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IGBO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

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The Catholic bishops of Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province in their joint Pastoral Letter to mark the first centenary celebrations of the advent of Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria call for an intense catechesis as a way of deepening the faith of the huge number of Catholics recorded in the first century of the Church. Undoubtedly marriage and family life are some of the institutions at the centre of this intense catechesis. Hence this work has been proposed as a survey of the traditional Igbo marriage and family life with the view of finding out how it can be used as a point of catechesis on conjugal love and ends of Christian marriage.

As the bishops rightly state, «the problem posed by persistent idolatrous practices among our Catholics cannot be solved unless we build up solid Christian families. It is in an atmosphere of a believing Christian family that faith grows and deepens».

Bearing this in mind, one of the aims of this work is to discover the wisdom of the ancestors, revalue their ceremonies, re-awakening their names and renewing their language in the spirit of Vatican Council II:

«Anything in their way of life that is not indissolubly ound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit».

The scope of the first part of the thesis is to examine the notion of marriage and family life among the Igbo of Nigeria. Investigation is made into the past and present practices with the view of discovering those aspects which, as
Vatican II states, 'can contribute to the glory of the Creator, the revelation of the Saviour's grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life'. Though the aim of this work is to bring out points for a catechesis on Conjugal love and the ends of Christian marriage, we have taken time to investigate into other aspects of marriage, because, in the traditional marriage and family life all the essential aspects are interwoven. One cannot talk of conjugal love among the Igbo in isolation without thinking of the kinds of marriage practised by these people, or the religious beliefs surrounding their family life. In the same way, one cannot talk of the ends of marriage without bearing in mind the type of family system and their general outlook on life.

It is our intention in the second part, then, to treat in details the weaknesses and defects found in the Igbo marriage and family systems using the Christian doctrine and the good aspects of Igbo culture as our guide. This is done under the title, «A Dialogue between Igbo culture and the Christian doctrine on Conjugal love and the Ends of marriage. This second part is made up of two chapters «Marriage as a relationship of Ilove» (chapter three); and «Marriage and the good of offspring» (Chapter four).

Though the title of this work speaks of a catechesis on conjugal love and the ends of Christian marriage, we have no intention of treating the ends of marriage in the traditional thomistic manner of enumerating five ends procreation and education of offspring as primary; and mutual help and the remedy of concupiscence as secondary. It is believed that in treating marriage as a community of love and marriage and the good of offspring justice will be done to the theme of conjugal love and ends of marriage. Because, as goods they are not five entirely distinct ends (procreation, rearing, mutual help, remedy of concupiscence, fostering of conjugal love). They interwine and overlap in many aspects.

The aim of this work then is to present Christianity in such a way that the Igbo can see it as a culture which is not incompatitle to their culture, that is, the Igbo can be a Christian and at the same time no less Igbo. This is with the
belief that «African traditions, judiciously utilized, may have their place in the construction of Christian homes in Africa. I am thinking in particular of all the positive values of the family feeling, so deeply rooted in the African soul and which take on multiple aspects, which can certainly give so-called advanced civilizations commitment at the end of a long process; priority given to transmission of life and therefore, the importance attached to the mother and children; the law of solidarity among families related by marriage, which is exercised especially in favour of old persons, widows and orphans; a kind of co-responsibility in taking charge and bringing up the children, which is capable of relieving many psychological tensions; the cult of ancestors and of the dead which promotes faithfulness to traditions».

In accomplishing this work I have relied much on the anthropological literatures dealing with Igbo culture for the first part and the documents of the Catholic Church especially the documents of the Vatican Council II and the post Vatican documents, e. g. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World; The Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul VI, Humanae Vitae; The Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, to mention but a few.

Before ending this introduction may thank all those who helped in the accomplishment of this work. My thanks goes first to my moderator, Prof. Dr. Augusto Sarmiento who directed both the Licentiate and the Doctoral thesis. His encouragement and gentle suggestions were of immense help to me. My thanks also goes to Prof. Dr. Paul O'Callaghan for his patience in proof-reading the manuscript. My thanks also goes to the authorities of the Faculty of Theology for their help to me.

2. Ibid., p. 15.


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THE TRADITIONAL IGBO MARRIAGE SYSTEM

I. INTRODUCTION

The legal union of man and woman as husband and wife is what we might, in a very narrow sense, call marriage. But marriage, especially as we shall see it among the Igbo is much more than a legal union of man and woman. Sociologically speaking, marriage is a sexual fellowship, the structure of which varies considerably according to general social conditions. The nineteenth century evolutionary theories, especially that of Morgan, state that marriage gradually developed from primitive promiscuity through various stages of group marriage (sexual relations of all men with all women in group) and polygamy to monogamy. Though modern anthropologists tend to disprove this, the practice that obtained among some societies in Africa tends to give credence to it. An example is the practice among the Maasi, whereby «members of one age group who were initiated in the same batch, are entitled to have sexual relations with the wives of fellow members». But this does not obtain among the Igbo. We shall not devote any time on the polemic of whether the evolutionary theories were correct or not. That is beyond the scope of this work. Is should be the problem of sociologists and anthropologists. But whatever is the case, the truth remains that every human society in the world has always some form of marriage and some method of classifying people socially on the basis of
blood relationship and relationship through marriage. The Ibgo are no exception.

Among the Ibgo marriage can be defined as «an undertaking entered into by the close kin of the man and wife, in particular by their respective lineage kin, with regard to the parternity or the wife's children». It is one of the most important events in the life of the Igbo. From the time the boys and girls are capable of thinking for themselves marriage is set before them as the one object to be attained.

Marriage among the Igbo is patrilineal. By this we mean a family situation in which status and property are inherited through the paternal line. It is almost always associated with virilocality. Women leave their paternal group and reside with the paternal group of their husbands.

Only in Ohafia, Afikpo Edda and Arochukwu in the South-Eastern Igbo area is recorded the system of matriliny situation in which status and property are inherited through the maternal line. Even though this type of extended family is normally associated with uxorilocality, the South Eastern Igbo system is still virilocal as in the patrilineal systems of the rest of Igbo land. In the matrilineal system a child is expected to be trained, not by his father but by his mother's father or brothers. Our treatment of marriage here will focus on the patriline which is more common and more original to the Igbo people.

Igbo marriage is a process. Not only in the fact that once entered into, it starts growing and assumes its full meaning, but also it undergoes different processes before a man and a woman start living together as husband and wife. This process or traditional procedures undergone before a union is recognized among the Igbo as marriage is what we shall take time to describe in this chapter, bearing in mind the Igbo notion of marriage, betrothal and courtship, bridewealth and the marriage ceremony. Hence, we have set out to treat this chapter under the following headings: Igbo notion of marriage; Igbo marriage procedure with emphasis on the initial rites; Igbo marriage procedure -betrothal and courtship; Determination and payment of the bride-wealth; The final ceremonies.
II. THE IGBO NOTION OF MARRIAGE

1. Igbo Emphasis on Married Status

"Marriage has a foremost place in Ibo social economy. It looms upon the horizon of every maid and youth as an indispensable function to be fulfilled with as little delay as possible after reaching the age of puberty. The idea of a celibate life finds no favour whatsoever: to the Ibo it is rank foolishness, as well as being utterly contrary to the law of nature". Parents and relations are always at hand to remind a youth of this social obligation. The letter of Uz’aka to her brother is an example.

"You ought to begin now to search for a girl to marry. I am worried by the remark you made to me several times before, to the effect that you might one day become a priest. We are no Irish people whose ambition in life seem to be able to trace as many bishops, priests, monks, reverend mothers and sisters as is possible in the geneological table. You must remember that among us, celibacy is an impossible prospect...".

The unmarried Igbo adult is called by many derogatory names. He is called oke-okporo (male-woman), ‘akalogheli’ or ‘oke ikpa’: The unmarried woman is called ‘Ndabili’; all meaning good for nothing. An unmarried male (oke-okporo), though he may be expected to pay tax, is not regarded as a full grown adult in the community, regardless of his age and financial status. He is not given the opportunity to air his views in the gathering of adults. If he dies, he is not mourned for a long time. He is buried on the same day (unlike a married man who is expected to lie in state in his house for at least a day).

An unmarried girl is regarded as a burden to the family and more often she is reminded that she is not in her rightful place. The torment is more when her brothers get married. She is likely to quarrel with her sister-in-law always, especially over inheritance of some of her mother’s belong-
ings. In this case, it is rightful for a daughter-in-law to inherit her mother-in-law’s fruit trees and other personal belongings through her husband. But the unmarried daughter is always on her way to claim them as belonging to her mother and therefore to her.

«For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Otherwise, he is a rebel and a law-breaker, he is not only abnormal but ‘underhuman’. Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him in return»⁶. Therefore, one of the aspects of the Igbo life that cannot be joked with is marriage. «Nwoke nwechaa ego, wuo ulo, mee ihe nile ndi ozo di iche iche ma olughi nwanyi, anaghi agunye ya na mmadu. Otu aka ahu, nwanyi machaa mma ma olughi di, anaghi akpo ya mmadu» (If a man has money, builds a house and makes other achievements but is not married, he is not regarded as a human being. In the same way, if a woman has all the beauty in the world and has no husband, she is not counted as a human being)⁷. This is why the Igbo answer names like ‘Di bu ugwu’ (husband is the prestige of the woman). The Igbo woman shrinks from the prospect of being husbandless. She knows only too well the disgrace that is attached to that unfortunate situation. Such a woman is mocked and ridiculed, especially by other women, while her own instincts are outraged, causing her to suffer actually both mentally and physically. Not even in death would her failure be forgiven.

