

Promotion of Morality of Traditional Marriage among Abagusii through a Curse (Amasangia)

Zacharia O. Mokua, Herman Kiriama, Evans Omosa Nyamwaka, Peter Gutwa Oino, Eliud Nyakundi

Department of History, Kisii University, Kisii, Kenya

Email: ondieki.zachary@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Abagusii abhor infidelity and the aftermaths associated with it. On this basis, this study sought to explore how morality in marriage was promoted through a curse (amasangia) that resulted from infidelity. A historical research design was used and investment model of relationships guided the study. A sample of 30 snowballed respondents provided data through an interview guide. Data were analyzed through content analysis which resulted into themes. The study established that Abagusii disallowed and loathed infidelity. That the vice could lead to instant death as a result of a curse (amasangia) which was associated with unfaithfulness. The findings also established that if signs of amasangia were noticed speedily, a cure for reversing the effect could be prescribed. The study also found that, amasangia still exist but most of the contemporary Abagusii seem not to be aware of it. The study recommended that the aspect of infidelity and the resulting amasangia should continue to be a topic to be taught from generation to generation among the Abagusii. This will facilitate the sanctity of the institution of marriage and eliminate undeserved deaths resulting from infidelity. The study will benefit the Abagusii, present and future to know how morality in marriage was maintained. This will help future generations borrow past beneficial practices.

Keywords

Morality, Infidelity, Sex, Couple, Traditional Marriage, Amasangia

1. Introduction

Infidelity in marriage is shunned and abhorred by society. Consequently, mechanisms to counter infidelity were put in place by each community. Since the

creation or evolution of mankind in the world, the aspect of infidelity has been in existence (Ojo, 2013). No country in the world is infidelity free (Kenya Bureau of Statistics, 2020). A 2015 survey on global infidelity shows that Thailand and Denmark were the most adulterous countries (Durex & Match.com, 2015). Xin & Hassan (2020) confirm that infidelity is a reality in most Asian countries. Statistics indicate that in Ghana, nearly one in five married men (19%) reported having engaged in extramarital sex (Sitawa & Yanyi, 2005). According to United Nations report (UN, 2018), 60% of married men and 40% of married women commit adultery in Kenya. The issue of infidelity has been in existence among Abagusii since their migration and settlement in Gusiiland (Ayako, 2020; Okemwa, 2012). Due to the fact that it is a vice that is reviled globally, various systems were put in place world over to curb or minimize it. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew law prohibit adultery (NIV Bible, 2011) and the penalty to those who were involved was stoning to death. Stringent laws against adultery were put in place in the Greco-Roman world. It involved stoning or hanging those who were involved in the act of immorality within a marriage (Catholic Encyclopedia, 2014). In ancient Mesopotamia, the Code of Hammurabi dating back to about 1772 BC prescribed drowning as a punishment for infidelity (Budge & William, 1908). Stoning by those involved infidelity has been and still is a punishment to those involved in infidelity in most Muslim countries that follow sharia law (Islamic Sheria Law, 2015). In most native American cultures, an unfaithful woman was made to endure body mutilation (Bancroft, 1878). Wives in the Aztecs culture underwent occasional stabbing and stoning to death (ABA aug Journal, 1969). Other forms of punishment executed on infidelity from region or country to country include; amputation of the nose many civilizations such as India, ancient Egypt, among the Greeks and Romans, the Byzantium and among Arabs (Sperati, 2014). In some parts of United States of America, culprits of infidelity were fined (Rhode Island General Laws, 2012) while in parts of Asia, caning was administered (Sterling, 2017). Among immigrant communities in Europe, Canada and the USA, the victims were killed. This punishment is also applicable in Jordan, Turkey and Syria (Maher, 2013). In many parts of the world where there is no prescribed punishment for infidelity, violence is executed and, in some cases, may go unreported (Garcia-Moreno, Guedes, & Knerr, 2012). In Nigeria, among the Yoruba, a juju called *mogun* is applied to the suspects and if they are found guilty, they die (Ojo, 2013). Abagusii punished those who were involved in infidelity in various ways; one of them was through sending a woman away to her matrimonial home for a fine of a goat and the worst was through a traditional curse which was referred to as *amasangia*. This curse was mysterious on the way it speedily worked on the victims leading to instant death (Ayako, 2020). It was and still is not understood how it worked or works and this may explain why it is called a curse. Based on this, this study sought to explore and document how the morality of traditional marriage among Abagusii was maintained through *amasangia*.

