



RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE DYNAMICS OF BRIDEWEALTH PRACTICES AMONG THE LOBI IN THE CANTON OF GAOUA (BURKINA FASO)

¹Mimine Akissi Hien, ²Dr. Yacouba Tengueri and ³Dr. Alexis Clotaire Némoiby Bassolé

¹Master's Student, Joseph Ki-Zerbo University; ²Lecturer-Researcher, Daniel OuezzinCoulibaly University

³Lecturer-Researcher, Joseph Ki-Zerbo University

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 15th December, 2025
Received in revised form
25th January, 2026
Accepted 18th February, 2026
Published online 29th March, 2026

Keywords:

Bridewealth, Customary Marriage, Social Change, Monetisation, Burkina Faso

*Corresponding author:

Mimine Akissi Hien

ABSTRACT

Background: Bridewealth constitutes a foundational element of customary marriage in sub-Saharan Africa. Among the Lobi of the canton of Gaoua (Burkina Faso), it is perceived by non-Lobi communities as financially inaccessible, thereby generating intercommunal tensions. **Objective:** This study analyses the transformations undergone by bridewealth practices within the Lobi community under the influence of modernity and cultural intermingling. **Method:** A qualitative approach was adopted, grounded in semi-structured interviews conducted with Lobi households, customary and religious authorities, as well as migrant populations residing in the canton of Gaoua. **Results:** The findings reveal a progressive monetisation of the constituent elements of bridewealth, notably livestock and agricultural labour, under the influence of urbanisation, migration, wage employment, and the individualisation of social relations.

Copyright©2026, Mimine Akissi Hien et al. 2026. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Mimine Akissi Hien, Dr. Yacouba Tengueri and Dr. Alexis Clotaire Némoiby Bassolé. 2026. "Social change and the dynamics of bridewealth practices among the Lobi in the canton of Gaoua (Burkina Faso)". *International Journal of Current Research*, 18, (03), 36540-36545.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social institution that ensures the perpetuation of the human species. Prior to colonisation, bridewealth was embedded within a complex system of symbolic and material exchange in West African communities (Mauss, 1923–1924). Marriage, far from being a mere union between two individuals, defined the social status of persons and organised the social reproduction of communities. Today, two principal forms of marriage are recognised in Africa: modern marriage and traditional or customary marriage (Anani, 2008). Customary marriage is regarded as the cornerstone around which the entire life of the community revolves (Sahgui, 2018). It constitutes an alliance not only between a couple but also between their respective families, typically formalised through the payment of a compensation, commonly referred to as bridewealth. It is bridewealth that confers legal validity upon marriage in the eyes of the community, according to Koné and N'Guessan (2005), as cited in Anani (2008). This reality is codified in certain countries, such as Togo, where Article 86 of the Code of Persons and the Family stipulates that non-payment of bridewealth may constitute grounds for the nullity of a marriage. Bridewealth, which may consist of goods in kind or in cash transferred by the suitor's family to that of the bride or, alternatively, of agricultural services rendered by the suitor to his prospective in-laws, is considered

an ancestral practice that remains indispensable in the celebration of marriage across numerous African societies. In contrast, Burkina Faso's Article 244 formally prohibits bridewealth; yet this prohibition appears to conflict with established practice among certain communities, including the Gourounsi, the Bobo, the Dagara, and the Lobi, for whom bridewealth remains an indispensable component of customary marriage (Cavin, 1998). Whilst bridewealth has withstood the test of time, this institution has been traversed by profound transformative dynamics arising from colonisation (Radcliffe-Brown & Daryll Forde, 1950; Chanock, 1985; Iliffe, 1995; Hawkins, 2002), evangelisation (Meyers, 1999; Pell, 2000), Islam (Kané, 2003), urbanisation (Cohen, 1969), and the globalised economy (Shipton, 2007). Research conducted in Ghana has documented a dramatic escalation in bridewealth payments in urban settings, giving rise to a matrimonial crisis among young people (Bop, 1996). In this context of bridewealth commodification, women risk being reduced to objects of exchange, thereby reinforcing relations of domination and depriving them of their fundamental rights. It is within this field of tension that the present study examines the changes undergone by bridewealth practices among the Lobi of the canton of Gaoua, in the context of modernity and cultural intermingling. Popular perception portrays Lobi bridewealth as exorbitant and financially inaccessible, a perception that constitutes a source of discord and tension

between different communities, and which influences the choice of marital partners according to the bridewealth requirements imposed by the community to which the prospective bride belongs.

