

A Hidden History of Marriage Among the Imilangu of Kalabo and Sikongo Districts of Western Zambia

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ABSTRACT

This article is a discussion of marriage among the *Imilangu* of Kalabo and Sikongo Districts of Western Zambia. Despite many scholars like Sumbwa, Kakula, Strike and others having documented different aspects of life like social, political, religious and economy on the people of Barotseland, the *Imilangu* inclusive, marriage among the *Imilangu* occupies a very small portion in their literature. Having identified this gap, this article discusses in an exploratory manner marriage among the *Imilangu*. The ways through which marriage was established have been examined. In addition, wedding ceremonies and the activities therein have been conversed. The article closes with an examination of polygamy. The reasons that made men to get into polygamous marriages have thoroughly been articulated. The article finally deliberated on the decrease in polygamous marriages in the area. Here, it has been observed that economic hardships and the introduction of christianity are the main reasons for the decrease in polygamous marriages among the *Imilangu*.

Keywords: Imilangu, marriage, sex, childbearing, polygamy

INTRODUCTION

All human beings, despite their colour, origin, location, education, wealth status, religion and any other aspects of life, are social beings. Being social beings, human beings have a number of social activities that they are associated with which finally gives them their identity. One of such activities among the *Imilangu* is marriage. Just like in many other traditions and cultures, marriage among the *Imilangu* was very important as it was the cornerstone of the home and the clans.

Chondoka observes that:

Among the Lozi marriage plays an important function of ‘*kutiisa mu kowa*’, meaning reinforcing and renewing family relationships in the community. People’s families come together because of marriages. Relationships are created as a result of marriage between two families previously unknown to each other.¹

Chondoka further states that our traditional society looked at marriage as union of a man and woman forever.² Chondoka’s definition is correct in line with what was obtaining in *Imilangu*. When a man and woman got married, they ensured that they lived together for life. There were few instances of divorce based on genuine grounds like barrenness, laziness or lack of respect for both the husband and his relatives. People lived together for life because of the value they attached to marriage. Marriage was cardinal among the *Imilangu* because it was believed that it was through marriage that villages continued to exist. To espouse the value of marriage, Magesa outlines that:

¹ Yizenge A. Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia: A Study in Cultural History* (Ndola: Mission Press, 1988), p. 28.

² Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 162.

Whatever else a person has or is, without marriage and children, one is nothing. Indeed such a person is seen to be damned, a lost soul. Without marriage and children, a person is most likely already “rotten” in religious terms, that is, completely dead.³

Ngulube expounds that marriage is the backbone of the society. It is on marriage that the whole definition of society lies.⁴ He further notes that marriage symbolises the transformation of status for a man and creates new roles and expectations for a woman.⁵

Marriage among the *Imilangu* was considered to be one of the cardinal pillars in their social life because it was through it that people were able to produce children leading to the expansion of the families. Among the *Imilangu* marriage was believed to be founded on two pillars, namely, sex and childbearing. Without sex and childbearing marriage could not last for a long period of time. Livinus Mufana supported this view by stating that, “sex and childbearing are the major reasons that made people to marry. Any other reason that one may give as a reason for marriage is a by the way.”⁶ Sex and childbearing were highly regarded as the major reasons that make people to marry. This is the reason a marriage without sex or children could not last long.

METHODOLOGY

This study used various sources and methods in the process of gathering information. Purposive sampling procedure was used during data collection. The study used qualitative data collection method. Primary data was collected from nine oral sources (six males and three females) who had important data on marriage establishment among the *Imilangu*. These were selected from different villages within and even outside the study area based on recommendations from people who knew them to have adequate oral data on the history of *Imilangu*. Secondary data was collected from different written literature at Kwame Nkrumah University and the University of Zambia (UNZA) libraries. National Archives of Zambia (NAZ) was of help in provision of more primary data. In addition, internet sources were of great help during data collection.

Marriage establishment

There were four main ways through which marriage was established among the *Imilangu*. These were *ku ungekela* (betrothal), *ku kufaa* (formal marriage proposal), *ku kuica* (running away with the bride without her parents' knowledge) and *ku yanga* (elopement). However, this article deals with the first two only (*ku ungekela* and *ku kufaa*) because they were more common than the other two (*ku kuica* and *ku yanga*).

