

## THE MARRIAGE INSTITUTION IN THE NIGER DELTA: THE IZON OF THE CENTRAL NIGER DELTA IN FOCUS

**B.I. AMAH, PhD.**

**Department of History and Diplomacy  
Niger Delta University  
Wilberforce Island  
Bayelsa State  
Nigeria.**

**And**

**O.C.C. AMA-OGBARI, PhD.**

**Department of History and Diplomacy  
Niger Delta University  
Wilberforce Island  
Bayelsa State  
Nigeria.**

### **Abstract**

*The marriage institution is one of the oldest social institutions in the world. Its importance is pervasive and overwhelming as it is the core of human existence. In Africa and indeed among the IZONS of the Central Niger Delta of Nigeria, marriage apart from the value and relevance attached to it, serves as connecting link and/or go-between in the tripartite configuration of the ancestry-the living-and the unborn generation. The essence of this paper is therefore a comprehensive examination of this institution acknowledging its relevance, types, stages, and procedures involved in the consummation of this institution.*

### **Introduction**

This discourse is on marriage institution in central IZONLAND, from the colonial to the post-colonial areas. In this paper, focus is on the word 'marriage' starting from its structural, functional perspective to its importance. And for one to obtain a full understanding of the concept of marriage, various writers views including anthropologists are advanced and its importance to the human race emphasized.

Scholars who study human cultures and societies have disagreed on whether marriage can be universally defined. Marriage is not easy to define because of the diversities in the systems of marriage throughout the world. Although marriage is known to have some common qualities, it varies from one cultural group to another. It is because of such an assertion that some people are of the view that there is no definition which can adequately cover all types of human marriage. However, it suffices to say that it is an institution of society which can have very different implications in different cultures. It is no surprise therefore, that Akak considers "marriage as simply the union of a man and woman as husband and wife." Marriage is therefore, a significance event in human life and as such, "every community adopts a system of

Marriage permitted by its culture. Through this institution, a society recognizes the right of a man and woman to live together in a stable sexual relationship “(Babona 2).

The fact that marriage is closely linked to parenthood has made many scholars including master-Mack, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, to propose definitions of marriage which center on what Malinowski termed the principle of legitimacy. Radcliffe-Brown views marriage as “a school arrangement by which a child is given legitimate position in the society, determined by parenthood in the social sense.”

Notes Queries on anthropology in British Association for Advancement of Science, defines marriage as ‘a union between a man and a woman such that children born by the woman are the recognized legitimate offspring of both partners. (Winch, 1-7)

In essence, marriage can be considered as a process signifying the assumption of the role of husband and wife in accordance with jural tenets prevalent in the society or the stratum of the society to which the parties belong. What should be noted is the fact that the term marriage is in one sense the relationship itself, or status of being marriage.

On an elaborate perspective, one should call to mind Nanda’s notion of this concept which Tonivey cited in his work. He defined marriage as, “the customs, rules and obligations that establish a special relationship between a sexually co-habiting adult male and female between them and any children they produce and between the kin group of husband and wife” (Marshall 8). Defining marriage in relation to kinship system, Aminadoku considered it in same light as ottite and Ogionowo namely that it is an essential step towards family formation. They argued that a person cannot have kinsmen unless in the context of family membership. Poweigha also stressed this marriage and kinship ties by looking at it from African context that “marriage is that which brings people together in peace and harmony, traditionally, it concerns not only the couple but it also concerns their families and relatives” (Poweigha 2). Most people view marriage in this way because of the extended family system and kin group where the marriage does not exist alone but she does that together with his people. Marriage by such function is used to cements relationship.

To Africans, marriage was and remains a means of ensuring the survival of the human species. At the immediate level, it ensures individual social fulfillment and satisfaction. Such fulfillment and satisfactions are defined differently at different times because of the dynamic nature of society. Mbiti characterizes marriage as a sacred duty for normal person if flow of life is to continue. It is the meeting point for the three layers of life recognized by most African people: present and future (the ancestors, the living, and the unborn). Failure to marry cuts off the link between the dead and the living and destroys the unborn.