METHODOLOGY

Study setting: This study was conducted in the canton of Gaoua, the administrative seat of the Djôrô region and the Poni Province. Gaoua is bordered to the east by the commune of Boussera, to the west by Loropéni, to the north by Bouroum-Bouroum and Nako, to the north-east by Malba, to the south by Midebdo, to the south-west by Pérignan, and to the south-east by Gomblora. The population is distributed between two spatial units: the town of Gaoua, comprising eight sectors, and the rural area, which encompasses fifty-six villages. The canton is predominantly inhabited by the Lobi and Birifor peoples. Other minority groups are also present, including the Dagara, Djan, Gan, and Pougouri, as well as migrant communities such as the Mossi, Senufo, Gouin, Fulani, and Bobo (Municipal Development Plan, 2020–2024).

Study population: All Lobi community households residing in the canton of Gaoua constituted the target population. Resource persons comprised customary and religious authorities as well as municipal officers, whose perspectives enabled an understanding not only of their views on bridewealth but also of the role of bridewealth in civil and religious marriage ceremonies. Migrant community members who had contracted marriage with Lobi individuals constituted the control population. The selection of these various categories was based on purposive sampling.

Methods and data collection tools: In order to apprehend the meanings that social actors ascribe to bridewealth practices in the canton of Gaoua, a qualitative methodology was adopted. Interview guides served as the primary data collection instruments. The semi-structured interviews, which centred on the social and cultural dimensions of bridewealth practice, aimed to elucidate the meanings attributed to marriage, and to bridewealth in particular, by the Lobi community as well as other communities. Three distinct interview guides were accordingly developed: one addressed to Lobi community households (the target population), one to resource persons comprising customary and religious leaders and municipal officers, and one to the control population, which included, *inter alia*, Mossi, Birifor, Senufo, and Karaboro respondents. The study involved a total of 46 participants, divided into three groups. The target population comprised 30 individuals, 12 women (widows and married women) and 18 Lobi men, one of whom was married to a Dagara woman. The control population consisted of 11 men of varied ethnic backgrounds: Senufo, Karaboro, Birifor and Mossi. Finally, 5 resource persons, all male, completed the sample. Women thus accounted for 12 of the 46 participants, representing approximately one quarter of the overall group.

Ethical consent: The informed and voluntary consent of each participant in the study was obtained prior to the commencement of the interviews. As Fortin and Gagnon (2016) emphasise, informed consent constitutes a fundamental pillar of research ethics, ensuring respect for the autonomy and dignity of participants. In order to guarantee the anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected, the names and surnames

of the respondents were deliberately abbreviated. This precaution is consistent with the perspective advanced by Guba and Lincoln (1989), for whom the protection of participants' identities represents a moral obligation incumbent upon the researcher. It is likewise in keeping with the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (2003), who stress the necessity of preserving confidentiality throughout any qualitative research process, so as to prevent any form of direct or indirect identification of the individuals interviewed.

RESULTS

Bridewealth in the Lobi community traditionally comprised the prospective son-in-law's provision of domestic and agricultural services to his future in-laws, livestock, cowrie shells, and plant fibres used as a belt (*wiè*)¹. However, urbanisation and demographic growth have brought about changes in certain modalities of bridewealth payment.