Ku ungekela simply meant to engage a girl who was below marriageable age. Stirke bemoans *ku ungekela* saying, “... girls are all bespoken in marriage many years before arriving at a marriageable age, and have, theoretically, very little say in the matter at all; the arrangements being made between suitor and father or mother.”⁷ Chondoka outlines that:

The practice of parents or guardians choosing marriage partners for their sons was very common in the traditional pre-literate society in Zambia. Parents or close relatives of the man were the ones who went in the neighbouring villages (or in their own village) looking for a girl from a good family for him to marry.⁸

For example, if parents to a boy loved a certain girl, they approached the parents to that girl requesting that their son and their daughter marry when they grew up. Stirke adds that sometimes a father while his son is still fairly

³ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), p. 100.

⁴ Naboth M.J. Ngulube, *Some Aspects of Growing Up in Zambia* (Lusaka: Nalinga Consultancy/Sol-Consultancy A/S Limited, 1989), p. 95.

⁵ Ngulube, *Some Aspects of Growing Up in Zambia*, p. 95.

⁶ Interview with Livinus Mufana Like on 8th July, 2018.

⁷ D.W. Strike, *Barotseland: Eight Years among the Barotse* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), pp. 65-66.

⁸ Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 14.

young, will arrange a marriage for him.⁹ Having agreed that the two children should marry when they reached marriageable age, the parents to the boy gave an axe, hoe, spear or anything available as surety to the parents of the girl. If the girl had reached an age that could allow her to be kept by the parents to the boy, she was picked to stay with the parents to the boy until the time she could be ready for marriage. Despite being kept by the parents to the boy, she was strictly not allowed to share the same room with the husband to be. However, if she was still young, she remained with her parents until she grew up. When the girl was ready for marriage, the parents to the boy met with her parents to formalise the marriage.

Other than parents to the man approaching the parents to the girl, *ku ungekela* was sometimes done by the boy himself approaching the parents to the girl and requested them to allow him to marry their daughter when she would reach marriageable age. According to Stirke,

A young man arriving at an age when he considers it good to get married, goes to the parents of the girl of his choice (generally before she has arrived at the age of puberty), and asks their consent to his marriage with their daughter. If the parents agree, the suitor gives the girl a necklace of white beads and a blanket. The matter is then left until the girl goes into hiding for her “*mwalianjo*.”¹⁰

Having agreed with the parents, the man then waited for the time the girl would be ready for marriage. However, following some disappointments that happened in *Imilangu*, especially when people started going out for labour migrations, where a man or girl disappointed the other despite having waited for each other for a long period of time, marrying through *ku ungekela* came to an end in *Imilangu*. Moreover, the increased population of girls in the area contributed to the stoppage of men marrying through *ku ungekela* because girls were readily available whenever one wanted to marry. According to Muyemisa Namushi,

Ku ungekela was very common in *Imilangu* in the olden days because there were very few women. A man then had no option but to wait for a young girl because if he did not wait, the possibilities of finding a good woman were very slim because women were very few. However, since there are a lot of women now, there is no need to marry through *ku ungekela* because a man can find a lady to marry at any time.¹¹

The second way of establishing marriage was through a man proposing marriage to a lady (*ku kufaa*) when both of them had reached marriageable age. Using this form of marriage establishment, a man went round the villages nearby, or even far away, looking for a lady to marry. At times, instead of going round the villages searching, a man went direct to a particular village where he knew or he had been told that there was a lady he could marry. Chondoka states that in *ku batana* (*ku kufaa*) the young man visited villages where he heard that there were ladies. He could go there alone, pretending to visit somebody or he could go with friends who may or may not be looking for girls to marry.¹² In this kind of a marriage, just like in a marriage established through *ku ungekela*, parents to the man and other relatives played a very big role of approving the lady and her family. On the other hand, the family to the lady also had to dig deeper to know more about the man who wanted to marry their daughter. In his research about the Tonga, Chondoka observed that, “after scrutiny of the man’s family, the panel will either reject marriage or accept it.”¹³ Sumbwa observed that:

The girl usually makes the subject of her being proposed known to her parents (who, with the help of relatives) dig into the man’s character and other characteristics (if he is not known to them) and give their daughter their opinion concerning his worth as a husband. The man’s suitability is by no means the only thing under scrutiny during this

⁹ Strike, *Barotseland*, p. 66.

