

# Evolution of Beliefs and Practices of Bride Wealth and Their Role on Marriage among the Bukusu

ANNE NEKESA WEPUKHULU<sup>1</sup>, MARGARET NANJALA MATISI<sup>2</sup>, STANLEY NGOME MUTSOTSO<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Department of Social Sciences, Kibabii University

<sup>3</sup> Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Kibabii University

***Abstract- The practice of bride wealth has been retained in Bukusu communities for generations because of their religious role in marriage. Marriage was considered valid only after payment of the bride's property, so the bride's property and marriage were intertwined. However, factors such as colonialism, modernization, individualism, urbanization, interracial marriage and commercialization have undermined the religious and cultural significance for which the practice was intended. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the evolution of bridal wealth beliefs and practices among the Bukusu and their role in marriage. The study was conducted on Bukusu cultural informants, elders, chieftains, village leaders, clerics, householders, youths, and judges who worked in the Bukusu customary courts in Syria due to their knowledge of matters related to bridal wealth and marriage customs as stipulated in the Bukusu community. It is evident that bride wealth was a key component of the Bukusu customary marriage as it gave marriage validity, compensated the girl's parents for her upbringing, boosted her self-esteem and gave her security in her matrimonial home. Bride wealth symbolized that the man was capable of taking care of his wife and children in marriage. Bride wealth was compulsory and men who failed to pay were ridiculed hence every effort was made to ensure bride wealth was paid and those men who were too poor to pay were assisted by their kin. In some cases, the „too poor“ to pay men abducted girls of their choice and went to stay with a far relative who would help him pay later.***

## I. INTRODUCTION

The practice of bride wealth has been retained in Bukusu communities for generations because of their

religious role in marriage. Marriage was considered valid only after payment of the bride's property, so the bride's property and marriage were intertwined. (Nasimiyu, 2015). Marriages were sacred because they commemorated their ancestors by naming and reciprocal marriages to families who called upon the gods and ancestors to bless their marriages. Since marriage was a family matter, every step was taken to ensure that a suitable spouse was chosen, after which the bridal wealth, which was a duty, was paid, and even the poor paid the bridal wealth. Therefore, it was a religious obligation for all ordinary adults to marry in order to continue generations. Traditionally, this practice sanctified marriage, ensured that any child born of the marriage would remain in the father's line, compensated the girl's family for looking after her, and set the law for men to bear children. helped to protect human rights. (Dodoo et al, 2013). Engaging the entire community helped build interracial family friendships and stabilize marriages.

However, factors such as colonialism, modernization, individualism, urbanization, interracial marriage and commercialization have undermined the religious and cultural significance for which the practice was intended. As a result, marriage, marital stability, and family relationships degenerate into abusive marriages, domestic violence, separation, and divorce, as most men pay dowries and abuse women. (Oduor, 2017). All women are associated with monetary value based on their level of education, social status, and type of employment, so besides strengthening the sacred institution of marriage, bridal wealth has become a way to profit. I'm here. In addition, bridal wealth in marriage, the foundation of Bukusu families, clans and communities, is also declining. Christianity teaches women to perceive each other as equal partners to men in marriage, and

women are made to reject bridal wealth, which puts them in a subordinate position in marriage. Increased urbanization has given rise to mixed cultures hence it is difficult for the Bukusu practice of bride wealth to thrive in exactly the same way it was in the traditional society due to the religious role it played on marriage. Some choose to live together, not recognize in the traditional Bukusu religious and cultural life. Efforts have been made to study the practice of bridal wealth and its role in marriage. There is also some research on the negative effects of wealth on brides (CREAW, 2015; Eryenyu, 2014). However, these efforts have failed to address the evolving beliefs and practices of bride wealth and its role in Bukusu marriage. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the evolution of bridal wealth beliefs and practices among the Bukusu and their role in marriage.

The study was conducted on Bukusu cultural informants, elders, chieftains, village leaders, clerics, householders, youths, and judges who worked in the Bukusu customary courts in Syria due to their knowledge of matters related to bridal wealth and marriage customs as stipulated in the Bukusu community

## II. THE TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF BRIDE WEALTH AND THEIR ROLE ON MARRIAGE AMONG THE BUKUSU

Bride wealth customs were begun by the ancestors and was to be passed from one generation to another. Bride wealth and marriage were intertwined as no marriage was legally recognized if the man failed to pay bride wealth for his wife. Customary marriage took various forms. Marriage by abduction where the bride was forcefully taken by some members age set members of the groom (*Bakoki*) and taken to his home after which bride wealth was paid. Consensual marriage involved the bride and groom living together first after their consent and that of their parents after which the groom would pay bride wealth. Thus, regardless of the type of marriage, bride wealth payment was a must and no marriage would be valid unless bride wealth was paid, observes Bulimo (2013). Bride wealth was thus the cornerstone of Bukusu customary marriage hence no

bride wealth no marriage. Bride wealth was thus very important as it was hard if not impossible to come across a marriage where nothing had been paid in form of bride wealth. Even poor individuals were assisted by the community in raising the required bride wealth. No marriage was allowed to commence unless and until the bride wealth had been paid. It was very rare for a man to fail to pay bride wealth as in most cases; bride wealth was paid before the girl could be allowed to go to her husband. Marriage by elopement was also allowed but the man had to visit the girl's parents to negotiate bride wealth. Once the issue of bride wealth had been settled, marriage could go on and wedding could be allowed (ibid). A respondent echoes the above views during an oral interview when he states that:

It was the duty of the groom's father to help his son in paying bride wealth hence the groom didn't shoulder the burden of paying bride wealth for his wife alone thus strengthening marriage relationships. Polygamy was highly valued but the groom's father could only help him pay for the first wife hence it was the man's duty to pay bride wealth for his subsequent wives. Male relatives also contributed animals for bride wealth. Moreover, bride wealth received from daughters in the homes created a circulating fund so that their brothers could use the same to pay bride wealth for their wives. Men had the right to use cattle as bride wealth as established by the elders. Over time, those men who managed the growth of the herd and the acquisition of wives would effectively allocate themselves additional wives and first wives to their sons. This was not a simple process as resources used in bride wealth received created a circulating fund where by men would acquire wives with the wealth acquired from their sisters or daughters. Therefore, it was very rare for a man to completely fail to pay bride wealth, which would mean violation of the marital rules and custom of the Bukusu and the wishes of God and ancestors. (O.I, Vincent Walukhale, Lwanja, 24/9/2022).

