

**CHANGE AND CONTINUITY OF TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE SYSTEM IN
UGHELLI, 1999-2016**

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JULY, 2021

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE BACHELOR OF ART (B.A.)
HONOURS DEGREE IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND DIPLOMACY
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY
NIGERIA**

JULY, 2021

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was done by **GLORY URINRIN AMREDE**, in the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin-City, under my supervision.

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Date _____

Date _____

DEDICATION

This project work is dedicated to God Almighty and to my Parents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first appreciate Almighty God, my creator whose grace and unending mercy got me thus far.

I want to express my unreserved gratitude to my supervisor Dr. J. C. Nwaka for her unending advice and love shown towards me to ensure the completion of my project.

My gratitude also to the Ag. Head of Department, F. Ikponmwosa, whose profound diplomacy, both in academic, and other spheres of life is worthy of emulation. I am equally thankful to all teaching staffs of the Department of History and International Studies, particularly

Prof. Leo Otoide, Prof. Eddy Erhagbe, Prof. E. A. Ifidon, Dr. Odion Osiki, Dr. Charles Osarumwense, Dr. Daniel Nweze, for the meticulous way of teaching, the love shown to me. I am indeed grateful to them all.

To my parents, Comrade. and Mrs. Amrede, my backbone, I am grateful and I will continue to make you proud

To my siblings, I love you all and together we shall achieve greater heights. And special thanks goes to Uncle Samson, Uncle Godwin, and Uncle Joe.

Finally, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to all my friends Emerald, Grace, Praise, and my ones. People who I met in the course of pursuing this degree, who have enriched and impacted my life in so many ways. Thank you all.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The definition of marriage varies according to cultures. Marriage to a lay man is the legal union of a man and woman as husband and wife. In some jurisdictions, it is a union between two persons in the same sex usually entailing legal obligations of each person to the other.¹

Marriage is also called matrimony or wedlock. It is a socially or ritually recognized union or legal contract between spouses that established rights and obligations between them and their in-laws, as well as the society in general.² When defined broadly; marriage can be recognized by a state, and organization or a religious body, a tribal groups, local community or peers. Oxford advanced dictionary defines marriage as the legal relationship between a husband and a wife. According to the definition above, which states that marriage could also be a union between two persons of the same sex which has a legal backing.³ However,, this research stands with the definition that are based on marriage being a union between a man and a woman which is the most acceptable in Ughelli land and not the other way round.

The Ughelli kind of marriage extends beyond the couples direct involvement. It embraces the extended families of the spouses. Indeed Ughelli marriage of two families. This so because the families play very central roles in ensuring the success of marital relationships from the time of courtship through the marriage negotiation to the

contracting of the marriage. It is clear here that there is unity among the couples, according to the Ughelli, traditional marriage is an institution that unites families together not just the couples, also the marriage contract involves both families from the beginning to the end.⁴ The tie of the family is so much that even when the man dies, according to tradition, the marriage contracts with the woman continues and the woman could be given to another man in the family of the dead husband. Thus, it said that Ughelli traditional marriage endures beyond the life of the husband, in fact it is the wife's life span. This is due to the fact that on the death of the husband the wife is passed onto a number of husbands in the family for continuity of the marriage.⁵

By implication, marriage is seen in Ughelli tradition as that institution which endures for life. The wife is a wife of the man's family not just the husband alone. From the day she is married into the family she becomes part of the family, she is referred to as "Our Wife" by members of the husband's family and continue the marriage being pass to another member of the family. Moreover, in the definition of Ughelli traditional marriage. Polygamy is an accepted norm. But with the introduction of Christianity and western culture, certain norms and culture at the traditional marriage institutions in Ughelli kingdom has been abolished.⁶

Therefore, this study attempts to highlight the place of changes and continuity of traditional marriage system in Ughelli.

This study therefore would be a compliment to the general understanding of how westernization has change the socio-cultural institutions of marriages institution in the history of Ughelli chiefdom in particular and Urhobo in general.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine change and continuity in Urhobo traditional marriage with case study of Ughelli Chiefdom from 1999 to 2016 and the objectives are as follows.

- a. To unveil the norms and tradition of marriage activities in pre-colonial Urhobo land.
- b. To inspect the traditional origin of Ughelli people.
- c. To scrutinize the nature of marriages in Ughelli kingdom.
- d. To survey the introduction and activities of western culture in Ughelli kingdom.
- e. To observe the impact of western culture on Marriage activities in post-colonial Ughelli chiefdom.

Scope of the Study

The study covers the most interesting part of marriage activities in Ughelli chiefdom. The study covers from 1999 to 2016, a period when the European spread their culture and religion in Urhobo land. The study explores the contributions of traditional norms and values on marriage system in Ughelli as well as the changes made on marriage by the introduction of western culture. This period is crucial because it brought the changes of marriage system of which this project will carry out.

Literature Review

There is much literature on marriage system in Urhobo and its socio-cultural activities both in pre-colonial and colonial times as the review below shows. However, there is virtually on much work on the changes and continuity of marriage system in Ughelli kingdom. This study will fill the existing vacuum.

The first on my review list is Philomena E. Soje, work titled, “The Concept of Traditional Marriage among the Urhobo People of Delta,”⁷ in the work, several arguments were put up on how the Urhobo people contract marriage today and how modernization and Christianity have greatly influence the way traditional marriage is being conducted among the people. The author identifies how modern civilization and Christianity are threats to the rich cultural heritage of the people. However she observed that the greatest threat was negligence on the part of the ingenious people of Urhobo land, for instance, if a lady whose bride price has not been paid is seen with pregnancy by the parents, such parent are supposed to do everything possible to ensure proper marriage of their daughters. The girl leaves the home to stay with the young man without considering the implications. Both the tradition and Christian religion frowns greatly at such attitude.⁸ The author further recommended that there is need for proper education on the tradition of the people and that it is not everything about the tradition that is idolatrous as some assure.

The second on the review list is John Arierhi article “The Urhobo Traditional Justice System in Relation to Adultery in the Light of John 8:1-11: A Feminist

Approach.”⁹ Author examined how Urhobo traditional justice system in relation to adultery constitutes injustice to the Urhobo woman and to use Jesus critical response in John 8:1-11 to call for a change of the status-quo in Urhoboland. The work also showed that the Urhobo traditional justice system in relation to adulteress was addressed. The author concluded on the presupposition that adultery is a sin on matter who commits it.¹⁰ the work is important to this study in the area of the norms and traditions of marriage rite in Urhobo land.

According to Festus Udio work titled “Traditional Marriage: A Glimpse at Urhobo Culture,”¹¹ the author survey the history of the Urhobo people and how marriage is contracted in the land. In the course of the research work the writer points out that traditional marriage is one of the ceremonies that depict the rich cultural heritage at Urhobo people and that when traditional marriage is contracted several factors are put into consideration.¹²

Agbo M. Charity’s work titled “Posthumous Marriage in Niger Delta Land, South-South Nigeria and its effects on Child Development and Education,”¹³ The author investigated on the posthumous marriage in Niger Delta land and its effects on the developments and education of the posthumous children. The population of the study was all the single parents in Niger Delta Land. Simple random sampling was used to select 400 respondents from three states in southeast of Nigeria (Niger Land). Questionnaire and oral interviews were used for data collection. The data were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations, while z-test statistic was used to analyze the hypotheses at

0.05 alpha level of significance. The author revealed quest for male child, continuity of a lineage, love for the dead and others as the reasons for posthumous marriage. The author also indicated that posthumous children's moral, social, and other developments and education are adversely affected due to poor conditions and social problems associated with posthumous marriage.¹⁴