The rationale behind some of these concept is however, hard to define and comprehend. But it is sufficient to draw conclusion from the meaning and purpose of marriage to Africans as stated by Mbiti which should include; obligation to bear children, build a family, extend life, and pass down the torch of human existence. Failure to marry and begat (rear) children is like committing sacrilege against traditional beliefs and practices. He points out that many African do not countenance nor do they recognize childless marriage. Marriage serves as a way of remembering those departed person through prayers and pouring of libations. Form the African point of view in general and these communities in particular, marriage gives status

To individuals in the society and confers mantle of full maturity on both men and women. At this juncture, it would be necessary to approach the definition of marriage from the cultural point of view which will throw more light on some of the system in operation in these Niger Delta communities.

Adopting a cultural approach, marriage may be define as a cultural approved relationship of one man and one woman (monogamy), of one and two or more woman (Polygamy) with the last option or of one woman and two or more woman (polyandry not totally accepted in these communities of study). Polygamy subsumes both polygamy and polyandry. Heterogamete is the marriage in which the husband is of higher social status than the wife. The term endogamy' refers to marriage between persons belonging to the same social group whereas in exogamy the partners come from different groups. The last two are a common practice among the Izon and Efik.

Most African place values on kinship ties and the central Izon no exception. In the word of Ingiabuna and Obara, this is necessary because "human beings are known to live in groups and the kin group and family among the most important aspects of human association. They form a central part in the social organization of people throughout the world, the different cultural and environmental settings notwithstanding. It is to crown the above notion that some authors affirmed that "kinship descent, and marriage are basic social building blocks linking otherwise separate groups in a common social system." (Ingiabuna and Obara 970).

### **Importance of Marriage**

This will focus on some of the advantages that one derives from getting involved in marriage.

Marriage is considered important and an advantage to man because it is a cultural institution that helps procreates the human race and as such, it ensures the perpetuation of the race through childbirth. This function of marriage depicts it as the main institution that enhances continuity of family lineage. It is also this function of marriage that results in population increase in communities and the world. Bible students see the origin of this institution and the said function from the scriptural point of view when God the creator made the pronouncement that "man should be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28 NKJV).

The pronouncement of multiplying and replenishing the earth was not restricted to man alone but all creatures. From the above quotation, we can see the advantage man had over other creatures. This is because, marriage whether tradition, court or church is only registered and thoroughly managed in man's kingdom. This institution thus necessitates planning among spouses such that children born into the home are brought up to be useful not only to their families and kinsmen but to the larger society. This important and functional role of couples is easier to appreciate when we recall that by virtue of marriage and the right training most children receive at home, love one another as well as their parents. Moreover, love being the basis of harmonious living, creates that sense of security needed for the peaceful co-habitation of family and homes that has ever remain as the bedrock of the society.

As a continuation and expatiation of the above concept, the need for security must be stressed. This is because a peaceful home relaxes peoples mind as well as reduces the tendency of one being too over anxious about little things. In the absence of anxiety in the home, it creates awareness and sense of belonging as well as establishes in them a strong tie to build up home free of atrocities which are vices demonstrated by delinquent children. The point of emphasis here is a dramatic reduction of crime life among juveniles who have neglected so much parental advice and training, as stated in **Proverbs 22:6**. We accept the injunction to, “train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is grown, he will not depart from it.” (NKJV)

Marriage bond strengthens communal ties especially when exogamy is practiced and both parties come from different communities. Where unity prevails in a home, such heterogeneous marriage ties to a considerable extent not only bring people of different place together but check and discourage communal differences. Ejituwu buttresses this fact stating that:

*“Prominent kings of Bonny like Asimini  
Marriage an Andoni woman and became a  
Factor in cementing relationship between  
Bonny and Andoni; that considerably  
Eliminated that spirit of rivalry hitherto  
Present in them, any Andoni war with Bonny  
And these Ather ethic groups (with moral  
Relations with Andoni) would be an exercise  
In futility since the main result of such war  
Would be the shedding of the blood of kiths  
And kins who had derived their existence  
From inter-marriage with Andoni men and  
Woman” (130-131.).*