This was corroborated by elders who added that bride wealth preparations, negotiations and payment was communal, hence, enhanced unity and reciprocity, observe elders in an (18/10/2022, Sanandiki.).

Therefore, payment of bride wealth was made easy as other members of the family helped to groom to pay. The findings above resonate with Mawere&Mawere (2020), who observe that it was believed that if a girl got married, her family was to be given a token of appreciation for her upbringing or rather compensation to the girl's family for the loss of her physical presence in her parental home and loss of her services (*Kamabiio/Kumwoulo*). Bride wealth thus indemnified the bride's family for bringing her up and preparing her for marriage. To bring up a good girl was considered a rigorous responsibility among the Bukusu. It was believed that once a girl had been trained by her family, she was to provide services in her parental home or farm but all these were lost by her family to her husband and his kin hence the need to pay bride wealth as indemnity for the loss of her services.

Marriage was considered as sacred and a religious obligation thus every normal adult was expected to marry or be married at one point in life. The key purpose of marriage was to multiply and fill the earth hence, it was a taboo for one to abscond marriage. Learning of family values was natural for those who grew up with their elders. The elders transferred values to the youth and future generations including the need to pay bride wealth during marriage, opines Namulanda (2010). This is emphasized by one of the respondents in an oral interview as stated below:

Bride wealth was the cornerstone of Bukusu customary marriage. Even in the case of ghost marriage, bride wealth was paid; if a man died without a wife and children, to deter his ghost from haunting the living, his family looked for a woman and paid bride wealth. This woman slept in the same house with the corpse and other relatives. After burial, the family looked for a brother or close male cousin of the deceased to sire children with this woman. Even impotent men paid bride wealth and their cousins or brothers could help them sire children to perpetuate their lineage (O.I, Moses Waliama, 18/8/2022, Sirisia)

These sentiments are further supported by a chief during an interview when she states that bride wealth and marriage were intertwined as failure to pay bride

wealth was equivalent to no marriage (O.I, Brigit Kongani, 18/10/2022, Miyanga).

From the findings above, marriage and bride wealth negotiations were not an individual affair but a social affair that got every member of the extended family involved. The wide network of family members served as a social unit with norms and beliefs and as an economic unit for the survival of its members. Bride wealth established alliances and contracts between intermarrying families. Marriage thus was a rigorous process that involved different steps that culminated into bride wealth negotiations (*eng'anana*). A key respondent corroborated this when he noted that:

Marriage preparations began when the girl and boy got to know each other by themselves, through parents or a relative. The man's mother and her womenfolk visited the girl's home to seek her hand in marriage (*khuselela*). They made a jembe (*embako*) and a woven basket (*endubi*) which they intentionally left behind the door. When the girl's mother found the items, she got to know the intentions of the visitors and informed her husband of the intriguing visit. A young daughter could not get married before the elder sister as it was believed she could block blessings of her elder sister getting married and it brought bad omen. Parents especially fathers could identify wives for their sons during *busaa* sessions that were held for friends to crown social ceremonies (*Siyotelo*) The father of the groom could ask his friendship for the hand of his daughter for his son's marriage or the man of the girl could ask his friend to allow his daughter to marry one of his friend's son. During courtship, investigations were done to ascertain if the two families were related or not and it also allowed the parents of the girl and the boy (*Basakwa*) to know each other. If there was no relationship between the two families, the girl's father carved a handle for the jembe (*kumwini*) and handed it to the wife whom in the company of her women friends took to the boy's home to signify acceptance of the marriage proposal. Both parents; father to the boy and the girl met to discuss bride wealth (*eng'anana*). All these steps were duly followed so that the intermarrying

families could know each other and to ensure the right marriage partner was chosen because of the religious, social and cultural duty marriage played in the Bukusu community. (K.I.I, Henry Naulikha, 20/9/2022, Kimaeti)

The above findings were corroborated by household heads in a focus group discussion when they asserted that bride wealth was to be paid by the man to the woman's family because it was believed that the woman will bear the man children to perpetuate his lineage and not the other way round. (FGD, Household heads 10/9/2022, Sirisia). Therefore, it was a social, cultural and religious duty of the man to pay bride wealth for his wife failure to which he could lose his wife and children and the marriage could be annulled and the man termed as a thief. Therefore, bride wealth was payment from the groom and/or his family to the bride's family at the time of marriage to seal the marriage. Bride wealth functioned as a legal proof of marriage, and a couple was not married until bride wealth was paid. Bride wealth was believed to be a determining factor for inheritance and the lineage of any children of the marriage since if a husband died, it allowed a wife to prove that they were officially married. Bride wealth was a real symbolic gift of exchange legalizing children of the union and propagating the lineage. Thus, in the traditional Bukusu community, marriages were all legalized on delivery of the main payments, opines Namulunda (2005).

Bride wealth was not purchase of a woman but rather an expression of love (*Lukosi*) and God will by the man and his kin to the kin of his wife through the gifts and ceremonies that accompanied it. It was not wife buying but a token of love and a sign of a lasting bond of friendship and recognition that the woman belonged to the clan. Kyalo (2011) shares in these sentiments when she asserted that bride wealth was a token of gratitude from the relatives of the man to the family of the bride for allowing her to become a wife in their family and thus sealed the marriage.

It was believed that payment of bride wealth cemented relationships and established bonds of friendship through the exchange of the gifts during marriage. Bride wealth signified *kumuliano*; eating together by the intermarrying families. The

symbolism of paying bride wealth meant that the two families; that of the groom and the bride acknowledge that they hitherto were strangers but through payment of bride wealth, they would eat together, cry together, and come to each other's aid, as revealed by Gabriel Makokha (O.I, Mayanja, 22/9/2022). Nganga (2015) corroborates this view by stating that payment of bride wealth was a process as gifts were given over period of time and involved every member of the intermarrying clans which strengthened kinship ties and friendship bonds. Therefore, from the above findings, it is clear that bride wealth cemented kinship (*khuandalasiabulebe*) hence payment of bride wealth brought the family of the groom and that of the bride together to strengthen kinship ties.

Payment of bride wealth stabilized marriage as it symbolized exchange of marriage vows. It was compulsory to pay bride wealth as marriage was sacred.