2. Marriage as a link between families and villages

Not only two persons but two families or two umunna and even two villages are united in the marriage of the
children. «Since marriage is patrilocal, the wife coming to live in the village of her husband, the result is that the villages are everywhere linked together by their women, the daughters of one village being the wives in a larger number of others» ⁸. Members of the two families become ‘ogo’ (in-laws) to each other. This relationship of ‘ogo’ is not as light as other societies take it. For the Igbo say that ‘ogo mmadu bu nwanne ya’ (A person’s in-law is his brother also). Social links are widened as the couple and their people are at home in one another’s place. So also are the children who became ‘nwadiala’, okele, or nwa nwa in their mothers’s home. «Intermarriage creates a network of ties by which the cell of Ibo society, though not united by any central governmental authority, nor arranged on any political hierarchy, are none the less interlinked horizontally, each with its neighbours by the social bonds of intermarriage. There are also economic links but these appear to be, in part at any rate, dependent on the fact of intermarriage» ⁹.

By a marriage certain existing relationships, particularly those of bride to her family, are changed. New social relations are created not only between the husband and the wife, and between the husband and the wife’s relatives on the one side and between the wife and the husband’s relatives on the other, but also between the relatives of the husband and those of the wife, who, on the two sides, are interested in the marriage and in the children that are expected to result from it. «Because of the system of exogamy and polygamy large numbers of clans and lineages are in this way united for mutual assistance, defence and trade» ¹⁰. «The importance of this linkage in breaking down self-sufficiency and in facilitating intergroup economic exchange can hardly be exaggerated. It is the great factor for mitigating the centrifugal force of Ibo separatism» ¹¹.

Lineage or families that have linked themselves through the marriage of any of their sons and daughters are bound by the legal, moral and ritual obligations generated by the alliance to protect the interest, life and property of all members of the other marriage groups. As in Nri situation,
they may not fight or cheat one another in marketing. The link does not end with the families but extends also to the kindred and the village. The man can move about freely and is always welcome as 'ogo' (in-law) among the members of the wife's umunna or village. This wide contagion of friendliness brought about by marriage also plays an important part in the softening of relationships between villages and even between village-groups. If two village-groups fought, the 'ndi nwa nwa', sons of the women born in those groups, but married elsewhere, would come to stop them. They would take young palm fronds and put them between the combatants and make them cease fighting till the case could be judged.

3. Kinds of Igbo Marriage

Technically speaking, only two kinds of marriage exist among the Igbo. These two systems of marriage are polygamy and monogamy. These two kinds of marriage in practice take many different forms. For practical reasons we have chosen to deal with these forms of marriage, some of which are mere forms of engagement, as the different kinds of marriage.

(a) Polygamy:

Technically the term 'polygamy' should mean what it's Greek components imply, and that is, marrying 'many' (wives, husbands or times). But in popular usage it is applied to mean the state of marriage in which there is one husband and two or more wives. This system or kind of marriage is inseparably bound up with the family and social life of the Igbo people and without exception, touches the lives of every man and woman in the country. It is favoured and fostered equally by men and women.

To the pagan Igbo, plurality of wives is a laudable ambition and, given the opportunity, he would add to the
number up to the time that old age causes him to lose interest in life. The ambition of every Igbo, according to G. T. Basden «is to become a polygamist, and he adds to the number of his wives as circumstances permit. They are an indication of social standing and to some extent, signs of affluence, in any case, they are counted as sound investments» 15.

It has been argued that the custom of marrying more than one wife which is found, not only among the Igbo but all over Africa and in some Asianic countries, fits well into the social structure of their traditional life and thinking, serving many useful purposes. «If the philosophical or theological attitude towards marriage and procreation is that these are an aid towards the partial recapture or attainment of the lost immortality the more wives a man has the more children he is likely to have and the more children, the stronger the power of ‘immortality’ in the family. He who has many descendants has the strongest possible manifestation of immortality. He is ‘reborn’ in the multitude of his descendants, and there are many who ‘remember’ him after he has died physically and entered his personal ‘immortality’. Such a man has the attitude that ‘the more we are, the bigger I am’. Children are the glory of marriage, and the more there are of them the greater the glory» 16.

The high infant mortality that was a phenomenon in Igbo land seem to favour the existence of polygamy. To the exponent of this, the security and stability of monogamous household in Igbo land would seem to be more precarious than that of polygamous households in so far as socioeconomic security and family stability depends on the number of children in the household. In such a situation a plurality of wives clearly makes for greater security and stability in so far as two wives are likely to produce more children than one wife.

Connected to this need for many children are the reasons behind the desire, one of which is the idea that polygamy raises the social status of the family concerned. What Uchendu refers to as ‘the big compound ideal’ is the
aim of every Igbo. A big family earns greater respect for its head in the eyes of the community. The Igbo say the ‘gidigidi bu ugwu eze’ (the crowd is the prestige of the kind). Even some women derive some vanity from this. The more wives a man has, the more she feels she has married somebody of importance. One of the striking features of the Igbo of old and which still lingers among the wealthy young men is the extent which surplus wealth is invested in additional marriages. Chiefs and wealthy men and especially those who have taken ‘ozo’ titles had harems ranging from ten to thirty. There were cases where the man was not able to know all his children by face not to talk of knowing their names. In some cases there had been some rich men who, like the wealthy Nupe od Bida town, go on marrying additional wives right up to the end of their lives. It surprised one to notice a girl of 15 or 16 married to a man of more than 80 just because he was wealthy.

The need for a male heir in the family can be said to be the most common and most urgent cause of polygamy where this seems to be lacking in a monogamous marriage. If the first wife has no children or has only daughters, the husband must eventually add another wife partly to remedy the immediate concern of childlessness, and partly to remove the shame and anxiety of apparent unproductivity. The Igbo believe that to have only daughters is equally having no descendants.

In a good harmonious polygamous home, orphanage is not severely felt. In times of need, there is always someone around to help. If one wife dies, there is another to take over the care of her children. There is that mutual help and corporate existence for which Igbo family is characterized. In case of sickness other wives will fetch water from the river, cut firewood, cook and do other jobs for the family. If one wife is barren, others bear children for the family, so that the torch of life is not extinguished.

The Igbo mentality and philosophy of life makes polygamy a desired end. The Igbo believe that he belongs to his family unit, his umunna and village unit and so, whenever
he leaves his family to live anywhere else, especially in the modern time when people move away from their village unit into the cities in search of job and more lucrative business, this it believed to be only temporal. He knows that after making money he must return to the village to spend it. While there in the cities, he does not abandon his home completely. Most Igbo tend to leave their wives and children at home in the village to look after their share of the family and other inheritance, because the Igbo say that 'the yam of the absentee is roasted at the side of the fire' (onye na anoghi ya, ji ya n'ahuru n'aga oku). This separation of husband from the wife tend to lead into the temptation of unfaithfulness and prostitution, especially on the part of the husband. «If the husband has several wives he can afford to take one at a time to live in the town while the other wife remains at home to care for the children and family property. Later on the wives exchange their positions. In such cases, the husband is unlikely to take and keep concubines or go to prostitutes. The wives are also given the opportunity to see and enjoy something of their husbands, and to satisfy their marital feelings without waiting for an unbearable long period before they can be with their husbands again» 17.

Similar to this argument is that according to Igbo custom, husband and wife are expected to refrain from sexual intercourse from the birth of a new baby, sometimes from as early as the time of the pregnancy of the wife, for it was a taboo for a woman to bear a subsequent child until the former one is no longer dependent on its mother for nourishment. Roughly, there is an interval of about two to three years. This prescribed interval had sound reasons for its support. It was maintained that a woman needed prolonged rest after giving birth to a child, she must be allowed time to recuperate thoroughly, both for her own sake and particularly, for the sake of the next child she might be called upon to bear. Its chances in life must not be jeopardized, risks must not be taken, It must be remembered in this connection that there was no system of artificial feeding, and no
woman was expected to nourish more than one child at a time. According to Basden, «artificial feeding is unknown, hence there can be no relief for the mother from the duty of suckling her child. There are herds of cows and goats, but neither are ever milked and if they were, the Ibo would not make use of the milk, the very idea being disgustingly repulsive to the native mind». No relief being forthcoming for the mother, it was wiser to avoid the possibility of another child appearing on the scene. «It therefore, comes to this that husband and wife practise abstinence for a couple of years; at least, they are supposed to abstain. It does not call for much imagination to form some idea of the difficulties created by this impasse. To solve the problem, the husband seeks a second wife».

Another reason given for the existence of polygamy concerns men and their stomach. It is said that the best way of getting a man is through his stomach. It is the woman who supplies the man his food. It is regarded as degrading to see a man in the kitchen, not to talk of his cooking food. Moreover, the idea of eating in the restaurant or hotel is very foreign to the native Igbo. So, every married woman holds the whip hand over her husband by means of this vital weapon. A crossed woman will torment her husband in gallant manner by refusing to prepare food for him. He may resent the treatment by becoming furiously angry and by vigorous corporal punishment, but neither satisfies his appetite, and he feels keenly the insult of having to retire to bed supperless. (And this is the worse punishment you can give to an Igbo man). To avoid these little domestic difficulties, a man argues that it is diplomatic, if only for his stomach’s sake, to have a second string to his bow. He can then have a more certain hope of getting his meals from at least one. If one be suffering from a fit of the sulks he can play off the other against her, or again, if one is sick, there will be the other to minister to his necessities.

One of the reasons why polygamy has persisted even in the face of Christianity and mostly among Christians is the unnecessary fear and theory that there are more women than
men. Whether this is true or false is not within the scope of this work to prove. But the fact remains that this fear, coupled with the culture of the Igbo, makes it impossible for the Igbo girl to refuse the suitor that comes to her. The theory is that as there are more women than men, were monogamy to be the rule, a large number of women must necessarily remain unmarried. And as we said earlier, no woman would tolerate such condition. She would be exposed to every form of contempt and persecutions, as well as obliged to suffer the shame of her outraged feelings. The constant yearning of the woman is for a home and children of her own. She will strive for the latter though she be deprived of the former; so long as polygamy exists she can have both. All elements of shame or dishonour are thereby avoided, and she prefers the protection of a husband's name even though she be but a subsidiary wife. An educated Christian girl might stick out some time for a Christian monogamous marriage, but if no suitor presented himself, she would accept a Christian polygamous one.