It is this importance of marriage Mbiti had in mind that he opines that “marriage brings people of different clans and lineage together for procreation. In time of conflict, it helps bring amity between warring factors, families and the like” (Mbiti, 98-99). It is no surprise therefore, that in using the African concept of marriage as a background, Poweigha summarizes that marriage in Opokuma was more than union just between two persons but involve two families, two lineages or even two villages. In a relative development, she regarded the institution as that, which is used to cement relationships. In her words, “two families may not be in terms for one reason or the other, but once they inter-marry, their enmity ceases” (Poweigha 2) sic. Under normal circumstances, love provides the moral basic for marriage. It is therefore, partly the various definitions of what marriage is, the social and moral function in time perspective, alongside with challenges surrounding study and documentation. Such an exercise is imperative especially in an era when the institution is being faced with enormous challenges of breeding and nurturing delinquent and restive youth.

Another importance of marriage can be seen from the definition given in the holy bible in the book of **Hebrew 13:4** where it states that “marriage is honorable in all and the bed

Undeified: but whore mongers and adulterers God will judge.” The quotation implies that marriage legitimizes sexual relationships and reduces pre-marital relationship if not placing a complete check on it. In a situation where one gets attached to his/her spouse, the problem of promiscuity will virtually be a thing of the past with a considerable reduction of sex related disease. In essence, it is the absence of that urge of living a settled life that has contributed to the ineffectiveness of marriage institution in maintaining its role, as the foundation stone of the home that make up the society and help in raising future leaders of the nation.

Marriage as a source of economic development can be viewed from the angle of parents and relatives drawing financial and material benefits from the bride wealth. This occurs during the cultural celebration processes when the bride’s parents receive the bride wealth. The fund generated through marriage enriches not only the bride but the nuclear family. This is so because, some bridegroom are shouldered with the responsibilities of paying back in cash or kind amount expended on the education of the bride.

At this juncture it is important, we make reference to John Guttmann and waits, L (et al)’s input on the issue of the importance of marriage. To them, marriage gives the married an edge over the unmarried. This can easily be deduced from their postulation. From their perspective, there is less tendencies to drink, smoke and abuse less the tendencies to these tobacco substances, in married people than the unmarried. The underlying reasons could be that each spouse serves as a check on the other especially when the practice is offensive to one. It should not be completely ruled out that one’s religious and social status could act as a guide to any behavioral misconduct. The authors are also of the view that married people live longer, perhaps because of care offered on both sides. They also pointed out that the married earn more, are wealthier, and have children who do better. In contemporary industrialized societies, marriage functions less as a social institution and more as a source of intimacy for the individuals involved.

In some societies, there are many short term marriage, high divorce rates, and remarriages. To such category of persons it matters little or nothing. While this may be so, there are those who are of the view that it matters because marriage typically provides important and substantial benefits to individuals as well as to the larger society. Researches confirm the importance of marriage. In a work produced by interdisciplinary group of leading scholars, they affirm that “marriage improves the health and longevity of men and women; care and companionship assured, it gives couple access to a more active and satisfying sex life with no deprivations as may be the case of boys and girls under parental control. With joint income and expenditure, wealth, and access increase, it boosts children’s chances for success and enhances men’s performance at work and in their earning. Secret and divergent expender are minimal in well-built and unified home”. (Research confirms Importance of marriage. (The web Angeifire 7/3/2008).

In addition to being a personal relationship between two people, marriage is one of society’s most important and basic intuitions. Little wonder therefore, that Akak generalized it as the most important society activity in any community, social groups or enlarged society (Akak 331). Marriage and family serve as tools for ensuring social reproduction. Social reproduction includes providing food, clothing, and shelter for family members, raising and

Socializing children, and caring for the sick and elderly. Generally speaking, marriage institution is an inevitable societal development such that among human beings one is affected by it either negatively or positively. These facts are easier to appreciate especially when we observe that in families and societies in which wealth, property or a hereditary title is to be passed on from one generation to the next, such inheritance rules and the production of legitimate heirs are a prime concern of the marriage institution.