¹⁰ Strike, *Barotseland*, pp.65-66.

¹¹ Interview with Muyemisa Namushi on 28th November, 2016.

¹² Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 28.

¹³ Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 118.

time. The girl's suitability is like-wise scrutinised by the man's parents and relatives when news about the *libato* is brought to their attention by their 'son'.¹⁴

'*Wayeka oipulange*' meaning 'when looking for someone to marry you should ask' was highly espoused among the *Imilangu* because parents and other relatives guided and approved the wife or husband one wanted to marry. The aspect of consulting and seeking approval from family members when a man wanted to marry was very cardinal as it was believed that the woman who was brought in a village through marriage was to take care of everybody in the village. Therefore, to ensure that a man married the rightful woman, parents, family members and friends were consulted before one advanced in making marriage arrangements.

Without consulting people when one wanted to marry, the possibility of marrying a problematic spouse was very high. *Kuyekela mu muluti* (lit. marrying from the shade) was a saying that was used to refer to marrying someone who came from a good family. On the other hand "*kuyekela mu limwi/mu mulilo*" (lit. marrying from the sun/fire) was the direct opposite of *kuyekela mu muluti*, meaning marrying from a bad family. The 'shade' and 'sun/fire' in the two sayings simply referred to peacefulness and problems respectively that one could encounter from his or her spouse.

As soon as a man found a woman he loved, he proposed marriage to her. However, girls could not accept a man's proposal when approached the first time. According to Nalishuwa Namushi, "girls were told to reject a man's proposal between two to five times so as to prove his seriousness."¹⁵ If she agreed, the man gave her *tamo*¹⁶ in form of bangles, beads, etc. The word *tamo* comes from a *Silosi* word *kutama* which means tying. In this case the relationship between the man and woman is what was tied. After the lady was given *tamo*, both the man and the lady went to inform their parents of their intentions to marry. Unlike other ethnic groups in Zambia like the Ngoni where the man was not allowed to disclose his intentions to marry to his father,¹⁷ among the *Imilangu* the man was allowed to disclose to his father. As soon as the father was informed, he informed the uncles, the grandfather and other family members for them to approve or disapprove the girl the man wanted to marry. If the family members approved the girl, the man went with his uncles or brothers to meet the parents to the lady to make all the necessary marriage arrangements (*kupangeka*). Contrary to the Namwanga and Ngoni cultures where one person (go-between) called *Siukombe* and *Nkhoswe* respectively approached the family to the woman to discuss all marriage matters,¹⁸ among the *Imilangu* the man went with his relatives (preferably uncles and brothers) to meet the family to the lady he wanted to marry.

As soon as both families were seated, one of the brothers to the man started the discussion saying, '*kumatunaya lombo mulilo kwa mwanenu*' (lit. we have come to ask for fire from your daughter). Chondoka states that the girl's side knew what the man's side wanted when they mentioned that they had come to ask for fire.¹⁹ Upon mentioning the name of the lady from whom they came to ask for fire, she was called to be part of the discussion. Firstly, the man was asked by the relatives to the lady to explain how he got to know that there was a lady in that particular village or home. In response, the man told them that he saw her on his own. In case the man said that he had been told or shown the woman by someone else, it would mean that he was influenced to marry the lady by the same person who showed him. This would mean that the man did not have genuine love for the lady.

Having finished asking the man all the necessary questions, the lady was asked if she loved the man. Following the training done during initiation, the woman responded saying, "if I was a 'white person', I would have gone with him today". The term 'white person' was figurative meaning if all the needed resources were available she would go with the man the same day.

¹⁴ Sumbwa, *Aspects of the Lozi-Luyana Culture*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁵ Interview with Nalishuwa Namushi on 28th November, 2016.

¹⁶ See Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 20.

¹⁷ Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 40.

¹⁸ Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 20.

¹⁹ Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 30.

