
II-II Wa (Traditional Marriage): Towards the Typologies of Marriage in Ogoni Traditional Philosophy

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Abstract

Every society has its own norms, values and morals, which help them to structure their universe. Among the Ogoni indigenous people, the centrality of ii-ii wa (traditional marriage) as the nucleus of society is the under guiding factor for their comprehensive marriage rites. To the Ogoni indigenous people, marriage is a sacred institution, inextricably attached to the Ogoni traditional religion. It is a process rather than a discrete event that marks one's transition from one stage of life to another; it involves rituals, negotiations, and transactions that stretch over years. It is a community practice within which the values of a community are shaped and preserved. However, the eventual contact with the western culture through colonialism, christianity, education and, with the subsequent upsurge of globalization, reflects the diffusion of modern orientations and ideologies. These values are not only being challenged but also eroded. Consequently, this onslaught brings into question the place of the Ogoni cultural values and marriage system amidst modernization. This study, therefore, centers on the organized system of the Ogoni traditional marriage forms in relation to specific underlying dimensions, attributes and categories. The study further distinguishes between Bia-kē, biabe and the assumed Sira-culture that do not exist in Ogoni cultural practices. In analyzing the subject matter, the study adopts the descriptive research design, using the philosophical approach,

with special reference to the structural functionalism and the diffusion of innovation theories. Through the research effort it was observed that the fortunes of marriage and family institutions are dwindling due to the emerging trends of individualism, loosed morality, materialism and intrusion of foreign ideas into marriage and family system in Ogoni. Hence, the need to respect, project and protect those core Ogoni traditional marriage values.

Keywords: II-II-Wa (traditional marriage), family values, religion, social change

Introduction

Ii-ii-wa (traditional marriage), and its typologies are dynamic constructions that describe the Ogoni traditional marriage system in relation to specific underlying dimensions, forms, types, and attributes as practiced in the Ogoni traditional society. However, there is a relatively long tradition of interest in the typologies of marriage in Ogoni traditional philosophy, as the institution has undergone a lot of changes over the last 50 years. This approach to understanding the Ogoni indigenous *ii-ii-wa* (traditional marriage) procedure and forms therefore have the advantage of preserving the Ogoni religious and socio-cultural values in its dynamism.

In the Ogoni traditional philosophy, *ii-ii-wa* (traditional marriage) marks a significant transition from one socio-religious status to another in their existential circle. Marriage is a transitional rite that legitimate and socially recognized the union of a man and a woman who, as a result of parental consent and fulfillment of societal requirements, agree to live together as husbands and wife to procreate. It is an alliance between a man and woman which legitimizes sexual access and the children which

result, giving them an ascription in the society as members of a particular lineage and family (Yamah, 2012).

Marriage therefore, plays a central role as an expression of Ogoni culture and religious tradition. It is a community practice within which community values are shaped and preserved. In as much as it seeks to preserve life, marriage also safeguards against any evil that would destroy the human community, for instance witchcraft and death (Okiyah, 2016). The community dimension of marriage takes into account, the Ogoni lineage, leadership, adulthood, elder hood, bride wealth, polygyny, herbalism, and continuity of the community (Kirwen, 2011), marriage covers the major values and ideas that bring wholeness and coherence to human life. Magesa (1997) while discussing African marriage in the context of kinship, widens the scope covered by the items of lineage to include affinity. He places the discussion in the context of inter-personal inter-communal, and inter-tribal relation, Magesa added, the family created by marriage is the ‘fundamental element’ and the ‘basic sphere of action’ in African relations. The family is the person’s channel of integration into the clan, and the wider society (Magesa, 1997). Hence, this approach to the understanding of family reveals the communal nature of marriage.

Today, however, the interconnectedness of marriage with the Ogoni religio-cultural themes is not that distinct or realized. In the Ogoni contemporary society, for example, bride wealth as an essential element of marriage has been commercialized and the cultural and religious interconnectedness to marriage of such an important element has, apparently, lost significant or has been profoundly compromised. In other words, most of this traditional marriage rites, procedure forms and values, have fallen or been pushed aside in favor of new cultural and constitutional norms of sexual liberty, privacy and autonomy. Marriage is viewed

increasingly at law and at large today as a private contract to be formed, maintained and dissolved as the parties deem fit (Witle, 2015). Requirements of parental and extended families consent and witness to the formation of marital contracts have largely disappeared. The mandatory waiting periods for detailed inquiries by families of both parties have also disappeared.

Sequel to this, most often, some modern scholars have misconstrued *Bia-kē* with ‘Sira-Custom.’ The ‘Sira-Custom’ is wrongly assumed to mean a system where the first daughters are not given out in marriage. This misconception has been so popularized that Patrick & Angela (2013) identified the Ogoni Sira-Culture as one of the gender related violence in Rivers State. To them, the Sira-Culture is a cultural practice in which the first daughters are not given out for marriage; rather they are made to live a promiscuous life with attendant consequences of single parenthood and mental abuse. This therefore raises the following posers: what is marriage in Ogoni traditional philosophy? What are the different typologies of marriage in Ogoni traditional society? Why are some daughters giving out in marriage, and others retained at home? Is there such practice like the Sira-Culture that restricts first daughters from getting married in Ogoni? What is the place of Ogoni traditional marriage amidst modernization?