*Khukwaula/eng'anana* solemnized marriage as it was during this time of bride wealth negotiations when the two families were in the reciprocal act of giving and receiving to form new relationships. The exchange of wives for cattle was a communal affair that was governed by the Bukusu council of elders who provided guidance during bride wealth negotiations and marriage ceremonies and offered sacrifices to God and the ancestors to bless the union, says Walsh (2003). Therefore, the involvement of the family, clan and community sanctioned the woman against misconduct in her marital home. The paternal aunt (*Senge*) gave the girl advice (*lubito*) on how to be a good wife, mother and how to treat relatives of her husband. This minimized conflicts in marriage and stabilized marriage. Bride wealth bestowed honor on the families that were involved with women enjoying honor and respect in her home and the man was highly regarded and deemed responsible for his ability to pay bride wealth for his wife. A woman whose bride wealth was paid had a voice and confidence in her matrimonial home than one whose bride wealth had not been paid or was still being paid. Although bride wealth was customarily associated with a man's commitment to his wife and signaled respect for her, it also hindered the woman's options in the case of marital disputes hence

enhancing stability of marriage as agreed by Augustine Wamalwa, during an interview (O.I, 21/8/2022, Kibuke).

The findings above thus reveal that bride wealth conferred certain rights and responsibilities to the bride and the groom. Once a man had paid bride wealth, he acquired sexual rights over his wife and was entitled to all joys of marriage, physical and otherwise (*Khurungakhuchamumarango*) and legitimacy over his children. A man who paid bride wealth for his wife earned respect from his in-laws and was considered a „full brother-in-law (*MukhwasiKamili*). This meant whenever he visited his wife’s people, they slaughtered a cockerel for him and if the wife went to her parents, she was given adequate food and smoked meat (*EnyamaEsike*) to cook for her husband. A man who failed to perform the cultural and religious obligation of paying bride wealth was ridiculed even in songs and was not respected. The woman was given recognition and honor in her marital home and belonged to the husband’s clan. Bride wealth made the woman feel respected and feel secure in her home and provided a material prove that the woman and her children would be treated well in her marital home. It protected the woman against abuse from the husband as she became part of the husband’s family and kin. Mbaye& Wagner (2013) agree with the above findings when they observe that bride wealth placed obligations on wives to procreate biologically and to work hard on farms so as to produce food as agriculture was the main source of livelihood of the Bukusu community. Thus, Bukusu marriage and procreation were intertwined as failure to bear children on the part of the woman would force her to return to her parents or bring her husband another wife to sire children on her behalf as supported by Leequence (2000). Thus, a husband could not assume full sexual and procreative powers of his wife until he had paid bride wealth.

Dennis Nyongesa (O.I, 24/9/2022) concurs with the above views when he asserts that:

If a man failed to pay bride wealth, the marriage and children born of the union were considered illegitimate, without roots, without a belonging and such children lost care and protection of their

paternal family. Bride wealth ensured paternity because failure to pay would lead to shame on the part of the man and his kin as they would lose legitimacy of their children. If a woman died and her bride wealth had not been paid, the man was not allowed to bury her until bride wealth was paid as it was assumed they were just cohabiting and not married according to the Bukusu customs. If a consensus was not reached between the family of the husband and the deceased wife, then her people would bury her and the man would lose his children and would not claim them forever. This made every man to try as much as he could to pay bride wealth so that they could perpetuate his lineage especially the birth of sons. Bride wealth was sometimes known as child wealth because it gave men legitimacy over their children who remained in their lineage forever.

Village headmen in focus group discussion support the above when they state that children were very important and a must in Bukusu marriage as men who died without children (*Basumba*) were taken out of their huts through the window and not the door and the unmarried people were not allowed to attend such burials lest they ended up the same way. A special thorn (*Likunga*) was pricked on the hind quarter of the deceased man to remove the curse so that he could be received well by the ancestors. He was also wrapped with an animal skin on his head and waist to symbolize that he had unfinished business on earth and to protect the relatives from stubborn spirits associated with the departed man. The children became legitimate within their father’s lineage and had rights to inheritance and were connected to their ancestors through naming only if bride wealth was paid (FGD, 24/9/2022, Malakisi)

The findings revealed that payment of bride wealth was a remedy against divorce as it enhanced permanency of the marriage because the bride wealth animals were shared between the father of the girl and his kin who participated in the bride wealth and marriage ceremony as witness. Divorce among the Bukusu community was something unheard of since it was not a matter of individual decision but a clan affair. A woman could not be dismissed by her husband without the consent of his family, as supported by an archival source (KNADS:

PC/NZA/2/9/9). The elders provided guidelines during negotiations and provided rules and regulations that governed marital customs. Divorce was very rare and frowned upon because once bride wealth had been paid, it was supposed to enhance permanence of marriage, as observed by Wekesa (2018).

Therefore, it is evident from the findings that in case of marital disputes, the elders and the extended family were called upon to arbitrate, and even offer prayers and sacrifice to God and the ancestors for the wellbeing of the marriage. If the man failed to sire children, his brother or a close relative was assigned to sire children on his behalf. The man and the sister-in-law had an oath of secrecy so that children that were born belonged to the husband. A ceremony was done and ancestors called upon to bless the marriage with children. The husband was not to know until death. A respondent corroborates the above views during an oral interview when he states that:

Divorce did occur among the Bukusu community but was rare except in certain special circumstances such as adultery (*KhutisaSilukhi*), continued cruelty and witchcraft, leprosy (*Kumubilimubi*), Tuberculosis (*Bulwalebwebuwela*), and theft on the part of the woman. A woman who was found to be a thief was divorced as it was believed she could cause death. In cases where the woman consented of witchcraft, her father was given an extra cow so that the husband could teach her witchcraft if not they divorced. Even grounds of divorce on adultery were tough as the man had to find another man in his marital house with his wife. The accused man paid a fine; a cow and sheep. They were then locked in the house and rituals performed after which the husband could forgive the wife. If the wife continued with her adulterous behavior, then the husband had every right to divorce her. A woman who had partaken all marriage rituals such as sealing Bukusu marriage (*Khutisa*) and traditional wedding (*Khuboachinyinja*), and whose bride wealth was paid could leave her marital home in her youth to wherever then come back aged and no one would question her presence or what she had been up to even if her husband was long buried. The death of