If the family to the woman was convinced that the two loved each other, they demanded for *kapunya mulomo*²⁰ in form of a spear, clay pots, bangle, beads or grain. However, Sumbwa states that *kapunya mulomo* was usually in form of a nominal amount of money.²¹ The money aspect highlighted by Sumbwa is a recent one. Before money was introduced in *Imilangu*, *kapunya mulomo* was paid in kind. Unlike the Lunda who set the pride price a week after the ‘mouth opener’ was given,²² among the *Imilangu* the lady’s family told the man’s family the same day the marriage discussions started the amount of *yoonda* (pride price) to pay. Having set the bride price, the lady’s family prepared *ishima* (*nshima*) with a whole chicken. According to Headman Muhongo, “slaughtering a cow for the man and his family by the girl’s family was a clear indication that they did not love the man because the only relish that was a symbol of respect and love was chicken.”²³ Chondoka adds that chicken is a dignified traditional relish.²⁴ When eating, the man and his relatives were not allowed to break the bones of the chicken. The bones were later collected by the lady’s mother or grandmother who took and soaked them in water. The essence of soaking the bones in water was to avoid witches and other people with evil intentions from bewitching the lady. According to Richard Namenda, if people with evil intentions found the bones of the chicken which had been prepared for the man and his family, they were going to bewitch the lady such that she would never have a child, or her marriage was not going to be stable.²⁵

Traditionally, for a lady who had never been married, a virgin, (*mwalyasho*), the man paid three cattle. For a lady who had a child or who was once married, the man paid two cattle only. If the parents to the man had no cattle, they paid pots, axes, wooden plates, etc. Payment in kind was acceptable since cattle were not common in the area until the second half of the nineteenth century. Sumbwa states that hoes and axes seem to have insignificant value at present, they were highly valued then because they were quite scarce because they were not produced massively as is the case now.²⁶ Payments were done by parents, and not the man marrying. This was because it was difficult for a young man to find cattle or the needed items for marriage payment. Sumbwa explains that payment done by parents was very helpful in sustaining marriages as young husbands were scared of disappointing their sponsors by divorcing their wives on insubstantial reasons.²⁷

On the set date for taking the marriage payments to the girl’s family, the man in the company of his relatives took them to the lady’s family. Upon arriving at the lady’s village, the relatives to the lady inspected²⁸ the marriage payments and then accepted or rejected them. Simasiku Lukupa confirmed this view when she stated that parents to the lady inspected the animals or whatever was brought as marriage payments to ensure that the payment done was acceptable.²⁹ As soon as marriage payments were accepted, the family to the lady prepared *nshima* and chicken to give to the man and his family. Unlike the Namwanga and Bembas who had a food preparation ceremony (*amateweto* in Namwanga) after giving marriage payment,³⁰ among the *Imilangu* giving of marriage payment was followed by the wedding. The date for the wedding was set just after the man’s family ate the food that was prepared for them.

There were scenarios when a man had completely nothing to pay as bride price for the lady he intended to marry. In such situations, the man made some promises that he would pay latter and he could be allowed to get his wife without any wedding ceremony conducted. Simakando postulates that, “marriage without any payment done to

²⁰ *Kapunya mulomo* simply means “mouth opener”. This is money paid by the man to the woman’s family in order for marriage discussions to start (opening the mouth).

²¹ Sumbwa, *Aspects of the Lozi-Luyana Culture*, p. 54.

²² Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 71.

²³ Interview with Moses Mutuso (Headman Muhongo) on 12th July, 2018.

²⁴ Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 64.

²⁵ Interview with Richard Namenda on 13th July, 2018.

²⁶ Sumbwa, *Aspects of the Lozi-Luyana Culture*, p. 55.

²⁷ Sumbwa, *Aspects of the Lozi-Luyana Culture*, p. 55.

²⁸ Inspection was done to verify if the goods brought were acceptable. If the man brought animals, the family to the lady had to check if they were of good age and they were in good health.

²⁹ Interview with Simasiku Lukupa on 17th April, 2017.

³⁰ Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 25.

the parents was called *maluwo amapoto*".³¹ Some people coming from poor families could marry for life without paying anything. However, such marriages were fragile because they could end at any time. Moreover, a lady married in a *mapoto* marriage could misbehave towards her husband knowing that she was in a marriage where she was labouring for husband free. Such a wife could pack her goods at any time if she got frustrated and could go back to her parents. After sometime she would go back to her husband on her own, or the parents would send her back. Sometime the husband followed his wife and pleaded with her to get back home.