It is against this backdrop and imbalance misconception that the paper through the qualitative and descriptive research design is attuned not just to address the typologies of Ogoni traditional marriage, but to give a clear distinction between *Bia-kē*, Biabe, and Sira-culture, as well as to explore the prospect of Ogoni traditional marriage amidst social change.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two socio-philosophical theories – functionalism theory and diffusion innovation theory. Functionalism also called structural theory grew out of the writing of English philosopher and biologist Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) who likened the society to a human body. He argued that just as the various organs in the body work together to keep the entire system functioning and regulated, the various organs in the society work together to keep the entire society functioning and regulating (Spencer, 1998), and as well promote solidarity and stability.

Emile Durkheim applied Spencer's analogy to explain the structure of societies and how they change and survive over time. Durkheim sees the society as complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts working together to maintain stability (Durkheim, 1893). As a general approach, functionalism “explains the existence of social institution-marriage and family, religion, and education, politics, and economics, etc. in terms of the needs that the institutions would meet in society. In other words, the survival of the society depends upon the process of biological reproduction. Marriage as an institution therefore provides a context for reproducing, nurturing and socializing children, as well as regulating sexual activity. The relations established after marriage help in maintaining social solidarity and thus contribute to the unity of the society. However, this theory failed to consider the role of individual action and social change.

The diffusion of innovation theory developed by Everett in 1962 is one of the oldest theories in sociology. It originated in communication to explain how, why, and not what rate new ideas or production gains momentum and diffuses (or spread) through a specific population or social system. The end result of diffusion is that people as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behavior

or product. Hence, for Rogers (2003), adoption is a decision of “full use of an innovation as the best course of action available” and rejection is a decision “not to adopt an innovation” Rogers see diffusion as the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain Channels-Religion, education, and urbanization, etc. It is a situation by which a particular cultural traits have been borrowed as a result of trade, conquest or migration over time among the members of a social system.

The theory proposes generally that those who have early encounters with westernization are more highly educated, and have higher status and are more exposed to both mass media, and interpersonal channels of communication (Asu, Ekwok, & Chimezie, 2014). Within the context of this study, the diffusion theory is used to explain the various channels of social change which has led to the alteration and neglect of the Ogoni traditional philosophy, marriage and value system.

Defining Religion, Marriage and Family

Religion has defied a univocal definition due to the lack of scholarly consensus on the definition of religion. Consequently, religion has meant different things to different people over time. Within the context of this study, religion is seen as an organized and integrated system of beliefs and practices, morals and symbols expressed out of experience in relation to sacred and profane, feelings and mysteries, resulting to self-abasement and absolute dependency upon the Super Being (Deezia, 2017). It is the springboard for the development of socio-ethical values, as it contains not only the spiritual backing to individual conduct, but also an effective means of inculcating interpersonal relationship within the society.

Like many social terminologies, marriage is an essentially contentious concept; thus, the multifarious theories offered by social anthropologists about the origin and history of this important institution; its various forms, modes and conditions in different epochs and societies. Within the context of this paper, marriage is seen as a socio-religious and legal institution (Russell, 1959), founded on and, governed by special religious norms of a society. It is the first school of virtues, which is the principles and foundation of human existence, and development of the family and society at large. This is because without marriage there will be no family, and without a family, one could not bear children. It is the connecting bond between the two extended families of the spouses-between compounds or communities. In recognition of this, Mbiti writes;

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 unborn. All the dimensions of time meet here and the whole drama of history is separated, renewed and revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator (Mbiti, 1969:133).

African traditional conception of marriage is teleological, and as such, although the purpose of marriage is not essentially the procreation of children, sex is always recognized as a legitimate part of marriage. It was in this view that E. E. Evans-Pritchard notes;

Sex is mainly bounded with marriage and the first sexual play occurs in imitation of one of the domestic routines of

married life. It occurs in response to a cultural and not to an instinctive urge (Evans-Pritchard, 1951:50).

The family is conceived differently by different people of the world. In this respect, family is defined based on its meaning as all the people living in the same house; a social unit consisting of parents and the children they rear; a group of people related by ancestry or marriage; relatives and all those claiming descent from a common ancestor; tribe or clan; lineage (Kilani, 2017). Therefore, the family is the most basic trait of social organization in Ogoni in terms of socialization, child upbringing, transfer of traditional norms and values, beliefs, knowledge and practical skills. To this end, religion, marriage and family are three important social institutions that have an overbearing influence on the personality of the human person. For instance, religion shapes the moral dimension or aspect of the person, while the institution of marriage gives rise to the family.

The Ogoni as a People

The origin and migration of the Ogoni indigenous people is a subject of many speculations among scholars. Hence, ethnologists are divided on the question of the precise origin of the Ogoni people. This is as a result of the near absence of written records on which conventional history depends; as well as the near absence of an accurate and comprehensive oral traditional that could explain the origin and migration of the Ogoni as a people.

However, one of the common hypothesis or theories on the origin and migration of the Ogoni people holds that, the Ogoni indigenous people, originally known as the KHANA (a corruption of GHANA) people are believed to have migrated from the former

Gold Coast (now Ghana). This account chooses the 14th century as a possible arrival period for the Ogoni on the Bonny Island (Saronwiyor, Oral interview 2000). However, scientific proofs have not given this theory any credibility.

The Ogoni people who currently occupy the Eastern part of Niger Delta upland Nigeria, are said to have settled in the six Kingdoms of Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Ken-Ghana, Nyor-Khana, Tai and Oyiigbo, including Ban-goi (Special Unit). Apart from Eleme, the other kingdoms speak mutually intelligible languages. The population density of this territory is over 1,200 per square mile, probably among the highest in any rural area of the world (Igbara & Keenam, 2013). It is believed that the Ogoni settled in this territory as farmers and fishermen since remembered times and had established a well-organized social system, before the colonial invasion of 1901.

