

Full Length Research Paper

The Concept of Traditional Marriage among The Urhobo People Of Delta State

Mrs. Philomena E. Sodje

Department of Christian Religious Studies, Delta State College Education, Mosogar, Delta State, Nigeria

Corresponding Author's E-mail: philomenasodje6@gmail.com

Accepted 9th July, 2018.

Traditional marriage is one of the ceremonies that depict the rich cultural heritage of Urhobo people. When traditional marriage is contracted, several factors are put into consideration in order to properly observe the tradition of the land. However, many young people today do not know much about the tradition of the land. This is because they have migrated from home and the elders do not teach them about them. It is against this background that the researcher decided to make several researches on the history of the Urhobo people and how marriage is contracted in the land. In the course of the research work, the writer made use of the library, internet materials, journals, questionnaires and oral interviews. These were done to ensure a better research. In the work, several arguments were put up on how the Urhobo people contract marriages today. Modernization and Christianity have greatly influenced the way traditional marriage is being conducted among the people. The trend is worrisome. Also, modern civilization and Christianity are threats to the rich cultural heritage of the people. However, this researcher observed that the greatest threat was negligence on the part of the stakeholders. For instance, if a lady whose bride price has not being paid is seen with pregnancy by the parents, such parents are supposed to do everything possible to ensure proper marriage of their daughter. The girl leaves the home to stay with the young man, without considering the implications. Both the tradition and Christian religion frown greatly at such attitude. Overtime, several changes have taken place in the way and manner in which the traditional marriage is contracted. These changes also have other challenges. This writer sees the need for proper education on the tradition of the people. It is not everything about the tradition that is idolatrous as some assume. Also, modern civilization has greatly influenced the way traditional marriage is celebrated today. In conclusion, it is therefore the opinion of this researcher that Urhobo people should try to preserve the cherished culture of the land by using the traditional marriage as a tool.

Keywords: Traditional Marriage, Urhobo People, Delta State.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Marriage, the legal union of a man and a woman, is as old as human history. From both biblical and the traditional point of view, marriage is an old institution. It is seen as a way of uniting families and it also helps in the continuity of the human race. The Urhobo people in Delta State of Nigeria have their own peculiarities as regards the concept of marriage.

However, the marital relationship varies from culture to culture, society to society and religion to religion. These peculiarities are as a result of the traditional lifestyle of the people. Urhobo people have a unique culture and tradition which makes them different from other people. These culture and tradition are displayed in marriage, burial installation of chiefs and so on.

Statement of the Problem.

Due to the advent of modern technology, most of the young people among the Urhobo now move to bigger cities in search of jobs. Many who get jobs outside the community never return or visit the community until they are about to get married. The villages are not only neglected but the traditions of the people are also abandoned and forgotten by many of the young ones. Following this negligence, the youth who want to get married do not know what is enshrined in the culture and tradition of the Urhobo people on the issue of marriage. Many are confused by what they see in the environment where they live. In the society, changes take place in accordance with what is happening in that particular society. According to P. Ighovojah and P.O. Okumagba (1997:40):

Norms and values are essential components of our social cultural system. Norms may be referred to as rules and regulations guiding the societal shared standard of behaviors. Human beings are born with an ongoing society which has already institutionalized patterns. Individuals in the society are constantly involved in social interaction through what is known as social-action.

Most of the Urhobo young people spend most part of their lives outside their communities. They share in the norms and values of other societies. And to a great extent, many have been influenced by the culture of other ethnic groups. This is because many have been away from home for long. Therefore when they are to get married, they are confused as to what is obtainable in the tradition. Some even intend to avoid the traditional marriage due to their misunderstanding of the concept of the Urhobo tradition.

Aim and Objectives.

The aim of the dissertation is to ensure that the concept of the Urhobo traditional marriage is properly understood. At the end of this dissertation, the writer hopes that everyone who reads the research work would understand the concept of Urhobo traditional marriage. They will also see the need for the youths to properly marry according to tradition. It will help those living outside the Urhobo communities to appreciate the traditions, especially the traditional marriage.

Justification of the study

Although the idea of traditional marriage among the Urhobo is not new, this researcher believes that knowledge is dynamic and intends to bring some dynamism and new ideas into this research work.

Scope and Limitation of the Study.

In the course of this research work, the writer intends to have an over view study of African Traditional Religion, Urhobo people, Delta State in general, but will zero in on the concept of traditional marriage among the Urhobo people, particularly in Delta State which is the main issue. Personalities, politics and other unrelated issues to this research work will not be discussed.

METHODOLOGY.

In this research work, the writer applied several research methods. These include historical approach in which the researcher tried to work on the history of the Urhobo people through the internet. The analytical and descriptive approaches were also employed. These approaches include primary and secondary sources in which the researcher interviewed Forty (40) persons some of whom are over 70years of age, with much experience of the Urhobo Tradition. Others interviewed, include men and women whose marriages are over twenty years. People whose marriages are less than ten years were not left out. The opinions of the interviewees are included in the work. Also, questionnaires were randomly distributed to different classes of people in Urhoboland. These include those in the market, churches and government parastatals.

These questionnaires were collated, analyzed, interpreted and discussed in the research work. The secondary method applied in this research work is the use of relevant text books, journals, internet materials etc. This is to ensure a better research work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For this research work, several materials are available both in the library and in the internet. Some of the literatures used are reviewed below. J Omosade Awolalu, etal, in his book *West African Traditional Religion*, includes various names West Africans call God and the wrong nomenclature for the peoples religion. In this view, the wrong nomenclature include: The high-gods of the primitive peoples, the withdrawn god, fetishism, idolatry etc. The book also discussed man's origin as conceived by different tribes in West Africa. The religion of the West African people is traditional according to the book. In his opinion, Omosade J. Awolalu , etal says:

Some people think that because the religion is traditional, it is primitive. Although, the word traditional connotes something of the past, something that came into being long ago, in essence, it does not mean that traditional religion is fossil and incapable of adaptation to

new situation and changes. Being traditional, it only means a religion that evolved from the people's personal experience, and thereby leaves the forebears with their descendants who now live it and practice it. It is traditional because it originated from the people's environment and on their soil. It has not been preached to them; it is not imported.

Africans are not converted into their traditional religion rather, they are born into it and they practice it as their own. This indeed makes them proud. John S. Mbiti in *Introduction to African Religion*; explained the richness of African heritage and how it spreads across the African countries and beyond. He also elucidates what African religion is all about such as; its beliefs, practices, morals and values. In the book, the author discussed how God is approached by the people of Africa among others. On traditional marriage, Mbiti says "Marriage is the meeting point for the three layers of human life according to African religion. These are the departed, the living and those to be born".

The above point of view is accepted by a large number of the African people. That is why during traditional marriage; the tripartite nature of human life is usually recognized. In his book, *Urhobo Traditional Medicine*, John O. Ubrurhe explained what African Traditional medicine is and its related concepts. He also examined the causes of barrenness in women, and explained the reason for this. Barrenness and impotence are not palatable experiences in marriage. The author argued that certain things are responsible for them. However, according to Ubrurhe, one of the areas of human affliction and disease where Urhobo medicine has achieved immense success is barrenness or gynaecological problems.

Michael P. Adogbo, briefly discusses God in the world view of Africa Traditional religion. In his book *Comparative Historical and Interpretative Study of Religion*, he states that African people believe that God is above the divinities that are his functionaries in the maintenance of the order in the divine universe. Africans believe that God has absolute authority over all things. Lauren Everett, in *Ten key moments in the history of marriage*, discusses the history of several debates concerning the issue of the owner of marriage-the Church or state. This is because both play important roles in every marriage.

It is observed also that marriage among the Urhobo people is seemingly more expensive than it used to be. This has become a thing of concern to many stakeholders in Urhobo land especially the elites. On this, Dr. Emmanuel O. Ojameruaye in his paper, *Culture and Economic Development in Urhobo land*, presented at the 6th Annual convention and meeting of the Urhobo historical society says:

The marriage ceremonies have become so expensive that Many prospective bridegrooms virtually have to

borrow or beg to meet required expenses. Those who cannot afford this, decide to do without marriage and co-habit with their would-be wife. Thus there has been an increase in the number of Urhobo men and women who live together and have children without formal marriage.

This situation is not good for the society. Both the Urhobo society and the Christian church condemn it. The implication of the above is that many children in Urhobo communities are born without proper marriage. This is a sad situation for the Urhobo people and nation. Many family members rather than thinking of making things easy for the young intended couple, make things difficult not thinking of the future consequences it will have on the society. These illegal marriages have given rise to several miscreants in the society. This could be as a result of the kind of foundation of illegal marriage. But on the overall, part of the problem comes from the high cost of marriage celebration in some families.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF URHOBO PEOPLE

A study of this type will not be complete without a cursory or a deliberate survey of the people under discussion hence according to Agbegbedia (2015): *No treatment of any aspect of the life of a people could be said to be complete without a corresponding or at least, a basic knowledge of the people in discussion.*

Thus the Urhobo people according to Olorogun (2004) *are a people of the Northwestern Niger Delta in Nigeria, Kwa Branch of the Niger. The Ethnographers called them Sobo to refer to Urhobo and Isoko. Referred to as "Uhobo" by the Binis and "Soubo" by the Portuguese.*

The Urhobo people are unique in the way they do things. They are very good at upholding their custom and traditional marriage is not left out. Before the advent of Western Education, oral tradition was being used by the elders to promote the moral upbringing of the younger generations.

According to *Wikipedia Encyclopaedia* (2008):

Urhobo belong to a people whose history is largely undocumented. There is almost an absence of European record on the Urhobo. The early Europeans were preoccupied with economic interest on the coasted communities. However, in 1505, Pereira observed that in the hinterland beyond the Forcados River, lived the Subou or Sobo a name that is corrected to be Urhobo in 1938.

Urhobo people suffered historical documentation for a long time. This is majorly responsible for the variation in their historical facts told orally. From the

above, one can deduce how Urhobo originally got her name before it was eventually corrected in 1938. According to 2009 Urhobo Association:

The origin of the Urhobo people is rooted in oral tradition. While accounts may vary, one fact is proliferating: The belief in migration from Aka-The present day Edo territory. Although twenty two kingdoms have distinct dialects and traditions that reflect slight variations in the Urhobo migratory patterns, there is a universal Urhobo language. See Figure 1.

