

GENDERIZED IMPLICATIONS OF BRIDE PRICING CULTURE IN IGBO LAND: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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Abstract

The study aims at ascertaining the actual implication of bride pricing system in traditional marriages in Igbo land. A total of fifty respondents (thirty women and twenty men) from the five states that make up the southeast zone in Nigeria were selected for the study. With qualitative research, the study adopted ethnographic research design and employed a purposive non-probability sampling method in selecting the respondents. The study made use of focused group discussions, unstructured interview and participants' observation method as instruments of data collection. The collection of data lasted for a period of six months from June 2020 to November 2020. The research is anchored on Radical and Snail sense Feminism theories and data for the study were analysed using descriptive thematic method. Findings from the study reveal that payment of bride price does not reduce women to mere commodities in Igbo land. It also reveals that it gives undue privileges to men in Igbo land among other findings. Finally, it was shown that Igbo men and women still regard bride price payment as an important aspect of their culture which should not be abolished.

Keywords: *bride price, culture, gender, commodification, Igbo land, women*

I INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the nature, advantage and disadvantages of bride price payment in marital culture of Africans has provoked series of scholarly debates and personal opinions. While proponents of bride price payment (Bishai, Falb, Pariyo, & Hindin, 2009, Ego-Allowes, 2018) advocate for its sustenance as a unique mode of traditional marriage in African culture; the opponents of this system of marriage (Kaye, 2005, Ezeifeka, 2016, Lowes & Nunn 2017) are of the view that it not only leads to objectification and commodification of the woman, but equally constitute unnecessary economic burden on the man. They contend that marriage should be contracted only the basis of love and agreement between the two individuals coming together supported by their families.

Indeed, the culture of bride pricing is one of the most commonly accepted system of marriage in Nigeria and most African countries and which is usually based on custom, religion and tradition of the people. Bride price simply refers to an obligatory payment made by a groom to the family from whom he takes a bride in marriage (Falana, 2019, p.132). In Igbo land, bride pricing is a very crucial rite of marriage without which it is believed that marriage has not taken place. According to Oguli (2004) a typical bride price consists of contract where material items often cattle, pigs, other animals or money are paid by the groom to the bride's family in exchange for the bride for the labour and her capacity to produce children. Anderson (2007) traces the history of bride price to at least as far back as 3000 BCE, and was used by the Ancient Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Hebrews, Aztecs, and the Incas.

Notwithstanding the importance of this popular practice in Africa, the culture of bride pricing has come under intense criticisms in recent times. The rise of feminism perspectives and the persistent push for gender balancing has given birth to a school of thought (Kaye, 2005, Ezeifeka, 2016, Lowes & Nunn 2017, Adichie, 2018, Chitu et al 2019) that criticizes the idea of bride price payment in African marital culture. Their objections according to Lowes & Nunn (2017) stem from the view that the transactional nature of the practice results in the commodification of women and has adverse consequences. For example, husbands may feel they can maltreat their wives because they have paid for them, leaving women in marriages prone to physical violence and conflict. The women's rights group *Mifumi* in Uganda reports cases where men say 'I am beating my cows' when they hit their wives, women are denied ownership of property, and women may be expected to be sexually available to their husbands at any time and without protection (Eryenyu 2014).

The implication of the above instances is that not only does the culture of bride pricing in the views of the anti-bride pricing scholars commodify women; it also sets the stage for incidences of gender-based violence. With issues of gender equality ranking among crucial global development goals, it is imperative to closely examine the gender implication of the bride pricing culture and discover whether it should be encouraged or discouraged. Consequently, this study intends to assess the opinions

of Igbo people about bride pricing culture in marriage; do they consider it a catalyst for debasement and endangering of women or are there other factors beyond bride pricing that are responsible for the genderized challenges faced in marriages in Igbo culture? The study will focus more on women who are the alleged victims of the controversial culture and seek to know their views about bride pricing culture in marital union. In all, the intent of this study is to establish whether the opposition against bride pricing culture in Igbo land is just an attempt to further the neo-colonialistic agenda of the west in Africa or whether there are actual merits in the claim that the practice of bride pricing contributes to the problem of gender inequality in Africa.

I.1 Archival Consideration and Problem Identification

In Nigeria and other African countries, some scholars have conducted researches on bride price. Such scholars including Princewill et al. (2018) who investigated bride price payment and women autonomy in Nigeria used Ikwerre women as a case in point. The study revealed that patriarchy and a culture of absolute respect for men and not the bride price is the reason for women's diminished autonomy. Similarly, Oniyangi et al. (2020) examined high bride price as determinant of marital stability among Akwa-Ibom People in Surulere Area of Lagos State, Nigeria. The findings of the research prove that marital stability of married Akwa-Ibom people is affected because of high bride price which is a significant determinant of domestic violence and emotional problems among married Akwa-Ibom people in Surulere. The study recommends that high bride price should be reduced in order to avoid domestic violence which leads to marital instability among Akwa-Ibom people in Surulere Area in Lagos State, Nigeria.