the husband who paid bride wealth could not be used to annul the marriage because the wife belonged to the family and clan of her husband hence, she could be inherited by the deceased's brother or close relative who could sire children to continue the lineage of his deceased brother. If the deceased man did not pay bride wealth, the man who inherited his wife paid the bride wealth so that the woman and her children could remain within the clan of the man. If the husband was unable to sire children, it did not lead to divorce because of the significance accorded to marriage. The elders convened a meeting with the man and appointed one of his brothers or close relative as a "care taker" who was assigned the duty of siring children for him. It was done secretly such that the "care taker" or the wife and all who partook the oath of secrecy (*khuliasilulu*) from a special tree (*kumrembe*) would never talk about it till their death. The care taker was to go into the brother's wife only when he was away and the woman was to time herself to signal him when she was ovulating as the key purpose of this arrangement was procreation to ensure continuity of the lineage of the sterile man. Therefore, marriage was holy and once payment of bride wealth had been made, every effort was made to protect the sanctity and permanence of marriage as divorce would sever kinship ties and affect children psychologically. Simple pronouncements like 'we are divorced' did not add up. For divorce to hold, animals had to walk back. Not just any animals but both in number and appearance in which they were exchanged. For instance, if one's husband had been evil enough to pay bride wealth with a spotted cow (*Eng'enda*) which was abhorred and deemed as bad omen, her people had to look for it when they returned the animals. Bride wealth symbolized that the custom took the bride's grave from her parents' home to her matrimonial home thus in life or death, the bride's place was her marital home. (O.I, Patrick Waswa, Wamaliche, 25/9/2022)

Thus, bride wealth gave the woman security in her matrimonial home. In addition, Karanja (2003) observes that bride wealth was a continuous process and was never paid at once. However, wealthy a family was, bride wealth was paid in installments to

unite the intermarrying families" extended families, clans, and lineages. It was considered ill luck to bring all the bride wealth at once. The more often gifts were taken to the bride's family, the more chances the families met and got to know each other better states Bawa (2015). An informant concurred with the above authors during an oral interview by stating that:

One guiding principle in bride wealth in bride wealth payment negotiations was that under no circumstance was bride wealth paid in full at ago (*Bukhwesebuliwatawe*). One of the reasons was to avoid straining the family of the boy financially, second to keep the family of the boy intact by deliberately leaving something so that the family of the girl could resist every now and then. The Bukusu will always say that a girl a granary (*OmukokoSilundu*) The third reason which was very crucial was to allow the family of the boy to wait until they were satisfied and convinced that the girl, they married was a wife material and had ability to give birth. However, something small was to be paid before the man could be allowed to move in with his wife. (O.I Dennis Nyongesa, 26/9/2022, Ngoli)

From the above findings, it is clear that bride wealth negotiations were exclusively a male affair and women were only informed of the outcome and helped in brewing *busaa* and preparing food for the guests during the ceremonies. It existed in Bukusu society which was patriarchal that reinforced and perpetuated a man's lineage as children born of marriage after payment of bride wealth belonged to the man and his clan and not the wife, opinioned Bell (2008). During an oral interview, a respondent agreed with the above views when he asserted that:

Bride wealth was exclusively a reserve for men because a woman was only a helper to the husband. All powers belonged to the man who was the head of his marriage and family. Blessings were bestowed by fathers upon children. A woman was the farm and the husband was the farmer, hence children born of the marriage enhanced the lineage of their fathers and not their mothers. A woman was part of the

property of the man just as it was the case of children hence could not make decisions in the home. A woman was regarded so gentle and could not even go for war or protect her homestead but stayed at home to do house chores and took care of her husband and children. Women in the Bukusu community was regarded as unclean because of menses hence they could not perform rituals (*Khukholakumusango*). Women could not partake of the bride wealth negotiations because they were the subject matter of the discussion after which they were exchange for the bride wealth. Women were considered naturally polite and hence could not argue well in the bride wealth negotiations. They helped in brewing *busaa* and preparing food for the guests. Thus, because payments were received by the wife's parents, she was not directly involved in the transfer of bride wealth. (O.I, Augustine, Syara, 27/9/2022, Tamlega)

Elders during a focus group discussion further add that bride wealth was paid in terms of cattle as the traditional Bukusu kept large herds of livestock such as cattle, sheep and goats which was the main source of their economic livelihood that was complemented with cultivation of crops such as millet, sorghum, millet, cassavas, sweet potatoes and a variety of traditional vegetables. The animals were chosen carefully to enhance the wellbeing of the marriage. There was no specific number of cows that were paid as it was assumed that a man gave out his love for the wife and good will for his in-laws (FGD, 10/10/2022, Mukhweya). Cows given were to be of reproductive age and not old to symbolize that the woman would enhance the lineage of her husband through procreation, as observed by Lowes (2017). Only animals of good health that did not have a deformity were given a way to attract good luck in the marriage. The animals given represented different ideas to do with marriage. Thus, several taboos were observed on the conduct of bride wealth to enhance marriage, opine Corno&Voena (2016). Only cattle were counted as bride wealth, as revealed by an archival source (KNADS: PC/NZA/3/3/2). The other things such as beer, hoe and goats were gifts.

JoseckWamalwa, during an interview supported the above views by narrating the following on bride wealth:

Cattle were very important. They were the main means of exchange alongside cowrie shells (*Chisimbi*). In some cases, *Lubengalweeraba* (bundle of tobacco) was given to the father and some bundle of millet for the girl's mother. There was no single number of animals but depended on social status and marriage was based on consensus. Apart from the Baambwa clan that usually have the dog escorting animals, the rest of the clans give a goat. If the man did not pay anything before, marriage, bride wealth negotiations (*Eng'anana*) were done from the groom's home but if he had paid something, it was held at the bride's home. Most valued the beauty of a girl with the price of a field of land which was expressed in terms of head of cattle. Bride wealth was often negotiated in terms of cows and involved experienced elders with good negotiation skills and who offered prayers, sacrifices and poured libations for the ancestors to bless the marriage union. A typical scenario involved the intermarrying families meeting to discuss bride wealth. A man with prowess (*Omusechaweefusi*) from the bride's family threw a stick (*Kumusuni*) with might probably from a special tree (*Lusiola*) that was believed to attract good luck in the midst of the herd of cattle. Those cattle that fell on the right hand (*Kumukhonokumusecha*) were taken as bride wealth. The animals were then flogged off to the bride's home by young men while the bride's father and his team remained behind and would follow later. He would be given a small pot of *ofbusaa* (*Esachi*) and a narrow wooden pipe (*Lusekhe*) for siphoning the brew. All these happened while the bride was still in her parents' home. The cattle were accompanied with a goat for *senge* and one cow would be given to *khocha*. *Eng'anana* for a girl who broke virginity or had a child outside wedlock was done from the house of her father as it was believed that if it was done outside, the father of her child would claim her and interfere with negotiations. The husband could pay anything because she lost her honor. *Eng'anana* for a virgin were done out of the house because she had preserved her purity.

