

**THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERNISATION ON AFRICAN MARRIAGE
PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF THE ITESO IN SOROTI DISTRICT**

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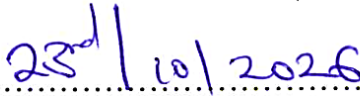
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**A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE DIRECTORATE OF GRADUATE AND RESEARCH
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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled, *The Influence of Westernisation on African Marriage Performance: The Case of the Iteso in Soroti District*, is my own work and it has never been presented for the award of any academic qualification at any university or institution of higher learning, and that all references have, to the best of my knowledge, been correctly acknowledged.

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Approval

This is to certify that this thesis entitled “*The Influence of westernization on African Marriage performance: The case of the Iteso in Soroti District*” has been conducted under my supervision and is now ready for examination.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Ms. Yikiru Peace

Dedication

I lovingly dedicate this work to my dear husband, Mr. Luryamamoi Kenneth, whose unwavering support and quiet strength sustained me throughout this journey, and to my cherished children, Nicer Elsie Bridget, Moro Jeremiah Goodluck, Okot Onesmus Luryamamoi and Amongi Asteri Olivia, whose patience, encouragement and boundless love gave me the courage to persevere and the inspiration to see this work to completion.

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of Westernisation on traditional marriage performance among the Iteso of Soroti District and was guided by three objectives: to describe the performance of traditional marriages, to analyse the aesthetics of these performances in the context of Westernisation, and to investigate the role of Western culture and religion in shaping marriage practices. Anchored in African Drama and Postcolonial theories, the study adopted a descriptive research design within a qualitative approach. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and included traditional leaders, religious leaders and married couples in both customary and religious unions. Data were collected using semi structured interviews, focus group discussions and observation, and were analysed thematically in line with the study objectives. The findings revealed diverse marital forms among the Iteso, including monogamy, polygamy, elopement, ghost marriage and religious marriage, each carrying distinct cultural meaning. The study further established that traditional marriage aesthetics remain deeply embedded in cultural values, reflecting a structured system that reinforces social identity and continuity. However, Westernisation has significantly reshaped these practices, leading to the commodification of bride price often linked to educational attainment, as well as the growing influence of Western legal systems on marriage recognition and divorce. The study recommends the integration of traditional marriage practices into educational curricula at upper secondary and tertiary levels to enhance cultural awareness among younger generations, the establishment of community dialogue platforms to facilitate intergenerational engagement on evolving marriage customs, and the incorporation of elements of traditional marriage into formal legal frameworks to ensure their recognition and protection. This study offers a foundational contribution to understanding the changing dynamics of marriage performance among the Iteso in the context of Western influence.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This study examines the influence of westernisation on African marriage performance, considering the case of Iteso in Soroti District. Westernisation is the process by which communities and nations outside of Europe, either voluntarily or under duress, absorb the customs and culture of Western Europe (Britannica, 2022). The spread of Westernisation throughout most of the world from the period of the colonialism until now has affected the culture of the communities in which its impact is felt to such an extent that there is either a hybridization of cultures or some original practices of such communities have been abandoned. This effect has been mainly seen in African cultures. This study, therefore, intends to establish the effect of Westernization pertaining to African marriage practices, with regard to the Iteso. This chapter presents the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research objectives, and the research questions. It also describes the scope of the study, justification, significance of the study and theoretical framework.

1.1 Background of the Study

This sub-section explains the conceptual, contextual, historical and the theoretical perspective of the study.

1.1.1 Conceptual perspective

In this section, the researcher examined the concept of Westernisation and analyzed its influence on African performances, especially marriage performances.

This adopts to Rasoanampoizina's (2005) conceptualization of Westernisation as a process by which long-standing, traditional cultures absorb the values and influences of Western (American or European) culture in areas such as industry, technology, economics, lifestyle (where marriage practices fall under), and food as well as moral and cultural values. This definition aligns with my study from the angle of how African cultures have been affected by Western influence. It points to the fact that prior to this period, African marriage systems have been organized around African values. However, as a result of Westernization, new practices that are alien to Africa have been incorporated to the marriages performance. Over the past few centuries, the effects of Westernisation have become increasingly widespread and swift throughout the world. Many

smaller African governments that had been established by previous colonial powers, primarily European ones, gained independence and assimilated some elements of western culture following the two world wars of the 20th century, which marked the culmination of centuries of imperialism and colonialism.

Westernisation has a significant impact on the colonised Africa as a whole. Even though some critics may actually see Westernisation as a progress effective, other conservative critics (in support of tradition) would contest this assessment. To this effect, two groups with differing point of views have emerged, i.e. groups that welcomed the western culture and those that saw it as a way to undermine all of their society's values (Rasoanampoizina, 2005). Westernisation, as inferred from Bond et al. (1985) has been a concept or topic of discussion because some scholars believe it to be the same as modernity. Western influences and interests are combined with at least some aspects of the affected society to create a more Westernized society, with the apparent aim of achieving a Western life or some aspects of it.

Hayford (2009, p. 1) posits that the concepts of acculturation and enculturation are similarly comparable to Westernisation. According to him, acculturation deals with "the process of cultural and psychological change that results from contact between cultural groups and their individual members". Cultural trends within one or both civilizations clearly shift after encountering a culture. A community becomes acculturated to Western customs and characteristics when it becomes westernized. Similarly, enculturation refers to the process through which individuals learn and adopt the values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors of their own culture. It primarily occurs within a particular cultural group as people are socialized by their family, community, and society from childhood (Hayford, 2009). These terms are specific to Westernisation and non-Western culture: foreign societies tend to adopt changes in their social systems relative to Western ideology, lifestyle, and physical appearance, among numerous other aspects. Kottak and Phillip (2007) add that since the degree of adaptation and fusion with Western customs will vary at different magnitudes within different communities, the phenomena of Westernisation do not follow any one exact pattern across societies. In particular, after interethnic interaction, the degree to which dominance, destruction, resistance, survival, adaptation, or alteration affect a native culture may vary.

As far as performance is concerned, this is the act or process of executing a task, activity, or presentation, frequently in front of an audience, to achieve particular objectives, evoke feelings, or convey meaning. It includes a broad variety of human pursuits, such as professional undertakings, academic presentations, sporting contests, musical concerts, and theater shows (Goffman, 1959). Within African culture, performance refers to a broad range of expressions that are firmly anchored in ritual activities, oral histories, and community customs. In African culture, performance is more than just a source of entertainment or pleasure; it is a means of social cohesiveness, promotion and transmission of cultural values, and preservation of legacy. African performance art captures the sense of spiritual connectivity and community identification through a rich element of dance, music, storytelling, and ceremonial enactments. Scholars such as Gray (1997) and Barber (2003) draw attention to the symbolic nature of African performances which represent stories of spirituality, heritage, and shared experiences. These performances serve as dynamic manifestations of cultural resilience and adaptability in the face of shifting socio-political environments, and they frequently take place within specialized contexts like religious ceremonies, rites of passage, or celebratory occasions (Barber, 1997; Gray, 2003). However, performance in the culture refers to a series of symbolic activities whose motivation does not only cover entertainment but also includes cultural issues and beliefs that may be accompanied by singing, dancing, storytelling, ululation, among others.

Westernisation, in the context of African marriage, has introduced Western ideals of monogamy and individualism shifting the focus of marriage from a communal institution to a more individualized and contractual union (Gwanmesia, 1999). The concept of Christianity plays a central role in this transformation, as Christianity has often been associated with Western cultural practices and values (Beidelman, 1974). The Christian notion of marriage as a sacred, monogamous union between one man and one woman has, over time, supplanted the traditional African view of marriage as a multi-faceted institution that involves families, communities, and polygamous arrangements (Beidelman, 1974). Christian teachings, emphasizing marital fidelity and sanctity, have led to the decline of practices such as polygamy, which was once integral to many African societies (Falola, 1999). In the same vein, Cultural adaptation within African societies has involved both the integration of Western marital practices and the modification of indigenous customs to fit within the framework of Christian or Western norms. This dynamic shift has led to a blending of marriage practices, creating hybrid forms of marriage that combines

elements of both Western and African traditions. For instance, in many African communities today, church weddings and civil marriage contracts are commonly practiced alongside traditional ceremonies, such as the payment of bride price or dowry (Beidelman, 1974). The reshaping of African traditional marriage by Western culture and religion involves a complex interplay of concepts. Westernisation, Christianity, traditional marriage, and cultural adaptation are all central to understanding how African societies have responded to and integrated Western influences. These concepts not only reflect changes in the institution of marriage but also provide insights into broader cultural transformations within African societies in the face of globalization and colonial history.

Three categories of marriage are discussed in Tonizek (cited in Ogoma, 2014): traditional, court, and white marriages. Ogoma (2014) argues that White marriage occurs in churches and mosques, with the clergy or religious leaders presiding over the union. Court or State marriage is a type that is made possible by law, and there are specific laws in each country's constitution which explains how marriage should be performed in accordance with the order of the law (Ogoma, 2014). Accordingly, Ogoma (2014) explains that the customary marriage is the kind that is practiced traditionally and is based on the specifics of a particular culture of a given nation or society. This is the main topic of investigation in this current study. Nonetheless, in Africa, it is typical to witness some individuals engaging in any of these types of marriage.

In the African culture, the performance of marriage is a deeply embedded and culturally significant act that frequently goes beyond a simple ceremony and involves a wide range of customs, rituals, and group celebrations (Ogunyemi, 1996). These performances signify the coming together of families and communities. In addition to bringing people together, African marriage rites usually entail lavish celebrations that include storytelling, drumming, traditional dances, and customary gift exchanges. Every component of the event has a deep symbolic meaning that reflects spiritual beliefs, ancestors' customs, and cultural values. For example, the Yoruba people of Nigeria perform complex marriage ceremonies that include customs like tying the nuptial cords, *rr*, which symbolizes love, commitment and unity between the bride and groom, presenting the dowry, *owó iyawó*, symbolizing the grooms' commitment and appreciation to the bride and her family, and sharing a community meal symbolizes unity and an agreement between the bride's and the groom's family (Ogunyemi, 1996). Similar to this, Zulu marriage performances in South Africa frequently

include colorful song and dance that end with the customary gift-giving between families (Guy, 1991). In addition to establishing a new family unit, these performances uphold ancestor customs, strengthen social ties, and validate cultural identity. Therefore, we note that marriage performances involve symbolic activities accompanied by the idea that a man and a woman should come together as one in body and yield a fruit of life.

1.1.2 Contextual perspective

The study focuses on the influence of westernization on the Iteso marriage performance. In this section, a contextual examination was on Westernisation and the Iteso, by looking at who they are and their cultural organization in line with their cultural performances. Westernization and Christianity should be treated at the same footing because in Africa, Christianity was introduced as a result of Westernisation. As far as marriage performances are concerned, westernisation redefined African marriages practices as it came with a value shift where there was an integration of non-African values in the marriage performances (Maua, 2020). These values were either adopted wholesomely by the Africans or blended with the African ones. Maua (2020) observes that the contact between Westernisation (Christianity) and culture changed the Iteso way of life culturally, socially and religiously. Marriage, as one of the traditional performances, was also equally changed. This study investigated the effect of westernisation on the Iteso marriage performance.

Notably, the Iteso are an ethnic group that occupy the eastern part of Uganda (Karp & Ivan, 1978). They belong to the group of Nilotics who are engaged in subsistence agriculture and cattle herding with a social system historically centered around a decentralized, clan based structure. Their way of life emphasizes on strong communal values, respect for elders and rich oral traditions. They settled in eastern part of Uganda and western Kenya. Karp and Ivan (1978) mention that *Teso* is the traditional or cultural homeland of the Iteso people, and they speak a language called *Ateso*.

1.1.3 Historical perspective

The historical development of Westernisation in Africa is deeply rooted in early contact with Europe through the Atlantic slave trade, missionary expansion and imperial conquest, which collectively initiated long-term processes of cultural transformation and domination (Rodney,

1972; Falola and Heaton, 2008). This process of cultural reorientation began as early as the fifteenth century with the arrival of European explorers and traders along the West African coast, who introduced Christianity, European goods and foreign cultural practices, although these early interactions did not immediately transform African social structures (Falola and Heaton, 2008). However, this encounter gradually intensified and became more disruptive during the nineteenth century with the expansion of missionary activity and the establishment of Western-style education systems, which played a central role in disseminating European values, literacy and religion across African societies (Rodney, 1972; Kallaway, 2009). The most significant acceleration occurred during the Scramble for Africa, when European powers formally partitioned and colonised the continent, imposing Western political, legal and economic systems that undermined indigenous governance structures and reshaped African societies (Madeira, 2005; Matasci et al., 2021). Missionary activity functioned as a key instrument of Westernisation, as missionaries established schools, promoted European languages and Christian doctrines and often portrayed African belief systems as primitive, thereby legitimising cultural replacement (Watras, 2015; Wambugu, 2021). In parallel, colonial administrations enforced new institutional frameworks that privileged Western epistemologies and marginalised indigenous knowledge systems, resulting in profound alterations in social organisation, identity formation and cultural practice (Rodney, 1972; Malisa and Missedja, 2019). From an African-centred perspective, this process is widely interpreted not merely as cultural exchange but as cultural domination and epistemic displacement, in which African societies were systematically restructured to serve colonial economic and political interests while being conditioned to internalise Western worldviews (Rodney, 1972; Berman, 1974). Nevertheless, African societies did not remain passive recipients; rather, they engaged in forms of resistance, adaptation and selective integration of Western influences, thereby producing hybrid cultural formations that continue to characterise postcolonial African identities (Galindo-Silva, 2026; Abebe et al., 2021). Consequently, Westernisation in Africa should be understood as a historically layered and contested process shaped both by colonial imposition and African agency, with enduring implications for contemporary governance, education, religion and cultural identity (Stearns, 2008; Falola and Heaton, 2008).

Meanwhile, in Africa, cultural performance has played an important role in indigenous traditions for the millennia, encompassing an intricate web of dance, music, storytelling, and ritual enactments that are deeply based in communal customs and spiritual beliefs. From ancient

civilizations such as Egypt and Nubia to numerous ethnic groupings across the continent, African cultural performances have acted as demonstrations of identity, social solidarity, and resistance to colonialism and cultural imperialism (Mudimbe, 1994). Therefore, throughout centuries of exchange, colonization, and globalization, cultural performances in Europe and Africa have evolved, incorporating influences from indigenous traditions, colonial legacies, and contemporary global trends to create the vibrant tapestry of cultural expression we see today (Mudimbe, 1994).

Among the Iteso, Nabacwa (2017) shows that marriage practices have existed for as long as the Ateso cultural group existed. Accordingly, the tradition of marriage performance, which has evolved throughout time to reflect social, economic, and religious factors in the community. Nabacwa (2017) still shows that Teso marriage practices have traditionally been distinguished by elaborate ceremonies, rituals, and exchanges representing the union of individuals and families. Traditional Teso marriage ceremonies usually take place in phases, involving ritual performance, singing, dancing, costumes, etc., during marriage, accompanied by payment of bridal fortune (known as "akamu") by the groom's family to the bride's family, and the performance of rites to bless the union (Nabacwa, 2017). The marriage performance was and is still accompanied by very many activities such as ritual performance, singing, celebrations among others. However, with respect to the influence of Westernisation on the Iteso, Kennedy (1937) indicates that the Iteso became affected by Westernisation during the period of colonization and the new culture introduced changed their economic and social way of life. As a result, the people of Teso may have embraced some of the cultural practices of the Whites. This therefore, forms a basis upon which the researcher saw a need to carry out this study to find out whether there were such western influences on the traditional marriage performance among the Iteso people.

1.1.4 Theoretical perspectives

The current study is underpinned by Postcolonial literary theory and African drama theory. Postcolonial theory is widely associated with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which marked a critical turning point in the analysis of colonial discourse (Azim, 2001). Its development is often traced through three major intellectual strands: anti-colonial thought represented by Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi and Edward Said; subaltern studies associated with Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Gayatri Spivak; and the decolonial tradition

advanced by Aníbal Quijano, Walter Dignolo and María Lugones. Although the theory gained major academic prominence in the 1990s, its intellectual foundations are linked to earlier works by Said, Homi Bhabha and Spivak (Santos, 2023). Central to postcolonial inquiry is the interrogation of colonial power relations, representations of Otherness and the persistence of cultural hegemony (Said, 2003). It provides a framework for understanding how colonial legacies continue to shape African societies through enduring power imbalances, particularly in cultural, legal and social institutions (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006). In the African context, colonialism imposed Western systems such as Christianity, legal codes and education, often marginalising indigenous cultural practices including marriage systems and ritual traditions.

African drama theory complements this perspective by foregrounding indigenous performative traditions such as ritual, oral narrative, music, dance and storytelling as central forms of cultural expression. Ritual performance is understood as structured, symbolic action grounded in religious belief, ranging from the sacred to the social, and it functions as a medium through which communities express collective fears, hopes and values while connecting the living with the ancestral world (Losambe & Sarinjeive, 2001). Scholars such as Chinyowa, Motsa and Ebewo, as discussed in Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001), demonstrate that African ritual drama integrates costume, gesture, song, dialogue and movement to transform ordinary action into sacred performance, thereby reinforcing communal identity and continuity. Oral traditions including myths, legends, riddles and proverbs also function as dramatic forms that educate and entertain, often transmitted through storytelling in communal settings. Similarly, indigenous ceremonies such as wedding rituals in the Eastern Cape illustrate theatrical structures characterised by performance, audience participation, music and dance, while maintaining communal significance (Sirayi, cited in Losambe & Sarinjeive, 2001). These traditions, alongside practices such as *bira* and *kurova guva*, reinforce the integration of the living and the ancestral within African cosmology (Cox, 1996; Mbiti, 1994). From a postcolonial perspective, these performative systems reveal both continuity and disruption, particularly in relation to Western influences that have reshaped African dramatic forms and cultural expressions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Performance is an integral component of African traditional marriage, expressed through rituals, dance, music, songs and costumes and symbolic representations that continue to thrive within

many communities (Schechner, 1994; Staal, 2013). However, existing studies indicate that Westernisation has significantly altered African marriage performances. Rasoanampoizina (2005) observes that through Christianity, Westernisation has reshaped the structure and perception of traditional marriage performance, with some practices being labelled as demonic, leading many individuals to adopt Western forms of marriage. In a similar view, Rodney (1972) argues that Westernisation disrupted indigenous African marriage systems by undermining traditional practices, while Falola and Heaton (2008) further demonstrate that colonial legal and religious frameworks redefined marital legitimacy and transformed customary practices across African societies. Although literary research has generally focused mainly on Christian teachings and traditional marriage, it is not plausible to generalize their revelations to the current study. Therefore, this study investigates the extent to which Westernisation has influenced traditional marriage performance among the Iteso of Teso.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of Westernisation on traditional marriage performance among the Iteso in Soroti District, using the descriptive study design.

1.4 Specific Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To describe the performance of traditional marriages among the Iteso in Soroti District;
- ii. To critique the aesthetics in Iteso traditional marriage performance in the face of Westernisation;
- iii. To analyse from the colonial perspective the influence of Western culture and religion in shaping traditional marriage performance among the Iteso in Soroti District.

1.5 Research Questions

- i. How is traditional marriage performed among the Iteso in Soroti District?
- ii. What are the aesthetics in Iteso traditional marriage performance in the face of Westernisation?

- iii. How have Western culture and religion influenced traditional marriage performances among the Iteso in Soroti District from a colonial perspective?

1.6.0 Scope of the Study

This section gives information regarding the theme of the study, the context or the target area where it was conducted and the time frame it was conducted.

1.6.1 Content scope

The study is focused on the influence of Westernisation on marriage performance among the Iteso of Soroti district. It specifically describes the performance of Iteso traditional marriage, examines the aesthetic aspects of traditional marriage performances and analyse the influence of Westernisation on Iteso marriage performance from a post-colonial perspective.

1.6.2 Geographical scope

The study was conducted in Teso sub-region in Soroti District in Uganda. Soroti District is located in the eastern part of Uganda, within Teso sub-region. It is situated approximately 300 kilometers northeast of the capital city, Kampala. Soroti town, the district's administrative center, lies at an elevation of about 3,600 feet (1,100 meters) above sea level. The area experiences a tropical climate, with distinct wet and dry seasons. The district is bordered by Amuria District to the north, Katakwi District to the northeast, Serere District to the east, Ngora District to the southeast, Kumi District to the southwest, and Kaberamaido District to the northwest (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

1.6.3 Time scope

The data needed for the study was collected between the months of January and March, 2024. This was then followed by data analysis and presentation.

1.7 Justification of the study

There are many scholarly works that have been carried out with regard to the influence of Westernisation in many traditional cultures, especially in the field of marriage performance; for

example, Rodney (1972) argues that Westernisation disrupted indigenous African marriage systems by undermining traditional structures. An evaluation of these studies reveals that they were conducted in other cultures. Much as I anticipated that Western culture has an impact on Iteso marriage performance, there had been no identifiable studies to unveil this fact. My study therefore, investigated the influence of westernization on Iteso marriage performance in Soroti District.

1.8 Literature Review

1.8.0 Introduction

The researcher examined pertinent literature in this section in light of themes generated from the study objectives: describing the traditional marriage performances in African cultures to foster an understanding of the Iteso marriage performance, examining the aesthetic functions of marriage performance in African societies to offer an understanding on aesthetics in the Iteso marriage performances and investigating the influence of Westernisation of traditional marriage performance in African societies which helped to offer insights on that of the Iteso. In the process of the review, the researcher analyzed and contrasted findings which were used to shape the subsequent chapters.

1.8.1 Traditional marriage performances in African societies

According to Ogoma (2014), marriage is seen as an embodiment of peace, meaning a system observed to enhance peace and socialization. Additionally, Ogoma (2014) maintains that the family, through marriage, is the first to emerge from these two connections between men and women, or masters and slaves. However, the village is the first community to be formed when multiple families get together and the association seeks to achieve goals beyond meeting basic necessities. The state is created when multiple villages come together to form a single, fully fledged community that is big enough to be almost entirely self-sufficient. The state is born out of the basic necessities of existence and persists for the purpose of a decent life. This informs the study how marriage (family) is the very basic structure of a particular nation or groups of people in a society. In traditional African marriage performances, this social significance is articulated through oral narratives, metaphorical expressions and ritual symbolism that portray marriage as more than a union between two individuals. Instead, it represents marriage as a means of

establishing kinship ties, transmitting cultural knowledge, and sustaining communal identity. Therefore, examining the literary aspects of traditional marriage performances reveals how oral artistic forms communicate the cultural values and social expectations through which marriage is understood as a foundation of family stability, communal harmony and social continuity (Ogoma, 2014).