Ii-ii Wa (Traditional Marriage) in Ogoni Culture and Religious Philosophy

In the Ogoni traditional society marriage is referred to as *ii-ii wa*. When a man is getting married, it's called *ii-wa*, and *ia-dam* in terms of a woman getting married. It is viewed as a rite of passage, connected to initiation. It is a sacred institution inextricably glued to the Ogoni traditional religion. The sacredness attached to marriage makes it a highly celebrated ceremony among the Ogoni people. Like every other traditional institution, the Ogoni people believe that marriage is ordained by Kawaa-Bari (The Supreme Being). This is not only because it is the acceptable institution that promotes the transition of life and the survival of kinship, it serves as an essential criterion for assessing how responsible a man or a



woman is, for this reason, the whole family, clan a community
Fig. 1 Ogoni traditional marriage attire

(including the community of the ancestors) takes it as a responsibility to honor this obligation and to help all family and clan members to fulfill it to the fullest (Ikhindero, 2016). Hence, marriage, to the Ogoni people remains an integral, nucleus, and vital cell of the society cycle of human existence, through which everyone is expected to pass through. Hence, marriage is one of the important institutions to the human race, cultures, and religious affiliations. For the Ogoni the yardstick for one's maturity is measured through marital status. This explains the rites of passage carried out for young men and women matured enough for marriage as part of the initiation process into the institution of marriage.

The performance of the ritual, emphasizes the transfer of the woman from the spiritual power of the father to that of the husband. It is a transfer of ownership which signifies that the bride's family would no longer have control over her possession and that her husband would respectfully take on the responsibilities and obligations that her father once boasted. This practice is not peculiar to the Ogoni, as the Yoruba also perform a ritual of crossing-over; washing of feet at the threshold of the husband's house (Oduyoye, 2004). As noted elsewhere, a man or a woman is regarded to have finally landed when he or she get married. Marriage also establishes a strong bond as it involves inter-personal (family, clans, and kin groups), inter-communal and inter-tribal relation, and is the preparation of individual's to assume higher responsibilities of adulthood (Deezia, 2016a).

Sequel to this, children are highly valued in Ogoni traditional marriages, practically speaking, the birth of a child marked the real consummation of a sustained marriage and crises free marriage. So much are children valued that a marriage without children was seen as a curse from the gods of the land, and it is a very good reason strong enough for divorce or polygyny (Asu et al, 2014). In other words, it is believed that more wives, and more children, the stronger the power of immortality. However, most marriages in Ogoni start with monogamy, but the delay in childbearing, childlessness and the quest for more hands in their agricultural produce, so as to amass wealth for oneself and family resulted to polygamy. Also, an only son is encouraged to marry more than one wife for the continued existence of the lineage.

It is important to note that in the Ogoni philosophy contracting marriage is not just the business of the couple but that of the different extended families, compounds and communities. Therefore, the consent of family members must be sought and obtained.



Fig 2. Ogoni maidens on traditional marriage attire

Mate Seeking and Procedures in Ogoni Traditional Philosophy

Marital search involves observing the good, surveying the knowledge and opinion of family members and kinsmen, looking into the history of the good and sampling them. Marriage negotiations therefore are not completed in a day, hence such journey is in stages. The stage starts with the identification of the girl (bride), either from “*dee-maa*,” “*dee-wii*”, *ale* “*dee-du*” (Stream road, farm road or market road), or through “*bii-e-dee*” (moonlight plays), at times, it is also on recommendations either from parents, relations and well-wishers. When the desire is confirmed by both parties, their parents are intimated. The parents will now take the expected steps (traditionally) based on the information from their children. As a follow up, some families will go as far as consulting the oracle, to confirm whether the groom/bride is appropriate or not. If the information is in the negative, the marriage plans might be cancelled, but if in the affirmative, then they will proceed on the marriage rites proper.

Another process or way of searching for wives is through *Bogokoo Custom*. This is also known as *Nwihinakoo* in some communities, unlike the male folk, the coming of age initiation rite for the female folk begins with the *Bogokoo* ceremony. This ceremony is not as elaborate as *yaa* (adulthood ritual) ceremony. It is a yearly ceremony and it begins with the performance of libation by every lineage head in their shrine to intimate the deities of the intention. The average ages of initiates are between 10 and 15 years and they are confined within the home for a period of about three months depending on the availability of resources. Within this period, the older women inculcate into the young girls those traditional values attached to the Ogoni marriage institution. The

young girls are exempted from any work such as farming, fetching water from the stream and making purchases in the market (Igbara & Keenam, 2013).

Emphasis is placed on improved nutrition restriction of movement during this period which is seen as sacred. Carnal knowledge is a taboo during this period. Consequently, boys are not allowed into the place of confinement. The bodies of the initiates are beautified and rubbed with camwood, painted with indigo and palm oil on a daily basis. They are all taught the positive values of womanhood and how to raise a successful family. They are paraded in a procession around the community at the end of the period of confinement with additional body adornment made of beads on their waist and various metals bangles on their hands and legs. After visiting the market place, they all converge at the central town square, where they entertain the community and visitors through a special dance called “*Gbayor*” dance to the rhythm of *geregere* (xylophone). Gifts are presented to them by well-wishers and at the end each participant is carried home by a male relation on his shoulder. A special reception is held for the participants including entertainment with food and drinks.