More so, Nwoke (2009) examines bride price and its implications for women's rights in Nigeria from a psychological perspective. The work advocates that conflicting issue or value system that does not allow for growth and development of the individuals should be reconciled with reasons. It further maintains that the terminology/notion bride price appears to be misconstrued. The paper, therefore, recommends the restructuring of the term bride price with some new terminology options. Also, Nwatu and Nwogugu (2018) surveyed the constitutionality of bride price and the validity of the decision against the background of Nigerian constitutional law. The paper agreed to a nuance change in the practice but argue that the change must be authentic and not dictated by western typology.

Beyond the shores of Nigeria, Adjei and Mpiani (2018) studied bride price, cultural and gender identity, and husband-to- wife abuse in Ghana. Their work explored the subjective interpretations and contextualized discoveries around the custom of bride price and how it shapes cultural and gender identity and husband- to- wife abuse in Ghana. Despite the abuse women are subjected to due to the bride price paid on them, the paper holds that payment of bride price serves as a material condition necessary for accomplishing desired masculinity and femininity legitimizing husband's exercise of matrimonial authority over their wives and apparently presenting them as objects and commodities in marriage. Their paper further concludes that the marked and continued saliency of the practice of bride price results from its significant role in conferring cultural identity status on both men and women in Ghana.

In addition, Mbaye and Wagner (2016) provide evidence about the relationship between bride price payments and fertility decisions in Senegal. According to them higher bride price payment reduces the fertility pressure for women with results being robust to confounding socio- economic and contextual factors. The study espouses that fertility reducing impact is greater for women who are economically dependent on their husbands. Their work further reveals that in polygamous households and for arranged marriages, lower bride price increase fertility pressure but does not affect fertility in monogamous households and for non-arranged marriages.

In a similar vein, Bishai, Falb, Pariyo, and Hindin (2009) explore the angle of westernization which is seemingly tied to most opposition to bride price payment. In a study testing the connection between bride price payment and sexual risk in Uganda, they discovered that the view of bride price as a purchase price of a wife is consistent with Western media who obviously do not fully comprehend the ways of Africans. They note that the views of the media are very different from the general interpretation of the practice made by anthropologists. Furthermore Bishai et al. (2009 p.147) point out that 'almost all of what is known about the potential harms of bride price is based on small qualitative studies or anecdotal recollection'.

Lowe and Nunn (2017) in their research conducted in Kananga, Democratic Republic of Congo discovered that wife's education is the only robust predictor of the bride price payment at the time of marriage. Their findings are in line with Asraf et al. (2016) who equally discovered that wife's education is a strong predictor of the value of the bride price in Indonesia. They further note that why

parents encourage their daughters to be married at a younger age is to obtain the bride price payment especially if the parents are credit constrained and need funds immediately which may even be at the cost of their daughter's future welfare.

There is no doubt that the extant studies provided the background for the current study, however, from the works reviewed, no study has been carried out on genderized implications of bride pricing culture in Igbo land. To fill this gap some questions become apparent: What are the genderized perceptions of Igbo women about bride price? Are there some traces of western radical feminism influence behind the opposition of bride price payment in Igbo land? Should the bride price payment culture be retained or abolished in Igbo land? The current study therefore intends to fill these gaps in knowledge. Findings from the study will also validate or refute extant knowledge on the implications of bride pricing culture in Igbo land.

1.2 An Overview of Gender and Bride price

The concept of gender is one of the most misconstrued concepts in cultural discourses. According to Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) gender is embedded so thoroughly in our institutions, actions, beliefs, and desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural. The world swarms with ideas about gender – and these ideas are so commonplace that we take it for granted that they are true, accepting common adage as scientific fact. West and Zimmerman (1987) clarify that gender is not something we are born with, and not something we have, but something we do. A common misconception about gender is its confusion with sex. Sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). People often associate sex with nature; that is the biological identity of a person. However, gender is seen as a product of nurture; that is the environment which accounts for the social upbringing of a person. Writing on the intertwined nature of gender and sex, Fausto-Sterling (2000, p.3) elaborates ‘... labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision, but only our beliefs about gender – not science – can define our sex. Furthermore, our beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place.’