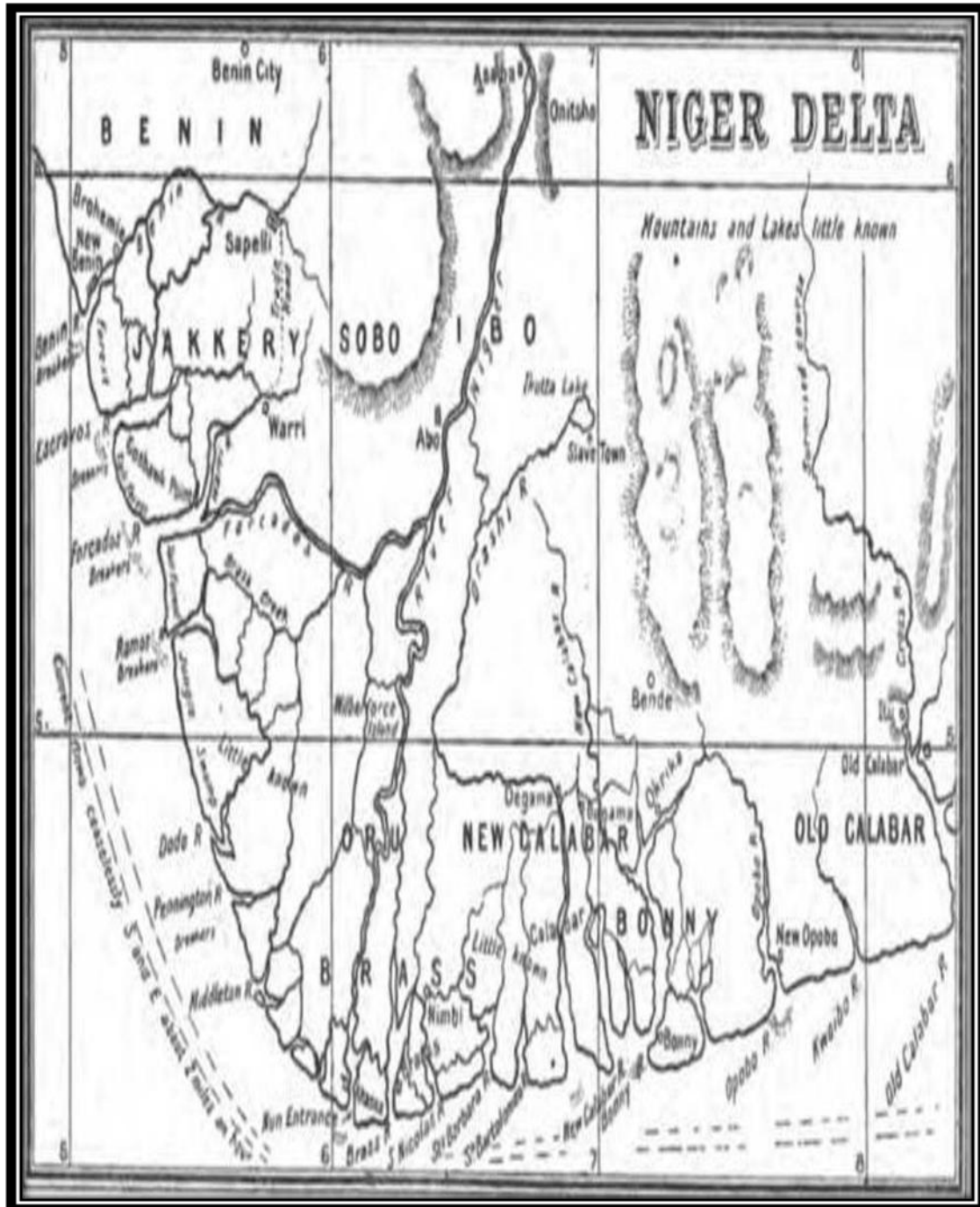


Figure 1: The Historical Map of Urhobo People.

Source: *In The Niger Country* By Harold Bindloss

Geographical Location

Geographically, the Urhobo people are surrounded by neighbours whom they have always tried to maintain good relationship with. Urhobo neighbours to the North-East are Ndokwa, to the South-East are Isoko, to the North are Bini, the West are Itsekiri and the South are Izon. The Urhobo people occupy about 5000 sq kilometers with population of about 2.0-2.5 million people in Nigeria. This makes Urhobo people the 5th largest ethnic group in Nigeria, and the single largest ethnic group in Delta State. Also, in Delta state, according to Aziza (2004:86), "Urhobo is a major language among the other minority languages. Since 1991, when formal education first came to Urhobo land, it has featured in Sunday school and at the primary level". The geographical location of Urhoboland and its surrounding ethnic groups in Delta State is shown in Figure 2.

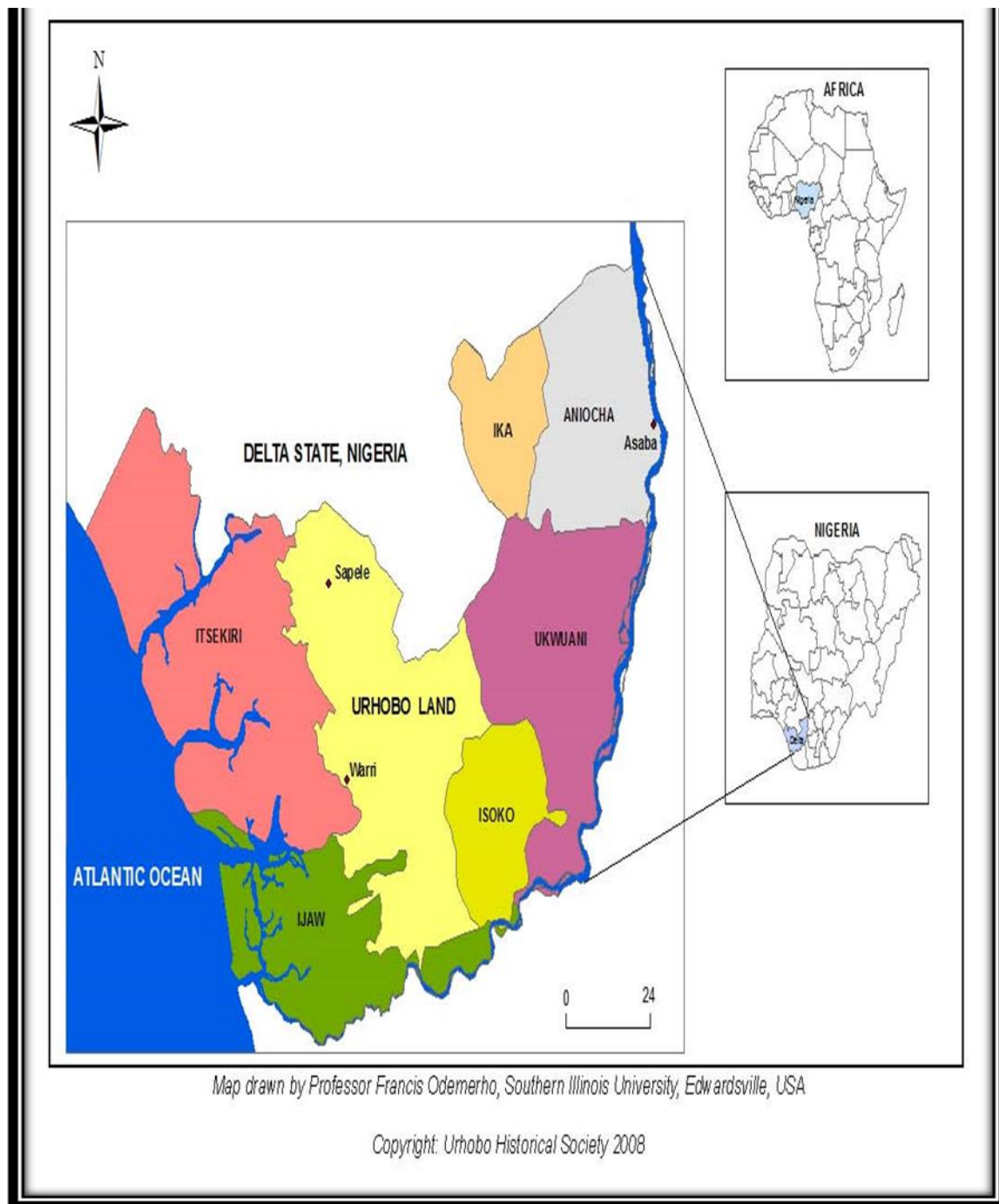


Figure 2: A Map of delta state, showing Urhoboland and other ethnic Nationalities

From figure 2, Urhoboland occupies over 30% of the land mass with Sapele region up North and Warri and its environs down South. It is located amongst other Niger Delta regions in the Southern part of Nigeria.

Human Activities of the People

Like every other responsible group of people, the Urhobo people are a responsible and hardworking set of people. They have never been lazy but hardworking. Although Urhobo communities are oil producing communities, however, before the advent of the crude oil exploration, Urhobo people have been doing well. Most of them have been living on agriculture and trading. Many were successful farmers, fishermen and traders and have been self dependent.

In his papers, *Strategies for Self-Reliant Economic Development of Urhoboland*, Dr Emmanuel O. Ojameruaye opines that:

Historically, Urhobo people are known to be one of the most hardworking and enterprising peoples in Nigeria, relying on their own human and material resources for sustenance and growth.

Collectively, they had built community schools, earth roads, and town halls and awarded scholarships to deserving children. There were many vibrant non-governmental organizations such as Urhobo Progress Union (UPU) and community based organizations and groups that initiated and propelled self-help efforts in Urhoboland. Because government (federal religion/state) was far from area, the people had to learn to do-it themselves.

Here, Ojameruaye did not only describe the Urhobo to be self-sustaining, but they are also able to do certain things such as building of schools, construction of earth roads, town halls and also gave scholarship to deserving students. These are things the governments were expected to do for the populace, but since the government did not do them, Urhobo people took it upon themselves to help her indigenes. It underscores the spirit of cooperation among them. They also work hard among themselves doing their legal businesses to help one another.

Religion of the People

Religion is part of human existence. It is ancient and universal. According to Adogbo, (2000:4): Religion is one of the most ancient, universal and enduring components of human existence. Regarding its antiquity, as far back as we can trace human culture, we find evidences of religious beliefs and practices.

Africans and particularly Urhobo people are not left out. They are basically religious people. Before the arrival of

Christianity in Urhoboland, the Urhobo practiced traditional religion which has its own peculiarities. To this, Adogbo (2010:81) explains that in Urhobo traditional religion, the divinities or nature gods play an important irksome role. They are called *edjo* and are broadly of two types: *edjarame* (water spirits) and *edjorawha* (bush or forest spirits). Adogbo further categorized the spirits into three. In his essay, *The spirit world of African people*, Adogbo (2000:112); comments that among the Urhobo people of Delta state Nigeria, three broad categories of spirits beings are identified. They are *edjarame* (water spirits), *edjorawha* (bush or forest spirits) and *esemo* (ancestral spirits). He explains that *edjarame* and *edjorawha* are primordial spirits which were so created by God while the *esemo* are the spirits are of departed members of the community.

This religious belief of the people influences a great part of their lives. It affects their marriages, burial, cure for the sick, etc. In the use of traditional medicine to cure the sick, the Urhobo tradition is put into consideration. Urhobo traditional medical system is practiced by our progenitors and it is transmitted from one generation to another. Some of the procedures in preparation and administration of magical medicine are inexplicable, (Ubrurhe,2003:10). This is due to the religious belief of the Urhobo people. However, with the advent of Christian religion, many Urhobo people have embraced Christianity but this does not rule out the fact the indigenous religion of the Urhobo people is still evident and practiced in their day-to-day activities or daily lives.

THE CONCEPT OF TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

The concept of marriage varies from tradition to tradition. The idea and practice of marriage contract has much bearing on the cultural background and traditional beliefs of a group of people. However, there is the general concept of marriage. This writer will consider all these, and focus on the Urhobo traditional marriage which is the main issue in this dissertation.

The general Concept of Marriage.

Marriage is as old as the history of mankind. In the biblical creation story, it is recorded that man was created after every other thing has been spoken into existence by God (Gen1:3-25). In the creation process, God spoke the word, "Let there be..." and whatever He commanded to be came into existence. But in Genesis 1:26, the Bible declares that God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures

that move along the ground". Here, it is clear that after creation of other things, God took a deliberate decision to create man, and with his hands he fashioned man from the dust. The second chapter of the book of Genesis gives a graphic description of the creation of man. "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostril the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen.2:7). Now, everything God created had its kind except man. Man could not marry other creatures, even though He was giving dominion over them. Rev. T.O.P. Anyanahun in his book *Ten Commandments of Marriage* argues that in marriage there is the need for the people to have things in common. In this sense, even though the animals and plants are living things which respire, feed and grow like human beings, they are not human beings. The animals have their own kinds. He continues, *God saw the disharmony between Adam and the animals He asked him to name, and so He declared: but for Adam then, no companion could be found (Gen.2:20) in spite of the animals. And of the males and females of the same kind of animals he made pairs signifying his desire for equality also for humankind. (Anyanahun 52-53).*

Seeing that man has no companion like other creatures, and that none of the other creatures could fit into marriage with man, God decided to create for man a companion. The man was all alone in the midst of other creatures. God commented on it saying: "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18). This gave rise to the institution called marriage in the bible. However, in extra biblical accounts, the etymology of marriage dates back to several centuries ago. According to *The Wikipedia foundation Inc.* (2012):

The word "matrimony" is derived from the old French word matremoine which appeared around 1300C. Ultimately, it is also derived from Latin matrimonium which combines two concepts mater meaning "mother", and the suffix monium signifying action, state or condition.

From this etymological analysis, we discover that the word has much relationship in its meaning in English, French and Latin. Since then, the general concept has not varied much. Both in the traditional or western concept, marriage have always involved a relationship between a man and a woman. However, with the passage of time; culture, tradition, religion and civilization have influenced marriage contract immensely. Today, such ideas as polygamy, polyandry, same sex marriage, wedding vows, traditional marriage and so on, have become issues of concern.

