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## Abagusii traditional marriage and conservation of community moral values

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### Abstract

In the Abagusii community, marriage is a process which not only involves a one day event but an event which prolongs for days until it is consummated. Each and every step is meant to contribute to the instilling of moral values to ensure marriage retains its permanence and that once it is entered upon separation is almost an impossible. In particular the wearing of the anklets by a married woman and the vows associated with it ensured faithfulness in marriage. The breaking of the marriage vows by engaging in adultery by either of the partners resulted to a condition referred to as “*Amasangia*” which if left unattended could lead to death of the offender or vice versa. Therefore, divorce or separation and whatever the results out of it became non-existence. The institution of marriage was jealously guarded by the taboos attached it. This study focused on the process undertaken towards the Abagusii traditional marriage, analyzing important stages with emphasis of the wearing of anklets by the bride. The research also interrogated the role of “*Amasangia*” in preserving the community moral values related to the institution of marriage. Finally, this study suggests ways of conserving community moral values, through the process of inculturation. This will be of great significance in the present Abagusii society which has embraced the Christian faith, while discarding traditional practices which helped conserve community moral values.

**Keywords:** anklets, unfaithfulness, culture, incarnational, community moral values

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### Introduction

Marriage has been a strong agent of conservation of community moral values among the Abagusii people. This was the case until the coming of the Christian faith which brought about complete change by doing away with community rituals which helped hold marriages together. The Abagusii traditional wedding, and particularly the wedding ring, anklets (*ebitinge pl.*) and the resulting curse (*Amasangia*) in case of unfaithfulness strongly guarded marriage. The foreign religion was against the traditional anklet (*egetinge*) which did not argue well with the community members. For example, Senior Chief Musa Nyandusi, one of the first converts into Christianity baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1922, was a very strong defender of culture and did criticize his own church for being opposed to the anklet (*egetinge*). He argued that the Abagusii traditional anklet is the equivalent of the Western wedding ring and had nothing to do with matters of spirituality. He petitioned the district commissioner to intervene without success (Nyachae 2010). Pettifer and Bradley (1990) <sup>[21]</sup>, reports a similar situation where father Stam a priest at the Mill Hill mission recorded his frustrations that a Gusii man and woman were being forced to abandon their family commitments and social obligations including their dress code, in favor of Christianity. Further, they add, “The Seventh-Day Adventists required married women to cut off their wedding anklets” (Ibid, 1990). Alan Hirsh (2006) referring to what he calls incarnational ministry states, that “when God came into our world in and through Jesus, He Eternal moved into the neighborhood and took up residence among us (John 1:14).” This statement suggests the approach which the missionaries into new field ought to apply in reaching out people from different cultural backgrounds. The purpose of this study was to interrogate marriage rituals that were important for the

conservation of community moral values, in order to preserve the Abagusii culture by digitizing the past heritage for future generations. The study is also sought to establish how the Abagusii traditional marriage rituals can be incorporated into the Christian faith, for the conservation of community moral values. Therefore, I analyzed Abagusii traditional marriage ritual equivalent of wedding ring, anklets (*ebitinge*) and the moral value attached to it. The study specifically emphasized the importance of the installation ceremony and how finally marriage is consummated. I also explored the relationship between the Abagusii traditional wedding ring, anklets (*ebitinge*) and the curse resulting from unfaithfulness (*amasangia*).

The study on Abagusii culture and particularly marriage was first done by a western scholar Mayer, P and recent times there are studies done by Nyang’era, N. K, Akama, J. S, Nyaruri and Maangi, and Ochoi J. A, among others. Mayer (1950) discusses “*Privileged Obstructions of Marriage Rites among the Gusii.*” The journal gives emphasis on various privileged obstructions whose main purpose was to receive gifts. In his other work Mayer (1950) the focus was on “Gusii Bride wealth Law Custom.” In the study the Gusii customary marriage is discussed making mention of the laws governing bride price and the traditional wedding ceremony. The studies form a basis for the study of Abagusii traditional marriage, but do not provide the fine details and the significance of some of the ceremonies. Akama & Mason (2000), *Ethnography of Abagusii of Western Kenya*, covers marriage as rite of passage. Akama (2017) seems to expand on the previous knowledge, while noting that there might not be uniformity in reconstructing the history as changes might have taken place during migration and settlement. Nyang’era (1999) presents finer details of the Abagusii Customary marriage, but