According to UNESCO (2003), gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. By extension, the study of gender also focuses on the social behaviour expected from both women and men. This is otherwise known as femininity and masculinity. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, (2013) opine that gender roles and expectations are learned factors which can change over time with regards to cultures and environment. As such, varied modes of social stratification like political status, class, ethnicity, physical and mental disability and age, all function as modification to gender roles. Through the study of the nature and workings of gender, one gets to understand how certain attitudes and dispositions held by individuals of varied sexes are constructed. The moment a child is born, what follows next is that the parents in tandem with their socio-cultural beliefs and expectations begin to raise the child to fit into his or her respective genderized roles and responsibilities. In African society, boys are raised to learn how to hunt, farm, make baskets and other tasks expected from the male child. The girls, on the other hand, are trained to embrace domestic responsibilities like cooking, sweeping, washing and other female associated chores.

Furthermore, bride price is that ‘first and compulsory payment either in cash or in kind that a man pays to the parents of a girl or lady he intends to marry in order to be granted permanent traditional legitimate relationship with the girl’, which will in turn, bring about his own family (Falana, 2019 p.132). Payment of bride price is the singular most important aspect of marriage rite in Igbo culture and other African cultures. Without bride price, marriage is said not have taken place and thus the couple living together are said to be merely in amorous relationship without proper recognition in the traditional scheme of things. According to Sambe, & Avanger (2013), bride price is the payment made in kind, cash or material as demanded by custom of a group by a groom or his family to the family of the bride who in order to make the union legitimate. The emphasis on legitimacy in this definition implies that without bride price, a marriage is said to be illegitimate in Igbo culture and Africa. The parents of the couple, as well as their entire community cannot give their consent to a union unless a bride price is paid.

The importance of bride price in Igbo culture can be best witnessed in situations of divorce in traditional setting. Generally, in Igbo culture once a man and woman agree to end their marital relationship, an important step which lends legitimacy to such development is the retrieval of bride price from the bride's family by the groom. Once a man takes back the bride price, the marriage is officially deemed to have ended. In the research carried out by Sessou, Tenebe, Abasifiok & Okonkwo (2018), it

was discovered that while bride price payment varies from tribe to tribe in Nigeria, there is a common agreement that the practice of bride price payment helps in solidifying marriages. Some of the respondents opined that bride price removes shame from the face of a woman and elevates her from the status of the single to married.

On other hand, the practice of bride price payment has come under serious criticisms in recent times from scholars who believe the practice demeans and places women in a disadvantaged position. The inability of parents especially from poor families to return the bride price in the case of a failed marriage often leaves the woman trapped. According to Lowes & Nunn (2017, p.1)

Bride price may trap women within their marriage. In many customs, the woman's parents are required to return the bride price if the woman leaves the marriage, particularly, if she has not yet had any children. Thus, it is possible that the practice of bride price results in women being locked in marriages because parents are unwilling or unable to repay the bride price.

In her views, Adichie (2018) opines that historically, the idea of marriage has changed from being a fluid act of gift exchanges between the groom and the family of the bride to being now a grossly commercialized venture. Similarly, Corno and Voena (2016) and Corno et al. (2016) also expressed that a lady maybe given away in marriage by her parents strictly because of the bride price to cushion economic shocks which are common in most poor families. Furthermore, the big issue about bride price is the perceived patriarchal undertone which places women increasingly on gross disadvantaged positions. Thus, there is seemingly a feminism undertone to the criticisms against the practice of bride price payment. While not strictly opposed to the idea of bride price payment, Falana (2019) found out that men are often guilty of abuse of privileges accorded by the payment of bride. Such abuse may manifest in form of excessive dominance which often spiral into gender-based violence.

I.3 The Igbo Culture and Bride Price

Bride price payment is a sacrosanct rite of marriage recognized in Igbo culture. In every part of Igbo land, any man who wants to marry a lady must observe the culture of bride price payment before such union is deemed valid. In Ezza land of present day Ebonyi state, it is common knowledge that any man living with a woman whose bride price has not been paid must in the event of death of the woman, pay her bride price before the deceased is buried. Similarly, in Afikpo, also in Ebonyi State, during the payment of bride price ceremony known as *Aku*, all men who are unmarried and those who are living with women they have not paid their bride price are sent out and prevented from observing the rite as well as partaking in the eating of the stockfish reserved exclusively for those who are validly married. Also, only genuinely married men get N100 (One hundred naira) each from the bride price paid by the groom. All these are said to be done in order to motivate those yet to legalize their marriages to do so.