Unlike modern weddings where attendance is by invitation, among the *Imilangu* there was no invitation done for people to attend a wedding ceremony (*linona*). Whoever wanted to attend was free to do so. Picking of the bride (*kunona mukaci*) was only done at night and not during daytime. As the party from the husband's side went to pick the bride, all the accompanying men carried firewood from *mupupu* or *muhole* trees to be given to the parents to the bride. *Mupupu* or *muhole* trees were used because both trees supported fire well and lasted long when burning. This symbolised a long lasting marriage just like *mupupu* and *muhole* trees lasted long when put on fire. On their way to pick the bride, women sang and ululated. When the party arrived at the bride's village, the ladies sat down while men stood with their firewood on their shoulders. Men could only sit and put down their firewood after a payment (*munyembu*) for the firewood they had brought was made by the family to the bride. Having sat down, *ishima* with chicken was given to the party.

After eating, one of the sisters to the bride got some beads and put them around the bride's neck and then lifted her up. The beads put around the bride's neck were left with her parents when the party went back to the man's village. After lifting up the bride, the party made a payment of beads, an axe, a hoe, etc. to the bride's elder sisters. When the party started off, the mother to the bride also followed until she was given a hoe, pot or anything else to send her back. Her going back home was an indication that she had surrendered her daughter to the groom and his family.

As the wedding party proceeded home, wherever they found a junction (*mahangananjila*), a big tree next to the road or a big tree fallen on the road, the relatives to the bride would sing a song called *njome-njombee*, *palelo shaminjombela* - meaning the bride was stuck and she could only move after the bridegroom's side paid something to the bride's family. For the bride to enter in the yard when they arrived home, the same song *njome-njombee*, *palelo shaminjombela* was sung to make sure that more payments were done. The bridegroom was hidden by his relatives and he could only be brought in the house after the bride's family made a payment to his family. Throughout the night people drummed, sung, danced *kayowe* and ululated while the bride was taught a number of issues in relation to marriage. Early in the morning, before dawn, the bride was taken to join her husband in the house.

One happening worth noting was that as soon as the bride was taken to join her husband in the house, a sister to the bride and a brother to the bridegroom³² also went in the house to witness their first sexual encounter for the new couple. During sex the bride lay with her back down and then the man was given a small axe (*kabanga*) to support him as he went down to have sex with his wife. The man bent horizontally towards the bride and made sure he put his erected penis on his wife's vagina without any body contact with her. The penis was not inserted in the vagina but just put on top of the vagina. Fire was lit in the house to enable the two witnesses to see what was happening. If the man did it successfully, people ululated and some beads were put around his right arm. If the man was not successful, he was charged. As soon as this was done, the couple was left to sleep in their house. To mark the end of the wedding ceremony, the following morning was characterized by *kayowe* dance, drumming, eating *nshima* with chicken and beer drinking. Finally, the couple's hair was shaved and the two joined the rest of the people in the *kayowe* dance. According to Namenda Nawa, the shaving of hair from the couple was done to protect them from witches who could bewitch them so that they could not have children.³³

³¹ S. Simakando, 'A History of the Imilangu in Kalabo and Sikongo Districts of Western Zambia', PhD. Thesis, Zambian Open University, 2019, p. 197

³² A sister to the bride and a brother to the bridegroom were known as "*akwaiunji*" which means marriage counselors. The sister to the bride and the brother to the groom were counselors to the bride and bridegroom respectively.

³³ Interview with Namenda Nawa on 5th December, 2016.

A day after the wedding ceremony, one of the elderly women in the village introduced the bride to her roles as a married woman. Chondoka observed that:

An elderly village female-in-law who was in good health, meaning the one who never miscarried or lost a first born child before, held a hoe with her. The two dug in the ground one or three times, the same lady held a broom with the bride and they swept a little. They also held a pounding stick and pounded a few times. This was done in the presence of all the women who came. Only a healthy woman could introduce the bride to such things. The unhealthy one, it was believed could transfer her misfortune to the new family.³⁴

It must however be mentioned that the Lozi aspect to do with a female-in-law in good health stated by Chondoka in the above citation was not applicable to the *Imilangu*. Any female-in-law, either in good health or not, could perform this task. In the absence of a female-in-law, any other woman available in the village could do it. The most preferred, however, was a sister-in-law.

