The Changing Status and Role of Women in Toro (Western Uganda)
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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an analysis of the major changes that have taken place in the status and role of Toro women during the past 130 years. It notes the extent and direction of these changes, their major causes and consequences. The changes are described and analyzed in four successive time periods: 1830-1890, 1891-1935, 1936-1950, 1951-1960. The analysis for each time period is divided into three sections: (1) the major historical events and social system of the period, (2) the status and role of women independent of marriage, and (3) the status and role of women within marriage. The first section provides the historical background and documents, the major sources of change which are then related to specific changes in the two following sections. In the second section, I discuss the jural status of women, their role as child bearers, and their role in the economic, political, and religious life of Toro society. The focus of attention in the third section is on different types of conjugal unions, polygyny, and a Toro woman's changing relationships with her father and especially with her husband. Some attempt is made to compare the changes in different social classes within Toro society, and, finally, to suggest some reasons for the relatively fast rate of change in the...
status and role of women in Toro as compared to some other African societies. In particular I maintain that one of the most important of these reasons is that the status and role of Toro women independent of marriage have had a very important effect upon their status and role within marriage.

I. 1830-1890

1. History and the Social System.

In about 1830 Toro broke away from the parent kingdom of Bunyoro. The kingdom of Toro was at the height of its power during the first two reigns, until the 1870's when Kabarega, King of Bunyoro, launched a formidable expedition against Toro. The wars were followed by famine, and in 1889-90 rinderpest devastated the cattle population of Uganda with incalculable loss of livestock. Outside the turbulent last decade or so of this period, however, no great change occurred in the everyday lives of most Toro people.

Toro society consisted of three categories of people, based on ascribed status and sanctioned in myth: Bito rulers, Huma pastoralists, and Iru agriculturalists. The first two higher status categories, Bito and Huma, were clearly distinguished from the lower status Iru. The distinctions between ruler and ruled, pastoralist and agriculturalist, corresponded to others—such as rich and poor, landlords and tenants, masters and servants—and these distinctions were deemed to be of divine origin. The concept of superordination and subordination was as pervasive and characteristic of Toro as of Nyoro culture. This concept found particularly clear expression in the political hierarchy at the top of which was the king, or Mukama. Below him in the hierarchy were senior and junior chiefs, clan and lineage heads.

The subsistence economy of the country was based on the distinction already mentioned between pastoral and agricultural classes of people, for this distinction rested on the practice of a particular mode of life, as well as on descent. Cultivation was largely the work of women, except that women of high ranking pastoralists and rulers did not work as they had servants. The cultivation of bananas and other crops entailed a fixed habitation and a settled mode of life, which was the basis for a strong and well integrated society.

The kinship system accounted for part of this strength. Lineages were said to be corporate groups occupying a hill or ridge, and they discharged a number of functions, not only in the sphere of kinship,

but in other spheres as well—economic, religious, and political. Lineages were closely knit groups and formed a strong and solid foundation of the social system at the local level. Each lineage had its own religious specialists, including some women who had positions of considerable importance. Supernatural beliefs functioned as a means of social control, and we may note in particular for purposes of this paper that they provided a strong sanction for a father's authority over his daughter.

The pattern of life at this period (excluding perhaps the last decade) reveals a series of interrelated social institutions which insured an ordered existence for the inhabitants of Toro. This was not a rigid order, but such conflicts as existed were "ordinary" and did not lead to any "radical" change. Norms were clear and unequivocal, and it is fair to assume that there was a high degree of conformity to those norms, which embodied traditional values that had been in no way challenged. For example, no one questioned the right of the king, chiefs, lineage and family heads to rule in their respective spheres. Norms were enforced by these people, who were backed up by strong sanctions, supernatural and otherwise. And in the small, closely knit communities, public opinion (also backed by supernatural and other sanctions) was easily mobilized, making it difficult to evade the norms. Security was to be found within some group, and a person could ill afford to flout the norms of his group; there was little room for individualism to develop. It was only in the last decade or so of this period that disorder came into the land.

2. **Women's Status and Role Independent of Marriage.**

a. *Jural.* Apart from the exceptions noted below in which certain women took on male roles, a woman was represented by some man, usually her husband or her father. In practice there was very little need for such representation because she had no legal responsibilities nor privileges; for the wrongs of disobedience and unfaithfulness she was punished by beating. The fact that she had to be represented by a man did not necessarily detract from her status, so long as he looked after her interests properly. Where it was crucially important to her, namely in marital disputes, it is significant that she herself initiated the proceedings, if necessary by running away to her father, though minor disputes would be settled by her father-in-law. In a society in which the roles of husband and wife were clearly defined and strongly sanctioned in a number of ways, we have no reason to doubt that these men upheld the appropriate norms,

even if it meant finding fault with one of their own sex. There was no place for unattached women in Toro for they all needed protection.

b. *Economic.* As elsewhere in Africa, Toro women were (and often still are) considered as inferior to men. It appears from the evidence concerning property rights, however, that the status of women in Toro was somewhat higher than it was in some other societies of Africa. Even in the nineteenth century a Toro woman could inherit from her father on his death if he had no son, and moreover she could do so before another male agnate. This inheritance sometimes included property of considerable value, especially livestock, which was hers to dispose of. If she was married, her husband had no authority over such property and could not dispose of it without her permission, and it was returnable to her on divorce. If she had no brothers, she inherited not only the property, but also her father’s status as householder and became known as the heir. In this case, uxorilocal marriage was practiced, so that in effect she fulfilled several socially important roles ordinarily reserved to men. Doubtless few men died without a son. But it is significant that when this did happen, some important male roles were fulfilled by a daughter. And even in the usual situation, where a man had sons, he would still leave some property to his daughters, albeit little in comparison to what the sons received. Still, the idea that every child of whatever sex should receive something was strongly held.

c. *Child Bearer.* In the nineteenth century a very strong value was attached to virginity, and this is associated with an inferior status for women. Few unmarried girls bore children prior to marriage as there were strong sanctions against this, although much less shame appears to have attached to the bearing of such children by women who had been divorced more than once and who eventually remained in the homes of their fathers. The attitude appears to have been that a woman’s childbearing capacity should not go to waste. Since in Toro a child belongs to its genitor, children could be acquired outside of marriage and this was considered just as desirable as through marriage, for every child increased a man’s “wealth”. The children themselves lost no birthrights because their parents were not married, not even the right to become full heir father.

d. *Political.* Not all women were subordinate to men, the most obvious exceptions being the princesses and other female members of the royal house. Notable among these were the king’s official sister and his mother, both of whom had considerable political power and authority, being really like chiefs for they maintained courts and administered estates¹.