Falana (2019) speaks of certain cultural values attached to bride price that made the practice very significant, such as being a sign of sincerity, commitment, and marital faithfulness which is akin to the wedding and engagement rings used in modern times. In addition, bride price payment has a spiritual connotation which makes it not just a mere transactional exchange but a tacit approval from the elders of the land. Despite the social value placed on bride price payment, some feminists like Adichie have argued that it gives the impression of commercialization of women. Conversely, Ego-Alowes (2018) promptly refutes Adichie's position that bride price amounts to commercialization of women in Igbo culture. She espouses that bride price is not mere exchange of money for a female but *ime onu/ishi aku nwanyi*, the rite of treasuring a woman/bride. For him, the word *aku* does not translate into money as the price in bride price literally suggests. *Aku* goes beyond money to include properties too. This is why wives in Igbo culture are generally addressed as *oriaku*. On this, Ego-Alowes (2018 n.p) expresses:

Oriaku was too literally interpreted by the contemporary Igbo under the curse of a second non-native lingua franca. But the truth is, *Oriaku* does not convey a fattened or fattening bride or wife. *Oriaku* is actually the tenderest thing a man can compliment a woman with. If well understood and translated, *Oriaku* means 'You are the reason I labour, that I am alive.' Generally, we live to achieve *aku*, which is not always money or cash as often depicted. A more precise equivalent of money or cash is *ego* not *aku*. While *aku* may include *ego*, *ego* is not all there is to *aku*. The Igbo say '*Ohia eri aku*,' (true asset/value/wealth is imperishable); this implies that wealth is hinged to eternal values. The Igbo do not say '*ohia eri ego*' because material wealth does come to vanish.

From the above, Ego-Alowes (2018) holds different views from the views of most feminist scholars who see bride price payment as an instance of debasement for the feminine gender. Her view implies that in its truest sense, bride price payment does not imply commodification or commercialization. It rather connotes dignity and respect for womanhood. As for Vroklage (1952, p.135) bride price is a compensation for the expense, the care and trouble spent on the bride's upbringing... It is compensation for the complete loss of a worker as a bride withdraws from her own kindred and henceforth belongs to her husband's.'

In furtherance to this, Lowes and Nunn (2017) argue that bride price is particularly common among groups that practice patrilineal descent and is considered as a compensation payment for the bride's future children, who will no longer belong to her parents' family. This is equally true of the Igbo people who are known to be patrilineal. Okigbo (2020, personal discussion) held that the payment of bride price in Igbo culture, is borne not out of the desire to own or control the woman as a wife, but rather to show appreciation to the parents of the bride as well as bring dignity to the new bride. He further presents that male dominance in relationship with the female precedes the payment of bride price and may easily be traced to religious-cultural configurations.

There is seemingly an agreement between Okigbo (2020), Ego-Alowes (2018) and Bishai et al. (2009) on the European historians misconstruing the real essence of 'bride price'. Ideally, the proper translation of what obtains in Igbo land is 'bride wealth' and not bride price. What really obtains in traditional Igbo marital rite is '*ime aku nwanyi*' the opening of a jewel or treasure which the woman is in Igbo land. The token paid by the groom to the bride's family is mere symbolic gesture which by no means equates the real value of the bride. The parents of the bride usually tell the groom after collecting a token from whatever is presented as the bride price, "take back your money and use it to take care of our daughter; we do not sell our daughters!" This is to say that the idea of bride price payment in Igbo culture is not borne out of the desire to commercialize, commodify, enslave or oppress, but rather a symbolic gesture of commitment and appreciation between two families entering into a lifetime of unity.

I.4 Towards a Theoretical Understanding of Bride Price Culture in Igbo Land

Two theoretical perspectives best reflect the genderized implications of bride price payment in Igbo land. They are: Radical feminism theory and Snail-sense feminism theory. Evidently, the idea of bride price payment as an instance of female debasement in Africa and Igbo land stemmed mainly from the views of radical feminism. Radical feminism theorists believe that patriarchy is at the heart of gender inequalities and injustices present in human societies. According to Vukoicic (2013), radical feminist theory is based on the fact that gender inequality fueled by unbridled male dominance is the foundation of all other inequalities and oppression against women. To ensure equity and equality for women, this perspective of feminism sues for a radical dismantling of all forms of patriarchy in all ramifications of human society. Essentially, the radical feminist theory entertains no dialogue or negotiation in suing for the comfort of women in male dominated climes. The radical feminists profile men as potential abusers and bully from whom women must be protected. Lober (1997, p.17) aptly captures the sentiments of radical feminists thus:

