

Culture and Tradition: Their Socio-Economic Implications on the Traditional Marriage Rites among the Obudu People of Cross River State

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Abstract

Review Article

The Obudu Community of Northern part of Cross River State is made of ten political wards with about five languages spoken with dialectal differences. The people are very friendly and richly blessed with an enviable traditional marriage system which this paper chooses to x-ray regarding the way culture and tradition influences it. The paper also examines the socio-economic implications on the less privileged since marriage, they say, is the beginning of a legitimate family in all societies of the world and certain rules are established in order to specify unions that can be called marriage and those that cannot for whatever. The society stipulates what right becomes legitimate and therefore desirable and appropriate but in some situations, certain persons may challenge or oppose the existing marriage norms by going into unions or alliances that are contrary to natural rules and law of decency and societal norms of proper enculturation. This is not because of their will but due to the huge cost which culture and tradition imposes on mankind. The society is a complex whole of belief, art, moral, law, customs as well as the total way of life of the people. The practice by the Obudu people degenerates to delay in marriages, unwanted pregnancies, abortion, as a result of the huge economic implications involved. The paper equally examines the political, social and religious practice of the people, traditional marriage and contends that the practice of this nature should be reformed so as to reduce excess cost as well as other social, political and religious vices that bedevil the practice of traditional marriage among the Obudu People.

Keywords: Culture and Tradition, Socio-economic Implication and Traditional Marriage Rites.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept and nature of marriage among different cultures and people in different times and places differ for different reasons. In a particular case like old Europe, marriages were made for dynasties, to form alliances between families and for the production or procreation of heirs (Nwoko, 2014, p.73). In modern times, Europeans have other reasons for marriage; which include inheritance, companionship, prestige and love. The same goes for some cultures in pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa. Marriages, whether same-sex or heterosexual marriages, were often conducted out of family duty, most times for purposes of inheritance, prestige, procreation, and even to maintain matrilineal traditions.

The Obudu People of Cross River State considered the institution of marriage to be as old as man himself. This is because, it helps to propagate and perpetuate human existence, and they revered their culture because it is sacrosanct. To them, marriage represents the instrumentality for the realization, preservation, and the accentuation of the Obudu essence (Undiyaundeye 2006 & Nwoko 2014). The agency of this preservation was child birth; hence infertility was considered a peculiar harsh misfortune and sometime a punishment for one's misdeed or disapproval of a particular union by the gods. In fact, according to tradition and practice of the Obudu communities, marriage rites and stages of marriage are also the same, except that for child marriage, after the initial betrothal, the child brick was allowed to grow up to maturity before the traditional marriage rites were to be observed.

In contemporary times, however, the nature and practice of these forms of marriage among Obuduans have continued to change. However, these changes appear to be radical and range from the traditional patterns and conduct of marriage ceremonies, the bride price, to the essence of marriage itself. The major arguments of this research are that, there have been progressively radical changes in the nature and patterns of marriage among Obuduans of Northern Cross River State Nigeria and have brought about decline in form of marriage among the people following huge bride price, cultural infusions, influence of Christianity, Western education and their occupation influence.

This study is significant because it is an attempt at logically comprehending the radical changes that have occurred in the nature and patterns of marriage among the Obudu people of Northern Cross River State of South-South Nigeria. The implications of culture and tradition in the marriage pattern of Obudu have negative effects on socio- economic, political, and cultural attainment.

Marriage Rites of the Obudu People

The Obudu people, being lovers of good things right from ancient time, never gave out their daughters in marriage or received their daughters-in-law shabbily. The parents and family members of the girl or boy spend their time, money and effort to prepare their children for successful marriage to ensure that they build a lasting, happy and healthy home. Towards this end, thorough investigation is carried out before their consent in order to know the family their child intends to marry from or marry into is decent.

This work is to enable the young people of Obudu everywhere around the world to recognize culture and tradition as a mark of identity and think of innovation to improve on it rather than allow it to hinder marriages as a result of huge implication involved. It is on this note that this research is advocating for a return to the true culture of Obudu traditional marriage rites and has to streamline the stages to be followed in the performance of traditional marriage that is noted to combating and hindrance as thus:

Stage I

The first step is for a young man who desires and admires a girl to be close to the girl’s family. This offers an opportunity for close observation and understanding both ways. It is at this stage that the young man could visit with a friend or go between (Utan-ushiom) and relations as the case may be to “greet” the family.