A radio broadcast of 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1998, the topic being: “the Home,” emphasized the importance of this cultural institution: and said “marriage is an important institution.” It is the starting point of the home, which is made up of a man and woman who play complementary roles to each other. Just as the head cannot do without the body, so is the man and woman relationship. It is from such relationship that springs up children, children that are a heritage from God. They are precious gift. If you train them well, they will become good husbands and wives in the society. God instituted the family to represent his relationship with man. The importance of the family can be seen from the point of view of it being the smallest unit of the society (through families) and it being the mirror of the society (198 anonymous). Bearing in mind the multiple role marriage plays in life, it become imperative that marriage and its importance be drummed into the ears of all sundry if we must trace back our roots to God’s original intension of universal brotherhood of man where hatred and its vices are denounced, and love the spring board of unity enthroned. This should actually be the watchword because it is essential at least for the sake of peaceful cohabitation of all human race irrespective of the community, race, and people.

### **Types of Marriage Systems in Central Izon in the Early and Mid-Twentieth Century**

The Izon of the Central Niger Delta in their per-colonial history practiced different types of marriage system like the kala Ikia, Opu-Ikia, Ere-bere, Saabe, Er pai, Pon-tua, duere (widow inheritance/ere mo tie). These were so complex that they are classified as “Situational Marriage”.

### **The Kala Ikia, Opu-Ika and Ere-bere marriage of the Izon of Central Niger Delta**

The Izon of the Central Niger Delta have been chosen as a case study in this discourse. The fact that there has been little or no conflict among them and their neighborhood calls for our interest especially with respect to marriage and choice of spouses. Though the Izon in the past practiced more of matriling by their Kala-Ikia system of marriage, the adoption of such is still flexible enough to accommodate children who, by virtue of their birth and upbringing should have been matrilocal but take to patrilocal residence.

It is mostly at the death of a woman that ownership of a corpse becomes the bone of contention such that a conscious effort is made by her paternal relations to claim the corpse. Maintaining close link with the dead was of a paramount importance because of their belief system in reincarnation. Thus, Poweigha using Opokuma clan as a case study notified that:

*“Marriage is not only necessary to perpetuate society, but also to maintain close ties with deceased relations who are believed to be reincarnating. The question of mandating close relations explains why people in the clan give names of their deceased parents and of the close relations to newly born babies.” (12)*

One thing we should still note among the Izon of the Central Niger Delta is their method of mate selection which is both endogamous and exogamous. Their field of eligibility can be from anywhere even within the neighborhood. This could be Urhobo, Isoko or Itsekiri which forms a sharp contrast with the endogamous and exogamous communities of the Eastern Niger Delta. It suffices to say that: until late twentieth century, the Eastern Niger Delta took wives from Igbo land and among the Ibibio's rather than Ogoni, Okrika and Andoni though exogamy has been in operation. The Izon of the Central Niger Delta before the mid-twentieth century practiced different types of marriage some of which could be considered as situational marriage: They include the kala and opu-ike, Ere-dei (still practiced), Ere-pai, Ere-bere and Pontua (archaic). In addition, the ceremonial aspect of the marriage custom as practiced in the past will be enumerated. Some of these are ceremonies which have overlapped to recent times.

### **Kala-Ikia**

Kala Ikiia "small friendship." This type of marriage which is still very much in vogue is relatively cheap with a low bride wealth attached to it. King Agara, the Onya Mozi, (64 years old) (2008) who is the present leader of over seven Kolokuma villages refers to this marriage as "small Dowry" (Ikiya-ere), it is not expensive as Opu-ikiia (big dowry) and Brer-Ere marriages or the ya of the Eastern Delta Izon. The Ikiya-ere is the commonest that is practiced in our society, and the most popular marriage in the land. The official sum of money the father received from his son-in-law before and until 1975 was twenty six naira (N 26.00) or thirteen pounds (£13). The mother of the bride and the bride herself received ten naira (N 10.00) and six naira (N6.00) respectively. The mother gets a sum for the purchase of canoe, if the son-in-law cannot carve one for her. It is called Yengi-arua (mother's canoe). Usually, a day was earmarked by both families for the purpose of entertainment; the number of visitors was made known to the host, the bride's family. It is important we indicate the descent and inheritance rule for the kala-ikiia marriage. Their off springs are matrilineal and so they inherit from both sides. At death, their corpses are returned to their maternal homes.