Radical feminism turns male-dominated culture on its head. It takes all the characteristics that are valued in male-dominated societies -- objectivity, distance, control, coolness, aggressiveness, and competitiveness -- and blames them for wars, poverty, rape, battering, child abuse, and incest. It praises what women do -- feed and nurture, cooperate and reciprocate, and attend to bodies, minds, and psyches.....Radical feminism claims that most men have the potential to use physical violence against women, including rape and murder. They point to the commonness of date rape and wife beating, of murders of ex-wives and former girlfriends. The commercial side of this systemic misogyny, or women-hating, is the way women are depicted as sex objects in the mass media and as pieces of meat in pornography, and the global exploitation of girls and young women in prostitution. Even more insidious, they argue, sexual exploitation is the common downside of romantic heterosexual love, which itself is oppressive to women. The threat of violence and rape, radical feminism theorizes, is the way patriarchy controls all women.

By inference, the views expressed above account for why the payment of bride price is seen by radical feminists as a ploy by men to enslave and control women. They disagree with the opinions of scholars like Ego-Alowes (2018) who maintain that bride price is less a ploy of endangerment and more

a symbol of commitment and appreciation. Of course, the sentiments of radical feminists are not unfounded as cases of gender-based violence and abuses stemming from patriarchy abounds. However, the radical approach of suing for equality which seldom entertains dialogue or divergent explanations is what other scholars of subtle feminism schools of thought are opposed to.

The snail-sense feminism theory also known as African feminism is one instance of these considerate viewpoints opposed to radical feminism perspective. The theory was first presented at a roundtable discussion on Feminism in Africa at the International Conference “Versions and Subversions in African Literature,” which took place in Berlin, Germany, in May 2003, (Ezeigbo, 2012, p. 48). Referring to the theory in a monograph series by Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos (2012), Ezeigbo clarifies that her own model of feminism is as a result of the peculiarity of Nigerian women. She adduces reasons for her choice of feminism which according to her emanates as result of a comprehensive research in African system. She puts it succinctly in these words:

It emanates as a result of an in-depth research or investigation into the condition of Nigerian women, their reaction and response to socio-cultural and political forces that impacted and still impact on their lives in the past and in contemporary times. I must state clearly at this point that my view about feminism has undergone some modifications, following more than two decades of studying women’s writing from Nigeria and other parts of Africa... (2012, p. 48).

Ezeigbo asserts that in spite of the theorizing and analysis done over the years on feminism, the problems women experience in society still persist. She states further that the principles of shared values which operate in many cultures in Nigeria encourage one to be tolerant, to imbibe the virtues of negotiation, give and take, compromise and balance.

Of course, the snail-sense theory does not deny the fact that there is gender inequality especially in Africa and that women are unfairly treated. The problem spotted by this new model of feminism is the fact that there is a fundamental inadequacy with the already existing theoretical viewpoint especially in the area of making considerations for the socio-cultural peculiarities of traditional societies like those of Africa. Snail sense theory encourages dialogue, negotiation, tolerance and wisdom in suing for fairness for women in male driven society like that of Igbo land. It recognizes the cultural roles of women in Africa which women in Africa see those roles not as subjugation but as prestigious responsibilities which must be appreciated in its own respect. The snail-sense feminist theory is derived from the habit of snail which most Nigerian women adopt in their relationships with men. Ezeigbo (2012:27) explains further:

Women in our cultures -from different parts of Nigeria- often adopt a conciliatory or cooperative attitude towards men. This is akin to what the snail does with the environment in which it moves and exists. The snail crawls over boulders, rocks, thorns, crags and rough terrains smoothly and efficiently with well-lubricated tongue which is not damaged or destroyed by these harsh objects.... The snail carries its house on its back without feeling the strain. It goes wherever it wishes in this manner and arrives at its destination intact. If danger looms, it withdraws into its shell and is safe. This is what women often do in our society to survive in Nigeria’s harsh patriarchal culture. It is this tendency to accommodate or tolerate the male and cooperate with men that informs this theory which I call snail-sense feminism.

When applied to the issue of bride price payment, the provisions of snail-sense theory do not completely exonerate patriarchy as leading to abuse of women which is a unique cultural practice of Africans. Rather, it sues for an in-depth evaluation and proper re-sensitization of the true meaning of bride price payment as well as discourage abuse by men through dialogue. The snail sense theory suggests reforms and believes that through parleys and negotiations, balance would be achieved without taking rash decisions that may have further adverse consequences. The African woman loves to be a wife and a mother and function under her husband without being oppressed or unfairly treated. The snail-sense theory, by implication, evolves a distinct brand of feminism clearly removed from the westernized appeal towards intolerance in the discourse of gender equality.