Polygamy

Having deliberated on the establishment of marriage, it is also vital to look at another important aspect of marriage among the *Imilangu* known as *lipala* (polygamy). Despite *Imilangu* being characterised more by monogamous marriages, there were some isolated cases where people were involved in polygamy. Among the *Imilangu* when a man thought of marrying another wife he had to inform the senior wife and gave her reasons for contemplating marrying another wife. It was not in order for a man to marry a second wife without informing his first wife. If a man married a second wife without the knowledge of the first wife, confusions were expected between the two wives and even between the senior wife and her husband. Ngulube elucidates that:

A well-defined custom did exist which made it possible for co-wives to live in harmony with each other. If not properly controlled, polygamous marriages have been a source of death, quarrels, and marital instability. Love portions administered to polygamous husbands have usually left a man dead or dysfunctional in one way or the other.³⁵

A number of reasons were behind polygamous marriages in *Imilangu*. To start with, some men went into polygamous marriages because of the economic activities they were involved in which needed more labour. Such men felt the more wives they had, the more children they would have which would make their economic activities easier. Farmers fell in the category of people who felt that for their fields to be worked on within the shortest possible period of time they needed more man power. Driesen expands this view by highlighting that:

On the economic side, the value of possessing a plurality of wives arises from its bearing on the supply of labour. Agriculture in the Ife Division largely consists of the cultivation of cocoa and food crops, and there are many tasks which a woman can perform in connection with both. Hence, the more wives a farmer has, the greater the number of helpers he has on his farm.³⁶

The desire among the *Imilangu* to have a lot of children to be used for labour was the exact situation obtaining in Guinea Bissau in the colonial era. Gutkind and Waterman outline that:

The Balantes still retain certain tendencies towards polygamy, although it is a monogamous society. Among the Balantes women participate in production but they own what they produce and this gives Balante women a position which we consider privileged, as they are fairly free; the only point on which they are not free is that

³⁴ Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia*, p. 36.

³⁵ Ngulube, *Some Aspects of Growing Up in Zambia*, p. 98.

³⁶ Driesen, 'Africa', *Journal of the International African Institute*, p. 54.

children belong to the head of the family and the head of the family, the husband, always claims any children his wife may have: this is obviously to be explained by the actual economy of the group where a family's strength is ultimately represented by the number of hands there are to cultivate the land.³⁷

In addition to the desire of having more children to be used for labour, having a lot of children helped the father or mother to be respected in society. This was because the more children one had, the more powerful he was considered to be. Therefore, some men married many wives to produce more children so that they could be respected in society.

Lack of sexual satisfaction among some men contributed to their desire to marry two or more wives. Some men with high sexual feelings were never satisfied with one wife resulting into having more than one wife. "A man who takes more than one wife satisfies some of his sexual urges, ... and generally feels happier about himself."³⁸ In addition, some men married more than one wife because they did not want to have sexual breaks in case their wives were on their menstrual period or even when they were away from home. Marrying one wife was considered to be a risk as it was stressed through the saying '*mukaci mumweya liunga*' (lit. marrying one wife was a risk). This view was supported by Nalishuwa Namushi who stated that, "if a man has one wife, the possibility of him starving sexually is very high in case his wife is sick or she has any problem that cannot allow her to have sex with her husband."³⁹ With such explanations, some men were compelled to marry more than one wife so that they could not starve sexually.

The other reason that made *Imilangu* men to be in polygamous marriages was wealth. Wealth contributed to polygamous marriages in two main ways. Firstly, some men felt their wealth could not be managed well by one wife. As a result, they had to marry many wives since they felt this would help to safeguard their wealth. Secondly, other men were engaged in polygamous marriages because of having wealth that enabled them to give marriage payments and feed their wives. Ngulube asserts that a large number of beasts gave one an opportunity to marry many wives since payment was not a problem at all.⁴⁰ Therefore, the availability of wealth was a reason enough among the *Imilangu* for a man to be involved in polygamous marriages. Among the *Imilangu*, having a lot of clay pots, traps, fishnets, baskets, wooden bowls and many more was wealth enough for one to be in a polygamous marriage. "A man who takes more than one wife ... signals his high social status, and generally feels happier about himself."⁴¹

Furthermore, some men were engaged in polygamy because having a lot of wives was considered to be a source of pride. In short, the more wives a man had, the more he became famous in the community. According to Driesen,