### **Opu-Ikiia**

Opu-Ikiia means "Big friendship." This is the big or high bride-wealth marriage. There was no fixed rate in the bride wealth but it ranges from fifty naira (N 50.00) upwards. Male children born out of this marriage belong to the husband while the female are the mother and her family. This type of marriage by virtue of its operational dynamics of distinction made between male and female children was a combination of patrilineal and matrilineal systems. Using a comparative approach, Philip Mounma (71 years a retired headmaster with GRI, A.C.E.) (2008), affirmed that the marriage procedure is the same but in the big bride wealth marriage a large amount is paid and in the small bride wealth kala-ikiia small amount is paid.

Another type of marriage is the Ere-dei. (It is a kind of exchange) In the past, this occurs when out of carelessness or a deliberate act, one kills a person from within the communities of a distant own. As an act of compensation, the person or relations give out their sister to take the place of the deceased. This arrangement entails an agreement which should get an

approval from the culprit's family before the plan is executed. In this contemporary time such hardly exist especially with the presence of high and magistrate courts.

### **Pawn or Ere Pai System of Marriage**

It was the pawning system, mostly contracted when one was in trouble or difficulty. In this case, one takes his bere tobo or one's sister to one who is wealthy and borrows money. This girl stays with the creditor and so becomes a bere ere (one's owned woman or bought with huge amount with the purpose of owning the girl forever) to the man who has given out the money. The man who has received the girl may prefer leaving her for his son, brother, or any male relation of his. This was no longer the business of the girl's relatives. The children of this marriage were the man's bere owo (child from a slave or owned woman). It was always an abuse on any family that gives out their daughter through pawning. The girl's family may look for money to refund to get back their daughter and redeem their pride. It is the degraded state of such marriage Ingiabuna and Obaro had in mind that they cited Okaba's work:

Among the Ijos, there was the practice of "pawning" girls for money in conditions of extreme financial distress. As the pawned girl mature into puberty, she is espoused to the pawnbroker or his closest kin, and all children born by her before her redemption belong to the latter. However, it should be noted that a father could not "pawn" away his daughter without the approval of the girl's maternal uncle, except in cases of high bridal transfer (Opu-ekiye) marriage systems (109).

Before the hand-over, a pregnancy test was to be carried out by a trusted masseur. If the result was positive, the child in her womb when delivered still becomes beret obo (child from a slave or owned woman). If the two in such marriage after the redeeming ceremony finds out that they are still in love and will wish to continue the co-habitation, then marriage proceeding will follow the pattern of Ikie-ere (friendship marriage or wife) and children born after the consummation of this were Ikiá owo (children gotten through friendship). From observation, developments in the marriage institution depicts that such type of marriage does not exist anymore. Some may prefer getting a loan either from banks or other related establishments to solve their financial problems.

Furthermore, there was the SA gbẹ (pay debt) which was a system of payment or a kind of compensatory system of marriage. It was another version of the bere ere. Just as the name implies, if a family is in debt, and do not have money to refund, where the creditor desires, he could be given a girl as payment of the debt and such a girl becomes bere ere. In case the money was too small to equate the value of a woman, the creditor could add more money as demanded by the debtor. Children from this marriage are called bere owo just like the pawning system.

There is also the proper bere ere system which is also a high bride wealth system of marriage. There was no fixed amount in this type of marriage except that the rate ranges from ₦160.00 (One hundred and sixty naira) upwards. Generic rights were attached to such marriages and the children born out of this marriage belonged to the husband. The woman also solely belonged to the husband's family, including all her possessions so much so that she is not permitted to erect a building or sponsor any member of her family in her marital home.



One thing so remarkable about the above system is the fact that both male and female children born out of such marriages remain in their paternal homes. Bere ere are women bought permanently through high bride wealth and as an owned slave stays permanently in her husband's land. It is important to still note that if the Bere ere (woman owned forever) dies, she is buried in her husband's town while those of Kala Iki and Opu Iki are taken to their father's house for burial. This is so because the Izon still believe that he who marries and owns a woman does not own the bones. Therefore, the bones must go back to her ancestral home.