Looking at the above reasons and arguments in favour of polygamy one sees one central point running through: the woman is regarded and used as a 'spare tyre'. This is the most unfortunate way of regarding a human being. Almost all the reasons for polygamy are for the benefit of the man. Even though out of vanity some women opted for polygamy, the whole idea is for the pleasure of the man. The reason which Basden gives that a woman is not content to remain the sole wife; that an only wife considers herself placed in an uneviable and humiliating position because she is always lonely and bears the whole of the domestic burdens of the household alone, may in theory be true but in practice false. The constant quarrels among the wives of the polygamist and the many incidents of murder and poisoning which were regular occurrences in most polygamous families, render Basden’s reasoning baseless.

Even Basden himself confirms that «although the taking of additional wives may be a matter of mutual consent,
yet after a time, it is apt to lead to violent outbursts of jealousy involving not infrequently danger to life» 21.

Apart from the incident of the barrenness of the first wife, and to avoid being the cause of the extinction of the man’s name, which might lead a wife to support or even take initiative in the marrying of a second wife, it seems in practice no woman likes the introduction of a second wife after her. All Igbo women are by nature jealous as any European or American woman. None would like to share her husband with another person. Not only sharing her husband is at stake, every Igbo woman would like her children to own all the property of the father without interference from any other angle. Basden saw this to be true during his missionary activities among the Igbo. According to him «so great is the friction and suspicion that the common practice is for the mother of the heir to send her son to friends at a distance as the only way to ensure his safety till he can succeed to his inheritance. Every wife covets the heirship for her son and, should opportunity present itself, the temptation to remove a rival claimant is likely to prove too much for her, hence the necessity of sending the rightful heir away to a temporary home, where life and interest will be safeguarded from the jealous machinations of the rival mothers» 22.

These days, polygamy is no more regarded as the ideal. There are now only two classes of polygamists: those who are forced into polygamy because of the infertility of the first wife or the inability of the first wife to bear male offspring; those who enter into polygamy out of lust and show of wealth.

In general polygamy is increasingly becoming difficult to maintain as the cost of living and cost of the bride-wealth rise. In urban communities it is difficult to provide housing for the polygamous households, and the increased movement of families from one town to another makes it difficult for the polygamous families to cope with.

Polygamy creates a family of considerable legal complexity, lessens the educative influence of the father over his children, and is irreconcilable with the educational and
economic emancipation of women and desire of women to play independent roles in society.

It can create room for desertion and divorce where the first wife is not in support of the idea. In the past, domestic conditions were such that sometimes the assistance of an additional wife was a help to the first. In modern life this is less often true and the first wife is more likely to walk out sooner or later after the second has been introduced. Where this does not happen, there is the unfortunate alienation of the first wife, who is normally rejected in favour of the younger and more attractive second one.

That polygamy is both unChristian and a share exhibition of injustice will be shown in the subsequent chapters.

(b) Monogamy

The system of one man one wife know technically as monogamy is another kind of marriage practiced by the Igbo. It existed side by side with polygamy, in the olden days and ranked inferior to polygamy, in that it was looked upon as the marriage of the poor who could not afford to marry and maintain more than one wife. Though polygamy was esteemed higher than monogamy, it was a fact that more families were monogamous than polygamous. "As a generalization it may be safely asserted that many Africans must always have been monogamous. It is a considerable overstatement to say that all Igbo or Africans in general are polygamous. Our use of the terms 'man and wife or wives' to describe a marital union among the Igbo should not create the impression that all Igbo marriages are polygamous. The terms are so used, not that the families are composed of one man and more than one wife, but because the legal marriage of one man to two or more women concurrently is permitted. It exists but it does not predominate.

With Christianity claiming more than 90% of the population of the Igbo country and the economic situation being unfavourable to polygamy, there is a move towards monogamy as the order of the day. But this movement is
very slow compared with the speed with which other changes have taken place among the Igbo since the advent of Christianity.

The above two systems of marriage are the existing systems among the Igbo. We shall now see how the Igbo practised both monogamy and polygamy in their marriage procedures.

Child Marriage: There is a practice among the Igbo rightly or wrongly called 'child marriage'. By this practice, a child may be engaged at any age by his or her parents. Different factors might motivate different parents into this act. It may be to strengthen an old friendship, to show gratitude for a favour received. At times it is the desire to marry from a good 'agburu' (specie) for the Igbo say that what is looked for in marriage is the 'good' family or lineage (ihe ana alu na nwanyi bu agburu).

A person who sees a new born baby girl might decide that his or her son would marry her. «He informs the parents with a calabash of wine and performs the ceremony of ‘ido oku mmiri’ of the child. From that day onwards, he might begin to pay from time to time some unspecified amounts for dowry and performs other ceremonies and requirements (e. g. ibu chi, ibu udara) until she attains marriage age» 24. In other localities, the parent concerned may indicate his or her intention to engage the little girl to his or her son by paying a specified amount of money which is known as ‘ego obara mmiri’ (the money put into the drinking bowl of the child). When the girl grows up she is made to know of the engagement. She is bound by parental obedience to accept the engagement. But in some cases girls refuse this type of arrangement, especially among the most modern girls. Boys also were known to have rejected this kind of engagement though in principle it was thought that «no one had ever turned down a childhood engagement. If he does, the whole village would side with his father and pour scorn on him» 25. Also it was believed that since girls had no voice in choosing husbands, such a child when she grows up had no right to reject the man unless the parents
wish to do so on their own accord. To the girls of Nneato, «marriage arranged by the parents was the natural goal. It involved a change of status, a new importance, above all, it meant the possibility of having children. So long as the man was not too old or too ugly, I doubt whether they considered the emotional relationship at all, or guessed even that it might exist» 26.

Wives Married by Women: «There is a custom whereby a woman who has no male issue or who is sufficiently wealthy to foot the bill 'marries' a wife. Naturally the husband looks after his wife's wife. A woman who has lost her husband but has no issue may 'marry' a wife and in that case she chooses who should be responsible for making her produce issues for her» 27.

Uchendu commenting on this writes: «Woman marriage is a recognized Igbo institution by which women can validate status in the society. Under this system, women 'marry' in their own right by paying the bride-wealth and have the right to dispose of their brides. Some women allow their husbands to exercise their rights and they accept their bride as a co-wife. If such female husbands have no children, their wives share the same hut with them and their children are adopted by the female husband. Generally female husbands found independent compounds and then let their bride chose 'iko' (lovers) who are accepted to them to beget children by their wives.

Although there is high correlation between economic power and female husbands, other categories of women who play this role include barren women, those who have lost their children by death, and those who have only female children. There is no doubt that the institution of 'women marriage' benefits capable women by neutralizing the harsh effect of the Igbo inheritance law, which excludes women who have no male children from inheriting from their deceased husbands and excludes most women from inheriting from their agnatic lineage» 28.

Though women take this initiative of paying the bride-wealth for another woman to be brought into the family, it
is their husband that takes all the benefits. The wives become the wives of their husbands if the husband is alive. The children born out of this marriage, whether through the husband or through any surrogate father belong to the husband and answer his name.

Marriage by Inheritance: The most common of all these practices and the one that has persisted for a long time even in the face of Christianity is ‘widow inheritance’. It is a very common practice in all parts of Igbo land for the first son to inherit the young wife of his dead father, even though sometimes this young wife may be older than him. Provided the woman is still capable of begetting offspring, she is a potential wife of her step-son. This is known as ‘ikuchi nwanyi’ (to inherit a wife). In the absence of a son, or where the sons of the dead man are still minors at the death of their father, one of the brothers or near relatives of the dead man inherits the wife. In some African societies, the children of this marriage by inheritance belong to the original husband. But among the Igbo, this union is a separate marriage altogether, and so, the children belong to the new husband.

In some areas, there is a practice whereby parents especially those who have no male issue, refuse to give one of their daughters in marriage. This daughter is encouraged to procreate in her father’s house. She may choose her male consorts or her parents may find men with the features they would like their children to have; with these men, arrangements would be made on how they would be responsible for the pregnancies of this girl. Her children are regarded as the children of her father and they answer the same surname with their mother. This practice is very predominant in Orlu, some part of Owerri and the areas where Christianity has not taken much root.

The above samples or marriage as we have seen have one thing in common, viz. the search for offspring. The Igbo can enter into these complications for the sake of male offspring.

Another kind of marriage which could be classified as more recent but more short lived is the ‘marriage by photograph’. This developed during world War II under the
‘send me a wife’ program initiated by Igbo soldiers serving in Nigeria and overseas. Under this program, prospective grooms and brides who could not possibly meet for some time exchanged pictures and then made up their minds whether their respective families should proceed with the marriage negotiation. It is a system followed by some Igbo migrants who work in Fernanda Poo (Equatorial Guinea) and in Ghana and other West African countries.\(^29\)

In Ibuozo and other parts of the Western Igbo area, where marriage by capture was practiced, there was a custom whereby a man after capturing his prospective bride snip off a tiny wisp of hair from the girl’s head. By doing so, the girl automatically became bound to him for life. She could not run away nor could she marry another man in regular and accepted fashion.

This practice of snipping off a wisp of hair from the girl’s head is also used in a normal marriage, which is not by capture, to prevent the woman from deserting the husband, thereby divorce is prevented.

It would be an oversight on our part were we to describe the types of marriages that obtain among the Igbo without mentioning that the Igbo like the people of other societies in the world, practice the system of personal choice of partner. Even though the general trend was that parents should select wives for their children, it was and is not uncommon for a young man to go out on his own to look for a wife without waiting for his parents to do it for him. In this case the wife is known as ‘nwanyi aka ya’ (the wife of his own choice). When the man acts independently, he may be stirred by an impulse to marry and acts with set purpose to find a wife, or he may be suddenly moved to the same end by meeting a girl whose attractiveness especially appeals to him.