In discussing the issues of male dominance or oppressions against women fueled by bride price payment, the snail-sense theory recognizes that there are also oppressed men who are in abusive relationships with women they paid their bride prices. What then is the cause of the abuse? Are men to

be blamed in any challenge experienced within marriages? Would the complete halting of bride price payment culture see to the end of gender discriminations experienced in marriages? In all, the summary of snail-sense theory is gender related issues like bride price payment can be best resolved through dialogue and never through confrontations and intolerance.

II MATERIALS AND METHOD

The research design used for this study is the ethnographic research design. The choice of ethnography is informed by the fact that this study is apparently anthropological in nature. That is to say it has its prime focus on humanity and culture. D'Andrade (1992, p.230) clarifies the conditions of something being cultural thus:

To say something is cultural is—at a minimum—to say that it is shared by a significant number of members of a social group; shared in the sense of being behaviorally enacted, physically possessed, or internally thought. Further, this something must be recognized in some special way and at least some others are expected to know about it; that is, it must be intersubjectively shared. Finally, for something to be cultural it must have the potential of being passed on to new group members, to exist with some permanency through time and across space.

Accordingly, the selected study area is the five southeast states of Nigeria where the Igbo indigenes predominantly occupy: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The duration of this study was a period of six months beginning from June 2020 to November 2020. Using the purposive non-probability sampling method which according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) is the most fitting for qualitative research, the researchers selected fifty respondents (thirty women and twenty men) whom they interviewed while observing marriage ceremonies in different communities within the area of study. The justification for the unequal number in men and women is that women are the alleged victims of bride price payment culture in Igbo land. Hence, they are given higher number in the study. The observed had fore knowledge of the study beforehand and consented to feature in the exercise. Most of the respondents who spoke to the researchers were mainly engaged impromptu. Thus, in the course of carrying out this ethnographic study, the participants' observation method was used as instrument for data collection. For the purpose of this study the respondents between the ages of twenty and forty-five years of age are taken to belong to younger generation while the respondents between the ages of forty-six years to seventy years are taken as people that belong to the older generation.

Generally, the researchers were guided by the research objectives in the course of their observations and interviewing. While the researchers made use of their eyes in the field, two distinct field notes were still kept to enable proper future interpretations and generalizations. The researchers adopted the focused type of observation which was described by Werner and Schoepfle (1987) in Angrosino & Deperez, (2000) as a method of observation that is supported by interviews in which the participants' insights open more room for further observations.

The researchers went with Dewalt and Dewalt, (2002) suggestions, and had field notes publicly taken so as to reassure the observed of the harmless intent of the study. This enhanced a more relaxed atmosphere for the conduct of the study. As a way of maintaining confidentiality, the opinions of those interviewed were used in the study on the basis of anonymity. With regards to data analysis, the researchers utilized the thematic analysis approach. To arrive at themes, the collected data were first coded using deductive coding method.

II.1 Research Objective Codes

The codes reflected below represent the opinions of ten women and five men who were interviewed and observed among others in the course of this study. These respondents and observed were engaged in their homes at different parts of southeast, Nigeria. The following include the data elicited from the respondents which were also used in developing related themes.

II.1.1 Bride Price and Commodification of Women

Observations and Responses from the Field (Initial Coding)

Some of the observations and responses which point to commodification of women through bride price payment practices include:

- Respondents who hold the opinion that bride price is a way of commodifying the women were mostly women of younger generation. This notion of commodification is mainly inspired by their agreement with western radical feminist ideals.
- Bride prices were set according to the educational qualifications of the bride. Hence, there are separate prices for university graduates, secondary school certificate holders, elementary school certificate holders and those who did not attend any formal education at all.
- There is price haggling during the bride price payment which is held in secret only by family members of the bride and groom without the knowledge and consent of the bride.
- Statements like there is flower or an udala (a particular type of fruit in Igbo land in reference to the bride) we saw in your house and decided to come pluck it suggest commodification.
- In situations where the bride had been made pregnant by the groom before the marriage, the bride's kinsmen insist on being paid extra for giving out two persons. Otherwise, the child becomes the child of the bride's maiden family.
- Suggestions that large sums of money were spent by brides' parents training the brides, thus, the sons-in-law are urged to increase the amount of the bride price to be paid on the brides.
- Some parents especially from poor families, hinged their hopes of improved standard of living on the marriages of their daughters. Hence, they put pressure on their daughters to accept marriage proposals only from men who are financially capable with less consideration for compatibility and peace of mind of their daughters.

Deduction from the Observations and Responses (Focused Coding)

- In the course of exacting bride price haggling, women are often treated as commodities as it is only objects or commodities for sale that are bargained over. The idea of such bargains presents brides as commodities put off the shelves and which can be negotiated over.