In Kolo E. Enwereji's work titled "Indigenous Marriage Institutions and Divorce in Nigeria: The Case of Delta State of Nigeria,"¹⁵ This author examines the principles and structure of marriage institutions in Nigeria. It notes conditions and factors that induce divorce by using empirical examples drawn from the family as a formal institutional structure and from the administrative operation of this institution. The author also revealed that marriage in its present institutional functions are compared to show how divorce affects its stability and to document the results, which follow from this interaction.¹⁶

Jide Kolo. Danmbaezue's in his work, titled, Traditional Marriage Values & Rites in Biafra,¹⁷ the author asserts that

In societies with arranged marriages, the universal custom is that someone acts as an intermediary or matchmaker. This is very true in Igbo communities, whereby the intermediary's chief responsibility is to arrange a marriage that will be satisfactory to the two families represented. Some form of dowry or bride price is almost always exchanged in societies that favour such arranged marriages. This is more like an insurance policy that preserves the life of the marriage when problems arise! On the other hand, among the educated class, especially those that want to exhibit their acquired western education, youths are

allowed to choose their own mates. Dating is permitted so that spouses-to-be meet and become acquainted with their prospective marriage partners and members of their families. Successful dating may result in courtship that usually leads to formal traditional marriage rites and religious weddings.¹⁸

While this study was able to tell us about the traditional marriage activities of the Biafra people, it is silent on the influence of western culture on marriage activities among Urhobo people of which Ughelli people are part of. It will however be useful in examining the pre-colonial marriage system in Ughelli. This work will fill in the gap in the existing knowledge of the influence of western culture on marriage activities among Urhobo people.

Udoka Obindigbo's in his article "The Importance of Traditional Marriage in Urhoboland,"¹⁹ the author revealed that the Urhobo traditional marriage is a popular event in *Urhobo* land. Young ladies and men who are getting married use it to bring their friends and well-wishers to their homes, to showcase the families where they are coming from unlike before especially in the early 1980s, when it was not as popular as it is today, because at that time, young ladies would bring their suitors to their parents and kinsmen who drew up a list of things to be done, including the dowry to be paid, other expenses to be incurred as well as going to the church to solemnize the marriage. He further argue that traditional wedding cannot be done today in Urhobo land without traditional marriage being performed between the parents and relations of the bride and suitor; and that traditional marriage in Urhobo land is giving out a girl that has matured to marry, to the suitor when the suitor comes to the parents and the father and mother of the bride will

hand the girl over to the suitor who is always accompanied by his parents and well-wishers after doing the traditional things that are involved.²⁰

According to Thomas K. Nwachukwu's thesis titled, "Long-Term Marriages Among Nigerian Immigrants: A Qualitative Inquiry,"²¹ The author reports the lived experience of nine Nigerian Igbo immigrant couples who live in the Houston area metropolis and who have been married for 20 years or more. Data from two clergymen who also live in the Houston metropolitan area and who have ministerial duties for the Nigerian Igbo community were utilized. Interviews were audiotape and transcribed. The author finding did not differ greatly from other studies on long-term marriages. The results support the conclusion that there may be cross cultural similarity in structural factors fostering marriage longevity. The results did, however, indicate some uniqueness germane to the acculturation of this immigrant population in the areas of extended family, upbringing of children, gender roles, and male patriarchal hegemony. This underscores the need for counselors to consider cultural context when looking at marriage longevity. The Nigerian couples in this study also acknowledged that the above listed structures may have either a positive or negative impact on marriage stability.²²

Ushe M. Ushe's in his work, "The Effect of Christian Religious Education on Traditional Marriage Customs among the Tiv, Central Nigeria,"²³ Ushe examine the effect of Christian religious education on traditional marriage customs among the Tiv, North central Nigeria. The article utilized qualitative approach which makes use of secondary sources and participant observation in collection and presentation of data. The

author observed that Tiv traditional marriage has experienced an infusion into Christianity due to the advent of western civilization in Nigeria. The author also recommends among others, that an infusion of Tiv traditional marriage into Christianity should be made to contextualize those practices that are not in line with the Christian oriented practices.²⁴

Joachim I. Oforchukwu's book titled, *A Biblical and Theological Study (Analysis) of Marriage and Divorce among Urhobo Catholic Christians (Nigeria)*.²⁵ The book is all about the question of "marriage and divorce" as one of the toughest issues that faces the Urhobo church in the 21st century. Unfortunately, not all Christian couples continue to the injunction, "What God has joined together, let no one put asunder". The author emphasizes that Some Christian couples believe that it is biblically permissible to marry and divorce when a couple becomes incompatible at any stage in their married life. The author revealed that childlessness, adultery, quarrels, and inadequate financial support could disintegrate Christian couples. He also revealed that there were fewer divorces in earlier societies than in modern society and that Christ's teaching on marriage and divorce is unquestionable, and therefore is used as a model. Christ disapproved of some would even say forbid – divorce. The author challenged the Urhobo Church leaders to do more than just administer the sacraments and that the time has come for the Urhobo Church leaders to re-evaluate its teaching techniques. The author demonstrated that love has the ability to strengthen and unite all Christian families. When love, peace, and joy prevail in Urhobo Christian marriages, the number of divorces would be reduced.²⁶

Paul U. Udio, in his work titled, “The Traditional Eku Society: Perspectives on Urhobo Socio-cultural History, 1500-1900,”²⁷ This author examines aspects of the socio-cultural institutions and practices in the context of traditional Eku society and culture. And that the process of evolution and growth of Eku society was predicated on a number of institutions and practices which had socio-cultural, political, economic and religious implications. Appreciating the fact that social development is a vast area in socio-cultural history, the author concentrated on the family structure, marriage institutions, religious beliefs and practices. He emphasizes that traditional Eku society was endowed with these great institutions and others which Christianity sought to wipe out, though without success. The impact of Christianity and other western influences notwithstanding, the author argues that these institutions generated ideas, values, and norms which crystallized into the Eku identity and cosmology. Against the backdrop of the popular opinion held by the western writers to the effect that pre-colonial African societies were not part of world history and civilization (and hence incapable of initiating change), he argue further that this negative and bias narrative about pre-colonial African societies is now very anachronistic and no longer worthy of intellectual attention by scholars of both African and European persuasions.²⁸

In as much as we agree, that these contributions and views have their own merits towards understanding the traditional marriage system in Urhoboland, but we must also agree that they have not been able to give a total study of the changes and continuity of Urhobo traditional marriage system in Ughelli town like; the study of marriage in Urhobo

land. All the books and articles reviewed have been able to cover only some parts of this research. Therefore, this proves a reasonable extent that a proper study has not been carried out on the changes and continuity of Urhobo traditional marriage system in Ughelli. This research seeks to fill that vacuum that has been created for a long while by various scholars.

Research Methodology

In the course of research for this study, relevant materials were obtained from two sources. These were primary and Secondary Sources.

Primary Sources:

Primary sources which were used in the course of this research were of one categories, oral interview. Oral interviews were conducted with experienced individuals such as opinion leaders, Chiefs, marriage couples, Rev Fathers and market women. Archival document will be used to furnish this work with a detailed historical research.

Secondary Sources:

Secondary Sources such as textbooks, journals, thesis and dissertation were consulted in the libraries. Information obtained from these sources helped to guide and supplement the materials obtained from primary sources. These sources provided data for a historical analysis of traditional marriage in Urhoboland; a case study of Ughelli town.