Utan-ushiom- is a noble man that would act between the two families throughout the marriage and

who understands the tradition. He carries out negotiation, between the two families.

First Official Visit

This visit is officially made to the girl’s parents with kola nuts and drinks as the man can afford to avoid shame and pride in order to know what is involved and the cost. He makes the visit in company of his parents, relations and “Utan- ushiom”. At this visit, he introduces himself to the girl’s parents and declares his mission and good intention to establish a life relationship with the girl. This visit is requested to be repeated to allow the parents of the girl have a better interaction with their daughter on the issue and her opinion. Also to investigate the boy’s family background/character/blood affiliation.

Second Official Visit

The groom makes this in company of his parents or guardian and “Utan-ushiom” to get the response from the girl’s parents. He takes along with him kola nuts and drinks to know his intention has been approved. Source (Obudu Culture and Tradition).

Third Official Visit

Based on the outcome of the second official visit, the man would be required to make this third visit in company of parents and “Utan-ushiom” who is the witness and negotiator with the following items,

- 10(ten) seeds of giant size native kola nuts
- 2 (two) calabashes (20) litres of fresh palm wine (up wine)
- 2(two) cartons of assorted beer each
- 1(one) crate of Malt
- 2(two) bottles of hot drink
- 2(two) crates of mineral water
- 1(one) bottle of red wine
- 100,000 = cash

The above listed items are to enable the girl’s parents to invite members of the immediate family to inform them of the man’s proposal or intention.

Fourth Official Visit

In this step, there are five stages under this visit which ordinarily should have been made on separate days to the bride’s home on different days with kola nuts and drinks but can however be merged by consent of both families understandably.

The Stages are

Stage 1, 2

Breaking of kola nuts “Kigie –libo-ungie”

Here, kola nuts and drinks are presented by the man to the girl who is to receive and present them to her parents as a sign of her consent to the man’s proposal; this is witnessed by her family.

Stage 3

Payment of bride price “Unde-lishi-ungie”. The payment of bride price is usually done in the bride’s home on a separate day to her parents. And the amount is to be determined by the girl’s parents based on their level of training.

Stage 4

Entertainment of the girl’s immediate family “Kikwuliwhuan- ungie”

Stage 5

Entertainment of the girl’s larger family “Kikwuliwhuan-kikandi”

Stage 6

Entertainment of the married women in the bride’s family “Bengie- Libe”

All these stages involve elaborate spending for entertainment and the women are fed and in addition they are given salt, maggi cubes and special drinks to share among themselves.

Items Required for the Fourth Official Visit

- 20(twenty) seeds of giant size kola nuts
- 10(ten) calabashes (200 litres) of fresh palm wine (up wine)
- 4(four) cartons of assorted beer each
- 2(two) crates of malt
- 2(two) crates of mineral water
- 2(two) bottles of red wine
- 2(two) bottles of hot drink
- 20,000 (twenty thousand) cash

Stage 7

Special Visit to be made before the Fourth Visit or Marriage Day and Items to Go With

- a. The man is to visit the girl’s paternal and maternal grand-parents or whoever the bride’s family may identify for him. The visit is necessary for familiarization and to receive their blessings. He is to be accompanied by the bride.
 - i. Drinks and kola nuts (not quantified)
 - ii. Cigarette or snuff for each of the grand-fathers.
 - iii. Yards of good wrappers for each of the grandmother. Note these items can be monetized for the grand-parents.
- b. A visit to one maternal uncle and maternal auntie as well as one paternal uncle and one paternal aunt as determined by the girl’s family, each of these visits is accompanied with kola nuts and drinks, (not quantified). Note that there is the implication of below expectation.

Picking of Traditional Marriage Date

The groom and the go-between (Utan-ushiom) and parents make a visit to the girl’s family any other day after the fourth official visit to pick a date.

Stage 8

Dressing of Bride’s Parents by Groom’s Mother

- Hollandis wrapper(3 fadoms)
- Head tie (Gele)
- Shoes
- Jewelry
- Blouse
- M Bangles
- Underwear’s
- Cost of sewing. The above items or involvement can be monetized. Check out the implication and the socio- economic effect. The same is applicable to **FATHER** thus:
 - Traditional Nigerian outfit
 - Cap or hat to fit
 - Sandals
 - Inner wears
 - Walking stick “UTIU” and a dried bush meat.