Virginity was highly upheld hence an extra cow was paid by the groom if the bride was virgin (*Omukima*). Out of the animals that were given, there were six cows that of which each symbolized a specific purpose: *Siraraw* which loosely translates to granary was meant to show case profound love the man had for the bride to be and symbolized the hard work of the bride on her father's farm, the skill she will continue with while in her matrimonial home; *Eyekhusera* was the cow that was that the bride's mother would milk as compensation for taking her daughter away. The Bukusu consider that were it not for marriage, the bride to be would have been home contributing to the economic welfare of her family; *Eyelubeko* symbolized that a woman would die in her husband's home and a hair-shaving ceremony (*Lubeko*) would be done in her memory. By accepting this cow, the family of the girl relinquished the bride to the groom even in death; *EyekhukwisiaSituru* (making the breasts fall) was given because the woman will bear children who will suckle her and make her a mother; *Eyembako* (for farming) symbolized that the family of the woman will lose her labor on the farm so it compensated for the fields she would have tended for her parents and *Eyakhocha/Mabiyo* was a cow that was reserved for *khocha* as it helped to further cement relations by involving relatives of the bride from both sides thus showing respect and recognition of the bride's mother and her kin. Once a man paid bride wealth, he became a *mukhwasi kamili* (full brother-in-law). The implication was that his would never visit her parents and come back empty handed but she would be given a gift of roasted meat (*EnyamaEsike*) or the biggest cockerel (*Etwaya*) as compensation for leaving her husband unattended for a while she was a way. Moreover, if the woman died, the husband had all the customary rights to bury her. The relatives from both side of the girl rigorously advised the girl on the importance of respecting her husband and taking care of his clan thus the woman got married knowing her roles in her marital home which enhanced marriage. (O.I, 29/9/2022, Kibingei).

The above view is further supported by elders when they observed that animals for exchange were carefully selected to bring good fortune to the couple. Every effort was made to ensure that only healthy animals without defects were given (FGD, 18/10/2022, Bumula).

The findings above thus revealed that bride wealth and marriage had several taboos that regulated the conduct of all the parties that were involved so as to protect and preserve the institution of marriage. All steps were undertaken during bride wealth negotiations stability of marriage. The quality of the cattle paid was considered. A bride's people could not be fooled by quantity alone. To ensure "good cattle" were received, the girl's father sent his brothers and sons to be shown the actual cattle which the man's parents wished to give and 'bad cattle' were replaced, observes Amatsimbi (2009). A cultural informant agrees with the above view when he states that:

The animals exchanged were cows (*Chimasoti*) and a few males (*Chiunwa*) that were young to symbolize that the bride and the groom were expected to reproduce and bring up children, which was the main purpose of Bukusu customary marriage. Of the animals exchanged, *eunwaebucha* (bull that bellows) was not given as it meant bad omen for the marriage and in most cases, it was it was slaughtered. After paying bride wealth, the groom's father made a follow-up visit; tracing hooves (*Khulondabikhakayu*) by visiting the girl's father (*Basakwa*). He went with nothing as he had already paid bride wealth. The family of the girl could slaughter a goat for them. The visit enhanced the friendly ties between the two families so that they could visit each other and share meals at any time to further strengthen marriage. *Nasikumu* (cow without horns) and *Eng'enda* (with spots) were not given for bride wealth because they symbolized misfortune thus cows that were of pure color and were to be health to enhance sanctity of marriage. The traditional liquor for the bride wealth negotiations (*Kamalwakeeng'anana*) was observed before drinking. Some was spat on the ground for the ancestors and prayers were made before drinking commenced to ask for blessings for the marriage from God and the ancestors. The drinking spree

involved relatives from the side of the groom and the bride who drank from the same pot to enhance harmony and peaceful co-existence of the two families which were now one entity because of marriage of their children. As they drunk the brew, they carefully observed its behavior to detect various things: If the brew formed a circle (*Kamalwakakhalaengara*) it meant that the children that would be born of the marriage will be great leaders (*Babami*). If it had many bubbles (*Chimoni*) it symbolized that the marriage will be prone to many conflicts or someone was against the marriage. An elder could one any one against the marriage and pronounce a curse so that the person could stop his evil and release the marriage. If the brew ran in the pot in to and fro motion it symbolized funeral. The elders were also able to tell if the bride was fertile or not through the behavior of *ofbusaa* they were able to avert any would be calamity and guard the marriage. If one animal died it was to be replaced by the groom. If a woman died and her husband had not completed paying her bride wealth, the husband's family holds negotiations to finish the payment. Her people ask for two animals: *Ye Lubeko* (one for shaving and cleansing); *Yikalamiandu* to symbolize the woman will no longer be cooking for them. If a woman died during child birth (*Lifumo*) and her bride wealth had not been paid fully, her husband offered a sheep to be slaughtered and about 40 animals as fine (*Kumurwe*) and rituals were performed so that the husband of the deceased could re-marry and have children. If a man killed his wife in the course of domestic violence, the woman's kin came and raided the man's homestead and take as many animals as they could and a sheep was slaughtered for cleansing against the taboo of murder (*Khuosiakumusango*). This deterred men from mistreating their wives and enhanced peace in marriage. If bride wealth was paid and the girl had *olwanda*; turgid reproductive organs that hindered intimacy and procreation, sacrifices were offered and rituals performed. The maternal uncle (*Khocha*) was used a special horn from a goat (*LulwikalweEmbusi*) to break the turgidity after which the woman was given special herbs to bath with and the uncle was given a cow and goat

for cleansing (K.I.I, Luka Wekesa, 3/10/2022, Maeni)

Nanda & Warms (2013) corroborate the above view when they posited that several factors determined the payment of bride wealth. Among them was virginity of the girl whose parents were given an extra cow. The grandmother took the beddings (*Liliafu*) on her day of marriage. A hardworking girl was highly valued as she would ensure adequate food for her husband and children. A girl who had respect for her parents was equally sought after as it meant she would live with her husband's kin peacefully. Thus, young men sought women who were morally upright for marriage and ensured they paid bride wealth to be allowed to marry the girls. Therefore, it is clear from the above findings that ability to cook, ability to bear children and ability to work on the farms were the key factors that determined bride wealth payment. The element of love and beauty did not feature so much because in most cases the relatives of the man helped him identify a good wife.