2. Statement of the Problem

Infidelity is an issue that has been condemned since antiquity in various parts of the world. Various methods were and are still used in various parts of the world to curb or minimize the vice. Some of the methods used like hanging, stoning, beating, amputation and nose cutting among others have been condemned by international laws and human rights organizations. The cultural methods seem not to be understood but they seem to be effective in discouraging couples from being engaged in immoral acts within a marriage. Studies on traditional methods that were used to discourage infidelity are scanty. There is need to learn these traditional methods which were used by various communities in the world to discourage infidelity. It may not be possible to study how infidelity was discouraged traditionally by all communities in one study. Each community was unique and needs individual attention. This explains why this study was carried out to explore and document how morality in marriage was promoted among the Abagusii through amasangia (a traditional curse).

3. Research Objective

This study sought to explore and document how morality in marriage was promoted among the Abagusii through amasangia (a traditional curse).

4. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Attachment Theory by Mikulincer et al. (2003). According to this theory, close people develop emotional representations of the availability of close others that lead to strong mental and interactive patterns of responding to those others. Those who develop a secure attachment style tend to believe close others are available to them and behave accordingly, those who develop an insecure attachment, tend to believe close others are less available to them and therefore commit adultery. Intimates who develop high levels of attachment anxiety are uncertain of the availability of close others and cope by seeking reassurance from and clinging to the partner. Intimates who develop high levels of attachment avoidance, in contrast, doubt the availability of close others and cope by avoiding behaviors that promote intimacy. Both types of insecurity may be associated with marital infidelity. Individuals high in attachment anxiety tend to feel that their needs for intimacy are not being met in their current relationships and use sex to meet their unmet needs. Accordingly, they may be more likely than individuals low in attachment anxiety to seek intimacy with another partner through infidelity. Individuals high in attachment avoidance tend to be chronically less committed to their relationships and have more permissive sexual attitudes. Given that both tendencies are associated with infidelity, avoidantly-attached individuals may be more likely to engage in infidelity as well.

5. Literature Review

Communities in the past detested and chastised adultery (Wiederman, 1997).

Adultery was punished in the ancient Roman society by deporting two people who were involved to different islands and confiscating part of their property (Weinstein, 1986). The Islamic law and Judaism religion stoned those who were involved in infidelity (Hussain, 2021). Due to this, many people in Iran, Somalia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Mali, and Pakistan have died due to this form of punishment (Maher, 2013).

The French punished those who were unfaithful by beating them and later confining them (McDougall, 2014). A woman who was unfaithful among most native Americans was made to endure bodily mutilation (Bancroft, 1878) while the Aztecs occasionally speared and often stoned the victims to death (ABA aug Journal, 1969). Most sub-Saharan countries punished adulterers through to physical violence (World Bank, 2019). A husband in Guinea was allowed to kill or abuse a wife for real or imagined infidelity (Anoko, 2008).

Kuwait has a law that arrests and imprisons victims of adultery for five years. In some pre-colonial west African countries, husbands fined those who committed adultery with their wives. In Benin kingdom, punishment for adultery would involve death of a child of the adulterous wife if the act of adultery was not admitted (Erhabon & Ikelegbe, 2013). If the wife of a royal scribe in ancient Egypt committed adultery, Pharaoh would order her to be seized and burned to death (Reshafim, 2013). The Hammurabi Code in ancient Mesopotamia prescribed drowning one who committed adultery. Among ancient Indian, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Byzantium and among the Arabs, nose amputation was done (Sperati, 2014).