Theme: Bride price payment often commodifies women.

II.1.2 Undue Advantage to Men

Observations and Responses from the Field (Initial Coding)

Some of the observations and responses which suggest that bride price confers undue privileges to men include:

- The payment of bride price confers undue privilege to men. The man often ends up treating the bride as his possession; thus, the common phrase in moments of conflicts, "a woman I married with my money".
- During the ceremony, the bride's father pours palm wine into a cup and have the bride go round the arena playfully looking for her husband. On sighting him, she submissively goes down on her knees to present the drink to her husband.
- Only men discuss bride price. Women are prohibited from being parties to the discussion/haggling. So, the men decide the fate of the bride without any input from her or her mother, and in event of any disagreement among the parties, the men can choose to walk away and there ends the marriage.
- The sitting arrangement during the ceremony often have women sitting behind where they are barely seen.

Deductions from the Observations and Responses (Focused Coding)

- The bride price payment culture places the men at advantaged positions over women.

Theme: Payment of bride price gives undue advantages to men.

II.1.3 Trapping of Women

Observations and Responses from the Field (Initial Coding)

There are some observations and expressed views that suggest that payment of bride price leads to trapping of women in marriages:

- Most respondents who subscribed to this view were educated or live mainly in cities. They have been exposed to western lifestyles and thus, believe bride price traps women in abusive marriages.
- This view is prevalent among the younger respondents. Their position further explicates the reason for the prevalence of marital conflicts, separations, and divorce in Igbo land which were rare occurrences in the traditional Igbo culture. Consequently, the respondents in reaction to the realities blamed bride price payment as a remote cause of marital strain.
- Both the male and female respondents elaborated that the Igbo society permits polygamy. Hence, a man can easily marry more wives if he feels mistreated by his wife and to divorce his wife would only ask that

the bride price he paid be returned to him. Conversely, a woman mistreated in marriage, even when separated, would not be able to remarry until her bride price has been returned to the estranged husband. Hence, divorce is recognized officially in Igbo culture only when the bride price is paid back. The situation often leaves the woman trapped unfairly until the family of the bride chooses to return the bride price.

- A situation of tilted advantage in favour of the men was also observed. Men who understand their privileged position often use it against the women.

Deduction from the Observations and Responses (Focused Coding)

- Most enlightened respondents believe that bride price payment can trap women in abusive marriages.

Theme: Bride price payment traps women in belligerent marriages.

II.1.4 Means of Cultural Identification

Observations and Responses from the Field (Initial Coding)

Some of the responses and observation point to the fact that bride price is seen as a form cultural identity that should not be scrapped:

- Most respondents who held the view were in the older generation. Further explanations from them revealed that the youths are unduly influenced by western cultures. Hence, their desire to end bride price payment practices in Igbo land.
- Greater number of the respondents present that bride price payment is a symbolic gesture that proves that a man is capable of taking care of his wife and immediate family rather than dehumanize the woman.
- Bride price is not the major cause of marital conflicts as there are situations where the women are the main aggressors.
- Both male and female respondents agreed that abolition of price bride payment is a western ideology that seek to get rid of our cultural identity.
- Bride price is symbolic as no one has ever been required to pay the real worth /value of the bride.

Deduction from the Observations (Focused Coding)

- The older respondents see bride price payment as a means of cultural identification which need not be changed as a result of influence of the western culture.

Theme: Bride price is a means of cultural identification.

II.1.5 Cognitive Dissonance

Observations and Responses from the Field (Initial Coding)

The researchers observed and also elicited that there are some forms of cognitive dissonance present in the attitude of the respondents in respect of bride price payment:

- The respondents are aware of the negative consequences of bride price culture, but prefer to carry on with the traditions unmodified. The men among the respondents complained of the exorbitant bride price in most communities in Igbo land which often discourage eligible struggling bachelors from making marriage moves. A lot of female respondents complained about the patriarchal right which the bride price culture confers on men. They were equally afraid of the possibilities of entrapment in situations of marital challenges.
- Yet, in the face of all these negative effects, the respondents were unwilling to sue for a change in the culture of bride price in Igbo land; rather, they made excuses for its continuation without modification regardless of the inconveniences. All the reasons adduced for the retention of the culture of bride price in Igbo land centre on the widely held belief that payment of bride price confers dignity on a couple. The point is overt in some communities in Igbo land where unmarried men or women are denied certain rights and are asked to participate in communal duties reserved for the unmarried. Again, the need not break the chain traditional practice which began the days past support were significant reasons for the support of the culture of the bride price in Igbo land.