does not give details on how the rituals accompanying marriage helped in the preservation of community moral values. The Curse of unfaithfulness is mentioned without explanation on how it worked. Besides events associated with marriage are mentioned in passing. Ochoi (2013) has made an attempt to fill some of the gaps, for example describing in details the ceremony of *ogotimia ebitinge* (installing anklets) and the giving of a bridal name, but does not give certain details, such as what happens when the anklet is removed, and the importance of the rituals associated with the entire ceremony. Nyaruri and Maangi (2014), *Traditional Marriage and Customs among the Gusii of Kenya*, provides a summary where they discuss marriage, wedding and after wedding, but the study is very scanty, void of proper research work apart from depending on a limited resources from already documented materials. Therefore, these studies have failed to describe the significance of the traditional marriage rites. Akama (2017) notes that the Gusii customs were interrupted by the colonial administration and various religious groups, but suggests no solution concerning conservation of community values and how they should be restored. The institution of marriage in modern Abagusii society remains threatened in the face of Christianity as rituals that conserved community moral values have been ignored. This formed the basis of conducting this study in order to bridge the gaps by interrogating the Abagusii traditional marriage rituals of the anklets (*ebitinge*) and unfaithfulness (*amasangia*).

This study employed a phenomenological approach as advanced by Hiebert, P. G., Shaw, R. D., & Tienou, T (1999), which states that “the first step in biblical response to popular religiosity is to seek to understand folk religions phenomenologically.” The approach further argues that religions are part of cultures and societies, and that human society, cultures, and individuals cannot be separated in reality. This theory states that culture consists, in part belief systems composing three interacting dimensions ideas, feelings and values. Therefore, Christians must take the religious beliefs of other people seriously, in order to understand them and not necessarily to believe them, but to be able to share the message of salvation to them. Beliefs are strongly held by those who practice them. Religion also involves deep feelings, that are powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods act as a wall, protecting beliefs from attacks from within and without by providing emotional support to their truthfulness, which emotions are expressed differently in different cultures. The third component has it that, “at the heart of most religions is a call for transformed lives based on a moral order that judges people and their actions as right or wrong, righteous or evil, moral or immoral, just or unjust, proper or improper” (Ibid, 1999). The bottom line is that unless people are able to respond to their beliefs and feelings religion has not become living in their lives. The phenomenological approach posits that, “to understand religion as a cultural system, it is important to study religious symbols, theories, beliefs, and worldviews and to show the connections among these levels” (Ibid, 1999).

I employed a descriptive research design. The study respondents were identified by using snow-balling and purposive sampling method. This method of sampling was necessary since there are few members of society with necessary information regarding the Abagusii traditional marriage and its accompanying rituals. The respondents with relevant information were scattered and it was not easy to get them unless through a lead by their peer. The study

relied on both primary and secondary data. Focus group discussions, personal interviews, site visitations, and forensic review of related literature were used to collect relevant data. The obtained data was incorporated into the study according to the main objectives. The findings are discussed along with supportive literature.

### **Abagusii Traditional Marriage and its Accompanying Rituals**

**Training on the Importance of marriage among the Abagusii**  
Marriage among the Abagusii community was highly regarded and preparation towards the event was a process that begins from childhood until adulthood. The moment a child reached the age of initiation which started from 15 years to 18 years (Ochoi 2013) preparation towards marriage began. In case of a girl child, for example, the song contains words such as “*Oreng’e mokabaisia obeire mokabamura*” (she has been for the lads, she is now for men). These words could be taken to mean that promiscuity was allowed, but in actual sense pre-marital sex was highly prohibited as it was a preserve of marriage. In order for her to qualify for marriage she was to keep her virginity. A woman that was known to have had sex before marriage disqualified herself from a normal marriage. She never could be married as the first wife or even the second, third wife or whichever number. A girl who happened to find herself in such a situation or even as a result had children outside wedlock, could only be married to either an old man without family, a barren woman in woman to woman marriage (this was a kind of adoption and not actual marriage), or even to a man that either physically or mentally challenge. Therefore, she was given several lessons to prepare her for marriage and parenthood. Apart from being instructed to keep her virginity she was made to understand marriage as a live long event which once entered it meant no separation was allowed.

In the case of a boy child, similarly, during initiation a song was sung which had words such as “*Arwana Sigisi, arwana bomanyi, arwana bokuria, arwana boikoyo...*” (He fights the Kipsisis, he fights the Maasai, he fights the Kuria, he fights the Kikuyu...). The message contained in the song gave the man freedom to go out and seek for a wife from whichever tribe or clan desired. Although marriage did occur between the Abagusii and the neighboring Luo, men were indeed discouraged from entering into marriage covenant with the Luos, simply because of failure of the Luo to be circumcised. Hence, like girls boys were also given various teachings and instructions which made them understand the importance of marriage and the seriousness upon which it should be entered.

Initiation ceremonies were accompanied with several rituals and teaching some taking place before, during seclusion, and after. The initiate was given either a Godfather or Godmother to train them especially on how to relate with different members of society. Boundaries were clearly demarcated which helped conserve the sacredness of marriage among other things. The initiation fire that was prepared and kept burning throughout the period of seclusion was of great significance. It meant that now the initiate had undergone the cut, there was freedom to get married upon which children were expected. Secondly, prior to coming out of seclusion, the initiate was required to visit the parents at midnight to seek for blessing. The blessing pronounced granted the initiate two things, namely, children and wealth in terms of cattle (Akama, 2000).