Fig 3. Ogoni maidens on the Bogo-koo attire

Many intending suitors choose such girls as wives during this ceremony and start the process of marriage negotiations with their families. Minor variations exist in the ceremony described above but they are essentially similar in every community. It is important to note that whereas a girl who did not perform the ceremony was not treated with contempt; reverse was the case with their male counterpart. It was so because emphasis was placed on the male for reasons of leadership.

Sequel to this, good character, conduct and morals were emphasized in selecting a spouse. The social history of the would-be affine relatives was equally considered. If they had any case of adultery, incest, stealing etc., these were capable of discouraging marriage relationship. This is to say that the Ogoni parents are very meticulous concerning the choice of spouse of their children.

The Typologies of Marriage in Ogoni Traditional Philosophy

Typologies are well-established analytic tools in the humanities and social sciences. They can be put to work in forming concepts, refining measurement, exploring dimensionality, and explanatory claims (Collier, Laporte, and Seawright, 2012). In the Ogoni traditional society, the various typologies or forms of *ii-ii-wa* (traditional marriage) includes the following:

1. Ia-dam or Ia-wa (Formal Marriage)

Having found a suitor, the first stage is called *Kpogabu* (knocking of the door or the inquiry stage). This is significant because the Ogoni believe that before anyone should gain entrance into your home and family, he is expected to seek the permission of the elders in the family, this is akin to responsibility and respect (Igbonezim, 2016). At this stage, inquiries are made by both

families. This inquiry is conducted under caution and secrecy to ensure that there are no inherited diseases like epilepsy, leprosy, insanity, barrenness and frequent miscarriages in the lineage of the man or woman. They will also inquire to know if the family members die young, known for murder, sorcery, theft, traces of twin birth as well as assure themselves that the families are not in any way related. This is because; it is a taboo to marry a blood relative in Ogoni. Marriage among members of the same lineage is forbidden; and as such, no individual is expected to marry from his father's or mother's lineage. Nwideede added that if marriage fact findings regarding the would-be spouse as well as the family history is accepted, the concerned families proceed to another stage which is called "*Bib-wa*" (formal acquaintance or the introductory stage) (Nwideede, 2018 Oral interview).

Under the *Bib-Wa* (introduction) being the second stage, the bridegroom's parents, relatives as well as the intermediary will then go to the house of the intended bride parents to inform them that they have found a "ripe apple" (a maiden) in their family which they have come to plug with the permission of the family. The bride parents will then respond, which of "the apple" as there are many "ripe apples" (maidens) in the family? The intended bridegroom's parents will then mention the name of the particular bride they have come to seek her hands in marriage. The bride parents will finally respond thus: now that we have known the essence of your visit, we will have to find out from our daughter about your intention. After three occasions of such visit, their drinks may now be accepted or rejected by the bride's parents. If rejected, the marriage plan ends there; but if accepted, the groom's parents will return on an agreed date for the collection of "list," which of course was a later development. The bridal list is a document of necessary items that are culturally determined, to be

made available by the groom on the day set aside to celebrate the union. The items on the list are usually compiled by the elders and kinsmen in the family. Negotiations are limited and dependents on the flexibility/rigidity of the bride's father and kinsmen. It is important to note that each of these visits goes with '*mii-tor* (jars of palm-wine), some bottles of spirits and other requirements. Thereafter, a date is set for the payment of bride price otherwise called *kpugiwa*. At this stage, it is only the bride's inner family member that is needed, same goes to the groom. The dowry varies pending on the families. The payment of bride price is done at night, reason being that many were farmers and had to return from farm and market, have enough time to rest before going into serious negotiations like marriage.

In the pre-colonial era, daughters were given out in marriage to great warriors, farmers, record breakers, adventurers etc, based on bravery, hard work, good acrobatic display in dancing, drumming, singing, pounding, and other skill related activities and dexterity, as well as a common show of valiance. It later increased to *Ereba kpugi* (seven cowries). In the 1950s, it changes from just a jar of palm-wine and bottles of gin to ten to twenty naira (#10 to #20). Currently, bride price has been inflated to over #500,000. (Nwideede 2017, Oral interview). However, the Ogoni people believed that no amount of money and material commitment made can replace the investment of parents on the bride. Hence, the whole amount was never paid at the same time; with the belief that "*ia-dam naa le oo-oo*" (giving out a daughter in marriage is not selling).

The fourth stage is the maturation ceremony where the maidens are usually kept in fattening room for a period during which the young girl is fed very well and gets plenty of sleep in order to increase the waistlines. Most importantly, the girl goes

through domestic training of home economics, like cooking housekeeping, childcare and she is thought how to respect and make her intending spouse and his family happy. The older women give instructions based on their experiences in marriage to ensure that the young lady succeeds in her own marriage. Nwideed added that, they are not only lavishly fed but they are luxuriantly taken care of; their bodies were adorned with ‘*Biogor*’ and ‘*koo*’ peculiar hair style (Nwideede 2017, oral interview). The above is followed with an outing ceremony, otherwise known as ‘*koo*.’ This is the stage where the bride is dressed in three traditional outfits – The ‘*koo*’ dressing, dressing of the bride in covered clothes for husband to identify, though a later development. This brings to mind the popular Ogoni proverb which says: *gbene maa a ibere ye de, bee waaba kaga* (a river that forgets its origin dries up) Before the appearance of the bride, the indigenous ‘*Ekwini*’ music is played to welcome her, so that she could show her beauty in ‘*koo*’ attire to the husband, it was also meant to welcome all that have come to honor her day. While she dances in with all her age mates, dressing like her except for the ‘*kpari, sege or gegene*’ on her waist that differentiated them. Her hands, neck and legs are beautifully designed with red beads, her breast and waist parts are wrapped with beautiful red George-wrappers leaving her stomach and navel open for admiration of her husband.

