

DOES THE “COMMUNAL OWNERSHIP” OF WIFE EXIST IN THE 21ST CENTURY AFRICA?

John ChidubemNwaogaidu

***Abstract---** The peculiar nature of African traditional marriage ritual, which is fundamentally communalistic, has remained in conflicting terms to the understanding of the Christian marriage. While Christianity emphasizes the individualistic content of marriage, the Igbo customary system recognizes the ‘communal ownership’ of wife. The kinship structure as drawn from the ‘alliance theory’ and the manner it endures through the marriage ritual in Igboland gives meaning to communal ownership. The major interest of this study is to evaluate the impact of Christianity on the marriage ritual and the communal ownership of wife. The study is carried out through a fieldwork and ethnographical research. The implication of this study is to understand the increasing marriage ritual interaction between Christianity and African Traditional Religion.*

***Keywords---** adultery; integration; kinship; ownership; ritual*

I. INTRODUCTION

The African traditional ritual of marriage, which is fundamentally communalistic, has remained in conflicting terms to the understanding of Christian notion of marriage. While Christianity emphasizes the individualistic content of marriage, the Igbo customary system recognizes the ‘communal ownership’ of wife initiated through different rituals. In Igbo marriage, the wives are married into the clan or village for the sustenance of the kinship ties. In that sense, marriage implies that a wife belongs to the clan not actually to the individual member of the community. There is also a strong social relationship between the ‘wife-giver’ and ‘wife-taker’ in an environment of communal bond of exchange (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, p. 6), which sustains the communal ownership. However, the cultural transformations brought about by Christianity have continued to impact on this social order. The influence may have challenged the autochthonous communal ritual systems. Hence, the major interest of the study is not just to establish how different marriage rituals are performed in the traditional Igbo society, but more so to concentrate on a specific ritual practice that defines marriage as communal exercise. The study addresses the question: does the communal ownership of wife exist in the 21st century Africa? Following this question, ritual of marriage is to be defined based on its practice within the kinship system and how it consummates the marriage between a man and a woman, between one family and another, and between one clan and another.

The basic reference unit in Christian marriage is individual. Here the social relations are far less seen as a communal act, rather as an exchange system in which the individuals are the sole determinants. That places a dichotomy between individual and community interests in the African conception of marriage. Against this backdrop, the Igbo marriage emphasizes the communal action in marriage. This idea is unconnected with the communist’s ideology of ‘collective will’ that suppresses the place of individual in the community with regard to the ownership of private property. Rather in African conception, the individual though independent finds his/her meaning and identity in the community (Mbiti, 1989; Nwaogaidu, 2013). It is on this basis that ‘communal ownership’ of wife finds its meaning.

The significance of this study is to determine how the Igbo ritual practices on the one hand serve as guides toward the communal ownership of wife, and on the other hand as ways of giving meaning and purpose to the marriage alliance. Although the ritual practices could be in conflict with the Christian beliefs through the operationalization of the rituals (Eller, 2007, p. 250). Yet placed in the changing circumstances as a result of

Christian influences, the study attempts to analyze how the ritual practices in Igbo marriage systems have transformed in the recent time and the effect they have both on the people and their culture.

This research was targeted on the traditional marriage ritual ceremonies among the people of Obimo¹ (-*Asebere*) in Igboland. The people's strong bond to their traditional norms and religious practices is attributed to their clan networks and descent systems that give value to their spiritual understandings and religious beliefs regardless of the Christian influences. In other words, being born into the culture, it is prevalent that most Africans are pervasively religious and they also maintaining their religious roots notwithstanding their embrace to other religions (Gyekye, 1996; Mulago, 1991; Pobee, 1998). The research tool applied in this study was through a fieldwork and ethnography that made it possible to explore the socio-cultural contents of marriage ritual and the changes over time as a result of Christian influence. The selection of informants was based on 'member-recognized' categories in order to avoid misinterpretation of meanings that events may have on the targeted groups and domain (Emerson, 2011, pp. 45-46). The gathered information is presented in this work as a reflection of different ideas in public debates, opinions and ethnographic evidences from the informants that draw attention to the complex realities and ambiguous practices of everyday life (Balkenhol & Schramm, 2019, p. 588). The literatures are majorly based on the social relationships as constructed through marriage ritual. Though the field research was mostly confined to the Obimo community in the Northern part of Igboland and the informants were also limited to the area and subject of examination. But the findings and the problem analysis would at least apply to other parts of Igboland.

1.1 Basic Kinship Reproduction in Igboland

Kinship studies have been central to the development of anthropological study (Kuper, 1988). The structure of kinship relationship and the manner it endures through marriage alliance helps to understand the society and its people (Gyekye, 1996, p. 76; 'alliance theory' by Lévi-Strauss, 1969). It is also the reason d'être for various ritual practices in the marriage system and reciprocity of exchanges. Kinship is thus defined by 'marriage alliance' through male descendants from common ancestors (Lévi-Strauss, 1969). Marriage alliance introduces people into the next phase in life (Mbiti, 1975). In fact, the relational transition depends not only on the actions of the performers (i.e. descent groups), but also on the social space or designated environment that provides those actions with their necessary formalities. These two categories create awareness to the participants that a new social relation is at stake. The categories enable them to have a common experience of the ritual actions (Leach, 1995, p. 41). This common experience therefore makes the participants aware of themselves and the domain of action reproduced by the ritual.