In the general concept of marriage, several key players at various times get involved. The traditions of a people in the case of traditional marriage, the state in the case of court marriage and registry, the church in the

case of church wedding are all players in marital contract. To a great extent, the legality of the union is what is uppermost here. Some have argued about who owns marriage whether the church or the state. During the debate over same sex marriage, Lauren Everitt at BBC news magazine, wrote on *Ten Key Moments in the History of Marriage*. He argued that:

During the 11th century, marriage was about securing an economical or political advantage. The wishes of married couple- much less their consent were of little importance. The bride, particularly, was assumed to bow to her father's wishes and the marriage arrangement made on her behalf.

Many happenings today were planned or introduced by someone. Everitt also argues that before 1858 divorce was rare. In 1670, parliament passed an act allowing John Manners (who was referred to as Lord Roos) to divorce his wife, Lady Anne Pierrepont. This created a precedent for parliamentary divorce on the ground of wife's adultery. According to Everitt, divorce in marriage was passed into law in 1670, though some may have divorced their spouses before that time, but passing it into law made it legal and acceptable then. This law must have been influenced in order to allow Lord Roos divorce his wife. Since then, many people have followed his example.

Apart from people getting married in the church or court, people also get married through the tradition of the land. Every group has its own traditional way of doing things, including marriage. The idea of marriage according to tradition varies from tradition to tradition, depending on what is obtainable in the tradition of the people. In the course of this dissertation, the writer will dwell on the concept of Urhobo traditional marriage.

Definitions and Purposes of Marriage.

In an attempt to help people understand what marriage is all about, several definitions have been given for marriage. In *Encarta Dictionary of Microsoft Corporation 1993-2008*, marriage is defined as A legal recognized relationship established by a civil or religious ceremony between two people who intend to live together as sexual or domestic partners.

Here, marriage is viewed as a legal relationship in which two people come together with the intention of spending their lives with each other. This relationship makes them sexual and domestic partners. The implication of this definition is that it allows same sex marriage. In some societies today, same sex marriage is being legalized. Marriage is also seen as the social institute under which a man and woman establish their decision to live as husband and wife by legal commitments, religious ceremonies, e.t.c.

Moreover, in the African setting, marriage is also

seen as a link between generations. According to Mbiti (1981:104):

Marriage is the uniting link in the rhythm of life. All generations are bound together in the act of marriage—past, present and future generations. The past generations are many but they are represented in one's parents; the present generation is represented in one's own life, and future generation begins to come on stage through child bearing.

In this definition of marriage, Mbiti picks up the issue of life's continuity. The traditional African sees it as a way through which the past and the future are connected, the present being the linking factor. Getting married and having children is thus part of the African culture. To the African society, marriage is an obligation not subject to the opinion of the individual. Mbiti puts it this way: Marriage fulfills the obligation, the duty and the custom that every normal person should get married and bear children. This is believed to go back to the very beginning of human life. Failure to get married is like a crime against the traditional belief and practice.

The above position of Mbiti is the general view of many Africans. In Christianity, the purpose of marriage is seen from the angle of God's purpose for marriage. God's purpose for marriage is the ultimate and the most important purpose. Thus, understanding God's purpose for marriage is of utmost importance because to marry and miss it is to enter into a life full of frustration and disappointment— setting the stage for great marital unrest. The purpose of marriage is to spiritually, emotionally and physically unite a man and a woman together as husband and wife, in a covenant relationship between themselves and their creator.

Anyone who wants to get married should understand the purpose for which God established it because going into it without such understanding can be really frustrating. That is not to scare people from it because God is interested in marriage. From the beginning in the bible, God says "it is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). So one of the purposes for which marriage is instituted is for companionship. Anyanahun (2012), puts this view this way; Marriage is meant to be an enjoyable relationship between two parties. God made them for himself. One could imagine the aloneness of Adam when he had no companion even among the animals and the other creatures. He was their master, king and lord but he had no equivalent in body, soul and spirit.

Companionship is primary. Naturally, man will not be happy to stay alone. Therefore he needs a wife to make him complete and happy. When this companionship is missing, nothing can replace it. Just like Adam was not satisfied being with the animals, so it is with every normal man.

The Islamic view is similar. In Islam, marriage is seen as the formation of a family through which one can

find security and peace of mind. A person who is not married resembles a bird without a nest. This emphasizes the place of security and peace of mind. Muslims also emphasize the place of sexual satisfaction, reproduction and avoidance of the evil deeds like the Christians.

Socially, the purpose of marriage is viewed in its contribution to the society. Marriage also has a profoundly social purpose. Marriage creates his own small society consisting of mother, father and children. That small social unit contributes to the larger society by creating a functioning future- the next generation. Everyone benefits from having a next generation that can sustain the society and keep its institution going. Accordingly, marriage helps to sustain the continuity of the society. The family which is the basic unit of the society is made through procreation. The traditional view of marriage emphasizes the place of offspring. Jennaya Arias (2002) is of the view that;

Traditionally speaking, the primary purpose of marriage is the generation and nurturing of offspring; the second purpose is the mutual help of spouses, and the third is the remedy for concupiscence.

This is connected to the traditional African views. In the perspective of the African Traditional Religion, child bearing is main factor. The supreme purpose of marriage according to African people is to bear children, to build a family, to extend life and to hand down the living torch of human existence. For that reason, a marriage becomes fully so only when one or more children have been born. It is a very tragic thing when no children come out of a marriage. Then people do not consider it to be truly a marriage, and other arrangements are made to obtain children in the family.

This is one of the opinions which accounts for why several people among the Urhobo get involved in polygamy. Among Africans, the issue of child bearing is not taken lightly. Hence it is the most important purpose of marriage. Further in his argument, to buttress his view above, Mbiti opined:

Through marriage and child bearing, the parents are remembered by their children when they die. Anyone who dies without leaving behind a child or close relatives to remember him or pour out libations for him, is a very unfortunate person.

This connects marriage with the belief of the people and strengthens the need for child bearing.

Furthermore, "marriage is the social reproduction of the kinship group. The entire community, including living and deceased, are involved in the marriage process". Here, the kinship of those getting married is involved. No marriage in the African setting is done without the involvement of the community and kins. They all have their parts to play in the process.

Definition of Urhobo Traditional Marriage

Just as every ethnic group has its peculiar way of doing things, that is how it is with the Urhobo people. The Urhobo are unique in their way of doing things. The cherished culture and tradition of the people come into play during festival, marriage contract and burials. The Urhobo traditional marriage is that kind of marriage contracted according to the Urhobo culture and traditions. The Urhobo have their unique culture and tradition, so their marriage rites are unique. It is argued that Urhobo traditional marriage is unique to Urhobo cultures and traditions. Indeed, marriage in Urhobo worldview is an enduring institution. It is sacred. It looms large enough to tie two independent families together forever. The Urhobo kind of marriage extends beyond the couples direct involvement. It embraces the extended families of the spouses. Indeed, Urhobo marriage is a marriage of two families. This is so because the families play very central roles in ensuring the success of the marital relationships from the time of courtship through the marriage negotiations to the contracting of the marriage.

It is clear here that according to the Urhobo tradition, marriage is seen as an institution that unites families together, not just the couples. Also, the marriage contract fully involves both families from the beginning to the end. The tie of the family is so much that even when the man dies, according to tradition, the marriage contract with the woman continues and the woman could be given to another man in the family of the dead husband. Thus, it is said that Urhobo traditional marriage endures beyond the life of the husband; infact it is the wife's life span. This is due to the fact that, on the death of the husband, the wife is passed on to a number of husbands in the family for continued marriage. This custom provides the emotional and financial stability, and continuity of the marriage.

By implication, marriage is seen in Urhobo tradition as that institution which endures for life. The wife is a wife of the family, not just the husband alone. From the day of the marriage she becomes part of the family. In the family, she is referred to as 'our wife' by members of the husband's family and continues the marriage, being passed to another member of the family.

Moreover, in the definition of Urhobo traditional marriage, polygamy is an accepted norm. Though development and Christianity amongst the Urhobo people have significantly affected this aspect of the institution, some still practice it. In his work titled, *Culture and Economic Development in Urhoboland*, presented at the Urhobo Historical Society, Emmanuel O. Ojameruaye opines that:

Development in Urhobo land has also brought about significant changes in Urhobo marriage institutions and ceremonies. Urhobo people were traditionally

polygamous and there was relative harmony within polygamous families. However, since the advent of colonialism, polygamy has been on the decline and polygamous families are increasingly becoming more acrimonious and divided than in the past. Men who are afraid of or cannot afford to have more than one wife sometimes indulge in extra-marital sexual activities.

From the foregoing, Urhobo traditional marriage can be seen as an enduring marital institution in which a man is married to one or more women, and the wives are accepted as members of the man's family. The marriage brings a life-time bond between the man's family and the family of the wife.

Definition of some Useful Terms in Urhobo Traditional Marriage Contract and Order of Program.

There are some useful terms in the traditional marriage contract. These terms will be defined by the writer. Also, the writer will endeavour to draw out a program format for payment of bride price according to the tradition.

a.	<i>Aye r' uwevwi</i>	A married woman
b.	<i>Qshare</i>	A man
c.	<i>Qse</i>	Concubine
d.	<i>Okpakoro orua</i>	Head of family
e.	<i>Ose</i>	Father
f.	<i>Oni</i>	Mother
g.	<i>Otota</i>	Spokes-man
h.	<i>Ikopha</i>	Bride's maids
i.	<i>Usuopha</i>	Middleman

Factors Influencing Marriage contract among the Urhobo people.

In contracting marriage in Urhobo land, several factors come to play. These factors are influential to the marriage. A little wonder why a young beautiful lady is given in marriage to an aging man. In this section, the researcher will look into various factors which are influential to the marriages of people among the Urhobo. The list is by no means exhaustive in this research work. However, the ones discussed in this work will help shed light on the issue for any reader to understand the broad concept.

i. Cultural Factor

Cultural factor is one of the factors that influences marriage contract among the Urhobo people. Culture is regarded as the way of life of a people. According to P.O. Okumagba etal, "Culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment." Every ethnic

group has its culture and the culture influences the people in the things they indulge in. In the Urhobo culture, polygamy is part of it, and so when a man has many wives, he is only being cultural. This cultural factor has much influence on the marriage of both young and old. Due to this factor, an old man may choose to marry more young ladies, even if he has wives already. No one sees it wrong because it is accepted in the culture of the land. They may not consider how to take care of the wives and children. If they can marry the women according to tradition, the women should fend for themselves.

ii. Traditional Factor

This factor is similar to the cultural factor. But the difference is seen in their definition. Culture is the way of life of the people in a community, but “tradition is a ritual belief or object passed down within a society, also a basic character of a society still maintained in the present, with origins in the past.”

Through traditional influence in the community, marriage is conducted without asking questions on why certain conditions must be met and ceremonies performed before marriage rite is completed. For instance, in those days, the girls are usually circumcised before marriage in Urhobo land. It was part of the tradition in the land. It is believed that female circumcision helps the ladies to overcome promiscuity. In the words of Revd. A.Y. Oguori (Interview) it is done “to avoid sex hunger. It was believed that the uncircumcised woman loves sex too much, so it was done to reduce immorality”. Moreover since it was part of the tradition, the children were not given any reason for it. For instance, the researcher interviewed Christiana Sodje and Christiana Onitsha on the issue of circumcision. These women were circumcised when they were younger. They both have similar views. Sodje Christiana said, “we grew up to meet circumcision that way. But we were also told that without circumcision, a lady cannot give birth to a baby”. She was circumcised when she was pregnant. However, in her opinion, that reason was wrong because now that girls are not circumcised they still have children.

Christiana Onitsha has a similar view but added: “another reason we were given for circumcision was that it is used as a means of getting extra money from the husband of the girl during marriage”. Therefore, the traditional influence on marriage contract would be noticed owing to the fact that in the case of circumcision, it was believed that the uncircumcised would be sexually immoral, family member of the man would be interested in knowing whether the lady their son wants to marry is circumcised or not because according to the tradition of the land, the uncircumcised lady would be “sex hungry”.