III. IGBO MARRIAGE PROCEDURE - INITIAL RITES

1. Choice of Partner

Marriage is regarded as obligatory on all Igbo males. But strangely enough, it is the parents that take the initiative
in most cases. Danda's father, Araba, having recovered from an almost fatal illness and fearing for the leadership in his household should he suddenly die, calls Danda into his obi and asked him what he thought of marriage 30.

Any marriage is a matter of interest not only to the parents of both parties, but to a wider circle of relatives, particularly the members of the lineage of each. Every marriage requires the consent of some senior person, sometimes not even the nearest male relative but the lineage head. Sometimes it is not only consent that is required. It may mean the elder, especially parents, making the choice themselves. We have seen this in the description of the child marriage above. Apart from the child marriage, a fairly widespread practice is the one in which the parents and relatives of a young man approach the parents of a particular girl and start marriage negotiations. This is done in some areas, around the initiation period which often coincides with the puberty period. This taking of the initiative of choosing partners by the parents is borne of the conviction that certain dispassionately observed qualities are more reliable and can stand the test of time better than an impression formed by emotionally charged relationship. Ludlow gives the reason for parents and relatives making the choice for their children saying:

«Are long custom in many countries has decreed that the choice should be with the parents of the boy and the girl concerned. This has not been wholly due to the desire of parents and elders to dictate to younger people, but to the belief that marriage is the concern not only of individuals, but of families, and even of larger groups, such as tribes and races» 31.

If either the girl or the young man very strongly and firmly rejects the prospective marriage partner, then the negotiations are broken down; though there are cases where force or pressure is applied to get the reluctant young person marry the partner chosen by the parents and relatives. The normal practice, however, is for the parents to make the
choice with the full consent of their son or daughter. This is what obtains in the case of ‘marriage by photograph’, described in article one.

Even today young men sometimes allow their parents to select wives for them, and the parties may never see each other before the formal betrothal. One often hears of people living outside their clan of origin, especially in the big towns, among people of other tribes, or those studying in Europe and America, writing home to their parents and asking them to find wives for them. A young man who behaves in such a way is regarded as being very sensible and the parents are always proud of him. On the contrary, it is regarded as a sign of loose character for a young man to select a wife in the township, worst still, to marry a white woman.

Marriage outside the tribe is looked upon with disgust. Even within the same tribe, marriage is restricted to a certain geographical area. It would have been unthinkable, for example, to have a marriage between one from the Southern Igbo and one from the Northern or Western Igbo areas, in the old days. In the first place, the distance was so long that it was impossible for the parents and relatives of the young man to travel on foot, for example, from Mbaise to Onitsha or Agbor, for the marriage negotiations. And it was regarded as sheer madness for a young man to undertake the marriage negotiations alone without his kin. Secondly, there is a variation in customs among the Igbo, according to the different cultural zones.

There is always some difference between theory and practice. Every marriage arranged by the elders is not necessarily forced upon an unwilling couple, nor, on the other hand, does the formal expression of consent which a bride is often required to give necessarily reflect her genuine opinion. In practice, the relative effectiveness of parental pressure and filial determination varies from case to case as well as between different societies. Moreover among many peoples which theoretically believe that the elders should arrange young people’s marriage there are recognized means by which the latter can assert their own choice.
In most other cases, especially among most modern young people, it is the young man who makes the choice and afterwards informs his parents about it. In this case, when a boy decides to marry a particular girl, he goes to meet her on the way while she is returning from the market, and openly declares his intentions. He may make his intention known through a friend who is well known to the girl. The girl may bluntly refuse, or accept by telling him to make his intention known to her parents. The young man then tells his father about the matter. His parents send a intermediary to the girl’s parents, to enquire if the suggestion of such a marriage is favourable in their sight. If it is, the parents of the young man in company of one or two members of their umunna and the middle-man, send kola nuts and a jar of palm wine to the girl’s father, together with a formal request for marriage. The girl’s father then consults his wife and daughter, and if these agree, he also gives his consent.

Another group that plays a role in choosing a marriage partner is the age-mates. In some cases, friends and age mates find a girl for the prospective suitor and then take him to the girl’s home to see her face to face. Or, to avoid disclosing their intention prematurely, they may choose to meet the girl in the market place. Even when the young man finds and makes the choice by himself, it is necessary to sound the opinion of his age mates, for they are always ready to criticize a bad choice made by any member.

2. The Initial Inquiries

Having found a girl of his choice, who meets with all the qualities he expects, (in the case of personal choice), or the parents and relatives having made the choice for their son, the next stage is the inquiry as to the background of the girl. This stage is very important in the Igbo marriage procedure because the Igbo believe that marriage is a lifelong union, and so, would not like to make any mistake in
the choice. «He that goes to marry without the necessary in­quiries», they sya, «let him be ready to have in his house a scoundrelly chatterbox» 33. «It should take many moons, even years of discreet inquiries and observation. You inquire from some one, who in turn inquires from some one, and so on, closer and closer to the family of the girl, until the thing got to the parents' ears. Marriage was a very important matter; therefore it must not be rushed. It was only at the end of your inquiries when you had satisfied yourself that the road was clear, that you could discuss it face to face with the other side» 34.

Inquiries have to be made concerning the moral character of the girl, her ability to work hard, intelligence, good behaviour and home-keeping ability. Also it must be inquired whether her lineage has hereditary disease such as leprosy, insanity, tuberculosis or bad conduct like inclination to stealing, lying, fighting etc. Generally, the qualities desired in a bride are her manners, physical beauty is secondary. That is why the Igbo say that «agwa bu mma» (good manners constitute beauty).

The rule of exogamy is very rigidly applied to forbid marriage between any members of the same lineage. If any kind of kinship relationship can be faintly established, the marriage is forbidden. Igbo geneology could be traced to any length. Degree of affinity are very rigid. In proper marriage, consanguinity up to eight or ten generations is 'nso' (for­bidden).

«The girl is our flesh and blood... Nwada is Nkem­bu's dauaghter. Nkembu is Nwakama's son. Nwakama's mother was Nwego who was Ojimba's sister... and of course you know that Ojimba is our great gran father. Custom forbids that a man should marry his sister» 35.

This complicating tracing of geneology by Oji in Munonye's novel is an example of the Igbo idea of affinity. Great care is taken to ensure that no blood-relationship can be traced between the two contracting parties.
Similar inquiries are made about the man; whether he is able to maintain a wife, to work hard, whether his family or lineage has hereditary disease, as were investigated on the part of the girl. Above all, and first and foremost, is the inquiry as to their consanguinity. Any trace of blood relationship, as we have earlier mentioned, disqualifies the marriage. A man is not expected to marry even a girl whose mother is from one of the villages which intermarriage is forbidden with that of the man, even though intermarriage exists between the man’s village and that of the girl in question.

Any mistake on this line was regarded as abomination and the adequate punishment was ostracism until the gods are appeased through sacrifices. An example is taken from Munonye’s novel about Ugokwe and Enyinna.

«Ugokwe had become infatuated with Enyinna who was his third cousin, and before anybody knew what was happening they were already expecting a child. The whole town cried abomination. To keep off the evil spirit that must have put the idea into their two heads people set up crossbars on two side-posts at the approach to the compounds and hung up the sacred umune (new bouldia) leaf there. Passers-by, seeing the leaf, would snap their fingers and exclaim; ‘Let nobody allow the evil spirit to enter his compound!’ In their moonlight games, on their way to the stream, or even while at work, children sang about the two, more especially about Enyinna» 36.

But if any marriage had already taken place unknowingly, due to the remoteness of the relationship, whenever such relationship is established no matter how vaguely, a sacrifice for the removal of ‘aru’ or pollution or abomination is performed. The kinship relationship is severed by this special sacrifice consisting of kola nuts and sheep, while the marriage is allowed to continue. We shall cite here the practice of this sacrifice as it is done in Enugwu-Agidi as an example. «First, the couple go to the shrine of ‘Ajana’ goddess to appease her sacrificially. Next, they masticate and spat out
native white chalk (nzu) before the ancestral shrine of an Ekwu or Ozo titled man. Then both of them hold a type of leaf at both ends and tear it apart. Thus their blood relationship is believed to be severed. The ritual is referred to as ‘ize alu nwanne’ or ‘idoka ibu nwanne na nwanne’. Both designate the dissolution of the bond of blood relationship.

It must also be found out whether his or her family is ‘obi’. «A family is called obi if it possessed not just the physical house, but also a clean history and a reasonable hopeful future. In addition, the founder must have been a free citizen and not a slave or one consecrated to a shrine».

Even though divorce is a recognized custom among the Igbo, nobody would like to marry from a family whose women or daughters are famous for deserting their husbands. Hence, among the points of investigations about the girl’s family would include the divorce rate in it. Also, on both sides investigation would centre on the incidence of premature death, whether the status is ‘osu’ or ‘diala’.

Lastly, the diviner’s opinion is sought as to the auspiciousness of the marriage. In some parts of Orlu local government area e. g. Orsu, it is necessary to find out on which market day the girl was born. This is important because, in places like Ihioma and Okporo, no girl born on Nkwo and Afor market days, respectively can be married within these two village-groups. In Ihioma it is believed by the people that in a very distant past, Ezize, the god of Ihioma decreed that all female children born on Nkwo day should be dedicated to him and thereby be married to his chief priest, who was by then also the chief of Ihioma. The people of Ihioma found this decree to be unjust, and so, they fought against this wicked chief priest. To punish the people for rebelling against him, and disobeying his order, Ezize decreed that no Ihioma man should marry an Mgbokwo (a girl born on Nkwo day). It was then believed that anyone who defiled it and married an Mgbokwo would meet with misfortunes in the marriage. One of the misfortunes would be that the woman must die at the first childbirth. In Okporo also, the people do not marry an Mgbafor
(a girl born on Afor day) for the same reason that the Mgbafor are dedicated to the god of the village-group-Ogwugwu.