Ogoma (2014) explains that the Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria observe distinct traditional marriage practices through which families initiate, negotiate and validate marital unions. The process may involve parental arrangement, sometimes with the consent of the prospective bride and groom and sometimes without their prior approval. When parents consider their children ready for marriage, they identify potential partners and initiate negotiations intended to establish a socially acceptable union. Once a prospective bride has been identified, the groom's family may appoint an Alarina, a respected family member who acts as a go-between for the two families. The Alarina approaches the bride's parents on behalf of the groom's family, conveys the marriage proposal and communicates the responses and expectations of both parties as negotiations proceed (Ogoma, 2014). If the bride's parents accept the proposal, the families exchange gifts as a sign of mutual recognition and the beginning of a relationship between the prospective in-laws. The process then proceeds to family investigations, during which the parents of the prospective bride and groom examine one another's family backgrounds to establish whether there are histories of serious illness, criminal conduct or other circumstances considered capable of undermining the proposed marriage (Ogoma, 2014). Where necessary, the families also consult an Ifa priest, who performs relevant customary procedures to seek spiritual guidance concerning the suitability and anticipated future of the union. This consultation reflects the Yoruba belief that the visible circumstances of a proposed marriage may not reveal everything about its future consequences and that spiritual knowledge can assist families in making decisions about marital compatibility and the well-being of the prospective couple (Ogoma, 2014). From a literary perspective, these practices are significant because the marriage process involves identifiable forms of oral communication, symbolic action and culturally meaningful performance. The Alarina, for example, functions not only as a messenger but also as a mediator whose carefully delivered speech communicates the intentions of one family to another. The marriage proposal, the parents' responses and the exchange of gifts constitute a sequence of socially recognised acts through which acceptance, respect and commitment are expressed. The gifts function symbolically

as material representations of agreement and the developing relationship between the families, while the consultation of the Ifa priest introduces a spiritual dimension into the interpretation of the proposed union. The verbal exchanges and ritual actions therefore communicate cultural expectations about family authority, marital suitability and social responsibility. Ogoma's (2014) account provides a comparative basis for investigating whether similar forms of mediation, family negotiation, symbolic exchange and spiritual consultation occur in traditional marriage performances among the Iteso. The present study can consequently examine who initiates marriage negotiations among the Iteso, how the prospective families communicate their intentions, what verbal expressions and symbolic acts accompany acceptance or rejection and how these performances communicate culturally accepted meanings of marriage. This comparison moves beyond describing marriage as a general cultural institution and directs attention to the specific communicative and literary practices through which marriage is negotiated, performed and understood within particular African societies.

As is the case with many African marriage systems, the Shona people of Zimbabwe observe traditional marriage performances accompanied by specific rituals and activities that establish marital relationships and affirm the social responsibilities of the bride, groom and their respective families (Meekers, 1993). These practices include libations, through which offerings of liquid may be poured as a means of acknowledging ancestors and seeking their protection, and lamentations, which involve the expression of grief or sorrow in culturally prescribed contexts. Traditional Shona marriage ceremonies also feature ritual acts and blessings performed by elders or spiritual leaders to seek spiritual favour and promote the prosperity and longevity of the marriage (Bourdillon, 1987). Meekers (1993) identifies sexual relations and childbearing as central elements of marriage among the Shona, explaining that the fulfilment of *rustsambo* 'marital rituals' culturally establishes the husband's sexual rights over his wife, while *roora* 'payment of bride price' establishes his recognised rights concerning the children born within the marriage. Meekers (1993) further observes that elopement, although common among young people, is traditionally disapproved of because it bypasses the recognised marriage procedures and may bring dishonour to the woman and her family. Such a union is therefore regarded as failing to satisfy the cultural expectations through which marriage is formally recognised and legitimised (Meekers, 1993). These marriage performances provide opportunities for analysing the oral and symbolic forms through which Shona cultural values are expressed and transmitted. Libations, for example, may

be accompanied by spoken invocations or prayers, while blessings may employ formulaic expressions, metaphors and culturally established verbal patterns to communicate wishes for fertility, prosperity and marital stability. Lamentations may also employ repetition, imagery and emotionally charged language to express sorrow, negotiate social relationships or mark significant transitions in the lives of individuals and families. Such verbal and performative elements are important because they transform marriage ceremonies into occasions for the artistic expression of cultural beliefs rather than merely sequences of customary activities.

Kyalo (2011) documents several forms of traditional marriage among the Akamba, including polygamy, ghost marriage and Maweto marriage, each of which reflects culturally specific understandings of family continuity, social status and reproduction. These practices lie in the cultural meanings attached to the words used to name and describe them and in the narratives through which their purposes are explained and transmitted across generations. Kyalo (2011) observes that polygamy was highly respected among the Akamba because a man who could afford the bride price for more than one wife was regarded as affluent. This association between wealth and marital status creates a culturally meaningful representation of the successful man whose economic resources enable him to establish a larger family. Although Kyalo (2011) describes marriage as an ostensibly economic decision, his account also invites an examination of the values communicated through the social recognition of polygamous unions. These values may be communicated through praise, proverbial language and narratives that associate wealth with masculinity, responsibility and social prestige. Cumming, as cited in Kyalo (2011), also identifies ghost marriage, a form of spiritual marriage practised when a son dies before marrying. In such circumstances, the deceased man's parents arrange a marriage in his absence to maintain his connection to the continuity of life and family lineage. The cultural representation of ghost marriage raises questions about how narratives construct relationships between the living, the dead and future generations, particularly through symbolic associations involving death, lineage and continuity. Another form of marriage identified by Kyalo (2011) is Maweto marriage, in which a woman marries another woman to ensure the continuation of her family line through children. The woman who takes an Iweto (singular) is herself married and may be barren or have given birth only to daughters. After preliminary discussions with her husband, the couple identifies a girl whom they wish to marry on behalf of their unborn son. In the presence of her husband or one of his family elders, the woman declares the girl to be the wife of her future son, after which marriage

negotiations begin if the proposal is accepted. Consent from the relevant parties remains essential to the union. The declaration is significant for literary analysis because it functions as a performative utterance through which a person is assigned a culturally recognised marital role. Its meaning extends beyond the words spoken to encompass the authority of the speaker, the presence of witnesses and the social conventions that enable the declaration to initiate marriage negotiations. The naming of Maweto marriage and the declaration of a girl as the wife of an unborn son provide grounds for examining how language constructs social identities and communicates culturally accepted understandings of kinship and reproduction. Kyalo's (2011) discussion provides a comparative foundation for investigating the forms of marriage practised among the Iteso and examining how the language, oral narratives and symbolic expressions associated with these unions communicate their cultural significance. The study can further establish whether particular marriage forms among the Iteso are explained through similar narrative patterns, performative declarations or figurative expressions and examine how these literary features articulate beliefs about family continuity, marital legitimacy and social responsibility.

Dundas (1913) examines the regulation of remarriage among the Akamba of Ukambani, Kenya, particularly the relationship between a woman's marital status, bridewealth and the rights of children. He observes that a woman was not ordinarily expected to be married twice in a manner that required bridewealth to be paid twice for her, although particular circumstances permitted exceptions. One such circumstance arose when a woman's husband died before she had borne children. In this situation, the widow could remain within her deceased husband's family and bear children who would be recognised as belonging to him, or she could leave the family and marry another man who paid bridewealth to her deceased husband's relatives. The expressions used to describe these arrangements, particularly the ideas of bearing children for a deceased husband and remaining within his family, construct marriage as a relationship extending beyond the lifetime of the individuals involved. The language of family membership and reproductive obligation represents kinship as a social relationship maintained through customary recognition, rather than biological parenthood alone. Dundas (1913) further explains that a woman might subsequently leave one man and enter another union, in which case her brother-in-law or son, depending on the circumstances, could consent to receive bridewealth from the new partner. The union was considered legally recognised when the man receiving the woman acquired rights over all her children. The account develops through a sequence of actions and consequences, as the woman's

movement between partners, the payment of bridewealth and the recognition of children determine the status of each relationship. The distinction between a union that exists in practice and one that receives customary recognition creates a contrast between personal relationships and socially sanctioned marriage. The kinship terms ‘brother-in-law’, ‘son’ and ‘deceased husband’ also identify the individuals through whom authority over marriage and family continuity is exercised. These terms therefore do more than identify family relationships; they establish the social roles through which customary authority is expressed and marital rights are negotiated. Dundas (1913) further describes the options available to a widow whose husband died before they had children. She could remain with his family and bear children in his name, or she could leave and marry another man, who was required to pay bridewealth to the deceased man’s relatives. Once the payment had been made, she could leave her late husband’s family and establish a new marital relationship. The contrast between remaining and leaving, bearing children in the deceased husband’s name and entering a new union gives the account an oppositional structure through which competing marital choices and their consequences are presented. The emphasis on bridewealth as a condition for leaving also establishes a recurring narrative pattern in which a woman’s marital position is determined through payment, negotiation and family consent. Although Dundas (1913) provides details about the customary arrangements, his account does not identify specific songs, ritual speeches or other verbal performances accompanying these proceedings. The literary features evident in his description therefore lie primarily in the narrative organisation, the contrasting alternatives and the culturally significant vocabulary through which marriage and kinship are represented. This account provides a basis for examining how language and oral literary forms communicate marriage values in other African societies, including the Iteso. In the Iteso context, particular attention can be given to the actual words spoken during marriage negotiations, the individuals who speak, the circumstances in which declarations are made and the meanings communicated through songs, proverbs, praise expressions and ritual utterances where these occur. Dundas’s (1913) account thus offers a historical point of comparison for investigating how marriage practices are narrated, how customary authority is expressed through language and how verbal performances communicate beliefs about marital legitimacy, family continuity and women’s positions within customary marriage.

Among the Lango of Northern Uganda, traditional marriage is closely associated with the payment of bride price, which establishes the customary recognition of a marital union. According to the

Daily Monitor (2021), a man who brings a woman home without paying her bride price is not considered to have completed a legally recognised marriage. The account further states that if the woman dies before the bride price has been paid, the man may be expected to marry her corpse, illustrating the customary importance attached to completing marriage obligations even after death. The expression ‘marry her corpse’ carries a striking symbolic meaning because it presents marriage as an obligation that may extend beyond the physical life of the woman. Its unusual imagery draws attention to the perceived incompleteness of a union in which bride price remains unpaid and represents customary marriage as a bond requiring formal closure. The marriage process among the Lango is described as involving several stages and specific items of bride price, reportedly including six cows, twelve goats, three hens and a spear. Three of the goats are allocated to the grandparents of the bride’s family. The first stage involves a preliminary payment to request the woman’s hand in marriage while she is still living with her parents. If she accepts the offer, this initial stage is completed, after which the full bride price may be paid immediately or at a later date. The staged nature of the process creates a sequence of customary actions in which the initial request, the woman’s acceptance and the subsequent payment of bride price mark successive developments in the marriage narrative. The woman’s acceptance functions as a consequential verbal or social act because it signals her willingness to proceed with the proposed union. The distinction between the initial payment and the full bride price also gives the process a structure of anticipation and fulfilment, with the first stage opening the way for the formal completion of the marriage. This symbolic interpretation gives the monetary figure a figurative function: the incomplete payment represents the continuing connection between the two families rather than merely an economic transaction. The idea that something must remain unsettled to keep the families connected expresses reciprocity and enduring social relationships through symbolic language. However, the account does not provide the exact words spoken during the initial request or identify a particular song or ritual utterance accompanying this stage. The Daily Monitor (2021) further reports that when a woman elopes with a man or becomes pregnant before a customary marriage has been completed, the man is expected to pay a fine. This requirement is intended to discourage premarital sexual relations and preserve peace and harmony when bride price is paid after elopement or conception outside marriage. The contrast between a marriage completed through customary procedures and a union arising from elopement or premarital pregnancy establishes a moral opposition between socially sanctioned conduct and behaviour that requires

correction. The fine operates as a form of customary redress, while the narrative of the offence and its settlement communicates expectations concerning chastity, responsibility and relations between families. These practices demonstrate how marriage is represented through symbolic expressions, sequential actions and culturally meaningful distinctions between accepted and unacceptable conduct. The Daily Monitor account provides a basis for comparison with traditional marriage performances among the Iteso of Soroti District. The present study can examine how Iteso marriage performances employ spoken declarations, songs, proverbs, praise expressions and ritual language, where these are practised, to communicate marital values, negotiate relationships between families and represent the transition from courtship to recognised marriage. Particular attention to who performs these verbal forms, the circumstances in which they are performed and the meanings conveyed through their words and imagery would establish how oral literary expression contributes to the representation and enactment of traditional marriage.

Another practice in African cultures is the rites of passage, in which the practice of marriage is linked to circumcision. An example is among the Masaai where female genital mutilation is practiced as a precursor to marriage. The Massai view female genital mutilation ceremony as a sacred and important part of a married woman's life since it marks the transition from girlhood to womanhood, which implies that a girl who is circumcised is ready for marriage (Esho et al., 2013). These rituals entail a suspension between inclusion and exclusion, femininity and masculinity, tradition and modernity. This suspension lasts throughout the ceremonial processes and carries over into the lived experience. This is performed by the elders, where the girl is summoned and prepared to undergo this rite of passage. This ritual was performed by cutting a girl's clitoris, an exercise that marks her transition into adulthood. After the ritual, she may not need to bow down to other women who had gone through this already (cf. Earp and Johnsdotter, 2021).

Similarly, Kyalo (2011) observes that circumcision is generally considered as a very important ritual process among many tribes in Africa. When a girl is circumcised, a small bit of her clitoris would be removed, whereas for the boy, the foreskin of the penis would be removed. Mbiti, referenced in Kyalo (2011), contends that among the Akamba, the child's sexual organ ties him or her to a condition of ignorance, inactivity, and perhaps impotence. When the connection is broken, the young person is released from the ignorance and passivity stage and enters a new one: the state of knowledge, activity, and reproduction. Before the circumcision rituals were performed,

marriage was forbidden among the Akamba. Another view, according to Kyalo (2011) is that the Akamba society's continuity was provided by the genitals. It was necessary to purify these genitals and this is what circumcision meant. The young person used this to unite with his ancestors and move forward with working on the yet-to-be-born. Following this rite of passage, the youth could then search for a partner in marriage. This study is relevant to the current study in that it brings to the awareness that circumcision is one traditional process of marriage celebrated among the Akamba. Nevertheless, this does not reveal the current state affair, hence prompting a need to carry out this study.

Meekers (1992) argues that the performance exchange of kola nuts and drink is a very significant practice of marriage in West Africa. Kola nuts play an important part in many West African wedding traditions. The caffeine-packed nut grows on a big tree, in tropical forests in West Africa. It is often used for medicinal purposes. He notes that the kola nut is also a symbol of healing, respect, hospitality, and unity. The nuts were presented by the groom, together with his family on a special pre-arranged night where they would knock on the door of the bride's house. Once they were let in, they present gifts such as wine for libation, money, and kola nuts to the bride's family. They would then announce their intentions, and discuss the prospects of joining the two families through marriage. If the expression of marriage intentions were accepted, the bride would then be expected to give her final consent as to whether or not she wants to marry the man. This revelation broadens the symbolic perspectives of the exchange of kola nuts as a traditional marriage performance.

Among the Acholi people of Northern Uganda, traditional marriage performance is a deeply embedded cultural practice embodying social, economic and spiritual values (Lamunu, 2023). Lamunu (2023) explains that traditional marriage among the Acholi follows a structured process involving family negotiations and adherence to established customs. Historically, young men had limited agency in choosing their marriage partners, as parents primarily selected hardworking and disciplined young women from families regarded as respectable (Lamunu, 2023). The boy's family would first investigate the girl's family background before approaching her parents to express its intention to marry her. As Lamunu (2023, pp. 1–2) explains, the girl's family would then prepare an assessment letter, a written document specifying the items required for the bride price ceremony. The bride price, known as kamara, varies between families and may include goats,

cows, soap, clothes, money, a lamp, a carton of matches, sugar, tea leaves and transport fare for distant relatives (Lamunu, 2023, p. 3). If the boy fathered a child with the girl before paying the bride price, he would be fined through a practice known as luk pa latin or lutino, while cohabiting with the girl without formal marriage attracted a fine called luk pa nyako (Lamunu, 2023, p. 2). For a princess, the bride price could include exceptional items such as leopard skin and shields made from elephant ears, or their monetary equivalents. Upon receiving the assessment letter, the groom's family would prepare the required items and bring them on the agreed date. Lamunu (2023) describes the negotiations as challenging for the groom's entourage because the outcome depends partly on the negotiators' skill. The process is associated with the saying *keny pa nyako pe donyo i gang idye ceng*, meaning 'a lady's bride price does not enter a home before sunset'. The saying employs metaphorical language, particularly through the expression 'does not enter a home', which presents the bride price as something whose acceptance depends on the successful completion of negotiations. The reference to sunset introduces temporal imagery, while the statement's proverbial structure expresses the uncertainty surrounding the negotiations and the possibility that they may extend over time. During the ceremony, members of the groom's family are expected to crawl into the bride's family house on their knees, particularly in relation to the mother-in-law. Anyone who enters the house while walking is fined by the bride's family. The contrast between crawling and walking creates a symbolic opposition between two forms of bodily conduct, with the prescribed movement and its prohibited alternative acquiring different cultural meanings. The physical posture becomes part of the ceremony's expressive language, while the contrast between the two movements gives the ritual a recognisable pattern of action and consequence. During the negotiations, the bride's father remains silent while members of his clan determine the marriage terms, whereas the bride's mother and other women leave the proceedings and the paternal aunt remains present (Lamunu, 2023). The arrangement of speaking and silent participants creates a form of dramatic organisation in which the interaction is shaped by the distribution of speech, silence and physical presence. The bride's father is characterised through his silence, while the clan members who negotiate the terms occupy the speaking roles. The paternal aunt's continued presence and the departure of the other women further establish contrasting positions within the unfolding ceremonial encounter. Once the parties reach an agreement and the bride price is paid, the paternal aunt ululates. The ululation introduces a distinct vocal element into the performance, contrasting with the spoken negotiations that precede it. Its

non-lexical vocal form differs from ordinary conversational speech and adds an expressive sound pattern to the ceremony. Through the proverb, metaphorical language, temporal imagery, contrasting bodily movements, the organisation of speech and silence and the ululation, the Acholi marriage ceremony incorporates several forms of verbal, vocal and physical expression. These elements reveal the literary and performative dimensions of the ceremony through its figurative language, symbolic contrasts, structured interaction and expressive vocal forms.

1.8.2 The aesthetics in African traditional marriage performance in the face of westernization

In African societies, traditional marriage serves a variety of functions that are deeply embedded in cultural, social, economic, and spiritual aspects; it serves as a means of forging alliances between families, tribes, or clans, strengthening social networks, and promoting solidarity (Mbiti, 1969). Through marriage, bonds are formed that extend beyond the couple themselves, encompassing their families and communities. This explain the bitterness of parents when their children either elope or conceive out of wedlock (Mbiti,1969). Marriage rituals (e.g., circumcision, libations, etc.) frequently involve members of the larger community, such as friends, relatives, and community members, who gather to celebrate the union, reinforcing social links and building a sense of communal solidarity (Hakola, 2024). Furthermore, marriage acts as a channel for members of the community coming together to celebrate a union between a man and a woman, where people come with many gifts for both the marriage couple and their families as a sign of peace and love. Hence this finding is relevant to the current study in that it points out the significance of marriage in social bonding and showing respect to both families of the bride and the groom. The literary aspects associated with these practices contribute to how marriage values are represented and communicated. Metaphorical expressions of family bonds, for instance, present marriage as a connection that extends beyond the couple, while symbolic acts such as gift-giving provide a non-verbal representation of generosity, respect and reciprocity. Where marriage ceremonies incorporate proverbs, songs, praise poetry and ritual speeches, these verbal forms can articulate communal expectations, express approval or disapproval and present marriage as a shared social responsibility. Repetition in songs and ceremonial speech can reinforce particular values, while parallel expressions and contrasts between proper marriage and elopement can foreground the perceived difference between socially approved conduct and actions that disregard family

conventions. These stylistic features therefore shape the representation of marriage by making cultural values memorable, emotionally compelling and publicly recognisable

According to Ashraf et al. (cited in Hakola, 2024), bride price is very significant in elevating the economic status of the bride's parents. Additionally, he connects it with how families are encouraged to educate their daughters as a more educated woman is worth more. Additionally, Ashraf et al. (2020) found that bride price increases a woman's education. Ashraf et al. (2020) show that families are encouraged to take their girls to school because they are aware that an educated lady fetches a higher bride price. Similarly, according to Goody (1976), marriage is acclaimed for its economic purpose. Traditional marriage rituals often involve elaborate ceremonies and exchanges of gifts or dowries, serving as avenues for the redistribution of wealth and resources within society (Goody, 1976). The exchange of goods or livestock, such as cattle among pastoralist communities or agricultural produce in agrarian societies, contributes to economic stability and ensures the bride's security within her new family (Murdock, 1949). In other words, this revelation brings to the awareness how marriage is seen as a source of economic empowerment. Therefore, the current study will try to find out whether marriage is also seen from an economic perspective. The literary representation of these economic practices can be examined through the figurative meanings attached to bride price, the symbolic value of exchanged items and the language used to describe the worth of a prospective bride. Expressions that associate a woman's education with a higher bride price, for instance, can construct education as a form of social and economic value, while descriptions of cattle, money and other gifts can represent marriage through images of wealth, prosperity and family status. Where oral marriage performances employ praise expressions, proverbs or metaphorical comparisons to describe the bride, the groom or the exchanged items, these stylistic devices can reinforce particular ideas about wealth, femininity, family prestige and marital responsibility. Such literary devices can, therefore, shape how economic values are understood within marriage by presenting material exchanges not merely as financial transactions but also as expressions of social worth, reciprocity and relationships between families.