Endnotes

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2. Ibid., p.232.
3. Ibid., p.177.
4. Paul U. Udio, “*The Traditional Eku Society: Perspectives on Urhobo Socio-cultural History, 1500-1900*,” *International Journal of African Society, Cultures and Traditions*, Vol.5, No.3, 2017, p.11.
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22. Ibid.
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24. Ibid.
25. Joachim I. Oforchukwu, *A Biblical and Theological Study (Analysis) of Marriage and Divorce among Urhobo Catholic Christians (Nigeria)* Owerri: Spectrum Books Limited, 2010, p.34.
26. Ibid.
27. Paul U. Udio, "The Traditional Eku Society: Perspectives on Urhobo Socio-cultural History, 1500-1900," *International Journal of African Society, Cultures and Traditions*, Vol.5, No.3, 2017, p.11.
28. Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

MARRIAGE RITES IN UGHELLI BEFORE 1999

Historical Background to Marriages Rites

The social institutions of Ughelli comprises of the totality of the people's way of life i.e. their birth, naming, burial, eating, and dressing, marriage, religion, Justice system, moral values and etiquette, festival, dance, musical instruments etc. are all part of the social structure.¹ The Ughelli people have a rich heritage; Ughelli culture is significant because besides revealing much about the kind of people they are, they also say much of the people's past and in some cases mark a deliberate attempt to preserve the past in human history. This does not remove the fact that there are variations in cultural practices as we move from kingdom to kingdom in Ughelli land. In pre-colonial Ughelli community, there were different social activities practiced among the people, these social activities include: Child birth, burial-rites, marriage, method of inheritance, religion, festivals, language, music, folktales and folklores.² Base on this backdrop, this chapter examines the origin, migration and settlement of Ughelli people, including early marriage system in Ughelli before 1999.

Ughelli is situated on longitude 5.59E and latitude 5.30⁰N, according to the 1991 census Ughelli had a population of 54,206 inhabitants. Ughelli is one of the oil producing area of the state with at least forty-five oil wells, with an area of 1440 square kilometers. Ughelli is within the tropical rain forest area of Niger Delta. The region experiences high rainfall and high humidity most of the year.³ The climate is equatorial and is marked by

two distinct seasons. The dry season and rainy season, the dry season last for about November to April and is significantly marked by cool “harmattan” dusty haze from the north east winds. The rainy season spans May to October with a brief dry spell in August. The town was originally an agricultural centre.⁴

The word Ughelli is an Urhobo word which means “The Founder” Ughelli is one of the 22 clans in Urhobo, they are the second largest among the various clans in Urhobo. The towns in the clan, include Afiesere, Ekiugbo, Ekrejebor, Iwhrekpokpo, Eruemukobwarien, Iwhremaragha, Ododegho, Odovie and Iwhreneneiwhreorie. It shares common borders with Okpe, Abraka and Orogun to the west, South and East, respectively. Ughelli is bounded on the North by River Ethiope. All the kingdoms in Ughelli except Igun have a common origin, Igun migrated from Ewu in Agbon, while Ovu is said to be an off- shoot of Okpara-the most senior or eldest.⁵

Generally, Ughelli people trace their origin back to Benin. Ughelli people according to oral tradition were one of the Edo speaking groups involved in the exodus from the Benin about the ninety century, during the rule of Oba Ogiso. Agbon was believed to be the son of Ukonurhoro, an Urhobo migrant from Udo. According to one account of origin, Oduma was the father of Ughelli. Having left Benin, Ughelli spent some time in Ukwuani, he also settled in Ewhen and Irri, in Isoko and from where he migrated and settled at Utakori, near Ughweru, then to Olomu, and finally through the present Ughele territory of Ighwreko and Ekiugbo to found the town Ughelli (Otorhor’ r’ Agbon).⁶

However, another version from Oral tradition opines that, Ughelli had to leave Isokoland, Irri, to be specific, due to the urge to found a separate entity. Having left Irri, the group settled at Utakori near Uwherun, but a quarrel with Uwhweru which their immediate neighbors Ewreni tried but failed to resolve, made them to move to Ughelli Olomu, from there they migrated to Abara between Ughelli and Agbon. Later, they journeyed and settled at Isiokolo (Otorho-Ughelli). Due to population pressure, elders of Ughelli, decided that elders of each quarters should lead their people to found new settlement. To this end, Odoze led the Okpara to Okpara, Ovu with time formed a separate quarter, having gained autonomy from Okpara. The Igun people who came from Ewu formed a separate quarter. This quarter later became sub-clan. However, they all took the name Ughelli which they have been known and recognized since.⁷

Traditional Marriage System in Ughelli

Pre-Marital Activities

In Ughelli land, there are major ceremonies before the consummation of the traditional marriage. A lady does not just wake one day to say she wants to get married. When a girl has received a proposal for marriage from a man, she informs her mother who in turn informs the father of the girl. In other cases, the groom sends a notice of marriage to a young girl through his kinsmen.⁸ At a point, the groom is asked to come with his family to introduce themselves to the bride's family. A day is fixed for this meeting. The father of the girl will inform his family members, and will all be at the man's house to wait for their expected guests the groom's family. This first major visit is

known as ‘djoma’ – to show oneself. It is also referred to as “introduction” because it is a day in which the groom’s family is formally introduced to the bride’s family.⁹

As it is customary in Ughelli, the family of the bride will welcome their guests and entertain them. This is done through the spokesman of the bride’s family. He stands and calls for the attention of everyone present with the greetings, “Urhobo waadoo” (greetings to Urhobo people). He then asks for the nicknames of the men from both families. He presents kola nuts, drinks, alligator pepper and money on behalf of the bride’s family. They are then received on behalf of the groom’s family by their spokesman; prayer is then said by the eldest man. Thereafter, they will all eat and drink together. A short while later, the spokesman of the groom’s family will stand and call for the attention of everyone in the same way the spokesman of the bride’s family did. He then presents kola nuts, drinks, alligator pepper and money on behalf of the groom’s family. These are received by the bride’s family. The procedure followed in the first presentation is followed. Prayer is said by the girl’s father or the eldest man in the family and they eat and drink together.¹⁰

After entertainment from both sides, the middleman of the bride’s family will stand and call for attention again, and this time, he will enquire from their visitors, the purpose of their visit. Then, through their middleman, the groom’s family will inform them of their intention to marry one of their daughters. Again, the bride’s family will say “we have many daughters, which of our daughters do you want to marry”? The groom’s family will mention the name of the bride in question.¹¹ The bride’s family will now

reason together, and then, through their middlemen, will then agree that they have such a person, but they need to enquire from her if she knows the young man. They will invite her in. In the presence of all, she will be told of the young man's intentions, and thereafter, her family will ask her if she knows the young man. If she agrees that she knows him, then she will be asked to go into her room again, while both families celebrate, eating and drinking together. After some time, through their spokesman; the groom's family will request for the list of required items needed for the payment of the bride price. They are usually given. Some items are negotiable, while others are fixed.¹²

Meanwhile, partying continues. When the groom's family is satisfied that they have achieved their purpose of visit, they will request for permission to leave for their home. They will be permitted, but before departure, both families will fix another day for the payment of the bride-price. Meanwhile, both families and other members of the community now know that the lady is engaged to be married to the young man who has been formally introduced to her family.¹³

Payment of Bride Price

After the introduction, both families fix another day for payment of the bride price. However, the traditional marriage slightly varies in some families. The middleman is always the one appointed to meet the bride's family to get the date for the traditional marriage as agreed by the bride's family. The variations experienced in the families in Urhobo are due to certain circumstances in the families. In most cases, it is the demands that come from the bride's family members. In some families outrageous demands are

made to the groom in order to prepare for the marriage rites.¹⁴ And so before the marriage is contracted, such grooms spend so much for the bride's family members. But in other cases, it is not so.