IV. IGBO MARRIAGE PROCEDURE - BETROTHAL AND COURTSHIP

If both families are satisfied with their inquiries, the marriage negotiations begin. The formal betrothal is the first step, and it ends with the payment of the bride-wealth.

1. *Betrothal*

On the part of the young man the preliminary inquiries enable his parents to conduct in-depth investigations into the character and life of the bride-to-be and her people (as we have seen). If the result of their inquiries is positive, they give their assent otherwise they withhold it and look for another girl. However, having obtained the confirmation of his parents, the road is then clear to look for the confirmation of the girl’s parents. This is the first official movement to be made by the young man, led by his parents, to the home of the bride-to-be. The purpose is to seek the consent of the girl and her parents for the marriage negotiation to commence. The items used for this stage are, one carton of beer, one big jar of native wine, and four kola nuts. After the exchange of pleasantries, and eating and drinking, the father of the young man discloses the purpose of their visit. The father of the girl, then sits back and thanks them for the concern shown on his daughter and his family. As the reply to such a request or intention is not normally given on the spot, he will ask his prospective in-laws to go home and wait for his reply within a given time.

During this period he has to confer with his daughter and her mother for their consent. It is after this that the parents and relatives of the girl begin their own inquiry about the young man, as we described above.

If the result of their own inquiries prove positive also, the young man and his relatives are given the green light to
start formal negotiations. A day is fixed for the formal betrothal.

The Betrothal Ceremony: Betrothal is defined as «a formal agreement under customary law between a woman and/or her family on one hand and a man and/or his family on the other, whereby the woman's family agree to give her in marriage to the said man, the man and/or his family, for their part, undertake to have the woman as wife, to pay any agreed bride price and generally to fulfil the usual obligations of in-law» 42.

The ceremony of betrothal vary from village to village and from clan to clan. In Ahiazu Mbaise, the betrothal takes place on the day of 'ihe nna nwa' (the ceremony exclusively for the father of the girl).

On this day the following things are given to the father of the bride-to-be: Sixteen kola nuts, four small bottles of ground tobacco, eight big jars of native wine, four cartons of beer, two bottles of hot wine, eight heads of tobacco with some quantity of potash (nnu anwuru or akanwu), N512.00 (five hundred and twelve Naira) cash to support the eight jars of wine, and a sum of N500.00 (five hundred Naira) cash known as 'Aku nchede uzo'. This aku nchede uzo is the first installment of the bridewealth, even though the amount for the bridewealth is not yet settled. The purpose is to enable the parents of the girl to have some amount of money for the numerous entertainments during the period of negotiations. For there will be much eating and drinking as the bride's father will invite members of his umunna and other friends and relatives to share the occasions with him. The entourage of the bridegroom also will include his relatives and members of his umunna. The amount for this 'aku nchede uzo' varies, depending on the academic and social status of the bride-to-be.

Before the father of the girl accepts these gifts, he calls out his daughter to declare in public her willingness to accept the hand of the young man in marriage, and by so doing give her father the green light to drink the wine and accept the other materials.
The girl is given a cup of wine which she sips a little, and then she is told to hand the rest to the man she has accepted to be her future husband. As she does this there is acclamations of joy by all present. If on the other hand she hands over the cup of wine to her father (though this rarely happens because she must have given her consent in the presence of her father earlier), that shows that she does not consent to the marriage. By declaring in the presence of the two families that she accepts the young man, through the drinking of wine from the same cup, the betrothal is thus ratified. Her father is then free to accept whatever the young man and his relatives bring to him.

In some villages the method of betrothal is quite different. It is done by the young man offering a coconut to the girl he intends to marry in the presence of the relatives of both parties. The acceptance of this coconut is a sign that the girl has accepted the fiance and so, he has the permission to start further negotiations. To round up this ceremony, a sumptuous feast takes place. At the end of the feast, the bride is expected to go with the birdegroom's entourage to spend four days with his people. In some areas she is only to send back the jars of wine the following day and spend only one day. But four days stay for the first time is the most common practice. She has thus an opportunity to get acquainted with the members of the family of her husband-to-be and other members of the village who normally would be curious to see the type of girls she is.

«On their betrothal, girls start to pay ceremonial visits to the families and lineage of their intending husbands, where they observe and were observed by their future mother-in-law, fellow wives of the patrilineage, and other prospective relatives-in-law generally. Taken with the inquiries already made quietly and unobtrusively about the girl's character and conduct before the betrothal, the visit was calculated to minimize the incidence of separation and divorce by giving both sides an opportunity to watch each other closely, in the environment of the permanent matrimonial home, before making up their minds».
period is what we shall describe as the Igbo period of courtship.

2. Courtship

Courtship, based on romantic love, dating and outing, as it is known in the Western world, did not exist in the Igbo traditional marriage. This is partly because most marriages were arranged by the parents of the prospective couple even without their consent. This is not only peculiar to the Igbo. It applies to the other tribes of Nigeria and Africa in general. An example is the marriage arrangement between Toro and Joshua, in the Yoruba background.

What we may call courtship starts formally after the betrothal ceremony. The period of many visits which the girl has to pay to the husband’s home, is the period we are referring to as the period of courtship. «In its institutional aspect, courtship involves all the members of the two families concerned. Presents are exchanged, relations become more friendly, and the qualities of the two families are critically observed».

The duration of the period of courtship depends on the type of marriage in question. Under the ‘chil marriage’, this period of getting acquainted with the prospective partners and their families, may last many years. For adolescent girls, it is a matter of few months. «The girl is introduced to the prospective husband’s home, during which time she is watched for social adjustment. Her capabilities in home crafts, her working habits, her temperament, her form and figure, all the characteristics inquired about earlier, are here observed practically. Every adult member of the extended family passes critical comments on the qualities and behaviour of the new member». If the comments of the members of the umunna and the couple’s relatives are adverse, that may be a sufficient reason to call off the affair no matter how beautiful or loving the girl might be. The need for endorsement of approval by all is because the
maintenance of good and successful family life is not the responsibility of only the husband and the wife but that of their respective parents and more than anything else that of the umuada, and umu nwa diala, singly or collectively.  

During this time also, the man renders bride-service (oru ogo) to his bride’s father. This enables the girl’s family to observe in their turn, how strong the man is and how likely he would succeed as a husband. 

At the end of the first visit of the prospective bride to the some of her future husband, gifts are given to her. «She may accept the gifts without demur or comment. If, however, she dislikes the man, she will return the gifts after she arrives back home. To return the gifts is her great chance to refuse the man as a husband if she does not want him. Retainment of the gifts implies acceptance of the man as a suitor.»

The periodic visits paid by a girl to the home of her affianced husband are all ceremonious. The first visit is made after the settlement of the betrothal, that is, after the initial instalment of the bridewealth has been accepted by the girl’s father. This provides an opportunity for the girl to become acquainted with the members of the family into which in due time she herself will be admitted a member. The man’s relatives in their turn, will be able to judge the qualities of the new wife. The number of succeeding visits depends on the age of the girl at the time of the betrothal. During the course of the visits she may, or may not, cohabit with her affianced husband; in the eyes of the people they are legally man and wife. For the most part this is what actually happens, although some parents are strict and will not consent to this. They take steps, in this case, whereby the girl is safeguarded, holding it a matter of honour to return her to her parents as she came from them. 

But in recent time, when men show lack of faith, both in God and in man, and there is the tendency to test the fertility of the girl they want to marry, it is very difficult to hold them back from cohabiting. Since from the moment the first instalment of the bridewealth has been paid the girl is
reckoned as the man's wife, what happens next is anybody's guess in this age of low moral standards.

This has been a situation in which the Igbo traditional marriage has been clashing with the Catholic discipline on marriage. The Mary League organization has not succeeded in holding back Catholic girls from taking the men who have paid the bridewealth on their behalf as legitimate husbands until the Catholic rites of marriage are performed.

In former days, love may, or may not have been a feature in Igbo courtship. At a stage, a substitute for it may have to develop, consisting of a certain amount of affection or favour bestowed by the husband upon his wife and vice versa. As can be seen, what is technically known as courtship does not exist. The answer of Mariam to her pastor who asked her why she got engaged to a young man before she knew more about him, gives a very good picture of Igbo engagement and courtship.

«In our country we can't talk to a boy and go out with him unless we are engaged. We can't have boyfriends. In your book you say one should not get engaged unless one is well acquainted with the other. But we can't get acquainted unless we are engaged» 50.

From this we can see that the Igbo get betrothed or engaged before embarking on courtship. The effect of this being that since the negotiations have already begone and betrothal made, both parties, will do all that they can to see that the union stands. The girl, in particular, will try as much as possible to show her good side or pretended good side, while hiding her real character. This is why the Igbo say that a woman is like a parcel, once married in, she starts to unwrap itself, exhibiting her hidden characters one after the other.

«Courtship customs make it difficult for boys and girls to really get to know one another» 51.
V. THE DETERMINATION AND PAYMENT OF THE BRIDE-WEALTH

1. Some Prefatory Negotiations

Other ceremonies leading to the payment of the bride-wealth follow after the return of the bride from her visit to the bridegroom's home. In Amucha, the ceremony of 'Ire Ihe' (the enumeration of the requirements) follows. The bridegroom and his people will ask their in-laws to tell them the customary requirements to be fulfilled on behalf of the bride. They would be told to go to the oldest man in the village to hear from him what they must do. On the day for this, they carry a jar of wine, some bottles of beer and mineral drinks, and some amount of money known as 'ego ire ihe' (the money for the enumeration of items). On their arrival, the old man sends for the village scribe, who reads out to them what the village traditionally demands from a man who wants to marry any of their daughters. The enumerated item were expected to be fulfilled gradually each time the bridegroom and his people visit the bride's home for the series of negotiations that are involved in traditional marriage.