They insist on the circumcision of the lady, or withdrawal from the marriage arrangement.

iii. Parental Factor

This is another important factor that influences marriage contract among Urhobo people. In Urhobo land, many parents tend to play a major role in the marriage of their children. Some parents arrange for the marriage of their children while the children are very young. The Urhobo have an adage: “*Ariomakrire, oyesoro avwo rehe omote k’omare*”(we have known for long, that is why a young girl is given in marriage to an old man).

By this saying, the parental factor in the influence of marriage contract is obvious. The reason is because the parents discuss the marriage of their children and in some cases, they even give gifts to each other on behalf of their children and refer to themselves as in-laws without the consent of their children. And so, when the children grow up and decide to marry someone else, the parents disagree vehemently. They do their best to persuade or ensure that the girl is wooed into the marriage.

The influence of the parents in the marriage contract of their children is also noticed in the decision making. Some parents among the Urhobo people think that their children are not mature enough to make decision of who to marry or not. Therefore, when the children talk of marriage, they question what they know about marriage. They then try to influence the decision either by persuasion or by force. The parental influence in the marriage contract in Urhobo land is a major factor. Several reasons are responsible for this. It could be financial reason or familiarity between both families and so on.

iv. Age factor

Age is also a factor that influences marriage contract in Urhobo land. Most parents today get worried when their children stay at home for a long time without telling them of marriage. In Urhobo land, parents feel proud and happy when their children are getting married. But when the children are at home and are gradually ageing in the home, they get worried. They get worried because of the mockery of people and also because of the sterility of the children. Due to the age of the children the marriage contract is made relatively easy for them.

v. Historical factor

Many Urhobo are naturally good historians. History is very important to the Urhobo people. Whatever they decide on and do have some bearing on history.

Historical factor is also an important factor influencing marriage contracts among the Urhobo people. When a lady informs her parents of a man's interest to marry her, the parents try to verify some things about the family of the man. The man's family also does the same about the girl's family. They do so because, they want to be sure that their children are not entering into a bad family. Isaac Aikoroje comments thus:

One of the profound aspects of traditional marriage is the investigation both parents carry out on behalf of the two that want to get married. Once the boy and the girl have introduced each other to their parents, the first question they will ask, is whose daughter or son are you? Once the names of their parents have been mentioned, both parents then carry out a secret investigation of each family.

This is to find out if they are noble and respectful families or have a peculiar family ailment that cannot be over-looked.

This is to investigate if there are marital problems in the family. At the end of their findings, each family will call their children and tell them their findings. If they is nothing odd about any of the family, the parents will then allow the marriage to go on. But if there is any blemish found in the family of the girl for example, the family of the boy will call the boy to discuss it and then give the boy reasons why the marriage should not go ahead. The family of the girl will do the same if it is boy that is found wanting or his family. This is done to protect them from impending marital problems in the future. Through the historical account of the families, people know if there have been wrong dealings in the families in time past. They trace the records of things that happened in the past in the family. This helps to verify if the family is under any kind of curse or traces of insanity, etc. Whatever their findings are may help them determine their decisions. And like suggested by Isaac, the family may stop the marriage from proceeding, giving reasons to their children. This is where historical factor influence marriage contract.

vi. Fame factor

The fame factor of a man in a community is also an influential factor in marriage contract among the Urhobos. This accounts for why many politicians and teachers are polygamists. When a man is famous and financially well-to-do in the land, many parents will wish their daughters are hooked to the man in marriage. Sometimes, some of these men are teachers posted to the community to teach. Since polygamy is part of the culture of the people, the parents do not mind if these men already have wives. Their daughters may become second, third or fourth wives. This is power of fame of the men involved.

vii. Sterility factor:

This is a major factor which influences the contract of marriages in Urhobo land. If a marriage is without children in the African context there are usually a lot of mockery, comments and threats to the survival of the marriage. This is because of the value Africans in general and Urhobo in particular place on childbearing. Mbiti opines that:

The supreme purpose of marriage according to African people is to bear children, to build a family, to extend life, and to hand down the living torch of human existence for that reason, a marriage becomes fully so only when one or more children have been born. It is a tragic thing when no children come out of a marriage. Then people do not consider it to be truly a marriage, and other arrangements are made to obtain children in the family.

This is why sterility factor play a very important and very influential role in marriage contract in Africa especially among Urhobo. Marriages without children are considered tragic. Lack of children in marriages in Africa is a big problem because children extend the existence of the family line, so that the family does not come to abrupt end. In Urhobo and other ethnic groups, the issue of sterility in marriage is taken seriously, that it leads many into polygamy. In Ubrurhe's opinion, *The practice of polygamy, which Euro-American scholars used to contend that the Africans had no concept of love and that it was a means to subjugate the wives to secondhand position, has its genesis in the African fear of childlessness. The truth, among other reasons, is that Africans were so preoccupied with the idea of having a child that they adopted the polygamous system of marriage to insure against childlessness, the concept of which is frightening to the Africans. Among the Urhobo, a barren woman is treated with disdain and has no respect among her womenfolk.*

Among Urhobo people, many men who are polygamists argue that the reason for their choice of other wives is to enable them have children. Many women in Urhobo land who are and are victims of delay in child bearing for the fear of being sent packing from the home, encourage their husband to marry other women as well so that while she experiences delay, the man may have children through the other wives.

viii. The search for male child factor

The place of children in Urhobo traditional marriage cannot be over emphasized. Traditionally, the Urhobo sometimes see children to be more important than money or wealth. Thus Ubrurhe (2008) opines that, Such names as *Omonigho* (a child is more important than money), *Omoefe* (a child is wealth), *Aruwewwhire* (I have

entered the house) and *Etuwevwire* (I have reached home) underscore the vital position a child occupies in Urhobo concept of life.

The Urhobos believe that without a child in the home, the woman has not actually entered the home, so a woman's primary focus in the home should be to have children. However, another problem women in Urhoboland face in their homes even when they have children, is the absence of a male child. Traditionally, the Urhobo adore male children as if they are more important than female children. Delay in having male children has led many Urhobo people to giving birth to many children, and it has influenced many to go for other wives. Ubrurhe also argues that "among the Urhobo, much premium is placed on fecundity. A marriage is considered successful to the extent that the woman gives birth not only to a girl but also a son who will survive and sustain the process of continuity." To substantiate the above view, Ubrurhe (2003) cited Metuh (1985) thus: A son's life is the prolongation of the life of the whole lineage. As its numerical strength increases, so does its life force becomes stronger.

Here, the son's life is used as a means through which the lineage of the family is prolonged. Without a son in the family, it can be deduced that the family eventually discontinues. And this places high premium on male children in Urhoboland. Hence this search for a male child factor greatly influences some marriages in the land.

THE TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE CEREMONY.

This section of the work is an attempt to x-ray the main activities during the traditional marriage in Urhobo land. Culturally, the Urhobo people circumcise their women in those days. Here, the writer will discuss Pre-marital activities and other salient issues in Urhobo traditional marriage.

Pre-marital activities

In Urhobo land, there are major ceremonies before the consummation of the traditional marriage. A lady does not just wake one day to say she wants to get married. When a girl has received a proposal for marriage from a man, she informs her mother who in turn informs the father of the girl. In other cases, the groom sends a notice of marriage to a young girl through his kinsmen. At a point, the groom is asked to come with his family to introduce themselves to the bride's family. A day is fixed for this meeting. The father of the girl will inform his family members, and will all be at the man's house to wait for their expected guests – the

groom's family. This first major visit is known as '*djoma*' – to show oneself. It is also referred to as 'introduction' because it is a day in which the groom's family is formally introduced to the bride's family. As it is customary in Urhobo, the family of the bride will welcome their guests and entertain them. This is done through the spokesman of the bride's family. He stands and calls for the attention of everyone present with the greetings, "Urhobo waadoo" (greetings to Urhobo people). He then asks for the nicknames of the men from both families. He presents kola nuts, drinks, alligator pepper and money on behalf of the bride's family. They are then received on behalf of the groom's family by their spokesman; prayer is then said by the eldest man. Thereafter, they will all eat and drink together. A short while later, the spokesman of the groom's family will stand and call for the attention of everyone in the same way the spokesman of the bride's family did. He then presents kola nuts, drinks, alligator pepper and money on behalf of the groom's family. These are received by the bride's family. The procedure followed in the first presentation is followed. Prayer is said by the girl's father or the eldest man in the family and they eat and drink together.

After entertainment from both sides, the middleman of the bride's family will stand and call for attention again, and this time, he will enquire from their visitors, the purpose of their visit. Then, through their middleman, the groom's family will inform them of their intention to marry one of their daughters. Again, the bride's family will say "we have many daughters, which of our daughters do you want to marry"? The groom's family will mention the name of the bride in question. The bride's family will now reason together, and then, through their middleman, will agree that they have such a person, but they need to enquire from her if she knows the young man. They will invite her in. In the presence of all, she will be told of the young man's intentions, and thereafter, her family will ask her if she knows the young man. If she agrees that she knows him, then she will be asked to go into her room again, while both families celebrate, eating and drinking together. After some time, through their spokesman; the groom's family will request for the list of required items needed for the payment of the bride price. They are usually given. Some items are negotiable, while others are fixed. Meanwhile, partying continues. When the groom's family is satisfied that they have achieved their purpose of visit, they will request for permission to leave for their home. They will be permitted, but before departure, both families will fix another day for the payment of the bride-price.

Meanwhile, both families and other members of the community now know that the lady is engaged to be married to the young man who has been formally introduced to her family.

Circumcision

The word “circumcision” which originates from the Latin “*circumcidere*” meaning “cut around” is defined in the English Pocket Dictionary as “to cut off the foreskin of (a young boy or man); to cut off the clitoris of (a girl or young woman)”. This act of circumcising males is an ancient practice. Even in the Biblical period, it was being practiced. God instructed Abram that he and his descendants should be circumcised as part of their covenant with him (God). Gen. 17:10 says: “This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every male child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.” Abraham as an old man was circumcised, and that continued, and became a practice all over the world. But female circumcision does not have a wide practice like that of the males. However, in several parts of the world, it was also practiced. Ojameruaye (2005), in his thesis presented at the 6th Annual Conference of Urhobo Historic Society with the title: Culture and Economic Development in Urhobo land, comments on female circumcision thus:

Female circumcision is a cultural practice shared by Urhobo and many ethnic nationalities in Africa, the Middle East and Far East. In the past, it was compulsory to circumcise all women. In fact, in some societies, it was almost an abomination for a girl not to be circumcised and there are festivals or ceremonies tied to female circumcision. (Ibid.)

Female circumcision is not a practice common to only the Urhobo people. It was practiced by other ethnic groups within and outside Nigeria. But the practice is not without opposition. It faced serious criticism from various groups. Ojameruaye continues that this practice has come under severe criticisms because of its health and human rights implications. However, he opines that these criticisms can be handled and taken care of if certain criteria are put in place.

Some of these criticisms can however be deflected if circumcision is done under hygienic conditions and medical supervision. Today, a growing number of Urhobo girls are no longer circumcised. Some proponents of female circumcision argue that the growing promiscuity (and hence growing infidelity and STDs including HIV/AIDS, can be explained in part by the gradual abandonment of female circumcision. (Ibid)

Here, the proponents argue that part of the reasons why Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are common today is the abandonment of female circumcision.

Many young ladies were scared of being circumcised possibly because of the pains involved. Due to this reason, girls are not sometimes informed before the circumcision. In most cases, the women are not

notified of the date of their circumcision. They are kidnapped and forcefully circumcised. According to Christiana Onitsha, when the writer interviewed her, she said, “I was deceived by my mother into being circumcised, and I felt very bad.” Then, if they are not deceived or forced, they will frighten them with the issue of child bearing. Like Christiana Sodje who said “I was told that without circumcision, a woman cannot bear children”. However, in spite of all these, circumcision was then an integral part of the Urhobo traditional marriage. It makes the marriage ceremony colourful. It was taken seriously in those days.