¹ See Beattie, 1960, pp. 30-31.
e. Religious. The most important religious practitioners were doctor-diviners and male and female priests or mediums. The Cwezi spirits were pacified by the sacrifices made to them through accredited mediums, usually girls who had been initiated into the embandwa spirit-possession cult, which was composed mainly of female adherents. One of the chief officiants at an embandwa ceremony was the priestess, for she was believed to have the power to communicate with one or two of the Cwezi spirits. This is evidence that some women had positions of considerable importance at least in the sphere of ritual behavior, and it is said that every lineage had at least one such priestess.

3. Women's Status and Role within Marriage.

a. Customary Marriages and Bridewealth. In the nineteenth century, marriages were arranged by parents for their children while the latter were still very young. The spouses themselves had little say in the choice of a marriage partner. The custom of child betrothal was practiced, and widows were inherited by a clansman of the deceased husband. Bridewealth was paid to the girl's father at marriage, and this established relations between the spouses as well as between their respective lineages. Payment of bridewealth was an expression of the transferral of rights in marriage to a husband by a woman's father, who had great authority over his daughter.

b. Wabusa Marriage. Although bridewealth was almost invariably paid in the past, there were some unions, probably very few, for which this was not done, and these unions were referred to as wabusa or "free" marriages. The legality of conjugal unions did not depend ultimately upon the payment of bridewealth, but rather upon the consent of the girl’s father and certain essential wedding ceremonies. When such a union occurred it probably arose out of a situation in which a rich man gave his daughter in marriage to a poor boy. Such marriages were probably rare because they involved a great loss of prestige on the part of the husband.

c. Polygyny. In the past polygyny was an important conjugal institution discharging a number of functions. It was an ideal, a mark of prestige, an alternative to the divorce of barren wives, and a means of obtaining more children so as to become "wealthy". The combination of girls' early marriage and polygyny was closely related to the inferior status of women. Polygyny always provided a sufficient number of potential husbands—even when the women outnumbered the men—to insure that rights over a woman could be transferred to a husband before she had a chance to protest, which she might have been inclined to do had she been older. Polygyny further provided
for the protection of widows and unattached women generally, and served as well as a means to display lavish hospitality.

d. Husband-Wife Relationship. In the nineteenth century, a wife always remained very subordinate to her husband and was considered an inferior sort of being. She was not allowed to eat with her husband in a society in which eating together signified friendship and amicable relations between those who partook of the meal. Her husband had control over her movements, and he could also order her to sleep with a visiting guest, especially a blood-brother or clansman. She did most of the hard work and was often treated like a servant, not only by her husband, but also by his parents and brothers. During the first years of marriage she was like a stranger among these people. Some informants went so far as to say that women remained good servants to their husbands because they feared to be sold into slavery. In any case, if she was too harshly treated her only defence (though usually an effective one) was to run away, back to the refuge of her own family. The husband maintained control of household affairs and commanded his wife's respect, obedience, and faithfulness, while he himself was allowed to have other wives and sexual relations outside marriage. Male dominance was an expression of the value attached to unequal status relationships, a value embodied in numerous norms of the society. But we have no reason to believe that Toro women themselves (or the men) considered that they suffered unduly under the system. These were the norms of their society and a woman accepted them partly, it is true, because she knew no alternative, nor was there any in a society in which there was no place for unattached women.

II. 1891-1935

1. History and the Social System.

In 1891 the young prince, Kasagama, was put on the throne by the British representative, Lord Lugard. In 1900 the British concluded an Agreement with the Toro, one of the important provisions of which was to set aside some 250 square miles as freehold land in the names of the rulers. Hierarchical ideas remained prominent in Toro, though extreme poverty, economic backwardness, and the abuse of power led the ruled to resent their rulers. Though the old distinction between pastoralists and agriculturalists was disappearing, a division between higher and lower social classes remained. Through loss of approximately 84 per cent of their cattle in rinderpest epidemics, many pastoralists fell to the lower class, while some peasants were able to rise in the hierarchy. The distinction was based largely on
political authority (and land ownership where this went with it), but increasingly on education as well. Most often these also coincided with a distinction based on birth. The new superstructure of power maintained and even expanded the traditional political hierarchy; this expansion removed much of the authority of lineage heads, the effective leaders of the closely knit communities of the past. Public opinion in these communities was no longer so strong, nor so easily mobilized, for alternative norms were available, backed by the power and prestige of the ruling white man and his religion. Traditional norms, so clear and unequivocal in the past, were now challenged also by the increasing migration to Buganda for employment.

Facilitated by Kasagama's zeal for the new religion, both the Catholic and Protestant missions were established in Toro prior to the turn of the century. Because of these missions, education, including girls' education, got off to an early start in Toro, especially among the Protestants and for the upper class. Men were beginning to lose control over their daughters because of the new religion. Schools and churches provided opportunities for boys and girls to meet, which militated against arranged marriages, as well as against the preservation of a girl's virginity. Individualism—now possible because group security was no longer the only security—was beginning to replace the former high degree of conformity to norms. New values were presented as a challenge to the old—hard work for the men as well as for the women, education, new religious beliefs, and a new conception of family life.

By 1935 the ordered existence of the previous century had suffered substantial inroads. War, disease, and famine left the country impoverished. The agents of peace, the British, were also sources of conflicts which were to become "radical", not merely "ordinary".