Modernity and marriage in the Lobi community of the Canton of Gaoua: In the contemporary context, migratory movements, formal schooling, and cultural intermingling have conferred upon young people a greater degree of freedom and a wider field of choice with regard to the selection of a partner. Within the Lobi community of the canton of Gaoua, young people are increasingly resistant to parental involvement in the choice of their partner, particularly when the prospective bride is a minor. Consequently, forms of marriage previously arranged by parents, that is, arranged marriages, have largely fallen into disuse. This development is partly attributable to the institution of formal education, which conveys values that tend to challenge established social norms and rules. This perspective is corroborated by the following informant:

One must acknowledge that, with all the changes that have occurred, people have travelled, learnt other cultures, returned home with them, gone to school, encountered different ways of life. Even women no longer wish to be given away to a husband, and men no longer wish to have a bride chosen for them. In that case, it becomes a forced marriage. We have learnt that this constitutes forced marriage. So it is rare nowadays. (PS, aged 56, married, private sector worker, Sector 2, Gaoua, 22 March 2024).

This statement was echoed by HW (aged 47, married, journalist at RTB Gaoua, 9 March 2024): "This type of marriage is rare nowadays. Isn't it true that one no longer speaks of such proposals? Today it has been recast as forced marriage." These extracts indicate that, within this community, formal schooling, cultural intermingling, and migration have collectively contributed to the abandonment of marriage arranged through parental mediation. It may therefore be concluded that, within the contemporary Lobicomunity, social institutions such as arranged marriage have progressively escaped social control.

Nevertheless, arranged marriage is regarded by some informants as a viable solution to the problem of celibacy among young people, as expressed by YS (aged 57, married, retired civil servant, Sector 2, Gaoua, 19 February 2024):

¹ plant fibres used as a hip belt

In the past, when arranged marriages were the norm, there were no unmarried men. But today, people say to let the girl choose the man she loves. If you do not find someone you love and, being a girl, your age advances, what will you do? Will you remain as you are? So if you have not yet found the one you love, and you follow your peers to ceremonies and celebrations, you might meet a young man who sleeps with you and subsequently does not marry you. And if it becomes known that you are sleeping with young men, who will want to marry you? That is why there are so many unmarried girls today.

In the same vein, KA (aged 68, married, farmer, Sector 2, Gaoua, 20 February 2024) argued: "In any case, arranged marriage allowed men who were too shy or too fearful to court a woman to get married." In the current context, with the abandonment of various forms of arranged marriage, two principal marriage forms prevail within the Lobi community of the canton of Gaoua: negotiated marriage and marriage by abduction (or elopement).

Negotiated marriage follows a formal procedure, whereby the suitor's family presents a basket containing the wiè, cowrie shells, and, depending on the family, additional items such as fabric, shoes, earrings, and a scarf, to the prospective bride's family. After an initial meeting and a period of family consultation on the bride's side, both the paternal and maternal families convene to determine the bridewealth amount, which generally corresponds to that paid for the bride's mother. To guard against abuse, bridewealth in the canton of Gaoua has been capped at three to four head of cattle, equivalent to twenty-five thousand CFA francs per head, and fifteen thousand CFA francs for a sheep in cash settlement.

The following account by YB (aged 56, married, tailor, Sector 2, Gaoua, 10 March 2024) illustrates the practical modalities of negotiated marriage:

I am not Lobi myself, but I have been delegated on several occasions to ask for the hand of a Lobi girl. Generally, when we visit the girl's family for the initial meeting, the parents ask for time to hold a family consultation and say they will call us back. After the consultation, they contact us again. Some families ask for only three head of cattle. Others add a sheep, a hen, or even a guinea fowl, it depends on the family. They also mention a thread that serves as a hip necklace; I do not know its name, but they say it is what they prize most. If you do not have it, they say you may send one thousand francs and they will procure it themselves. Others ask you to bring everything together before returning. They also ask for cowrie shells, three thousand cowries. Sometimes we send money to Bobo to purchase these. The cowries and thread are presented in either a basket or a calabash, depending on the family. Once the cowries and thread have been presented, the parents say you may take the girl, for she is now your wife. As for the cattle, in all the requests I have made, the parents say they are not in a hurry, you can leave, and when your wife has had children, you may return and pay the cattle.