Fig 4. Maturation Ceremony



The fifth and last stage is the handing over phase which was a time of mixed feelings-joyous tears in the eyes of the bride's mother, who held her tight to her chest for a moment. Her siblings and friends who will miss her after the marriage, also shared in the tearful mood. She goes before the parents and knee to receive advice and blessings. The main advice given is usually on obedience, not only to her husband but also to the other members of his family and extended family members. In his blessing the father wishes her long life and fertility. The words usually uttered are; "may our ancestors go with you; may our ancestors bless your household. No evil will happen to your spouse; you will bear both sons and daughters, and will live to give your daughters in marriage and as well have girls married to your sons." The father



Fig 5. Father's blessing during traditional marriage ceremony

finally blesses both spouses as husband and wife as a family.

2. ***Were-Gan* (Concubine):**

The second type of marriage among the people is *were-gan* (concubine). This form of marriage is synonymous to the '*Biake*'

(to be retained at home) culture which operates in almost every parts of Ogoni. The people that participate in this form of marriage are widows and divorcees which aimed at economic benefit. It is a sexual relationship with someone you are not formally married to. However, people who choose to legalize it would approach the parents of the woman; perform the customary rites after which they both live as husband and wife even for life. The customary rites, just like the formal marriage also involved jars of palm wine, bottles of illicit gin, goat and other requirements. Once the man is done with all these, the woman is recognized as concubine. The major difference from the formal marriage and this type of marriage is that the children of the association belong to the woman and not to the husband. When the children grow to manhood, they return to the home of their mother's parents, notwithstanding any training their biological father might have given them. In some cases, the man is being given one of the children as compensation for his effort but it is not his right.

3. *Wune-dam* (Posthumous Marriage):

As observed among the Ogoni indigenous people, time is never too late for a man to marry. Hence, a dead man or even a miscarried male child can get a wife through posthumous marriage. It is also one of the widely practiced forms of marriage in Ogoni land. These are marriages were a woman or a girl gets married to a man who had already died for his name and lineage not to go into extinction. Families marry wives for the deceased as to raise children for them. There is no special marriage rite attached to it than the normal wine carrying-the payment of price and other necessary marriage rites. Thereafter, the woman becomes the spouse of the deceased; hence she is accepted and accorded respect as such. (Agbo, 2016). She produces offspring with one or several

male community members, or any male approved by the husband's family. 'Wune-dam' just like any other life endeavor has its reasons which are rooted in the Ogoni traditions and culture.

4. Waa Pya-kawa (Female Husband):

Another type of marriage widely practiced especially in the pre-colonial era is the 'Wa-Pyakawa' (female husband). In this case, a woman marries another woman. It is important to note that a woman's marriage in this context is not the same as lesbianism. The nature of the relationship between women married to each other in Ogoni traditional marriage arrangement is legal and social but not sexual. Some women, who are independently wealthy, can choose to set up a compound of her own that is separate from that of her husband's compound. She will do so by marrying one or more wives to be her wives and bear her children, and the woman serves as the 'father' to the offspring's of the wives but the biological father is an assigned lover. Women who are old (beyond childbearing age), never married and have no children are another prime candidate to become female husband. This is because they will want an heir to inherit their name, wealth and property. A woman in such a situation will find a young woman and marry. This form of marriage benefits women by neutralizing the harsh effects of the inheritance law which excludes women (who have no male children) from inheriting from their deceased husband and excludes most women from inheriting from their father's wealth because the Ogoni matrilineal society has turned patrilineal. Hence, this form of marriage enhances socio-economic power for women.

5. Akpe (Damage):

This form of marriage was not a general practiced in Ogoni as it was not part of the culture. The form of marriage however, started in Luawii, the traditional headquarter of Babbe kingdom in the early 1970s and it is now a common practice in almost all the communities and villages in Ogoni. It is the systematic process or method of acknowledging and accepting responsibility pacifying the parents, for having had a pre-marital sexual relationship with their daughter. Hence it is referred to as ‘damage’, that the man has damaged their daughter and must pay for such damages. The man who is accepting this responsibility comes fully prepared with his parents and relatives just like the normal wine-carrying, he performed all the necessary marriage rites, and if he intends to marry the girl, he is giving ‘list’ to go and prepare and come back fully for the formal marriage rites. This form of marriage served as a mechanism or an instrument of checking and curbing sexual amorality (pre-marital sex).

6. Bia-kē

The next form of marriage is the *Bia-kē* (to be retained at home) culture. This is widely called “*Bia-kē*” among the Khana-Ogoni people, and ‘*Gbea-be*’ among the Gokana-Ogoni people, all meaning the same thing. The custom of *Bia-kē* culture which operates in all part of Ogoni is a compulsory practice especially in homes where the parents had no male child i.e. all the offspring’s are females. In which case, the first daughter or any of the female daughters have to be retained at home, or literally wedded to the father in order to ensure continuity of the father’s name, family and lineage. The particular girl to be retained at home must meet the desire of her father before traditional ceremonies and rituals are engaged in.