What should be noted is the fact that no man walks to any family to say he wants to (Bere) own a girl forever. In addition, it is worthy to emphasize that this Bere ere form of marriages entails among others, the presentation of ancient currency "manilas" oi-mamu finiy, uru jingo (very big bottles of dry gin). There is no ceremony in this sort of marriage. It is because of the amount paid on this woman that makes her a Bere ere.

### **Pontua (Guaranteed System of Marriage)**

This is another type of marriage practiced in Izon land. It is similar to Bere ere system of marriage. The difference is that during marriage, the parents of the girl will claim replacement if in course of delivering the girl dies. But if the child is of marriageable age or early teens before her death, there will be no replacement. It is assumed that the child has replaced the mother. It is important that awareness be created in less value that is now placed on this complicated and complex Bere system. What should be noted about this system of marriage is the fact that they are archaic and so, is hardly in operation. Why such marriages have been included in this study is to make for an effective comparison especially when we talk about the limited systems in operation - opu-iki and kala iki to mention but few. More so, it is worth stressing that though the issue that sometimes culminated into Bere system of marriage is not operational because of the availability of money (naira currencies are in use), the term Bere owo is still very much in use in reference to assets sharing (dudie).

### **Widow Inheritance**

From Ingbiabuna's work, we gathered that among the types of marriages practiced by the Central Izon, is the marriage by adoption or widow inheritance. It is a situation where the wife or wives of the deceased was or were asked to adopt any new husband among the male members of the family of the deceased. The vernacular word for it is duere. The man so adopted may agree or disagree where the latter is the case; another choice has to be made within the close relations of the deceased. The practice is gradually dying out such that widows are not compelled to marry within the deceased family but choose spouses outside of it with a return of the bride wealth and even her clothing's in years past. This is especially peculiar with the youth. It is optional because many could choose to remain single or have concubines. Some others may just name a younger man or the deceased's son as a husband in principle not in practice. The Sororate marriages: (marriage to a deceased wife's sister) does not obtain in Central Izon land.

### **'Ere mo tie' wife Capture/Elopement and Divorce**

Among the Izon, a suitor may own a woman or elope with a daughter if the parents of the girl refuse to approve the marriage proposal. The suitor however, could come later to

Properly marry the girl. In Izon land, a woman who deserts her husband remain his legitimate wife until the full bride wealth is refunded. Where she is caught with any lover while the bride wealth has not been returned, she and the lover will be fined an adultery fee (ere tu sagbe). In the words of an informant, Maclean Achimota (2012) and Ingiabuna, children born out of this relationship however belonged to a lover, as non-biological children cannot answer the former husband's name, neither can he make legitimate claim on them.

In case of one reason or the other, divorce occurs; the woman must go through a test to find out if she was pregnant and where it is positive, the child belongs to the husband. In a case of divorce in the past, the woman must go with nothing. All her possessions are taken over by the husband, including the bride wealth. New sets of clothes and dresses have to be given to her by her family members since the former belonged to the husband.

## **Marriage Procedures in the Early and Mid-twentieth Century**

### **Part One Wari-Nimi-Uru (Introductory Drinks)**

Marriages in Izonland are accompanied with a host of rituals in which kinsmen are involved. The first which is referred to here as part one - Wari-Nimi-Uru, meaning introductory drinks brings both families together. It was not handled singly hence King Agara, the Onya Mozi of over seven Kolokuma villages emphasized this point when he opined that: "both the family of the groom and bride must sit together for the ceremony." When a man develops an interest in a girl or gets a recommendation from trusted persons, with the aid of his selected family members, he makes inquiries concerning her social life and family background as well as her industriousness and character. Such knowledge was necessary because in the past where there was attachment to the importance of a woman's ability in agriculture - particularly farming and small scale fishing. Women then engaged in the upkeep of the home through subsistence farming, while men were more into planting cash crops like cocoa farms, plantain plantations, and large sale fishing like bailing of ponds and lakes.