This account reveals that negotiated marriage may be both inter-religious and intercommunal. Indeed, cognisant of the fact that no society can develop without openness to other cultures, the Lobi community demonstrates receptiveness not

only to other communities but also to inter-ethnic and inter-religious unions.

Changes observed in bridewealth practices

Agricultural Labour Services: The agricultural services formerly rendered by the suitor signified his dedication to work and his capacity to mobilise others, notably through the invitation of his peers to labour in the fields of his prospective in-laws. These periods of communal work constituted occasions for rapprochement, both between the son-in-law and his future in-laws, and between the respective families of the betrothed. However, agricultural labour as a component of bridewealth has progressively disappeared, for several interrelated reasons. First, since arranged marriages have become virtually non-existent and marital commitments are no longer made when girls are of a young age, the customary obligation of agricultural labour has lost its traditional context. Second, young men have developed strategies to circumvent this requirement: aware that a suitor must cultivate his future in-laws' fields as a matrimonial compensation, many now prefer to wait until the girl reaches majority before making a formal request for marriage or proceeding with an elopement. YS (aged 57, married, retired civil servant, Sector 2, Gaoua, 19 February 2024) articulates this as follows: "Today, people are no longer willing to go and work in the fields. They simply wait until the girl is of age, then come to ask for her hand, or they proceed to take her by elopement." Finally, migration, wage employment, and artisanal gold mining are further factors invoked by informants to explain the disappearance of agricultural labour. Wage earners, in particular, are unable to commit to field labour due to the demands of regular attendance in the public or private sectors, as illustrated by OZ (aged 64, married, retired civil servant, Sector 3, Gaoua, 20 February 2024):

Imagine a man who works in another town, comes to marry my daughter, and they leave together. I cannot detain him because of agricultural labour when he has a job waiting for him. In that situation, I do not require him to work in my fields. In any case, he will pay the bridewealth, that is what matters.

HB (aged 72, married, farmer, Sector 3, Gaoua, 22 February 2024) adds: "Nowadays, marriage has a far wider reach. It is no longer as it once was, when the husband lived in the same village or a neighbouring one. Today, a man may live in another town altogether. For instance, those who marry and then go to Côte d'Ivoire, where would you find them to come and work in your fields? And if you consider the artisanal miners, they are constantly searching for gold; they prefer to go and earn money at the mining sites and come back to pay the bridewealth in cash."

The place of livestock in the constitution of bridewealth in contemporary society

Formerly, livestock constituted an indispensable element in the composition of Lobibridewealth. In the contemporary context, one observes a progressive monetisation of livestock in the canton of Gaoua, driven by the scarcity and rising cost of cattle on the local market, as well as the decline of bovine husbandry within lineage groups. Consequently, suitors convert the livestock requirement into cash in order to meet this obligation.

Customary authorities intervene to regulate this practice among families and prevent abuse. This argument is substantiated by the following accounts.

Nowadays, if you are asked to pay three head of cattle in kind, you simply cannot. In Lobi country, it is not the market price of a bull that is taken. The price is fixed symbolically, and one head of cattle is valued at twenty thousand (20,000) CFA francs. If a sheep is required, it is five thousand. (HB, aged 72, farmer, Sector 3, Gaoua, 22 February 2024).

DL (aged 65, married, farmer, Sector 2, Gaoua, 17 February 2024) adds:

You know, nowadays, obtaining cattle is complicated. If you are told to pay cattle today, for example, one bull might be worth one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000 CFA francs) or two hundred thousand francs (200,000 CFA francs) on the local market. If your in-laws demand five or six head of cattle, imagine how much that would amount to. If you negotiate and your in-laws refuse, you can bring the matter before the canton chief. Nowadays, if you exceed three or four head of cattle, that is not possible, the chief will not accept it. Currently, three head of cattle amounts to sixty thousand (60,000 CFA francs), at twenty thousand francs per head.

