

## **The Concept of Bride Price in Ughievwen Culture: A Call for Transformational Education Curriculum in the Light of Modernity and Biblical Theology**

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### **Abstract**

Ughievwen people are special with regard to the value placed on the married woman. This informs the special love, care, provision and protection giving to her. The Urhobos resist and prevent anything capable of inflicting pains, frustrations, disgrace as well as disregard to the married woman especially in the promotion and maintenance of a life-long marriage irrespective of pleasant and unpleasant circumstances. To achieve the aforementioned value of life-long marriage, some values and taboos are put in place. The strength of the values and taboos rest on the acceptance of the marriage proposal by the woman before the presentation and acceptance of the bride price by her family. The bride price serves as a mark of sexual morality for life with the consciousness of the sacredness of marriage. It is on this note, no bride price is paid on a woman who is re-marrying. All that is done to contract the marriage is the acceptance of the money returned by the former husband as a mark of divorce. This is based on the belief that, payment of another bride price on a woman is considered promiscuity or moral laxity. The paper is a study of the Ughievwen culture of the sacredness, centrality and the binding force of the bride price on the Ughievwen woman. To achieve the objective of the study, primary and secondary sources of information were used. The paper recommends the need to develop educational curriculum to enhance and evaluate the value of bride price in Ughievwen culture. It also calls on the marriage hopefuls to be careful in

the choice of marriage partners in the light of modernity and Biblical theology.

### **Introduction**

Bride price is very significant in Urhobo culture of Ughievwen extraction. Bride price has both physical and spiritual dimensions as a result of the involvement of the physical and spiritual members of the families. Marriage confers on a man and woman some rights and privileges in Ughievwen such as chieftaincy title and the title of Okpako-Eghweya (The Most Senior Woman). The unmarried and the divorced woman receives the title Okpako-Emete meaning the most elderly girl irrespective of age and status. In the same vein, a man who is not traditionally married is not respected and not considered as an in-law to the parents irrespective of whether the relationship is blessed with children or not. In fact such relationship is known as Ose (concubine). The foregoing is based in the understanding that marriage is a religious and social obligation involving the presence and approval of the living and the living-dead (ancestors) as well as the belief that it bestows on a person(s) high level of respect, responsiveness and recognition (Oradejire, 2014). Ushe Mike Ushe, buttressing the aforementioned assertion said,

In Africa, marriage conferred dignity, certain rights and privileges on a man after he has performed all the necessary custom required of him to get married. These rights are broadly divided into two classes, namely: rights in Uxorem and rights in geneticism which are rights of a woman as a mother meaning that the man has to feed and protect the wife and children (Uche, 2016, p. 30).

Based on the aforementioned, the focus of this paper, the role of Bride Price in the enactment and maintenance of marriage relationship of the Ughievwen woman in the light of modernity and biblical theology.

The Ughievwen culture of marriage rests on her consciousness of the biblical injunction of permanency of marriage relationship by shunning all forms of sexual promiscuity and upholding fidelity in marriage especially with regard to the woman. As part of effort to safeguard and maintain the permanency of the marriage institution,

certain moral values such as restriction of relationship between males and females especially the married are to be upheld and maintained. This means that the moment a woman is married, no man or boy is expected to be too close to her or do anything that may be considered equivalence to sexual relationship.

### **Ughievwen Kingdom and Culture**

Ughievwen is one of the kingdoms in Urhobo. It was founded by a man called Ujevwen who migrated from Benin Kingdom through the guardian of Ogbaurhie (a river goddess) about 1370AD. He had female children and four sons, named after the four sub-clans of Orhoghwe (Ighwrenkan, Edjophe and Oto-Edo). Owahwa (Oto-Owahwa, Egbo-Ideh, Esaba, Ophorigbala, Otutuama, Ighwreogun, Otegbo, Okwemor and Otitiri); Ukpadi (Otughievwen, Eyara, Imode, Agbohwiame, Erhuvwaren, Agbaghare, Ayagha, Oginibo, Okwagbe-Oto, Okwagbe-Erhurun and Ighwreoku); Uphurie (Ekrokpe, Ekakpamre, Urhephron, Ekrejegbe, Ughevwighe, Otokutu, Egbo-Uphurie, Ighwrekreka and Arhagba). Ughievwen is bounded in the South by the Forcados River, Warri River in the West and the Okpare River in the East.