Commenting on it, Emuotu Max-Ogaga (Interviewed) from Ughellii says the variation is a result of traditional awareness level, economic background, educational background, religious status of the families involved.¹⁵ By this, you discover that families that are deeply involved in the tradition of the land try to compel the groom to do certain things such as, the pouring of libation on the ground. Also, some bride's parents make some financial demands from the groom. All these may be as a result of the background of the families. Some families are poor and see the marriage as a way of enriching themselves while some do not see it that way. They see the groom as their son and the groom's family as theirs.¹⁶

On the agreed day fixed for the traditional marriage, the groom's family comes to the bride's family in the girl's father's house. Meanwhile the list of required things to buy or pay for, has been given to him. Both families have their spokesmen. According to the tradition, the bride's family welcomes and entertains the visitors. Thereafter, the groom's family responds. When these have been done, they go into the business of the day-payment of the bride price. The list is brought out, and one after the other they look at the requirement.

Ughelli Traditional Marriage Requirements

1. Wrapper, hat and walking stick for the Father.
2. Ighorugbervharen (Money given to the bride's mother for her labour on the child) to be negotiated by the Mother.
3. Bride price #120
4. 5 tubers of yam and 2 big fish.
5. 3 bags of salt and #3,000.00.
6. 20 liters of local gin.
7. Ighorotoguan (Money for elders)
8. Otoyare- carton of drink
9. Ighorukpo (Money for permission for departure)
10. Clearing of Father's rubber plantation
11. Ifio (lavishing money on in-laws)
12. Escort of bride to the arena #15,000.00
13. Escort of bride to husband's place #3,000.00
14. Drink for youth #1,000.00
15. Sing three traditional songs and dance
16. See family members as directed by Father-in-law.¹⁷



Photo Showing Traditional Marriage Rite in Urhobo- Ughelli land., Photo Retrieved from Couple Family, 20/October/2020

Although there are variations in the ceremonies, but regardless of the families certain requirements are usually constant. Name and Address of the home where the ceremony will be conducted with the date and time of the ceremony is stated. Ọkpako-ro-
orua-Head of the Bride's family and the Parents/Guardians of the bride are recognized.

Others are;

Ọtota I (Spokesperson) for the Bride's family Ọtota

II (Spokesperson) for the Groom's family.¹⁸

Parents/Guardians of the Groom will also be in attendance. The Usuọwwa who is the Middleman will accompany the groom while the bride is in the company of her Ikopha (Traditional bridesmaids). Another important part of this ceremony is the Bride

fee settlement. A team which consists of four member team made up of two representatives from each side of the families, including their spokespersons does this while Musical group hired is to perform to sensitize the environment of the ceremony of the day. Meanwhile, the bride is being dressed up in her room before presentation to the groom. Usually, she is dressed at least twice specially for a photograph.¹⁹

According to Akpotu M (Interviewed) from Ughelli tried outlining some below; payment of dowry, buying of bags of salt for the women, gallon of ogogoro (dry gin) for the family and buying of clothes for bride's parents.²⁰ But in Akpotu's list above, certain details are missing. Some amounts of monies are given to the youths and the bride's siblings. The family will ensure that the groom settles everyone connected to the bride in his little way. In the list, there are things to buy for the father of the girl, the mother of the girl, her younger brothers and sisters. Others include things to buy for ighele (youths), eghwe-eya (married women), emete (girls) and the family as a whole, etc. (see appendix). The bride's family looks at everything to confirm.²⁰

The girl's mother is invited into the house to formally seek her consent and to confirm whether the groom met her behind and gave her what is required, if she affirms that the groom had done all required, he will rise with his people and "lavish" money on her. Then the bride price of one hundred and twenty naira (N120.00) is paid.²¹ It is interesting to note that in Ughelli tradition, the bride-price is never paid in full. A particular amount of money is usually refunded to the groom immediately after the money is paid or at the end of the ceremony this signifies that their daughter is not for

sale. After verifying that the groom has met the requirements and paid the bride price, the Opha will be sent for.²² She arrives in the company of her Ikopha and some family women who shower encomiums on her saying:

Opha cha o...o...o jejeje - the bride is coming make way and admire her

i...iyeeee werhi no. woda mre obuko exclamation of joy

See her, she is beautiful from

ano buko. Woda mre obaro ano baro.

Behind

Omo okporua She is beautiful in front, daughter of a famous family

omote verhuvwu beautiful girl i...iyeee. exclamation of joy.²³

When she enters, she stands before the eldest man of her family who will show to her the young man who has come for her hand in marriage. He will further ask her if she consents to his proposal. If her response is positive, the groom again rises with his people to lavish money on her. At that time, the two of them kneel before the eldest man who prays for them with a glass of dry gin and pours libation on the ground to commit the marriage to the ancestors.²⁴ But the issue of pouring libation on the ground during the prayers for the couple has been criticized as idol worship. This also has faced much argument and debate. Some see it as part of the tradition which must be upheld while to some, it is no longer compulsory because of Christianity (and this will be discussed in the subsequent chapter).

During the oral interview, several opinions on whether it is compulsory to pour libation on the ground during prayers were raised. Patience Ugbarugba says; it is traditionally compulsory²⁵ but Helen Edore (Interviewed) is of the opinion that it is not compulsory rather, it depends on the family.²⁶ Meanwhile, P. Esosuakpor (Interviewed) believes that it is necessary because it shows that both family ancestors are witnesses to the marriage.²⁷ Still, Emuotu Max-Ogaga (Interviewed) argues that it is not compulsory because the prayer can be said verbally without libation on the ground.²⁸ Then he gives the drink to the bride who in turn gives it to the groom. He drinks a little and gives it to the bride. She will drink a little from it and give it back to the man. The groom then finishes the drink with the bride sitting on his lap. He follows it up with the money which he and his family members lavish on the bride. When the bride price has been paid, the groom's family through their spokesman will take permission to go home and get prepared for the escort.²⁹ bride is led in, surrounded by her bridesmaids to stand before her father or the *Okpako-r'-orua* who is the Head of the bride's family. He calls on the bride and bridegroom, and both of them move forward and kneel down before him.³⁰

The Head of the bride's family initiates the process of formalizing the marriage by presenting a brief account of the lineage of the bride. He now begins the process by holding up a glass of drink and invoking the name of God and the memory of the ancestors in prayers, calling on them to bless the new life now commencing for their descendant or child and the man who has asked for her hand in marriage. However, the bride's father gives his blessings to the couple as he accepts the groom into his family

and from henceforth sees him as his so-in-law. The head of the family leaves some of the drink in the glass which he offers to the bridegroom to drink. The bridegroom after drinking some, in turn passes the same glass to the bride to drink whatever is left, to signify her consent to the marriage. Drinking from the same glass is thus the bride's acknowledgement that the Head of her family has indeed spoken for her, and the signal needed to indicate that members of the groom's family are now recognized as in-laws. The bride now returns the glass through the groom to her family Head, a process that essentially declares the couple's willingness and commitment to live together as husband and wife.³¹

Finally, the bride is handed over to the Head of the groom's family, who henceforth assumes responsibility to ensure that the husband and his family will take good care of their new wife. The bride is directed to sit on the laps of her husband in their first public display of life together as a married couple. The public reacts to the display by showering gifts on the new couple as both remain seated.³²

Escort:

After payment of the bride-price, the bride does not follow the groom home. She remains with her family who will prepare to accompany her to her husband. This is referred to as escort. During the escort, the following will be taken along: box, lantern, mat, umbrella, iron bucket, clothes, wrapper and other belongings. She takes them to begin life with her husband. According Mrs. Agusa (Interviewed), the escort is usually done late in the night at about 12:00 midnight.³³ It is a big party which all the

young men look forward to the bachelor's night. By implication, after escorting the bride to the groom formally, both of them are expected to start their lives normally. Also worthy of note is that, the escort is not done secretly. Both families are well represented. Neighbours are also in attendance. It is also taken as an opportunity of creating awareness in the neighbourhood that a new bride has been married into the home.³⁴ Helen Edoreh (Interviewed) pointed out that escort is practiced so that people living in the locality would know that a new bride has arrived and the in-laws will know their son-in-law.³⁵