2. Women's Status and Role Independent of Marriage.

a. Jural. During the first two decades of the present century, the status of women in Toro began to rise, owing in large measure to the progressive views of the king, Kasagama, who, for example, began to allow women to bring cases to court, even against their husbands. Women were no longer publicly flogged for disobedience. These changes came gradually, but by the mid-1930's, more women were initiating cases in court, and women were also held legally responsible for their actions. It may be noted that these women were members of the upper class who had had the benefit of some education in the Christian missions; for a peasant woman to take her husband to court was still hardly thinkable. It is significant for the status of women in Toro that both Christian missions were established there before the
turn of the century and their influence in this sphere has been considerable. Women of the upper class in Toro were receiving some education at an earlier date than in many other East African societies.

b. Economic. A number of court cases shows that the status of women in regard to property matters was rising as well. For example, in 1917 there was a case in which a woman accused a man (certainly a clansman, perhaps her father's brother) of failing to give her 54 cattle which she had inherited, and she was awarded all the cattle she claimed; the defendant was left with only five others. This is not only an instance in which a woman initiated and won a case against a man in the highest court of Toro; it is specific evidence that a woman could and did inherit property of the greatest value, for in 1917 54 cattle was a fortune, in view of the grave loss of livestock in those years.

c. Child Bearer. There was a small increase in this period in the proportion of children born out of wedlock. Sexual relations outside of marriage probably increased in proportion as fathers and husbands were less able to control the movements of their daughters and wives. Here we need to note that, especially after 1920, an increasing number of men were going to Buganda for employment, and at the same time a larger number of boys and girls were going to schools and churches. These two innovations together provided both the opportunity for these sexual relations, as well as the probability that they would be undetected. Though the increase was small it was nevertheless significant, for it represented the beginnings of an important break with tradition. The value placed on bridal virginity, and especially on not producing a child before marriage, remained, but the actions of a minority of girls who were breaking the norms began slowly to have an effect on the attitudes of the people. This affected the position of women in Toro society, though the change of attitude was hardly discernible at this period. Still, the birth of such children became one of the means through which girls were able to defy the authority of their fathers, and it was to become, as well, a means (paradoxically) of raising their own status vis-à-vis men in general. For wherever women are allowed greater sexual freedom their status rises proportionately 2.

d. Political. During this period royal women had less formal political positions, but they gained freehold land like their male counterparts, and they retained political influence behind the scenes.

e. Religious. In spite of the establishment of Christian missions, the practitioners of the traditional religion (including women) main-

1. Toro Kabarole Central Court case number 123 of 1917.
tained positions of considerable authority and influence. Although the missions fostered the formation of women's organizations within the church, relatively few women were yet involved in such activities at this period.

3. Women's Status and Role within Marriage.

a. Customary Marriages and Bridewealth. By the mid-1930's most fathers were still arranging marriages for their daughters, though a few girls rebelled against the authority of their fathers by eloping. This had become possible largely through the establishment of British rule, and with it law and order. Child betrothal was still practiced, though it began to decline at this period. Probably one contributing cause of its decline was the passing of a law against it by King Kasagama and his chiefs. Kasagama had been strongly influenced by Protestant missionaries, and it was partly because of his zealous Christianity that he promoted a number of progressive laws. As law and order had been established, it was now less necessary for widows to be inherited and this custom also began to decline. Bridewealth payments were now being made in cash and this led to some commercialization of the institution. It was beginning to lose its original meaning as part of a gift exchange between affines, and now served as one means of making money.

b. Concubinage. During this period it became clear that what were considered wabusa or "free" marriages in the past could no longer be considered to be legal unions because the consent of the girl's father was lacking. The people themselves do not have any indigenous term for such unions, and they no longer refer to them as wabusa marriages. Nevertheless, their attitude towards such nonlegal unions is clearly different from that towards legal marriages. In particular, a judge will not hear a case in court for adultery with a woman living in such a union. Accordingly, I use the term concubinages to refer to these nonlegal unions which increased considerably by the mid-1930's. This increase was due in part to the stringent economic conditions of the time, which made it difficult to get sufficient money or livestock to pay bridewealth. There was a grave loss of livestock in Toro in the early years of this century and also the district remained economically backward for many years. The increase in concubinages represented an adaptation by the Toro of their conjugal institutions to the changed circumstances under which they were living. It may be that they took up concubinage for what they hoped would be a temporary period; they probably thought that when better times came again in the future, then the usual norm of paying bridewealth would be followed.
c. Ring Marriage. At the beginning of this century, a ready-made and unequivocal norm of conjugal behavior, ring marriage, was embodied in statute law by the British government, and fostered by the Christian missions. Members of the upper class in Toro accepted this new norm quickly, no doubt largely because of its source—a powerful, prestigious, and influential group of new rulers and missionaries. Only a few members of the lower class contracted ring marriage. The new norm set up new standards of monogamy and the indissolubility of the marriage that were in conflict with traditional ideas and therefore difficult for the majority to accept. Furthermore, the ideal of Christian family life put forward by the missions necessitated strong economic foundations that were lacking in Toro, especially among the lower class. This norm was more suitable for the upper class, a larger proportion of whom were becoming Christians and receiving some education. Moreover, ring marriage provided them with a means of attaining high prestige for themselves and exclusiveness for their class. But the contracting of ring marriages did not always prevent men from taking second wives.

d. Polygyny. At this period polygyny had lost none of its former importance as a fundamental aspect of the traditional system of marriage. Opposition to the institution on the part of Christian missionaries was (and still is) very strong, but the Uganda government has maintained a policy of toleration and has not prosecuted for bigamy. Despite conflicting norms and stringent economic conditions that, it could be supposed, might have weakened it, polygyny was largely resistant to change because it was so highly valued by the people and remained of great functional importance.

e. Husband-Wife Relationship. Changes in the husband-wife relationship, as in the father-daughter relationship, had as one of their sources, the greater freedom of movement open to women. Young girls might go to school, some attended church, and many more went to local markets to an extent not possible in the past. Women now could more easily visit neighbors and relatives at greater distances from their homes than they could in the past. At the same time some husbands were going to Kampala for work, and those under whose control they left their wives were less careful than the husbands would have been. Husbands no longer had such firm control over their wives, and this led to mistrust and suspicion, if not to actual adultery. Women’s need for protection was less imperative. The small number of peasant women who had already had the benefit of at least a few years of school provided an example that furthered the rising aspirations of peasant women. Although women certainly did not question that they were subordinate to men, conflict arose in the differing degree to which that value was accepted by men as opposed to women,
and in the ways in which it was expressed the attitudes and behavior of both men and women.

In the early years of this century a wife continued to be regarded as an inferior being who did most of the work, and, strictly speaking, was never allowed to eat with her husband, for example (though this may have happened in private)\(^1\). It was King Kasagama who started eating with his wife\(^2\). Informants say that it was not until about the 1930’s that the majority of ordinary peasants started eating with their wives, and even then these were mainly Christians. Observers agree that cultivation was the work of women, and that men did as little as possible\(^3\).

But these attitudes were beginning slowly to change. We have noted the first case on record, in 1917, in which a woman took her husband to court. In another case a wife took her husband to court for beating her; he was sentenced to three months imprisonment and told not to beat his wife again\(^4\). Such a case would have been unheard of in the past. It became possible as women got more education, and probably also because the judge, Kasagama, was a very strong Christian with progressive views.