### The Ritual of the Wedding Ring Anklet: Ogotimia Egetinge

The wearing of the wedding ring anklets (*ogotimia ebitinge* pl.) was the last and final stage of the Abagusii traditional marriage. In reference to the wedding ceremony Akama (2017) describes it as “one of the most significant and sacred ceremonies in Gusii culture.” It is further argued that, the ceremony was accompanied with magical-religious rituals which involved sacrificing a white he-goat, which symbolized the finality and sealing of the marriage (Akama 2017). There are differing views as to which come first between the giving of a new name to a bride and the installation of the anklets (*ebitinge*). For example, Nyang’era (1999) states that the ceremony followed immediately after the bride had been welcomed into the groom’s home by his mother, in a ceremony known as *Ogotora Omoriakari*. Nyang’era (1999) continues that the ceremony was preceded by giving the bride a new name, *Erieta riabitinge* (literally, Anklets’ name). Ochoi (2013) holds different views that the choice of the bridal name followed the wedding ring ceremony. According to Akama (2017) the installation of the anklets and the giving of the bridal name seem to be running concurrently. However, from respondents immediately the bride arrived at her new home she was given a bridal name, but the ceremony of installation of the anklet (*ogotimia egetinge*) followed three to four months later. This was after she had stayed with the groom, a period which both the bride and the groom secretly learning one another. After the expiry of the period she was allowed to go back to her parent and report to them her experience in the new home. In case she reported any situation or event that could make the marriage difficult, such as the issue of witchcraft, the marriage at this point could be dissolved. In the same manner, if the man discovered any behavior with the bride that could negatively impact their marriage the marriage was dissolved and dowry returned. Other respondents said that there were times when the ceremony of the anklet was delayed until the bride had become pregnant and given birth. This was important because marriage was considered complete when children were born to the couple. The marriage was not complete sometimes even after the bride and the groom had stayed together. Among the Abagusii there was what could be said to be a trial marriage, that’s why they were not in a hurry to install the anklets (*ebitinge*) which meant there had to be vows accompanying it. Once the ceremony of wedding ring installation (*ogotimia egetinge*) was done the marriage was irreversible under any circumstances. The process involved fine details and it took a long period of time to be completed. Mayer (1975) commenting on divorce says that: “Divorce could only take place the period between the initial negotiations of the go-between and the final celebration of *enyangi* in case there arise certain reasons for which a marriage may be terminated at a request of one or other party.”

The new name of the bride was chosen from four main names Kemunto, Kerubo, Kwamboka, and Moraa. Each of the name reminded the community their past, especially their encounter during migration before settlement in their present homeland. The names were also given depending on the order at which they came. The first wife was referred to as *Mobucha ibu* or *Kemunto*, the second wife *Nyamisancho* or *Kwamboka*, the third *Nyabweri*

*Rogoro* or *Kerubo*, and the fourth *Nyabweri maate* or *Moraa* (Ochoi 2013). The name given to the first wife *Mobucha ibu* symbolically meant that the groom had not been involved in sexual intercourse with any woman before his marriage. *Mobucha ibu* signified she was the first one to receive sperms from him. Virginity and the sanctity of marriage were jealously guarded as far as the Abagusii community is concerned.

The Abagusii traditional marriage ceremony was officiated by a priest or priestess (*Omokundekane*) (Akama 2017). The respondents said that the officiating priest or elder must be a person who underwent the process during his marriage (*Omogaka bwe’chinyangi bweka*). Any elder that was not married through the traditional wedding (*enyangi*) did not qualify to officiate at the ceremony. Discussing the significance of the wedding rings Akama (2017) posits that:

The ankle rings signified that now the bridegroom and the bride had attained full status of marriage, and the wife was now both legally and spiritually bound to her husband. This marked the end of the wedding ceremony. After the wedding ceremony, it was in rare for the marriage to fail or lead into a divorce.

The ceremony of installing anklets (*ogotimia ebitinge*) was so elaborate, involving rituals which were meant to bind the groom and the bride together for life. The significance attached to the ceremony and the accompanying rituals made it difficult for a marriage to be dissolved. The couples also ensured that they were not to get into any situation that could allow such a thing to happen. Therefore, the ritual of wearing the anklets (*ebitinge*) marked a very important step in the process of getting married. In reference to the importance of the anklets, Miruka (2011) retaliates that:

*Egetinge*, a band worn on the ankle, was given to respected women in a ceremony. For a woman, the band implied she could not leave her matrimonial home or take another man even if the husband died

The wedding ring apart from sealing the marriage covenant between the bride and the bridegroom, also served to identify the community, Nyaunder (1997) adds that:

The anklets were particularly important. *Ebitinge* (ankle bands), as they are called signified a marriage contract. The present use of the name *Mwanyagetinge* (those of *ebitinge*) to refer to Abagusii.