After the investigation and acceptance of her person, an emissary or a go-between was sent by the man and his family to formally propose marriage. If this request was acceptable by her family, they will also go through the investigation process, on their proposed son-in-law. Where he was found suitable, he was invited to appear before the parents of the girl.

After these steps, the intending husband and his kinsmen and the spokesman will visit the girl's parents and present four bottles of native gin as wari-nimi-uru (drinks to enable us know the family of the girl). This wari-nimi-uru signifies that the girl has been engaged by someone. Then, unlike the practice today, the engaged man and woman are not expected to have anything in common including pre-marital relations during the period of engagement. This is because the marriage has not been consummated. Such situation is not prevalent among the youth who sees nothing wrong in mating before marriage. It is in this regard that changes are creeping in to play less value on the sacredness and chastity of the code of conduct in the marriage institution and its ceremonial procedures is concerned. Most youth now go into co-inhabitation especially as they can make claims over the offspring.

### **Part Two Dein ke/tebe sa-gbe ifie (Getting a Date and payment of Bride wealth)**

According to traditions, the next step after the wari-nimi-uru (Drinks that has to do with knowing the house of you would be wife) was for the man to conduct a visit and fix a date to

Perform the marriage ceremony. This is known as deinki. It has to be done with the knowledge and acceptance of the bride's family. These are but the preliminary stages of the marriage proceedings. After this comes the marriage ceremony and rituals.

Before the advent of western influence, marriage traditions in Izonland allow the incorporation of traditional religious rituals during marriage ceremonies. For example libations were poured during such occasions and it was done usually to appease the ancestors. For a deceased parent (bride's father or grandfather), a bottle of native gin was often set aside to venerate him, a day before the ceremony. However, western civilization has now taken over the traditions of the land, and such practices are not accepted again.

### **Presentation of Gifts**

According to Isaac Komokou (2008), the bride wealth of twenty-six thousand naira (N26,000) was paid along with such presentations like they sometime fixed the sum of twenty six (N26.00) naira, which is the total amount of the bride wealth for the father. The mother and daughter are not included in this amount. This money is given with a bottle of gin. On arrival, the host being the parents, kinsmen and well-wishers of the bride welcomed their visitors with two bottle of native gin. As a response, the guests will present four bottles of gin referred to as nua gbanal uru (we accept your welcoming). The girl's kinsmen would help the in-laws bring their luggage into the house. And for this reason they will demand for their aruzu okoba (money for carrying your luggage) being the sum of 40k (forty kobo).

During the main ceremony twelve bottles are presented by the proposed husband and his kinsmen as the marriage drinks to the girls kinsmen. What follows this drink was the search for the bride. This carries a price of ten kobo (10k) for the individual that succeeds in finding her within the village. On arrival, she would be questioned by her parents for purpose of securing her consent, on the issue of the proposed marriage. She can only do this after bibi fini ye (sufficient money is given to her to open her mouth). This is the spraying aspect of the ceremony which is still in vogue except that it is now too elaborate and cumbersome. As a matter of fact, in recent times, more complexities have been added with spraying of money from the kinsmen of both families. With approval from her kin-group she will give her consent and this is followed by a round of applause. The bride will thereafter, be accorded the privilege of searching for the bridegroom with a drink until he is found (yei dou uru). On finding the groom, on her knees she presents the drink to him as a sign of respect. The bridegroom accepts sips and gives it back to her to drink. That indicates a symbol of love and public acceptance of each other.

Furthermore, Isaac Komokou (2008) opines that twelve bottles of gin were also presented to the men of the village and this is called Biri bo bo uru (drinks for the people of the village). The bottler keeps the jar of palm wine on his laps and request for tene do do uru (drink to cool down the laps). Yet another four bottles of gin (kaikai) were demanded by the girl's kin group called Inabina/Inabi binabibi sei sei which implies that in case of quarrels that may develop, in which abuses are rained on the kinsmen of the bride, they are expected to overlook.