The superiority of a man over a woman had been one of the basic foundations of the Toro man’s whole way of life. There was no change in this fundamental attitude, and most men saw no reason why there ever should be. As against this, women were beginning, slowly but significantly, to aspire to a new kind of relationship with their husbands—subordinate in some respects to be sure, but not entirely so. Women’s expectations were beginning to change, but not men’s. The role expectations of husband and wife, therefore, were beginning to be seen differently by each spouse. New ideas about the relationship between husband and wife were being fostered through education and Christianity, and these were accepted more easily and quickly by women than by men. This has led to conflicts, and so to further changes in the husband-wife relationship.

This sort of strain was surely not manifest in every conjugal relationship, or even perhaps in the majority. Certainly among the upper class there was much less cause for conflict for these women had traditionally held a higher position. One of the major sources of conflict between husband and wife was absent among the upper class, for chiefs had servants instead of wives to do their hard labor. Upper-class men also were probably less suspicious of their wives, who were accepting Christian ideas about remaining faithful to their husbands.

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4. Toro Kabarole Central Court case number 27 of 1919.
Among the lower class, on the whole, women certainly remained entirely deferential and respectful to their husbands, and most were obedient and faithful as well; for the time being the change was one of degree, not of kind. And the frequency with which conflicts arose must not be exaggerated.

III. 1936-1950

1. History and the Social System.

Constitutional development in Toro was very slow and throughout the war underwent little change. The Native Courts Ordinance of 1940 reconstituted the courts, but they still contained only official members and the chiefs still had both executive and judicial powers. This ordinance had important consequences for ring marriage. In spite of prior objections by the missions, it empowered the native courts to deal with cases involving such marriages where the return of bride-wealth and adultery were concerned, though they had no jurisdiction in regard to divorce. Many people did not understand this distinction, however, since for them the return of bridewealth meant divorce. This led to a confusing situation in which people who had not been legally divorced according to Uganda Protectorate law nevertheless remarried under native custom. But the government still refused to prosecute for bigamy and the official attitude of tolerance towards polygyny was therefore clear.

During this period in Toro great strides were made in education, including a significant increase in the proportion of girls attending primary schools. But, while school attendance increased, church attendance decreased. Democratic ideas made little headway against the monopoly of political power concentrated at the top. But higher education was now leading to other occupations than politics and the upper class was becoming more diversified.

Agricultural development lagged behind, as cash crops were not a major source of income, at least for the Toro. The proportion of cattle to people remained low and pastoralism as a separate way of life was dying out. Lacking experience, training, and capital, the Toro made little advance in commerce. Near the town of Fort Portal opportunities for earning a wage were most plentiful and there, also, a larger proportion of men already had some higher education and

2. HAILEY, 1950, pp. 57-58.
3. For examples see MORRIS, 1960, pp. 201-202.
were taking up salaried positions. Their wealth was often sufficient to invest in land.

In the rural counties to the east, however, there were few opportunities for earning cash. This, together with a number of other factors, led to labor migration's becoming a habit of life for the young men of these areas. In addition, a considerable number of women and young girls were migrating to Kampala. For both sexes it was a two-way traffic, providing a means of escape from traditional norms as well as an avenue for the importation of new attitudes and practices, many of which concerned conjugal institutions.

By 1950, the lot of the common man had clearly improved; there was no more famine, and he could get at least a trickle of cash in addition to the products of his subsistence farming. Around Fort Portal incomes were considerably higher and the standard of living for the whole family rose accordingly. When men migrated for work to Kampala, however, the vast majority spent most of their earnings on themselves, leaving relatively little for their families.

2. Women's Status and Role Independent of Marriage.

a. Jural. By 1950, the number of court cases initiated by women against men began to increase. Already by the 1940's women were subject to the same fines and imprisonment as men. It now became possible for a woman to become the responsible guardian of a child. One of the most important changes that occurred was the much greater freedom of movement women gained by 1950. Some used it to go all the way to Kampala, others to go to live with a man in concubinage. In either case it provided an escape from parental authority or from an unwanted husband. This opportunity was of crucial significance for the status of women vis-à-vis men, and the fact that Toro women did not hesitate to exercise their newly gained freedom was an indication of their ability to grasp that significance and to use the opportunity to their own advantage. This freedom had become a weapon in the struggle between men and women, and by 1950 there was no doubt that women were slowly winning the battle.

b. Economic. The gradual changes in a Toro woman's legal status were occurring at about the same time as she was slowly beginning to gain greater economic independence. A few women were becoming independent householders, and perhaps the increase in the number of such women was made easier in Toro than in other societies because, even in the past, some women had had households of their own. The most numerous cases in which women took men to court involved disputed inheritance especially over cattle; in all these cases the woman was awarded either all the cows or at least most of them,
the number of cattle in dispute ranging between 2 and 30\(^1\). In one dispute over land a woman was awarded 8 square miles of freehold land\(^2\).

c. Child Bearer. By 1950, there was a marked increase not only in the number of children born out of wedlock, but also in the proportion of women, especially previously unmarried women, who were producing them. The old distinction between a previously unmarried girl and a divorcee was becoming blurred, especially as girls were now getting married at a somewhat later age, and there were more relatively young divorcees. This increase is a reflection of the decreasing authority of fathers over their daughters and is probably also related to the increasing concern of men for proof of fertility prior to marriage. It is a further indication of the rising status of women who were now being allowed (or, rather, who managed to obtain) greater freedom in all spheres, including extramarital sexual relations.

During this period the opportunities for girls and boys to meet increased again with the growth in school attendance and in freedom of movement generally. The attitude against previously unmarried girls bearing children out of wedlock was much less strong than in the past. Informants say that the boy was often fined only a calabash or two of beer, though he had to support the child if he wanted it. In itself fornication with an unmarried girl was not an actionable offence in court. Though it was a discredit to the girl’s family, so many girls were beginning to produce children out of wedlock that many parents accepted it with resignation. Whatever shame was still attached to it was further diminished by the increasing desire of men for proof of fertility. It led much less often to the breaking off of marriage negotiations, and even if it did the girl could easily find another suitor.

A few cases of disputed paternity reached the courts, but otherwise—that is in the very great majority of cases—the father of the child was named by its mother. If a girl did not recognize a particular man as father of her child, there was little he could do about it. Even the courts were now giving much greater weight to the woman’s word\(^3\).