On the other hand, some people also see the escort as the way of keeping an eye on the security of their daughter. Obenobe (Interviewed) opined that, escort is to enable the family and the relation to know and familiarize themselves with the groom's family and his home in case of emergency. When a girl gets married, some members of her family try to keep an eye on her. They also check on her from time to time to be sure that her husband is taking good care of her. This is part of the intention why some go for the escort.³⁶

During escort, certain ceremonies are performed, and the couple is initiated. The escort describes the final stage of a full marriage according to Urhobo custom. It denotes the completion of all antecedent requirements necessary on the part of the husband. It is the escorting of the bride by her family with her properties to the head of the husband's family, and handing over until death of the bride as wife to the groom's family. A special ceremony is usually performed to invoke the husband's ancestors to

also receive her, and bind her over in fidelity to their son – the husband. The entire women receive the bride, eat and dance in the special room prepared for her till dawn of the following day.³⁷

At the initiation ceremony, the bride is handed over to the groom's family as their wife until her death. This is done at about 2:00am. Meanwhile as the people are celebrating the marriage of a new wife into the family, a goat is tied somewhere in the compound. By 2:00am, the goat is killed. The young couple stands together and the blood of the goat is poured over their legs. This act of initiation is a way of bringing the couple and presenting them to the gods of the land whom they believe will protect them. The meat is eaten by all and the skull of the goat's head is hung on the wall as sacrifice to ancestors.³⁸

The Proof of Virginity

This is another interesting aspect of the escort process. While the celebration is going on, some women will go and prepare the husband's bed. In preparing the bed, a white cloth is used. The white is used as a test to prove if the bride was a virgin, this signifies purity.³⁹ When they have all eaten and drunk, and when it is time to sleep, the people are sent home, leaving the couple to spend their first night together on the bed already prepared with the white cloth. After sexual intercourse on the first night together, the family of the groom will come to see the white cloth.⁴⁰ If the cloth is stained with blood, it is a proof that she was a virgin before she got married. On this confirmation, the husband will go back to the wife's mother and shower her with gifts to prove to her and

everyone in the family that they are proud of the wife who kept herself as a virgin before getting married, and it was the effort of the mother.⁴¹

Conclusion

This chapter has x-ray the rich cultural heritage of the Ughelli people as regards marriage and its impact on the society. Historical antecedents indicate that the Ughelli culture and traditions have been of immense benefit to the society. This fact is seen from the perspective that the Ughelli are accommodative even to visitors. Their traditional marriage rites involve various practices which will help bring in decency to the society. For instance, it is of great honour to a family, if their daughter passes the virginity test. Knowing this every family wants to ensure that their daughters are kept undefiled. The various activities carried out in those days are not fully in practice today. This is due to various interferences on the tradition directly or indirectly. For instance, the female circumcision is not being practiced as a major part of the traditional marriage today. This is because of the advent of Christianity and awareness of the medical implications. Thus, this will be treated in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER THREE

CHANGES IN MARRIAGES RITES IN UGHELLI FROM 1999 TO 2016

Changes in Marriages Rites Ughelli

Marriage is an important part of every culture. For the Ughelli people, the declaration of the grooms' intention to marry the woman, marks the beginning of the life-long journey. Christianity has also influenced the traditional marriage of the Ughelli people. The various indigenous marriage systems which were practiced in Ughelli prior to the advent of Christianity have gone through some modifications and changes. In traditional Ughelli, marriage was not a mere personal matter between a husband and wife but rather the business of both families. It brought them together.¹ The Western idea that marriage is the union of two people drawn together by love has had some influence on Ughelli traditional marriage especially on Ughelli indigenes that stay in the cities. Modern life has distanced the people from their traditional rural kinship groups. Men and women in urban areas are becoming more likely to insist on their personal wishes in arranging their marriages, although they may still seek the approval from their family members in the village.²

In Ughelli, marriage was the duty and vocation of everyone. One was regarded as a boy or girl and immature, if one was not married and so there was pressure on single persons to get married. But today Christianity has changed this concept.³ According to Amaju Okemute, noticeable historical fact in Africa is the stress on the necessity of marriage and the resulting pressure on single persons to get married; this pressure was

partially lifted only under the influence of Christianity which at least for some time, found a special virtue in celibacy.⁴

In traditional Ughelli, virginity rituals meant a girl to lose her virginity on the night of her marriage. Virginity was a demand by the man's family. The more virtue a girl had, the more the celebration even after her marriage ceremony. This created a social balance and girls protected their virginity.⁵ Today as a result of modernity which is an offspring of Christianity, pre-marital sex relations are now common. Pre-marital conception is on the increase. Sex after marriage has been vulgarly abandoned in the favour of promiscuity. This is not only a moral and cultural issue, but it is also a health issue because lack of commitment to marriage is increasing abortion and Human Immuno Deficiency Virus/Acquired Human Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS).⁶

Austine Ikeleagbe, stated that Africans themselves point to the curtailment or abandonment of the traditional instruction at puberty, others are general increase in the freedom of young people from authority; the refusal of girls to submit to examination by the old women where this used to be the custom, the prolongation of the betrothal period necessitated by the high cost of marriage payment.⁷

Bride wealth popularly called bride price is one of the cultural heritages among the Ughelli people during marriage ceremony. It was twenty five cowries before the advent of Christianity, but today it has increased to thousands of naira this is as a result of modernity, one of the offspring of Christianity.⁸ Also, money has taken the place of some of the items of the bride wealth list as some families in Ughelli now substitute some of

the items of the bride wealth list for money instead of the bride wealth items. The substitution of cash for some or all the items or the gifts or services included in the marriage formalities, has often had consequence on introducing mercenary element that was not present in the olden days.⁹

Polygamy, which is the marriage of many wives by a man, was one of the features of traditional marriage in Ughelli. This is because polygamy enlarges a family and increases its ability to work and earn a living; it demonstrated the power and status of the head of the household. Another reason for polygamy in Ughelli was that, the number of children one had, determined his economic and social importance in the community. Children were a form of wealth, a family with more children was considered to be more powerful and it was also part of a way of building an empire.¹⁰

The missionaries discouraged polygamy and taught the Christian adherents to marry only one wife, at the same time. Those who had many wives were instructed to disown some of them and be left with only one if they would be baptized. With this, the idea of the number of wives and children as the determinant factors of one's wealth and power in the society became a thing of the past. Instead money, cars political achievements determines one's power and wealth. After the colonial era in Africa, polygamy has started to be perceived as a taboo.¹¹

Impact of the Western Culture on Indigenous Marriage Practices

Ughelli marriage institution had begun to experience some changes in its cultural practices due to the impact of new beliefs, aspiration and life style (occupational,

economic, social and political) because of the active presence of Western education, exposure and Christianity. But the changes were not fundamental as compared to the impact of the Code when it came into force. For example, the practice of pawning, seizure, and areobhau have become culturally unpopular in Ughelli because it is argued that it bothers on the question of fundamental human right of freedom of choice.¹²

The Code contained nine provisions, which dealt with the matters of infant marriage, divorce, custody of children, inheritance, adultery, runaway (absconding) wives, rights of heads of families and marriage registers.¹³

Infant Marriage

The Code stipulated that infant marriage could be dissolved. That created the atmosphere where women took advantage of the circumstances to randomly file for divorce under the disguise that they were married out without their consent.¹⁴ For example, in a case filed before the Eku Native Court, Christy petitioned the D O seeking for his intervention to be freed from a forced marriage. According to her, she was betrothed to Imudiaga at the age of three months. She cited the excuse that she was ignorant of the marriage transaction and, therefore, would not be part of it and her request was granted. The idea of infant marriage has its own universal appeal, for example, the Benin of Edos have defended the institution of infant marriage “on the ground that one function of it is to prevent the dangers of pre-marital sex relations of girls.”¹⁵ The Benin of Edos philosophy behind the institution of infant marriage is not different from that of

the Ughelli tradition because girls were not supposed to experience sex until after circumcision, but early sexual experiences became a frequent occurrence.¹⁶