The circumcision rite in Urhobo land varies from community to community. Some usually take four days which are the normal Urhobo week days. But for some others, it is more than that. Before the circumcision of a female is done, a diviner is usually sought. This is because it is believed that some girls’ spirits do not agree with circumcision. For those whose spirits do not agree, certain things are done, and theirs do not go the same way with others.

Eke P. Palmer (2005) explains it thus:
Before this is undertaken an Obuepha (a diviner) is usually consulted. He would indicate whether or not the girl’s erhi (personality-soul) consents to circumcision. It may become necessary to appease the erhi before the circumcision takes place. If the erhi is opposed to the circumcision of the girl, she would only have part of her clitoris and labia minora cut off after due sacrifice had been made. She would not rub cam wood dye which normally forms essential part of the circumcision ceremonies. Such would rub kaolin powder instead, and the elaborate ceremonies in which both girl’s parents and her promised husband spend could be avoided.

The above is the case study of a girl whose *erhi* (personality-soul) does not consent to circumcision. But for those whose *erhi* consents to the circumcision, the circumcision rite is obligatory. This brings honour to the girl and it proves to the people that she is respectful. It makes her parents proud as well. In those days in Urhoboland, parents look forward to such a day when their daughter would be circumcised.

Now, when the diviner confirms that a girl’s *erhi* consents to circumcision, she will be taken to the room, and some elderly women will come to her and carefully cut off the clitoris wholly or partially. When the circumcision has been done, that same day which is the first day, the *Ikopha* (bride’s maids) will come and keep her company. They will stay with her singing folk songs that have to do with circumcision and praise to the bride. Some of such songs include:

i. *Urhori ma vwerho opha* the bride enjoys crayfish

Urhori ma vwero opha the bride enjoys crayfish
Okperin kore she big fish is for sale

Eke re kpate ro kena The modern day traders
Re shikpi yeri jepha vwo re. Sell big fish without the bride

Urhori ma vwerho opha the bride enjoys crayfish

Urhori ma vwero opha the bride enjoys crayfish

Okperi ko re she big fish is for sale

ii. *Mevwo vo yavwo mame* I will circumcise myself

Mevwo vo yavwo mame I will circumcise myself

Inene ru vwe. Because of my mother.

iii. *Ode ro chana keme yavwa* I will circumcise myself

Inene juvwe kpirhe Tomorrow mother ask me

Inene juvwe kpirhe to fetch firewood

Mevwo vo yavwo mame I will circumcise myself

Mevwo vo yavwo mame I will circumcise myself

Inene ru vwe Because of my mother

These and several other songs they sing to keep the bride company. This day is known as “*Achuedewonu-* the day after *edewo* (market day)” On the second day, *Eduhre* (two days after market day), the *ikopha* (bride’s maids) will go with the *opha* to the forest to fetch firewood. It is believed that the *opha* is recognized by the gods to be special, and so she will be protected by them in such adventure. On their return that day they will be welcomed and greeted by many people. They will be celebrated. On *okirhie-edewo* (a day before edewo), which is the third day, rice will be cooked for the *opha*, *Ikopha* and *Otuemo* (maids and children) to eat. The rice is served on a large bowl. They will all eat without the use of spoons and forks but with their bare hands. After the meal, the *Opha* will open her belly and then both the *Ikopha* (bride’s maids) and the *Otuemo* (children) will rub their hands on her belly. The reason is that they believe that that will help attract children to the *Opha*. The fourth day is “*Edewo-* a day of rest, Sabbath, a day devoted to worship of the divinities, a market day”. On this day, the *Opha* with camwood dye rubbed on her, goes to the market with her *Ikopha*. They buy whatever they choose. She is celebrated in the community. In some communities, she goes to the market with her breasts exposed, but in others she ties wrapper on her chest. Nevertheless, all the *ophas* (brides) rub camwood on. When they return home, the suitor to whom she is engaged will come to visit. He will put on white dress, and they will stain him with the camwood dye. On his arrival, the maids also sing to welcome him. One of such songs is:

Iye iye ma mropha we hail the bride
Ikopha karo phare, bride does not lack maids
Ado iye we hail you

He gives the *opha* (bride) and the *ikopha* (maids) money and they celebrate together.

However, the days for the circumcision rites vary from community to community. In some communities, like the one mentioned above, it takes four days. Some take seven days, others take more days. Nevertheless, in all actual circumcision is done. They rub cam wood

dye on the bride and she goes to the market to show her beauty, and then she is celebrated in the market and community.

Payment of Bride Price

After the introduction, both families fix another day for payment of the bride price. However, the traditional marriage slightly varies in some families. The middleman is always the one appointed to meet the bride’s family to get the date for the traditional marriage as agreed by the bride’s family. The variations experienced in the families in Urhobo are due to certain circumstances in the families. In most cases, it is the demands that come from the bride’s family members. In some families outrageous demands are made to the groom in order to prepare for the marriage rites. And so before the marriage is contracted, such grooms spend so much for the bride’s family members. But in other cases, it is not so.

Commenting on it, Emuotu Max-Ogaga (Interviewed) from Ughelli says the variation is a result of traditional awareness level, economic background, educational background, religious status of the families involved. By this, you discover that families that are deeply involved in the tradition of the land try to compel the groom to do certain things such as, the pouring of libation on the ground. Also, some bride’s parents make some financial demands from the groom. All these may be as a result of the background of the families. Some families are poor and see the marriage as a way of enriching themselves while some do not see it that way. They see the groom as their son and the groom’s family as theirs.

On the agreed day fixed for the traditional marriage, the groom’s family comes to the bride’s family in the girl’s father’s house. Meanwhile the list of required things to buy or pay for, has been given to him. Both families have their spokesmen. According to the tradition, the bride’s family welcomes and entertains the visitors. Thereafter, the groom’s family responds. When these have been done, they go into the business of the day-payment of the bride price. The list is brought out, and one after the other they look at the requirement.

Urhobo Traditional Marriage Requirements

1. Wrapper, hat and walking stick for the Father.
2. *Ighorugbervharen* (Money given to the bride’s mother for her labour on the child) to be negotiated by the Mother.
3. Bride price #140
4. 5 tubers of yam and 2 big fish.
5. 3 bags of salt and #3,000.00.

6. 20 liters of local gin.
7. *Ighorotoguan* (Money for elders)
8. Otoyare- carton of drink
9. *Ighorukpo* (Money for permission for departure)
10. Clearing of Father's rubber plantation
11. Ifio (lavishing money on in-laws)
12. Escort of bride to the arena #15,000.00
13. Escort of bride to husband's place #3,000.00
14. Drink for youth #1,000.00
15. Sing three traditional songs and dance
16. See family members as directed by Father-in-law

Although there are variations in the ceremonies, but regardless of the families certain requirements are usually constant. Name and Address of the home where the ceremony will be conducted with the date and time of the ceremony is stated. *Okpako-ro-orua*-Head of the Bride's family and the Parents/Guardians of the bride are recognized. Others are; *Qtota I* (Spokesperson) for the Bride's family *Qtota II* (Spokesperson) for the Groom's family. Parents/Guardians of the Groom will also be in attendance. The *Usuqvwa* who is the Middleman will accompany the groom while the bride is in the company of her *Ikopha* (Traditional bridesmaids).

Another important part of this ceremony is the Bride fee settlement. A team which consists of four-member team made up of two representatives from each side of the families, including their spokespersons does this while Musical group hired is to perform to sensitize the environment of the ceremony of the day. Meanwhile, the bride is being dressed up in her room before presentation to the groom. Usually, she is dressed at least twice specially for a photograph (see figure 3).

In most cases, the bride poses for picture with her maids. Below is another figure which shows the bride and her maids as in Figure 4.

Akpotu M (Interviewed) from Eku tried outlining some below; payment of dowry, buying of bags of salt for the women, gallon of *ogogoro* (dry gin) for the family and buying of clothes for bride's parents. But in Akpotu's list above, certain details are missing. Some amounts of monies are given to the youths and the bride's siblings. The family will ensure that the groom settles everyone connected to the bride in his little way. In the list, there are things to buy for the father of the girl, the mother of the girl, her younger brothers and sisters. Others include things to buy for *ighele* (youths), *eghwe-eya* (married women), *emete* (girls) and the family as a whole, etc. (see appendix). The bride's family looks at everything to confirm. The girl's mother is invited into the house to formally seek her consent and to confirm whether the groom met her behind and gave her what is required, if she affirms that the groom had done all required, he will rise with his people and "lavish" money on her. Then the bride price of one hundred and twenty naira (N120.00) is paid. It is interesting to note that in Urhobo tradition, the

bride-price is never paid in full. A particular amount of money is usually refunded to the groom immediately after the money is paid or at the end of the ceremony this signifies that their daughter is not for sale.

After verifying that the groom has met the requirements and paid the bride price, the *Opha* will be sent for. She arrives in the company of her *Ikopha* and some family women who shower encomiums on her saying:

<i>Opha cha o...o...o jejeje</i>	the bride is coming make way and admire her
<i>i...iyeeee</i>	exclamation of joy
<i>werhi no. woda mre obuko</i>	See her, she is beautiful from
<i>ano buko.</i>	behind
<i>Woda mre obaro ano baro.</i>	She is beautiful in front
<i>Omo okporua,</i>	daughter of a famous family,
<i>omote verhuvwu</i>	beautiful girl
<i>i...iyeee.</i>	exclamation of joy

When she enters, she stands before the eldest man of her family who will show to her the young man who has come for her hand in marriage. He will further ask her if she consents to his proposal. If her response is positive, the groom again rises with his people to lavish money on her. At that time, the two of them kneel before the eldest man who prays for them with a glass of dry gin and pours libation on the ground to commit the marriage to the ancestors. But the issue of pouring libation on the ground during the prayers for the couple has been criticized as idol worship. This also has faced much argument and debate. Some see it as part of the tradition which must be upheld while to some, it is no longer compulsory because of Christianity.

During the oral interview, several opinions on whether it is compulsory to pour libation on the ground during prayers were raised. Patience Ugbarugba says; it is traditionally compulsory but Helen Edoe (Interviewed) is of the opinion that it is not compulsory rather, it depends on the family. Meanwhile, P. Esosuakpor (Interviewed) believes that it is necessary because it shows that both family ancestors are witnesses to the marriage. Still, Emuotu Max-Ogaga (Interviewed) argues that it is not compulsory because the prayer can be said verbally without libation on the ground. Then he gives the drink to the bride who in turn gives it to the groom. He drinks a little and gives it to the bride. She will drink a little from it and give it back to the man. The groom then finishes the drink with the bride sitting on his lap. He follows it up with the money which he and his family members lavish on the bride. When the bride price has been paid, the groom's family through their spokesman will take permission to go home and get prepared for the escort. bride is led in, surrounded by her bridesmaids



Figure3: A bride poses for photograph in her first dressing while waiting for the groom and the family members.

Source: www.namywedding.com



Figure 4: Bride and her maids (*ikopha*) pose for photograph while waiting for her husband and guest.

Source: www.namywedding.com

to stand before her father or the *Okpako-r'-orua* who is the Head of the bride's family. He calls on the bride and bridegroom, and both of them move forward and kneel down before him. The Head of the bride's family initiates the process of formalizing the marriage by presenting a brief account of the lineage of the bride. He now begins the process by holding up a glass of drink and invoking the name of God and the memory of the ancestors in prayers, calling on them to bless the new life now commencing for their descendant or child and the man who has asked for her hand in marriage. However, the bride's father gives his blessings to the couple as he accepts the groom into his family and from henceforth sees him as his so-in-law.

The head of the family leaves some of the drink in the glass which he offers to the bridegroom to drink. The bridegroom after drinking some, in turn passes the

same glass to the bride to drink whatever is left, to signify her consent to the marriage. Drinking from the same glass is thus the bride's acknowledgement that the Head of her family has indeed spoken for her, and the signal needed to indicate that members of the groom's family are now recognized as in-laws. The bride now returns the glass through the groom to her family Head, a process that essentially declares the couple's willingness and commitment to live together as husband and wife.