Moreover, traditional marriage ceremonies function as rites of passage, marking the transition from adolescence to adulthood and conferring social recognition and status upon individuals (van Gennep, 1960). Participation in marriage rituals imbues individuals with a sense of belonging and

identity within their cultural milieu, reinforcing their roles and responsibilities within the community (Turner, 1967). According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2006) marriage is a key journey into adulthood for many African tribes, representing maturity, responsibility, and social acknowledgment. For example, among the Xhosa of South Africa, the *Ulwaluko* ‘initiation ceremony’ is a rite of passage for young men, culminating in marriage as a symbol of their journey into manhood (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006). Similarly, among the Igbo people of Nigeria, marriage is seen as a critical milestone indicating the attainment of adulthood and social status (Nwosu, 1994). The elaborate performances and ceremonies associated with marriage, such as the payment of the bride price, the exchange of gifts, and the performance of traditional dances, serve to mark this transition and indicate the individual's readiness to assume adult roles and responsibilities within the community (Nnadozie, 2003). Even though this study focusses on the Xhosa tribe of South Africa, the current study looks at the aesthetic function of marriage from Ugandan context, specifically the Iteso. The literary and aesthetic dimensions of marriage ceremonies can be examined through specific oral forms, including bridal praise songs, farewell songs performed as a bride leaves her parental home, marriage advice songs and praise poetry celebrating the bride, groom and their families. Finnegan (2012) discusses a Ganda farewell song in which a young woman repeats the expression ‘Oh, I am gone’ as she prepares to leave her parental home for marriage. The repetition conveys the emotional weight of separation, while references to her father and mother foreground the relationship between marriage, parental authority and the bride’s departure. Finnegan (2012), drawing on Junod’s account of Ronga oral literature, also documents wedding songs in which the bride’s friends comment humorously on the groom and sing about the treatment the bride might receive from her in-laws. These songs employ direct address, humour and exaggeration to present marriage through the perspectives of those participating in the ceremony. In another African context, Diko (2024) examines the AmaXhosa wedding songs ‘Umakoti ngowethu’ ‘The bride is ours’, ‘Uze umphathe kakuhle’ ‘Look after her’) and ‘Ubhuti wethu yingwe’ (‘Our brother is a tiger’), illustrating how song titles, figurative language and direct expressions communicate expectations concerning the bride, groom and their relationships (Finnegan, 2012; Diko, 2024).

Furthermore, marriage plays a crucial role in the transmission of cultural values, traditions, and customary laws from one generation to the next (Fortes, 1969). Through the observance of marriage customs and ceremonies, cultural knowledge and practices are perpetuated, ensuring the

continuity and preservation of heritage (Nwosu, 1994). Marriage rituals such as "Enkipaata" and "Eunoto" among the Maasai people of East Africa not only represent individual unions but also reinforce traditional practices such as communal grazing rights and age-set systems, thereby perpetuating Maasai cultural identity and cohesion (Spencer, 1965). Similarly, in the Yoruba of Nigeria, marriage rites such as "Igbeyawo" include practices such as the pouring of libations to ancestors and the exchange of symbolic gifts, reflecting the Yoruba's veneration for ancestral spirits and the value of familial relationships (Bascom, 1969). These rituals and ceremonies reinforce traditional values like respect for elders, gender roles, and the importance of communal cooperation in succeeding generations, assuring the continuity and preservation of cultural legacy (Nwosu, 1994). While looking at this revelation, we note that this function makes reference to the Maasai and Yuroba and not Iteso, prompting a need to carry out this study to understand the current state of affairs.

Spiritually, traditional marriage ceremonies often incorporate rituals and invocations of ancestral blessings or deities, invoking divine favor and protection upon the union (Coleman, 1958). The involvement of religious or spiritual leaders underscores the sacredness of the marital bond and reinforces moral and ethical codes of conduct within the community (Wiredu, 1980). In other words, marriage has a tremendous impact on spirituality in numerous African societies, acting as a conduit for attracting divine favors, ancestral guidance, and spiritual harmony. Among the Bambara and wider Manding communities of West Africa, marriage celebrations may include performances by djeliw (griots), hereditary oral specialists who preserve family histories, praise individuals and perform music and poetry at important social occasions. However, I could not verify the specific claim that a marriage ritual called *Djeli Kunde* involves griots reciting ancestral tales and blessings, or confirm the attribution to Knight (2010). A documented Manding performance tradition, Djelidon, combines dance and rhythm associated with the djeliw, while griot performances may incorporate praise, salutations and references to ancestry and social standing. These oral and musical features have literary significance: praise, genealogical narration and formal address can connect the couple's marriage to collective memory, while rhythmic performance and figurative language give public expression to family identity and social expectations. Similarly, among the Zulu of South Africa, marriage ceremonies such as "Umemulo" and "Ukwaba" include the presence of spiritual leaders who give prayers and blessings in hopes of heavenly favor and protection for the couple's union (Bhana & Singh, 2017). Marriage is given

spiritual importance through these rites, which promote a sense of sacredness and connection to higher forces while also reinforcing moral and ethical ideals within the community (Wiredu, 1980). In all, marriage is purposely looked at here as a vehicle of belief, blessings, and most importantly spirituality. The current study will find out whether this is also the case with context under study.

1.8.3 A post-colonial analysis of influence of Western culture and religion in shaping African traditional marriage performance

According to Nwabude (2022), Western cultural and religious influences have contributed to changes in traditional African marriage practices, particularly among the Igbo, where Western conceptions of marriage have challenged the position of customary unions. Traditional Igbo marriage involves more than an agreement between two individuals, as it incorporates family participation, customary negotiations, bridewealth and recognition of the union by the wider community (Nwabude, 2022). However, the growing influence of Western marriage practices has introduced alternative understandings of marital commitment, legitimacy and the role of families in choosing marriage partners. From a post-colonial perspective, this transformation can be examined in relation to the historical power of colonial administrations and Christian missionary institutions to promote Western legal and religious conceptions of marriage while questioning or marginalising certain indigenous practices. Mann (1983), for instance, examines Christian marriage among educated women in colonial Lagos and demonstrates how Christianity was associated with changing ideas about monogamy and marital relationships. Similarly, Jean-Baptiste (2008) illustrates how colonial attempts to regulate customary marriage in Gabon generated struggles among colonial authorities, religious institutions and African political leaders over the authority to define and govern marriage. These historical developments indicate that changes in African marriage practices cannot be understood solely as personal choices, since they are also connected to broader struggles over cultural authority, religious legitimacy and the recognition of indigenous institutions. Nwabude (2022) further observes that some young Igbo men increasingly favour choosing their partners according to personal feelings and preferences rather than following all the customary procedures through which families traditionally participate in marriage arrangements. A post-colonial interpretation considers how the privileging of Western ideals of individual autonomy and legally or religiously recognised marriage may alter the status of customary practices that emphasise kinship obligations, collective consent and relationships

between families. Nevertheless, Western influence does not necessarily result in the complete abandonment of African traditions, since customary law continues to change in response to the social circumstances of the communities that practise it (Ndulo, 2011). African families may therefore combine customary marriage negotiations with Christian wedding ceremonies and civil registration, producing marital practices that reflect both indigenous traditions and external influences. The post-colonial significance of these developments also extends to the literary and performative dimensions of traditional marriage. Customary ceremonies may incorporate proverbs, praise poetry, songs, symbolic declarations and ritual exchanges through which families communicate marital expectations, affirm kinship ties and transmit cultural knowledge. When Western religious or legal procedures replace, shorten or modify customary stages, the contexts in which these oral forms are performed may also change. Some expressions may become less prominent, while others may be adapted to Christian beliefs or incorporated into contemporary ceremonies. The language used during family negotiations, the proverbs invoked by elders, the songs performed during the bride's departure and the symbolic actions accompanying the exchange of bridewealth can therefore reveal how communities negotiate the relationship between indigenous cultural authority and Western religious or legal expectations. The present study draws on this post-colonial perspective to examine how Western culture and religion have influenced traditional marriage performances among the Iteso of Soroti District, particularly the retention, adaptation or decline of indigenous literary forms and the implications of these changes for cultural identity and the transmission of oral traditions.

Culture and Christianity, as forms of Westernisation, have reshaped African traditional marriage practices by introducing new gender dynamics within marital relationships. Traditional African marriages often adhered to patriarchal structures where men held dominant roles as heads of households, and women were expected to manage domestic duties and child-rearing (Mamdani, 1996). For example, among the Maasai, marriage was primarily viewed as an institution where the man was the protector and provider, while the woman's role was more focused on nurturing and maintaining the family (Spencer, 1988). Christianity, however, introduced the concept of marital equality, where men and women were seen as equal partners in the eyes of God. This shift was especially evident in African Christian communities, where Christian teachings often promoted mutual respect, love, and partnership within marriages (Oduyoye, 1995). While the ideal of equality was not always fully realized, it did result in women gaining more rights within marriages,

particularly in societies like the Yoruba and Igbo, where women had historically been subordinated to men in the family structure (Falola, 1999). In many instances, women began to gain more autonomy in family decision-making, a shift that was largely due to the influence of Christianity's more egalitarian marriage ideals (Gwanmesia, 1999). While this finding considers the context of Massai and Igbo, it will be interesting to find out what happens with Iteso traditional marriage. These studies suggest that Westernisation did not simply introduce gender equality into African marriage; rather, colonial and religious encounters produced complex changes in which certain indigenous practices were challenged, some patriarchal arrangements were reinforced and new expectations concerning husbands and wives emerged (Oyěwùmí, 1997). A post-colonial analysis therefore avoids portraying African traditions as uniformly oppressive or Western values as inherently liberating. Instead, it examines how African women and men have negotiated, adapted and contested both indigenous expectations and externally introduced ideals (Oduyoye, 1995). In traditional marriage performance, these negotiations may be expressed through songs, proverbs, praise poetry, ritual speeches and symbolic actions that communicate expectations about authority, obedience, respect, responsibility and marital partnership. Such oral forms may preserve established gender roles, challenge them or acquire new meanings under Christian influence (Finnegan, 2012). This perspective is relevant to the present study because it provides a basis for examining how Western culture and religion have shaped the representation and performance of gender roles in Iteso traditional marriage in Soroti District.

In addition to the reconfiguration of gender roles, Christianity also altered the rituals and customs surrounding marriage in many African societies. Traditional African marriage ceremonies were complex, involving numerous rituals, such as the payment of bride price, communal dances, and feasts, which were vital in legitimizing the union and reinforcing social ties (Horton, 1967). However, with the spread of Christianity, many African communities adopted Christian wedding ceremonies, which focused on the public declaration of vows in a church setting. This shift sometimes resulted in the diminishment or modification of traditional rites. For example, in Uganda, the Buganda Kingdom's marriage rituals, including the "kwanjula" ceremony, which involved elaborate familial negotiations and traditional rites, began to incorporate Christian elements like church weddings and prayers (Beidelman, 1974). The church wedding became the preferred form of marriage in many African societies, replacing indigenous customs and altering the communal nature of marriage. The transformation of African marriage ceremonies can be

examined in relation to the historical power relations through which colonial administrations and Christian missionary institutions promoted Western religious practices and particular understandings of marital legitimacy. Comaroff and Comaroff (1986) explain that Christian evangelism in colonial southern Africa was closely connected to colonial processes, influencing not only religious beliefs but also everyday social practices and cultural meanings. In the specific context of marriage, Mann (1983) demonstrates that Christian missionaries and European cultural influences introduced new expectations concerning polygyny, marital relationships and conjugal roles among educated women in colonial Lagos. Similarly, Summers (1999) shows that Christian marriage among educated African men in colonial Southern Rhodesia became associated with social respectability, adulthood and acceptance within missionary institutions. These studies illustrate how Christian marriage could acquire social prestige while some indigenous marriage practices were criticised, discouraged or reinterpreted according to Western religious standards. Nevertheless, post-colonial analysis does not assume that Christianity simply displaced African customs or that African communities passively accepted missionary influence. Rather, it examines how communities negotiated, adapted and sometimes resisted imported practices while maintaining aspects of their cultural traditions. Bhabha (1994) conceptualises cultural hybridity as a process through which cultural meanings are negotiated and reconfigured in encounters between different traditions. Applied to marriage, this perspective helps explain how customary ceremonies may coexist with church weddings and civil registration, producing practices that combine indigenous and Christian elements. These changes may also affect the literary and performative dimensions of marriage, including the use of traditional songs, proverbs, praise poetry, ritual speeches, dances and symbolic exchanges. When customary stages are modified or omitted, the occasions for performing these oral forms may change, while other expressions may be retained or adapted to Christian beliefs and contemporary expectations. This post-colonial perspective is relevant to the present study because it provides a basis for examining how Western culture and religion have influenced the performance, adaptation and continuity of indigenous literary forms in Iteso traditional marriage in Soroti District.

Christianity's influence also altered marriage practices by introducing new rituals and ceremonies that replaced or altered indigenous customs. Traditional African marriages were often characterized by extensive pre-marital rituals, which included ceremonial dances, communal feasts, and the negotiation of dowry or bride price between families. These customs were seen as

vital to the legitimacy of the marriage and the bond between the families. However, as Christianity spread, many African societies began to adopt Christian wedding ceremonies, which were typically more formal and less rooted in community participation. Church weddings, with their emphasis on a public declaration of vows before God, became the standard in many African communities, sometimes replacing or diminishing the importance of traditional rites. For example, in the Buganda Kingdom of Uganda, the traditional marriage ceremony, known as “kwanjula,” which involved a series of rituals and family negotiations, was often adapted to include Christian prayers and church ceremonies. In some cases, the entire process of marriage shifted toward a more individual-centered, church-based ritual, sidelining the broader communal involvement that was a hallmark of African marriage traditions (Beidelman, 1974; Gwanmesia, 1999). These changes can be examined in relation to the historical influence of Christian missionary institutions and colonial social structures on the recognition and performance of African marriage. Comaroff and Comaroff (1986) explain how missionary Christianity in colonial southern Africa participated in wider transformations of indigenous social practices and cultural meanings. Mann (1983) similarly demonstrates that Christian marriage among educated women in colonial Lagos was associated with changing expectations concerning monogamy and marital relationships. These historical experiences suggest that Christian marriage ceremonies could acquire religious and social prestige, while some indigenous customs were criticised or reinterpreted according to missionary beliefs. Nevertheless, the adoption of church weddings does not necessarily mean that customary practices have disappeared. Bhabha (1994) conceptualises cultural hybridity as a process through which cultural meanings are negotiated and transformed through encounters between different traditions. Applied to marriage, this perspective helps explain how families may retain customary negotiations and ceremonial exchanges while incorporating Christian prayers, vows and blessings. These changes may also influence the performance of indigenous literary forms, including marriage songs, proverbs, praise poetry and ritual speeches, by altering the occasions on which they are performed or the meanings attached to them. This perspective is relevant to the present study because it provides a basis for investigating how Christianity has influenced the continuity, adaptation and performance of literary forms in Iteso traditional marriage in Soroti District.

Western culture also transformed the way marriage was conceptualized and celebrated in African societies. Traditional African marriages were deeply embedded in local customs, where elaborate

rituals, including the payment of bride price or dowry, played a central role in legitimizing the union. For example, in the Igbo community, the payment of bride price, accompanied by traditional ceremonies such as the *Igba Nkwu* “wedding feast”, was a crucial part of the marriage process, symbolizing the social contract between the bride's family and the groom's (Nwoye, 1991). However, with the spread of Christianity, many African societies began to adopt Western-style church weddings, which were seen as more formal and legitimate in the eyes of Christian converts. Church weddings often replaced traditional rites, which were viewed as incompatible with Christian values, and in some cases, traditional ceremonies were diminished or even abandoned altogether (Horton, 1967). In Uganda, for instance, the Buganda kingdom's “*kwanjula*” *introduction ceremony*, which was rich in cultural significance, began to incorporate Christian elements, such as church blessings and prayers, signaling a shift towards more Westernized forms of marriage (Beidelman, 1974). Nevertheless, Ranger (1983) demonstrates that colonial encounters often involved the reinterpretation and reconstruction of African traditions, challenging the idea that cultural practices remained unchanged under colonial rule. Mann (1983) provides a more specific example by documenting how Christian marriage influenced marital expectations among educated women in colonial Lagos, illustrating the relationship between religious conversion, social status and changing marriage practices. These studies provide a basis for examining how indigenous marriage customs may be classified as traditional or incompatible with Christian values, while church ceremonies may be associated with respectability and religious legitimacy. However, such changes should not be interpreted as a straightforward replacement of African traditions by Western practices. Bhabha (1994) explains cultural hybridity as a process through which cultural meanings are negotiated and transformed, offering a way to understand how customary marriage procedures and Christian ceremonies may coexist. This negotiation may also affect the literary and performative dimensions of marriage, including the use of proverbs, songs, praise expressions, ritual speeches and symbolic exchanges through which communities articulate kinship, identity and marital expectations. This post-colonial perspective is relevant to the present study because it supports an investigation of how Western cultural and religious influences have shaped the representation, performance and continuity of indigenous literary forms in Iteso traditional marriage in Soroti District.

1.8.4 Conclusions

The reviewed literature presents different perspectives on traditional marriage as a cultural performance shaped by indigenous values and external influences. Existing studies demonstrate how Westernisation, particularly through Christianity and colonial institutions, has influenced marriage practices, gender relations and attitudes towards polygamy in various African societies (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1986; Mann, 1983). However, these changes should not be understood simply as the disappearance of indigenous traditions and their replacement by Western practices. As Bhabha (1994) explains, cultural encounters can produce new forms of identity through adaptation, negotiation and resistance, while Ranger (1983) demonstrates how colonial encounters influenced the interpretation and reconstruction of African traditions. Despite these insights, limited attention has been given to how such cultural negotiations are expressed through the literary and performative dimensions of traditional marriage, particularly among the Iteso of Soroti District. Specifically, insufficient research has examined how traditional songs, proverbs, praise poetry, ritual speeches and symbolic practices are retained, modified or abandoned as Western cultural and religious influences interact with indigenous values. It also remains unclear how the Iteso negotiate competing expectations concerning marriage, gender roles and cultural identity through these performances, and whether the resulting changes represent cultural adaptation, the marginalisation of indigenous practices or the emergence of new forms of cultural expression. This study therefore seeks to address these gaps by examining traditional marriage performance among the Iteso of Soroti District, with particular attention to its literary expressions and the ways in which indigenous cultural heritage is negotiated, sustained and transformed through encounters with Western cultural and religious influences.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

1.9.1 Post-colonial Theory

The current study is guided by the post-colonial theory of literary criticism. Postcolonial theory offers a framework for understanding how colonial legacies continue to influence contemporary African societies and how disparities in power between colonizers and colonized persist in various forms (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006). For example, colonial policies enforced Western norms and values, including Christianization and the imposition of legal systems, which often led to the

marginalization or erasure of indigenous marriage customs. Analyzing the implications of Westernisation on African traditional marriage performance through a postcolonial lens involves questioning the historical, social, and cultural dynamics that have shaped these practices. In addition, postcolonial scholars such as Mbembe (2001) draw attention to the continuous struggle within postcolonial contexts for agency and cultural autonomy. They propose that African communities may choose to adapt, resist, or hybridize Western influences in their marital performances in order to reclaim agency and assert their identity. One can critically examine how Westernisation has affected African traditional marriage customs while also recognizing the agency and resiliency of African communities in navigating these changes by using postcolonial theory to this topic. The theoretical standpoints that influence my study are as follows.

The first related to colonial legacy, in which the post-colonial theory relies on the idea that colonialism left behind lasting effects that still influences cultures of the colonized, including their identities and cultural norms (Mbembe, 2001). In line with this ideology my study believes that there have been changes in traditional marriage performance of Iteso due to the effects of colonialism.

Another focus is on power dynamics where post colonialism studies show the unequal distribution of power and resources, which places special emphasis on the power dynamics between colonizers and colonized. On a positive note, postcolonial theory recognizes the agency of colonized peoples in negotiating and resisting colonial influences (Mbembe, 2001). In the context of African traditional marriage, communities may engage in acts of hybridization, blending Western and indigenous elements in marriage performances, to assert cultural identity and autonomy in the face of Westernisation (cf. Bhabha, 1994).

Post-colonial theory has generated considerable debate concerning colonial power, cultural identity, indigenous knowledge and the capacity of formerly colonised societies to resist and transform external influences. Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001), in *Pre-colonial and Post-colonial Drama and Theatre in Africa*, demonstrate the importance of examining African dramatic and performance traditions in relation to historical change, cultural continuity and colonial encounters. However, critics such as Parry (1987) argue that approaches centred on colonial discourse can overemphasise the power of representation while giving insufficient attention to material conditions, economic inequalities and the agency of colonised people. Another contestation

concerns the tendency to present indigenous cultures as homogeneous, authentic and unchanged before colonialism. Narayan (1998) challenges this cultural essentialism by demonstrating the problems associated with treating cultures as internally uniform and fundamentally opposed to one another. Similarly, Bhabha (1994) argues that cultural encounters produce hybrid identities through which people negotiate, adapt and transform inherited practices. Nevertheless, the emphasis on hybridity may obscure inequalities in the power relations through which cultural changes occur, particularly when practices are transformed under colonial, religious or institutional pressure. Feminist scholars also question approaches that celebrate indigenous traditions without adequately examining inequalities within them. Oduyoye (1995), for instance, examines the relationship between African cultural practices, patriarchy and women's experiences, highlighting the importance of considering whose interests traditions serve and whose voices they may marginalise. These debates demonstrate that indigenous practices should not automatically be regarded as culturally authentic or socially liberating, just as Western influences should not uniformly be interpreted as oppressive. Accordingly, this study will employ post-colonial theory critically to examine how Iteso traditional marriage performances reflect cultural continuity, resistance, adaptation and unequal power relations, while recognising that the meanings and significance of these performances may differ according to gender, age, religious affiliation and social position.