Most Germanic tribes committed acts of violence against an unfaithful wife (Bullough, 1997). In the Middle Ages, in Vienna, adultery was punished by spearing the victim of adultery (Marz, 2005). Honor killing was common in parts of South Asia, Middle East and among immigrant communities in Europe, Canada and the USA (Maher, 2013). In some countries like Bangladesh, extrajudicial whipping is carried out on a victim of infidelity (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2015) while intimate partner violence which may go underreported or may not be prosecuted when it is reported is netted on victims of adultery (Spencer, 2013). A combination of physical attack, making one impotent or putting one to death through a juju which was called *magun* were used to punish the adulterers among the Yoruba (Adewole, 1994; Adeniyi, 2011). From this discourse, it is clear that various communities had various ways through which they discouraged infidelity. Details of traditional approaches that discouraged infidelity is scanty in literature. Those among the Abagusii is glaringly scanty and therefore this study.

The breaking of the marriage vows by engaging in adultery by either of the partners among the abagusii people resulted to a condition referred to as “amasangia” which if left unattended could lead to death of the offender or vice versa (Ayako, 2020). The research also interrogated the role of “amasangia” in preserving the community moral values related to the institution of marriage. The condition known as “amasangia” was a result of unfaithfulness in marriage. It affected either a man who was unfaithful to his wife or vice versa. The condition

particularly affected a man or men who shared a woman sexually. In the event of adultery, if the husband crossed over the blood of his wife while she delivered a child, the unfaithful wife got an attack. Immediately following the crossing of the blood, the woman started to sweat, while she stretched herself slowly, becoming flexible, and finally she died, if quick action was not taken to reverse the curse. It also happened if the wife was sick, and an unfaithful husband decided to slaughter a goat for her, with an intention of facilitating her healing.

The unfaithful wife got the attack and could die while exhibiting the same signs the same as the one an unfaithful woman exhibited. Therefore, it was prohibited for a man to visit another man in case of normal sickness, if there was sharing of a woman. The moment the two set eyes on each other, which could slowly cause the sick man to die. In the case of a man under the attack of *amasangia*, the penis stretched abnormally accompanied with sweating. If left unattended the man finally died. In some occasions a child born out of an illicit relationship could also die. The respondents further, said that *amasangia* could kill very fast, but immediately it was discovered, the victim was made to cross over a dog, as a temporary measure. Then the process of treatment was begun, whereby a religious specialist was consulted to perform the rituals that resulted. The dog is believed to be an animal that lacks morals, the reason why, usually a person that has uncouth behavior is said to be having a dog's behavior. According to the respondents there were instances when either the promiscuous man or woman took preventive measures in order to avoid the attack of *amasangia*. This had to be done quite early before the relationship was discovered or before any event that could trigger and attack. The promiscuous spouse ensured that the other partner has shared food together eating from same dish.

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

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

kungu obutire korwa ase okonyora abana). The concoction was made from a mixture of different soils obtained from various places. In total there were eight different soils that made *Rirongo*. 1) *Ribusi Rieng'uko* (a mole hill soil). 2) *Ribusi Riechimonyo* (ant hill soil). 3) *Amaroba yechinsangia chiechinchera—Amatebekani* (soil taken from a junction where two roads/paths cross each other). 4) Ekegege giechintuga (Termite hill soil). 5) *Ebundo, amaraba yesasati esike* (Cray from a swamp). 6) *Amabiy'Eguto* (Feces of an Antbear). 7) *Amaroba ase omogoko oochaine* (silt heaped due to erosion caused by rain). 8) *Euuray' Engondi* (Intestine waste of a sheep). The different components were mixed together and dried on *Egesero* (special dry skin). In most cases *Rirongo* a brown substance resembling a sausage was prepared and kept for any eventuality. In the event of an attack the person known to be having the medicine was quickly consulted. The concoction is said to be given to animals like cows to protect them from an evil eye, therefore, it could also be found kept as a home remedy. for such an experience.