The ceremony and the rituals accompanying it were so elaborate and getting involved in any activities contrary to the vows called for a serious curse upon the offender. Nyang’era (1999) describing how the ceremony was conducted states that, it started by the bride being given a new name before the anklets were put on her legs. This was followed by slaughtering a goat by strangling it and in the process it urinated. The urine was tapped and sprinkled on both the bridegroom and the bride to bless and unite them. In an interview with one of the elders, he explained that the goat was held in a way that it urinated on the bride and the groom<sup>1</sup>. The significance of the ritual was that if any of the partner engaged in extra-marital affairs (adultery), the evil spirit of adultery will strike upon them leading to *Amasangia* (a curse due to unfaithfulness). The waste of the goat was cast on the newlywed couple signifying blessings and protection to them. The meat of

<sup>1</sup> The respondents had different versions describing the process involving the sacrificial goat. Some supported the idea that it urinated on them while it was held; others said the urine was tapped and sprinkled on them, yet others said it

was the waste from the intestines that was sprinkled on them. But the main purpose of the goat was to join them together, and the skin was both useful for the bride’s clothing and for making the anklets.

the strangled goat (*enyama yekegwanso*) was shared among the couple and the officiating elders. Finally, the bride accompanied by another woman and a boy carrying sticks (*Omosisia bw' ebiranya*) carried the skin of the strangled goat to her parent's home to introduce herself by the new name. The sticks the boy carried were from four different trees *Omosabakwa*, *Omosocho*, *Ekerundu*, and *Emenyatai* which were collectively referred to as *ebiranya or emerisera*.

There were different views on who did the installation of the wedding ring anklets. For example, a retired pastor and member of Abagusii elders' council shared same views with Professor Ondigi Abaya that the groom placed the metal rings (*Chintere*) on the legs of the bride after which the officiating elder did the finishing work which involved using the muscle tendons of the previously slaughtered goat to tie the rings. The differing view was that the actual installation of the wedding rings anklets (*ebitinge*) was done by the bridegroom himself assisted by the best man (*Omongwansi*)<sup>[2]</sup>.

According to Ochoi (2013), "the bridegroom took some anklet rings (*Chintere*) tied them up with a piece of string or dry banana fiber and put it around the bride's right leg. The best man also put the second ring round the left leg."<sup>[3]</sup> This process of installing the anklets is also described by Nyaruri and Maangi (2014) who say that:

On the second day the goat of the bride, '*omoriakari*', was slaughtered, '*okong'wansa*'. Before that, it was passed around her four times. It was then allowed to urinate on her. When it was slaughtered only the brothers and sisters of the groom are allowed to eat the meat. The groom's parents are not supposed to eat the meat. The skin of this goat was then torn into small pieces, '*ebitwanga*'. One was put on the right hand of the husband as such are put on both. Then the bride goes to her home with the remainder of the skin which was to be squeezed and made into '*engobo*'. After a day's stay at home she wears the newly made '*engobo*'. By this time she also wears the '*ebitinge*', to confirm that she was indeed married. She then returned to her husband accompanied by about five girls each carrying flour. The next day the mother of the bride groom cooks a lot of food and calls in the neighbours. During this festival, the bride is given a new name. Then follows a lot of drinking, and the couple is allowed to join. After this water is boiled, and the bride called on to start cooking. She is then watched by her mother-in-law and other women as she cooks. That night the bride sleeps in her skins until the morning. As the bridegroom installed the anklet on bride, he recited the traditional vows which also included his main clan. The Abagusii community had five major clans each belonging to the descendants of five wives of *Mogusii* the Great ancestor of the community. Philip Mayer (1949) supports the idea that, "the

totem is also mentioned by the husband during the ceremony of fastening the marriage ring on his wife." Abai (2013) describes the vows according to each of the major clans as follows:

The vow for the bridegroom coming from *Mosweta* family will go as: "*Aye omwencheri one, nakobekeire egetinge kia Mosweta O' Ngoge*" (My beloved wife, I have put the wedding ring of '*Mosweta Ngoge*' round your leg). *Omosweeta* is a skin of a Baboon that was initially worn by *Mosweta* the grandson of *Mogusii* through his son *Ibabe/Oibabe* I. because the skin came from a Baboon, his name became *Mosweta*. The Abagusii people swore by the Totem of their clan, hence the descendants of *Mosweta* namely *Majoge/ Bomachoge*, *Nyaribari/Onyangore*, *Kitutu/Bogetutu*, *Bosamaro*, *Bosigisa/Onchoke*, and *Borangi* all swore by the name of *Mosweta O'Ngoge*.