Finally, the bride is handed over to the Head of the groom's family, who henceforth assumes responsibility to ensure that the husband and his family will take good care of their new wife. The bride is directed to sit on the laps of her husband in their first public display of life together as a married couple. The public reacts to the display by showering gifts on the new couple as both remain seated as shown in figure 5.



Figure 5: A Bride and Groom pose for photograph during the payment of bride-price.

Source: www.namywedding.com

Escortion:

After payment of the bride-price, the bride does not follow the groom home. She remains with her family who will prepare to accompany her to her husband. This is referred to as escortion. During the escortion, the following will be taken along: box, lantern, mat, umbrella, iron bucket, clothes, wrapper and other belongings. She takes them to begin life with her husband. According Mrs. Agusa (Interviewed), the escortion is usually done late in the night at about 12:00 midnight. It is a big party which all the young men look forward to-the bachelor's night. By implication, after escorting the bride to the groom formally, both of them are expected to start their lives normally. Also worthy of note is that, the escortion is not done secretly.

Both families are well represented. Neighbours are also in attendance. It is also taken as an opportunity of creating awareness in the neighbourhood that a new

bride has been married into the home. Helen Edoreh (Interviewed) pointed out that escortion is practiced so that people living in the locality would know that a new bride has arrived and the in-laws will know their son-in-law. On the other hand, some people also see the escortion as the way of keeping an eye on the security of their daughter. Obenobe (Interviewed) opined that, escortion is to enable the family and the relation to know and familiarize themselves with the groom's family and his home in case of emergency. When a girl gets married, some members of her family try to keep an eye on her. They also check on her from time to time to be sure that her husband is taking good care of her. This is part of the intention why some go for the escortion.

During escortion, certain ceremonies are performed, and the couple is initiated. The escortion describes the final stage of a full marriage according to Urhobo custom. It denotes the completion of all

antecedent requirements necessary on the part of the husband. It is the escorting of the bride by her family with her properties to the head of the husband's family, and handing over until death of the bride as wife to the groom's family. A special ceremony is usually performed to invoke the husband's ancestors to also receive her, and bind her over in fidelity to their son – the husband. The entire women receive the bride, eat and dance in the special room prepared for her till dawn of the following day.

At the initiation ceremony, the bride is handed over to the groom's family as their wife until her death. This is done at about 2:00am. Meanwhile as the people are celebrating the marriage of a new wife into the family, a goat is tied somewhere in the compound. By 2:00am, the goat is killed. The young couple stands together and the blood of the goat is poured over their legs. This act of initiation is a way of bringing the couple and presenting them to the gods of the land whom they believe will protect them. The meat is eaten by all and the skull of the goat's head is hung on the wall as sacrifice to ancestors (figure 6).



Figure 6: A Bride and Groom's photograph during the excoition of the bride.

Source: www.namywedding.com

The Proof of Virginity

This is another interesting aspect of the escort process. While the celebration is going on, some women will go and prepare the husband's bed. In preparing the bed, a white cloth is used. The white is used as a test to prove if the bride was a virgin, this signifies purity. When they have all eaten and drunk, and when it is time to sleep, the people are sent home, leaving the couple to spend their first night together on the bed already prepared with the white cloth. After sexual intercourse on the first night together, the family of the groom will come to see the white cloth. If the cloth is stained with blood, it is a proof that she was a virgin before she got married. On this confirmation, the husband will go back to the wife's mother and shower her with gifts to prove to her and everyone in the family that they are proud of the wife who kept herself as a virgin before getting married, and it was the effort of the mother.

Ancestors' Presence in the Process of Traditional Marriage

In the process of the marriage contract, the family members recognize the presence of their ancestors by pouring libation on the ground before handing over the drink to the couple. This is because of the belief in the presence of the ancestors in the community. In Ige's contribution to the *Encyclopaedia of the Arts* Vol.10 (2006) with the title *The Cult of Ancestors in African Traditional Religion*, he opines that, "generally in Africa men are believed to become ancestors except in some areas like the Igalas and Urhobos." During sacrifices, pouring of libations, when homage is paid and prayers are said; it is only those within living memory that are mentioned. However, it is believed that though not remembered by name, they can still share in the offerings made to the dead and even exert some influence over the living. In the African belief system, the family is made up of both the living members and the ancestors. The ancestors are still present, watching over the household and the property of the family. They are the powerful part of the clan, maintaining a close link between the world of men and the spirit world. They are believed to be interested in the welfare of their living descendants. They even exercise protection and discipline on any erring member of the living belonging to their clan. Thus they are guidance of family affairs, traditions, customs, ethics and morality, health and fertility.

In this assertion, Ige made a detailed analysis of how some tribes in Africa recognize the presence of the ancestors. Thus he says the ancestors are believed to influence several things in the community. However, for

the purpose of this work, the writer is concerned about how the Urhobo ethnic nationality recognizes the ancestors during marriage contract. By the libation poured on the ground, the family members are giving honour to their ancestors who made it possible for their children to be married. They also believe that having recognized the ancestors, they will help their children have successful marriage. Another important area where ancestors are recognized during the process of traditional marriage contract is seen during the escort of the bride to her husband's house. The family kills a goat and pours its blood across the legs of the couple as a covenant which is witnessed by the ancestors. This could mean that there is an element of 'idol worship' in Urhobo traditional marriage. After the goat has been killed, the blood poured on the couple's legs; it is cooked and eaten by all. The skull of the goat is hung on the wall or kept somewhere as a present to the ancestors who are regarded to be watching over the marriage.

Moreover, in the process of recognizing the ancestors, they also bear witness to the marriage of their children. And their being witnesses continues with the couple in the home. The implication of this is that wife is expected to be faithful to her husband. Any act of infidelity has grave consequences punishable by the ancestors. For instance, if the woman commits immorality secretly, it can lead to the death of her suckling. When such abominable act is committed, the woman is not usually pardoned until she confesses and sacrifices are made for her cleansing.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS; SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION.

In this section, the researcher made use of questionnaires to collect data. The data are collated and analysis is made. This will be presented and discussed. In the data collection, the researcher prepared 100 questionnaires which were randomly distributed in churches, schools, and markets in Urhoboland. Of the 100 questionnaires given out to people, 90 were returned. The questionnaires have 10 hypotheses to be verified.

The data collected were then collated. In order to analyze the collated data, the respondents' reactions were tabulated under strongly agreed, agreed, strongly disagreed and disagreed. The statistician's tally system was used to obtain frequency for every reaction. Thereafter, the frequency and cumulative frequency for each respondent's reaction was obtained. Finally, the percentages of the cumulative frequency for the various reactions were obtained using the formula below:

$$\frac{\text{No. of each Respondent}}{\text{Total No. Respondents}} \times 100$$

After the analysis, the findings were presented in percentage form, and discussed.

Presentation of Findings

Hypothesis 1: Traditional marriage can be contracted without getting involved in idol the worship

Table 1: Traditional marriage can be contracted without getting involved in idol the worship.

	A	SA	D	SD	LOST	TOTAL
NO.	40	34	10	6	10	100
%	40%	34%	10%	6%	10%	100%

From the table1 above, 40% agreed, 34% strongly agreed with the hypothesis, while 10% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed with it. Of the 90 people who responded, 40% agreed.

Hypothesis 2: The advent of Christianity has brought changes to some aspects of Urhobo traditional marriage rite.

From the table 2, majority agreed (44%) with the hypothesis and (40%) strongly agreed with it.

Table 2: The advent of Christianity has brought changes to some aspects of Urhobo traditional marriage rite.

	A	SA	D	SD	LOST	TOTAL
NO.	44	40	5	1	10	100
%	44%	40%	5%	1%	10%	100%

Hypothesis 3: In traditional marriage, the rites are still being fully practiced today.

Table 3: In traditional marriage, the rites are still being fully practiced today.

	A	SA	D	SD	LOST	TOTAL
NO.	14	7	27	42	10	100
%	14%	7%	27%	42%	10%	100%

Table 3 shows that (42%) of respondents strongly disagree with the assertions that in traditional marriage, the rites are still being fully practiced today.

Hypothesis 4: Circumcision is compulsory in Urhobo Traditional Marriage today.

Table 4: Circumcision is compulsory in Urhobo Traditional Marriage today

	A	SA	D	SD	LOST	TOTAL
NO.	10	9	28	43	10	100
%	10%	9%	28%	43%	10%	100%

From table 4, more people strongly disagreed (43%) to the assertion that circumcision is compulsory in Urhobo Traditional Marriage today.

Hypotheses 5: Without escortion, Urhobo traditional marriage is not complete.

Table 5: Without escortion, Urhobo traditional marriage is not complete.

	A	SA	D	SD	LOST	TOTAL
NO.	29	29	22	10	10	100
%	29%	29%	22%	10%	10%	100%

342. Int. J. Arts. Humanit,

From table 5, it is observed that more people are in favour of the assertion. Both agreed and strongly agreed (29%) each.

Hypothesis 6: In traditional marriage, if the bride fails the virginity test, the marriage can be broken.

Table 6: In traditional marriage, if the bride fails the virginity test, the marriage can be broken.

	A	SA	D	SD	LOST	TOTAL
NO.	4	3	47	36	10	100
%	4%	3%	47%	36%	10%	100%

From table 6 a, 47% of the respondents disagree that in traditional marriage, if the bride fails the virginity test, the marriage can be broken.

Hypothesis 7: The way and manner Urhobo traditional marriage is being practiced brings decency to the community

Table 7: The way and manner Urhobo traditional marriage is being practiced brings decency to the community

	A	SA	D	SD	LOST	TOTAL
NO.	43	18	15	9	10	100
%	43%	18%	15%	9%	10%	100%

From table 7, more respondents agree with the hypothesis that the way and manner Urhobo traditional marriage is being practiced brings decency to the community.

Hypothesis 8: The list of getting married according to the Urhobo tradition is too much; hence many young people among the Urhobo remain unmarried.

Table 8: The list of getting married according to the Urhobo tradition is too much; hence many young people among the Urhobo remain unmarried.

	A	SA	D	SD	LOST	TOTAL
NO.	11	9	25	45	10	100
%	11%	9%	25%	45%	10%	100%

From table 8, we realized that majority of the respondents were not in favour with the notion that the list of getting married according to the Urhobo tradition is too much; which is as the result of many young people among the Urhobo remain unmarried.

Hypothesis 9: In Urhobo traditional marriage, the test whether the bride is a virgin or not is no longer practiced.

Table 9: In Urhobo traditional marriage, the test whether the bride is a virgin or not is no longer practiced

	A	SA	D	SD	LOST	TOTAL
NO.	23	30	12	11	10	100
%	23%	30%	12%	11%	10%	100%

From table 9, 37% agree, 30% strongly agree, 12% disagree, 11% strongly disagree and 10 were lost in the assertion that in Urhobo traditional marriage, the test whether the bride is a virgin or not is no longer practiced.

Hypothesis 10: Polygamy is an accepted practice in Urhobo Traditional marriage system.

Table 10: Polygamy is an accepted practice in Urhobo Traditional marriage system.

	A	SA	D	SD	LOST	TOTAL
NO.	35	35	12	8	10	100
%	35%	35%	12%	8%	10%	100%

From table 10, 35% agree, 35% strongly agree, 12% disagree, 8% strongly disagree with the above assertions and 10% were lost.

Discussion of Findings

In summary, the findings presented above shows that the reactions of the respondents are in various degrees. It is shown in the hypotheses above.

First of all, table 1 shows that more respondents (74%) are in favour of the view that Urhobo Traditional Marriage can be contracted without getting involved in idol worship, while 16% disagreed with the view. However, the writer observes that most of the respondents in the above hypothesis are speaking from the perspective of the Christian religion. But in fairness to those who disagree, some people and possibly families hold firmly to the ancestral worship. In such cases, due recognition is given to the ancestors. When this is done as discussed in section 4.8, then to a great extent, the people get involved in idol worship.