PG (aged 57, married, farmer, Sector 3, Gaoua, 25 March 2024) concurs: "As I mentioned earlier, it is now money that is given. At a certain point, cattle became expensive. So if the suitor does not have the means, he takes time to gather all the cattle required, because he must visit his maternal uncles to ask for cattle. If, on the other hand, he has cash available, or if the uncles can pool their resources on the spot, that is accepted. Nowadays, one head of cattle is worth twenty-five thousand francs and a sheep fifteen thousand francs, because some parents add a sheep."

The cash equivalent of cattle varies from family to family, despite the canton chief's decision to cap the number of head of cattle at four. According to the canton chief, the price per head is fixed at twenty-five thousand (25,000) CFA francs: "Across the entire territory of the canton, we have decided that the number of cattle to be given as bridewealth shall not exceed four (04). And since it is now paid in cash, the price of one head of cattle is set at twenty-five thousand francs (25,000)." (OA, canton chief of Gaoua, married). The management of the cash received varies considerably between families. According to some informants, when parents accept cash in lieu of livestock, they are expected to set aside a share for the maternal uncles, who must in turn perform the same rituals as those conducted when the payment is made in cattle. The money received by the maternal uncles is, according to certain informants, used to purchase a young female calf, which is then raised; once it has grown, the appropriate sacrifice is performed. Nowadays, you may accept cash, but you must still convert it nonetheless. The most recent amount we received was 150,000 CFA francs, equivalent to three head of cattle. When we receive cash, we must purchase at least one head of cattle and keep it. We rear it and it multiplies. And even if the father does not buy cattle, he must know how to manage the money well, to preserve it carefully so that, should the need arise and the daughter faces difficulties, there are means available to assist her." (OZ, aged 64, married, retired civil

servant, Gaoua, 20 February 2024). Moreover, to prevent mismanagement, some families entrust the sum received to the woman for whom the bridewealth was paid, with the obligation to preserve and safeguard it, or to invest it as working capital in an income-generating activity. OA (canton chief of Gaoua, married) elaborates: "The money given by the husband remains with the wife. In our family, when a suitor comes, we no longer take cattle. We take money and give it to the woman, telling her that this money must never be exhausted. The father takes it and hands it to the woman, and she uses it for trade. We even say that she may lend it to her husband. This money may be used for commerce or for livestock husbandry, in that way, it will never run out."

Conversely, the majority of informants insist that a woman should not spend the bridewealth paid for her, nor consume the meat of the bridewealth cattle, on pain of adverse consequences. KA (aged 68, married, farmer, Sector 2, Gaoua, 20 February 2024) states: "When you receive the bridewealth, you must ensure that the girl for whom it was given does not consume any of it. If it is in the form of money, she must not spend a single franc of that sum." In view of the consequences that mismanagement of bridewealth may hold for the woman concerned, some mothers have expressed their opposition to receiving bridewealth on their daughters' behalf. OS (aged 33, student, married, Gaoua, 8 October 2024) recounts her experience:

In my family, when my husband wanted to pay my bridewealth, my father did not impose it upon him. I mean, he was not obliged to pay my bridewealth. They told him that if he truly wished to pay it and I agreed, there would be no objection. But they said that I was to keep the money for trading purposes, since in our family cattle are converted to cash. Yet some say that a woman must not touch her own bridewealth. My mother opposed the idea of my keeping the money. So in the end, my husband did not pay my bridewealth. In addition to the variable management of bridewealth, a lack of familiarity with its constituent elements is observable in certain families. Whilst some have retained the traditional symbolic items, the *wiè* and cowrie shells, others display uncertainty regarding what is required at the outset of the bridewealth process. DL (aged 65, married, farmer, Sector 2, Gaoua, 17 February 2024) provides an illuminating example: Recently, the suitor of my niece came to ask for her hand. When she called the village to find out what her suitor should bring for the occasion, my elder brothers in the village told her that, in addition to twenty cowrie shells and the *wiè* (plant fibres for a belt), he should bring two or three sets of fabric, a pair of earrings, a necklace, a bracelet, a pair of shoes, a scarf, a cockerel, and a hoe. I have never seen a cockerel and a hoe included in the bridewealth before. But we accepted it all the same. These findings demonstrate that modernisation has affected not only the various forms of marriage that have historically existed in Lobi society, but has also altered the nature of certain bridewealth elements. With regard to marriage, external influences and the phenomenon of migration have contributed to the abandonment of arranged marriage practices. As for the constituent elements of bridewealth, whilst the *wiè* and cowrie shells continue to feature, agricultural labour and livestock have undergone significant changes: livestock is now monetised and agricultural labour has been abandoned as a bridewealth component.