These children born out of wedlock now provided a means for daughters not only to gain greater independence from their fathers, but also to raise their status vis-à-vis men in general. This was true

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1. Toro Kabarole Central Court Appeal case number 15 of 1940, and Toro Kabarole Central Court case number 6 of 1947.
2. Toro Kabarole Central Court Civil case number 1 of 1937.
3. Toro Kabarole Central Court Appeal cases numbers 28 of 1938 and 21 of 1943; Mwenge County case number 10 of 1938, and Burahya County Civil Appeal case number 21 of 1947.
because women gained not only greater sexual freedom, but also greater powers to determine paternity in a society where men were very anxious to obtain possession of these children. As these children grew they provided assistance and support, moral and ultimately financial, for their mothers.

d. **Political and Religious.** The evidence I have suggests that there was little change at this period in the status and role of Toro women as regards politics and religion.

3. **Women’s Status and Role within Marriage.**

a. **Customary Marriages and Bridewealth.** By 1950 women began to assume much greater responsibility both for initiating as well as for breaking up their own conjugal unions. Many more were beginning to force their own choice of a spouse upon their parents by eloping. Opportunities to escape from traditional norms were due not only to the enormous increase in the freedom of movement as such, but also to the existence of some place to go, in particular the town of Kampala. The payment of bridewealth did not protect a man’s rights in his wife unless he fulfilled his obligations to her, especially her adequate support. The frequency of bridewealth payments decreased sharply (especially prior to cohabitation) and this was a reflection of the fact that Toro fathers were losing much of their former authority and control over their daughters.

b. **Concubinage.** By 1950 the number of concubinages increased enormously, so much so that they constituted almost 80 per cent of all unions contracted during this period. But it was no longer because men were so poor that most of them did not pay bridewealth. Rather, it was simply that the advantages of not paying bridewealth outweighed the disadvantages. In the first place, concubinage provided the opportunity for young people, especially girls, to choose their own spouses. The man had little to lose by not paying bridewealth, which in practice was not very useful in insuring legal protection for his sexual rights in his wife and with or without which the children she produced by him would be his. With the rise of individualism there was no longer sufficient community pressure to force conformity to the norm. A few fathers were hesitant to ask for bridewealth for fear of having to repay it quickly. Some girls born out of wedlock had no father to accept bridewealth for them. What young people were learning of conjugal behavior while in Kampala found easy acceptance in Toro. Concubinage, as an unstable type of conjugal union (it is broken as soon as either spouse leaves) was admirably suited to the needs of both sexes striving to adjust to their changing role expectations. As such it flourished, especially among the lower class, where
from the beginning there had been greater sources of conflict between husband and wife than among the upper class.

As an easily broken union, concubinage served to allow men and women to continue searching for a spouse whose expectations of the conjugal relationship were in line with their own. Most men searched for a traditional type of wife, whereas some young women sought a modern type of husband. This was a very important function in view of the gradualness of the change in the role expectations of husband and wife, a change that is still going on and is at the basis of most other changes in conjugal institutions in the past 60 years or so.

c. *Ring Marriage.* The proportion of ring marriages being contracted had decreased by 1950. This was partly related to the declining influence of the Church generally. More specifically, marriage was no longer expected to be as stable as it was in the past, and divorce was much less morally reprehensible. Therefore, fewer people were prepared to commit themselves to what was supposed to be a lifelong union. The standard set by the missions was still too high for the majority. Even the upper class sometimes modified ring marriage to conform to traditional values, especially concerning polygyny and divorce.

d. *Polygyny.* Though by 1950 polygyny was losing some of its functions and had decreased in frequency near the town of Fort Portal, it still served as a mark of prestige, despite 60 years of Christianity in the district. Again, government policy did nothing to weaken it as an institution. Polygyny now provided an opportunity for marriage for the surplus of nubile girls, at least in the rural areas, who themselves wanted to marry at an early age. Now the combination of early marriage and polygyny was becoming more of an aid than a hindrance to women’s independence.

e. *Husband-Wife Relationship.* During this period both sexes still accepted that a woman should be subordinate to a man. Again, it was in the degree and manner in which that value found expression that the conflict continued. Now the conflict moved more frequently into the economic sphere of the household. As times were somewhat better and more cash was available, women began to expect a larger share of the family income. The absence of a greater number of men working in Kampala contributed to the conflict on the economic as well as the sexual level. If a husband suspected that his wife committed adultery in his absence, she, on her part, often felt that he was spending on other women much of his money that should have been spent on her and their children. Young men and women conceived of the roles of husband and wife in different ways. The conflicts that arose as a result of these different viewpoints were an expression of the struggle to work out a mutually acceptable degree of subordina-
tion (or equality) for the wives. Few norms now commanded unquestioned acceptance by both sexes, and each sex was striving to establish its own ideas as to what the husband-wife relationship should be.

Though more prevalent than in the past, the kinds of conflicts described here were certainly not manifest in every conjugal relationship. Again, they were probably found less often among the upper class for the reasons noted earlier. However, it seems likely that there was now less difference between the two classes as regards the degree of equality between husband and wife. The economic difference remained, of course, but as more luxury goods became available, upper-class women desired these (e.g. articles of clothing, shoes, jewelry) from their husbands as often as lower class women desired an extra pound of meat or sugar from theirs. Moreover, some lower-class girls were getting primary, if not higher, education, and their husbands may not have had much more. Making for greater equality was the ease with which lower-class women could terminate their unions, and here they had an advantage over women who contracted ring marriages. The latter could, of course, separate from their husbands (for example, if he brought a second wife into the house), but they were less free to remarry elsewhere. That is, lower-class women in concubinage could easily threaten to leave husbands who treated them badly, and this was perhaps a more effective means than higher education of attaining the measure of equality they sought. Furthermore, many upper-class women did not take jobs after marriage and also probably did comparatively little in their gardens, whereas lower-class women continued to make a very important economic contribution to the household (often even greater than their husbands') and this inevitably must have enhanced their status vis-à-vis their husbands.

IV. 1951-1960

1. Recent Events and the Social System.

During the decade of the 1950's education in Toro, as elsewhere in Uganda, got a tremendous push through increased government spending. Girls' education, though far behind an ideal standard, still made considerable progress in this period over the previous one, and girls' higher education in Toro is ahead of that in most other districts in Uganda. Women's clubs are very active and play an important educational role.

About half the population profess Christianity, but relatively few are deeply convinced. Beliefs in spirits and sorcery are still very strong. The Church is no longer the center of the lives of the Christians,
and, for many Christianity and church-going are little more than symbols of respectability. The missions have continued to hold out for the ideal in marriage, but have been criticized for insisting upon their own conditions.