Then comes the ceremony of 'ibuzu mmanyi' or 'igba isu' (the completion of wine). On this day, about six jars of wine, four cartons of beer and four crates of mineral drinks are demanded from the bridegroom and his people. Other items include, a head of tobacco, a bottle of ground tobacco, four packets of cigarettes and some amount of money ranging from N20.00 (twenty Naira) upwards. When these have been fulfilled, the bridegroom's people ask their in-law to tell them the amount to be paid as the bride-wealth.

The settling of the bride-wealth is the most rigorous part of the marriage negotiations. There is much haggling and sometimes both parties seem to be on the point of quarelling. This may not be settled on the same day. The man may have to return with a few of his people and the middleman to do the final settlement.

In Obodo Ahiara, the ceremony leading to the determination and payment of the bride-wealth takes different
forms. Wine is carried to the family of the bride four time. The first, as we have seen, is the ‘mmanyi nna nwa’ (wine for the father of the bride), which marks the betrothal. The others are: ‘mmanyi Amala’ (wine for the umunna or village members); ‘mmanyi umundom’ (wine for the women of the village); ‘mmanyi nne nwa’ (the wine for the mother of the bride).

On the day the wine for the umunna or village members is brought, the bridegroom and his people would give to the members of the bride's village all that they demand, which would include a heavy sum of money of about N500.00 (five hundred Naira) which would be divided into two, one half given to the father of the bride, and the other half shared by the villagers.

The ceremony for the mother of the girl and that for the rest of the women or the village may be combined on the same occasion, depending on the ability of the bridegroom and his family. On this day, though the men of the village may be present, the ceremony is meant to be exclusively for women. As usual, there would be the presentation of kolantus, tobacco, native wine, beer and soft drinks, and a cash payment of about N200.00 (two hundred Naira) for the mother of the bride, and another amount much less, for the women.

2. The Role of the Middleman

In all these processes we have described above and in all the activities connected with marriage, there is an important figure who is always indispensable. This figure is the 'middleman' or 'middlemen' depending on whether the parties concerned would like to have one or more persons to act as the official witness or a go-between. In some places they are drawn from both sides of the marriage. According to the words of Mbili, when parents wish to arrange the marriage of their son and know of a suitable girl, they confide the matter to a close and trustworthy relative or friend.
Preferably he must be from the same village with the girl to be married. This man acts as an intermediary. He finds out all about the girl and her family, reporting back to the boy's family. If they are satisfied that the girl is the type of wife they want, the parents of the boy and the intermediary in company of one or two members of the umunna of the boy, go to the girl's parents and declare their intention. Should the other parents be unwilling, or less enthusiastic, it is the duty of the intermediary to pave the way.

In a negotiated marriage the formal arrangements are made by the intermediary, so that the girl's father has the assurance that the union has the consent of the groom, and he is willing to make payments. Some call this middleman the marriage guide who is normally selected from the girl's side, whose duty is to introduce the prospective bridegroom to important members of the bride's family. He intervenes when demands become excessive and more important still he fights tooth and nail to see that the bride-wealth is reduced. Although related to the bride, he is expected to side with the bridegroom in all things. Among the Igbo, it is believed that in every marriage arrangement there must be 'onye aka ebe' (witness) who generally serves as laison between the parties and even when the marriage has taken place, he settles or assists in settling any dispute between the wife and husband or their parents and relatives.

He takes record of the expenses incurred (except entertainment items like food and drinks) on the wife, so that in the event of the dissolution of the marriage they could be refunded to the husband. The handing over of the bridewealth is always through him since it is through him that it will be recovered if need arises. «It may be stressed that in this as in other preliterate communities an important part is played by witness in the legalisation of such contracts as the payment of bridewealth, or the pledging of land. In the absence of written documents it is the living witness who in many cases provides evidence of a legal reciprocal situation».
3. The Bride-wealth

A legal marriage, by which the children who will be born are given 'legitimate' status in Igbo society requires a series of transactions and formalities in which the two bodies of kin, those of the husband and those of the wife, are involved. The making of a payment of goods, money or services by the bridegroom to the bride’s kin is an essential part of the establishment of legality. This payment, which is so inbuilt in the Igbo marriage system as to be regarded as a typical feature of it, is what we refer to as the bride-wealth.

Attempts have been made to clear the misinterpretation given to it by non-Africans. Hence names like 'bride-price', 'dowry', 'dower', etc. have been rejected by anthropologists of Igbo culture. To non-Africans, the payment of money or goods to the family of the bride by the groom and his family is regarded as buying the bride. To them the woman is regarded as a chattel, and the ownership of the woman is bought from one kins-group by the other for goods or money.

But this is not so. A clear unbiased look by an insider will convince one that the bride is neither sold nor bought. Sometimes the amount is so small that it could not represent the real value of a woman. Above all there is no question of the woman’s ownership being transferred, as should have been the case of any object bought by a person, e. g. a slave etc. Instead, she remains always a member of her own lineage after the marriage, and returns to her people often at the slightest provocation. «The woman’s status may be inferior, but she is not a chattel, she is definitely a person with rights» 56. Her inferior status cannot be said to be as a result of the bride-wealth, nor can it be said that the bride-wealth is as a result of the inferior status of women. Even in societies where bride-wealth are not paid, the status of the woman is never equal to that of the man. «It would be truer to say that a price is paid for the right of exclusive sexual access to the woman by the husband and for the
power to bequeath status and property to the children of the union as to the descendants of the husband’s group. However, an economic aspect does enter into bride-wealth payments. They are often assessed taking into account the beauty and capabilities of the woman, and the status, wealth and material prospects of the husband» 57.

The bride-wealth is an important institution, not only among the Igbo but in all African societies. It is a token of gratitude on the part of the bridegroom and his people to those of the bride, for their care over her and for allowing her to become his wife. «She is a valuable person not only to her family but to her husband’s people. At marriage she is not stolen but is given away under mutual agreement between the two families. The gift elevates the value attached to her both as a person and as a wife. The gift legalizes her value and the marriage contract. The institution of this practice is the most concrete symbol of the marriage covenant and security. Under no circumstances is this custom a form of ‘payment’, as outsiders have often mistakenly said. African words for the practice of giving the marriage gift are, in most cases, different from words used in buying or selling something in the market place. Furthermore, it is not only the man and his people who give: the girl’s people also give gifts in return, even if these may be materially smaller than those of the man. The two families are involved in a relationship which, among other things, demands an exchange of material and other gifts. This continues even long after the girl is married and has her own children» 58.

Shorter calls bride-wealth «a symbolic gift exchange legalising a marriage, legitimising the children of the union, indemnifying the bride’s family, establishing the marriage to a limited extent, and propitiating the lineage spirits» 59. There are a number of different ways in which a man can establish his position as a woman’s legal husband and the legal father of her children. They involve some form of ‘qui pro quo’ giving by the husband or his senior relatives on his behalf to the parents or other senior relatives of the wife 60. Its essential features are two: the transfer, as the act which
makes the legal, establishes the legitimacy of the children, form a pledge for the maintenance of the marriage, since they must be returned if it is dissolved. The payment does not make the wife her husband’s property (even though men in their domineering characteristics claim so), or place her in the relationship of a slave to him.

The requirement of payment is more adequately understood as a recognition of the wife’s value both to her husband and to her own relatives, and of the importance of the marriage contract. The reply of the Nneato woman to Sylvia Leith-Ross shows the importance attached to the bride-wealth, even by the women themselves.

«When I tentatively asked, seeing how clearly the women realized all the complications inherent in the dowry system, whether they ever thought of doing without it, they looked at me in shocked astonishment. ‘But if no dowry were paid for us, we should be harlots...’ (she said)».

While it is true that bride-wealth shows the recognition of the wife’s value, it is not of course, denied that most parents prefer a son-in-law who can make high payment.

Earlier in Igbo society, in place of the payment of money as the bride-wealth, the bridegroom worked for his wife’s kin, just as Jacob served Laban seven years for each of the two sisterss, Leah and Rachael, whom he married (cf. Gen. 29). Marriage by service may be of two types. There is the type where both payments and certain prescribed service are given to the girl’s father in the period preceding the marriage, and that, where the husband both before and after his marriage lives and works for some period of time at the village of his wife’s father. This is characteristic of the matrilineal people of parts of Eastern and North-eastern Igbo. During the years which elapse before the marriage can be consummated annual gifts to work for him, either when called on or at stated seasons and sometimes for a fixed number of days. He often brings with him a working party consisting either of his male age-mates or his kinsfolk of both sexes.
Where good relationship exists between husband and his in-laws, the miscellaneous gifts and services for which the suitor is liable are continued throughout his life as a husband, and even after his wife's death. The system which is very wide spread in other African societies, where the payment is made in cattle is not very familiar in Igbo society. But this does not rule out its practice among the Eastern or Cross River Igbo and in the Eastern part of the Northern or Onitsha Igbo of old, which had some contact with the cattle-keeping Fulani of Northern Nigeria. Basden who worked among the Northern Igbo, has some record of this practice.

"Formally, the bride-price was reckoned in cows, goats, and cowries. Any presents given are additional and quite irrespective of it. Nowadays, the figure is fixed on an English cash basis. Moreover, the price is steadily rising. The social rank, age and personal qualities of the girl are all assessed, and to these must in these days, be added the cost of training and education if any have been incurred" \(^{62}\).

Once the payment has been made, the bride's family has no right to fetch their daughter back, except at death. If the union is broken by divorce at the instance of any of the parties, the payment has to be returned and the woman's family recover the rights they had over their daughter which they surrendered to the man.