The structures of traditional Ughievwen government consists of the Ogbaurhie cults of Ade, the administrative, ceremonial and judiciary cult; Igbun-Otoligbun Eshovwin cults, responsible for the military and law enforcement and Ebo cult, in charge of medicine and healing. Ughievwen people are very industrious in the area of farming, fishing, lumbering, tapping of rubber, production of palm wine, palm oil and white-collar job, etc.

It is on this note Ughievwen shun all forms of begging for a living, theft and all forms of illicit means of human survival. Furthermore, they are peace loving people and hospitable. The culture of Ughievwen is not different from that of the Urhobo which she belongs. Like the culture of other ethnic groups in Africa, the Ughievwen culture encompasses dress code, varieties of food, language (Ughievwen language of Urhobo), morality, religious practices, occupation which includes, farming, tapping of rubber, lumbering, fishing, trading, paid jobs, production of local gin (ogogoro), tapping of palm-nut fruit and production of palm-oil

among others. Political office holders in Ughievwen includes: Okobaro (King) Otota (Speaker) Ilorogun (Chiefs) and community leaders (Dara, 2011, pp. 285-296).

Ughievwen people uphold and promote the culture of morality and religious belief to have emanated from the Supreme Being. These concept of morality and religious consciousness give birth to the concept and consciousness of evil. Erivwo Samuel factorized the concept of evil into three categories of Umuemu (sin), okon (wickedness) and Orukuruku (iniquity). The concept of evil raises the consciousness of sexual fidelity and condemnation. Sexual promiscuity is prohibited in marriage through the payment of bride price and oath-taking that assist in the preservation and protection of a life-long marriage experience (Erivwo, 2003, pp. 50-53). According to Ijeweimen Ikhidero,

In Benin land, oath-taking is one essential mechanisms of social control that has survived antiquity and continues to persist in the modern world. It is a solemn appeal made to deities or some sacred objects or things in attestation of the truth of a statement or sincerity of an act. Oaths are sworn declarations to keep promises. They serve the basic purpose of ensuring that a person who makes any solemn assertion keeps to its terms (Ikhidero, 2016, p. 83).

### **Sexual Affairs in the Perspective of Ughievwen Culture**

In Ughievwen culture, sexual affairs is restricted to married couple based on the understanding that the right to sex is conferred only on the married characterized by spiritual, physical and social dimensions. Affirming the aforementioned, Ushe Mike Ushe said, “Sex is an ingredient of fruitful marriage which each partner freely accepts from the other. The fruitful love which partners shared imposes total fidelity on them for unbreakable consent”. Furthermore, he describes sex as a sacred obligation to the point that abuse of it or refusal to partake in it by the married is seen by society as either cursed or abnormal (Ushe, 2016).

In the view of Donovan Wilbur, Sexual promiscuity is also condemned in Africa and indeed Ughievwen as a result of their knowledge of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) such

as gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes virus, that causes severe pains, acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) carried by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) as well as the belief that it is one of the most significant social evils in Africa. The abuse of its sacredness gives birth to grievous consequences such as sickness, frustrations, setbacks and death because they are offences against the living and the living-dead. The consciousness of sexual sin, gives birth to sexual aberrations, such as fornication, adultery, incest, rape, seduction, homosexuality, lesbianism, intimacy between relatives, sexual intercourse with menstrual women and children, watching the genitals of parents (Wilbur, 2000). These are frowned at by Africans especially the Ughievwen people of Delta State, Nigeria. However, it must be stated clearly that the degree of sexual offense(s) in Ughievwen vary between a married man and a married woman. Irorobeje Monday, explaining the dimensions of offense of sexual sin and punishment said, "In Urhobo, a married man only commits adultery when he has sex with a married woman. While a married woman commits adultery whenever she has sex with any man outside her husband (Irorobeje)."