The theory is not without any loophole as such; for example, one critique is that postcolonial theory tends to homogenize colonial experiences and overlook the diversity of contexts and responses within colonized societies (Young, 2001). Others scholars argue that postcolonial theory often focuses on the experiences of former British colonies, neglecting the complexities of colonialism in regions with different colonial histories, such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Dirlik, 1994; Said, 1993). Additionally, it is assumed that postcolonial theory can be overly deterministic, emphasizing the enduring impact of colonialism while downplaying the agency of colonized peoples in shaping their own identities and societies (Dirlik, 1994). Others criticize postcolonial theory for its reliance on Western academic frameworks and language, which can reinforce colonial hierarchies of knowledge production and marginalize indigenous perspectives (Said, 1993). Nevertheless, despite these weaknesses, the theory is still applicable in that the researcher has used it to explore some of the issues associated with the influence of Westernisation on Iteso traditional marriage performance.

1.9.2 African Drama theory

Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) assert that much controversy surrounds the notion of whether or not the various forms of performance activity found in traditional African society may rightly be considered as drama (cf. Finnegan, 1970:516). Many other scholars, such as Rangarirai Zinyemba (1986:10-17) and Michael Etherton (1982:56-57) look at African drama as if Western aesthetics is the only criterion for determining what drama is. Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) uses the case of Shona ritual drama to demonstrate that African drama is more than storytelling. It is more of a ritual experience that seeks to recreate and, in the process, affirm desirable models of community life (Enekwe, 1981:158). It is a community-based oral genre whose context, performance and meaning are distinct from the mostly individual-based and literary-bound modern western drama. Rather than rely on the written word per se, the African's histrionic sensibility will be shown to derive its context from ritual celebration and its meaning from symbolic enactment, direct audience participation and stylised artistic forms such as mime, song, dance, movement, music, poetic rhythm, costume, gesture, dialogue and role-playing.

'Ritual' will be considered as those actions which are prescribed and repeated and which convey elements of religious symbolism (Bourdillon, 1990:13). 'Drama' will be viewed as an art form that employs histrionic aesthetics in its modes of signification (Taviringana, 1991). A cultural form, such as ritual performance, cannot be understood merely in terms of its surface structure, as most evolutionary theorists seem to have done. As Schneider (1976:214-215) contends:

To rediscover the meaning of ritual ... during the modern period, it is necessary to relate it to the specific social, political, economic and cultural milieu within which it was actually performed The very act of locating the (ritual) occasion or the (cultural) text in its appropriate context is not merely to provide the historical background, but actually to begin the process of interpretation.

The rituals of *kurova guva*, *bira* and *mukwerera* among the Shona demonstrate a profound convergence between ritual and drama, revealing that African performance traditions are inherently communal, symbolic and deeply theatrical in structure. In *kurova guva*, the incorporation of ritual and dramatic elements is evident in the use of role-playing, costume, dialogue, song, dance, symbolic gesture and movement, all of which are embedded within the

ceremonial process. The *n'anga*, for instance, adopts specific costumes such as animal skins and ritual attire to mediate communication with spiritual forces, while family figures such as *sekuru*, *muzukuru*, *sahwira* and *varoora* assume ritual roles that temporarily replace their everyday identities, thereby embodying what de Graft (1981) describes as drama's primary medium of expression. The ritual space itself functions as a performative stage where objects such as musical instruments, clay pots, animal sacrifices and symbolic materials acquire theatrical significance as stage properties, while speech directed to the deceased substitutes formal dramatic dialogue (Crow, 1983). Music, dance and song not only animate the ceremony but also serve as essential ritual components that transform the event into both a spiritual and performative experience. In this sense, *kurova guva* operates as a rite of passage that reintegrates the spirit of the deceased into the ancestral realm, reflecting a worldview in which the living and the dead coexist within a single moral and spiritual community (Bourdillon, 1991). The ritual therefore restores social and spiritual equilibrium, ensuring that ancestral spirits remain benevolent and that communal life retains harmony, continuity and protection.

Similarly, *bira* and *mukwerera* rituals extend this integration of performance and spirituality by emphasising communication with ancestral and cosmic forces through embodied theatrical action. In *bira*, spirit mediumship enables dialogue between the living and the ancestral world, where the *svikiro* embodies the *mudzimu* and performs through gesture, costume, speech and movement, thereby blurring the boundaries between ritual and dramatic impersonation (Horn, 1981; Cox, 1996). The ritual space becomes a symbolic stage, often dimly lit and arranged to enhance sacred atmosphere, while mbira music, dance and possession collectively produce a participatory performance in which the audience becomes both observer and co-creator of meaning. Likewise, *mukwerera* functions as a rainmaking ritual in which dance, mime and symbolic movement are used to appeal to the *mhondoro* and ultimately to the High God for rain during periods of drought. Performers enact agricultural labour through mimetic gestures such as digging, planting and harvesting, thereby transforming lived experience into performative expression (Crow, 1983). When spirit possession occurs, the *mhondoro* assumes a sacred identity, reinforcing the belief that performance mediates direct interaction with supernatural forces.

The theoretical implication of this perspective for the present study on the effect of Westernisation on Iteso traditional marriage is that ritual performance must be understood as a primary site of

cultural meaning, where social identity, spirituality and communal values are enacted through embodied practice. From this standpoint, Iteso marriage cannot be reduced to a legal or social contract alone, but must be analysed as a performative system in which rituals, symbols and communal participation constitute a form of indigenous drama. Consequently, Westernisation becomes analytically significant as a force that reconfigures these performative structures through the introduction of Christian marriage forms, legal formalisation and individualised interpretations of union, which may displace or transform indigenous ceremonial expression. The framework therefore enables the study to interpret changes in Iteso marriage performance as shifts within a living theatrical tradition, where continuity and disruption coexist in the negotiation between indigenous ritual aesthetics and imported cultural systems.

1.10 Significance

The study might be of great significance to the following beneficiaries.

First of all, the Iteso cultural foundation might benefit from the findings of the study. This is by way of giving information regarding the different perspectives regarding the change in the trend of marriage among the Iteso people. Since the study will give a clear description of the categories of marriage performance and how they have been influenced by Westernisation, it will create awareness and deeper understanding in the cultural foundation of the Iteso.

The study will benefit the younger generation regarding the issues in the field of African marriage system. The study will provide insights into the changes in marriage performances among the Iteso, and it will influence decisions regarding which form of marriage they can go with, considering the effectiveness in the social and economic lifestyle of the Iteso.

To future studies, the study might enable future scholars to gain research knowledge in this field by providing data on the influence of westernization on African marriage.

1.11 Research Methodology

1.11.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methods that were used to collect data. This chapter specifically presents the research approach and design, population and sample size, sampling strategies, data collection

methods and instruments, data quality control, data analysis and limitations and mitigating measures and ethical considerations.

1.11.1 Research Approach and Design

This section presents the approach around which this study was structured and is followed by the design the study used.

1.11.1.1 Research Approach

A qualitative approach was used to enhance a comprehensive interpretation and description of the responses and results from the study participants. Qualitative data is typically rich, even though it is subjective, but it is composed of detailed information that is typically expressed verbally (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Often, it involves reading a lot of transcripts and looking for patterns or discrepancies is a necessary step in the analysis of qualitative data. In this research approach, the study variables were described and explained in line with the study objectives. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative approach has been acclaimed for its interrogative and detail exploration of certain unquantifiable constructs (which does not exclude cultural phenomena).

1.11.1.2 Research Design

Berman (2000) asserts that a research design is a blueprint for scientific research. The research design determined what data collection methods, tools, and techniques to be used for conducting the research. The researcher used the descriptive study design to explore issues of marriage performance among the Iteso. Descriptive research design, according to Spector et al. (2014), involves systematically observing and documenting phenomena as they naturally occur, aiming to provide a detailed and comprehensive portrayal of the subject under investigation. This design focused on describing the characteristics, behaviors, and experiences of individuals or groups, without attempting to manipulate variables or establish causal relationships. According to Spector et al. (2014), descriptive studies often utilize techniques such as interviews, observations, and group discussions to collect rich, contextually embedded data that capture the nuances and complexities of the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, this design was used to explore participants' knowledge regarding marriage performance among the Iteso, examine aesthetics in

Iteso marriage performance and investigate the role played by western culture and religion in shaping traditional marriage performance among the Iteso in Soroti District.

1.12 Population and Sample Size

Banerjee and Chaudhury (2010) posit that a population is an entire group about which some important pieces of data are required to be assessed. According to UBOS (2024, p. 547), the estimated population distribution of Asuret County in Soroti District is 29,621 people, comprising 13,807 males and 15,814 females. The study engaged a total of 28 participants, with a slight predominance of female respondents over males. Among them, seven (7) were traditional leaders, comprising both male and female representatives, selected for their extensive knowledge of Iteso marriage customs. Another seven (7) were religious leaders, mostly male, given their significant role in officiating marriages and offering religious perspectives on both traditional and Western-style marriage. Additionally, the study included seven (7) wedded couples, ensuring an equal representation of men and women, to capture firsthand experiences of Western-style marriage. Likewise, seven (7) traditionally married couples participated, with a slightly higher number of female respondents, as they often play a central role in marriage ceremonies and the cultural transmission of marital traditions. (1) wedding ceremony was observed and (2) traditional marriage ceremony were observed to capture the ceremonial details. The selection of these participants was guided by the saturation model, which ensured that data collection ceased once no new themes or insights emerged, preventing unnecessary repetition while maintaining a representative range of perspectives relevant to the study.

1.13 Sampling techniques

The study was guided by the purposive sampling technique. As explained in Etikan, Abubakar, and Alkassim (2016), this is a type of sampling technique where participants' selection is based on the researcher's preference or judgment since it is normally deemed relevant in providing important pieces of information that are required for the study. This sampling technique was used to select cultural leaders, couples who have been married in a church, church leaders who preside over church weddings, couples who are traditionally married, one church wedding and two traditional marriage ceremony. This was deemed sufficient for the reason that the key informant study will provide based on their different experience of the different marriage orientations. By

using this technique, researchers specifically targeted people or groups that had special knowledge, viewpoints, or insights into the phenomena they were studying, which increased the study's relevance and validity. In other words, the purposeful sampling technique was very helpful in qualitative research environments where the focus was on comprehending complicated phenomena within particular circumstances.

1.14.0 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Data was collected with the following methods and instruments:

1.14.1 Semi-structured interviews

The researcher used the semi-structured interview to gather information from the study participants. A semi-structured interview was a useful method for gathering data for qualitative research because it was focused and flexible, Semi-structured interviews offered a framework of open-ended questions and prompts, in contrast to highly structured interviews that adhere to a predetermined set of questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This allowed the interviewer and participant to engage in a dynamic conversation that could explore unexpected avenues and uncover rich and contextually embedded data. In addition to allowing the investigation of many perspectives and experiences within the framework of the research topic, this method builds rapport and trust between the researcher and participant, permitting frank and in-depth responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore issues interactively and identify emerging themes and insights by adjusting questions in response to participants' answers (Liamputtong, 2011). Accordingly, the researcher engaged participants in open discussions about the influence of Westernisation on marriage performances among the Iteso. This guide contained open-ended questions that allowed the participants to provide comprehensive information on how Western culture has affected traditional marriage among the people of Teso.

1.12.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus group discussions (FGDs) provided an engaging and dynamic opportunity to find out about how traditional marriages are performed, the same method was used to investigate how Westernisation has impacted customs surrounding marriage performance in Teso. The researcher gathered members of the study population and discussed this matter to investigate participants'

views, attitudes, and experiences around changes in marital performance. According to Krueger and Casey (2014), focus group discussions gave participants a forum to talk about cultural changes, exchange insights, and consider how Western values and practices have affected customs surrounding marriage, responsibilities, and expectations in their communities. To say more about the relevance of this method, Morgan (1997) shows that FGDs can reveal both consensus and divergent ideas through group interaction and the interchange of differing viewpoints, enabling researchers to spot recurring themes, inconsistencies, and subtleties in participants' narratives. Additionally, FGDs allowed participants to expand on each other's answers, promoting a deeper investigation of the subject and offering a more thorough comprehension of the intricate interactions between tradition and modernity in the context of marriage (Morgan, 1997).

The researcher used a focus group discussion guide containing different questions relating to the influence of Westernisation on Iteso traditional marriage. The questions were meant to probe participants' responses regarding their knowledge of how Western culture has infiltrated the culture of marriage among the Iteso people.

1.12.3 Observation method

In this study, the observation method was employed to gather firsthand data on the influence of Westernisation on traditional marriage performances among the Iteso in Soroti District. The researcher attended two traditional marriage ceremonies and one church wedding, noting both traditional and modern elements. Detailed field notes, photographs, and audio recordings were captured the sequence of rituals, the attire of participants, the music, and the overall atmosphere. By directly witnessing these events, the researcher documented how Western practices are integrated or resisted, providing a comprehensive understanding of their impact on Iteso cultural traditions. The cultural elements were identified using an observation checklist developed from the study objectives, which categorised traditional and Western-influenced marriage practices according to their form, meaning, function and occurrence during the ceremonies.

1.15 Source of Data

The study used both primary and secondary sources to gather information in relation to the influence of Westernisation on Teso traditional marriage

1.15.1 Primary source

primary data was used, which was obtained from the field. The primary source of data is acclaimed for its capacity to provide first hand or authentic information about the subject matter under discussion (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I engaged with the participants in semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations in order to obtain authentic and real-life issues associated with the influence of westernisation on Iteso marriage performance.

1.15.2 Secondary source

According to Perry (1991), secondary sources of data are essential for providing context, theoretical frameworks, and comparative analysis to complement primary data collected through methods like focus groups and semi-structured interviews. They offer insights from existing literature, research, and scholarly discourse on the topic, enhancing the depth and breadth of understanding. In the study “The Influence of Westernisation on Traditional Marriage performance of the Iteso, secondary sources such as academic articles and books that deal with the influence of westernization on traditional marriage performances were used to provide historical background, theoretical frameworks (e.g., cultural anthropology, sociology), and comparative perspectives on the impact of Westernisation on traditional marriage practices.

3.16 Data Analysis

Data collected from the field was analysed using thematic analysis as the primary qualitative analytical approach. The process involved systematic organisation, transcription and repeated reading of the data to enhance clarity and ensure familiarity with the content before coding. Initial codes were generated and subsequently grouped into broader themes that reflected patterns emerging from the data. The development of these themes was guided by the study objectives, namely describing the performance of traditional marriage among the Iteso in Soroti District, examining the aesthetics of Iteso traditional marriage in the context of Westernisation and investigating the role of Western culture and religion in shaping traditional marriage practices among the Iteso. Through this process, thematic analysis enabled the identification of recurring patterns and meanings within participants’ accounts, allowing for an in-depth interpretation of how Westernisation influences marriage practices and cultural expressions.

1.17 Research procedure

The process began by developing the concept paper, which was followed by writing a research proposal, which was reviewed at the Department of Languages and Literature. To guarantee the precision and coherence of the data, pretesting of the research instruments was also carried out. The results for the trial stage were presented to the researcher supervisor, for possible advice and adjustments. The researcher collected an introductory letter (showing the purpose of carrying out the study) from the Faculty of Education and Humanities. This letter was, presented to authorities and participants to get permission to carry out this research investigation. Lastly, the researcher presented the research tools, i.e., the questionnaire and interview question guides, to the study participants in order to gather data. The findings were sorted, analyzed and compiled into a dissertation.

1.18 Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured the participants' anonymity about their contacts, names, and any other private information they may offer after obtaining their agreement, and to do this, the researcher coded the respondents' personal information. However, to engage the participants, their consent was sought, and their decision regarding their participation in the exercise were respected. The study participants were given serial numbers as an alternative identification means to conceal their identity. Participants' safety was guaranteed. The participants of the study were interviewed in a safe and free environment to ensure that they were not mentally or physically affected. Furthermore, the choice of the study participants, in regards to who should participate in the study, was not based on a particular gender, both male and female respondents freely participated in the study. The study participants were not asked any sensitive questions that can be taken by them as a tool for sidelining.

Chapter Two

The Performance of Iteso Traditional Marriages and the Aesthetics of the Marriage Performance in the Face of Westernization

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses findings on the performance of traditional marriage among the Iteso in Soroti District, with particular attention to the aesthetic qualities through which the community expresses, celebrates and sustains its cultural values in the face of Westernisation. The discussion moves beyond a description of marriage procedures to examine the actual performances that constitute the celebration, including traditional songs, dances, ululations, lamentations, ritual actions, elders' blessings, ceremonial utterances, symbolic exchanges and communal participation. The analysis draws on semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations to establish how participants understand these practices and the meanings they attach to them. The discussion is guided by postcolonial theory, particularly its concern on the ways African communities negotiate cultural identity in the presence of Western influences (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2006; Bhabha, 1994; Mbembe, 2001). It also draws on the understanding of African performance as an integration of dramatic, ritualistic and expressive elements. Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) argue that African drama extends beyond storytelling because it incorporates role-playing, dialogue, song, dance, symbolic gestures, movement, mime and spectacle into communal experiences that affirm shared values. This perspective is relevant to Iteso traditional marriage because the ceremony brings together verbal expression, bodily movement, ritual action and collective participation. Accordingly, the chapter examines the literary and aesthetic dimensions of these performances, compares the findings with existing scholarship and considers how traditional practices are maintained, modified or contested under the influence of Westernisation.

2.1 The Performance of Traditional Marriage among the Iteso in Soroti District

2.1.1 Pouring *ajon*, water and sand as ritual performances of blessing

Participants identified the pouring of *ajon*, a locally brewed alcoholic drink, and water as important ritual practices during traditional Iteso marriage celebrations. They explained that pouring *ajon*

expresses happiness, friendship and agreement between the families, while also recognising the thicancestors, who are believed to remain spiritually connected to their descendants. The act is therefore understood as more than the physical disposal of a drink because it acknowledges relationships that extend beyond the living participants. The findings further revealed that male elders pour sand over the couple as a form of blessing. Participants regarded this action as a culturally meaningful practice through which elders express goodwill towards the newly married couple and seek a favourable future for their union. One participant explained, “These rituals are our way of showing respect to the ancestors and asking for their guidance in the couple's journey.” The performance of these rituals takes place within a wider celebration involving songs, dance, verbal expressions and the participation of relatives. Nevertheless, some church leaders expressed reservations about the pouring of sand and other practices they considered incompatible with Christian teachings. This disagreement demonstrates that rituals remain significant within the community even as their religious acceptability is debated. Consider the picture below:



Figure 1: Showing a pot of ajon, sand and water taken to the place of ritual performance

The picture above demonstrates the ritual of pouring *ajon*, water and sand during Iteso traditional marriage, in which these substances are used to express cultural values and invoke blessings upon the couple. The stylistic device illustrated is symbolism, conveyed through the use of culturally significant objects to communicate meanings associated with the marriage ceremony. The women are seen carrying a pot, a calabash and jugs containing *ajon*, water and sand. These objects extend beyond their practical functions to become symbolic representations of cultural values and ritual significance. *Ajon* symbolises hospitality, friendship and agreement between the two families, while water represents blessing and goodwill towards the couple. Sand, when used in the blessing ritual, signifies the couple's connection to their cultural heritage and the elders' invocation of blessings upon their union.

The aesthetic force of these practices comes from the transformation of cultural beliefs into visible ceremonial action. Pouring *ajon* gives material form to the recognition of ancestors and the relationship between families, while the throwing of sand makes the act of blessing physically observable. Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) explain that African ritual performance incorporates symbolic gestures, movement and spectacle, allowing cultural meanings to be enacted rather than merely described. Turner (1967) similarly demonstrates how ritual symbols derive significance from their relationship to a community's wider system of beliefs. Finnegan (1970) shows that the expressive forms of African oral traditions must be understood in relation to their performance contexts, while Bhabha (1994) provides a way of examining the negotiation of cultural meaning where different systems of belief meet. These perspectives illuminate the relationship between the material action and the meaning attributed to it by the Iteso participants. The drink and sand acquire ceremonial significance because they are used within a recognised cultural setting and interpreted through shared beliefs. The disagreement between traditional participants and church leaders adds another dimension to the performance: it reveals competing understandings of what constitutes an acceptable marriage ritual. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) discuss the contested position of indigenous cultural practices within postcolonial societies, making their work relevant to this disagreement. The persistence of the rituals cannot, however, be taken as proof that all participants consciously resist Westernisation. Rather, the findings show that ancestral recognition and traditional blessing continue to hold meaning for some members of the community despite changing religious expectations.

2.1.2 Ajosi dance as an aesthetic expression of celebration

The participants described *Ajosi* as a traditional dance performed during Iteso marriage celebrations to express happiness and contribute to the festive atmosphere. Its performance forms part of the activities through which relatives and other community members participate in the public recognition of the couple. The dance occurs alongside traditional songs, ululations and other ceremonial expressions, making it part of a larger performance rather than an isolated entertainment item. Participants explained that dancing gives people an opportunity to express their joy through bodily movement and to take an active part in the celebration. They also associated the performance with the continuity of cultural practices because younger members of the community can encounter the dance by watching or participating in marriage festivities. Although the findings establish the place of *Ajosi* in the ceremony, the available accounts do not provide a detailed description of its choreography, formations, tempo or particular bodily movements. Its performance can therefore be discussed in terms of its reported function within the celebration, while more specific claims about its movement patterns would require detailed observation of the dance itself.



Figure 2: Showing Ajosi dancers getting ready for the performance

The *Ajosi* dance is a breathtaking tapestry of rhythm and motion, a living archive that breathes life into the royal history and collective soul of the Iteso people of eastern Uganda. At its heart lies the

ejos, a colossal, horizontal wooden drum bound to a log and suspended over a hollow ground pit; this cavernous earth acts as a natural womb of sound, magnifying deep, subterranean bass notes that a seated woman coaxes forth with the raw, rhythmic slaps of her palm. Her pulse is met by a man wielding slender wooden sticks, who rains down quicksilver, high-pitched accents upon two smaller *itelelei* drums, weaving a rich acoustic fabric punctuated by the metallic chatter of ankle bells, the melancholic chime of thumb pianos, and the soaring cries of horn flutes. Ignited by the music, dancers crystallize into a spinning celestial wheel around the instruments—an intimate inner ring of women encircled by a thrumming outer orbit of men, all adorned in rustic goat skins, towering horned headdresses, and carrying animal-tail whisks that slice through the air like brushstrokes. What follows is a mesmerizing display of physical poetry and sheer endurance, where the dancers unleash high-stepping, gravity-defying leaps and thunderous, synchronized foot stomping that makes the earth itself vibrate in harmony with the drums, all while a soaring female vocalist leads a spirited, cyclical call-and-response chant that echoes through the night to celebrate ancestral triumphs, the bounty of the harvest, and the unyielding pride of the Iteso identity.