The one coming from Bassi clan could say, "*Aye omwencheri one, nakobekeire egetinge kia Obasi O'Nchage*." The Bassi clan has *Enchage/Rigwari* (Zebra) as their Totem.

The Bridegroom from *Wanjare/ Bonchari* clan took his vow as, "*Aye omwencheri one, nakobekeire egetinge kia Onchari Omache chindiba chibokendu' okogenda boira bokia otairogeti gesiomba*." Translated, My beloved wife, I have put the wedding ring of (*Monchari Omache*) round your leg, the rest of the utterances, were a remind of the history of the clan, and particularly concerning the journey they made at night from Luoland crossing the deep chilled waters of river *Nyando*. The clan's Totem is a Hippopotamus, though they do not swear by it, but instead when swearing they recall their experience during their immigration and settlement.

The Bridegroom from either North Mogirango or South Mogirango would say, "*Aye omwencheri one, nakobekeire egetinge kia Omogirango egesimba ekenyerere getachi koiba*" (My beloved wife I have put the wedding ring of the Leopard or slim squirrel which does not steal, round your leg). The two sister clans have the Leopard as their Totem.

The Clan known as *Abakeira* which is also found in Kuria, could say "*Aye omwencheri one, nakobekeire egetinge kia, Omokeira Oonge, Chinchogu nechiberia bakonywera koboko mache buna monwa oborire*," (My beloved wife I have put the wedding ring of Mokeira who turned into an Elephant, the ones who drink water by lapping as if they lack a mouth).

The wedding rings (Anklets) once installed remain as an identifier of a woman being bond to her husband so long as he lives. The only time she was to remove it was upon the death of her husband which made her a widow. Even in such eventuality, she was supposed to remove only one of the rings. The other ring remained signifying she was widowed and she now got inherited according to the Abagusii customary law<sup>[4]</sup>. There also arose a situation when a quarrel of dispute erupted between the in a

<sup>2</sup> Professor Ondigi Abaya, differs strongly on the anklet installation ceremony, arguing that the best man did not have part in the installation of the anklet. His work was only to witness, as the bridegroom himself placed the anklet on the legs of the bride. The same sentiments were shared by Retired Pr. Harrison Moronya, an expert of Abagusii culture, and who has interacted much with the Abagusii elders, including his late father-in-law, retired Pr. Abel Nyakundi Onchoke, who had a lot of history about the Abagusii people and other Bantu speaking tribes. This position was supported by evidence Abel Nyakundi Onchoke (1930) unpublished document, stating that "the bridegroom brought a steel ring (*entere*), the best man also brought a ring (*entere*), then the bride put it on the right leg and the best man on the other.

<sup>3</sup> Views differed on how the anklets were installed, but, during the interview with the focus group discussions, the elders said that there were not similar fine details

in the way the ceremony was conducted. As the people migrated and settled in new places culture also continued to change. There could be cases where the husband placed the rings on the bride, but again the best man could give him a hand. The only thing that the bridegroom had to do in person was to recite the vow, according to his clan. The major work of installing the ring was done by an expert.

<sup>4</sup> Respondents were not comfortable with the usage of the term "wife inheritance." They said among the Abagusii, the right word is *Kogororokia omochie* (uplifting the home), they said the widow is never inherited because she remains the property of the deceased husband. The man who may come in serves the purpose of siring children for the deceased husband.

family, the woman in order to cut the relationship removed one anklet [5]. If the husband died after she had removed the anklet, she underwent a cleansing ceremony. This involved slaughtering of a goat whose meat was placed on the balm of her dead husband's corpse, and she ate it from the balm. Once she had completed performing the ritual, she was now free to bury her husband. The widow of the deceased was also taken to the grave where she was given *Rirongo* and *Amanyasi* (Special Concoction removing a curse). The cleansing process in the event of removing the anklet, while the husband was still living made women to bear with unfavorable situations in order to keep their marriages.

### A Curse Resulting from Unfaithfulness in Marriage: Amasangia

#### The Condition of Amasangia

The condition known as “*Amasangia*” was a result of unfaithfulness in marriage. It affected either a man that was unfaithful to his wife or vice versa. The condition particularly affected a man or men who shared a woman sexually. In the event of adultery, if the husband crossed over the blood of his wife while she delivered a child, the unfaithful wife got an attack. Immediately following the crossing of the blood, the woman started to sweat, while she stretched herself slowly, becoming flexible, and finally she died, if quick action was not taken to reverse the curse.