An informant's views are in line with the above when he asserts during an interview that:

Virginity was a venerated quality that beckoned an extra cow and a goat for the girl's grandmother. Pre-marital sex or pregnancy were an abomination as the old women performed the virginity test to ensure that sexuality was not abused but was used for procreation, the key purpose of marriage which was the foundation of the Bukusu clans. A lady with a gap between her teeth (*Embanya*) was precious as such ladies were rare hence her family demanded for an extra cow. A girl with a light skin made negotiations longer as her family had a right to claim an extra cow for feeding her well. The first born and last born were very expensive girls to marry. The first born (*Mwanawambeli*) represented the first pain and joy in her family, while the last born (*Mutua*) united parents. The most expensive girl was the only daughter among boys (*Nasio we basoreri*) who was a darling to the father and a man could literally shed tears to have her. If a man got a child out of wedlock (*MwanawaSimba*), he was to give three cows to the woman's parents if it was a boy, and two animals if it was a girl. The three

animals for the boy symbolized: *Khukwiasituru*, *Kamabiilo*, and *Likhoni* (the animal that *khochawill* slaughter for the boy during circumcision) A hardworking woman was the pearl of her family. She brought good appellation to her family during her negotiation as the man's family could be told that even the chicken served to them were hers and they could be shown the crops she had planted in the farm. She was viewed as a source of wealth hence the man's family paid dearly as her work would fill the extra bride wealth. A man also paid more if the girl was the only child as she was loved greatly and received special treatment (*Omwana we Lukosi*) (O.I Joseck Masinde, 2/9/2022, Kamukuywa)

From the above findings, it is apparent that virginity was a virtue highly upheld by the traditional Bukusu society as it brought honor to the girl at the time of marriage. Rigorous sexual education was given to boys and girls and there was punishment against pre-marital sex and children out of wedlock which enabled girls to uphold their virginity.

Ashraf, Bau & Voena (2016) observe that return of bride wealth (*Khubolola/Ebololi*) occurred but on very rare occasions such as divorce because the payment of bride wealth sealed marriage and every effort was made to solve conflicts in marriage by the intermarrying families and the elders. Depending on whether the couple had children or not, bride wealth could not be refunded either in full or in part. In case the marriage was dissolved, then bride wealth was to be paid back in whole or part by the wife's family. The extent to which return of bride wealth was done and enforced depended on which party was perceived to be at fault, and whether or not the woman had any children from the union. The requirement of paying back was believed to be a significant obstacle to women who would like to leave their marriages thus forcing them stay with their husbands. Requirement to repay the bride wealth upon divorce was more detrimental when the value of the bride wealth paid was higher hence marriage was taken seriously by both parties; the wife's and the husband's family, opines Dery, (2015). Stefano Waliaula is in agreement with the above view when he stated during an oral interview that:

Bride wealth was a seal of the marriage covenant between the family of the man and that of the woman and created a bond of unity between the two families. Participants of the bride wealth negotiations and marriage had a role to play to safeguard the sacred institution of marriage. Return of bride wealth (*Ebololi*) was therefore not an easy affair for it severed marriage and family relations. There were several exceptions that guaranteed return of bride wealth: In case of witchcraft or continued cruelty of the man, the woman will walk out of the marriage and her people would return bride wealth. Long time sickness or hereditary diseases that made marriage a nightmare was also used as a justification. If either the man or woman committed murder, the marriage would be annulled and bride wealth returned. If a man died and the wife refused to be inherited so as to remain in her matrimonial home and her bride wealth had been paid, it was to be returned. In some cases, a woman who was mischievous and flee her marriage for another man would lead to return of her bride wealth. Bride wealth was paid partially or wholly depending on children in the marriage. If marriage was dissolved and the woman had no children, bride wealth was returned wholly. If there were children, it was partially returned so that the remainder would give the children an identity and belonging to their father's lineage (O.I, 25/10/2022 Malakisi)

Therefore, from the above findings, it was not easy to return bride wealth once children were born in the marriage which placed a great obligation on the husband and wife to work on their marriage and preserve it. Every effort was made by the intermarrying families to enhance permanency of marriage and security of children.

### III. MODERN PRACTICES OF BRIDE WEALTH AND THEIR ROLE IN MARRIAGE AMONG THE BUKUSU

Bride wealth is still important in the Bukusu community today. The practice is still a physical symbol of marriage that shows that the parents have given consent for marriage and legally binds the wife and husband together. Bride wealth makes the wife

feel valued and respected thus boosting her self-esteem. Bride wealth compensates parents of the girl for the loss of her labor and for her good upbringing. A man who gives bride wealth demonstrates ability to take care of his wife and children, observes Namulunda, (2016)). Noreen Nafula had this to say about importance of bride wealth during an interview:

Am happy today because my husband is paying my bride wealth. For the past 5 years since we got married, we have been living like thieves but today as my people take my bride wealth, I feel secure and recognized as a wife among the clan of my husband Batakhwwe. I have been anticipating this day of my *Eng'anana* to become a full wife with full rights in my marital home. My people have been honored for bringing me up in a good way (O.I, 24/9/2022, Kimaeti)

Margaret Nekoye is in agreement with the above findings when she corroborates them by stating during an oral interview that:

My big day is finally here. It is not my wedding but the day when my marriage will be recognized as my husband and I eloped 5 years and have 3 children and thus we have been operating illegally. Today our marriage will be official as my husband and his kin negotiate my bride wealth. No marriage is recognized among the Bukusu without the traditional ceremony in which the man's family 'settles' his wife family by paying her bride wealth. My marriage to my husband was not only invalid but also sinful. After suffering stigma for 5 years, I consider myself lucky that my husband's people have finally taken this step to negotiate my bride price. I am legal clerk at a private law firm hence my bride wealth is especially important as my education means that my community raised me well so my people wouldn't let me rest until my husband's family pay my bride wealth. My people wanted to be appreciated for taking care of me and more so for educating me to college level. On this day, the family of my husband and mine will begin bride wealth negotiations and make the first payment to validate my marriage (O.I, 23/9/2022, Chwele)

The findings above reveal that bride wealth is still the legal proof of marriage. It is evident that however long a woman stays in marriage, as long as her husband has not paid her bride wealth, the marriage is considered illegal among the Bukusu community. Therefore, men make efforts to settle the parents of their wives by paying bride wealth over a period of time for their marriages to be considered valid.