Dance communicates through the body, moving an important part of the aesthetic organisation of the marriage ceremony. The significance of Ajosi lies not only in the pleasure it provides but also in the way bodily expression makes celebration publicly visible. Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) identify dance and movement as integral elements of African ritual drama, while Finnegan (1970) demonstrates the importance of performed expression in African oral traditions. Turner (1967) helps explain how embodied practices can acquire significance within ceremonies marking important social transitions. Goffman (1959), meanwhile, draws attention to the ways people present themselves and communicate social identities through conduct before an audience. These perspectives suggest that the dance can be examined as an expressive act through which participants display their involvement in the marriage celebration. Its aesthetic qualities would be more fully established by analysing the actual movements, their relationship to musical rhythm and the interaction between dancers and spectators. Westernisation provides a relevant context for this analysis because contemporary marriage celebrations may incorporate modern music, choreographed wedding dances or Christian ceremonial forms. Bhabha (1994) offers a way of understanding such encounters as possible sites of cultural negotiation rather than inevitable instances of cultural replacement. The continued performance of Ajosi, as reported by participants, establishes its ongoing cultural importance, although evidence of particular changes to its

choreography or presentation would be needed to determine how Western influences have affected the dance itself.

2.1.3 Traditional marriage songs and Akogo singing as forms of oral artistry

According to the participants, traditional marriage songs are performed during Iteso marriage celebrations by groups of singers, including those identified as *Akogo* singers. The singing accompanies other celebratory activities and contributes to the expression of happiness, entertainment and communal involvement. Participants explained that songs help create the atmosphere of the occasion and allow people to participate through singing or listening while other activities take place. Their performance alongside *Ajosi* dancing and ululations also demonstrates that music forms part of a broader expressive event in which sound and movement complement each other. Traditional songs therefore occupy an important place in the celebration because they give the community a recognised means of expressing the significance of marriage through collective vocal performance. However, the material provided by the participants does not include the full lyrics of particular songs. Consequently, it is not possible to establish the precise use of metaphor, parallelism, repetition, praise names, or proverbial language in the songs without examining their actual words and performance contexts. This is demonstrated in Figure 3 below:



Figure 3: Showing singing and danceing performance

During an Iteso traditional marriage, singing in the Ateso language and performing the high-energy Ajosi dance serve as the ultimate expressions of community unity and cultural preservation. The ceremony begins with live, call-and-response Ateso songs that humorously critique the bride price, recount family lineages, and deliver ancestral blessings for fertility and resilience directly to the newlyweds. This vocal dialogue transitions into the power of the Ajosi dance, where community members dress in vibrant, striped fabrics and heavy beadwork, lining up to perform synchronized leaps, intense shoulder thrusts, and rapid footwork. As the dancers stamp their feet, heavy iron bells strapped to their ankles create a roaring, rhythmic metallic crash that perfectly complements the traditional drums, physically symbolizing the harmonious merging of two families into a single, supportive clan.

The literary value of these songs lies in their status as performed verbal art. Their meaning cannot be understood from words alone because vocal delivery, rhythm, audience response and the occasion of performance may all contribute to their effect. Finnegan (1970) provides a foundation for examining African oral literature as a performed art, while Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) identify song as one of the expressive resources through which African ritual drama communicates meaning. Norrick (1985) demonstrates the importance of context in interpreting culturally embedded verbal expressions, although his work on proverbs does not establish that particular proverbial structures occur in the songs under study. Turner (1967) also helps explain how expressive forms acquire significance through their relationship to communal beliefs and symbolic practices. These studies support an examination of Akogo singing as a form of oral artistry situated within the marriage celebration. A close analysis of recorded lyrics could establish whether the songs employ repetition to reinforce particular ideas, parallel structures to organise expression, imagery to represent marriage or praise to recognise individuals and families. Such features should be demonstrated from the songs rather than assumed simply because singing occurs. Westernisation may affect this tradition through the introduction of Christian hymns, recorded music and contemporary wedding songs. Bhabha (1994) provides a useful framework for examining how indigenous and introduced forms may coexist or influence one another, while Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) discuss the continuing negotiation of cultural identity in postcolonial contexts. The presence of traditional singers within contemporary celebrations would therefore be significant evidence of continuity, although the extent of any musical transformation must be established from the actual performances.

2.1.4 Ululations and lamentations as performances of collective emotion

Participants reported that ululations, particularly those performed by women, are prominent during Iteso traditional marriage celebrations. They described ululations as expressions of happiness, approval and excitement, accompanying significant moments in the ceremony and contributing to the atmosphere of celebration. The findings also identified lamentations as part of the wider range of vocal expressions associated with marriage. These sounds occur alongside songs, dance and ritual actions, allowing participants to respond audibly to the events unfolding around them. Unlike formal speeches, ululations do not depend on extended verbal explanation. Their significance lies partly in their immediacy and their ability to communicate a shared emotional response. Participants can contribute to the ceremony through these vocal expressions even when they are not directly responsible for leading rituals or presenting gifts. Although the findings establish the presence of both ululations and lamentations, the precise contexts and meanings of the lamentations were not fully explained in the material provided. Their interpretation therefore requires attention to the particular circumstances in which they occur and the meanings that participants themselves attach to them.

The vocal character of these practices gives them a distinctive place within the aesthetics of marriage performance. Ululations make emotion audible and can draw attention to a particular moment, while their repetition and intensity may heighten the celebratory atmosphere. Finnegan (1970) demonstrates the importance of vocal delivery and performance context in oral expressive traditions, while Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) identify sound and collective participation as components of African ritual drama. Goffman (1959) helps explain how public expressions communicate responses and position participants in relation to an event, whereas Turner (1967) examines the significance of collective participation in ritual occasions. Through these perspectives, ululations can be understood as more than incidental sounds because they contribute to the way the celebration is experienced and publicly recognised. Lamentations warrant separate consideration rather than being treated as another form of joy. Depending on the context, they may express sadness, separation or other culturally recognised emotions, but their specific meaning in Iteso marriage must be established from the evidence. This distinction matters aesthetically because the ceremony may accommodate a range of emotional responses rather than a single, uniform mood. Westernisation may influence the space available for such expressions where

contemporary wedding programmes favour formal speeches, prescribed music or religious forms of celebration. Nevertheless, the presence of these practices does not by itself establish that they are declining. The relevant issue is how they are retained, modified or restricted in particular settings, and how participants interpret their place within contemporary marriage celebrations.

2.1.5 Elders' blessings, proverbs and ceremonial utterances as verbal performances

The findings showed that elders play an important role in the verbal performance of Iteso traditional marriage. Their utterances include blessings, advice and instructions intended to prepare the couple for married life: *anyun aberu na ere* 'finding a good woman of the homestead is a blessing', *emuria koliai kojali aipuc ore kon* 'may peace be in your home'. Participants explained that the bride and groom are reminded of the responsibilities and taboos governing their relationships with their spouses and extended families. The bride may be cautioned against extramarital relationships, while the groom is instructed to respect boundaries in his relationship with his mother-in-law. Participants cited the prohibition against a son-in-law shaking hands with his mother-in-law as one example of a customary boundary. They also reported expectations concerning a married man's conduct during visits and ceremonies, including the association between rising before the cock crows and demonstrating hard work. In addition to such instructions, participants identified clan-specific utterances and proverbs as expressions through which cultural knowledge and clan identity are communicated. Some elderly women were reported to address the bride through obscene or insulting utterances intended to test her emotional strength. Church leaders, however, objected to some of these expressions on religious grounds. The findings thus reveal several forms of ceremonial speech, each with its own role in communicating expectations, marking relationships or testing the participants.

These utterances (dialogue) provide an important area for literary analysis because their effectiveness depends on the use of language within a particular social situation. Proverbs may compress broader cultural ideas into brief expressions, while blessings may draw their force from conventional wording, repetition or the authority of the person delivering them. Norrick (1985) explains how proverbial meaning extends beyond literal interpretation and depends on shared cultural knowledge. Finnegan (1970) establishes the importance of oral verbal art in African societies, while Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) identify dialogue and speech as elements of

African ritual drama. Goffman (1959) also helps explain how public speech establishes social positions and shapes the way people are perceived by an audience. These studies support the examination of elders' utterances as performances through which social expectations are voiced and given authority. The obscene utterances directed at the bride require particularly careful analysis because they may involve provocation, insult, humour or verbal testing. Their literary effect cannot be established from their general description alone; the actual words and the bride's responses would reveal how the exchange operates. Such performances also raise questions about gender because the bride may be publicly tested in ways that place particular expectations upon women. The disagreement between traditional participants and church leaders further demonstrates that the acceptability of ceremonial language is contested. Bhabha (1994) provides a framework for understanding such encounters as negotiations between different cultural expectations, while Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) examine the contested authority through which indigenous practices are interpreted. The continuing use or rejection of particular utterances consequently offers a way of examining how Iteso verbal traditions are being reassessed under the influence of Western and Christian norms.

2.1.6 Bride-wealth display and gift-giving as ceremonial spectacle

Another significant issue observed is the presentation of bride-wealth as a significant feature of traditional Iteso marriage celebrations. The items mentioned include cattle, goats, cocks, horns, spears, hoes and money, depending on the expectations agreed upon by the families. These items demonstrate the groom's family's commitment and acknowledge the role of the bride's parents in raising her. They also associated the exchange with the establishment of a relationship between the two families and the recognition of the responsibilities attached to marriage. The presentation of bride-wealth makes the agreement publicly visible through the display and acknowledgement of material objects. Participants further reported that the couple may be brought to sit in the middle of the homestead after the bride-wealth has been accepted, where relatives and other community members present gifts intended to help them establish their household. The gathering places the couple at the centre of the celebration and allows others to participate through giving. The items therefore have a place within the ceremonial performance beyond their material value, as their presentation communicates commitment, appreciation and the public recognition of the union.

The visual dimension of bride-wealth gives this part of the celebration a quality of spectacle. Cattle and other objects become signs of commitment and family relations because they are presented within a culturally recognised exchange. Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) identify spectacle and symbolic action as important components of African ritual performance, while Turner (1967) demonstrates how objects acquire meaning within ceremonial systems. Goffman (1959) provides a way of examining the public display of social identity, helping to explain how the presentation of resources can communicate family standing before an audience. Meekers (1993), in discussing marriage and bride-wealth in African contexts, highlights the economic and social significance of these exchanges. These perspectives help distinguish the ceremonial meaning of bride-wealth from a purely financial interpretation. The public presentation of the items makes an agreement tangible, while gifts given to the couple extend the exchange to the wider community. The aesthetic interest lies in the way material objects, the positioning of participants and the audience's recognition combine to make the union publicly meaningful. Yet the findings also require a distinction between the social prestige associated with wealth and the participants' emphasis on appreciation and responsibility. Bride-wealth cannot be reduced to a display of economic power when participants explicitly associate it with respect for the bride's parents and commitment to the marriage. In contemporary settings, Western wedding conventions may introduce different expectations about expenditure, gifts and the public display of resources. Bhabha (1994) offers a basis for examining how such expectations interact with inherited practices, while Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) discuss the changing position of indigenous customs in postcolonial societies. Whether Westernisation has altered the types of items presented, the scale of the display or the meanings attached to bride-wealth must, however, be demonstrated through the study's specific evidence.

2.1.7 Communal celebration, feasting and the dramatic organisation of marriage

Analysis of findings revealed traditional Iteso marriage as a communal celebration involving the couple, elders, relatives, singers, dancers and other members of the community. They reported that the couple may sit in the middle of the homestead after the acceptance of bride-wealth, allowing relatives and other participants to present gifts and recognise the union. Songs, *Ajosi* dancing, ululations and ritual actions contribute to the celebration, while communal gatherings and feasting provide opportunities for interaction between the families. Elders lead particular activities, but the event also depends on the contributions of people who sing, dance, give gifts or respond vocally

to the proceedings. Participants regarded the gathering as significant because marriage establishes relationships that extend beyond the two individuals entering the union. The homestead becomes the setting in which these relationships are publicly acknowledged through shared activity. The celebration consequently brings together different forms of participation, allowing the couple's union to be recognised through a combination of formal ceremonial actions and less formal expressions of collective happiness.

The dramatic structure of the celebration emerges through the coordination of people, actions, sounds and objects. The placement of the couple at the centre of the gathering establishes a visual focus, while the surrounding activities create the atmosphere within which the marriage is recognised. Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) explain that African ritual performance may integrate dialogue, song, dance, gesture and spectacle, while Turner (1967) examines how collective ritual activities give significance to social transitions. Finnegan (1970) further demonstrates that oral and expressive forms must be interpreted in relation to the circumstances of their performance. These perspectives make it possible to analyse the ceremony as an organised cultural event in which individual actions contribute to a wider performance. The aesthetic effect comes from the relationship between its components: song provides a vocal dimension, dance introduces bodily movement, ritual actions give visible form to cultural beliefs and communal participation establishes an audience that is also involved in the event. Feasting adds another dimension by creating opportunities for hospitality and interaction between the families. It would nevertheless be necessary to investigate particular seating arrangements, foods and patterns of participation before attributing specific symbolic meanings to them. The communal structure also offers a point of comparison with contemporary weddings organised around a church service, a reception programme or a designated master of ceremonies. These arrangements need not be mutually exclusive, since traditional and modern forms may coexist within the same celebration. Bhabha (1994) helps explain such combinations as possible sites of cultural negotiation, while Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) draw attention to the continuing significance of indigenous forms within changing cultural settings. The important question is how the organisation of the ceremony shapes participation and meaning, rather than whether a celebration that incorporates modern elements can still be regarded as culturally significant.

2.1.8 The transmission and transformation of marriage performance under Westernisation

Participants associated traditional marriage performances with the transmission of cultural knowledge from older to younger generations. They explained that songs, dance, ritual actions, blessings, proverbs and the presentation of bride-wealth communicate expectations concerning marriage, family relationships and responsibilities. Elders contribute by leading ceremonial activities and explaining practices whose meanings may not be immediately apparent to younger participants. Through attending marriage celebrations, younger people can observe how cultural practices are performed and how the community responds to them. At the same time, participants acknowledged the increasing influence of Christian marriage and the objections raised by some church leaders against polygamy, the pouring of sand and certain ceremonial utterances. Other participants maintained that Christian weddings can coexist with selected traditional practices, particularly bride-wealth and family involvement. The findings therefore suggest that Westernisation has produced varied responses rather than a uniform rejection of traditional marriage. Some practices continue to be valued, others are questioned and some may be incorporated into contemporary ceremonies alongside Christian forms. The performance of marriage remains an important setting in which the community communicates cultural knowledge while negotiating changing religious and social expectations.

Cultural transmission through performance involves more than the preservation of customs in an unchanged form. It depends on whether people continue to enact, interpret and recognise the practices through which cultural knowledge is communicated. Finnegan (1970) demonstrates the significance of oral performance in sustaining cultural expression, while Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) explain how ritual and dramatic forms can affirm communal values through participation. Turner (1967) shows how ceremonial practices give meaning to important social transitions, and Norrick (1985) demonstrates how the interpretation of proverbial language depends on culturally shared knowledge. These contributions help explain why participation in marriage celebrations can provide opportunities for learning that extend beyond formal instruction. Younger people encounter cultural meanings through listening to songs and proverbs, observing ritual actions and witnessing how relatives respond to the ceremony. Nevertheless, the continued presence of a practice does not necessarily mean that its meaning remains unchanged. Bhabha (1994) argues that cultural encounters may produce negotiated or hybrid forms, while Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin

(2006) discuss the contested position of indigenous expression in postcolonial contexts. Mbembe (2001) provides a further basis for examining African cultural agency within changing social conditions. Applied to the findings, these perspectives help explain how participants may retain bride-wealth while questioning particular rituals or combine Christian wedding practices with selected indigenous forms. Such developments should not automatically be described as either cultural loss or resistance. Their significance depends on how participants interpret and enact the practices. The central concern is therefore the continuing relationship between performance and cultural knowledge: which forms are being passed on, which are being reconsidered and how these changes affect the aesthetic character of Iteso marriage.

2.2.9 Conclusion

The findings establish that traditional marriage among the Iteso in Soroti District is performed through a combination of ritual action, dance, singing, vocal expression, ceremonial speech, material exchange and communal participation. The pouring of ajon, water and sand gives visible expression to blessing and ancestral recognition; Ajosi dance provides a bodily form of celebration; Akogo singing contributes to the oral artistry of the occasion, while ululations and lamentations communicate collective emotional responses. Elders' blessings, proverbs and other ceremonial utterances convey cultural expectations, whereas bride-wealth and gift-giving make family commitment publicly recognisable. These practices interact within a communal event whose aesthetic character depends on the relationship between sound, movement, language, symbolic objects and participation. The findings are consistent with Losambe and Sarinjeive's (2001) discussion of the dramatic qualities of African ritual performance and Finnegan's (1970) account of performed oral literature. They also demonstrate that Westernisation has introduced disagreements about the acceptability of particular practices, especially where Christian teachings conflict with indigenous ritual or marital arrangements. Nevertheless, the continued recognition of traditional songs, dance, bride-wealth and communal participation indicates that cultural change does not necessarily involve the complete replacement of inherited forms. As Bhabha (1994) and Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) help explain, cultural practices may be retained, reinterpreted or contested as communities negotiate changing social conditions. The performance of Iteso marriage is therefore significant not merely as a cultural ceremony but as an expressive arena in

which literary artistry, social relationships and cultural identity are made publicly visible and continually negotiated.

2.3 Aesthetics in Iteso traditional marriage performance in the face of Westernisation

This section examines the aesthetic qualities of Iteso traditional marriage through the artistic and performative features that give the ceremony its cultural meaning, dramatic appeal and social significance. Rather than treating beauty as a general appreciation of marriage or discussing its functions independently of its artistic expression, the analysis focuses on how beauty is produced through ritual enactment, oral verbalisation, song, dance, symbolic gestures, ceremonial exchanges and the participation of the community. The accounts of the participants indicate that Iteso traditional marriage is valued not simply because it marks the union of a man and a woman but also because the union is enacted through culturally established forms of performance. These forms transform marriage negotiations and family agreements into public events characterised by symbolism, rhythm, repetition, figurative language, dramatic action and communal participation. The aesthetic significance of the ceremony therefore lies in the relationship between what is performed, how it is performed and what the performance accomplishes within Iteso society. Pouring *ajon* in recognition of the ancestors, pouring sand over the couple as a blessing, performing *Ajosi* dances, singing celebratory songs and reciting clan-specific utterances are not interchangeable elements of entertainment. Each has a distinctive expressive form through which particular cultural meanings are communicated and social relationships are established or affirmed.

The participants' commitment to these practices also reveals an important tension between indigenous aesthetic values and the influence of Western marriage conventions, particularly Christian wedding practices. Their reluctance to modify traditional marriage should, therefore, be understood in relation to the continued value they attach to the established forms through which their cultural identity is expressed. From a literary perspective, the significance of these performances lies in their capacity to communicate meanings through more than direct verbal explanation. Ritual actions operate as symbolic signs, songs organise communal feeling through rhythm and repetition, dances communicate through coordinated bodily movement while proverbs and clan utterances compress cultural knowledge into memorable verbal forms. These characteristics make traditional marriage a form of culturally situated performance in which verbal, visual, bodily and symbolic modes of expression work together. Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001)

provide a useful point of departure for understanding the performative character of African cultural expression, particularly the relationship between ritual, music, dance and communal participation. Similarly, Turner (1967) demonstrates the importance of ritual performance in affirming social relationships and collective identity. From a postcolonial perspective, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) help explain why the preservation of indigenous expressive forms matters when African cultural practices encounter external systems of evaluation. The analysis below therefore examines the particular performance styles through which Iteso traditional marriage produces aesthetic pleasure, communicates cultural knowledge and sustains its social and symbolic functions.

2.3.1 Ritual symbolism and the dramatic enactment of ancestral recognition

Participants identified the pouring of *ajon*, a locally brewed alcoholic drink, as an important ritual performance in Iteso traditional marriage. According to their accounts, the act recognises ancestors who are believed to be present spiritually despite their physical absence. It also expresses happiness and friendship between the two families whose children are being united. The pouring of sand over the couple by male elders constitutes another significant performance through which blessings are symbolically conferred upon the union. These practices demonstrate that the aesthetic character of Iteso traditional marriage is produced partly through the transformation of ordinary materials into culturally meaningful objects of performance. Alcohol and sand do not derive their ceremonial significance solely from their physical properties. Their meaning emerges from the actions through which they are used, the people who perform those actions and the cultural beliefs that make the actions intelligible to the community. The pouring of *ajon*, for example, is not merely the disposal of a liquid. It is a deliberate ceremonial act through which an otherwise invisible relationship between the living and the ancestors is publicly acknowledged. Similarly, the pouring of sand over the couple converts a physical substance associated with the earth into a medium through which the elders express blessing and approval. The aesthetic quality of these rituals consequently resides in the purposeful arrangement of movement, material objects, participants and culturally recognised meanings.

The literary significance of these rituals becomes clearer when they are examined as forms of symbolic enactment rather than as isolated customs. In literary expression, symbolism enables an

object, action or image to communicate meanings beyond its immediate physical existence. The Iteso ritual performances operate in a comparable manner because their significance depends on the cultural meanings attached to the acts being performed. The pouring of *ajon* becomes a symbolic enactment of ancestral recognition, while the pouring of sand over the couple makes blessing visible through bodily action. In this sense, the ritual functions as a kind of dramatic language: instead of merely telling the audience that the ancestors are acknowledged or that the couple has received the elders' blessing, the participants enact these meanings before the assembled community. The distinction between telling and showing is particularly important here. Through the physical act, cultural belief is converted into an observable event that participants can witness, interpret and remember. The ceremonial sequence also gives the marriage a sense of dramatic progression because the couple's union is situated within a larger order of family relations, ancestral continuity and communal approval. Turner (1967) helps explain how ritual action makes social meanings tangible through structured performance, while Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) illuminate the importance of ritualised action and spectacle in African performance traditions. The aesthetic value of the Iteso rituals therefore lies not in visual display alone but in their capacity to represent culturally significant relationships through carefully recognised symbolic actions. Their function is equally important: by acknowledging ancestors and allowing elders to confer blessings publicly, the rituals locate marriage within a moral and spiritual framework that extends beyond the couple. The performance thus transforms marriage from a private agreement into a culturally witnessed and symbolically authorised union.