Deduction from the Observations and Responses (Focused Coding)

- Most Igbo indigenes are aware of the downsides of bride pricing culture in Igbo land which requires some forms of modifications or amendments. Yet, they are unwilling to seek these changes for fear of changing the cultural tenets of the land.

Theme: There is cognitive dissonance in how bride price is construed in Igbo land.

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the study revealed the stance of the Igbo people on bride price payment. First, it was observed that women of younger generation in Igbo land view paying of bride price on a woman as reducing her to a mere commodity. Commodification in this sense breeds the desire to control or treat a woman as an object. The researchers further discovered that most female respondents that subscribed to the commodification notions are equally of the view that payment of bride price by a man places him in an undue advantaged position which is often exploited in moments of conflict. This advantage is similar to commodification in the sense that by paying the bride price, the man is given the right of a buyer. These views were found to have been inspired by the women's constancy to western radical feminist perspective which persistently trace all societal problems faced by women to men. These notions which are often mediated deliberately portray men as potential abusers and opportunists who take pleasures in the suffering of women. Thus, the women find bride price payment culture as an enabling tool of patriarchy for the perpetual subjugation and enslavement of women.

Trapping of women in abusive marriages was also one of the themes generated in the course of this study. Even in situations of separation, the man can easily remarry while the woman must wait until there is a refund of the bride price by her maiden family before she is free to remarry. This is because in Igbo culture, a woman is officially considered divorced only when her estranged husband formally retrieves the bride price he paid on the woman. By implication, some women in bad marriages find themselves trapped and often debased psychologically due to the traditional bureaucracies involved in divorce in Igbo land. Even women who walked out of their marriages are not spared as they cannot remarry unless the bride prices paid by their former husbands are officially refunded. Again, this view is in consonance with feminist's approach of bride price payment culture in Igbo land.

However, for the older generation, bride price payment is a primary marriage rite in Igbo culture and not a means of dehumanization for women as the western feminist schools of thought suggest. Their opinions are in line with Ego-Alowes who views bride price payment culture as a man's gesture of responsibility, appreciation to the family of his bride and accordance of honour to his new bride. It is therefore a unique Igbo cultural practice which needs not be demonized by western ideologies.

Finally, the researchers observed evidences of cognitive dissonance in the responses of the respondents. While they admit to the difficulties and pessimisms associated with price payment culture, there is still an unwillingness to sue for its modifications. The respondents still contend beyond logic that a review of the culture may not be necessary as it has become a normative way of life in Igbo land.

In all, the findings of the study relate to the two theoretical frameworks used in the study. Obviously, the notion of commodification or objectification and trapping of women relate directly to the radical feminism perspective. Radical feminism as earlier discussed traces human problems in society to inequality resulting from unbridled patriarchy. Thus, the views that bride price payment confers undue advantages on men which are often exploited are all products of radical feminism thoughts. The radical feminism perspective from the above findings challenges the Igbo cultural status quo on bride price payment and seek for possible end to bride price payment in Igbo marriages.

The snail-sense theory applies equally in the views of those older respondents who seek to protect their unique cultural identity through bride price payment culture. The position of the theory is that with negotiation and dialogue, any harmful implication resulting from bride price payment culture can be addressed. This view clearly shows a disconnect from the opinions of the western world which they believe do not appreciate the uniqueness of the Igbo marital culture. In sum, despite the downsides of the bride price payment culture, the respondents hold the view that it remains an intrinsic part of the Igbo tradition and should not be abolished.

IV CONCLUSION

From the findings, it is clear that bride price payment is still regarded as an important aspect of Igbo culture. It is seen as a symbol of total commitment and bond between the man and woman. Although the payment of bride price has been abused especially by men who do not understand the import or underlying reason of bride price payment in Igbo land, it remains a sturdy marriage rite in Igbo land. While the Igbo culture dissociates itself from the extreme provisions of radical feminism, it leans on Ezigbo's snail sense suggestions in suing for fairness and balance for women. The male folks in Igbo land also need proper sensitization and reorientation in this regard as the bride price cannot equate all the wealth expended in raising a bride from cradle to adulthood. It is rather a symbol of commitment, stability and appreciation from the groom to the family of the bride. Thus, while the culture of bride price needs not be abolished as the findings suggest, effort must be made to ensure that modifications

and amendments are made where and when necessary, as tradition is only an aggregate opinion of the majority in a given community. The traditions can be reviewed from time to time in so far as the genuine interest of the people is served. Harmful practices like hiking of bride price and abuse of marital privileges stemming from bride price payment should be completely discouraged and annihilated in order to accommodate all in a fair society.

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