

Joseph Tsonope (ed.), *Lenyalo: Marriage Cultures and Processes in Botswana: Past and Present*. Gaborone: Lightbooks, 2022, xiv+365 pages, ISBN: 978-9912-71-63-7.

Lenyalo: Marriage Cultures and Processes in Botswana: Past and Present is a collection of chapters that delineates traditional and contemporary conventions, procedures, rituals, roles, and ceremonies pertaining to marital unions among different ethnic groups in Botswana. The book also sheds light on how marriage rites and formalities have changed over time, especially how marriage as an institution is buffeted by the vagaries of modernity. The concluding section of the book offers a set of recommendations on how the institution of marriage and the customary practices that sustain it can be recalibrated.

The volume comprises twenty (20) chapters that present the results of a country-wide research project funded by the Alumni of the University of Botswana Development Trust (ALUBDEV). Each of the chapters underscores the meaning and significance of marriage from the point of view of selected ethnic groups in Botswana. The chapters identify the various stages and processes followed in different customary marital practices of the designated ethnic groups. The chapters also examine the role of various actors and the significance of metaphors and symbols used in marriage rites. The twenty ethnic groups covered in the book are Babirwa, Bakalanga, Bakgatla, Bakgothu, Bakwena, Balete, Bangwaketse, Bangwato, Barolong, Batawana, Batlharo, Batlokwa, Batswapong, Bazezuru, Veekuhane (Basubiya), Khoisan (Ghana People of Zutshwa), Khoisan (Naro People of New Xade), Ovaherero and Wayeyi.

The chapters in this book follow a set format. The contributions adopt the same methodology of triangulating personal knowledge and experience, interviews, and desktop research. The chapters, uniformly, start by providing a historical backdrop of the origins of the ethnic group. The historical background is followed by a section that defines and explains the meaning of marriage and highlights its significance. Then the chapters go on to list the different types of marriages, such as arranged marriages, monogamous marriages, polygamous marriages as well as different types of preliminary compacts or betrothals. A distinction is made between customary, civil and religious or church marriages although in many instances a fusion of these three types of marriage is enacted.

The chapters outline, in detail, the various steps of the marriage process from identification of prospective marriage partners, different types of betrothal, courtship stages (*go kokota*), preliminary and subsequent visits, bride-seeking (*patlo*), exchanges regarding lobola (*bogadi*), bride and groom counselling (*go laya*), the wedding ceremony (*kemo/mokete wa lenyalo*), the transfer of the bride to her in-laws (*go isa ngwetsi/monyadiwa*) and the bride being taken back to her natal home (*go gatisiwa*). The chief merit of this book lies in cataloguing and compiling the numerous rituals and protocols that characterise marriage practices in Botswana. This is what makes the book a veritable informational treasure trove for specialist researchers and the general reading community.

The respective chapters of the book also consider the customary roles of various actors in the different stages of the marriage processes while also examining the metaphors and symbols used in the marriage rites. The chapters assess how traditional marriage customs and protocols have been affected by societal change, such as the integration of local communities into the global capitalist economic system. Each chapter also specifies the rights, privileges, and benefits of different types of traditional marriages while pointing out the challenges associated with different types of marriage practices.

All the chapters in this book define marriage in heteronormativity terms as a formal or legal union between a man and a woman, each performing traditional gender roles. Marital unions are regarded as sanctified compacts. All the contributions in this book report that every ethnic community views marriage as a crucial rite of passage into the realm of adulthood. Marital union goes beyond the love attraction and bond between two individuals. It brings different families together. It binds the community. It ensures that

propagation of the species and the raising of children are undertaken in agreeable social arrangements. It is a socio-economic necessity that is congenial to the management and marshalling of financial and human resources. It is also considered to be a cultural obligation for adults to enter the hallowed sanctum of marriage since it confers dignity, respectability, and considerable social status on the married couple. Marriage is valued because it entails the establishment of a family, a basic unit of society. Marriage is consecrated as holy union. It even has ancestral blessings. Married couples enjoy the right and privilege to participate in all sorts of cultural activities and ceremonies. They are often accorded unwavering support of the vast social network of relatives from both families in times of celebration and grief during different stages of their lives.

It is easy to be idealistic about marriage and to view it with rose-coloured eyes. The data gathered by the respective contributors to this volume starkly indicates that the institution of marriage is bedevilled by all sorts of distresses. The divorce rate is worrisome. Instances of abuse and wrangles abound in too many marriages. Many people choose not to marry and opt for alternative or informal arrangements and engagements. Due to the socio-economic situation many people find marriage processes too time-consuming and the cost associated with marriage rites and ceremonies prohibitive. Some people question the customary requisite of *bogadi* as being exploitative and not in synch with the times. Some informants decried the reduction of marriage to the bare bones of a legal contract that can be mechanically revoked by courts of law without the benefit of parental guidance. Other informants apportion the blame to the impersonal and implacable forces of colonisation and capitalism as well as the bewildering crosscurrents of globalisation. Some blame young people for uncritically adopting foreign cultural practices and discarding time-honoured customs and mores. What is clear is that the institution of marriage is menaced by the multiplicity of factors and the remedies must be comprehensive and multifaceted.

The recommendations proffered in this volume to bolster the institution of marriage include legislative reforms, revamping of marriage counselling services, codification of customary marriage procedures, resuscitation of the initiation sacraments of *bogwera* and *bojale*, regulation of *bogadi*, combating toxic masculinity, promoting gender equality and more parental involvement in conflict-resolution procedures in marriages.

The book is an auspicious resource in terms of the abundance of details pertaining to the sundry procedures of conducting marriage in traditional settings. Although the volume is primarily targeted to the general reader and policy maker, and it is rich in raw data it would have benefitted from a theoretical rigour for the benefit of a critical scholar. The volume is also undercut by editorial lapses. Besides typos, the irregular length of the chapters is bothersome. Some of the chapters would do with more standardised attributions, footnotes, and references to augment the observations and interpretations. The whole volume needs an index for easy reference and a glossary of multi-lingual *Lenyalo* terms.

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