The practice of infant marriage remained unabated in the Urhobo Division and the whole of Southern Province in spite of the Code and that compelled the Lieut. Governor of the Southern Provinces in 1927 to propose “The Marriage of Girls under Sixteen years of Age: Proposed Native Court Rule” to curb the practice. Unfortunately, his proposal did not see the light of the day because it was thought that the Code would eventually eliminate the practice.¹⁷ However, with the passage of time, the colonial authorities observed that the practice of infant marriage took a different dimension as betrothed girls were sent to their husbands’ families at very tender ages to be nurtured, as would be wives. This again prompted the Secretary, Southern Provinces, in 1944 to seek for the opinions of the Residents and DOs on the expediency of protecting young girls from premature sex through the “Child Prostitution Act” which was adopted by the Benin Province. The indigenous practice of infant marriage is still alive in post-colonial Ughelli because of its social relevance.¹⁸

Divorce

The Code provided that divorce could be granted by the court on the repayment of 10 pounds by the woman to the man to cover the marriage expenses. This provision created a lacuna for easy divorce. For example, in 1939, Mr. Akpenvwoghene of Ughelli petitioned the DO that the verdict of the Eku Native Court in a case where he was a co-plaintiff was partial. In his complaint, he stated that Elohor, wife of Erhiaganoma

promised to marry him if he (Mr. Akpenvwoghene) could pay back her dowry through the Native Court to her husband, Erhiaganoma.¹⁹ Indeed, Akpenvwoghene gave Elohor about 3 pounds to summon her husband to Court and to refund part payment of the dowry. Rather than grant Elohor's plea, the court awarded a cost of 3 pounds as damages against Akpenvwoghene, the complainant, to be paid to Erhiaganoma and ordered Erhiaganoma to take his wife, Elohor, home.²⁰

Adultery

It is important to clarify the concept of adultery in Ughelli tradition. The Ughelli tradition considers some of the following actions of a woman as adulterous; holding another man's hand or vice versa, exposure of the breasts and laps, allowing another man to jump over her legs; concealing gift items presented to her by other men; refusing to report attempted seduction, boldly comparing her husband with another man, actual sexual relations, sitting on the same bed with another man and cuddling.²¹

It is a traditional belief in Ughelli that an act of adultery on the part of the woman would provoke the ancestors to visit the woman's children and husband with dreaded diseases and in some fatal, unless the woman quickly confesses her adulterous activities. As Ikime has rightly noted, a confessed adulteress would: The adulteress, shaved off her hair and stripped of her clothes with a heavy load balanced on her head, would be made to dance round the village. The stinging nettle leaves would also be wrapped round her waist to make her uncomfortable. When the women were exhausted from humiliating and

lashing the adulteress, they would take her to the house of the leader where she was made to swear oath not to have extra-marital intercourse any longer.²²

The above measure was intended to curtail and prevent women from committing adultery. However, with the introduction of the Code, all other forms of Ughelli considered adulterous offences and punishment were discarded, except actual sexual intercourse.

In some instances, it would be refund of dowry. It is instructive to note that before the implementation of the Code, the Secretary, Southern Provinces sought to know from the Resident, Benin Province, his thoughts on the proposed native courts Marriages and Adultery Rules because “the Acting Governor...is of the opinion that a very great deal of patient investigation (emphasized) must be carried out before we can feel ourselves to be properly equipped, to deal with this matter...[as regard] what the old customary law was before the introduction of the Native Courts.²³ It is worth noting that according to Obaro Ikme posits that adultery cases in the Ughelli native court were one in 1913 and three in 1914, while the whole of Urhobo Division only handled about 17 cases before 1913.⁵⁵ But between 1913 and 1944, adultery cases rose in an alarming proportion to 150 in 1939, 179 in 1943 and 247 in 1944.²⁴

Conclusion

It should be noted here that in this twenty-first century, marriage and family life in Ughelli and elsewhere in Urhoboland has always been under attack. And this has put Ughelli people and Urhobo as a whole at risk of impending collapse. Since 1900, the rise

and spread of cankerous Western perspectives and culture like cancer has eclipsed the traditional Urhobo conception and practice of marriage and family life. While Christianity revamped “what was” – i.e. the traditional pre-colonial conception and practice of marriage and family life, Western civilization on the other hand has, since the colonial era, overshadowed what is the Christian conception and practice of marriage and family life in Ughelli, and elsewhere in Urhoboland. Consequently, Christian principles are largely no longer the authoritative framework and bedrock of marriage and family life in Ughelliland. This has thrown the institutions of marriage and family into crisis, slowed down nation building, and pushed Urhobo’s sovereignty and civilization to the brink.

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CHAPTER FOUR
IMPACT OF THE NEW MARRIAGE RITES IN TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE
rites in Ughelli

New Marriage Rites in Ughelli

Globally, marriage has been one prominent outcome of positive and peaceful human relations and interactions over time. As a social reality most young men and women after interacting for a while often agree to get married, but most times they belong to different faiths and religious inclinations.¹ Conflicting pluralistic faiths, beliefs and religions in Africa are some of the consequences of unsolicited colonial incursion and missionary activities.

At the Ughelli proper, the groom's family is expected to pay all demanded of them in the bride price list before they marry the bride. The bride price requisites might range from jewelries to clothing, cosmetics, foodstuff, household utensils etc. In addition to these requirements from the bride's immediate family; groups from the bride's community like her age grade, women married into her community, kinsmen and women would also make their legitimate demands and requirements known to their prospective in-laws, which would as well be fulfilled before or at the Ughelli ceremony.² When all these are accomplished, then the atmosphere for the Ughelli would be filled with a mood that is festive, because the host or the bride's community would by the fact of their in-laws meeting these demands, realize that such suitor would be capable of taking good care of their daughter materially if handed over to him; as well as an indication that his is

truly interested in their daughter.³ At the beginning of the Ughelli ceremony, the father of the bride, admonishes her publicly on what is demanded of a good wife and mother. Afterwards, he gives her his blessing and then hands a cup of palm-wine to her and instructs her to search for the exact man that has asked for her hand in marriage among the people gathered and seated in his compound.⁴ The bride then carries the wine, and when fortunately she discovers her suitor, she gives him the wine and if he drinks it, the marriage has ipso facto been contracted, “for if the groom gives the wine to another male present or refuses to finish the quantity put for him in the local cup, then there is a potential problem; however if he finishes it, then everybody present would be agog with smiles.”⁵

Other additional rituals have over the years been introduced and made part of Ughelli to make the ceremony more interesting; however the handing over of the daughter to his in-laws and the drinking of the wine by the suitor are the crux or major points of the Ughelli ceremony.⁶ Ogbaru captures the scenario of Ughelli ceremony in the following words:

When the day for the marriage reaches, there is festivity everywhere. The groom’s family brings along with them palm-wine of about seven kegs and two big calabash, expensive local perfume, snuff, pomade, traditional eye lash. They would usually invite their relations and friends to accompany them to the family of their prospective in-law. The parents of the bride would on their part, invite their neighbours and prepare things that would be used to wait on their guest, ensuring that everybody eats to his or her fill.⁷

Accordingly, we realize that the fundamental aspect of every Ughelli ceremony is that of wine-carrying, which involves the giving of the palm-wine by the father of the bride to the bride to go in search of her prospective husband and hand over the wine; which when consumed by the suitor validates and certifies the union. The use of palm-wine is indispensable in any Ughelli ceremony, for the Urhobo believe that since palm tree absorbs water from the earth and goes up to form palmwine above, it is therefore a sort of bond for elements and spirits up in the sky and creatures here on earth. The regular use of palm-wine for libation among the Urhobos is consequential to the belief that palm-wine links the sky and earth spirits together.⁸ Considering this therefore, any move to inculturate the Ughelli into the Christian liturgy must put into consideration this fact and seek ways of usurping it.