DISCUSSION

This study highlights a dynamic transformation in marriage practices within the Lobi community of the canton of Gaoua. The changes observed in bridewealth practice have their origins in a constellation of interrelated factors. Modernity, urbanisation, formal schooling, public policies relating to persons and family codes, socio-economic transformations, and cultural intermingling have collectively engendered a shift in the perception and practice of bridewealth among the Lobi. The transition from total symbolic prestations (Mauss, 1923–1924) to the monetisation of bridewealth practices among the Lobi constitutes a marker of social change. Lobi bridewealth traditionally comprised four complementary elements: (i) agricultural labour services, referred to as the "Jacob's bridewealth", rendered over many years in the in-laws' fields, in reference to the fourteen years of labour accomplished by Jacob for his father-in-law in exchange for the hand of Rachel and Leah (seven years for each) (Coulibaly, 2020); (ii) the gift of four head of cattle; (iii) the gift of cowrie shells; and (iv) the *wiè*. However, a change has been observed in the practice of "Jacob's bridewealth," which served not only to bring the suitor closer to his in-laws but also to the other members of the bride's community. The philosophy underlying this practice was that marriage bound two communities beyond the union of the couple themselves (Poda, 1994). Moreover, by performing agricultural labour for his in-laws, the suitor endeavoured to demonstrate himself worthy of the honour bestowed upon him (Diop, 1985). Notwithstanding, Poda (1994) notes that "Jacob's bridewealth" did not, in its original form, carry the constraining character that it has assumed in more recent times. With regard to livestock, Poda (1994) explains that the demand for cattle in bridewealth composition reflects the symbolic value accorded to animals in Lobi society. In this society, livestock is associated not only with wealth and social prestige but also with fertility, through the medium of heifers. Just as women contribute to the expansion of the clan through procreation, cows augment the herd of their owner through calving. Similarly, the immolation of a bull in Lobi society serves an apotropaic function: when a man transgresses a prohibition linked to an ancestor or a divinity, he must sacrifice a bull to repair the transgression and avert the consequent threat of death. However, the Lobi community of the canton of Gaoua is progressively abandoning the inclusion of cattle in bridewealth composition, owing to the rising cost of livestock on the local market and household poverty, as well as the declining practice of bovine husbandry within lineage groups. This situation is also indicative of a weakening of social bonds and an intensification of social individualisation. Indeed, the growing independence of younger generations from their elders, and the disintegration of collective labour forces, have engendered a transformation in the power relations between elders and juniors (Ensminger & Knight, 1997). Individual members are becoming economically independent of one another, which partly explains the abandonment of livestock husbandry as matrimonial capital of the lineage. Yet, for lineages, bovine husbandry had historically been embedded in a logic of accumulating capital goods for the marriage of lineage members of marriageable age (De Rouville, 1987). One witnesses, in consequence, a diversification of alliances and the emergence of intercultural and inter-religious marriages (Maiga & Baya, 2014). Antoine and Nanitelamio (1995) have further argued that the urbanisation of rural areas has transformed the matrimonial market into a segmented space in which female celibacy is