2.3.2 Ajosi dance and the aesthetics of embodied expression

The participants also identified *Ajosi*, a traditional dance performed during marriage celebrations, as an important element of the aesthetic experience. Alongside singing, dancing creates an atmosphere of happiness and celebration, enabling members of the two families and the wider community to participate in the marriage event. Its significance extends beyond the provision of entertainment because the performance gives physical expression to emotions that might otherwise remain individually experienced or verbally articulated. Through coordinated bodily movement, rhythmic action and participation in a shared cultural activity, the dancers transform the marriage ceremony into a public expression of collective joy. The body consequently becomes an instrument of cultural communication. Whereas a spoken declaration can explain that the families are happy

about the union, dance allows that happiness to be demonstrated through movement and shared participation. The performance also distinguishes the ceremonial occasion from ordinary social interaction. The deliberate use of recognised dance forms signals that the gathering is taking place within a culturally meaningful event in which participants are expected not merely to observe the marriage but also to contribute to its celebration. The aesthetic appeal of *Ajosi* therefore emerges from the relationship between movement, rhythm, bodily coordination and the social setting in which the dance is performed.

From a literary and performance perspective, *Ajosi* is significant because it expands the expressive possibilities of the marriage ceremony beyond spoken language. Dance communicates through the body's movements, spatial relationships and rhythmic coordination, creating a form of embodied expression in which meaning is conveyed through performance rather than through words alone. This is especially important in a ceremonial setting where the objective is not simply to transmit information but to create a shared emotional experience. The aesthetic force of the dance derives from the way individual movements become part of a collective composition. Participants do not merely occupy the same space; through their coordinated performance, they produce a visible representation of communal participation. The dance can therefore be understood through the concept of spectacle, not as superficial display but as an organised arrangement of expressive actions that makes the cultural significance of the occasion perceptible to the audience. Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) are relevant to this interpretation because their discussion of African dramatic and performance traditions recognises the importance of music, dance and embodied action in communal cultural expression. Turner (1967) similarly provides a basis for understanding how participation in ritual performance reinforces a sense of belonging. The significance of *Ajosi* consequently lies in the relationship between its aesthetic form and its social function. Its rhythmic and bodily qualities make the celebration engaging, while the collective nature of the performance strengthens relationships between participants and affirms their involvement in the marriage. The dance also creates an opportunity for younger members of the community to encounter a recognised cultural practice through direct participation. Its continued performance therefore sustains cultural knowledge not merely by describing tradition but by allowing tradition to be experienced through the body.

2.3.3 Traditional marriage songs and the poetics of collective celebration

Participants identified traditional songs as another important feature of Iteso marriage performance. The songs contribute to the atmosphere of celebration and provide a culturally recognised means through which happiness about the union can be expressed. Their presence also demonstrates that the ceremony is not exclusively organised around formal negotiations and ritual obligations. It incorporates artistic forms through which participants can communicate emotion, interact with one another and participate in the social experience of marriage. Consider the song below:

Traditional Teso marriage Song:

Emati "Emaali""Yayaya, ejok

Awurida...Ikon koku eye

eyawuni EmaaliWululu Emaali,

Wululu Emotoka

Wululu eda bada"English Translation

New Vision

Emaali - Wealth

This is one of the most popular traditional songs performed at nearly every Iteso marriage, carrying a rich heritage that spans over 60 years. Women lead the singing and dance gracefully, rhythmically shaking their waists to the beat. The climax of the performance occurs when the crowd chants "edabada", cue that prompts the bride's fathers and male elders to join the dance floor, proudly showcasing the "dabada" as a treasured gift received from their new in-laws. This traditional Iteso marriage song holds profound cultural significance because it serves as the definitive public validation and legal certification of a new union within the community. By repeatedly chanting "Emaali" alongside expressions of gratitude, the performing women transition the event from a tense negotiation into a celebration of mutual respect, acknowledging that the groom's family has successfully honored the bride's parents with the required bridewealth. The inclusion of the word "Emotoka" highlights the modernization of this prestige, celebrating the grand arrival of the in-laws and signaling to the village that the bride is being wedded with the highest standards of dignity. The true climax of the song occurs during the rhythmic shift to "edabada," which functions as a mandatory cultural summons for the bride's fathers and male

elders to join the dance floor. As these men step forward to proudly showcase the dabada, or the physical tokens and gifts brought by the in-laws, they are executing a vital customary ritual that serves as a visual receipt for the entire community. Because children in Iteso society belong to the wider clan, this public dance by the elders signals that the wealth has been formally accepted, the bride's upbringing has been fully appreciated, and the two independent families are now officially and spiritually bound together.

Song is particularly significant because it combines language with rhythm and melody, giving words an expressive quality that ordinary conversation does not necessarily possess. In the marriage setting, this combination enables the expression of collective feeling through a shared performance. The song becomes an event in its own right, drawing attention to the occasion and providing participants with a means of articulating the emotional significance of the union. Its aesthetic appeal arises from the interaction between verbal expression, musical organisation and the social context of its performance. Although the accounts supplied do not identify particular song lyrics, the participants' emphasis on traditional singing establishes its importance as a recognised component of the ceremony. The analysis must therefore distinguish between the documented function of the songs and any specific literary techniques that would require examination of the actual lyrics.

The literary significance of traditional marriage songs lies in their potential to organise cultural experience through the distinctive resources of oral poetry. Song can employ repetition, parallelism, imagery, metaphor, rhythm, praise and direct address to make cultural messages memorable and emotionally compelling. However, these techniques must be established from the actual songs rather than assumed to occur in every Iteso marriage performance. Where repetition occurs, for example, it can intensify the expression of joy, reinforce a central message and enable several participants to join in the performance. Where metaphor or imagery is used, the song can express the meaning of marriage through culturally familiar representations rather than through literal explanation. Praise language can also confer recognition on the couple and their families, while rhythmic patterns can coordinate collective participation. These possibilities illustrate why songs should be examined as literary compositions as well as musical performances. Finnegan (1970), in her study of oral literature in Africa, establishes the importance of examining oral forms as artistic expressions whose meaning is inseparable from their performance contexts. Losambe

and Sarinjeive (2001) likewise provide a relevant basis for considering the relationship between music, communal participation and African performance. The function of the Iteso marriage songs must therefore be understood through the interaction between their verbal content, musical form and ceremonial purpose. Their aesthetic contribution lies in the organisation of language into an emotionally expressive performance, while their social contribution lies in creating a shared medium through which the community celebrates the union. Songs may also serve as vehicles for cultural transmission when their words contain praise, historical references, moral observations or familiar cultural images. Establishing which of these functions the Iteso songs actually perform requires close attention to their lyrics and the circumstances in which they are sung.

2.3.4 Clan-specific utterances and the literary force of proverbs

The participants further explained that clan-specific utterances form an important part of Iteso traditional marriage and may be expressed through proverbs. These utterances distinguish one clan from another and communicate aspects of lineage identity during the marriage proceedings. Their importance lies in the fact that marriage brings together individuals whose identities are embedded within wider family and clan relationships. Some of the proverbs include *Epedore na aberu, edula lo aijar*, which translates to the capability of a woman is the granary of life, emphasizes that a successful household and marriage depend heavily on a wife's resourcefulness, wisdom, and management skills, highlighting her central role as the keeper of the family's wealth and survival. Following this, *Mam emunoata akituk ka akipi*, which translates to the cow and the water are never at peace, yet they cannot exist without one another, is used by elders to remind newlyweds that disagreements and conflicts are natural parts of a marriage, but the couple must learn to resolve their differences because they are fundamentally dependent on each other to build a future. Finally, *Erai aberu ekesot lo aiboyet* sometimes spoken as *Aberu ngesi epiri lo ere*, which translates to mean that a wife is the pillar of the home, underscores the traditional belief that a stable, peaceful, and respectable home is held up by the emotional strength and character of the woman, advising husbands to respect and protect their partners as the foundational core of the entire household.

The public use of culturally recognised utterances makes these relationships audible and establishes the historical and social affiliations of the people involved. Unlike an ordinary statement that provides straightforward information, a proverb often communicates through

compressed language, figurative meaning and an appeal to shared cultural knowledge. Its interpretation may depend on the audience's familiarity with the circumstances, values and experiences to which it alludes. The use of such verbal forms therefore gives the marriage ceremony an oral-literary dimension in which language performs a social action. The utterances do not merely describe the participants; they help identify them within a recognised cultural order. Their aesthetic significance emerges from the relationship between the economy of expression, the depth of implied meaning and the ceremonial context in which the words are spoken.

The literary quality of clan-specific utterances is particularly evident in the relationship between figurative language, oral compression and cultural allusion. Proverbs frequently communicate complex observations through a concise verbal structure, requiring the listener to move beyond the literal meaning of the words towards the cultural principle they express. This process creates an interpretative relationship between speaker and audience. The speaker draws on a recognised form of expression, while the audience uses shared knowledge to recover its significance. In the marriage ceremony, such verbal artistry can make clan identity memorable because it presents cultural knowledge in a compact and recognisable form. Where a proverb employs metaphor, analogy, contrast or parallel structure, these stylistic devices can intensify its meaning and make the utterance more memorable. Nevertheless, the particular devices employed by the Iteso utterances must be demonstrated through their actual wording. Norrick (1985) is useful for understanding proverbs as conventionalised expressions whose meanings cannot always be reduced to the literal meanings of their component words. Finnegan (1970) also establishes the importance of oral literature as a form of artistic communication embedded within social life. From this perspective, clan utterances function as more than decorative speech. They can affirm lineage, communicate communal values and provide a means through which cultural knowledge is publicly recognised. Their literary force lies in the way language compresses history and identity into memorable verbal forms, while their social function lies in the recognition of kinship affiliations and the reproduction of cultural knowledge. The performance of these utterances consequently demonstrates that the literariness of Iteso traditional marriage is not confined to songs and dances. It also resides in the stylistic organisation of speech and the culturally specific meanings that speech activates.

2.3.5 Bride-wealth negotiations and the dramaturgy of ceremonial exchange

The participants regarded the payment of bride-wealth as an important component of Iteso traditional marriage, explaining that it expresses appreciation for the bride's parents, recognises their contribution to her upbringing and establishes relationships between the families. They also associated the practice with reciprocal obligations and the strengthening of economic and social ties. Although the payment of bride-wealth is commonly discussed in terms of its social or economic function, its inclusion within a study of performance aesthetics requires attention to how the exchange is enacted. The marriage proceedings bring representatives of the two families into a shared ceremonial space where requests, responses, negotiations and exchanges take place before an audience. These interactions provide the event with a recognisable dramatic structure. Participants occupy different roles, statements are made in response to earlier statements and the progress of the ceremony depends on the actions and responses of the parties involved. The exchange therefore becomes more than a transfer of material goods. It is a public performance through which respect, willingness, responsibility and the relationship between the families are communicated. Its aesthetic dimension lies in the organised interaction of speakers, ceremonial actions and symbolic objects, while its social significance lies in the recognition of obligations and the establishment of relations between the two families.

The literary and dramatic significance of bride-wealth negotiations lies in their potential to organise social relationships through structured dialogue, ceremonial action and symbolic exchange. Dramatic performance frequently develops through interaction between participants whose speech and actions advance an event towards a recognised outcome. In a marriage negotiation, the exchange of statements and responses can perform a comparable function because each contribution forms part of a developing social encounter. The meaning of the negotiation is not located exclusively in the words spoken or the goods exchanged; it emerges through the relationship between the participants, the order of their actions and the expectations governing the ceremony. Where the negotiations include formulaic expressions, proverbs, indirect requests or ceremonial forms of address, these may be examined as stylistic resources through which respect and cultural authority are communicated. Such features should, however, be identified from recorded or reported examples rather than presumed to be present in every negotiation. Goffman's (1959) account of the presentation of self in social interaction provides a useful conceptual basis

for examining how people enact socially recognised roles before others, while Turner (1967) helps explain the relationship between ritual performance and the affirmation of social order. The relevance of these perspectives lies in their capacity to illuminate how the marriage ceremony makes obligations publicly recognisable. Bride-wealth exchange may affirm the value attached to the bride's family, establish reciprocal expectations and create a public record of the relationship between the two households. Its performance also gives the marriage a recognisable sequence through which social agreement is expressed and acknowledged. The aesthetic value of this process should not be confused with the financial value of the goods involved. It lies in the ceremonial organisation of the exchange and the culturally meaningful interaction through which the exchange is accomplished. A critical analysis must also distinguish the participants' interpretation of bride-wealth as appreciation from the possibility that the practice may be experienced differently by women and their families. This distinction is important because the cultural significance of a performance does not prevent its social implications from being critically examined.

2.3.6 Ceremonial display, marriage prestige and the performance of social status

The participants also associated Iteso traditional marriage with prestige and social recognition. One participant observed, "Every woman takes great pride in getting married because a married woman is respected and valued in our society." Another described polygamous marriage as a display of wealth and social standing, explaining that a man who could support several wives and their households might be regarded as successful. These accounts indicate that marriage can function as a public representation of social position. However, the aesthetic dimension of this finding requires a distinction between prestige as a social outcome and the performance through which prestige becomes visible. The marriage ceremony creates a setting in which families demonstrate their ability to fulfil customary expectations, participate in recognised exchanges and host a culturally significant event. The gathering of relatives, the presentation of gifts and the public acknowledgement of the union can all contribute to the visibility of family status. Where elaborate dress, ceremonial arrangements, music or dance are present, they may further contribute to the visual and performative character of the occasion. The available accounts, however, do not provide sufficient detail to establish specific costume styles, decorative conventions or patterns of expenditure as defining features of Iteso marriage. What the evidence does establish is that

participants understand marriage as an institution associated with social recognition and that the ceremony provides a public setting in which such recognition is expressed.

From a literary and performance perspective, the significance of prestige lies in the way marriage can operate as a social spectacle through which status is represented, interpreted and affirmed. Spectacle in this context does not mean mere extravagance. It refers to the visible and publicly organised aspects of the ceremony through which social relationships become available for communal observation. The couple, their families and the assembled participants become part of a performance whose meaning extends beyond the immediate event. The marriage ceremony can consequently be analysed in terms of representation, audience and social interpretation: what is displayed, who displays it and how the community interprets the display. Goffman (1959) provides a useful framework for examining the presentation of social roles before an audience, while Turner (1967) draws attention to the role of ritual performance in making social relationships publicly meaningful. The relevance of these perspectives is that prestige is not produced by material resources alone. It also depends on the social meanings assigned to the public enactment of marriage. The participants' descriptions of polygamy illustrate this relationship because the ability to support several households is interpreted as evidence of economic capacity and social achievement. Nevertheless, this interpretation should not be treated as a universal account of women's experiences or as proof that all members of the community value polygamy in the same way. A critical literary analysis must examine how the performance represents social authority and whose interests are affirmed by that representation. It must also recognise that the aesthetic appreciation of a ceremony can coexist with unequal social expectations. The function of ceremonial display is therefore twofold: it can celebrate the couple and strengthen communal recognition, while also reproducing cultural ideas about marriage, gender and status. Examining these tensions allows the study to move beyond describing the ceremony as beautiful and to explain how its performance produces and communicates social meanings.

2.3.7 Communal feasting, participatory performance and the dramatic organisation of social relationships

Participants described Iteso traditional marriage as a communal event in which families and other members of the community come together to celebrate the union. They explained that the

ceremony may include dancing, singing, storytelling and shared celebrations, creating opportunities for interaction between people who might otherwise have limited contact. This communal dimension is important because it changes the nature of marriage from an event observed only by the couple and their immediate relatives into a performance involving a wider social audience. The participants are not necessarily passive spectators. Through their attendance, responses, participation in songs and dances and involvement in ceremonial activities, they contribute to the production of the event. The gathering also creates an opportunity for relationships between families to be established or strengthened. Where historical tensions exist, the marriage may provide a socially recognised occasion for renewed interaction and the development of peaceful relations. The aesthetic quality of the ceremony consequently arises partly from its participatory structure. The event draws together multiple voices, bodies and actions, creating a shared experience in which the celebration of the couple becomes inseparable from the social interaction of the community.

The literary significance of communal marriage performance lies in its ability to combine different expressive forms within a single unfolding event. Songs provide a medium for organised verbal and musical expression, dance communicates through movement, storytelling conveys experience through narrative and proverbs compress cultural knowledge into memorable language. When these forms occur within the same ceremony, their meanings can reinforce one another. A song may express the happiness associated with the marriage, while dance gives that happiness a bodily form and a proverb connects the occasion to established cultural knowledge. This interaction produces a form of performative composition in which the meaning of the event emerges through the relationship between different modes of expression. The ceremony can therefore be examined as a structured cultural performance rather than as a collection of unrelated activities. Finnegan (1970) demonstrates the importance of performance contexts in understanding African oral literature, while Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) emphasise the relationship between communal participation and expressive forms such as music and dance. Turner (1967) further helps explain how participation in ritual events can affirm social belonging. These perspectives clarify the function of the Iteso marriage ceremony: it provides a setting in which relationships are enacted, cultural knowledge is shared and communal identity is reaffirmed. Its aesthetic significance lies in the interaction of the expressive elements through which these outcomes are achieved. The ceremony is not beautiful merely because it contains entertainment. Its artistic value is tied to the

ways its performances organise collective feeling, give cultural meaning a public form and enable participants to experience their membership of the community. The social function of the performance is thus inseparable from its literary and aesthetic organisation.

2.3.8 Traditional marriage performance as cultural transmission and resistance to aesthetic displacement

The participants emphasised that Iteso traditional marriage sustains cultural identity by preserving customary practices and transmitting them to younger generations. They associated the marriage process with the recognition of clans, ancestral acknowledgement, elders' blessings, bride-wealth exchange and the performance of culturally established utterances and celebrations. These elements make the ceremony a setting in which cultural knowledge is not simply discussed but enacted. Younger participants can observe the conduct of elders, hear clan-specific expressions, witness ritual actions and participate in songs and dances. Through these experiences, cultural knowledge becomes available in forms that can be remembered and repeated. The ceremony therefore functions as a mechanism of cultural transmission because its artistic and ritual features give tradition an observable and participatory form. The significance of this process becomes particularly apparent when traditional marriage encounters Western influences. The participants' reluctance to abandon established practices suggests that the meaning of marriage cannot be reduced to the formal recognition of a couple's union. The indigenous ceremony also provides a means through which the community maintains its distinctive ways of representing kinship, spirituality and social belonging.

The literary and stylistic importance of cultural transmission lies in the capacity of performance to preserve cultural knowledge through repetition, embodiment and memorable expression. A proverb can transmit a cultural principle through figurative language, a song can preserve words and ideas through rhythm and repetition, a dance can reproduce a recognised pattern of bodily movement and a ritual can preserve customary meanings through the repeated enactment of symbolic actions. These are distinct expressive mechanisms, yet each enables cultural knowledge to be encountered through performance. Their continuation does not depend exclusively on written documentation because the knowledge is also preserved through the acts of speaking, singing, moving and performing. Finnegan (1970) is important here because her work establishes the

significance of oral literature as an artistic tradition sustained through performance and social participation. Norrick (1985) helps explain how conventionalised verbal expressions, including proverbs, preserve meanings that depend on shared cultural knowledge. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) provide a postcolonial framework for understanding the relationship between cultural representation, external authority and the preservation of indigenous forms. Applied to the Iteso findings, these perspectives suggest that the continued performance of traditional marriage customs is not simply the survival of old practices. It is an active process through which the community reproduces its own cultural meanings and maintains authority over the forms through which those meanings are expressed. Westernisation becomes relevant because the introduction of alternative ceremonial conventions may affect not only the outward appearance of marriage but also the expressive forms through which Iteso identity is communicated. Nevertheless, cultural continuity should not be understood as requiring every practice to remain unchanged. Communities may reinterpret particular customs while retaining their cultural significance. The central issue is whether such changes emerge through the community's own processes of negotiation or through the assumption that Western forms are inherently more legitimate or aesthetically superior. The findings therefore demonstrate that the beauty of Iteso traditional marriage is inseparable from the cultural meanings embodied in its performances. The rituals, songs, dances and oral utterances are aesthetically significant because they communicate cultural knowledge, establish social relationships and sustain the community's capacity to represent itself through its own expressive traditions.

2.3.9 Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that the aesthetics of Iteso traditional marriage are most clearly understood through the stylistic and performative features that give the ceremony its distinctive character. The pouring of ajon and sand demonstrates how ritual symbolism converts physical actions into expressions of ancestral recognition and blessing. Ajosi illustrates how rhythmic bodily movement creates a shared expression of celebration, while traditional songs combine verbal and musical resources to organise collective feeling. Clan-specific utterances and proverbs demonstrate the literary force of concise, figurative and culturally situated language. Bride-wealth negotiations reveal the dramatic organisation of social relationships through ceremonial interaction, while the public celebration of marriage illustrates how performance can communicate

status and communal recognition. These features are connected by a central principle: the aesthetic value of the ceremony emerges from the relationship between expressive form and cultural function. Rituals, songs, dances and utterances are not merely additions to marriage. They are among the means through which the union becomes culturally intelligible, socially recognised and emotionally meaningful. The findings also demonstrate that the literariness of Iteso traditional marriage extends beyond written texts to the artistic organisation of oral language, bodily movement, ritual action and communal participation. Its literary qualities can be identified in symbolism, figurative expression, rhythm, repetition, narrative, verbal compression and the interaction of different modes of performance, provided these features are established from the actual practices and utterances documented in the study. This approach is important because it moves the discussion beyond general claims about the cultural value of marriage and towards an analysis of how its aesthetic qualities are produced. The performances are beautiful not merely because participants appreciate them but because they provide meaningful forms through which the community expresses joy, acknowledges ancestry, establishes relationships, transmits knowledge and affirms identity. Their continued significance in the face of Westernisation therefore concerns both cultural preservation and the maintenance of indigenous expressive authority. In the terms developed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006), the recognition of these practices requires that indigenous cultural forms be understood through their own histories and systems of meaning rather than evaluated solely against external conventions. Iteso traditional marriage consequently emerges as a culturally grounded performance tradition in which literary artistry and social function remain closely connected.