This is the reason the degree of punishment for adultery is more severe on the married woman. The variance of the punishment rest heavily on taboos associated with the married woman such as, not sleeping with either a married or unmarried man outside her husband, not cooking for husband during her menstrual period, not sleeping in the same room and on the same bed with her husband during menstruation, not allowing another man to cross her outstretched legs, touch her waist, buttocks or to hold her wrists and shedding tears when cooking for her husband, etc. These are taboos as they are offenses against the gods, ancestors and other spirit beings. Sex taboos emanate from moral values which encourage and empowers person(s) to desist from sexual misconduct capable of bringing shame and punishment. In the view of Ushe Mike Ushe, the spiritual beings are believed to be the custodians of traditional values of love, mutual trust, understanding, generosity, good leadership, respect for human life and other people's property, collegial spirit, hospitality spirit, fear of God and hard work (Ushe, 2016, p. 34).

### **Marriage Among the Ughievwen**

Like other ethnic groups in Nigeria, Ughievwen upholds and practice the culture of marriage ordained by God for the good and progress of humanity. Marriage is widely and traditionally accepted as the covenant that cement the relationship among males and females. Marriage is seen as a sacred and social affair as it involves the Supreme Being, divinities, ancestors, the consent of the man and the woman who are married, their parents and families. Marriage in Ughievwen is in stages of courtship between the boy and the girl, introduction and acceptance by both parents and families, Udi-Eghrekuotor payment of bride price and excursion of the bride to the husband's family's house for the official welcome of the bride by the groom's family. The official welcome ceremony is characterized by elaborate entertainment of food, drinks, singing and prayers. In Ughievwen, marriage among traceable relations is a taboo as it is against the ethical standard of the ancestors and if for any reason two persons who are related cohabited before the knowledge of the families, either the marriage is dissolved or sacrifices and rituals must be performed for their peaceful co-existence and the wellbeing of their children.

Marriage in Ughievwen on the part of the woman, extend beyond the lifetime of the husband as the wife is inherited by the relation of the husband after his death. Marriage in Ughievwen is an unending institution tying two families together forever as neither death nor any circumstances is able to bring a permanent separation to it especially when there are children. It is for this reason, the saying "Aye avwaren" (our wife) even if there is separation, divorce or death (Vwovhen, 2011).

Upon the death of the husband, the wife is remarried to a member of the family for continuity of the marriage relationship to preserve the marriage heritage and legacy as well as the provision of emotional, material and financial security. Webmaster summarizes this aspect of the culture of marriage when he describes marriage in Urhobo applicable to the Ughievwen as,

An enduring institution regarded as a sacred bond tying two independent families forever. Once the traditional marriage rites are fully performed, neither death nor divorce is to unlock or

separate it. It is contracted to endure beyond the life of the husband as the wife is remarried to a member of the family in the event of husband's death (Sorokwu, 2017, p. 2).

A major uniqueness in Ughievwen marriage system is that only the physical body of the woman is married by the husband and family. Her *erivwin* (spirit double) remains in her family home. This explains the reason she is brought back to the family when she dies. The climax of Ughievwen marriage rites is the prayer by the father of the girl or the most elderly male member of the family characterized by the pouring of libation.

In Urhobo culture, Ughievwen inclusive, marriage involve written and unwritten contract which include children and relatives. As a result, it is imperative for the couple and family to make adequate efforts to sustain the marriage relationship as a permanent entity. It is on this basis, Obegor said, "Marriage is the focus of existence, a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actresses and not just a spectator. It is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Failure to get married under normal circumstance means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him in return" (Obegor, 2016).

Like other African cultures, Ughievwen expects the ancestors to bless them with good health, children and wealth. After the marriage ceremony, the woman is escorted to her husband's family house for entertainment and integration.