increasingly prevalent. These various economic and social realities have introduced the monetisation of goods formerly required in bridewealth composition. However, Wepukhulu (2024) expresses concern regarding the commodification of bridewealth practices in African societies, warning that this development weakens matrimonial bonds and exposes young women to domestic violence, as the liquefaction of social relations reduces them to acquired objects who consequently lose their fundamental rights. In this context, marriage is sometimes instrumentalised by parents as a survival strategy, and the young girl becomes an economic asset for her family (Meillassoux, 1991). Other authors, such as Mathers (2021), argue that the high bridewealth demanded by certain ethnic groups may serve as a mechanism for combating the early marriage of young girls by delaying their entry into matrimony. In the context under examination, however, this delayed marriage is rather attributable to the effects of mass female schooling and the economic precariousness of families. Contrary to this interpretation, early marriage for young women is perceived in certain communities as a social privilege. Consequently, the standardisation of bridewealth amounts by the canton of Gaoua, regardless of the young woman's attributes, reflects a logic of facilitating the entry of young people into marriage, given the socio-economic realities facing marriageable youth. This approach also forms part of a broader effort to deconstruct the perception of Lobi bridewealth as financially inaccessible among both non-Lobi and Lobi communities alike. In other societies, however, as described by Diop (1985) and Binet (1959, p. 130), the high value of bridewealth constitutes a criterion of social distinction for the parents of the bride, and to settle for a symbolic bridewealth would be to dishonour the woman. The argument most frequently invoked to justify a high bridewealth is the loss of labour for the family of origin and the enrichment of the in-laws, which is what Meillassoux (1991) has in mind when he speaks of "women, granaries, and capital." The transfer of goods to the bride's family thus functions as a counterpart compensating for the domestic and productive activities that the woman will no longer be able to perform in support of her family of origin, in short, a payment for the loss of female labour (Solus, 1959; Pontié, 1973; Diop, 1985). In contrast to Poda (1994), who places the number of cowries entering into bridewealth composition at between 250 and 360 among the Dagara, Somda (1990) emphasises that this number varies from clan to clan. For instance, among the Dagara-Lobr, the number of cowries may reach 12,000, whilst among the Dagara-Wiilé it may reach 28,000.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyse the changes undergone by bridewealth practices among the Lobi of the canton of Gaoua. Beyond its function as a mere modality of exchange between families, lineages, or communities, bridewealth constitutes a foundational act of matrimonial alliance. The findings of this study reveal a transformation in bridewealth practices driven by modernity, socio-professional demands, and geographical and intercultural distance, manifested in the progressive monetisation of certain symbolic elements formerly constitutive of bridewealth. "Jacob's bridewealth" has given way to monetisation, owing principally to professional constraints, a development that may be interpreted as a reinterpretation of the symbolism of the suitor's participation in his in-laws' agricultural labour. This practice has been reduced

from a process of socially recognised valorisation of labour and the strengthening of social bonds to the mere discharge of a transactional obligation. This change is equally perceptible in the symbolic value accorded to cattle in Lobibridewealth composition. In the collective imagination, cows represent both the reproductive and productive capacity of women: just as a cow expands the herd by calving, so a woman increases her husband's labour force and enriches him by bearing children. Nevertheless, the disappearance of these practices is not solely attributable to poverty and individualisation; it must also be understood in relation to the effects of cultural intermingling and urbanisation.