Kinship system also depends on the pattern of residential community. The territorial pattern of settlement differentiates one community from the other. Each community or town is residentially aggregated by villages. The internal organization of each village such as in Igbo community consists of different 'clans' or 'sub-clans' or 'kindred' with their specific ancestral names either dispersed residentially or corporately together in an area. A clan is thus made up of group of blood relatives (both 'real' and 'putative', Shorter, 1998, p. 84) comprising of two or more extended families with a common ancestral descent.

In a clan structure, the importance of the rank by age and ancestral priority are reckoned with respect (Paris, 1995). The head of the clan is the eldest member (called *Onyishi*), who is believed to be the closest to the ancestors and embodies the spirit of the ancestors among the living. He is installed with a symbol of authority and profession of religious truth (called *Ofonu Oguin* Igbo language), believed to be inherited from the ancestors. Before any decision is made in the clan, the *Onyishi* must be consulted for approval. His words and authority are usually final but only within his clan domain, but then less supreme to the clan loyalty. That implies that he cannot go beyond his authority – that is to say, he is not above the clan itself. The system of clan loyalty is built based on 'cosmological hierarchy of being' (Mbiti, 1989, p. 268; Paris, 1995, p. 86), which ideologically structures the social relationships.

The clan members or the patrilineal kin (the *Umunna*) are bound together in diachronic relationships from the male's side; and through the marriage alliance with women received in marriage. The male members bring in the women into the clan and ensure the growth of the lineage descent (Onwuejeogwu, 1975, p. 57). It implies that marriage within the patrilineal group is forbidden notwithstanding their unilineal descent structure. Through the pattern of out-marriage lineage, alliance brings together different corporate descent groups and as such reproduces the society through its members (Keesing, 1981, p. 251). The implication is that marriage sustains the kinship relationship by an exogamic affinity of different generations of ancestral links (Platenkamp, 1992, pp. 76-77). In that category, marriage alliance is possible only outside of the clan in so far as there is no patrilineal bond within the

outside clan, be it parallel or cross cousin affinity. The system is also guided by the rule of exogamy that prohibits incest. Lévi-Strauss (1969) notes that incest prohibition is fundamental to culture and is most pertinent when the group's corporate existence is at stake (p. 32). In that case, a person cannot do what he or she likes in a social group but must be guided by the ordinance of the collective good (p. 43). It is on this basis that Lévi-Strauss based his idea of kinship. He equates the incest taboo with the origin of culture itself and the rule governing marriage (pp. 12-25).

While particular attention is paid to the rule of exogamy that prohibits incest, the rule of conjugal fidelity guides the already consummated marriage. It is the rule imposed by the ritual of *ikpuekwuNwanyi* (ritual of conferment of rights and obligations to a woman in her husband's clan) in most part of Igboland. This ritual bond is sometimes presumed, according to the ordinance of the custom, in so far as the important rituals of marriage that create relationship have been completed, whereby the woman has become part of her husband's clan (Hughes, 2019). That means that the rule is presumed to be effective even if this particular ritual was not performed in its original form. This side of the law makes it even more complex in the modern peoples' thinking as it is in conflict with Christian understanding of marriage.

The social relations within and between the clan members are expressed in kinship terms. Firstly, it has to be pointed out that kinship relationship manifests in two dimensions (Mbiti, 1989). On the one hand is the *vertical relation*, which is the ancestral relation through the male descent. It is the union of corporate descent groups and consanguinity. This relationship differentiates the relations by 'blood' from the non-relatives (Keesing, 1981, p. 215). On the other hand is the *horizontal relation*. This is an extended relation by affinity. It is established through marriage alliance (Lévi-Strauss 1969).

The two dimensions of relations indicate that there exists a distinction among the same line of kin and affine. For instance, one's own household is seen as in opposition to the households of one's brother and other remoter agnatic kinsmen. But the grouping of such households constitutes extended family. According to Shorter (1998): "the mental image of the extended family is of a column, marching through time, and making marriage alliances with other extended families in order to ensure the progress of the column" (p. 84). Notwithstanding the distinction among the same line of kin and affinity, such groupings are closely connected to each other in the kinship systems, which ensure their own survival. There is a continuous interaction between these two dimensions of clan relations through ritual transfers of gifts. It is clear to say that the kinship relationship is tied and rooted through the blood relatives and affinity, which places much emphasis on the *social character* than on the *biological character* of the relationship. It is based on this social relation that the 'African concept of community' finds its meaning and by extension 'communal ownership' of wife.

The unity of the clan descent is identified by classificatory terms, which the members collectively address themselves as the root property of evolving of other terminologies (Allen, 1989). Collectively, they are referred to as *umu-nna* (meaning literally the children of the same father or same ancestry). This kinship terminology reflects the clan relations – as people of the same ancestral descent. There are also some classificatory distinctions among the same line of affine as well as kin members. That is to say, distinctions between those that entered into the clan by alliance and those born into the clan as kin. Perhaps, this could be likened to a diversity that often exists within a social group (Dumont, 1957, p. 3). The use of the suffix – *nne* (mother) and – *nna* (father) to distinguish the parents according to sex are also derivative in differentiating the affine relatives and kin members.