The majority in central Toro are subsistence farmers; there has been no great expansion in agriculture, and cash crops are still not a major source of income, at least for the Toro. Increasing numbers are going into wage-earning employment, especially near the town where more jobs are to be found. The availability of ready cash has led to a strong emphasis on individualism, not nearly so apparent in the outlying areas where cash is still hard to come by.

Both men and women, especially from central Toro, continue to migrate to Kampala in increasing numbers. This labor migration makes relatively little contribution to the Toro rural economy. Some money comes back, but usually in small amounts and infrequently. This is partly related to a conflict of goals between the men and their families. Labor migration provides an alternative occupation to a fully acceptable male economic role in the villages for many men in central Toro; though it allows these men to achieve their short-term goals, it is a very ineffective role as far as their own families are concerned. Village families have been acquiring new goals, especially that of a higher standard of living. In this context the traditional male roles of husband and father are weakening. Largely because of their inability or unwillingness to make an appropriate economic contribution to their families, combined with their absenteeism, men are losing the respect of their wives and children, as well as much of the authority they have traditionally held over them. Life in Kampala is now an alternative not only for a woman wanting to escape from the drudgery of domestic life and the dominance of a man, but also for a man wanting—among other things—to escape from a wife who has come to expect a larger share of his earnings than he is willing to give her.

Democratic ideas have been slow to gain a foothold in Toro, especially at the upper levels of the hierarchy; at the lower levels, however, there appears to be a measure of real democracy. Hierarchical ideas still remain important, though not as all pervading as in the past. Egalitarianism is slowly being accepted as a value, and this acceptance appears to be affecting the rising status of women.

The lineage has now given way to the extended family and the neighbourhood as important elements in the social organization. Class distinctions are more evident now than a decade ago and more apparent near the town than in the outlying areas; this relates largely to the greater wealth of the area near the town, deriving from better employment opportunities as well as from the attraction of wealthy people.
to the proximity of the town. The distinction between two major social classes is based largely on wealth and higher education and is partly a heritage from the past. Upper-class people nowadays tend to coincide largely with their counterparts of the past and their descendants. Lower-class men resent changes and consider that they do not have the respected station in life that was the lot of their fathers; this is correlated with the marked decrease in the number and prestige of male economic roles in the villages, as well as with the weakening of men's authority in their roles as husbands and fathers.

2. Women's Status and Role Independent of Marriage.

a. *Jural.* In the past in Toro, as elsewhere in Africa, women remained minors all their lives. This is no longer true, and this is certainly one of the most significant changes that have been taking place in Toro during the past half century. Nowadays, Toro girls may be said to attain majority status at age 16, according to the Chief Judge. At that age they are legally bound to represent themselves in court. They may initiate legal action, as well as be fined and imprisoned by the court. An increasing number of women are now taking cases to court, including those against men.

Nowadays a woman may even be expected to repay her own bridewealth, which she usually does by finding another husband or a job, or cultivating cash crops. I know of a case in which a man sued his own wife in court for return of bridewealth, and the court ordered her to repay it. And there are other similar cases.

Also nowadays at 16 a girl may live alone or with a man in concubinage. When she reaches that age, her father can no longer claim legal custody over her; that is, if a girl of 16 runs away to work in the towns or to live with a man, her father can take no legal action to bring her back to his home.

b. *Economic.* Education above the primary level is now one of the important means to financial independence for young women. The most usual training is for a position as a teacher or a nurse. Other women who have had some secondary schooling are taking up positions as clerks, especially near the town, though also in the outlying areas. An increasing number of women are taking over men’s positions as tailors. It was suggested to me that this is because employers have discovered young women to be more hard working, loyal, and efficient than men.

As to those young women who are not getting an education, some

1. Burahya County Civil case number 29 of 1954.
2. Burahya County Appeal case number 9 of 1951, and Rutete Gomborra (Burahya County) case number 3 of 1951.
come in the town of Fort Portal and manage to find jobs as housegirls and nursemaids. Others work hard in their gardens and support themselves through the sale of cash crops, perhaps combined with the sale of articles of handicrafts such as basketry, beaded necklaces, embroidered tablecloths, and knitted sweaters. Some women have managed to save enough money to open a shop or a bar. It seems likely that some women are more successful at trading than men, in part, it is said, because they trust each other more than the men do and are therefore willing to co-operate. For example, one woman may own a bar and pay for the permit, but allow her friends to sell their beer there for a share of the profits.

Toro women have always had some important rights in property, and these are becoming increasingly significant as greater wealth becomes available and is invested in property. There is no specific ruling in Toro concerning the proportion of property that a daughter, as opposed to a son, should inherit from her father. All informants agree, however, the general rule is that a daughter should receive less than a son, but that every child should receive something. I have even heard of several wills in which a daughter has been appointed as heir of the deceased, in spite of the fact that the man had a capable living son, and then the daughter, as heir, has received a share of the property approximately equal to, or even more than, that given to a son. Thus, although some women inherit only a small share, they usually get something. Others, as in previous periods, inherit property of considerable value, not only livestock, but increasingly nowadays freehold land.

Not only permanent rights in freehold land, but also rights of occupation in customary land may be obtained by women in Toro. These latter rights may be acquired by request from the parish chief. According to customary law, the chief is bound to grant the request if the woman can provide the means to build a house on the land, and an increasing number of women can now do so. This pertains to any adult woman including widows.

That women should be considered on very nearly the same level as men in such an important matter as rights to major property like land is an important indication of their relatively high status. I say very nearly the same level because, although a daughter has the right to inherit land, if she is married the question does not usually arise (except in the case of freehold land), and if it does, in practice she is likely (though not always) to get a smaller portion than a son.

c. Child Bearer. The number and percentage of children born out of wedlock remained about the same as in the previous period.