Chapter Three

The Influence of Western Culture and Religion in Shaping Traditional Marriage Performance among Iteso in Soroti District

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the results concerning the role played by Western culture and religion in shaping the performance of traditional marriage practices among the Iteso. Through the presentation of key findings and their contextual analysis, this chapter aims to illuminate the extent to which Western culture and religion have either integrated into or conflicted with the indigenous traditions of Teso marriage practices. This is supported by the post-colonial argument that recognizes the agency of colonized peoples in negotiating and resisting colonial influences. In the context of African traditional marriage, communities may engage in acts of hybridization (cf. Bhabha, 1994), blending Western and indigenous elements in marriage performances, to assert cultural identity and autonomy in the face of Westernisation (cf. Mbembe, 2001). The aspect of Post-colonial theory by Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) is also relevant to the study that demonstrate that African drama is more than story telling. It argues that the performance of rituals clearly demonstrates that both ritual and drama are mutually inclusive categories in the African theatre tradition. This is because of the fusion of peculiar elements of drama such as role-playing, costume, dialogue, song, dance, symbolic gesture, movement, mime and other histrionic signals into the fabric of the ritual. The presentation, analysis and discussions are guided by the research question:

- i. What is the role played by Western culture and religion in shaping traditional marriage performance among Iteso in Soroti District from a post-colonial perspective?

3.1.1 The introduction of Christian marriage

The focus group discussions with the study participants revealed that Christian weddings, specifically church weddings, are rapidly gaining popularity within Teso community. Many young people now admire and aspire to have their weddings in church, to the point where some are bypassing traditional marriage ceremonies. This shift in preference highlights the increasing prominence of Christian marriage practices within the community, as more individuals are drawn

to the luxurious celebration associated with church weddings. As one participant shared, “the Christian wedding is always colorful and grand. People enjoy it because it brings together the community in a beautiful way.” This observation suggests that the appeal of Christian weddings lies not only in their religious significance but also in the aesthetic and communal aspects they offer. The growing trend of favoring Christian weddings over traditional ones signifies a cultural shift, where modern, religiously sanctioned ceremonies are increasingly seen as a more desirable and prestigious way to marry, particularly among younger generations. This revelation is significant to this study, as it reflects the broader influence of Christianity on marriage practices within Teso community, marking a clear departure from traditional forms of marriage that have long been practiced. This aligns with post-colonial approach that colonial practices imposed Western standards and values, such as Christianization and legal systems, which frequently resulted in the marginalization or eradication of indigenous marital customs (see Mbembe, 2001). Edward Said’s (1993) argument in *Culture and Imperialism* is relevant here because colonial cultural relations often established European institutions and values as standards against which other societies evaluated their own practices. The preference for church weddings may therefore reflect more than a change in religious observance; it may also indicate the growing prestige attached to ceremonies associated with Western religious institutions. Nevertheless, the participants’ accounts do not establish that every Christian wedding is an act of cultural submission. The important postcolonial question is whether traditional marriage is being rejected because community members freely prefer another form of ceremony or because Christian and Westernised practices have come to be regarded as more respectable and legitimate.

The fact that people in Teso community are increasingly embracing Christian weddings resonates with a broader trend observed in many African societies, where the spread of Christianity has led to the adoption of church marriage, often at the expense of traditional marriage practices (Horton’s, 1967). As noted by participants in the study, young people now admire Christian marriage, viewing it as more formal and legitimate, to the point that some are even opting to bypass traditional ceremonies altogether. This shift reflects the growing influence of Christianity in shaping marriage norms within Teso community. The rising popularity of church wedding is consistent with findings in other African contexts, where the introduction of Christianity has transformed traditional marriage rituals. For instance, in Uganda, the Buganda Kingdom’s marriage ceremonies, particularly the “kwanjula” ritual, began incorporating Christian elements such as church

weddings and prayers, which significantly modified or diminished the traditional rites (Beidelman, 1974). As Christianity spread, the church wedding emerged as the preferred form of marriage, often replacing indigenous practices, and altering the communal nature of marriage. This trend aligns with Horton's (1967) observation that many African societies, under the influence of Christianity, adopted Western-style church weddings, viewing them as more formal and legitimate, while traditional rites were seen as incompatible with Christian values. Furthermore, this trend of embracing Christian weddings resonates with Gwanmesia's (1999) assertion that Christian norms have gradually overshadowed traditional African marriage customs, leading to the hybridization of both systems in contemporary African societies as presented in the post-colonial theory (cf. Bhabha, 1994; Mbembe, 2001). Frantz Fanon's (1967) analysis of colonial alienation provides another way of interpreting this change. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon examines how colonial hierarchies can influence the ways people evaluate themselves and their cultures in relation to dominant cultural standards. Applied cautiously to the Iteso findings, this argument raises the possibility that the perceived superiority of church weddings is partly sustained by an inherited hierarchy in which Western-associated institutions appear more modern, respectable or socially advanced than indigenous ceremonies. Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity offers a different interpretation: the incorporation of Christian elements into customary marriage does not necessarily mean that Iteso culture has disappeared, since people may adapt outside influences while retaining selected customary practices. These interpretations are not contradictory. They draw attention to the possibility that cultural adaptation can involve both unequal historical pressures and the active choices of community members.

3.1.2 The integration of western courtship (co-habitation)

The participants observed a significant shift in the Teso community, where Western forms of courtship are increasingly embraced, particularly the practice of cohabitation among young couples who live together as though they are already married. This shift, according to the participants, is often rationalised by the claim that the couples are merely "familiarising themselves" with one another before committing to the more formal aspects of marriage. While this rationale may seem harmless to some, the participants expressed reservations, as they believe it overlooks the inherent risks and consequences of such relationships. For many, this practice is not simply a modern convenience but a reflection of growing discontent with the traditional

marriage structure, which they perceive as increasingly difficult to maintain in the face of Western cultural influences. However, the participants are particularly concerned about the negative implications for young women in these cohabiting relationships. In many cases, they argue, these young women are left vulnerable to emotional exploitation and societal disregard, as the informal nature of cohabitation often fails to provide the security and commitment that marriage traditionally offers. This lack of formal recognition and commitment, they believe, exposes their daughters to situations where they may be abandoned, leaving them emotionally and socially damaged. The participants emphasised that this trend does not bring them happiness; rather, it generates feelings of unease and dissatisfaction, as they witness what they perceive as the erosion of cultural values that have long underpinned Teso society. The weakening of traditional marriage practices, they argued, is a troubling consequence of Westernisation that threatens Teso identity and family structure. They expressed a longing for a return to more structured and respected forms of union, where respect, commitment and cultural heritage are preserved. Nandy's (1983) discussion of the psychological effects considers the same as examining how imported social ideals can become influential in postcolonial societies, even when they conflict with established local values. In the Iteso context, the participants interpret cohabitation as evidence of the growing influence of external cultural models and the weakening of customary expectations surrounding marriage. However, a postcolonial interpretation must distinguish between the participants' perception of cohabitation as a Western import and the evidence available to establish its historical origins. The finding more securely demonstrates a conflict between customary expectations and contemporary relationship practices. It also reveals that cultural change is contested: younger people may understand cohabitation in terms of personal choice, while elders may evaluate it through communal responsibility, family recognition and customary obligations.

The growing embrace of Western-style courtship practices, particularly the rise in cohabitation before marriage, is not a phenomenon confined to the Teso community but has become increasingly prevalent across various African societies. As already observed by Popoola and Ayandele (2019), the pressure to adopt Western cultural norms has led many African youths to move away from traditional marriage practices. In Nigerian communities, for instance, traditional customs have long forbidden any form of sexual coupling before marriage, considering it not only a moral violation but also a social one, as marriage was viewed as a sacred institution that binds not only the couple but their families and communities (Popoola & Ayandele, 2019). The shift

towards cohabitation, where young couples live together before marriage, is seen by some as a natural progression, justified by the argument that it allows couples to "familiarize themselves" with each other. However, this shift is viewed with growing concern, as it undermines the long-standing cultural obligations that governed relationships in African societies (cf. Popoola & Ayandele, 2019). Popoola and Ayandele (2019) emphasize that this trend reflects a larger influence of Western ideologies that prioritize individual freedom and choice, often at the expense of collective cultural practices and social obligations. This change challenges the sanctity of marriage, once protected by well-defined cultural and social norms, and has prompted a rethinking of what marriage and commitment mean in an increasingly globalized world.

Similarly, the erosion of traditional marriage structures in South Africa, as noted by Hunter (2016), reflects a broader decline in the rate of formal marriages, particularly in urban areas like Umlazi. Hunter's (2016) study highlights a growing preference for informal relationships and cohabitation, a trend that has sparked criticism from African traditionalists. In many African communities, marriage is seen not just as a personal commitment but as a communal and family-oriented union that carries significant social and cultural weight (Goffman, 1959). This means that the decline of formal marriage, especially among younger generations, raises important concerns about the future of African cultural practices. As Hunter (2016) observes, the shift towards cohabitation has been met with disapproval from those who argue that this trend undermines the essence of African identity and the values that have long been the cornerstone of African society. The practice of cohabitation, though offering greater individual autonomy, lacks the formal recognition and cultural respect associated with traditional marriage. For many, this decline in marriage rates signals a larger cultural crisis, one in which the erosion of time-honored practices threatens to disconnect younger generations from the values and traditions that have defined African societies for centuries.

While cohabitation may appear to offer more freedom particularly for women. Okyere-Manu (2015) points out that the prevalence of cohabitation in some African communities, while seemingly offering an alternative to traditional marriage, exposes individuals, especially women, to greater vulnerability. Traditional marriage, despite its flaws, often provided a framework of support, both socially and financially, through extended families and community networks (Okyere-Manu, 2015). In contrast, the informal nature of cohabitation, with its lack of formal

commitment and legal recognition, leaves individuals at risk of emotional exploitation and financial instability. Women, in particular, are often the most vulnerable in such arrangements, as they may find themselves in relationships that lack the security and protection afforded by formal marriage (Okyere-Manu, 2015). The absence of a public commitment can lead to emotional distress, exploitation, and, in some cases, abandonment. Furthermore, as Okyere-Manu (2015) submits, the increasing normalization of cohabitation in place of traditional marriage is tied to the disillusionment many individuals feel towards the rigid and, at times, oppressive structures of traditional marriage. This growing acceptance of cohabitation in place of marriage brings with it a lot of emotional, social, and cultural consequences that are often overlooked. Ultimately, while the shift towards more individualistic and informal forms of relationships may reflect a broader desire for autonomy, it also raises important questions about the preservation of cultural practices and the protection of individuals, especially women, within these newly formed social structures.

3.1.3 Change in gender roles

The participants said that Westernization has significantly altered traditional gender roles within Teso community, reshaping long-established expectations and responsibilities in ways that are both delicate and deep. In the past, gender roles were clearly defined, with men primarily responsible for providing for the family and fulfilling the role of the head of the household, while women were expected to manage the home, care for the children, and contribute to the community through domestic and agricultural labor. However, the participants observed that with the increasing influence of Western ideologies, particularly through education, media, and religion, these roles have become increasingly blurred. They noted that young people, especially women, are now more empowered than ever before to pursue education and careers, challenging the traditional expectation that women should solely focus on the home and family. While some participants acknowledged that this shift has empowered women, they also pointed out that it has led to tensions within the community, as the younger generation often questions and rejects the gender expectations that were once deeply ingrained in Teso society. The participants further highlighted how the traditional male role as the primary breadwinner has been undercut by Western values that emphasize gender equality and shared responsibilities within the household. As a result, some men feel disoriented or displaced, especially as the economic dynamics in many households, with women now contributing to the family income and, in some cases, even

surpassing their male counterparts in financial independence. The participants emphasized that this redefinition of gender roles has not come without its challenges. While it has opened up new opportunities for women, it has also created confusion and conflict, as the younger generation grapples with reconciling these new values with the traditional norms. They observed that men, in particular, have faced the challenge of adapting to a changing social order, where their authority within the home is no longer unquestioned, and where their roles as providers are increasingly shared or even taken over by women. The participants argued that these changes are not always viewed positively, as they sometimes lead to a sense of disruption within the family structure, with traditional power dynamics upended and long-standing cultural norms being questioned. In reflecting on this shift, the participants noted that while Westernization has offered greater autonomy and freedom for women, it has also created societal tensions and a sense of loss, particularly in terms of cultural identity and the cohesive functioning of the family unit. Realistically, the Postcolonial theory asserts that colonialism left behind lasting effects that still influence cultures of the colonized, including their identities and cultural norms (Mbembe, 2001).

The findings on changing gender roles correspond with Oduyoye's (1995) examination of the interaction between African cultural expectations, Christianity and patriarchal authority. Where participants report that women's education and financial independence have altered household decision-making, the findings show how access to resources can change the distribution of authority within marriage. However, Oyěwùmí (1997) cautions against applying Western gender categories universally to African societies, arguing that gender relations must be examined within their particular cultural and historical settings. This is important because the Iteso findings do not establish that women's changing roles result exclusively from Western influence. Education, employment and financial independence may also reflect local aspirations and changing economic conditions. Mohanty (1984) further challenges interpretations that treat women in different societies as a homogeneous group with identical experiences of oppression or emancipation. The different responses among participants suggest that the consequences of changing gender roles are not uniform: some recognise opportunities for women while others express concern about the weakening of established household arrangements. Bhabha's (1994) argument concerning cultural negotiation helps explain this tension because changing gender identities may involve the reinterpretation of established expectations rather than their complete disappearance. The findings therefore complicate the opposition between oppressive tradition and liberating Westernisation.

Customary expectations may sustain family responsibilities while restricting individual choices, while new economic opportunities may strengthen women's bargaining power without necessarily removing their domestic burdens. The postcolonial significance lies in examining how authority and responsibility are redistributed, and whether the changing position of women produces more equitable relationships or simply creates new tensions within existing household arrangements.

3.1.4 Negative view of ghost marriage and polygamy by Christianity

One participant shared their frustration with how the practice of polygamy is fading away as a result of Christianity. He indicated that many people in Teso region are in preference of having one wife which is contrary to the beauty and expectations of a typical traditional marriage in Teso culture. To clarify this, the participants observed that Christianity has posed a challenge to traditional practices of polygamy in Teso community. The participant explained that Christianity, with its teachings about one man marrying one woman, has conflicted with long-standing cultural practices that allowed polygamous marriages. According to the participants, *“Christianity teaches us that one man should marry one woman, and they should live in peace together. This is different from what we used to do, where men could marry several wives, and even marry for someone who has passed on.”* Respondents pointed out that the traditional practice of ghost marriage, where a man would marry a dead wife to create peace among the two families, is increasingly criticized in Christian teachings. The findings concerning the declining acceptance of polygamy and ghost marriage correspond with Comaroff and Comaroff's (1991) argument that missionary Christianity influenced African societies by changing the moral classifications through which established practices were evaluated. Participants associated Christian teaching with monogamy and contrasted this expectation with customary arrangements that permitted a man to have multiple wives or organised marriage in relation to a deceased person. Their accounts suggest that religious conversion can influence not only personal belief but also the standards through which a community determines whether a marriage practice is acceptable. From a postcolonial perspective, this change raises questions about how religious authority becomes established and how indigenous institutions are reinterpreted when they conflict with the teachings of a dominant religious system. Ashcroft et al. (2002) explain that colonial cultural power often involved positioning European institutions and beliefs as authoritative while representing indigenous practices as inferior or in need of reform. Where customary marriage arrangements are rejected

because they are classified as incompatible with Christianity, the resulting change may reflect the influence of a religious hierarchy in which Christian teachings determine the boundaries of acceptable marriage. However, the findings do not establish that every Iteso rejection of polygamy or ghost marriage is a consequence of colonial influence. Individuals may oppose these practices because of personal conviction, changing expectations about intimacy, concerns about household resources or disagreements about their social consequences. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the historical influence of Christianity from the reasons individuals give for their present choices. Bhabha (1994) provides a useful way of understanding this relationship because cultural encounters may lead to selective adoption and reinterpretation rather than complete replacement. Iteso families may reject certain aspects of a customary marriage institution while continuing to recognise the kinship obligations and family relationships associated with it. Nevertheless, cultural continuity should not be assumed simply because some customary elements remain. If the authority to define legitimate marriage shifts almost entirely to religious institutions, indigenous practices may lose recognition even where their social functions continue to matter to the community. The postcolonial significance of the findings therefore lies in examining how religious teachings interact with local interpretations of marriage, which customary meanings survive these encounters and whether the community retains the authority to assess its own practices critically.

A further issue concerns the relationship between cultural recognition and the rights and interests of individuals within customary marriage arrangements. A postcolonial interpretation should not assume that every indigenous practice must be preserved because it predates colonialism, nor should it assume that a practice becomes unacceptable simply because it conflicts with Christian teaching. The reported decline in acceptance of polygamy and ghost marriage therefore invites consideration of the different social functions, expectations and consequences associated with these arrangements. Participants' accounts indicate a shift in the religious criteria used to evaluate marriage, but they do not by themselves establish the historical origins or complete social meaning of either practice. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) demonstrate that missionary Christianity could transform African consciousness by introducing new moral categories, while Bhabha (1994) emphasises that cultural identities are negotiated within encounters that may involve both adaptation and resistance. Together, these perspectives suggest that the changing evaluation of Iteso marriage practices should be examined as a process in which religious authority, cultural memory and contemporary personal choices interact. This is particularly important because the

rejection of a customary practice may affect more than the ceremony itself. It may also influence the recognition of family relationships, the obligations assumed by relatives and the ways in which marriage is understood across generations. At the same time, the continued acceptance of a customary practice should not prevent critical consideration of the experiences of the individuals involved. A culturally grounded analysis must therefore ask how the practice is understood by different members of the community, how its obligations are distributed and whether its continuation serves the interests of those affected. This approach avoids both the romanticisation of indigenous culture and the assumption that Christian norms provide a universally appropriate standard. The findings are most productively understood as evidence of changing cultural authority, with the interpretation of marriage becoming a site of negotiation between religious teachings, customary knowledge and individual judgement.

3.1.5 Increase in the rate of divorce

The participants in the study also highlighted a concerning increase in the rate of divorce in the Teso region, which they attributed largely to the broader forces of Westernization. One participant remarked, “In a sub-county, you will register or hear of at least one couple divorcing,” which reflects the growing prevalence of marital breakdowns within the community. This rise in divorce rates has become a significant issue for many elders, who expressed deep concerns over the changing dynamics of marriage. Traditionally, marriage in Teso community was seen as a lifelong commitment, with families playing a central role in resolving disputes and ensuring marital stability. However, with the increase in education and the growing pressure for self-dependence, particularly among women, the nature of marriage has been shifting. Women, who now pursue education and seek employment in far-off places, are often expected to contribute financially, which has led to a change in gender roles within marriages. Many women in the region now aspire to be breadwinners, a shift from the traditional role of women as homemakers and caregivers. This new pursuit of personal independence, inspired by Western ideals of individualism and gender equality, has led to tensions within marriages, as both partners may seek autonomy and financial independence. Elders in the community lament that this transformation, fueled by the rise in education and the changing economic landscape, has disrupted the traditional balance of roles in marriage. They are particularly troubled by the erosion of familial and communal support systems, which once helped couples navigate marital challenges. According to the elders, the increase in

divorce rates signals a breakdown in the foundational values of commitment and stability, with individuals increasingly prioritizing personal fulfillment over the communal nature of marriage. The elders express that this shift, rooted in Westernization, is deeply troubling, as it challenges the values that have long sustained Teso marriages. Spencer (1988) observed that marriage was seen as a male-dominated institution, with men as protectors and providers, and women as nurturers who upheld the household. This view is supported by the post-colonial stand on gender that focuses on power dynamics where it studies the unequal distribution of power and resources, which places special emphasis on the power dynamics between colonizers and colonized (cf. Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006).

The reported concerns about divorce also raise questions about whose interests are prioritised when the community seeks to preserve marriage. Family intervention may provide opportunities for dialogue, reconciliation and support, but its consequences depend on the circumstances of the dispute and the interests represented in the process. If maintaining the marriage becomes the overriding objective, the experiences of a spouse who wishes to leave may receive insufficient attention. Conversely, if family involvement disappears entirely, couples may lose access to a socially recognised mechanism for resolving disagreements and mobilising support. A postcolonial analysis reveals the distribution of authority within customary mediation rather than treating communal intervention as inherently beneficial or individual independence as inherently destructive. Spivak (1988), through her discussion of representation and the marginalisation of subaltern voices, encourages attention to whose accounts are heard and whose interests may be obscured by dominant systems of authority. Although her work does not specifically address Iteso divorce, it offers a useful theoretical prompt for asking whether women, men and younger spouses have equal opportunities to express their experiences when families intervene in marital disputes. Oduyoye (1995) similarly provides a comparative basis for considering how African women negotiate cultural and religious institutions that may influence their choices. Applied to the present findings, these perspectives suggest that concerns about divorce should be considered alongside questions of marital wellbeing, individual rights and the distribution of power within households. The findings do not establish that Western influence has made Iteso people less committed to marriage; rather, they indicate that participants perceive changes in the expectations and mechanisms through which marital relationships are maintained. The postcolonial significance lies in examining how customary obligations and contemporary expectations interact, how disputes

are resolved and whether the available forms of intervention protect the interests of both partners. This interpretation recognises the value of cultural continuity without assuming that the preservation of marriage is always more important than the circumstances and wellbeing of the individuals involved.

3.1.6 The legal intervention

Some participants in the study emphasized the increasing involvement of legal intervention in the traditionally culturally governed aspects of Teso marriage practices. One participant noted that in various parts of Teso, it has become more common for marriage-related issues, including disputes and divorce, to be resolved in the courts rather than within the confines of community-based conflict resolution mechanisms. Traditionally, marriage matters, such as disagreements or disputes, were settled by clan elders or local leaders through discussions and negotiations rooted in cultural norms and values. However, with the increasing influence of Western legal systems, particularly in urbanized areas, these traditional ways of resolving conflicts are being replaced or supplemented by formal legal procedures. For example, when a young man refuses to marry or fails to fulfill marriage obligations, the family or community would intervene to resolve the issue according to established cultural practices. In relation to the Postcolonial theory, it is worth mentioning that colonial legacies continue to influence contemporary African societies and how disparities in power between colonizers and colonized persist in various forms exist (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006). In some cases, the boy may be pressured or coerced into fulfilling his marriage duties through social pressure, and if he refused, he could face public shame or ridicule. Yet, now, under the influence of Western legal frameworks, the boy could face arrest and imprisonment for defying societal expectations, as legal interventions increasingly replace traditional social mechanisms. Similarly, eloping, once heavily criticized and frowned upon, was traditionally managed through cultural means, such as mediation or negotiation, to resolve any issues that arose. However, with Westernization and the rise of modern legal systems, elopement cases can now lead to criminal charges or legal consequences for those involved. The shift from a predominantly community-based system of conflict resolution to one that involves state-imposed legal sanctions reflects a broader transformation in the Teso society, influenced by modernization and the ongoing integration of Westernized legal structures. This transition has sparked a change in how marriage-related issues are handled, moving away from customary law and local solutions

toward the influence of formal legal processes that may sometimes undermine or replace traditional cultural practices.