The correlation between aggregate holding, plot location, and marriage patterns appear to be intimately related to certain social-economic phenomena which motivate the practice of polygamy To some, a multiplicity of wives is a symbol of wealth and status, and the prestige it confers is so highly valued that it is often sufficient to overcome even the strictest religious admonitions.⁴²

In addition, having a big family was also a catalyst for some men to involve themselves in polygamous marriages. For example, if a man had a lot of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunties and other relatives who needed his support, he was prompted to marry many wives so that his wives could help each other take care of his family. The ability by a woman to take care of her husband's relatives, and even visitors, was one of the key features which was

³⁷ Amilcar Cabral, 'Brief Analysis of the Social Structure of Guinea-Bissau', Peter C.W. Gutkind and Peter Waterman (eds.), *African Social Studies* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1977), p. 227.

³⁸ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-seek/201801/the-pros-and-cons-polygamy>

³⁹ Interview with Nalishuwa Namushi on 28th November, 2016.

⁴⁰ Ngulube, *Some Aspects of Growing Up in Zambia*, p. 98.

⁴¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-seek/201801/the-pros-and-cons-polygamy>

⁴² Vanden, I.H. Driesen, 'Africa', *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. XLII, No. I (1972), p. 54.

considered when a man was looking for someone to marry. '*Lineki lyamwapa mulume, lyamwapa mukaci kalyaika*' (lit. it is late for relatives to the husband, for relatives to the wife it is never late) was a saying used to refer to a woman who failed to prepare food for visitors related to her husband on grounds that they had arrived late (after supper). However, when she received her own relatives food was prepared no matter how late it was. Men expected their wives to take care of all their relatives. Therefore, if a man was married to a wife who could not take care of his relatives, he was bound to marry another wife.

Furthermore, some men married more than one wife in order for them to have children from different mothers because it was believed that depending on children from one woman was a very big risk in case their mother had 'bad blood' (*unyinga uyi*) whereby all the children she produced could not do well in life. '*Wamatama meli kapi mulilo*' (lit. a person with two cheeks cannot be burnt by fire) was a common saying among *Imilangu* men used to support their idea of having children from different mothers. The 'two cheeks' in the above saying referred to two wives which meant when children from one wife failed to succeed, those from the other wife would succeed. Therefore, to avoid the risk of having children who could not succeed in life due to their mother's 'bad blood', some men were involved in polygamous marriages so that in case children from one wife did not do well, those from the other wife would do well and in turn help their father. Richard Namenda supported this view by giving an example of Moses Mutuso who had been supported more by children from his first wife, Lukupa Mulilo, and not the children from the other wives he married. According to Richard, "Moses would have had no one to take care of him if he never married Lukupa whose blood has been proved to be good because most of her children are educated and are doing well in life. None of the children Moses has from the other wives he married completed school."⁴³ Therefore, having children from different mothers was key among the *Imilangu* leading to men being involved in polygamous marriages.

Barrenness among women was yet another motivating factor that made *Imilangu* men to practice polygamy. Since childlessness was not acceptable in the society, men could not allow a situation where they could live with a woman without children. Therefore, if a man discovered that his wife was barren, he had no option but to marry another wife so as to have children. In situations where a couple stayed in marriage for more than a year without a child, the parents and other family members became concerned and encouraged the man to marry another wife for him to have children. Mbita posits that:

Childlessness is an extremely difficult reality to face. It sometimes leads to a complete breakdown of the marriage and in almost every case, in African societies, it leads to marrying a second wife (even if the husband is the partner who is sterile).⁴⁴

Misunderstandings between the couple also contributed to men marrying more than one wife. In situations where the couple had children and the relatives loved the wife but there was no peace between the couple, the man could not divorce his wife. Instead, he decided to marry another wife who could give him peace. "There is no reason for a man to stay with a woman who doesn't give him peace. The best is to divorce her or marry another wife who can give him peace."⁴⁵ Therefore, misunderstandings between the couple greatly influenced some *Imilangu* men to be involved in polygamy.