The prospective in-laws present another two bottle of gin to bride's kinsmen as ekpeti tu diye (permission to see the portmanteaux) because husbands were required to clothe their

wives during marriage. This time around a box was presented along with a snuff box that will be opened to people's view. Some of these drinks must be left for the oldest man in the groom's family for libations to the ancestors. This was meant to check the activities of wives. Offences that have to do with committing adultery and evil acts were by these, punishable (visited with illness that is not curable until confessions are made). There was the *daukari uru* (drink to libate to the ancestors). Ten Naira (N10) with four bottles of gin was finally presented to the bride's age mates that are spinsters.

### **Part Three: Ere Nana Uge/Domo Mu (Marriage Celebration and Farewell)**

These ceremonies were accompanied with food which was elaborately prepared in an assorted form to the groom and his kinsmen. This was the joyous aspect of the occasion. In an interview (2008) His Royal Majesty, King Agara Mozi, buttressed this fact when he said; "the feasting brings joy and attraction. Friends, relations, and well-wishers were given four bottles of drinks for their labour. Addition to this celebration was two bottles of gin to the bride's family called the title *aladou uru* (drinks for the sisters). It is important to lay emphasis on the importance for one to undertake all the enumerated steps involving drinks and other related items in marriage proceedings in Central Izon before owning a wife. There is however, the continuation of this practice even in recent times but with a remarkable difference. Modernization has brought in the use of crates of soft drinks and cartons of beer and malt. The sisters benefit in the marriage by getting certain sum from the groom called *ere-owomo fi yo* (money for the sister) usually one hundred and sixty naira (160). The last to leave the scene benefits with a bottle of gin. It is called *tu kobo ebieri* (last peoples' share). Extra bottles are given as *mie ki negbe* (a show off to be recognized) and finally the *seri mo ye* (drinks for the end of the ceremony).

### **Food (Entertainment)**

Food is served after the whole ceremony. The groom and his kinsmen as well as well-wishers are presented with different types of food such as *kekefie* (plantain porridge); *osin* (starch), *igina beni* (pepper soup) prepared with fresh fish. This food is served by relations of the girl. Water for washing of hands is presented by which the groom will honour by dropping twenty kobo (20k) into the bowl. The sum of forty kobo (40k) is given as an amount for the escort of the groom and bride by the young ladies from the bride's family. This is at the end of the ceremony which is referred to as *gbali mu ye*. Where there residence is within the girl's village, they will escort them home but if from a far distance, they will be provided accommodation to at least pass the night till the next day.

From Agara's account, given on the Izon marriage proceedings in the early and mid-twentieth century, we noticed the meager sum attached to the marriage presentations. Then it was fixed. Recent proceedings show that the issue of fixed bride wealth does not exist. The sum has skyrocketed and standards have fallen so low that the young generations do more of co-habitation. The highest most people go for is the *wari nimi uru* and by their belief system, once pregnancy sets in, the tradition forbids or prohibits the payment of any bride wealth until after delivery. This in most cases rarely materializes into proper marriage with the exception of those with a living conscience.

## Conclusion

In summary, a general overview of the Central Izon marriage procedures reflects kind of continuation of the ancient practices with constancy in the itemization of the procedures and the new additions. Already detailed explanation has been done under marriage in the early and mid-twentieth century. Repetition of this procedure which to a considerable extent is similar will not be necessary. Spelling out the different items and drinks by using OP (old practice) and NP (New practice) is aimed at exposing how elaborate, complex and tasking these new creations and additions have been through times. Consequently, this earmarked the difference between the previous customs and the present. The plus or minuses in the amount of money paid, the equation of items in money also depict the unstable nature and level of acculturation in Izon land through association and interaction. This helps to explain how the dynamic nature of a society even in the social institution of marriage in Central Izon, could either positively or negatively affect the citizenry, depending on the dimension an individual may take.

The falling standard in the marriage institution from the economic crunch of the times have given room to single parenthood, co-habitation, and the elopement syndromes. It has of recent breed people who have no respect for the norms and values of the society they belong. More children are born into the society and the world at large, with no proper focus. The present feature so far constitutes a social menace amongst most of the youth and can partially explain the state of unrest in the south-south region of Nigeria.

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