Like all human institutions, abuses have crept into the practice of paying bride-wealth. Its original function of giving cohesion to the extended family is today turned to actually operate against the extended family, disrupting it, and serving the profit of individuals within the family at the expense of others.

One sees on the pages of the newspapers and hears over the radio and television debates and people's outcry against the institution. These cries centre, not on bride-wealth 'per se' but on the 'high bride-wealth' that is current among parents, which tends to confirm the European criticism of the institution as a system of buying and selling of a woman.
Recently the economic aspect of bridewealth is being emphasized in many Igbo societies, thereby making it an intolerable burden to the bridegroom and his family. The amount demanded and paid has to reflect the educational level and the potential economic contribution of the prospective bride. The evils that this produce abound. «Marriage is delayed because of prohibitive bridewealth, and marriages are even broken as a result of the cupidity of parents wishing to sell their daughters more profitably».

Another aspect of this high bridewealth is the practice which Shorter beautifully describes as 'playing the marriage market'. Here a man leaves his home area where bridewealth is high in order to look for a girl in another area where bridewealth is low. The consequence of this is anybody's guess. The young man may be forced to marry, not out of love, but out of what economists would call 'opportunity cost'. High bridewealth, though flattering to the bride, may also lead to the husband treating her as a chattel.

Some authors have given the reason for this high bridewealth to the system whereby the parents of the bride are expected to give their daughter dowry or gifts which she has to bring into her new home. The dowry which the bride is expected to bring with her consists of household furniture and cooking utensils. These are supplied by her parents and relatives. In practice, it is the bridegroom who pays for all these because it is from the amount he pays as the bridewealth that the father of the bride gets money to buy the items. In the past, the household furniture was both local and few. Moreover their cost was very low. But in recent times, a bride's parents are expected to buy a good family bed, not the wooden or bamboo type of old, but of the spring type. Instead of the old clay cooking pots, they are expected to buy the most modern types of cooking pots. On top of this, the new system of cooking with gas or electricity has made it necessary that parents have to buy, at least, the kerosene stove for their daughter, instead of the old tripod stand. The price of all these articles have to be borne in mind while negotiating for the amount to be paid for the bride-wealth.
Attempts by both the Church and the civil government to abolish bridewealth have met with no success. Imposition of a fixed amount in the defunct Eastern Nigeria Marriage law has been as ineffective as the ‘Nigerian Price Control Board’. Some authors and thinkers have suggested a public re-education as the solution to the problem of high bridewealth. To this Shorter writes: «Toleration is really the policy of drift, in the hope that bridewealth will disappear of its own accord, as economic changes take place. Although it is true that in some areas which enjoy a relatively high standard of living bridewealth has diminished in importance, in many of these areas bridewealth has escalated. It does not look as if the custom is simply going to die out. Some people hope to remedy the situation by revaluing the institution of bridewealth and restoring it to its original purpose through public re-education. If this is a realist attempt to deal with the problem and not an attempt to put the clock back then there may be something to be said of it. In general, one might recommend a public re-education for restoration and reduction through the joint action of Church and State, and the abandonment of legal measures of control».

One is led to subscribe to Shorter’s recommendation following the argument that age long customs are hardly eliminated through legislations. Not only that bridewealth is a custom as old as the Igbo tribe, it has qualities, as we have shown, which help in the stability of marriage. What is needed is not a legislation to do away with the institution completely but a new religious awareness; a clear understanding of the central meaning of marriage. When people start looking at marriage from the point of view of a God-given institution which demands on the part of man some sacrifice; a give and take relationship, not only between the couple in question but also between their two families and relatives, there will be a change of attitude in the way they give their daughters in marriage. This new awareness can only be achieved through public re-education, especially a re-education on the original purpose of bridewealth and the
Christian meaning of marriage and family life. When all Christians have taken the right stand on this issue, the problem is as good as solved.

Bridewealth in itself is good and plays an important role in marriage. What is wrong is the commercialization of it which is unChristian as it is uncharitable.

VI. THE FINAL CEREMONIES

1. Puberty Rites or Premarriage Rites

In the old days, before a girl leaves her father’s compound for her husband’s, she must undergo some ritual ceremonies. One of the most famous of these premarriage ceremonies was the fattening ceremony, known among the Igbo as ‘Iru Mgbede’ or ‘Nkpu’.

This is done a little before the final marriage negotiations are completed, and since in some areas this is done once a year, and for girls of the same village belonging to the same age grade, it invariably involved both those that were already betrothed and those not yet betrothed. About six months before the final marriage ceremony the girls take up their quarters in separate apartments. «They must not venture out into the open during daylight, though they do not hesitate to wander forth after dark! They do no work whatever during this period, and are provided with abundance of food. For the purpose being to make them as fat as possible. It seems that the Igbo of old loved fat wives. Their only occupation at this time is the preparation of camwood dye wherewith to stain their bodies» 65. In some areas, during this time, the ‘nkpu’ girls were given marriage instructions. They were now «formally taught the virtues of womanhood, fidelity to husband, pregnancy rules and childcare, house craft and other necessary requirements for a happy married life» 66.

They would remain in this state of idleness and seclusion until the time for the final festivities which were spread
over some seven days. Maids of honour attended upon the girls throughout the round of festivities and these also were smeared with camwood dye, the fashion being to use as much paint as possible, from the crown of the head to the feet.

The outing took place in the late afternoon. When the bride-to-be was ready, she sallied forth into the street followed by her maid of honour. She might join company with other girls observing the mgbede with her. Together they would wonder through the village into the market square. The attendants carrying large fans wherewith to refresh their ladies after the bouts of dancing in which they indulged. Dancing was an exhausting business and the mgbede girl did not spare herself in her effort to win the applause of the spectators. If she succeeded in pleasing them, the basket or calabash, placed at her feet for the purpose, received a contribution of cowries or cash from the bystanders as a token of their pleasure and good wishes for her married life.

In some Igbo societies there existed other ceremonies to indicate that a maiden was ready to take up the status of married life. Among the people of Enugwu Agidi in Anambra State, instead of the mgbede they have the ‘iche-enyo’ dance. «it publicized that an engaged girl was fully married to her fiance. The feeding and decorations of the bride, indentified with this celebration, are similar to those of the ‘mkpu’ though the duration of ‘iche-enyo’ is shorter.»

Among the people of Mgbidi in Imo State, the ‘Ikwe-Ezi’ ceremony takes the form of a puberty rite and an introduction to a married status. The final ceremony in this rite, which is the outing or going to the market (ije ahia), marks the end of the girl’s stay in her father’s house and the beginning of her married life. «From the market she goes to her husband’s home - a full wife».

A similar ceremony marking a transition from maidenhood to womanhood was recorded among the Umuchu people of Aguata. Here the final ceremony as the ‘Ifu ahia’ in Mgbidi is known as the ‘izu ahia’.
In Nneato, when the girl is considered ready to conceive and consequently ready to take up her permanent abode in her husband's house, a feast takes place at which the husband kills a goat to be eaten by both families and he presents another goat to the bride's family. The bride, usually accompanied by a bevy of other girls who have reached the same stage at the same time, goes round the market place followed by a small girl from her own family bearing the skin of the goat which was killed, another carrying a three-pointed stick upon which the fat of the goat is placed (to show how rich an animal had been chosen for the feast) and a third bearing a bowl into which are put small gifts of money for the bride 'for honour of being able to conceive'. She will also be followed by women from her fiance's family, singing songs in her praise, and the fiance's friends will let off their dane guns with much noise and smoke.

This last description of the Nneato outing ceremony shows that in this area a girl had to be pregnant in her parents' home before she moves in to live with her husband. It would not be surprising that the current trend of testing a girl's fertility before marriage is a carry-over from this old custom, and in such areas as Nneato the practice is more rampant than in other parts.

There is another custom to which the bride-elect must submit to before the actual marriage can be consummated, namely, cicatrization. This consists of very rough tattooing over the front part of the body, generally in the form of a cros, made with triple lines of mbubu or ebubu (small raised lumps or blobs). The presence of such cicatrices indicates that a woman is already married or preparing to enter that state. For conception to occur before this ceremony has been fulfilled is an abomination.

In general it is the girls' puberty rites that have direct connection with marriage. Boys have also their own puberty rites, though not directly linked with marriage, they nevertheless indicate that the initiates are ready to undertake manly responsibilities, one of which is marriage. In Mbano and some part of Ahiazu Mbaise, there still exists the ceremony
of ‘iwa akwa’ (wearing of cloth). This is a puberty ceremony performed by boys (and in some places girls also) to show that they are ready for the married status. The group to perform the initiation are usually presented before the elders at the beginning of the year. It is believed that they have reached the age of manhood, capable of paying levies and contributions for developments. A date is fixed for the wearing of cloth ceremony, usually during the dry season of the December months. During the ceremony, the initiates dress up in their newest and best clothes, with long wrappers left hanging from their shoulders and sweeping the street. The girls of the same age carry the flowing wrapper for the boys. They dance, jubilate, and match along in a line towards their market square, with dane guns (indicating that they have reached the age of handling guns). The jubilating and parading in the market square in the presence of spectators, parents, friends and relatives over, they return to their homes to feast and make merry with their well-wishers and friends. Their parents derive the greatest joy because they feel that their children are now grown up men ready to take up family responsibilities. Some will then start making arrangement for their sons’ marriage.

Cicatrization of the face was a requirement for marriage for men. It was a test of masculine maturity and ability to bear pain. One being cicatrised was not expected to show any sign of pain. The shaking of hands or legs in pain during this exercise was regarded as shameful. In some areas it was done, as all initiations, according to age grades. Cicatrisation marks the entry or preparedness to enter into the married state.

2. The Concluding Rites and the Marriage Ceremony

The Igbo traditional marriage ceremony does not end with the payment of the bridewealth. The marriage negotiations are not as dry and stereotypical as it may seem. There is much merry-making and feasting, for the importance of any
institution in Igboland was best measured by the rites and ceremonies attached to it. If any phase of human existence was unimportant, it had neither rite nor feast going with it, if it is very important, it had both of these things.