1. These are discussed at greater length in M. L. Perlman, 1960.
Most such children appear to have been fathered by men of the upper class and by those who have spent several years working in Kampala. Among women, migration to Kampala is also associated with bearing children out of wedlock. The frequency of such births is largely a result of the absence of strong sanctions and of means of birth control, together with a later age of marriage nowadays. The frequency is also associated with important functions, for such a child provides its father with a part of his “wealth”, and may lead to a relationship with the child’s mother that serves as an alternative to polygyny. These children may provide a means of testing the fertility of a prospective wife, as well as the means of attracting a husband. Bearing children out of wedlock is clearly associated with the increasing independence of women, both initially in helping to free a woman from the parental home and in later life when such children may provide a form of old-age security. Women have considerable power to name the father of their child, and this much enhances their status vis-à-vis men. They are legally entitled to retain custody of their children until the children reach the age of seven, but in practice they are often allowed to keep them for several more years. How well such a child is supported depends partly on how much his father wants to retain his custody, and partly on the wealth of the father. Some such children receive very little support, others are sent through secondary school. The children themselves lose no birthrights; the attitude of society towards them is not at all adverse, and in adult life they suffer from no disabilities arising from their birth out of wedlock.

d. **Political.** Women are now represented on political councils at the highest as well as the lowest levels, and vote in national as well as local elections. Toro was the first district in Uganda to pass a bylaw to the effect that women earning a salary of 100 shillings per month or more should pay an education tax of 5 shillings per year, which is the same as for men.

The passing of this law has led to an important development for women in Toro, because it was the basis for the formation of the Toro Women’s Organization (*Abatorokati Abaitakamu*) in February of 1960. When the bylaw was passed a few educated women objected to it; they came together on the education tax issue, and then decided to form a club. There were about 20 of them who elected officers and sent a delegation to see the Prime Minister of Toro about the bylaw, which they said was unclear. There was a certain amount of opposition to the organization at the beginning, but this now appears to have ceased.

The Toro Women’s Organization has been involved in politics at the highest level. For example, they sent a delegation to the Toro Constitutional Committee to put proposals to it that the constitution
should contain safeguards for the rights of legally married women and their children, as against concubines. They also sent telegrams to the Colonial Secretary in London to request him to grant federal status to Toro District. When the Prime Minister of Uganda visited Toro, "30 angry representatives" of the organization "accused him of being responsible for nearly everything that was going wrong politically in Toro".

The organization was started by Toro women for themselves, but some Nyoro women, resident in Toro, have also joined it. It was suggested to me that the organization could one day become an intertribal movement. It is said further that Toro men want to join the organization because they see that the women are putting them to shame; they admit that the women have taken the initiative to unite the Toro. A few men come to meetings as speakers and give advice to the women, but their number does not exceed about five. In April of 1962 it had not yet been definitely decided whether men would be allowed to join the organization officially, but I was told that this was unlikely.

e. **Religious.** For a number of reasons traditional religious practices are still strongly valued and this means that women practitioners continue to discharge important religious functions. The *embandwa* spirit possession cult, composed of female members only, is still very important especially in times of major illness. Along these same lines we may note also that some women have considerable knowledge of native herbs which they are often called upon to use in dealing with relatively minor illnesses.

f. **Implications of Women's Status and Role for Marriage.** The status and role of women in Toro, independent of marriage, have become considerably enhanced in a number of ways as noted above. This has important implications for marriage; it means not only that a married woman may not consider the prospect of becoming a divorcee unattractive, which may well be one of the important factors that would influence her to break up her marriage, but also that an unmarried woman, even one who had never been married before, may not be very anxious to marry at all—or at least may put it off for some time and become excessively choosy about the man she would be prepared to marry. The age at marriage for girls appears to be rising, especially near the towns.

1. *Uganda Argus*, 23 March 1962; the women's tax issue was reported in this newspaper on 1 March 1961, 7 March 1961, and 4 August 1961.

2. This is discussed in E. H. Perlman, 1959, pp. 47-50.

3. This cult has been described in some detail by J. H. M. Beattie for the Nyoro and it is essentially the same in Toro; see for example, J. H. M. Beattie, 1957 and 1961.

4. For a detailed account, see E. H. Perlman, 1959.
Even if she is unmarried, a woman does not have to give up what is considered the *raison d’être* of her being—children. A virgin bride is becoming a rarity, and this goes hand in hand with the emancipation of women. Their power to determine the paternity of children has been particularly important in raising their status vis-à-vis men. Indeed, the very considerable rise in the status of women over the past half-century needs to be seen in relation to the loss of a number of important male economic roles and to the weakening of the authority of men both as husbands and fathers, during the same period.

These possibilities for living a single life independent of men are very important for the status of women. But of course the majority of women prefer marriage. If they give up an independent life, however, they still hope and expect that their husbands will provide a fair share of the material benefits that could have been theirs had they remained single. Some women are able to achieve the dual aims of marital harmony and a fair share of the material benefits of life because their husbands have accepted views of the husband-wife relationship similar to those of their wives. Other women fall far short of achieving them, but remain married largely for the sake of their children; still others prefer the status of divorcee. Where the two aims are not achieved, the conflict is often greater for upper- than for lower-class women. The former have greater expectations, are more financially dependent upon their husbands, and are more limited in the alternatives open to them to solve the conflict. In particular, divorce and remarriage are more difficult for upper- than for lower-class women. Even if actual divorce does not occur, the greater ease with which it can be attained, if necessary, among lower-class women, often serves to prevent their husbands from making the conflict worse than it would be otherwise.

3. **Women’s Status and Role within Marriage.**

a. *Customary Marriages and Bridewealth.* At the present time the custom of child betrothal has almost completely disappeared, and widow inheritance is very rare. Proper customary marriages (bridewealth paid prior to cohabitation) are contracted only infrequently nowadays by the younger generation. Indeed, it may be that this type of conjugal union, as well as the custom of bridewealth itself, may disappear in Toro. This may be interpreted as one of the most, if not the most, significant change that has been taking place in conjugal institutions in Toro during the past half century. In essence, it is a change in the father-daughter relationship so that to an increasing degree a woman, not her father, transfers rights in herself to her husband.

b. *Concubinage.* At the present time concubinage is by far the
most frequent type of union being contracted. It is distinguished from prostitution on the one hand and from legal marriage on the other, though it appears to be moving toward greater legal recognition. It may be considered to be the norm for the lower class. The high frequency of this type of union is associated with the desire for it by young people and with the inability or unwillingness of the woman's father to prevent it. Young men like to "try out" a girl before committing themselves to more permanent ties. Some girls have the same attitude, and whereas others would prefer that bridewealth be paid, this is less important to them than maintaining their conjugal relationships. What young people really want (women at an earlier age than men) is a permanent and harmonious conjugal relationship. The institution of concubinage allows them to strive with a minimum of conflict to achieve this aim because they can—when they consider it necessary—easily continue searching for a more suitable mate. This aim is often very difficult to achieve because of the rapidly changing relationship between husband and wife. Concubinage also allows that relationship to continue to change with a minimum of strain. Thus, concubinage emerged and developed as a highly functional adaptation to changing circumstances, and in particular it has provided a means for social changes to occur in the relationships between men and women with a minimum of conflict, even though conflict has often been considerable.