The moment an adulterous person exhibited signs of an attack resulting from *amasangia*, it was necessary for the victim to say the truth. Upon confession of the offender, the process of treating or reversing the curse began. The offender brought a goat which was slaughtered. Raw intestines were removed and mixed with a little honey. The offenders were brought together and made to kneel while hands stretched with open palms. Pieces of intestines mixed with *rirongo* were placed on the palms. The leaked the concoction like dogs using their tongues. Then, they were given the thigh bone from the slain goat. The adulterous man and the adulterous woman hold the bone each on one side. They cut it into two pieces each taking one, then, they chew *emenyika* (muscles). The strict adherence to the rules led to the healing of the victims of *amasangia*. Hence, it was presumed reconciliation was accomplished. The entire process was so involving and due to the rigorous procedure undertaken to reverse the curse resulting from *amasangia*, individuals preferred to maintain faithfulness. Unless discovered and the victim made to confess, death resulted. Therefore, marriage was properly guarded and it was one of the ways of guarding community moral values. The study also interrogated on the reversal of the curse, which was done by use of a special concoction (*rirongo*). This was on condition that the offender admitted and confessed the act of unfaithfulness. Otherwise, there was a possibility of a person dying as a result of promiscuity, an act highly discouraged among the Abagusii people.

Abagusii had measures which could mitigate adultery such as, the adulterer could not slaughter a hen or so to a sick husband or wife, this person was not supposed to be allowed see a patient, the individual would not see a woman who had delivered or was delivering (*okoibora*). In case a man fornicated and denied, he was brought before a council of elders (*abatireti*) and an oath was administered. Woman with whom he had fornicated was paraded before the elders and the two were made to strip their attire (*chingobo*) and became naked (*gesobo-*

no). The woman was made to stand at a distance, opened her legs, and the man swore that he did not commit the act. He passed between the legs of that woman. Whatever he swore would happen to him could indeed happen. Rape was equally very rare in traditional communities. Whoever did this could be brought before a tree, specifically *omotembe* while carrying a spear and a shield. He took an oath that he did not do the act and if he had done that act, curses befell him.

6. Methodology

This study sampled elderly and resourceful local men and women through; stratified, purposive and snowballing techniques. The justification for the choice of these techniques was based on the fact that the target population is small and scattered in unknown locations across Gusiiland. Stratified sampling was used to divide Gusiiland in 15 sub-counties as found in Kisii and Nyamira Counties. This helped to reduce the probability of being biased in getting respondents from only one region of Gusiiland. Different places in Gusiiland have varied cultural settings and transformations. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents who were born in 1950s.

Most of the respondents were obtained through snowballing. According to [Cohen and Arieli \(2011\)](#), this is a technique in which one interviewee gives the researcher the name of at least one or more potential interviewee. The sequence that was used in this study is that, the researcher requested the local chief, sub-chief or village elder to identify elderly respondents in their area of jurisdiction who were born in 1950 and below. After identifying a case from each sub-county, this case was requested to identify more cases, asked new cases to identify further cases and so on until there were no further cases left. This sampling technique was used because few respondents in Gusiiland fall in the bracket of those who were born in 1950 and below and are scattered in locations unknown to the researcher. After sampling, a sample of 30 respondents composed of 21 women and 9 men was obtained after reaching saturation. From this, the research established that there are more aged women than men. At the same time, the study established that the level of recall by women was higher than that of men. The research found a justification of utilizing such a size of a sample based on the rule of thumb by [Guest, Bunce, and Johnson \(2006\)](#) that a sample of between 10-30 respondents is sufficient to provide adequate qualitative data. The validity and reliability of data gathering instruments was safeguarded through piloting. Because most of the data was qualitative, NVivo software was engaged in the analysis. Data was analyzed using inductive approach of content analysis and findings presented in descriptive form.