Secondly, table 2 indicates that 84% agree that the advent of Christianity has brought changes to some aspects of Urhobo Traditional Marriage rites. This is true and is due to the influence of Christianity on the people in general. Because of this, some things are left out during the process of traditional marriage. For instance, during the prayer for the couple by the eldest man, libation is not usually poured on the ground to the ancestors. Also due to the role Christianity has played in the community, Urhobo Christian musicians are made to perform during entertainment of guests during the traditional marriage. Ochuko Tonukari (N.D) in his paper, *The Influence of Christian values on Urhobo culture*, comments that:

Religious intolerance is more manifest in the dealings of Christianity with such aspects of Urhobo culture as marriage. Almost all the Christian churches have refused to recognize polygamy within the Urhobo context. Others refuse inter-denominational marriages involving their members. The Urhobos regard polygamy as a healthy institution which insures respect for husbands and love for wives, assures social security, and checks flirting or prostitution. The insistence of Christianity on monogamy is an arbitrary imposition without adequate consideration of the raison d'etre of the traditional institution of polygamy which sustains the extended family patterns and assures continuity, the bedrock of the traditional ancestral worship. The influence of Christianity has caused certain Urhobo customs and beliefs to be discarded or modified, at the same time that it has caused others to be retained by one level of community while on another level new alternatives are being accepted.

In this analysis, Tonukari sees the influence of Christian values on the culture as selective. This is similar to the views of some of the respondents who believe that due to the influence of Christianity, certain aspects of the culture on marriage rites have been modified. However, some people have vehemently criticized the above opinion. For instance, in his paper *Beyond Social and Political Issues in Urhoboland* presented at the third annual conference and meeting of the *Urhobo Historic Society (November 1-3, 2002) in Goldsmith College of London and Goddis Restaurant, F.M.A.* Ukoli opines that:

The Urhobo traditional marriage ceremony is no longer what it used to be. What is essentially supposed to be a union of two families in the ancestral home of the bride at which the bride is publicly handed over to the bridegroom and his family following appropriate prayers and libation, is now quite often nothing more than a second Christian wedding ceremony conducted, sometimes even in the banquet hall of a hotel or a civic centre. What used to be a family affair has now become an excuse for the blatant display of wealth in which an entire town or community (with important dignitaries as guests from as far afield as Lagos, Abuja, London, U.S.A.etc.) are lavishly feted. Live bands are on hand dishing out loud gospel and Urhobo-disco-makossa music drowning all other forms of communication, even the ceremonial negotiations between the ototas of the two families. There is no longer any pretence that Urhobo traditional music and dance and other cultural activities are on offer at these gatherings.

A third pillar traditional marriage custom is the negotiation and payment of the bride price (some still insist on calling it dowry). Traditionally, this has always been a token fee reckoned in the old English 'shillings'; usually not more than twelve shillings representing symbolically the price of one crate of gin. But these days, the bridegroom and his family, and even friends are coaxed into 'spraying' the bride lavishly with currency notes reckoned in hundreds of thousands of naira, which completely eclipse the value and significance of the bride price.

The Urhobo man and indeed all other Nigerians should be dissuaded from indulging in the crude and uncivilized practice of plastering the forehead and face of the couple with filthy naira notes as a show of affection. One does not have to be a physician to appreciate the dangers of acquiring infection through exposure to these contaminated currency notes. Marriage, according to Urhobo "native law and custom" shorn of the ritual of libation, formalities of negotiating the bride price and devoid of traditional song and dance, and whose essence is overshadowed by an overwhelming urge for ostentatious display of affluence

and conspicuous consumption cannot be said to be an admissible way of promoting or preserving Urhobo cultural and traditional heritage.

It can therefore be concluded that what passes for Urhobo traditional marriage ceremony can at worst be described as an adulteration of the culture or at best an admixture of a multiplicity of influences mainly of Christian and English origin.

In this assertion, Ukoli speaks generally of the deviation from the cultural heritage which came mostly from the Christian influence. He sees it as nothing but a second Christian wedding. This is because in some cases, clergymen are asked to pray when in actual sense the prayer ought to be done by the elders in the families. He also spoke on the issue of the kind of music played and sometimes the venue during the traditional marriage. In several cases, Christian musicians are now invited to play in the traditional marriages and so on.

In the third analysis, table 3 indicates that 69% disagree with the assertions that in Urhobo traditional marriage, the marriage rites are still being fully practiced today. Only 21% agree with this view. By implication the marriage rites are not being fully practiced today. Obviously, the marriage rites are not being fully observed today. Several aspects have been left out for various reasons. Medical science is strongly against female circumcision, and coupled with fact that it is not favoured in the Christian religion, its practice has greatly reduced. On the issue of escortion, even though it still practiced by many, some part of it are not being practiced today. For instance, for those who are Christians, the act of killing goats and pouring the blood on the legs of the couple is no longer done.

In the fourth hypothesis, circumcision is compulsory in Urhobo traditional marriage today. A total of 71% disagree with the assertions, while 19% are in favour of it. Clearly, it indicates that the practice has greatly dwindled in Urhoboland. Several things are against the practice. Medical science is against it and there is much campaign opposing it. The Christian religion has greatly influenced the Urhobo people today and so most of the people are no longer interested in the circumcision of their daughters, hence it is no longer made compulsory before a lady marries.

The fifth analysis shows that from the table 58% are in support of the view that without escortion, Urhobo traditional marriage is not complete, While 32% disagree with it. This implies that most Urhobo still practice escortion. The reason why most people support this view is because of the respect it gives to the family of the bride. Osolo Joseph in buttressing the view says, "the girl ought to be escorted so the family she is going to will know she came from a family, and that she did not go to marriage on her own".

If the bride fails the virginity test, the marriage is not necessarily broken. This is indicated in table 6. From it,

83% disagree with the assertions, while only 7% agree with it. Of course, the marriage is not broken, but it brings shame to the bride's family. It means they may not have brought up their daughter properly. Today, the practice has dwindled greatly.

Seventh, from table 7, 61% agree that the way and manner Urhobo traditional marriage rites are being practiced bring decency to the society. 19% however disagree. But in the analysis more respondents are in support of the view. This writer observes that the intention of Urhobo people is geared towards decency in the society. For instance, Onoge, O.F. in his Keynote address at the Fifth Annual Conference of Urhobo Historical Society, delivered at Petroleum Training Institute, Effurun, on Saturday, October 30, 2004, says:

It can be safely assumed that all socio-cultural formations recognize the imperative linkage between a people's collective future and the character of their youths. Evidence of this recognition is abundantly provided in ethnographic reports of the institutions and customary practices devoted to socialization and enculturation of the young.

In this report, the goal of enculturation is to enable the young people acquire the appropriate behavior, beliefs, values orientation and identities of the group. The young generation is in a position to reproduce the institutional format of the society and its culture, long after the parental generation has moved on. This is achieved because in the way Urhobo traditional marriage is practiced; families do not only get involved in the process from the beginning to the end of the ceremonies but also the marriage itself.

No family wants to be disgraced. For instance, the proof of virginity test that is usually carried out during the traditional marriage is meant to bring honour or shame to the bride's family. If the bride passes the test, the honour goes to her and the family. The family will be respected in the society. But if she fails the test, it will bring disgrace and shame to them all. This is always in the mind of the parents, and so they do everything possible to guide their children especially the daughters in the right way. The children also watch their steps and the way they do things in the community. By this, the moral upbringing of the children helps the society to become decent, and also promotes the family norms and values.

Eighth hypothesis is whether the cost of getting married according to the Urhobo tradition is too much or not, and as a result of this, hinders many young people in Urhoboland from getting married early or not. On the analysis 70% disagree with the view, while 20% are in favour of it. By implication, more respondents believe that the marriage cost is not the issue. This view varies amongst individuals. For those who think money is the issue, they either have no job or want to spend extravagantly. However, the families involved in most cases have roles to play in the cost of the marriage. In

some families, the parents of the bride make excessive demands on the groom like asking him to build house for them or complete the uncompleted one. This kind of demand is outside the usual requirement and it is discouraging to young people. But in other families, the parents may be very considerate. Hence the cost of marriage is not same in all cases. However, in the general requirement, the difference is not much. Nevertheless, it is advisable that any young man who wants to get married according to the Urhobo custom should have a measure of preparation. Oyibo, C.E. in his paper *Guidelines for the Financial Aspects of the Urhobo Traditional Wedding (2011)*, says that:

Weddings, in general, are scarcely inexpensive undertakings. In the West, suitors are admonished to earmark three months' salary for the purchase of the engagement ring; in ekw'otor r'Urhobo (Urhoboland), by contrast, the financial prescriptions are not always as clearly defined. The general requirements of the Urhobo traditional wedding, though familiar to many an Urhobo traditionalist, may appear nebulous to the uninitiated. A man wishing to marry an Urhobo woman in the traditional form must contend with such seemingly esoteric requirements as the presentation and support of kolanut, sedigwe (kneeling down to greet), and kidio-owoh (who is the person) each of which carries monetary accompaniments that often vary with the whims of the family and community.

On the ninth analysis, 67% agree that the test whether the bride was a virgin or not is no longer in practice. 23% did not favour this view. On the whole, majority of respondent are not in support of it

The tenth analysis shows that polygamy is an accepted practice in Urhobo traditional marriage. This is supported by 70% of respondents against 20%. Although polygamy is a common practice in Urhobo traditional marriage, it is not without some implications. Ms Janet Oromafuru Erubetere in her lecture at fourth annual conference and meeting of the Urhobo Historic Society in London, England October 31 - November 2, 2003 with the topic "*Urhobo Traditional Marriage and Modern Influences upon its Institution*", pointed out that: *Traditional marriage is a polygamous institution. It allows the husband to marry as many wives as he can afford. It provides the man with a variety and diverse sexual choice or satisfaction. It provides prestige to the husband – more wives mean wealth and honour. Generally, it provides more children – also seen as wealth. The traditional marriage system is actually based on the husband's financial ability rather than true love. Relationship amongst the wives involves living in close quarters – same compound and different apartments, sort of communal living. This causes tension and often affects any form of cordial relationships being formed between the wives.*

There is bitter rivalry and envy/jealousy, which leads to fights and conflicts. Polygamy creates a hierarchical order within the household or family. The first and most senior wife often rules the day. Sleeping arrangements between the wives and the husband are also programmed. This too often creates conflicts, frustrations and anger. The wife or wives are seen as part of the husband's chattel, and thus the wives have no property rights of their own, irrespective of the wives' contributions to his wealth creation.

Oromafuru, here highlights some of the serious implications in the polygamous marriage amongst the Urhobo people. In her opinion, the Urhobo traditional marriage system is not based on true love but on the man's financial ability. In some marital cases, there is much jealousy and rancour among the wives. However, in spite of these challenges, several men in Urhoboland are involved in this polygamous marriage.

Summary

The purpose of the study is to x-ray the rich cultural heritage of the Urhobo people as regards marriage and its impact on the society. Historical antecedents indicate that the Urhobo culture and traditions have been of immense benefit to the society. This fact is seen from the perspective that the Urhobo are accommodative even to visitors. Their traditional marriage rites involve various practices which will help bring in decency to the society. For instance, it is of great honour to a family, if their daughter passes the virginity test. Knowing this every family wants to ensure that their daughters are kept undefiled.

The various activities carried out in those days are not fully in practice today. This is due to various interferences on the tradition directly or indirectly. For instance, the female circumcision is not being practiced as a major part of the traditional marriage today. This is because of the advent of Christianity and awareness of the medical implications.

Conclusion

In concluding the dissertation, this researcher has the following remarks. The Urhobo people have a rich culture and traditions which was built up over time, especially on marital relationships. However, due to modern civilization and religious affiliations, the cultural heritage and traditions have been greatly abandoned. In Urhoboland marriage contract is meant for responsible people and the ceremonies have a great impact on the lives of the people.

However, the researcher also discovered that

there seems to be a gap between old and the young. The young people, due to search for white-collar jobs now stay far from home, and as a result do not know what is obtainable in the land, especially as it relates to marriage contract.

Recommendations

The researcher, based on the findings, has the following recommendations. Since the Urhobo culture and traditions are rich and beneficial not only to Urhobo but even the society, the traditions should not be totally abandoned. Certain aspects of the tradition that promote decency in the society should be revived. For instance, the proof of virginity in marriage contract: This writer believes that if this is being done, most of the young ladies in Urhoboland who are aware of the shame and disgrace they will face when they fail the test will be careful of how to live before marriage. Also, the teaching of Urhobo language, culture and traditions be made compulsory in all primary and post-primary schools in Urhoboland.