The Rite and Essential Elements of Christian Marriage

The Christian Marriage rite is usually celebrated in the presence God's people, within the context of the liturgy and in most cases in a place that is specifically designated as a place of worship. It is usually officiated by an ecclesiastical minister who acts and stands on behalf of the church as a witness to such union. However, the bride and groom who are to express their willingness to be united before the entire people of God are the major celebrants in the sacrament of matrimony and not the priest.⁹ The Christian marriage is considered ratified when all the prerequisites for such celebration are fulfilled and then the couple publicly declares their intention to be united before the

people of God. It is considered consummated if the couple crowns their commitment with a physical union through sexual intercourse.

In Christian marriages, the public exchange of marital vows stands to be an indispensable element. This exchange of the vows is summed up, crowned and certified with the exchange of nuptial rings. The bride puts on the ring on the fourth finger of the groom and the groom likewise puts on the ring on the fourth finger of the bride. When this act is performed the minister on behalf of the church blesses the wedding and ipso facto the union is considered ratified provided there are no hidden impediments or deception.¹⁰

Ughelli and Christian Marriage: A Proposed Liturgy

As obtainable in traditional cultures, the call to the marriage ceremonies would have to be carried out by the Village Town Crier, inviting people to the compound of the bride's family, as well as, intimating the members of the community of their prospective in-laws. The ceremony or liturgy would simply be divided into four phases namely: The Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Nuptial Rites and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In arranging the arena for the celebration, the seat of the priest need not be a presidential one.¹¹ It should not be conspicuous, so as not to distract the attention of the congregation from the couples; relatively, the chair of the bride should be visible and be kept in a strategic place. The chair of the groom should also be close to that of the bride, however it must be left vacant until the bride dramatically searches for and finds her groom as the rites requires.¹² The arrangement of the place of worship or arena of the

ceremony should be “in a fairly large open space where participants can sit in a semi-circle around the central action with the couple being the centre of attraction.”¹³

Before the Introductory Rite, there would be an entrance; but unlike normal liturgical celebrations, the priest should calmly take his position just like every other invited guest. The entrance which has to be with fanfare and with traditional dance would be to usher in the bride and the bridal train in their native attires. Suitable cultural songs which could also have in them themes that call people to worship would be appropriate for the entrance. In the absence of such songs, the local drummers can play in with the flutist playing rhythmic melodies without words while the bride and her train dance in into the arena.¹⁴

When all are seated, the introductory part of the celebration begins. The father of the bride would be the one to welcome the assembly and not the priest, intimating all on the reason for the gathering, introducing as it were the community of their in-laws to all those present especially to his kinsmen and women. This role could also be played by the Traditional Ruler of the bride’s community or even by the eldest in the bride’s extended family.¹⁵ The speaker, would then question their guests if their motive for coming is to take their daughter’s hand in marriage. If they answer in the affirmative, then the speaker would invite the priest and everybody around to proceed with the celebration. At this, the priest would begin the mass normally, and move directly to the penitential rites.¹⁶

The second phase of the celebration would be the Liturgy of the Word. The readings which should be carefully selected by the couple from both testaments should

reflect what they feel and wish for each other and what they aspire for in their new state of life.¹⁷ These readings would have to be taken by a member of the family of the bride and then of the groom. The gospel should be taken by the minister, who would also give the homily, explaining as it were what the Church expects of couples who receive the sacrament of matrimony; however he may give room for shared reflection, after which he sums up and align the various thoughts.¹⁸ Bernard Cooke approves of this proposal when he opines that:

As a representative of the church's theological understanding of marriage, the ordained minister can appropriately give a homily on the text selected by the couple, but it would also be in place for him to be joined to a shared reflection on the texts by the assembled community, particularly those who are married couples. Again, but clearly in the role as representative of the church, the minister can assure the couple of the support of this larger community and in its name bless them. If the wedding is celebrated in conjunction with the Eucharist, the homily should link the intrinsic sacramentalities of Christian marriage with those of the Eucharist making clear that this particular Eucharist is part of the celebration of the wedding.¹⁹

After the Liturgy of the Word, comes the marriage ritual which is the crux of this inculturation project. The wine for the celebration of the Eucharist, 26 should preferably, be put in a locally made cruet or if considered permissible the chalice. This is to be given to the father of the bride, who would in few words, admonish his daughter publicly on the intricacies of marriage. If the girl accepts these responsibilities and conditions embedded on Christian and traditional marriage, then the father would pronounce his words of

blessing on her, hand over to her the cruet or chalice filled with wine and then asks her to go in search of her intended husband in the crowd of the attendants cum worshippers.²⁰ At this point the drummers would play to the dance steps of the girl who would go in search of her husband, skipping through the crowd to make sure she finds her right suitor.

As usually obtained, the groom must not be conspicuously seated but should be in a common area with the other attendants. On finding her groom, she hands over the wine to him, who in turn accepts it and embraces the bride. Unlike, what was usually done in normal opha, the groom at this point should not drink the wine; rather with pump and peasantry and joyful expressions from the crowd for the bride to have found her suitor and for the groom to have accepted the wine, they both would then proceed to the altar where they would hand over the wine to the priest, at a point close to the altar, the priest would at this time demand their marital consent before the public at which they respond I do, I do.²¹ At the end of it, the priest says the nuptial blessings; however, the ring is not put on the couple, since rings are not commonly used traditionally among the Urhobo. The bride and groom are then advised to get back to their seats.

The marriage should not yet be considered ratified until the celebration of the Eucharist during which the groom would drink the wine that was presented to him by the bride, which is traditionally a symbol of the ratification of marriage in Urhobo culture. There would be no need, I think for any offertory in this celebration, since the principal celebrants are the couple, thus gift items should rather be left for the couple who would need such to start off this new stage of life. The priest however should be given a mass

stipend ahead of time by the bride's family since he would in most cases be the pastor of the bride's parish and not of the groom. Hence the movement of the couple to the altar with the wine in the cruet or chalice by the couple would suffice for offertory procession.²²

The next stage is the celebration of the Eucharist. At this stage, the priest will use the wine in the chalice that was brought by the couple and proceed with the consecration. Preferably, the couple would kneel close to the altar accompanied by their parents, each staying by the side of their child. The Eucharistic prayer should go on as normal; but at the recitation of the Lord's prayer, the couple would remain kneeling while their parents would "give their blessings to the couple by some gesture such as placing their hands on the heads of the kneeling bride and groom; or with a short explanation this might be linked to the giving of the kiss of peace."²³ The kiss of peace should be a time for exchanging pleasantries between the two communities gathered together, hence enough time should be given for this. The parents of the couple and others who are present for the celebration should perform the kiss of peace, while the couple remains kneeling close to the altar, pondering on the step they would in a very short time take i.e. the ratification of their marriage, with the reception of the Eucharistic species.²⁴

After the marital blessings by the priest, the Agnus Dei and Ecce Agnus Dei, the priest would then partake of the Eucharistic meal, and after that allow the couple to stand. He then gives the consecrated host on the pattern to the couple, and on receiving it, the bride would take a piece of it and give the groom and the groom would also do likewise.