Stage 9

Bride’s shopping: The groom provides money for the bride to shop for herself

Items to shop for her traditional marriage

- Clothes – Obudu maiden traditional dress
 - 1 piece of wrapper
 - Short wrapper or towel (Igedie)
 - Blouse
 - Gele (Head tie)
 - Short blouse to cover breast
- Waist beads (“Ujigida”)
- Bracelets
- Anklets
- White chalk (Kuusor)
- Underwears
- Animal (cow) tail (Utel- kigundu)
- Hand bag
- Small size mirror
- Toiletries
- Towel
- Eye pencil
- Tooth paste and brush, soap, body cream/ powder etc.
- Chewing stick
- Small combs for puff hair style

Stage Ten (10)

Journey of The Bride to Groom’s Home from Her Father’s Home

First wine and native lanterns are very significant at this stage as the take-off to a successful marriage so, must be properly observed and provided by the groom. First wine and kola nuts known as “Kutio-ungie-awale” is again brought by the groom and

his parents to the father-in-law on or before the night of giving away of bride

- 20(twenty) litres of up palm wine
- 2(two) cartons of bear
- 1(one) bottle of hot drink

A delegation from the groom's family in company of his friends and "Utan-ushiom" will all move to the bride's home on the evening of "removal". The bride's father blesses the first wine and kola nuts and everyone present is feasted. He also prays for the daughter for a successful marriage using the water prayed over by him, sprinkles it on the daughter's face invoking long life, fertility, prosperity etc. upon the couple and God's protection on the marriage.

Also a delegation from the bride's family, including her friend(s) and bridesmaid, would be chosen to join the entourage and escort her to the groom's home carrying a kerosene lantern since it is done at night. Although cars are used nowadays, the native rules of usage of lamp must be observed even inside the car.

Stage 11

Stop Over at the Special Aunt's House in the Groom's Town

Special Aunt: she is one of the bride's "sisters" who is married at the groom's town. She is acquainted with the area and the people. She acts as the bride's mentor or confidant to help her integrate into her new home smoothly. The groom provides the following items for the special Aunt:

- 1(one) carton of beer
- 1 (one) crate of mineral water
- 2(two) gallons of palm wine (up wine)
- 20,000 (twenty thousand) cash

After the entertainment, the bride is taken to the groom's compound by the entourage of married women in the groom's family with songs and jubilation. A gun shot is fired into the air to welcome her home. The gun shot is a mark of honour and acceptance into the new family. Her entry into the compound is also heralded with her mother-in-law spreading wrappers on the ground for her to work on, while the women and children ululation is heard across the village and is greeted by the entire community in a filing past, presenting kola-nuts to her. When food is served, her spokeswoman examines the soup to ensure that the current quantity of bush meat has been presented before she gives consent to eat though not without an excuse but a fine from the groom.

The Morning After

Very early in the morning, the bride is presented with her special toiletries by her husband: soap-dish, sponge, soap, chewing stick (now tooth paste and brush), body and hair cream, eye pencil, powder,

hand mirror and other make-up items she may desire so that she (bride) takes her bath, adorns herself and dresses up for the formal handing over alongside her best friend and younger sister who act as chief bridesmaid and little bride respectively, also dressed up in their special marriage attires. The traditional ceremonial reception (Kuga ungie) begins at about noon when the marriage party accompanies the bride to a worm, colourful and tumultuous welcome in the groom's compound. By this time, guests are seated and the bride, with her group, move round greeting everybody as she dances. While there is ululation, praise singing and a warm welcome, she is guided to her seat where the husband is already sitting and waiting for her. He gets up and greets her with an embrace as she gets to her seat. At this point, recognitions are done and the programme commences with the breaking of kola nuts.

The Marriage Feast Prosper

Guests and members of community are seated in their various groups for the feast of pounded yam and rice. At a corner, on their own, will be found women recognized as the bride's "Sisters", that is the women from the bride's community who are also married in her groom's community. They are known as "Bengie-libe". They are sumptuously fed with pounded yam in a specified bowl, and "Akpu" in a specified basin which must be filled to overflowing level. They are given 20 seeds of native kola nuts and a live hen, which they slaughter and prepare by themselves with drinks. The general feast for everyone includes kola nuts, assorted drinks, food of various kinds, some special delicacies depending on the groom's family's status in the society. Children in particular are ecstatic and the celebration goes on till night fall.