The relationship between customary mediation and formal law also raises the question of how cultural recognition can be reconciled with individual rights. Customary procedures may offer forms of dispute resolution that are familiar to participants and grounded in established relationships between families. They may provide opportunities for dialogue, the restoration of communication and the negotiation of responsibilities that extend beyond the couple. Nevertheless, their effectiveness may vary according to the dispute, the resources available to the families and the balance of power between the people involved. Formal legal procedures may offer alternative mechanisms for addressing certain disputes, but they may also be experienced as distant from the customary meanings attached to marriage. The findings do not establish that either system consistently produces better outcomes. A postcolonial analysis should therefore avoid presenting the relationship as a choice between culturally authentic but necessarily fair customary procedures and externally derived but necessarily superior formal law. Mamdani (1996) demonstrates the importance of examining the historical construction of customary and state authority, while Bhabha (1994) provides a basis for understanding how different systems can interact without one simply eliminating the other. In the Iteso context, the practical question is whether customary mediation and formal legal procedures can respond to marital disputes in ways that recognise cultural context while protecting the interests of individuals. This requires attention to who participates in decision-making, whose voices are recognised and how competing understandings of marital responsibility are negotiated. The findings consequently extend the discussion of Western influence beyond religious and ceremonial practices to the institutional regulation of marriage. They suggest that cultural transformation also concerns who possesses the authority to settle disputes and which forms of knowledge are recognised as legitimate in doing so.

3.1.7 Commodification of bride-wealth

The findings concerning bridewealth correspond with Goody's (1976) comparative examination of marriage exchanges and the relationship between wealth, kinship and social organisation. His work provides a basis for understanding marriage exchanges as part of wider relationships between families rather than as isolated financial transactions. In the Iteso context, participants reported

that educational attainment and modern consumer goods have become more prominent in some bridewealth negotiations. These changes suggest that the material forms through which families recognise marriage are responding to changing economic conditions and expectations about social status. However, the inclusion of modern goods does not necessarily indicate that bridewealth has lost its customary meaning. Items exchanged during marriage negotiations may continue to communicate recognition, establish reciprocal obligations and strengthen relationships between families even when the specific goods involved change. The more important question is whether the growing prominence of material expectations changes the relationship between these customary functions and the financial value assigned to the bride. Where a woman's educational attainment is used to justify higher bridewealth demands, education may be interpreted simultaneously as personal achievement, family investment and a basis for material negotiation. This creates a tension between recognising women's accomplishments and treating those accomplishments as a means of increasing their financial value within marriage. Ashraf et al. (2020), in their study of bride price and female education, provide a comparative basis for examining how marriage payments can interact with educational opportunities and household decisions under particular social and economic conditions. Their findings should not be transferred directly to the Iteso context, but they demonstrate why the relationship between education and bridewealth warrants careful analysis. From a postcolonial perspective, the inclusion of modern consumer goods also raises questions about the interaction between indigenous institutions and wider economic values. Ashcroft et al. (2002) encourage attention to the historical authority of dominant systems of value, while Bhabha (1994) explains how cultural practices may be adapted through encounters with changing social conditions. The Iteso findings may therefore indicate an adaptation of bridewealth to contemporary economic expectations rather than the complete disappearance of customary practice. Nevertheless, where negotiations become increasingly focused on the quantity or monetary value of goods, the reciprocal and relational meanings of bridewealth may become less prominent. The postcolonial significance lies in examining how the institution is being reinterpreted, whether material valuation is displacing its customary functions and how these changes affect the relationships between women, prospective spouses and their families.

The reported association between educational attainment and bridewealth further illustrates the complex relationship between women's social recognition and economic valuation. Education

may increase a woman's opportunities, expand her knowledge and strengthen her ability to participate in decisions affecting her life. Yet, where higher educational attainment is associated with increased bridewealth expectations, the same achievement may also become a basis for placing additional financial demands on a prospective spouse and family. The findings do not establish that every family treats education in this way, nor do they demonstrate a direct causal relationship between schooling and the amount of bridewealth requested. Nevertheless, participants' accounts raise an important question about whether educational achievement is being recognised primarily as a personal and social accomplishment or incorporated into a financial assessment of marriage. Goody (1976) helps situate this question within the wider relationship between marriage exchanges and the distribution of wealth between families. However, the contemporary significance of bridewealth cannot be understood solely through economic exchange because the practice may also carry meanings associated with recognition, belonging and reciprocal responsibility. From a postcolonial perspective, the reported changes show how an indigenous institution can be reshaped by contemporary economic values without necessarily losing its cultural identity. Bhabha (1994) offers a way of understanding such developments as cultural negotiation, but the concept of hybridity should not obscure the possibility that adaptation may also reproduce inequality. If a woman's educational achievement increases the material demands made during marriage negotiations, her success may be acknowledged in a way that simultaneously reinforces the idea that her value should be expressed through an exchange. This raises questions about the consequences of bridewealth expectations for women's autonomy, the financial position of prospective couples and the relationships between families. The findings therefore suggest that the changing practice should be examined not simply in terms of whether modern goods have been introduced, but in terms of the meanings attached to those goods, the expectations they create and the extent to which reciprocal obligations remain central to the institution.

3.1.8 Changes in oral traditions and other performances

Observations and discussions with the participants revealed significant changes in the oral traditions and performance of traditional marriages in the Teso community. One of the notable changes highlighted by the participants is the inclusion of secular music in traditional marriage ceremonies, a departure from the strictly traditional songs that once dominated these events.

According to the participants, many now view oral traditions and the performance of traditional rituals as outdated and backward, contributing to their decline in favor of more contemporary practices. Additionally, the participants noted a shift in dressing codes, with individuals opting for modern clothing such as coats, rather than the traditional attire that was once customary for these events. The transformation extends to the marriage ceremony itself, as the bride and groom now kiss publicly, a practice that was never part of the traditional marriage customs in Teso. This change in behavior reflects broader influences of modernization and Westernization, where expressions of affection, once reserved for private settings, are now openly displayed during the ceremony. Another striking change observed is the increasing presence of religious figures, with reverends and priests now being invited to officiate or participate in what were traditionally secular, culturally significant events. These developments highlight a shift in marriage performance, reflecting blending of traditional practices with modern influences and the growing prominence of religious and secular elements in what was once a purely customary practice. This trend points to the evolving nature of marriage in the region, as traditions continue to adapt to contemporary cultural dynamics. This revelation aligns with the views of Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001), who argue that African performance traditions should not be narrowly interpreted through Western aesthetic frameworks. In response to debates surrounding the classification of African performance forms as drama, Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001), drawing on the example of Shona ritual drama, maintain that African dramatic expression extends beyond mere storytelling and functions fundamentally as a ritual experience that recreates and affirms desirable models of communal life. Their position, supported by Enekwe (1981), demonstrates that African ritual performances are dynamic cultural processes that continuously adapt to changing social realities while preserving communal identity and meaning.

The reported changes in dress, public displays of affection and the participation of religious figures further demonstrate that marriage performance is a site where cultural authority is expressed through the body, ceremonial conduct and institutional participation. Clothing can communicate ideas about respectability and social status, while gestures and public expressions of affection may be interpreted according to particular cultural expectations. The involvement of priests or reverends may also change the relationship between religious authorities, elders and families in determining how a marriage ceremony should proceed. These developments should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that indigenous practices have disappeared. Modern attire

may coexist with customary dress, religious figures may participate without displacing elders and new forms of bodily expression may be incorporated into ceremonies in different ways. Nevertheless, participants' concern that customary forms are becoming outdated suggests that the changes may involve a shift in the standards through which ceremonial behaviour is evaluated. Bhabha (1994) helps explain how cultural encounters can generate new forms of expression, but his account of hybridity should not be used to overlook differences in authority between the cultural elements being combined. Where religious or Westernised standards determine which gestures, clothing styles or performances are acceptable, indigenous practices may be retained only to the extent that they conform to external expectations. Conversely, where families decide how new elements should be incorporated while continuing to recognise the authority of customary knowledge, adaptation may demonstrate cultural agency. Finnegan (2012) and Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) provide a basis for understanding why these distinctions matter: oral and performative traditions derive their significance from the social relationships and cultural meanings they communicate. The findings therefore invite examination of whether contemporary Iteso marriage ceremonies continue to provide space for customary performances to communicate their original or evolving meanings. The postcolonial question is not whether every ceremony should reproduce an unchanged historical form, but whether cultural change occurs in a way that allows indigenous knowledge to remain meaningful and publicly recognised rather than positioning it as an inferior remnant of the past.

3.1.9 Conclusion

Grounded in the postcolonial approach, scholars such as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006), Mbembe (2001), Bhabha (1994), and Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) argue that colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary African societies through enduring influences on cultural identities, norms and social organisation. In line with this perspective, the findings of the study indicate that Westernisation has significantly transformed traditional marriage practices among the Teso community by introducing structural, symbolic and institutional changes across the marriage process. These changes are evident in the increasing emphasis on bride price, which is now often linked to educational attainment as a measure of its value, as well as the growing influence of formal legal systems in regulating marriage recognition and divorce. The transformation is also reflected in marriage rituals, where secular music, Western dress codes and public displays of

affection such as kissing have become more prominent, thereby altering previously established cultural practices. The findings also demonstrate why the analysis of Iteso marriage performance must extend beyond the identification of practices that have changed to consider the meanings and relationships affected by those changes. The reported modifications to songs, dances, ululations, ceremonial speeches, attire and ritual participation may influence how cultural knowledge is communicated and reproduced across generations. Finnegan (2012) demonstrates the importance of oral literature within African social life, while Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) emphasise the relationship between ritual performance and communal meaning. Their work supports the view that traditional marriage performances are not merely ornamental elements but may communicate values, expectations and social relationships that contribute to the cultural significance of marriage. When these performances are omitted or assigned lower status, the consequences may extend to the transmission of indigenous knowledge. Nevertheless, the presence of contemporary music, Christian ceremonies and modern attire does not necessarily mean that traditional culture has disappeared. Bhabha's (1994) discussion of hybridity provides a way of understanding how cultural practices may be combined and reinterpreted, although such combinations must be examined critically to determine whether the different practices retain comparable authority. A ceremony may contain both customary and Christian elements while still privileging one system over the other. Similarly, customary marriage may continue to be performed while its economic and social meanings are changing. The postcolonial significance of the findings therefore rests on the need to examine not only the survival of indigenous practices but also the conditions under which they remain meaningful, the authority accorded to those who preserve and interpret them and the extent to which younger generations participate in their transmission. This perspective avoids assuming that cultural authenticity requires the unchanging reproduction of every customary practice. It also challenges the assumption that Westernised forms are inherently superior simply because they are associated with contemporary life. The central conclusion is that the future of Iteso traditional marriage performance depends on how the community negotiates continuity and change, evaluates the consequences of different practices and determines the place of indigenous knowledge within contemporary religious, economic and institutional arrangements.

Chapter Four

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the major findings from the study followed by conclusions and recommendations. The summary and conclusions underscore how the study filled the knowledge gap based on the study objectives. Describing the performance of traditional marriage, examining the aesthetics in Teso traditional marriage, investigating the role played by western culture and religion in shaping traditional marriage performance among the Iteso in Soroti District and research questions.

4.1 summary

The study explored the Influence of Westernization on African marriage performance, focusing on the Iteso in Soroti District. The findings revealed that traditional marriage is a communal cultural performance expressed through rituals, songs, dance, ceremonial utterances, blessings, ululations, bride-wealth presentation, gift-giving and communal feasting. Rituals involving the pouring of ajon and water, as well as the sprinkling of sand over the couple, communicate respect for ancestors, unity between families and the desire for blessings upon the marriage. The Ajosi dance, songs performed by Akogo singers and women's ululations contribute to the celebratory atmosphere, while elders' blessings, proverbs and instructions convey cultural values, marital expectations and clan identity. The presentation of bride-wealth and gifts further gives the occasion a visible ceremonial character, affirming the relationship between the families and their commitment to the union. These performances demonstrate that Iteso marriage extends beyond the joining of two individuals to become a shared cultural event through which the community expresses emotion, displays artistic creativity and transmits cultural knowledge across generations. However, Western cultural influences and Christian teachings have contributed to the reconsideration of some traditional practices, including the pouring of sand and certain ceremonial utterances, while other elements continue to be performed. The findings therefore show that the influence of Westernisation is reflected not simply in the replacement of traditional marriage practices but also in the selective retention, adaptation and rejection of particular elements,

revealing ongoing negotiations between Iteso cultural values, religious beliefs and changing forms of marriage performance.

The findings on the aesthetics in traditional marriage among the Iteso underscore its profound cultural significance, reflecting not only its structured nature but also the deep-rooted values it upholds within society. Participants expressed appreciation for both the visual and performative elements of the ceremony, highlighting its integral role in the transmission of culture, reinforcement of communal identity, promotion of social cohesion, and the establishment of status within the community. These functions extend beyond the personal, affecting the collective social fabric and perpetuating traditions across generations. This strong attachment to traditional marriage practices aligns closely with the principles of postcolonial theory, which advocates for the reassertion of African cultural practices by recognizing their inherent value, resilience, and meaning (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006; bhabha, 1994; Mbembe, 2001; Losambe and Sarinjeive, 2001). The reverence for these cultural customs demonstrates the enduring strength of indigenous traditions, performance of rituals, affirming their ongoing relevance and importance in contemporary society. This reverence also illustrates how African traditions continue to resist the eroding effects of external influences, maintaining their vitality and significance despite modernity's challenges.

The findings on the effect of western culture and religion on Iteso traditional marriage showed that Westernization has significantly influenced traditional marriage practices among the Teso community, leading to substantial changes in various aspects of the marriage process. Notably, there has been an overemphasis on bride price, with education being viewed as a means to increase its value. Additionally, Western legal frameworks have impacted divorce and marriage recognition. The transformation of marriage rituals includes the integration of secular music, modern dress codes, and public displays of affection, such as kissing during ceremonies, which were previously absent in Teso traditions. The influence of Christianity and Western ideals has led to a hybridization of marriage customs, where traditional practices are being overshadowed by more secular or legally governed alternatives. This shift demonstrates how Westernization has reshaped not just the ceremonial aspects of Teso marriages but also their economic, social, and legal dimensions. This revelation correlates with Bhabha (1994), who emphasises that such hybrid cultural formations are not passive outcomes of Western domination but active spaces where

meaning, identity and agency are continuously negotiated. Overall, these changes demonstrate that Westernisation has not only altered the ceremonial aspects of Iteso marriages but has also reshaped their economic, social and legal dimensions.

4.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals the complex impact of Westernization on Iteso marriage practices in Soroti District, highlighting both the cultural richness and adaptability of the community's traditions. Traditional marriage, characterized by various forms such as monogamy, polygamy, elopement and ghost marriage, reflects the deep-rooted values of social cohesion, cultural transmission, and community identity. While these customs continue to hold significant cultural weight, Westernization has introduced substantial changes, such as the overemphasis on bride price linked to education, the influence of Western legal frameworks on marriage and divorce, and the transformation of marriage rituals through secular music, modern attire, and public displays of affection. The integration of Christianity and Western ideals has led to a hybridization of marriage customs (cf. Bhabha, 1994), shifting the focus from traditional practices to more secular and legally governed alternatives. Despite these transformations, the enduring attachment to traditional marriage practices underscores the resilience of indigenous cultures, affirming their relevance in contemporary society (Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001). This shift illustrates the ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity, demonstrating both the pressures of external influences and the ability of cultures to adapt while maintaining their core values (cf. Mbembe, 2001).

4.3 Limitations and Mitigating Measures

I encountered logistical constraints, such as limited access to certain communities or reluctance among participants to discuss sensitive topics related to marriage and cultural change, further complicating efforts to obtain comprehensive and diverse data. In other words, some participants were not easily accessible, as well as others were not willing to participate in the study due to reasons best known to them. However, the researcher was able to use the available participants and explained the purpose of carrying out the study, which is purposely for academics.

The study is limited to the Influence of Westernisation on Teso traditional marriage Performance, yet there could be other factors that can account for changes that may have occurred in Teso

marriage over the recent years. Nevertheless, future studies may consider looking at other factors that may have influenced Teso traditional marriage performance.

Furthermore, since this is a field study, the researcher anticipated the challenge of financial constraints, as far the issues of facilitating research assistants, movements and other areas that demand money. To address this problem, the researcher gathered help in terms of finances from well-wishers and other willing sponsors who were interested in the study, hence, making it possible to handle these problems of finances.

4.4 Recommendations

The study provides the following recommendations:

The study recommends the integration of traditional marriage practices into educational curricula at upper secondary and higher institutions of learning to promote awareness and understanding among younger generations. This would help preserve the cultural significance of marriage rituals while balancing the influence of external factors like Westernization. Schools, cultural institutions, and community leaders can play a pivotal role in educating the youth about the values embedded in traditional marriage, fostering pride in indigenous practices.

The study suggests the establishment of community forums or platforms where elders and younger generations can engage in discussions about the evolving nature of marriage customs. This would facilitate a deeper understanding of how traditional practices can adapt to modern realities without losing their cultural essence. By promoting dialogue, communities can ensure that marriage customs are both relevant and respectful of changing social, economic, and legal landscapes.

The study recommends that policymakers consider incorporating aspects of traditional marriage practices into legal frameworks to ensure that they are recognized and respected within the legal system. This could involve creating laws that allow for a balanced recognition of both secular and traditional marriage practices, ensuring that cultural customs such as bride price negotiations and other rituals are given appropriate legal standing, while safeguarding the rights of individuals involved.

The current study can be interpreted as a first step in the research on the influence of Westernisation on traditional marriage performance among the Iteso of Soroti District. However, I

suggest that further research be conducted on investigating the long term effects of westernization on family structures and marital performance in Teso sub region to create awareness of the long-lasting effects of westernization on traditions to community members.

The study further suggests that future research could explore best practices and identify successful strategies for balancing cultural preservation with adaptation to western influences on marriage customs in Teso sub region, this could contribute to a deeper understanding of marriage as an institution that has both traditional customs and western practices or influence.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Instruments for Data Collection

Dear participant, I am Ajoot Sarah, a student of Master of Arts in Literature and English Linguistics at Gulu University. Currently, I am undertaking a research study entitled *THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERNISATION ON AFRICAN MARRIAGE PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF THE ITESO IN SOROTI DISTRICT*. I humbly request you to assist in providing answers to the questions enlisted below. Your cooperation in this exercise is highly appreciated. Note that your name will not appear anywhere or even in the dissertation. You feel free to leave the exercise anytime you wish if you are not comfortable with it. If you consent to this, you may proceed and answer the questions.

Semi-structured interview guide

1. Can you describe traditional Iteso marriage practices and rituals?
2. How have these practices been traditionally perceived within the community?
3. How is traditional marriage performance relevant to Iteso?
4. What aspects of Western culture do you think have influenced marriage practices among the Iteso?
5. How do you perceive these changes? Are they positive, negative, or neutral?
6. Can you provide examples of Western culture has changed the way marriages are performed in Soroti District?
7. Explain how Western religion has reshaped Iteso traditional marriage.
8. What is the community's reaction to these changes in marriage practices?
9. In what ways have Western legal systems and marriage customs, such as the civil marriage, altered the role of family and community in Iteso marriage ceremonies?

10. What changes have occurred in Iteso marriage rituals, such as bride price and family involvement, due to Western cultural influence?

Focus Group Discussion Guide

1. What are some of the key traditional Iteso marriage practices that you believe are important to discuss today?
2. How are the traditional marriage practices significant to the people of Teso?
3. How do you feel Western culture has influenced marriage practices among the Iteso in Soroti District?
4. What specific marriage rituals have changed due to Western influences?
5. How do you feel about these changes? Are they an improvement or a loss?
6. How has the introduction of Christianity and Western religious values influenced the traditional Iteso views on marriage?
7. To what extent has Christianity influenced gender roles in Iteso marriages, particularly in the division of responsibilities between husband and wife?
8. How has the concept of monogamy, promoted by Western religion and culture, affected polygamous practices within Iteso society?
9. Reflecting on our discussion, are there examples of the positive and negative influence of Westernisation on Teso traditional marriage? If yes, explain them.

OBSERVATION OF PERFORMANCE

1. Setting and Participants
2. Preparation Activities
3. Ceremony Details

4. Post-Ceremony Activities
5. Presence of Western Religious Elements
6. Changes in traditional rituals due to Western influence
7. Reactions of participants to these changes and the General atmosphere and mood of the event
8. Traditional attire and its significance.
9. Modern attire and its impact on the ceremony.
10. Decorations and their meanings.

APPENDIX B: A Sample of Field Pictures



The groom's team dressed in western style



*cutting of the cake by the bride and her brothers and sisters
As a symbol of the love and unity they shared*



The dance team entertaining the audience



Bride and groom dressed in a cultural attire

Appendix C: Introductory Letter

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OFFICE OF THE DEAN, FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES

January 21, 2025

TO : WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to introduce to you Ms. Ajoot Sarah (Reg No. 19/U/2614/MEL/PS) a student pursuing a programme of study leading to an award Master of Arts in Literature and English Linguistics of Gulu University, Master of Gulu University.

She is undertaking research on the Topic:

THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERNISATION ON AFRICAN MARRIAGE PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF THE ITESO IN SOROTI DISTRICT

Which is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award.

Any assistance rendered to her in relation to this research work will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Denis Thaddeus Ofoyuru

Dean, Faculty of Education and Humanities