Then finally as full ratification of the marriage, the bride would give the chalice to the groom who would drink from it and in return do same to his bride.²⁵ At this point the marriage would be said to have been ratified. At that moment, the members of the congregation would give a simple applause to the couple thanking God as it were for the indissoluble union that formally has started. The couple would then go back to their seats in a position where both will sit together. The rest of the congregation who are prepared would then file out for the reception of the Holy Eucharist.²⁶ After the reception of Eucharist and the prayer after communion;

The couple should be given the opportunity to explain to the community that they see the event as celebrating the sacraments they now are, a celebration that they hope will continue in their Eucharistic participation over the years. They might invite their assembled friend to see the Eucharist as beginning the celebration that will carry on into the wedding reception and festivities.²⁷

Then the closing remarks and appreciation would afterward be given by the father of the groom or an elderly person from the groom's community. Towards the end of the mass, the priest could invite some elderly couple, to assure the newlywed on behalf of the congregation of their support and prayers. This they would do in a circle form enclosing as it were the newlywed couple as is usually done in most Urhobo initiation rites.²⁸ In a bid to enhance participatory liturgy, the priest could permit a representative of this group to say the final prayer or the nuptial blessing and in place of rings which is alien to Urhobo culture, a beaded necklace should be hung on the necks of the couple and bangles fixed on their hands as a symbol of their union. At the end of this investiture the priest

concludes the celebration by blessing the entire congregation and dismissing them with the normal ritual as found in the Sacramentary. Dance and support by the families and friends would then follow, and subsequently entertainment and presentation of gifts to the bride. With this done, the two segmented ceremonies would have been successfully juxtaposed into one within the same venue and with the same attendants.²⁹

Wrong Reasons why People get Married in Contemporary Time

People get married every day, and some of them even for good reasons. Of course everyone gets married because they fell in love and want to spend the rest of their lives with each other. But when it comes to choosing a life partner is not something to be played with. Often time's people marry for the wrong reasons.³⁰ The synthesis of wrong marriage is divorce. It is often advice that potential couples should trade carefully. The reason why people marry for the wrong reasons are: family pressure, wrong expectation, sex, time is kicking, friends are getting married, un-expected or un-planned pregnancy, want to become rich quick, if the partner is well to do, financial security, longing to join the married term, competing with friends etc. All these reasons stated above are ingredient for an unfruitful marriage. When partners married for the wrong reasons, divorce is always not far from the corner.³¹

Significance of Africa Marriage Rite

In traditional thinking, ancestors are an essential link in a hierarchical chain of powers stretching from this world to the spirit world. Insofar as African traditional religion can be defined by specific “religious” actions, the cult of the ancestors is its most

common and essential activity. In order to understand the importance of ancestors one must realize that in the African view, death is not thought to end human relationships. Rather, those who die enter the spirit world in which they are invisible.

Deceased ancestors are integral to the traditional African social structure. In a culture where tribe, clan and family are of utmost importance, ancestors are the most respected members of the family. To be cut off from relationships with one's ancestors is to cease to be a whole person. Moreover, the ancestors sanction society's customs, norms and ethics. Without them, Africans are left without moral guidelines or motivation, and society is powerless to enforce ethics. However, the bible is clear on when should a union between a woman and a man end, in case of the ghost marriages. A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

Causes of Divorce in Ughelli

The greatest tragedy in marriage is divorce. The causes of divorce are different for every marriage. The causes may come as a result of one or two of the couples' behaviour. Among these causes are Childlessness or Bareness: Nyam remarked that children, especially a male child ensures the family continuity. For married couple to be childless or wife to be barren is not only considered a disgrace, but a curse in some Nigeria societies. When a childless wife becomes frustrated in her matrimonial home, divorce is not far away the corner. In some societies, a woman who miscarriages is looked down upon as a 'witch' nickname as 'eating her children in the womb.'³² Counselling session

with divorcee (name withheld) revealed that, no matter how good a wife may be, her husband together with his family may not be satisfied with her because of her inability to bear a child. In many societies in Nigeria, a wife may be divorce if she fails to give birth especially to a male child, even worst none.³³

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes this work. It ties up all the major points in the previous chapters relating to the impact of change and continuity in Urhobo traditional marriage with case study of Ughelli Chiefdom.

The evidence from the study of the area of Urhobo marriage system and to examine the rationale of the changing role of traditional marriage system in Urhobo sub-ethnic group. The study indicates that a woman whose bride price has been paid is treated differently especially, when a situation arises from another woman who just packed in with a man. For example, respect is accorded to a woman who was married properly whereas a woman who just moved into a man's house is treated with little or no respect by the man's family. This is why every parent wants his/her daughter to be properly married is central concern of this research.

From the observation of this research marriage activities in Ughelli were well managed and elaborate, as it served the people well by helping to keep them united, stable and creating a sort of prosperity that made a remarkable Urhobo tradition in Ughelli which also inspired her neighbors.

The study also examined the life of the pre-colonial history of Ughelli, it explores the significant of their socio-political and economic institution in the ancient time, which entails their labour in economics and their creativity in the social circle by farming, trading, customs, arts and crafts and of course their form of political life. All these would

be highlighted. The study thus concludes by identifying various obstacle in the traditional system of Ughelli Community, it also talked on the issues on the adultery, childless, marrying more than one wives and the punishment that accustom the any break of custom law that widowhood persists as an important aspect of indigenous cultural life given most of the indigenes still see the practice as the only proper and acceptable way to mourn a deceased spouse.

In addition to this, debates on common and challenging elements that are intimately linked to Urhobo widowhood practices are conceptually and analytically mapped out, in light of prevailing customary law, national legislation and changes brought by Christianity. In fore-going research, the influence of colonial rule on traditional practices is the evident that the coming of Christianity had a tremendous and unquantifiable influence and impact on the traditional widowhood practice in Ughelli.

This research project builds on researcher extensive, direct and personal experiences of traditional widowhood in Ughelli as one of the family members was once a victim. Indeed, it was quite challenging because there was little information on specific Urhobo widowhood rites in the literature due to the sensitive ritual servitude which makes it unsafe for the widows. Reflecting on the sensitivity of this research, the selection Ughelli community as a case study could be limited by some ethical dilemma, cultural/ linguistic practices, sub group characteristic (widows in different Ughelli communities) and the researcher's subjectivity. Nevertheless, the research is still somewhat accurate despite these shortcomings.

From the result of this study, it is clearly demonstrated that in Ughelli land, marriage is a village affair or in the least, a kindred affair, whereby it is not only the bridegroom that is the husband of the new bride but all his kinsmen and women. The woman is called: '*our wife*' by the people. Therefore to marry in our culture entails pre-marital investigations or research into the family backgrounds of both bride and groom. This is the unique aspect of traditional marriage that benefits the couple. It is the most advantageous aspect of Ughelli wisdom.

From the foregoing, it is deducible that the conventional definition of marriage is that it is a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized as legitimate offspring of both parents. However, Okodudu assert that the idea of marriage has changed in recent times. In much of the Western European countries, marriage has been conceptualized as a union between two consenting adults irrespective of their sexes with or without approval from their parents or family; hence same sex marriages are being contracted today without the possibility of having children, except that it is a relationship between two consenting adults that has been recognised by law.

However, in Ughelli, marriage remains a union of two consenting adults (male and female) but largely with the express support and approval of the immediate families of the individuals involved in the relationship. Marriage also confers upon a man various rights over a woman. These rights are in two classes: rights to a woman's sexual and domestic services, which is right in uxorem and rights to a woman as a mother i.e. rights over her offspring which is called rights in genetricem.

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Avwerhota Oghenedoro Lucky	51year	Business man	Ughelli	6 th /June/2020
F. Akpobome	89years,	Otota Ovie of Ughelli,	Ughelli	6 th June, 2020
Goerge Oghenechovwe,	56yrs,	Traditional Palace Chief,.	Ughelli	, 23 rd /September/2020
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