Ughievwen men places high regard for women. As a result, women are exempted from hard labour such as felling of trees, cutting of palm fruits, climbing of palm trees and other trees among others. Supporting the culture of physical weakness of women, John Mark Omorovore/Ikeke said, "In traditional African culture, the woman is spared of difficult jobs such as felling of trees, climbing and cutting palm fruits" as they are considered to be gentle, tender, tolerant and peaceful" (Omorovie, 2021).

### **Bride Price and Its Significance in Ughievwen Culture**

The term "Bride Price" is from the Latin word "dowarie" which became the middle English word "dowry" it has a resemblance with

the middle English word “dower” meaning a woman’s share of her husband’s property after his death. In the view of Padma Mohapatra and Jessica Whittermare “Bride Price is the money, gold, property, vehicles and such items that the groom’s family pays to the bride’s family to marry her. It is also seen as the amount of money or property that the groom and his family give to the bride’s family. It is not a payment to purchase the woman, but rather, a way of valuing the labour of women, the effort involved in the raising of the girl by her family as well as the values placed on women. It is an instrument to ratify the marriage as it serves as one of the values of the bride and womanhood.

Bride Price in Ughievwen is paid on traditional days of Edebi, Edure and Omamede. It is a taboo to pay a woman’s bride price on Edewo (market days) as market day is regarded sacred.

The list for the payments of bride price include, a bottle of local gin (ogogoro), kolanuts, alligator pepper and some cash for prayers; Udi-Merhovwenren (ogogoro for the acceptance of the bride’s family to give her to the husband and family). Ighogberharen (money “used in taking care of the bride); Igho-Oyanvwan (money for circumcision of the bride); complete dress for the mother of the girl; two wrapper (leleji); two headgears, an umbrella, a pair of shoes, a golden necklace, wrist, coral beads, a suitcase, a lamp, one otovwe fish and cosmetics are provided for the girl by the husband and family. Some tubers of yam, fish, garri, starch, palm oil and other cooking ingredients are provided for the bride’s family to cook Owho (palm oil soup), a traditional marriage soup, three bags of salt – one for the mother of the bride, two for Ewheya (married women in the extended family). The last and the most important among the list is the money (₦120.00) for the bride price proper of which, ₦20 is given back to the man to assist him to take care of his wife. In fact, in the event of divorce, it is the return of the ₦120.00 by the groom and his family that mark the end of the marriage.

The aforementioned reveals the significance of bride price list below:

- i. It removes shame and insult from the woman. As stated in this paper, married woman in Ughievwen are highly respected. No person no matter how highly placed is



allowed to insult them. Anyone who does is giving appropriate punishment.

- ii. It enables the woman to have full respect in her husband's house, family and society.
- iii. It reduces sexual promiscuity to the barest minimum. This is based on the taboos of not allowing any man to cross her outstretched legs, touch her buttocks, hold her wrist, touch her breast or sit close to any man outside her husband. It is even a taboo for a woman not to inform the husband of any form of wooing or sexual attempt by another man to her.
- iv. It gives room for permanency of the marriage as the bride price automatically keeps away other men from her as well as the penalty associated with such action by the living and the living-dead members of the family.
- v. The bride price is considered sacred as it involves the Supreme Being, ancestors, the physical family and the society at large. This gives birth to the arrest and interrogation of the woman if she commits adultery.
- vi. It assists in the exhibition of self-control in the face of the display of sexual attraction by the opposite sex or regulate extra-marital affairs.
- vii. Bride price is a one-time experience by every Ughievwen woman as whatever is done by another man to marry her in case of any divorce with the previous husband is not considered as bride price. In fact in case of remarrying only the money returned by the previous husband is collected from the new husband. The other items on the list of marriage are no longer included. This is based on the belief that marriage is a permanent experience as well as the belief that giving a woman in marriage to two or more men at different times is prostitution or sexual promiscuity, a shame to the woman and family.
- viii. Bride price consolidate friendship relations between the two families (bride and groom) with a pledge to take adequate care of the woman and children.

- ix. Bride price represent her worth family and community. This is one of the reasons, no girl, parents and family accept marriage proposal by a man and her family the first attempt. They always required time to reflect on the proposal before indicating their consent.
- x. Bride price serves as compensation to the bride's natal family of the loss of her labour and company.
- xi. It is an instrument for the legitimization of the marriage.
- xii. It gives the man (husband) full right to the sexual, economic and procreative powers of the woman.

