

The changing forms of the traditional Africa marriage systems and their implications for the plight of widows in Tanzania: some reflections from the Shambaa of Lushoto Tanga

Upendo Emmanuel Shemaghembe

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University of Dar es Salaam, College of Social Sciences, 2009

This study has explored the changing forms of the traditional marriage system and their implication for the right of widows in Lushoto. The objectives were to examine the traditional marriage system and the associated meanings, values and norms socio- economic conditions of widows, to assess the social institutions which cared for widows in the pre-colonial and the post-independence societies, and to examine the changing forms and nature of the marriage system in the contemporary Shambaa social formation. The study used the materialist political economy approach to elucidate the social processes, forces and relations responsible for the change in marriage system and the subsequent plight of widows. A qualitative design was adopted for the reason that it enabled the researcher to grasp the real situation. The quality, meaning context, and image of the reality of what people actually do. For this case, Focus Group Discussion and in depth Interviews were used to collect data for the study. Documents were reviewed in order to supplement some information. The study found that there has been a great change in the marriage institution. The change has been from the traditional to current 'modern' marriage system. The contributing factors were found to be migration industrialization, urbanization, and monetarization of bride-wealth. All these were found to be the result of establishment of capitalism. These social process, forces and relations were considered to be cause of plight of widows. It was concluded that the current plight of widows in Lushoto is a result of the changes in marriage systems and not embedded in the Shambaa tradition and customs. In light thus it was suggested that further research focusing on the custom of widow cleansing should be conducted.