Finally, the elders and parents should teach the children and young ones of the rich cultural heritage in Urhoboland. This will help in the continuity of the traditions of the people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first and special thanks go to God Almighty who has sustained me and enabled me to run this programme successfully. My immeasurable appreciation goes to my lovely and ever caring husband for his support, motivation and for staying by me throughout the period of my studies and for typesetting and proof reading this work and also to my wonderful children for their understanding and love. I am indebted to my supervisor, Prof. S.G.A. Onibere for his patience, encouragement and for reading this work and making necessary corrections in order to ensure that this work is properly done. I will not fail to appreciate the effort and the encouragement of Prof. J. Enuwosa, my Head of Department. I also want to thank other lecturers of the Department for their tireless efforts towards the success of this programme.

I am also grateful to my lovely mum and mother-in law who stood by me during the period of this programme and made useful contributions towards the success of the research work. To my brothers and sisters, I say thank you very much for your support. I will not fail to acknowledge the wonderful efforts of my brothers and sisters in law who were always there for me. My course mates are worthy of note for their cooperation.

My sincere thanks also go to members of Olivet Baptist Church where we work as ministers of the gospel. Their encouragement, words of advice and love cannot be over-emphasized. And to all my friends, loved ones and well-wishers, may God bless you all.

REFERENCES

- Adogbo, M.P (2000): Introduction to the Study of Religions in Contemporary Essays in the Study of Religions, S.U. Erivwo and M Adogbo (eds.), Fair and Exhibitions (Nig.) Ltd, Lagos.
- Adogbo, M.P (2000): The spirit world of African peoples in Contemporary Essays in the study of Religions, S.U Erivwo and M. Adogbo (eds.), Fairs and Exhibitions (Nig.) Ltd Lagos.
- Adogbo, M.P (2010): Comparative Historical and Interpretative Study of Religion. Lagos: Malthouse press Ltd.
- Agbegbedia Oghenevwoke Anthony: An Evaluation of the Urhobo Cultural Conception of Death. A new journal of African Studies vol 11,pg 48, 2015. Available at: <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/og/article/download/121674/111137>.
- Aikoro,I.(2007):Marriage in Nigeria Tradition/Church, www.aikosystems@gm.com.
- Amini, I.A. (2010): Purpose of Marriage in Islam. Islamicinsight. Com.
- Anyanhun, T.O.P (2012) :Ten Commandments of Marriage, Chris Communications, Warri.
- Arias, Jennaya, (2010): On the Purpose of Marriage, www.our catholicfaith.org
- Awolalu, J.O and Dopamu, P.A (1997): West African Traditional Religion, Ibadan: Onibonoje Press and Book Industries (Nig.) Ltd.(2009):Collins English Dictionary-Complete and Unabridged,10th Edition, Harper Collins Publishers.
- Ekeh .P. (2008): Studies in Urhobo Culture, Books. Google.com/books
- Erivwo, S.U (2006): Oto re Eta: A Dictionary of Urhobo Words and Pithy Sayings. Benin City: Ambik Press.
- En-
wikipedia.org/wiki/tradition/http:/dictionary.referen ce.com/ browse / marriage.
- Eruvbere, J.O. (2003): Urhobo Traditional Marriage and Modern Influences Upon its Institution. UHS, London.
- Ige, S.A. (2006): The Court of Ancestors in African Traditional Religion in an Encyclopedia of the Art Vol. 10
- Ighovoja, .P. and Okumagba, P.O., Nigeria Norms and Values in Nigeria People and culture and History

- and Philosophy of Science, Bernard .O Ejechi (ed.)
 Founder press Ltd.
- Laureen Everitt,(2012): Ten Key Moments in the History
 of Marriage.
www.bbc.Co.uk/news/magazine.Marriage,Microsoft
 Encarta, 2009.
- Laureen Everitt (2012): Marriage-Wikipedia, the Free
 Encyclopedia. Wikipedia Foundation, Inc.
- Mbiti. J.S (1981): Introduction to African Religion
 Nairobi:Heinemann Educational Books.
- Morse, J.R (2009): The Institute Formally Known as
 Marriage.www.realclearpolitics.com Na my
 wedding, (2012): www.namywedding/articles/64.
- Ojameruaye,O.E (2002): Culture and Economic
 Development in Urhoboland.
www.wadoo.org/geography.
- Ojameruaye,O.E (2004): Stragergies for Self Reliant
 Economic Development in Urhoboland Effurun:
 A Paper Presented at the 5th Annual Conference
 of Urhobo Historical Society at PTI Conference
 Center.
- Okumagba, P.O, et al (1998): Culture Areas of Nigeria
 and their Characteristics in Nigeria People in
 Culture and History and Philosophy of Science,
 Ejechi, B.O and Uweru, B.C eds. Founder press
 Ltd, Nkpor.
- Olorogun Moses Taiga: The Urhobo Economy in the
 Niger Delta. A Paper Presented at the Annual
 Conference of the Urhobo Historical Society,
 Petroleum Training Institute, Warri. October 29-
 31, 2004. Available
 at:[http://www.waado.org/Geography/developme
 nt/Taiga.pdf](http://www.waado.org/Geography/development/Taiga.pdf). Accessed June, 20th, 2018.
- Onoge, O.F. (2004): Keynote Address at The 5th Annual
 Conference of Urhobo Historical Society.
- Osolo, J.(2012): Oral Interview on Bridal Excursion
 According to Urhobo Tradition.
- Oyibo,C.E. (2011): Guidelines for the Financial Aspect of
 Urhobo Traditional Wedding.. (2002) :Pocket
 Oxford English Dictionary 9th Edition. Oxford
 University Press.Purposeofmarriage.org
www.wowessays.com.
- Tonukari, O. (N.D): The Influence of Christian Values on
 Urhobo Culture.
- Ubrurhe, J.O (2010):Urhobo Traditional Medicine.
 Ibadan Spectrum Books Ltd..(2003): citing E.J
 Metuh, African Religions in Western Conceptual
 Schemes. Ibadan. Pastoral Institute, 1985
- Ukoli, F.M.A.(2002): Beyond Social and political Issues
 in Urhoboland.UHS London.
- Wehmeier, S.(2000): Oxford Advanced Learner's
 Dictionary ed. New York Oxford University
 Press.2012: [www. Unhcr. Org/
 refworld/ igeria.UNCHR](http://www.Unhcr.Org/refworld/)

APPENDIX-C INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Occupation: _____

The questions below are for academic exercise, your opinion is needed. It will be treated confidentially. Thank you for your anticipated co-operation.

1. Why do we practice excursion of bride to the bridegroom in Urhoboland?

2. Are there conditions necessary for a lady to meet before she can be circumcised according to Urhobo tradition?

_____ Why
does the practice of traditional marriage rite vary from family to family in Urhoboland?

3. What are some of the constant issues required during Urhobo traditional marriage regardless of the family?

4. In Urhobo Traditional Marriage, is pouring of libation on the ground compulsory when praying for the bride and bridegroom?

5. Is pouring of libation on the ground compulsory in Urhobo traditional marriage today?

APPENDIX A-PRIMARY SOURCES QUESTIONNAIRE

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND PHILOSOPHY DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY
PMB 1, ABRAKA DELTA STATE, NIGERIA.**

Dear Respondent,

This research work is on the Concept of Traditional Marriage Rite Among Urhobo People. This questionnaire does not intend to probe into your private affairs. Every piece of information given will be strictly used for academic purpose and will be treated as confidential information. The researcher will need your candid opinion(s) and cooperation on this issue, which will be highly appreciated.

INSTRUCTIONS

Kindly tick (✓) that which is appropriate in the space provided.

1. Age: 15-40 40 and above
2. Marital Status: Single Married
3. Sex: Male Female
4. **KEY:** A (Agree) SA (Strongly Agree) D (Disagree) SD(Strongly Disagree)

		A	SA	D	SD
1.	Urhobo Traditional Marriage can be contracted without getting involved in idol worship.				
2.	The advent of Christianity has brought changes to some aspects of Urhobo Traditional Marriage rites.				
3.	In Urhobo Traditional Marriage, the rites are still being fully practiced today.				
4.	Circumcision is compulsory in Urhobo Traditional Marriage today.				
5.	Without excursion, Urhobo Traditional Marriage is not complete.				
6.	In Urhobo Traditional Marriage, if the bride fails the virginity test, the Marriage can be broken				
7.	The way and manner Urhobo Traditional Marriage rite is being practiced brings decency to the society				
8.	The cost of getting married according to the Urhobo Tradition is too much, hence many young people among the Urhobos remain unmarried				
9.	In Urhobo Traditional Marriage, the test whether the bride is a virgin is no longer practiced				
10.	Polygamy is an accepted practice in Urhobo Traditional Marriage system.				

APPENDIX B-SECONDARY SOURCES
TABLE OF INTERVIEWEES

1	NAME	PLACE	OCCUPATION	AGE	DATE
2	Mrs Erhi M.P	Ekiugbo	Teaching	45	01/01/2013
3	Onitsha C.	Agbarho	Farmer	63	03/07/2102
4	Mr. Eduviere	Ovu	Teaching	48	07/09/2013
5	Mrs Eduviere	Oginibo	Teaching	51	23/08/2013
6	Mr. Apiamu	Jeremi	Director	57	12/12/2013
7	Rev. Oguori	Ughelli	Clergy Rtd	79	15/05/2012
8	Chief Edegware	Ewvreni	Contractor	54	23/03/2012
9	Rev. Osolor	Ekiugbo	Missionary	58	26/08/2012
10	Mrs. Onojeje	Orogun	Teaching	50	28/11/2013
11	Efe Akanugba	Orogun	Politician	34	04/02/2013
12	Mama Agusa	Otovwodo	Trader	65	06/11/2013
13	Mrs. C. Sodje	Ighwreka	Trader	71	23/05/2013
14	Mr. Sunday M.	Uduophori	Welder	56	20/04/2013
15	Mrs. Mubi H.	Eku	Accountant	34	09/07/2013
16	Mr. Obenobe	Okpara	Politician	47	15/04/2013
17	Mrs Esosuakpo	Kokori	Trader	46	06/03/2013
18	Mrs. Oyibo	Ughelli	Teaching	51	27/07/2013
19	Mr. E. Enajemo	Agbarho	Contractor	54	02/12/2012
20	Mama Oharisi	Ogor	Farmer	75	04/08/2013
21	Mama Awocha	Agbarha	Trader	85	06/09/2012
22	Mr. Orhuerakpo	Ewu-Urhobo	Business man	48	31/07/2013
23	Mr Omotegbona	Okwagbe	Pensioner	56	05/11/2012
24	Mrs. Apiamu	Udu	Trader	52	06/10/2013
25	Erhinyodavwe S	Ododegho	Nurse	43	03/07/2012
26	Mrs. Ufomata	Eku	Teaching	59	03/02/2012
27	Mr. Eyarefe S.	Abraka	Teaching	40	04/11/2013
28	Mr. M. Ojobor	Afiesere	Shell Contractor	59	02/03/2013
29	Mrs. B. Idogun	Idjerhe	Teaching	44	01/08/2013
30	Mr. Ogbabuko	Agbarha	Teaching	34	09/08/2012
31	Mrs. P. Ugbarugba	Ughelli	Trader	52	10/04/2013
32	Mr. J. Isioku	Warri	PHCN Staff	40	03/11/2013
33	Mrs. V. Agogo	Agbarha	Trader	43	06/12/2012
34	Mr. J. Okurume	Ekiugbo	Teaching	42	23/07/2013
35	Mrs. P. Adeda	Olomu	Teaching	46	04/07/2013
36	Ejakpofo S.	Ughelli	Trader	40	08/16/2012
37	Mr. Akpotu	Ovu	Teaching	55	09/10/2012
38	Mr. Akpobome	Ewvreni	Teaching	46	27/04/2012
39	Com. Emuotu	Ughelli	Politician	35	22/04/2013
40	Mrs. B. Masor	Ughelli	Trader	46	07/08/2013