The rituals required that the father must first inform his lineage (*Gah-te* or *Bua-te*) of his intentions with (*toor-mii*) a Jar of palm wine, and a bottle of local gin. Next, he schedules a date on which to perform the traditional marriage before the '*Gāh-te*' (father's lineage). On the agreed date, he comes with a customary basket (*Topie*) containing seven yam-tubers, a bunch of plantain, a bottle of palm oil, a good quantity of local spices (*Suu-ri*), and one racket of smoked '*aka*' or '*Tee*' fish (*akwue-aka* or *tee*). Other items to accompany the '*topie*' include a jar of (*tor mii*) palm wine, a bottle of (*mii-gini*) illicit gin, a bottle of schnapps, fowl, and seven cowries (*ereba-kpugi*) for the neck of the fowl. As narrated by Ken Gbo-gbo (2016, oral interview), the father then presents these to his lineage and tables the issue at stake. He next pays the commensurate bride price. His lineage accepts all of them and shares the bride price; while the girl gets set for the traditional rites. She is stripped half naked and brought to the gathering seated adjacent to the family tree (*Si-dee*), with legs outstretched. A hole is bored beside the tree into which the blood of the slaughtered goat and fowl are allowed to drip.

The slaughtered fowl purifies the man of the blood of the goat slaughtered, while the smoked fish (*aka*) is used to cleanse him of the blood of the fowl. The seven cowries for the goat and three cowries for the fowl (*Ereba Kpugi le taa kpugi*) are swung round the neck of the girl after each slaughtering and thrown away. Seven of the '*Eka* or *Tee*' would be tied together and given to the woman to be added to the goat, fowl, yam and plantain meant for cooking. The elders use the remaining fish in drinking palm wine at the background, while the traditional priest makes incantations, libations and recitations over the girl in other to fortify her against evil forces that may come her way. Next the girl is carried up sideways for her to go and dress up in full marriage regalia in her

room having been formally married. A similar ceremony is performed for the mother's lineage. (*Gāh-ka*).

Igbara & Keenam (2013) however observed that *Bia-kē* has been misconstrued with malapropism call **Sira Custom**. *Sira* custom is wrongly assumed to mean a system where the first daughters are not given to marriage. There was never a period in Ogoni history when such a practice existed. Every Ogoni daughter is eligible for marriage. However, depending on the peculiar circumstances of household, the father could actually perform marriage ceremony for any of the daughters that may be found to be energetic to perpetuate the household. It was also attributed to parent's greater love for a first, middle or last daughter who takes the *bia-kē* status. Hence, it was not compulsory that every first daughter must be retained in the home for such a system as confirmed by the recent studies.

Bia-kē was the only acceptable method of adopting children with known biological background for the continuity of the household. These children were adopted for the purpose of security and care of the parents at old age. They are also required to stay back at home and produce offspring who take her own father's name and become his heirs. Hence, it is also for the purpose of keeping the family legacy or family name. Such a daughter was regarded as one of the wives in the home, she and her children shared in the inheritance of the home or equal basis with other members and children of the family and the community at large. The person so designated was not expected to be morally loose. She was to conduct herself like any married woman, and any relationship contracted must be consented to by the father after due consultation. The suitor presented drinks to the father for recognition. He performed the roles of a husband including conjugal right but the father was responsible for her general

wellbeing (Igbara & Keenam, 2013). Disengagement did not attract any refund of expenditure incurred. When the father died, the *Biakē* performed all the rites of widowhood as any other wife in the home.

7. Bia-be

Bia-be is different from *Bia-kē*. In this category are women, who, due to one circumstances or the other are unable to find a suitor and therefore remained unmarried. Their illicit relationship attracted litigation and claim of damage. They do not have special status in the home and can only be considered for remnants of inheritance. Their status may change once they are lucky to secure a suitor. Other forms of marriage found in Ogoni were infant betrothal and levirate or wife inheritance among others.

The Significance of Marriage and Family Values

The significance of marriage especially in procreation and identity formation cannot be over emphasized. Among the Ogoni indigenous people, marriage is a sacred institution. A man or a woman is to be regarded to have finally landed when he or she marries. The position of a wife in her husband's family remains shaky and unpredictable until she begets a child – she becomes really secure after the birth of a 'male' child. At this stage she is especially welcome as a responsible house wife to her husband's extended family (*bua-wuga*).

Marriage fulfils the obligations; the duty and the custom that every normal person should achieve is to get married and bear children. Failure to get married is like committing a crime; as such a person is not seen to be responsible. Thus, if one did not participate in marriage, there will be a sense of being cut off from community life, from partaking in human existence.

Marriage also enhances communalism and inter-tribal unity. As the basic cell of the society, all socio-cultural practices find their connections with a notion of family; either supporting or distorting. Communalism connotes concern for human beings and their well-being. As an offshoot of extended family system, where there is inter connectedness among members of the community, there is care for one another. There is the bearing of one another's burden and everyone is his brother's keeper. Hence, the family is understood as the fundamental unit of society, the foundation from which religious, civil and legal organizations naturally developed and flourished. In other words, the relational ties community forged through marriage resulting in many positive outcomes for society, is a clear indication that marriage is the '*seed-bed*' for pro-social behavior that foster social connections, civil and religious involvement, charitable giving: The institution of marriage is a sacred reality as well as an instrument of social stability (Deezia, 2016a). Inter-tribal marriage therefore encourages growth and social interaction and reduces tribal problems facing the nation. It brings about brotherly love among the different tribes in the country, it promotes unity among families which is the smallest unit of the society by so doing bringing unity to the society at large (pointer 2014:95).