CONCLUSION

Unwa-ungie who now has a new name is expected to settle down in her new home, while her family awaits the news of pregnancy, so the next step in a young women's development can be done symbolic circumcision.

Socio-Economic Implication of Culture and Tradition of Obudu People's Marriage Rites

The bureaucratic and huge monetary involvement in the marriage rites of Obudu people of South-South Nigeria has become a stunted barrier to legal marriages owing to lean resources and typology of poverty and strata of an individual existing in every society, community and effect of Nigerian economy on its citizenry which has structured into two types of poverty known as absolute poor and relative poor (Hammer 2016). The absolute poor is involved a judgment of basic human needs and is measured in terms of the resource required to maintain health and physical efficiency (Haralambos 2013) while Hammer (2014), absolute poor refers to lack of minimum

physical requirements of persons or a household for existence, and is so extreme that those affected are no longer in position to lead a life worthy of human dignity. To Schubert in Emeka (2016), it refer to a situation of particular individuals without any comparison being made between them and others. It exists when the lives of those concerned are impaired by physical or socio-cultural deficiencies while relative poor are person(s) or household whose provision with goods is lower than that of other persons or households. They maintain that in the distribution of structures in a society, certain economic subjects are disadvantaged to an unacceptable extent. Geodharteld (in Emeka 2016), the two strata are of micro-economic and macro-economic levels. For micro-economic level, individual persons or household are not able to satisfy their basic needs or cannot, in these scenario; the only way out for these classes of people is to by-cord the culture and tradition of marriage pattern and marriage rites not because of their wishes but because of socio-economic deprivation which involves lack of access to property, income assets, factors of production, finance and necessities of human existence. In social deprivation, its lack of social, political and economic opportunities of basic needs necessary for their survival. UNICEF, as stated in (Chamber 2012), Cultural deprivation involves values, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, information, orientation and they are not able to take advantage of economic and political opportunities to control their destinies thus has negative influence on children, families and society as a whole. (Adedokun, *et al.*, 2012), observe that marriages are often arranged in two distinct ways within a context of force and coercion, either by parents or other persons in positions of authority in the family arranging their young daughter's marriage based on prospective husbands with social, religious and monetary factors which are detrimental to the categories of people earlier discussed (mentioned) thereby hinder majority of less privileged individuals who are unable to afford the charges involved for payment of bride prices to their potential wives owing to socio-economic, political and cultural disadvantages.

EVALUATION

Which is the critical assessment of any policy to determine the effectiveness or efficiency to provide the cost implication as well as the impact and performance of a policy, in this case shows the socio-economic implications of culture and tradition of Obudu towards marriage rites and has negative influence on their subject considering the socio-economic nature and strata of society. The cost effect of this policy is not productive to family growth as it does not encourage the less privileged ones to undergo the course of paying bride price considering the huge monetary implication. It therefore drums or encourages baby mothers and fathers out of wedlock without proper marriage rites. It also encourages corruption, devaluation of culture and immorality such as

prostitution, arm robbery, promiscuity and other social deviant acts in order to get married.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There should be changing nature and patterns as well as the social construct of traditional marriage and practices among the people of Obudu.
2. There should be cultural infusions from within and outside Bette people added to the construct and practices of Obudu.
3. The cultural practice should be inculcated alongside dynamics that have brought about new features in recent times.
4. Encourage acculturation to shape the contemporary social construct of marriages as well as how it articulates with continuities and changes in Obudu marriage rite
5. There should be uniqueness in culture and tradition within the context of the Nigerian society to curtail outrageous bride price considering the less privileged individuals
6. Due to Socio-Economics effect of culture and tradition, the need to streamline marriage rites becomes imperative to reduce promiscuity in order to encourage legitimate families.

CONCLUSION

The paper noted that the customs and tradition of Obudu People to marriage rites need to be amended owing to it hurdles, considering its implications and strata of individual couples with social, economic and political inequalities experienced in the every society which Obudu people are not exceptional and ignorant of the fact. It is therefore believed that if soft-landing is given to Obudu young men and women, the issue of "so-called" unwanted pregnancy, abortion and other forms of promiscuity will be reduced to the barest minimum therefore encouraging legal marriage to foster true and egalitarian culture and tradition beneficial to all.

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