Bulimo (2013), in his point of departure with the above respondent opines that payment of bride wealth has become a personal commitment rather than a family or clan affair than it was in the past where bride wealth was shared among relatives who were involved in the bride wealth negotiations and marriage preparations. Today, bride wealth has been reduced to an affair between only the family of the girl and that of the boy while excluding the extended family. Thus, relatives only get to know of marriage if there are disputes. Similarly, Adjei (2019) observes that the relevance of bride wealth in uniting the intermarrying families has been ignored. Bride wealth has become a more individual practice where the groom mainly funds the expenses of his marriage though some families still provide financial support to their sons during marriage. He was supported by Wekesa during oral interview below where he says that:

People have become so selfish that they don't even involve their brothers in bride wealth negotiations for their daughters. In some cases, the women have overstepped their mandate and give orders to their husbands on what should be done. When the marriage of their daughter hits the rock is when they ran to their relatives for help. The reason of involving members of the family, clan and community in bride wealth negotiations and sharing of the bride wealth animals was to enhance stability of the marriage as the girl knew that it was impossible to re-assemble the animals hence held on her marriage but it's not the case today as girls walk in and out of marriage at their volition (O.I Destimore Wekesa, 21/10/2022, Kulisiru)

Elders corroborate the above view when they say that individualism has undermined the traditional role of bride wealth as the input of members of the extended

family is ignored and they only learn of marriage in case of disputes when they are called upon to arbitrate (Elders, FGD, 11/10, Mukhweya)

From the above findings, it is difficult to pay bride wealth because of individualism. The man has to shoulder the whole burden of paying bride wealth for his wife hence the reason why there are many cases of non-payment of bride wealth today, a case that was unheard of in the traditional Bukusu community. Bride wealth was specifically paid by the groom and his kin to the bride's family and was exclusively a male affair but today some women are helping their men to pay their bride wealth a scenario that was unheard of in the traditional Bukusu community. A man gains rights to the woman's reproductive and domestic services such as cooking and child care when he pays bride wealth, observes Nukonya (2003).

Today, many steps have been ignored and *eng'anais* even done at the bride's home. The reason why it was the man and his family who paid bride wealth was that the woman would perpetuate the husband's lineage through procreation and it was the man to ask the woman for her hand in marriage. Even if the man dies once he has paid bride wealth his wife remains in the family. Today, some women are the ones 'marrying' men hence paying their own bride wealth which is against the Bukusu marital customs, notes Khasakhala (2015). Mary Wefwafa echoes the above sentiments during an oral interview when she states the following on the security that bride wealth provides to the woman:

After getting to know my suitor, he organized and visited my parents to inform them of our intention to get married. After one year of courtship, my husband gave 20 cattle and a goat after which we had our traditional wedding in 1974. My husband was attacked by armed robbers and killed three years into our marriage and left with two sons. I went back to my parents who took me to TTC and left my children with my mother. I stayed away for 10 years then returned to my matrimonial home. I have never gotten married again but live in the home my late husband established for me with my children and his relatives have never disturbed me because of the

children and the bride wealth that was paid to my parents and kin (O.I, 28/9/2022, Makhonge)

It is evident from the above findings that bride wealth is no longer compulsory as some men just cohabit and are not in any hurry to fulfill the cultural and religious obligation of paying bride wealth. This is because marriage is no longer compulsory to some individuals who have embraced secular approaches to marriage such as come-we-stay, celibacy and single-parent families, a view shared by Barasa (2012).

There is a trend where by many young men and women are avoiding marriage altogether or are getting married very late because of the high demands of bride wealth. Some choose to live alone or with their lovers to satisfy their sexual needs without any commitment thus come-we-stay is gaining momentum as compared to legal marriage. The fear of the demand for bride wealth has made some couples to live together as they look for money which is the main medium of exchange today, observes Ng'ang'a (2015). In agreement with the above findings, an informant in an oral interview below opines that:

The Bukusu community recognized various types of relationships including elopement. It didn't matter how one started marriage as long as he started the process of paying bride wealth (*Bukhwe*). Negotiations of bride wealth were part of the intermarrying families knowing each other and forming a bond as *Basakwa*. Bride wealth is an act of solemnizing marriage as it is a moment when the two families are in the reciprocal act of giving and receiving to form new relationships. This aspect is being watered down by some women who have gone to the extent of picking loans which they give to their husbands to pay their bride wealth. Even if a man is not financially stable it is his duty to pay bride wealth for his wife to seal the marriage bond (O.I, Zedekiah Wanjala, 22/10/2022, Kibingei).

From the findings above, it is evident that bride wealth is not only paid in terms of cattle but also money and other materials such as vehicles, land and buildings. The counting of cows was introduced in the 1950s. The standard payment includes thirteen

cattle; 12 for the bride's father and 1 for *Khocha*, money for the father and the mother, and other gifts which vary from one family to another, as observed by Mawere&Mawere (2020). In relation to the above, an oral interview with a cultural informant from Kimilili revealed that:

Bride wealth in contemporary Bukusu include 50,000 for *Esimiko*, 50,000 for *Situru*, 13 head of cattle of which one is for *Khocha*, 1 goat for escorting the cattle and another goat for *Senge*, unspecified amount of money usually in hundreds of thousands determined by the clan, a blanket for the girl's maternal grandmother and loose change to please aunts who usually appear on the scene at awkward moments to the stretch the groom's tolerance levels. You will be expected to assist in fees payment for your wife's siblings. This is not supposed to be recorded anywhere because it is support to her family. Your respect for mother-in-law will be second to your respect for God such that when you happen to meet her you do serious shopping for her and give her some money as bus fare. This range from 1000 onwards depending on the various factors that should be clear to both parties. If both parents of your wife are still alive, you should keep two cows on standby for slaughter during their funeral and this is not part of bride wealth negotiation. Payment may occur over time but the mother's money must be paid upfront because Bukusu culture dictates that mother and sons-in-law may never interact not even look each other in the eye or shake hands as a sign of mutual respect. Otherwise, where shall the bride's mother stand to ask her son-in-law about the balance when culture does not allow them to see each other eye to eye?

(O.I, Protus Masinde, 27/10/2022, Kimilili)

It is evident from the above findings that unlike in the traditional Bukusu community where non-payment of bride wealth was rare because of the sanctions against such, today, it is very common today to come across cases where by a man hasn't paid anything to his in-laws. Many men have sired children out of wedlock and haven't paid bride wealth for them thus the children lack an identity and belonging. Marriage and bride wealth payment was by consensus between

intermarrying families and even the poor were helped by the kin to pay bride wealth for their kin. Traditionally, it was a taboo among the Bukusu for a woman to elope. The above findings were complemented by Nasimiyu (2015). She states that today, it is almost the sole responsibility of the man to pay bride wealth which explains the many cases of unpaid bride wealth and cases where women die and court cases ensue over whom to bury them and custody of their children.