It also happened if the wife was sick, and an unfaithful husband decided to slaughter a goat for her, with an intention of facilitating her healing. The unfaithful wife got the attack and could die while exhibiting the same signs the same as the one an unfaithful woman exhibited. Therefore, it was prohibited for a man to visit another man in case of normal sickness, if there was sharing of a woman. The moment the two set eyes on each other, which could slowly cause the sick man to die. In the case of a man under the attack of *Amasangia*, the penis stretched abnormally accompanied with sweating. If left unattended the man finally died. In some occasions a child born out of an illicit relationship could also die.

The respondents further, said that *Amasangia* could kill very fast, but immediately it was discovered, the victim was made to cross over a dog, as a temporary measure. Then the process of treatment was begun, whereby a religious specialist was consulted to perform the rituals that resulted. The dog is believed to be an animal that lacks morals, the reason why, usually a person that has uncouth behavior is said to be having a dog's behavior. According to the respondents there were instances when either the promiscuous man or woman took preventive measures in order to avoid the attack of *Amasangia*. This had to be done quite early before the relationship was discovered or before any event that could trigger and attack. The promiscuous spouse ensured that the other partner has shared food together eating from same

container. In such an event, the culprits had to do it with a lot of care to avoid suspicion.

During the interview with the respondents, I learned that *Amasangia* did not affect members in a polygamous marriage. Where the legal process is involved and individuals have been married by the same husband, there is no unfaithfulness. This is the reason why the condition of *Amasangia* is referred to as a curse. Abagusii tradition allows for the practice of polygamy, and in case of marrying more than one wife, in every marriage anklets are worn. The rituals that accompanied the ceremony of the wedding ring, anklet (*egetinge*), made it possible for an individual to fall victim of *amasangia* in case of unfaithfulness. A man in a polygamous relationship was equally not safe if he went outside of his legally married wives. There remains a mystery behind how the curse of unfaithfulness happened, but it was one way of maintaining community moral values. It also came out very clear that the use of the anklet (*egetinge*) is a practice that is strictly confined to the Abagusii people.

#### Reversing the Curse, treatment of Amasangia

The Abagusii were very knowledgeable in treating several ailments. As much as sexual unfaithfulness could lead to the victim's death, once discovered the curse was reversible. However, it needed quick confession on the part of the offender for the curse to reverse. Upon confession, as earlier discussed in this study, the first step towards treatment, the affected person was made to pass over a dog. Then, the victim was given medicine referred to as *Rirongo* (a special concoction).

*Rirongo* was prepared by a woman who had reached menopause (*omokungu obutire korwa ase okonyora abana*). The concoction was made from a mixture of different soils obtained from various places. In total there were eight different soils that made *Rirongo*.

1. *Ribusi Rieng'uko* (a mole hill soil).
2. *Ribusi Riechimonyo* (ant hill soil).
3. *Amaroba yechinsangia chiechinchera—Amatebekani* (soil taken from a junction where two roads/paths cross each other).
4. *Ekegege giechintuga* (Termite hill soil).
5. *Ebundo, amaraba yesasati esike* (Cray from a swamp).
6. *Amabi y'Eguto* (Feces of an Antbear).
7. *Amaroba ase omogoko oochaine* (silt heaped due to erosion caused by rain).
8. *Euura y'Engondi* (Intestine waste of a sheep).

The different components were mixed together and dried on *Egesero* (special dry skin). In most cases *Rirongo* a brown substance resembling a sausage was prepared and kept for any eventuality. In the event of an attack the person known to be having the medicine was quickly consulted (Moronya 2013). The concoction is said to be given to animals like cows to protect them from an evil eye, therefore, it could also be found kept as a home remedy.

for such an experience. In reality, during the installation ceremony, it was emphasized that the anklets were to remain permanent so long as the husband lived. On the same note, even after the death of the husband still one anklet remained until the death of the woman/wife. Therefore, at no time did a married woman stay without the anklet, so long as she lived. That is the reason why a married woman remained a possession of her husband (*Ritinge*) even when there was divorce or separation, even though divorce was almost non-existent among the Abagusii people.

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Oirere, a wife to retired Pr. Nathan Oirere, claimed to have witnessed a cleansing ceremony where a wife had a broken relationship with her husband prompting her to remove one of the anklets (*ebietinge*). Again Professor Ondigi, was of the opinion that an anklet was never removed under any circumstances, unless the husband had died. But, an interview with some of the members of Abagusii Council of elders, said that times could arise when a woman removed one of the anklet, the reason why a special ceremony cleansing ceremony was conducted in the event of dead. However, they insisted it was very rare for such an occurrence because of what the ceremony involved and no woman was ready

### Reconciling Victims of Adultery: Ogosangia Abatomani

The moment an adulterous person exhibited signs of an attack resulting from *Amasangia*, it was necessary for the victim to say the truth. Upon confession of the offender, the process of treating or reversing the curse began. The offender brought a goat which was slaughtered. Row intestines were removed and mixed with a little honey. The offenders were brought together and made to kneel while hands stretched with open palms. Pieces of intestines mixed with *Rirongo* were placed on the palms. The leaked the concoction like dogs using their tongues. Then, they were given the thigh bone from the slain goat. The adulterous man and the adulterous woman hold the bone each on one side. They cut it into two pieces each taking one, then, they chew *emenyika* (muscles). The strict adherence to the rules led to the healing of the victims of *Amasangia*. Hence, it was presumed reconciliation was accomplished.

