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The Fading of Traditional Igbo Marriage Rites: *A Modern Perspective*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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The Fading of Traditional Igbo Marriage Rites: A Modern Perspective

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Ndi Igbo, are a prominent ethnic group of African descent, with a rich heritage culturally and historically, especially in matters that affect marriage.

The marriage customs of Igbo people have always been an important part of Igbo society at large, portraying not just the people's values but also the religious beliefs of the people, not omitting their historical roots and social organization.

but in recent times, these marriage rites seem to be fading slowly due to modernization, external influence, and social dynamic changes, this post explains the traditional marriage rites of the Igbo people, their importance, and the challenges they face in the present day.

Traditional Rites of Igbo Marriage The marriage of Ndi Igbo is a highly respected ceremony and a well-structured procedure that differs from one community to the other, however, there are a few core elements that remain common across ndi Igbo

1. The Role of The First Wife: In Igbo tradition, the first wife is crucial, the marriage of the first wife is accompanied by a more strict ceremony, unlike subsequent wives. However, there are no religious rituals involved, the marriage ceremony is known to be a contract that binds husband and wife, and any violation of this contract like committing adultery can attract big punishment which could include death. This custom also highlights that a man cannot get married to a woman who hails from the same village, thereby promoting alliances between close communities.



2. **Bride Price and Customary Payments:** A crucial part of Igbo marriage is the bride price in which the groom will pay a certain amount of money to the woman's family, this is part of the marriage arrangement and the payment represents the transferring of responsibility of the bride from the grooms family. This amount differs but failure to make full payment would leave the bride's family with no option than taking the first daughter from the marriage as part compensation. This tradition further shows the importance of family in Igbo culture.

3. **The Ceremony and Family Involvement:** Marriage in Igbo culture is said to be a communal affair that involves the entire family, the husband must seek the acceptance of the bride's parent and the family elders before the marriage. In cases where the groom has been married, the first wife has precedence over the rest of the wives, and the position of the first is respected. Marriage in Igbo culture is more of a family agreement than just two individuals coming together as husband and wife.

4. **Divorce and Inheritance:** This process is challenging in Igbo culture especially when it involves the first wife, however, it is not impossible, the wealth and property of the man are shared via the male line, basically passing to the first male of the man, in cases where the son of the first wife is still very young, the brother of the man keeps the property, ensuring that property and wealth remain within the family, further showing the necessity of heritage and lineage in Igbo society.

The Challenges Facing Traditional Marriage Rites Even though this traditional way of life has shaped the society of ndi Igbo for centuries, in the modern world of today, they seem to be facing challenge s that are significant, numerous factors contribute to the slow eroding of these marriage customs in Igbo tradition:

With the increased rate of migration to distinct urban areas and exposure to distinct and global cultures, numerous young people of Igbo are moving out of traditional rural life. Modern influences and Western values have brought new ideas about marriage which in most cases conflict with the Igbo traditional values. This makes marriage



rites like bride price and other strict ceremonies attached to the Igbo marriage is being questioned, especially among the younger generation.

2. Westernization and Changing Attitudes Western practices have brought about gender equality, individualism, and personal choice in marriage. These practices have led few Igbo people especially young ones to see the marriage customs of Igbo as restrictive or outdated. Some of the traditional marriage arrangements that are viewed by some today as oppressive are the idea of money being paid to the woman's family, the roles of elders, and the mode of sharing property. Also, the influence of Christianity which mostly kicks against polygamy and other cultural practices has played a huge role in further shifting the attitudes of ndi Igbo as regards traditional marriage arrangements.

The rise in the cost of living and the increase in pressure on people to provide for their families when it comes to financing has halted the marriage dreams of many young men, affording customary prices for the bride and other marriage-related expenses is ten times harder than it used to be. These challenges lead to marriage being delayed, the polygamy dreams of young men is being given second thoughts, and even avoidance of traditional rites altogether. The demand for career advancement and education mostly precedes over the achievement of marriage leading to lesser unions traditionally.

The laws of Western establishments that Nigeria practices play a huge role in the fading of certain aspects of traditional marriage rites of Ndi Igbo, especially the aspect of bride price and polygamy, these changes have drastically altered the dynamics of Igbo traditional marriage rites within the community of ndi Igbo.

So many Igbo people are now seen opting for civil marriage that grossly lacks the weight of community involvement and the weight of family as the marriage of traditional Igbo Society.

The Igbo family structure has also experienced drastic changes over



time. With the breakdown of extended family networks and the increase in mobility, the weakening of traditional Igbo marriage rite is being facilitated by the absence of communal support that once strengthened this union. Young people who just got married now have to not rely on the extended family for support. And elder's involvement in the marriage rite ceremony is also declining.

The Future of Igbo Marriage Customs Although the traditional customs of Igbo marriage seem to be undeniably fading, the rites are not fading away entirely as ndị Igbo still have a sense of great pride in their identity. Many Igbo people are working hard to adapt and preserve these traditions in the face of modern interference.

Some of these efforts include integrating modern civil ceremonies into traditional marriage practices allowing this generation to enjoy the benefits of both worlds.

A handful of others are also advocating for the reviving of traditional values via cultural preservation initiatives and education, making sure that younger ones appreciate and understand the importance of these customs.

©Note on the Asaba People (Ibos) of the Niger

©Ethnography of Traditional Marriages in Southeast Nigeria

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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An enthusiast in tech with deep passion for studying and showcasing the vibrant cultural heritage of southern Nigeria . Combining my skill with my obsession towards African history and traditions to create contributions that impacts the digital space.



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