Finally, women laziness made some men to look for a second or third wife. Laziness, especially in terms of farming, was seriously not tolerated among the *Imilangu*. When looking for a woman to marry, men always considered or looked at the woman's ability to till the land. This was the reason the song entitled *wayeka oipulange, mboyeka liwa kuminwe* (lit. when looking for someone to marry you should ask because you may marry a lazy woman) was sang all over *Imilangu* from the early 1960s to late 1970s. Farming was highly valued as it was one of the corner stones of the economy of the *Imilangu*. To show the value that was attached to farming, the saying *wayoya okulimawele kukumbela kwalikenyi* (lit. a married woman should be able to grow herself food because begging for food from others is not good) was used to encourage women to be serious with farming.

⁴³ Interview with Richard Namenda on 19th June, 2018.

⁴⁴ John, S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, Second Edition (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1991), p. 197.

⁴⁵ Interview with Bernard Sitali on 19th June, 2018.

Therefore, if a woman was proved to be incapable of tilling land, the husband was compelled to marry another wife.

In spite of the above reasons justifying the need for polygamy, it was observed during the research that polygamy has drastically reduced in *Imilangu* due to a number of reasons. Economic challenges and the introduction of Christianity were the two main reasons given for the reduction in polygamous marriages in *Imilangu*. When asked to give a reason for the reduction in polygamy in *Imilangu*, Angelina Milelo stressed that, “our current economic situation where nearly everything has to be bought cannot allow someone to practice polygamy.”⁴⁶ Angelina’s point of view seems to be very true because the *Imilangu* are no longer dependant on their surrounding environment for their survival. Their surrounding environment initially provided them with food, clothing and many other necessities of life. Food, clothes, soup, salt, relish and many other items now require to be bought. Therefore, for one to practice polygamy, he has to be ready to spend a lot of money to feed, dress and provide other life necessities to his family.

The introduction of Christianity in *Imilangu* by S.M. Konigsmacher and his wife, his son Arthur and B.M. Heald⁴⁷ of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church who arrived at Liumba Hill on 29th May 1928 altered the way of life of the people in many aspects of life, social life inclusive. Konigsmacher and Heald established a mission station at Liumba Hill where they built a church, school and clinic. Having established a mission station, the missionaries did not treat polygamy with kindness. They condemned people who were involved in polygamy by telling them that they were sinners and that polygamy would lead them into the lake of fire if they did not repent. During an interview with Siambango Sinonge, she had this to say:

With the introduction of Christian churches in *Imilangu*, men have been discouraged from marrying many wives or to have extra marital affairs. Preachers in these churches have made it clear that a man or woman who leaves his wife or her husband to go for others is a sinner and such a person shall never enter the kingdom of God. With these messages, most people who go to church have done away with polygamy because they have openly been told that polygamy is an evil act.⁴⁸

From the above discussion, it comes out clearly that despite all the good reasons people put across to justify polygamy, the institution has greatly been affected by the capitalist economy which is money driven. Moreover, the introduction of Christianity in *Imilangu* also added its weight towards the demise of polygamy such that at the time of the research there were very few people in *Imilangu* that were involved in polygamous marriages.

CONCLUSION

This article examined marriage among the *Imilangu* of Kalabo and Sikongo Districts of Western Province, Zambia. The first part of the article explored marriage establishment. In here, it has been observed that the *Imilangu* established their marriage in two main ways, namely, *ku ungekela* (betrothal) and *ku kufaa* (formal marriage proposal). *Ku ungekela* has been discussed as a form of marriage which was organised when the girl was still young, before she reached marriageable age. This could be organised by the boy who loved the girl or by his parents. On the other hand, *ku kufaa* was a way of establishing marriage through a man proposing marriage to a lady. When the two agreed and all was set for marriage, a wedding was organised to formally join the two together.

The last part of this article looked at polygamous marriages among the *Imilangu*. In here, reasons for polygamous marriages have been discussed. The desire to have a lot of children to be used for labour, to be respected in society, lack of sexual satisfaction, barrenness, women laziness, marital misunderstandings and many other reasons have been elucidated as reasons that encouraged men to get into polygamous marriages. The article

⁴⁶ Interview with Angelina Milelo on 10th July, 2018.

⁴⁷ S. M. Konigsmacher, *The African Division Outlook: Liumba Mission-Barotseland*, vol. XXVI, No 13. Claremont, Cape, July 1st 1928.

⁴⁸ Interview with Siambango Sinonge on 9th July, 2018.

concluded by discussing economic hardships and the introduction of christianity as having led to the reduction in polygamous marriages in *Imilangu*.

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