REFERENCES

- Anani, K. (2008). Pratiques matrimoniales et transformations sociales en Afrique de l'Ouest. *Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, 12(1), 45–67.
- Antoine, P., & Nanitelamio, J. (1995). La montée du célibat féminin dans les villes africaines : Trois cas : Pikine, Abidjan et Brazzaville. *Population*, 50(6), 1831–1860. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1534332>
- Binet, J. (1959). *Le mariage en Afrique Noire*. Les Éditions du Cerf.
- Bop, C. (1996). Les femmes chefs de famille à Dakar. In J. Bisilliat (Ed.), *Femmes du Sud, chefs de famille* (pp. 129–150). Karthala.
- Cavin, A.-C. (1998). *Droit de la famille burkinabè : Le code des personnes et de la famille*. L'Harmattan.
- Chanock, M. (1985). *Law, custom and social order: The colonial experience in Malawi and Zambia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, A. (1969). *Custom and politics in urban Africa: A study of Hausa migrants in Yoruba towns*. University of California Press.
- Coulibaly, C. (2020). La problématique actuelle de la dot. <https://revuejuris.net/2020/03/20/la-problematique-actuelle-de-la-dot/>
- De Rouville, C. (1987). *Organisation sociale des Lobi : Une société bilinéaire du Burkina Faso et de Côte d'Ivoire*. L'Harmattan.
- Diop, A. B. (1985). *La famille wolof : Tradition et changement*. Karthala.
- Ensminger, J., & Knight, J. (1997). Changing social norms: Common property, bridewealth, and clan exogamy. *Current Anthropology*, 38(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1086/204581>
- Fortin, M.-F., & Gagnon, J. (2016). *Fondements et étapes du processus de recherche : Méthodes quantitatives et qualitatives* (3e éd.). Chenelière Éducation. <https://www.cheneliere.ca/fr/bundle-fondements-et-etapes-du-processus-de-recherche-4e-ed-9782765073567.html>
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Sage Publications. <https://collegepublishing.sagepub.com/products/fourth-generation-evaluation-1-2748>
- Hawkins, S. (2002). *Writing and colonialism in Northern Ghana: The encounter between the LoDagaa and the world on paper*. University of Toronto Press.
- Iiffe, J. (1995). *Africans: The history of a continent*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kané, C. (2003). Islam et pratiques matrimoniales en Afrique subsaharienne. *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 43(169–170), 155–178.
- Maiga, A., & Baya, B. (2014). Au-delà des normes de formation des couples au Burkina Faso : Quand les cultures s'épousent. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346042316>
- Mathers, K. (2021). Bridewealth and the politics of marriage in contemporary Africa. *African Studies Review*, 64(2), 389–412. <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.25>
- Mauss, M. (1923–1924). *Essai sur le don : Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*. *L'Année Sociologique, nouvelle série*, 1, 30–186.
- Meillassoux, C. (1991). *Femmes, greniers et capitaux* (2nd ed.). Maspero.
- Meyers, J. (1999). The social welfare function of Protestant missions in West Africa: Bridewealth, women's rights and changing marital practices. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 29(3), 319–349.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (2003). *Analyse des données qualitatives* (2e éd.). De Boeck.: <https://www.amazon.fr/Analyse-donn%C3%A9es-qualitatives-Michael-Huberman/dp/2744500909>
- Pell, M. (2000). Évangélisation et mutations des pratiques matrimoniales en Afrique de l'Ouest. *Études Théologiques et Religieuses*, 75(4), 531–548.
- Poda, N. E. (1994). Mariage et « prix de la fiancée » chez les Dagara (Burkina Faso). *Journal des Africanistes*, 64(1), 65–75.
- Pontié, G. (1973). *Les Guiziga du Cameroun septentrional*. ORSTOM.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R., & Daryll Forde, C. (1950). *African systems of kinship and marriage*. Oxford University Press.
- Sahgui, M. (2018). Mariage coutumier et identité culturelle en Afrique subsaharienne. *Revue Internationale des Sciences Humaines et Sociales*, 7(2), 112–130.
- Shipton, P. (2007). *The nature of entrustment: Intimacy, exchange, and the sacred in Africa*. Yale University Press.
- Solus, H. (1959). Le problème actuel de la dot en Afrique noire. *Revue Politique et Juridique de l'Union Française*, 4, 453–471.
- Somda, C. N. (1990). Les cauris du pays Lobi. In M. Fiéloux, J. Lombard & J.-M. Kambou-Ferrand (Eds.), *Image d'Afrique et sciences sociales : Les pays lobi, birifor et dagara (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire et Ghana)* (pp. 233–248). Karthala-ORSTOM.
- Wepukhulu, A. N. (2024). Effects of the transformation of bride wealth on stability in marriage among the Bukusu (Kenya). *IRE Journals*, 7(12), 1–10. <https://www.irejournals.com/formatedpaper/1705853.pdf>