Marriage being one of the most important Igbo institutions has all the features that characterise such an institution. «There are rounds of festivities and dancing, there are processions and body painting; there are even in some areas, special feeding. All this was just the native way of emphasizing the fact that marriage was the big thing in a girl’s life and that the whole community regarded it as an institution worthy of respect and expenditure. It was an excellent sign of the fundamental sanity of Ibo views of life, for nothing reflects the sanity or insanity of any human society better than its attitude towards marriage.»

One of these numerous final ceremonies is the ‘Iri ihe aku nwanyi’ or ‘Ibu nkwu nwanyi’. This is the most glamorous of all the ceremonies. It involves the umunna, and in some cases the entire villages of the husband and wife and other friends and relatives. The husband informs his people of the date of this final ceremony. On that day, every male member of his umunna brings, at least, a jar of wine, and all assemble in the man’s house together with their wives and other interested members of the family. From here they all proceed in a procession to the bride’s house, where her parents and their own umunna and other relatives warmly receive them. There is sumptuous eating and drinking. Young men and girls stage improvised music to which the man and the bride dance with others accompanying them. But in recent times music is supplied by local bands of music groups or sometimes by record players. The performance of ‘ndu-oku’ custom according to Ogbalu’s account, concludes the ‘Ibu nkwu nwanyi’ ceremony. «At the end of the entertainments during ‘ibu nkwu nwanyi’, the parents, relatives and friends bring out presents of all sorts ranging from cow to broom and in modern homes, houses, motor cars, to spoons, to their daughter. This is carried away when her husband’s people leave her home to her husband’s place at
the end of the ceremonies. They become her personal property and cannot be disposed of by the husband without her consent.74

This ceremony is known by different terminologies in different parts of Igbo land. In Mbano, it is called 'Ihe nrisa'. In Mbaifili it is 'Uzie nwani'; 'Ihe Ikpu aku' or 'Ikpu oru aku' in Nkwere/Isu; 'Ibu nkwu' or 'Igba nkwu' in Awka and other parts of Anambra state. In general this ceremony marks the Igbo traditional wedding. It is hosted by the bride’s family, with the bridegroom and his relations and friends as the special guest. The aim is to thank the bridegroom and his family, for it is assumed that they have been on the spending end since the beginnign of the negotiations till date.

Though it is presumed to aim at thanking the bridegroom and his people, it would be observed that most of the wine to be drunk on that occasion and many other things are supplied by the bridegroom and his people. In Amucha it is the day the members of the village or umunna receive their own share of the bridewealth. The men given eight jars of wine, eight cartons of beer, eight crates of mineral drinks, two heads of tobacco, two bottles of whisky and a sum of N60.00 (sixty Naira) cash. The same system applies in Umonoha, but the quantity of the items and payments recorded in some localities, the general trend is that this occasion is the time for eating and drinking. It is characterised by heavy courses of food made available for everyone to eat; wine and beer lavishly served, and each person eats and drinks two his content.

During the ceremony, a cup of wine is once more given to the bride. She takes the cup of wine, drinks a portion of it and hands the remaining to her husband. The parents of the girl give the couple their blessing. With this drinking from the same cup and the parental blessing, they are wedded as husband and wife. As Igbo marriage involves a give and take, the relatives of the bride make gift presentation to the parents of the bridegroom. This consists of one goat, and some quantity of yams.
Recently, the young people have started to Europeanize this ceremony, especially in areas where it is regarded as a substitute to Christian wedding. In these areas, the Western system of organized party is followed. People sit at tables, the chairman and supporters of the occasion are ceremoniously called out by the master of ceremony. The bride and the bridegroom are ushered in, dressed in a uniform attire. Then prayers are said and cake is cut by the couple. The invitees make donations to support the new couple.

At the end of the ceremony, the bride is accompanied by her mother, many girls of her own age grade, and some women from her village, to her new home. The women carry the items which were given to her by her parents and relatives. «Most of the women carried small head loads of the bride’s dowry to which they had all contributed - cooking pots, wooden bowls, brooms, mortar, pestle, baskets, mats, ladles, pots of palm oil, baskets of cocoyam, smoked fish, fermented cassava, locust beans, heads of salt and pepper. There were also two lengths of cloth, two plates and an iron pot» 75. «Ahurole’s bridal train was a train indeed. It carried all that wen to make the home of a young couple comfortable. Even goats, chickens and she-dog were included» 76.

In the bridegroom’s home there is singing and dancing. At the end, her mother and all the protecting company from her village set out for home again leaving her behind, fully handed over as a married girl.

In some areas, the new couple cannot consummate their marriage unless some rituals are performed in the home of the bridegroom. «The bride and bridegroom used to sit with their feet on the ‘Chi’ symbol made of odiri wood, and thereto be married by the priest, while the blood of the fowl was sprinkled on their feet and over the sticks. An offering of chalk, eggs, palm wine and other foodstuffs was made at the same time, while both bride and groom were marked with chalk and the protection and favour of the great goddess asked for them» 77. Achebe describes a sacrifice made
before Okuta and Obika started living together. This was meant to sever the new bride from whatever evil she must have incurred in her paternal home so that they might not follow her to her marital home, as the prayer said during this sacrifice indicates.

«Any evil which you might have seen with your eyes, or spoken with your mouth, or heard with your ears or trodden with your feet; whatever your father might have brought upon you or your mother brought upon you, I cover them all here».

The concluding marriage negotiation in the Mbaise area does not take the form of a wedding as we have described. The rite known as the ‘Ivu efere’ performed in the bride’s home marks the last of the numerous marriage negotiations. This ceremony is the most expensive of all the ceremonies connected with marriage in Mbaise. Many people shy away from marrying from Mbaise because of this ceremony. The items bought by the bridegroom for this include, four big jars of native wine, four pieces of wrapper, four blouses, four head-ties, one bag of salt, one bag of rice, one tin of palm oil, one tin of kerosene, one umbrella, a lamp, one carton of bar soap, one carton of toilet soap, eight jars of pormade, four tins of powder, forty big yams, a pair of shoes, a pair of sandals, a heap of onions, a dozen of tinned tomatoes, one wrist watch, a hand bag, and a big basin. In more sophisticated cases, a small motor cycle (love nwantiti or ‘ogom emeka’) is also included in the list.

There is feasting and merry-making, but not as elaborate as in the case of ‘iri ihe aku’. In Mbaise area where most of the marriage activities have been christianized, this ceremony indicates that the couple is ready to go to the altar at any time after. The bride does not follow the groom home as in the case of the ‘ihe aku’. The bridegroom returns the following day or any other convenient time and asks his in-law to escort him to the parish office for the posting of the banns of marriage. It is only when his in-laws agree to do this that the young man is sure that he has satisfied them and the wife is his.
VII. CONCLUSION

I have purposely chosen to be detailed, especially on the particular items presented during the marriage negotiations in order to highlight the expensiveness of marriage in Igbo culture. This is gradually posing a pastoral problem, in that its evil effects tend to touch even the fundamental purpose of marriage and family life.

Apart from the evils of high bridewealth, Igbo marriage being and alliance not only between two individuals, the man and the woman, but an alliance between families, villages etc. is a very big asset to the Igbo. All the elements found in Igbo marriage system contribute to holding the primary families together and ensuring the stability of marriage. «There was corporate responsibility in the marriage of every member. In those days the bride had to identify herself completely with relatives of the man, care for them, and go out of her way to be fully integrated with the husband's people. In this way her happiness was insured as well as her future and social security. The man had to do the same with the girl's people» 79.

We must not fail the remark that in a way the corporate responsibility in Igbo marriage has its negative side. The meddling of the parents and elders in most cases make the marriage union sometimes uncomformable for the couple. This is mostly the case when the union seem to be faced with some misfortunes e. g. childlessness etc. The first sign of conflict always comes from the mother of the bridegroom if the the marriage is childless. For example, Chiaku who undertakes her first visit to her son was only interested in assessing her daughter-in-law's progress towards motherhood. She feels bitterly cheated and disappointed by what she observes and throws back at them their gifts to her and minces no words in explaining to then how much they have defaulted. «Where are my grand-children? I am not a dead body which wants coth for its burial», she grumbled, «I am a living body and therefore want to see my own blood. Spirits of the righteous dead move about looking for where
to get re-incarnated, and yet two of you stay like that. Perhaps you don't want me to be called Big mother before I die»

The meddling of parents in the choice of partners for their children is another aspect of Igbo marriage system which militate against the aims of marriage. The discrimination involved in this is a very big obstacle to real conjugal love and ends of marriage.
10. E. Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, cit., p. 29.
17. Ibid., p. 143.
21. Ibid., pp. 103-104.
22. Ibid., p. 104.
29. Ibid., p. 51.
34. Ibid., p. 66.
35. Ibid., p. 50.
36. Ibid., p. 51.
39. The «Osu» in Igboland are regarded as outcasts. They are believed to have been sacrificed to the idol and so, are inferior to the «Diala» who are the free-born sons of the village. It is an abomination for a Diala to marry an Osu. If this happens, the Diala automatically becomes an osu through the sexual relationship with the osu and also all the children of the marriage become osu.
41. Only one kindred in Ihioma is exempt from this Mgbokwo prohibition. In this kindred, girls born on Nkwo day can be married, but those born on Afor day cannot be married by the members of the kindred.
44. C. IFEMESIA, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, cit., p. 60.
47. Ibid.
52. This practice of reading out the items required in traditional marriage negotiations is of late introduction. In the past, when there were no literate members of the village to do this, the old man enumerated all the items according to the custom of the village without the aid of a scribe.

57. Ibid., p. 168.
64. Ibid., p. 172.
68. L. Anamza, *Marriage in Enugu-Agidi of Igboland*, cit., p. 44.
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