A key informant, agrees with the above views during an oral interview when he states that:

Married men who have not paid bride wealth for their wives and children have been challenged to do so as a sign of respect and appreciation to the families of their wives. Failing to pay bride wealth may be considered theft and lack of respect culturally. The Bukusu council of elders is in the process of setting up a tribunal as it is shocking that some married men have sired children with their wives and have not paid even a penny for bride wealth. Some men have become like thieves. They marry but don't pay bride wealth. Such behavior is not good in Bukusu culture as bride wealth payment is the only way of appreciating and respecting the wives' parents for their parenting role. The bible says who gets a wife finds a good thing and favor from God. However, some men fail to recognize the good thing in their wives. There is a worrying trend where young men marry and fail to pay bride wealth thus there is need for this issue to be addressed by courts. Men should be reminded that family is important and marrying our daughters comes with a price. I will support the creation of the Bukusu tribunal because our culture is paramount and should be respected

(K.I.I, JefneyaWangamati, 2/10/2022, Kibisi)

A chief in Mayanja during an oral interview corroborates the above views when he states that repayment of bride wealth exists today but also very rare because the grounds that guarantee the return are equally complicated. Return of bride wealth can be granted after divorce but the children born out of the union and the years of stay in marriage make it

difficult for men to claim bride wealth back. Even in cases where there are children it is difficult. The Bukusu elders do not approve the return of bride wealth arguing that it violates their customs. Most men are not even paying bride wealth so when the marriage breaks down the women go their way without having to claim any refund (O.I, Chrispinus Wanyonyi,19/9/2022, Mayanja). Komingoi (2018) further agrees with the above views when she observes that in other cases, the women object payment of their bride wealth so that in case of separation the issue of refund should not hold them at ransom with their husbands. However, some cases have been reported among the Bukusu of return of bride wealth, reveals Mukanda during an interview in Namwela as stated below:

Saenyi Murunga sought refund after divorcing his wife of three years. He filed a report about threats about his life after highlighting his story in media. Bukusu elders warned him against taking the case to the court saying it should be resolved by them. He filed a divorce case against his wife on grounds that she had deserted their matrimonial home while he was away in the USA for studies. He paid bride wealth according to Bukusu customs when he married his wife in 2017. He paid 50,000, three Ayrshire heifers, one cross Ayrshire bullock, one she goat, a pair of gumboots, and a hat. He had the copy of bride wealth negotiations which was countersigned by representatives of both families. According to Murunga, he had travelled to USA for studies but had to cut short his education to return home. He used to send money to his wife who asked him to return and sire children with her. He had lived with his wife for about one year and six months when she started deserting their matrimonial home on several occasions. In the suit, he also demanded interest on the cash and property. He said he was committed to getting his bride wealth in full since they did not sire any children which would have seen only a fraction of it returned. However, the elders were quick to condemn him for irresponsibility for leaving his newly married wife (*Omwea*) alone as he went to USA. They solely blamed him for not having children as he was absent and demanded that he withdraws the

case as it amounted to embarrassment (O.I, Zebedayo Mukanda, 2/10/2022, Namwela)

From the above findings, it is clear that cases of return of bride wealth have been reported among the Bukusu. Unlike in the past where sharing of bride wealth made the couple to work on their marriage. The woman had the greater obligation of protecting her marriage as it was hard for her kin to assemble bride wealth. Today, due to failure of payment of bride wealth, cases of returning bride wealth are equally rare. The birth of children in a union also makes it difficult to repay bride wealth.

Several factors determine the amount of bride wealth to be paid today such as the education level, career, employment status, beauty, social status of the girl's family and the man's family. A highly educated woman from a well-to-do family attracts a high amount of bride wealth. Soi (2014) echoes the above view when he notes that the more educated a girl is, the higher the amount the groom pays including bits like the mother's and father's money. Although the material gifts remain constant, the mother's and father's money is negotiated depending on the girl's social, educational and financial status. The parents have to get something higher as appreciation if they took the girl to school. Somehow, they have to recover the money they spent on the girl given that she will benefit the man and his family financially and socially after her family give her out. A cultural informant in an oral interview complements the above view when he noted that:

For a woman who has a career, her bride wealth may comprise of 13 heads of cattle, two goats, blankets and bed sheets, a suit and 200,000 shillings for her father, 100,000 shillings for her mother and 20 liters of paraffin to pay for the candles she burned while at school. A man is expected to prove to the bride's family that he is worthy taking care of her and appreciate her by paying her bride wealth. (O.I, James Omuti, 1/9/2022, Lwandanyi)

From the findings above, it is evident that the level of education, career and social status of a girl that determine the amount of bride wealth to be paid to her parents and kin. For instance, a highly educated

girl with a well-paying job attracts high bride price. Key values such as hard work, virginity and hospitality of a girl have been ignored leading to choice of wives based on education and beauty which could explain the reason of instability of marriages and strained family relationships.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident that bride wealth was a key component of the Bukusu customary marriage as it gave marriage validity, compensated the girl's parents for her upbringing, boosted her self-esteem and gave her security in her matrimonial home. Bride wealth symbolized that the man was capable of taking care of his wife and children in marriage. Bride wealth was compulsory and men who failed to pay were ridiculed hence every effort was made to ensure bride wealth was paid and those men who were too poor to pay were assisted by their kin. In some cases, the „too poor“ to pay men abducted girls of their choice and went to stay with a far relative who would help him pay later. Marriage was meant to be permanent and did not end in death as a woman whose bride wealth was paid was inherited by the deceased man's kin who would sire children with her to continue their brother's lineage. Bride wealth was predominantly paid in terms of livestock which were not counted and some gifts to cement friendship between the intermarrying families. The ability of the girl to give birth, hard work on the farm, hospitality and virginity were considered before payment of bride wealth. Bride wealth was a communal affair and it was shared among the father of the girl and his kin to strengthen relationships. The groom's father helped him in paying bride wealth for his first wife but he could shoulder the burden if he became polygamous, a practice that was welcome and highly valued. Today, bride wealth is still important as it seals marriage. It has become an individual affair as bride wealth negotiations have been reduced to the father of the girl and that of the groom. Bride wealth is no longer compulsory because of changes in marriage as the youth are delaying marriage or not marrying at all because of the high demands of bride wealth hence cases of non-payment of bride wealth are very common. The educational level, financial and social status of the bride determines the amount of bride wealth to be paid. Divorce, a vice that was rare if unheard of in the

traditional Bukusu community is common today as bride wealth no longer guarantees permanency of marriage. People are walking in and out marriage at will without considering bride wealth that was paid.

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