The entire process was so involving and due to the rigorous procedure undertaken to reverse the curse resulting from *Amasangia*, individuals preferred to maintain faithfulness. Unless discovered and the victim made to confess, death resulted. Therefore, marriage was properly guarded and it was one of the ways of guarding community moral values.

### Conservation of Abagusii Marriage through Inculturation

As noted earlier the coming of the Christian faith into Gusii brought changes in many cultural activities including marriage. This was opposed by one of the very first converts into Christianity. Chief Musa Nyandusi, despite being an adherent of the Adventist faith married his first wife Mariamu Moraa Moige in 1925 under Gusii customary law, and she wore anklets (*ebitinge*), which she removed on permission from her husband in 1964, shortly before she died. Priscillah Motanya a retired teacher and granddaughter to Moige who stayed with her until her demise, recalls that there existed a unique relationship between Moige and Nyandusi, and the duo respected each other in a unique way. Despite the fact that the family was polygamous in adherence to Abagusii custom, Moige owned the homestead and all her co-wives, submitted to her, and any one of them that showed disrespect was severe punishment. But due to the disagreement between the missionaries and Nyandusi on the wearing of the anklets, Moige married through Abagusii customary law never continued with her faith in Christianity. She maintained tradition the reason that contributed to Nyandusi becoming a polygamous person, marrying sixteen (16) wives.

Alan Hirsh (2006) referring to what he calls incarnational ministry states, that “when God came into our world in and through Jesus, He Eternal moved into the neighborhood and took up residence among us (John 1:14).” This statement suggests the approach which the missionaries into new field ought to apply in reaching out people from different cultural backgrounds. The message is that God saves people within their culture; He does not replace their culture with a new one. Incarnational ministry can be attained through a process that is called inculturation.

Pardon Mwansa, in Bauer (2009) responding to interpreting traditions and/or cultural practices, states that “there are traditions that directly contradict the demands of the gospel and such traditions must be resisted and opposed by believers.” The Abagusii marriage wedding ring, anklets (*ebitinge*) do not contradict the demands of the gospel, for the White Missionaries to have been against the practice. Mwansa further argues that:

The interpretation of what traditions or aspects of culture are good and appropriate and what are not should be left to the local people themselves. For example, when people who are not part of a given community or culture take it upon themselves to interpret that culture to decide which traditions are bad and which ones are good, they often make a mistake. The task of deciding what to do is best done by the sanctified people, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, of the same community or culture, rather than by foreigners (Mwansa 2010)

The above statement concurs with the argument that, the western missionary Christianity was accompanied with some serious shortcomings, which has made it had to penetrate to the heart of an African (Parrett, 1997). Nyaundi (2003) states, that Christianity and African culture, have existed together for over 200 years with an ambivalent relationship. The long stay with a strained relationship could be as a result of misrepresenting the gospel by the white missionaries. The refusal of the Abagusii wedding ring is one of such cases of misinterpreting culture. Mwasa (2010) retaliates that “interpreting cultural practices and labeling them as either heathen or against the gospel can be a challenge.” Another writer has it that, “the need to study and understand African traditional religion in order to Christianize Africans without destroying their culture was recognized quite earlier by some missionaries” (Nthamburi 1989). However, as stated by Hirsh (2006), the missionaries failed to realize that change is not always easy, therefore, if one wanted to change society, then one must tell an alternative.

The wedding ring anklet (*egetinge*) played a very significant role among the Abagusii, meaning not only in ensuring marriage was a permanent venture, but also as an identifying mark of the community, as well as a way of instilling morality and curbing sexual promiscuity. Robert Levine et. al, (1996) posits that:

The Gusii were proud of their morality, which they saw as superior to that of other Kenya peoples. This pride was symbolized by the *ebitinge*, the iron ankle-rings worn by married women, who had undergone the *enyangi* wedding ceremony, an elaborate ritual that publicly and religiously certified the monogamy of a Gusii wife, her life long bond to the husband who gave bride wealth for her. Pre-colonial Gusii, seeing the *ebitinge* as their visible mark of distinction from surrounding people, referred to themselves as *abanyamatinge* [sic], <sup>[6]</sup> “people of *ebitinge*.” The implication was that their marriages were permanent, their wives faithful, their communities free from the sexual promiscuity they attributed to other groups. Rituals play a very important role in society and they are closely linked to the history and the culture of a particular people. Commenting on the importance of rituals, Hiebert *et al.* (1999) says:

Abagusii Council of Elders, in support of this assertion said, “*Abakungu baito nigo barenge aberiti, na kabere, nigo barenge namasikani amanene ase enyuomo yabo* (Our ladies practiced justity, secondly, they highly respected their marriage). The ritual of the wedding ring played a great role as far as faithfulness in marriage was concerned.