7. Results and Discussion

The following themes which are the findings of this study emerged from the analysis.

7.1. Amasangia is a Reality

One of the respondents explained that the traditional Abagusii society was fully aware and witnessed the aftermaths of amasangia. According to the respondent, the mysterious amasangia are not a fiction but a reality. The respondent further revealed that the modern generation seem to be ignorant of the reality of the effect of this curse. Another respondent affirmed the reality of amasangia and revealed that although the modern generation is ignorant of this curse, the negative effect is still a reality and deaths are still witnessed. One of the respondents revealed:

A relative of mine died after her husband's woman friend came to visit her in the hospital one week after she had given birth. After seeing each other one on one and greeting her, she started sweating, became breathless and eventually died. The husband's woman friend disappeared after noticing this. She could not explain this mystery. You see, a masangia has no scientific explanation on how it happens. The ancestors must have had a way they cursed immorality such that death just occurs mysteriously.

7.2. Amasangia Affect Both Husband and Wife (Wives)

All the respondents interviewed revealed that both the husband and wife (wives) would be victims of amasangia. If a husband was immoral, amasangia could affect his marriage just as it could do if the wife was unfaithful, It could also affect a man or men who shared a woman sexually.

7.3. How Amasangia Worked

According to most of the respondents, amasangia worked through blood or sickness. Without the two situations, amasangia were not effective. Amasangia occurred under certain circumstances. One of the circumstances was if a woman was unfaithful and the husband crossed over her blood while she was delivering a child, the unfaithful wife got an attack and passed on. Immediately he crossed the blood a sequence of events followed. The respondents revealed that, the woman started to sweat, she stretched herself slowly, became elastic, and eventually passed on. If a quick response was undertaken using traditional remedies, she could not die. Secondly, if a wife was unwell and an adulterous husband decided to slaughter a goat for her, with the purpose of enabling her quick recovery, she could pass on mysteriously because of sharing blood from the goat.

A respondent noted that:

The adulterous wife started sweating, while she stretched herself slowly, became elastic, and eventually passed on. Because of this, two men who shared a woman were not supposed to visit each other in the event either of them was unwell. When they set eyes on each other, the sick man gradually died due to amasangia. His penis stretched abnormally, then he experienced excessive sweating and if fast traditional remedies were not undertaken, he passed on.

Another respondent revealed that, in some instances, a child born out of infidelity was also likely to die as a result of *amasangia*.

7.4. Precautional Measures against Amasangia?

The fatal nature on amasangia made Abagusii devise precautional measures to avoid the attack. The precautions were taken on with a lot of care to avoid mis-giving. This had to be done fairly early before the illicit relationship was known or before any event that could cause an attack occurred. The precaution involved the philandering partner ensuring that his or her partner had common food with the one he or she was romancing with. They ate from the same container. According to one of the respondents;

If a woman was unfaithful, she could invite the man they had affairs with to her home. This was after making sure that she had made this man a friend to the husband or create a situation which could make them meet at meal time. She could cook a meal or drink, then put some concoction which was called rirongo in it. Once they shared this food which contained this concoction, amasangia could not kill them in future even if they set eyes on each other in the event one was sick or giving birth.

7.5. Amasangia and Polygamy

Data obtained from the respondents revealed that amasangia did not affect spouses who were in a polygamous marriage. In a polygamous home where the marriage process had been followed, amasangia could not affect the spouses. This finding helps to explain why it is right to refer amasangia as a curse resulting from infidelity in a marriage because even in polygamy, there is sharing of a husband or wives. As per the information that was obtained from one of the respondents, if a polygamous man had sexual affairs outside his legally married wives, amasangia could still lead to death. The man was therefore required to strictly remain faithful to his wives. Through amasangia, the moral values of Abagusii were maintained.