The Changing Philosophy: Towards the Continuity and Discontinuity

The Ogoni traditional marriage institution has been impacted by modernization, secularization, and globalization, thus, the several changes and threats at the economic, social, cultural, religious, and political levels. These changes or threats imply that the Ogoni adopt 'modern' way of thinking, acting, living, and consuming ways that are mainly western and sometimes opposed to the values

the Ogoni people holds dear. The economic, political, religion, educational, and socio-cultural changes have affected some aspects of marriage, rituals related to marriage, the purpose of marriage, marital unions, and the termination of the marriage covenant (Okiya, 2016). Considering some of the positive impact of westernization, it is important to note that the Christian "one man to one woman" (monogamous) system of marriage has help in curbing family conflict and unhealthy competitions especially in polygamous homes in Ogoni. Another positive impact on marriage is improved health conditions which has occasioned changing patterns of fertility and mortality as well as ending some ill practices such as the killing of twins in the Ogoni traditional society.

However, modern life in Ogoni has distance people from their traditional rural kinship groups and their value system. It has contributed to the lack/absence of physical nearness in the relations between the family and near relatives thereby eroding the traditional value system. In other words, the Ogoni marriage system serves as the main institution, where young people learn about norms, values, and religion within the family, thus, serving as the first school for children. Today, the family institution is in a serious struggle with the modern agents of change, and it seems likely that the Ogoni traditional marriage and family system has lost the grip on the indigenous education attached to these institutions; challenged by modern school, by the media especially by television and internet, by peers and by informal channels where children are seeking information. Sequel to this, the colonial governments and missionaries who are considered champions of modernity had a strong impact not only on the Ogoni political organization and economy but also kinship systems, gender roles and other socio-religious practices and traditional customs.

Although, some traditional beliefs and practices still holds way, there are many valued traditional practices that have failed to stand the test of time, thus gravitating toward extinction, like most of the typologies of marriage discussed above, due to the aforesaid phenomenon-modernization, the Ogoni tend to prioritize the modern than the indigenous. In other words, the Ogoni traditional marriage system has been sacrificed on the altar of modernization because of the believe that whatever is western is good for emulation and whatever is indigenous is devilish and demeaning, hence the rejection and denial of who the Ogoni truly are and what they value. The neglect of the Ogoni traditional marriage and value system has turned the Ogoni to indigenous strangers (Deezia, 2016b).

The advent of Christianity in the late 19th century introduces a new dimension in both the concept and process of marriage in Ogoni traditional society. While marriage is regarded in traditional society as a communal affair, Christians see marriage as a private affair between spouses only. The Ogoni newly converted Christians who were brainwashed to abandon the indigenous value system were encourage taking their bride to the altar for blessing, which is equivalent to taken a bride to family ancestral shrine for blessing (Obodoegbulam, 2019). It is evident that some processes of mate seeking and formal marriage consummation rites have been Christianized. Instead of parents and relatives, pastors and church elders now drive traditional marriage processes, without them or a representative from the church such marriage is not approved. No libation is poured to the ancestors, no gin or palm wine is required and instead soft drinks are used. The Ogoni traditional method of acceptance and rejection of a suitor by the bride has been thrown overboard by the Church.

This has resulted to false declaration and the break-up of so many marriages in Ogoni, especially among Pentecostal Churches.

Globalization which has meant integration and planetary free market of finance and the flow of information across national borders has also meant to many developing societies and religion, in particular, a deterioration of moral standards, a decline of religious scruples and a cultural breakdown (Kilani, 2017). In the Ogoni society today, marriages are contracted through the social media or on the bases of arrangement. The worst scenario is where marriages today are contracted on behalf of a brother or son who lives abroad, the attendant consequences of such marriages are enormous. To begin with, most marriages that are contracted online have always ended in a shipwreck. A good example is a marriage that was conducted on behalf of son living abroad who on return to Nigeria to the father that the lady in question was to become his wife to take care of his old age. Since the bride price has already been paid. The lady had to accept her fate by marrying the old man instead of the son who returned with a wife from abroad. Moreover, there was a case of a young lady who ended up being used for rituals just for accepting a marriage proposal online and thereafter met the man in a hotel where eventually she ended her life. What about the case of a lady that was raped in a hotel room where she went to meet with the supposed bridegroom? There are also evidence of ladies that have ended up being trafficked as commercial sex workers or domestic servants because they were deceived to believe they were going to meet with their husbands abroad or for a greener pasture. Sequel to this, there are modern day "artificial families," this implies situations were couples purchase, adopts or fake pregnancy, all in the name of bearing children, people now give birth and sell out the babies to either individual families in need of children or to baby factories.