<sup>6</sup> The use of the word *Abanyamatinge*, does not convey the same meaning as stated by Robert Levine, “people of *ebitinge*.” The word translated will mean “the people who have taken other people’s wives” a separated or divorced wife is referred to as *riinge* (pl. *amatinge*). Therefore, *Abanyamatinge* when used to refer to people becomes abusive. Notwithstanding this, Levine clearly describes the importance of the wedding ring among the Gusii people. Ong’uti a member of the

Rituals serve important functions in society. They help people remember who they are, re-create a world order, give people a sense of identity and belonging, relate them to the transcendent, and indoctrinate insiders and outsiders alike to the true values and perceived realities of society.

During a focus group discussion with members of the Abagusii Council of Elders, the respondents were so concerned that we are in a society where moral have disappeared. One respondent said, “*Titobwati gesaku, amasikani yenyangi yebitinge taiyo*” (we have no generation; the respect that was characterized with the anklet wedding has disappeared). We need to understand that culture is a vehicle for God’s truth, hence employ the incarnational approach in order to conserve society’s moral values. Incarnational approach incorporates culture with the gospel instead of ignoring it. Brian M, Howell & Jenell Williams Paris (2011), writing on culture as a conversation, posits that:

As Christians, then, we should not simply ignore the culture in which we find ourselves, as that invariably results in an unthinking acceptance of the status quo. Nor should we try to reject culture, becoming “just Christians” without any culture. God’s truth is revealed to us through specific cultural forms. We then use our own cultural forms to understand that revelation. Sometimes we try to strip away the medium by which communicates to us to get the “pure messages” underneath. But God gave us different cultures so that we can understand God. The incarnation was God’s statement that creation—culture, society, the human body—is a good thing that will be redeemed, not necessary evil we must tolerate or repress until Christ comes again. Without culture, we have no language, no symbols, no revelation, and no community.

### Conclusion

The discussion above interrogated marriage rituals that were important for the conservation of community moral values, in order to preserve the Abagusii culture by digitizing the past heritage for future generations. The study also sought to establish how the Abagusii traditional marriage rituals can be incorporated into the Christian faith, for the conservation of community moral values. The main elements I analyzed were the Abagusii traditional marriage wedding ring, anklets (*ebitinge*) and the moral value attached to it. The study specifically emphasized the importance of the installation ceremony and how finally marriage is consummated. I also explored the relationship between the Abagusii traditional wedding ring, anklets (*ebitinge*) and the curse resulting from unfaithfulness (*amasangia*). The study also interrogated on the reversal of the curse, which was done by use of a special concoction (*Rirongo*). But, this was on condition that the offender admitted and confessed the act of unfaithfulness. Otherwise, there was a possibility of a person dying as a result of promiscuity, an act highly discouraged among the Abagusii people.

The study found out that Abagusii people highly regarded the institution of marriage which was jealously guarded. Marriage remains a permanent institution to which is attached community moral values. Before modernity or the age of Christianity, the Abagusii community was held together by marriage, and especially the accompanying rituals. Marriage formed the core of existence among the Abagusii, and therefore, it had to be jealously guarded. The culture of a given people is important and the removal of important elements of such as the marriage rituals

is something to be cautiously entered. The Christian missionaries condemned the cultural practice of the wedding rings, without considering its value to society. This has led to what can be called nominal Christianity or dual allegiance, for believers in the Christian faith have continued either openly or silently to adhere to cultural practices, considering the foreign religion not sufficient. It also came up very clear that since the coming of the new religion a lot has changed as far as the cultural values of the Abagusii people. The rich culture of the Abagusii is disappearing to the point the elders think they have no generation left. The purpose of this study is to try to recapture the vanishing culture by digitizing. It was also discovered that Abagusii have a rich culture which has held them together as a people. The practice of wearing the wedding anklets (*ebitinge*) by married women made them unique and distinguished them from all other tribes around them. This will be helpful for the appreciation of our own cultural heritage. The wedding ring (*egetinge*) served a very important role in the preserving of community moral values. As it were marriage is almost losing meaning and is taken just like any other relationship, forgetting the permanence attached to it. The Christian missionaries while doing a great work of the gospel did a lot of undoing as far as the Kisii culture was concerned. Right from the beginning the native converts to the Christian faith had an intention to preserve their culture, which the missionaries refused to accommodate. This study concludes that in the twin rituals of *egetinge* and *amasangia*, there is a rich heritage for the conservation of community moral values.

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