7.6. Treatment of Amasangia

The Abagusii were very conversant in giving treatment to numerous illnesses. The respondents revealed that amasangia could kill very fast, but immediately it was discovered, various precautions could be undertaken. The first fast temporal measure that was undertaken before death occurred was to make the affected person (man or woman who was likely to die) cross over a dog. Abagusii understood a dog as an animal which lacked morals and therefore an individual who lacked morals was seen to be having dog like character. After this temporal measure, the process of treatment commenced. The treatment could include a religious specialist who was involved in performing a curative procedure.

Although infidelity culminated to death, it could traditionally be reversed once discovered very fast. The process of treatment required that the offender confessed very fast that he or she was involved in adultery. Once he or she had confessed, the affected person was made to pass over a dog. This was followed by the victim or one whose life was in danger being given a special concoction which

was referred to *as rirongo*. Not everybody could prepare this concoction but a woman who had reached menopause (*omokungu obutire korwa konyora abana*) was tasked with this responsibility. She made this concoction from a combination of varied soils gotten from numerous areas. Such places where the soil that made rirongo was obtained from included; a heap of soil made by a mole (*ribusi Rieng'uko*), ant hill soil (*ribusi riechimonyo*), soil taken from a junction where two roads/paths cross each other (*amaroba ase chinchera chikoumerana or amatabekania*), termite hill soil (*ekegege giechintuga*), cray from a swamp (*ebundo or amaroba ye esike ye esasati*), feces of an antbear (*amabi ye eguto*), silt heaped due to erosion caused by rain (*amaroba asang'ereirie no omogoko*) and intestine waste of a sheep (*euura ye eng'ondi*). The women who were tasked with the responsibility of making the concoction could prepare it in advance before even anybody in the community was attacked by amasangia. This was done by mixing the different soils or components from where rirongo was obtained and drying them on a special dry skin (*egesero*). rirongo was made ready and kept for any possibility such that in the event of an attack, the person known to be having the medicine was quickly consulted. After the one who was attacked by amasangia was given to sip, he or she recovered from the attack. Apart from human beings, the concoction was given to animals like cows to protect them from an evil eye.

7.7. Reconciling Victims of Adultery: Ogosangia Abatomani

The moment an adulterous person exhibited signs of an attack resulting from amasangia, it was necessary for the adulterer to say the truth. Upon admission by the wrongdoer, the process of treating or retreating the curse began. The wrongdoer brought a goat which was slaughtered. Unprepared bowels were removed and mixed with some honey and those who were being reconciled made to eat this mixture. The wrongdoers were brought together and made to kneel down while hands stretched with open palms. Pieces of bowels mixed with *rirongo* were placed on the palms. They seeped the mixture like dogs using their tongues. Then, they were given the thigh bone from the slain goat which the adulterous man and the adulterous woman held, each from one side. They cut it into two pieces each taking one, then, they chewed the muscles (*emenyika*). By strictly adhering to the rules amasangia could stop killing the victim. Hence, it was assumed that reconciliation had been realized. The entire procedure was so demanding and tedious that individuals favored maintaining faithfulness. If it was not discovered, the adulterer made to confess and the procedure executed, death resulted. This study therefore established that the use of amasangia helped to maintain the sanctity of marriage among the Abagusii.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1. Conclusion

Traditionally, Abagusii loathed infidelity because it breached societal norms which were associated to marriage. Infidelity could not result to death until a disease

attacked one or a woman's blood was crossed over during birth. In case of an attack by amasangia, the adulterous person was required to report and therefore a healing process was executed speedily before death occurred. Amasangia was curable using traditional remedies which were executed by a traditional expert. Through the curse of amasangia, morality in marriage was safeguarded as most of the married people feared the aftermath.

8.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that knowledge about maintenance of the morality or sanctity of marriage among the Abagusii be upheld from generation to generation. The custodians of such knowledge; what amasangia are, signs of their effects and how they are treated should pass it from one generation to another. This will protect the present and future generation from avertible deaths ensuing from the curse (amasangia).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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