The changing structures of education, employment, and living arrangements of young people modifies their activities, their relationship to the economy, and their interactions with peers, and thus have wielded great influence on the Ogoni traditional procedures for mate selection and marriage. This is because young people spend more time in school and in work outside of household, and as they established their residence part from parents, opportunities for interaction with the opposite sex increase while opportunities for parental supervision diminish. Again, the early practitioners and receptors of these ideas (western values) are those with increase educational status, those who have been exposed to western culture through migration to western countries, or movement from rural area to urban dwellings. Thus, as they gain knowledge of these new values, they are persuaded by the simplicity and ease of application of the western marriage value and practices such as ease of contracting marriage cohabitation before bride-wealth, the ease of separation without family interference etc. (Asu, et, al 2014). They implement these practices thus altering and neglecting the Ogoni traditional way of contracting marriage which is supposed to be a gradual process, involving families, as well as adopting nuclear family structures while abandoning the extended family structures that are associated with the burden of family commitments. In other words, Wester education contributed to the change of attitude on Ogoni traditional religion. The people began to embrace new of life against the traditional Ogoni worldview that was religious, holistic and humane explained in mystical terms. Thus, the Greco-Roman worldview brought by the Europeans postulated a philosophical and theological outlook different the Ogoni traditional religious philosophy.

Furthermore, the institution of marriage has continued to dwindle because of lots of economic, socio-political, educational and religious factors. With the passing of time, certain ills have befallen marriage that it has dealt a devastating blow to society. This has produced along its traits a myriad of social problems as a result; single parenthood, divorce, separation, rape, homosexuality, lesbianism and prostitution etc are rapidly on the increase (Kyalo, 2012). In other words, men and women in urban areas are becoming more likely to insist on their personal wishes in arranging marriage, without the blessings from both parents. People pretend to fall in love; they marry with or without the consent of their parents, only to divorce thereafter. Thus, single parenthood and inconclusive marriage now on the increase in Ogoni.

Materialism has crept into marriage consideration with men and women marrying for material benefit. In this kind of situation, the woman is after the Man's wealth and properties. While some women will endure in the marriage because of poverty, others upon the achievement of their aims, divorce becomes their next option. Sequel to this, among the Ogoni indigenous people, bride wealth which was at times a bottle of Jin (*Kai-kai*) or a jar of palm-wine (*Mii_toor*), and valuable items were for the establishment of legal marriage; giving the husband domestic and sexual rights over his wife; and enhances affiliation of children, as well as elevating the man to the status of a husband and the woman to the status of a wife, and as husband and wife, which incur reciprocal rights and obligations for which they are held accountable. However, the quest for materialism has led to the commodification of women during marriage consummation. Today, in present Ogoni society, educated women are priced higher than uneducated women. A university graduate then becomes so expensive that many young

men cannot afford to marry. This is because parents who trained their daughters would like to collect back the money during marriages. This fundamental change occurred in the nature of the bride-wealth because of new elements that accompanied the colonial order. The growth of cash economy, for instance, transformed various forms of bride-wealth payments among the Ogoni indigenous people into cash transaction. This led to the higher and higher bride-wealth payments, an inflation that not only made it difficult for young men to marry, but also changed the meaning that the Ogoni traditionally attached to the institution of marriage. While some young men work assiduously to save enough money, others go extra miles to borrow money in order to meet up with the challenge of getting married (Lawrence Hart, 2016). The idea of sharing bride-wealth among family members, or using the bride-wealth to build house, open business, and to train the male counterpart of the family in school as well as to clear debt is not only alien to the people, but one of the major factors of delayed marriage.

Conclusion

Ii-ii-wa (traditional marriage) is an institution that plays a central role in the Ogoni traditional society, as it affects decision regarding reproduction and continuous existence of the lineage and the community at large. Apart from monogamy (one wife), and polygyny (more than one wife) that is widely practiced in Ogoni, there are other forms or types of marriage practiced among the people of which some are on the verge of going into extinction.

As people are identified through their culture; likewise, any nation or people that compromise its culture or ways of life run the risk of being misplaced with other nationalities. It is on this line of thought that the researcher envisages the future of the Ogoni ethnic

nationalities, whose culture and marriage value system have been adulterated. As society evolves, the Ogoni institution of marriage continues to undergo changes. The socio-economic changes, modernization, religion, and education brought by the British colonialist ushered in a drastic change in Ogoni marriage norms and values. It is with regard to this view that the study recommends that, while western culture may not be completely discredited, such must not be to the detriment of the Ogoni distinctiveness and marriage values. Moreover, the author has attempted to set the records straight concerning the prevalent understanding about Ogoni custom, such customs include *Bia-kē*, *Biabe*, and *Sira-Culture*.

By way of recommendation, restoring marriage and family values in the Ogoni traditional society therefore requires that we make a positive choice among the values that recent social changes presents. We must not swallow hook, line and sinker all that is called change especially when those so called changes are inconsistent with our culture. Thus, the need to contextualize the Ogoni traditional marriage and family value system to accommodate western practices. The church should do well by studying the traditional ways and acculturating the good aspects of the people's values that are not at variance with the Christian view, with the aim of harmonizing them rather than capriciously relegating them to the background.

Again, there is need for the revival and promotion of the Ogoni indigenous educational system, where the institution of marriage serves as a means of teaching the young people morals and the virtues of marriage and sexuality in the Ogoni traditional society. Intending couples should also know that marriage is not for the immature, but for those who are ready to carry out responsibilities. Efforts should be made to know the background of

the wife or –husband-to-be. For the ladies, a man who does not take care of his parents is not likely to take care of any lady. For the young boys, a lady who shows any form of disrespect for her parents is not likely going to respect her in-laws. Consequently, the place of investigation cannot be overemphasized in marriage and should be revisited in our modern days. Marriage should be primarily family affair. The Church has two major roles to play in marriage to pray for the couple and to advise them. Also, couples should not beget children when they are not prepared for them.

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