### **The Concept of Ughievwen Bride Price in the Light of Modernity and Biblical Theology**

The practice of Bride Price in Ughievwen culture is ancient. On this basis it is expedient to evaluate its merit in order to ascertain its relevance in the face of modernity and Biblical theology. Modernity in the context of this paper is the contemporary time characterized by Western education, industrial revolution, socialization and highly developed roads and transport network among others. Like other aspects of the culture, payment of Bride Price in Ughievwen has been greatly influenced by modernity as the practice is no longer as strict as it used to be. Today, some parents wave some of the cultural demands to lessen the burden on the groom. For instance, as the local alcoholic drink for special prayers has been replaced with soft drinks for the bride and groom. In spite of these changes, payment of Bride Price is still very much invoked and a necessity in Ughievwen culture.

Biblical theology on the other hand is defined by Jeff Augustine, as the theology based on the teachings of the Bible. The word "Theology is from the Greek words "theo", meaning "God" and "Logos" meaning "the word or the study of God" to ascertain what God has said about Himself, His purpose, His plans and His promises. On this basis, Biblical theology can be described as the word of God as found in the Bible. The aforementioned affirms the mind of God concerning basic issues of human life such as marriage, holy living, education, economy and commerce, etc. In line with the subject of Bride Price,

God established a standard whereby the groom pays the Bride Price of his wife.

For instance, Adam, the first man created by God paid the Bride Price of his wife 'Eve' with one of his ribs. The scripture states:

The Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man and he brought her to the man. The man said, this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man" (Genesis 2:21-23 NIV).

In Genesis 24, Abraham sent his servant to look for a wife for Isaac his son. The servant prayed for success. But when he eventually found a wife by name, Rebecca for Isaac, he presented silver, gold jewelry and clothing for Rebecca and gave expensive things to her brother and mother which represent Bride Price. Jacob paid the Bride Price of hardwork for seven years each for Leah and Rachel which also represent Bride Price. From the Biblical point of view, payment of bride price is God's plan for mankind.

### **The Need to Inculcate Ughievwen Concept of Bride Price in Education Curriculum**

Curriculum is defined by Rhode Island as a standard based sequence of planned experiences where students practice and achieve proficiency in content and applied learning skills. It is the central guide for all education as to what is essential for teaching and learning so that every student has access to rigorous academic experiences (Rhode Island). Education on the other hand, is defined by Fanfunwa as the sum total of all the processes through which an individual develops abilities, skills and other forms of positive behaviour in a society in which he lives (Fanfunwa, 1979). Quoting Johnson, Alhassan Mallam Bolaji defines curriculum as "an intention, plan or prescription, and idea about what one would like to happen in schools (Bolaji, 1967, p. 1).

Considering the central place of transformational education curriculum, it becomes imperative to inculcate the concept of Bride Price into the educational curriculum to give room for global

acceptance that will transform cultures the world over that has trivialized marriage without much reference to payment of bride price. By its entrenchment into the educational curriculum, it will transcend its local practice to a global one.

### Conclusion

The paper discusses the Ughievwen concept of Bride Price and the need for it to be entrenched into the educational curriculum to have its global acceptance and transformation. The call for its entrenched is based on its contributions to the stability and moral uprightness of the Urhobo woman and man with regard to the value placed on marriage. In Ughievwen culture, the life-span of marriage extends beyond the death of the husband based on the value placed on woman. When a husband dies in Ughievwen, the wife is inherited by a male member of the family for the continuation of the marriage. This practice brings security to her by saving her from sexual misconduct and embarrassment.

Considering the rich culture of the Ughievwen with regard to marriage security and the value placed on the Ughievwen woman, it becomes expedient to recommend its inclusion into the education curriculum for wider acceptance and understanding. Furthermore, it will help in the sustaining of marriage across the world that is currently characterized with divorce in some advanced countries.

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