c. Ring Marriage. At the present time only a small minority contract ring marriages, and again many are of the upper class, for whom this type of union may even be said to be the norm. A major conflict has arisen between the desire to follow the rules of Christianity and also to gain the prestige of a ring marriage, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the reluctance to commit oneself to what is considered a permanent union, without sufficient confidence that a relationship with the first spouse chosen will be harmonious and successful. This conflict is associated with the rapidly changing role expectations of husband and wife. Ring marriage is ill-adapted to the present needs of young people striving to achieve a permanent relationship with one spouse or another whose expectations of the husband-wife relationship are fairly similar to their own. This largely accounts for the small number of people now contracting this type of union. As in the past, even some of those who do so find it necessary to modify ring marriage to suit their own needs better.

d. Polygyny. Polygyny remains about as common as it was in the previous period, especially in the rural areas, and this appears to be associated with its continuing functional importance. Polygyny continues to provide for a surplus of women and may offer a means of escape from the parental home or make possible marriage with a
man providing better support than do most monogamists. For a man, polygyny remains an important means of gaining prestige and "wealth" in the form of more food, children, and women to serve him. If there is any decrease in the institution, it is near the town, where women are somewhat more highly educated, have greater opportunities to become financially independent, and therefore more often refuse to become second wives.

e. Husband-Wife Relationship. The man is still the dominant partner in the husband-wife relationship. As in the past, it is the degree of subordination that is at issue. On the whole, men are successful in asserting their dominance because if one woman will not accept it, another one usually will. Those who will not accept male dominance often remain divorcees. Nevertheless, considerable conflict arises in working out an acceptable degree of subordination in specific situations, especially in the economic sphere.

Concubinages usually show signs of strain in the early months and years of the unions because the spouses may have widely differing conceptions of the husband-wife relationship. This may well lead to a dissolution of the union, especially if the woman is still young enough to remarry easily. If she stays, she may well be getting better treatment than many a woman married legally. In ring marriages among the upper class, the expectations of the spouses are usually more similar from the beginning, and sometimes this leads to a close relationship of mutual respect, service, and understanding. In other unions, however, this kind of relationship is not achieved. Although a few women try to rule their husbands, usually the man remains clearly the dominant partner, largely because of his superior economic position. Being secure in his position, he may sometimes assert his dominance over his wife to a greater degree than would a man living in concubinage.

Most women do not demand absolute equality with men, but rather a sufficient measure of it to insure that they obtain their fair share of whatever life has to offer, including greater freedom and responsibility to participate in decisions that affect them and their families. These demands have involved conflict and strain, often to a considerable degree, but such conflicts are an inevitable part of the process that has been going on now for half a century or more—that of redefining the roles of the sexes in relation to one another.

Conclusion

Changes in the status and role of Toro women result from a number of factors, and the relevance of these has been noted at various points in the discussion. Some of the most important are the establishment
of British rule and all that it entailed, including bringing peace to a society at war with its neighbours and thus facilitating freedom of movement, the introduction of a cash economy and modern systems of communication and transportation, the establishment of the Christian missions and the education and ideas about the husband-wife relationship that they have fostered, the proximity of the major urban center of Kampala, and the nature of the traditional social system in Toro.

In addition to these, the larger number of adult women than men in Toro, among other factors, has been relevant to the continued frequency of polygyny in some parts of Toro. This same demographic factor, plus the rule that children always belong to their fathers, not their mothers, has put men at a considerable advantage in their relationships with women, and these are important reasons why men are able to maintain their dominance, if not over one woman, then over another.

The personality of Kasagama with his Christian and progressive views, has been an important factor in raising the status of women in Toro, as have the liberal views of some native court judges. Decisions handed down from the British courts have also been important here, as well as the adaptability of native customary law in Toro.

Changes in the status and role of women seem to have proceeded fairly rapidly in Toro, and this may be related to a particular combination of factors. First of all, even in the nineteenth century the status of Toro women independent of marriage appears to have been somewhat—perhaps considerably—higher than in many other parts of Africa. I suggest that this was a major factor in the later relatively rapid rise in the status of women not only independent of, but also within, marriage. In more general terms, the status of married women has been strongly affected by the position of their sex independent of marriage.

For example, women could and did initiate court proceedings even against their husbands, and they became legally responsible guardians for children. Nowadays once a girl reaches the age of 16, her father can no longer claim legal custody over her; that is, she can live wherever and with whomever she pleases, and she may even be expected to repay her own bridewealth.

Toro women have always had important rights in property. Their husbands could not dispose of this property without their permission, and it was returnable on divorce. Their property rights have been enforced by the courts. In more recent years Toro women have gained greater economic independence, and some have set themselves up as independent householders. Although most prefer marriage, these opportunities put women in a relatively strong position vis-à-vis
men should they decide to remain unmarried or divorced, or should the man decide he wants to take a second wife.

Even if a woman remains unmarried she does not have to give up the *raison d'être* of her being—children. As children born out of wedlock grow, they provide assistance and support, moral and ultimately financial in the form of old-age security, for their mothers. Alternately, women who want to get married can use their childbearing capacities to attract the husband they want by providing proof of fertility, and through their powers of naming the fathers of their children.

Finally, the status and role of women in the spheres of politics and religion provide them with opportunities for participation and contribution to major social events in Toro society independently of their marital status. That is, a Toro woman no longer has to get married in order to fulfil her adult role and to feel that she is a fully participating and contributing member of her society. In all these ways, then, the status and role of Toro women independent of marriage have had important effects upon their status and role within marriage.

Other factors related to the relatively rapid rise in the status of Toro women may also be mentioned. The Christian missions got off to an early start in Toro and, partly through the personality of Kasagama, have had an important influence on the status of women. The fortuitous event of the grave loss of livestock at the beginning of this century, plus the fact that for a number of reasons Toro long remained economically backward, provided further conditions for the emergence and development of concubinage, which has now become by far the most prevalent type of conjugal union, and one in which women enjoy relatively high status vis-à-vis their husbands. Other important factors include the sex ratio and the proximity of Toro to the urban center of Kampala. Although European contact has penetrated to every part of Africa, these factors would appear to be the most important in accounting for differing rates of change in the status and role of women as between Toro and some other African societies.

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