For the affine relatives, the siblings (immediate brothers and sisters) address one another as *nwa-nne* (child of the same mother) and collectively as *umu-nne* (children of the same mother or children from immediate family as applied to polygamous family); that is, in separate terms with regard to other children of the same patrilineal kin. To separate the sexes, males are addressed as *nwa-nne-nwoke* (a male child of a mother), and females are reckoned as *nwa-nne-nwanyi* (a female child of a mother). Siblings are also distinguished by sex – *nwanyi* (daughter) and *nwoke* (son), but are commonly referred to as *nwa* (- child, and plural *umu* – children). The first son and first daughter have prominent position in the family and are addressed as *Okpara* and *Ada* respectively.

For the kin relatives, all siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins of the same ancestral lineage address one another with the term *nwa-nna* (child of the same father, i.e. depicting the same ancestral descent) and collectively as *umu-nna*. It shows that there is one term for father's brother's children (FBC) as distinct from father's wife's children (FWC), which is also experienced among the mother's brother's sons (MBS) and father's sister's sons (FZS). One could identify in this kin terminology that the mother is suffixed in the family ties (*umu-nne* – children of the same mother) and the father is suffixed in the kin relations (*umu-nna* – children of the same father). The implication is that the place of the in-married woman is sustained in the clan but plays major role within the family structure where her power is restricted. That means that the in-married woman only assumes an additional role as mother but her status

as in-married woman continues to function. Because her power is restricted to the family ties, it could therefore be said that woman symbolically rules the family because of the fertility she brings (Weiner, 1992, p. 116) and her ability of transmitting life and catering for the children.

II. EVALUATION OF THE RITUALS THAT DEFINE MARRIAGE SYSTEM

The starting point and goal of ritual in general are to create harmony and cohesion between the ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ worlds of reality, which form the order in social relationships. This world’s reality is an ‘integrated whole’ (Opoku, 1978, p. 8) that any lack creates disharmony and disorder. Eboh (1993) states that the Igbo people conceive life as: “inter-relationship between the visible material world and the world of the spirits. It is a constant and close interaction, a communion and communication between the two worlds” (p. 226). In the same way, Metu (1985) sees the Igbo vision of the universe as: “one fluid, coherent unit, in which spirits, men, plants, and animals, and the elements, are engaged in continuous interaction” (p. 4). The conception of the universe is in fact a continuous interaction of beings both the visible and invisible, whereby the activities of the invisible world manifest in the visible through various phenomenal experiences (Nwaogaidu, 2014, p. 12). It is those experiences through various rituals that make the interaction of beings in the universe more potent. This interaction abhors any demarcation in-between the two worlds of existence. That is why rituals are quite necessary in sustaining the ties of cosmological existence or in the words of Ray (1976, p. 17) ‘to recreate people’s identity’ as a unifying factor of community existence.

The communitarian nature of the society is evident in the rituals of marriage. The establishment of affine relationship is accompanied with various ritual actions that do not depend on the individuals but on agreed terms between the two families and by extension the clan members. The involvement of families and clans in marriage alliances make the rituals even more holistic. This is because their integral roles must be kept alive through continuous exchanges that preserve the harmony of relationship with the land and the ancestors. The ritual actions are performed based on their cultural relevance.

In Obimo community and elsewhere in Igboland, the ritual stages are divided into two parts: rituals of betrothal and rituals of conjugality. The first three ritual stages are categorized as rituals of betrothal. They include: *IjuEse* (i.e. Marriage Enquiry), Consultation with the Ancestors and the Deities, and *ItaQjiNwanyi* (i.e. Presentation of Kola-nut). These rituals are accompanied by series of negotiations between the living and ‘non-living’. The last four ritual stages are periods of conjugality, which represent the times of nuptial dedications. These include: *IgoMmanwu* (or *Muq*) *Nwanyi* or *Igbankwunwanyi* (Ritual of Pacification on the Spirit of the Woman) (Kuper, 1982, p. 26), *UsoNwanyi* (Bridal Invitation Ritual), *IduObu* (loosely translated as Dowry) and *IkpuEkwuNwanyi*: (Ritual conferment of rights and obligations to a woman). These rituals initiate the spouses into a “commitment to the spirits of the land and the clan lineage” (Magesa, 1997, pp. 100-101). They are processes of transition into new house and the periods of incorporation into new community of ownership. That is why at these four stages, the ritual actions are focused on the whole community of the living as well as the spiritual agents that play the mediating role. This work will then emphasize the last ritual that confers rights and obligations on the in-married woman and the man.

2.1 Ritual Conferment of Rights and Obligations

For a woman to have rights and privileges in her husband’s kindred according to the Igbo custom, the marriage must be officially announced through the ritual of *ikpuekwu* (literally meaning the erection of cooking tripod of hearth-stones) among the kinsmen and women of the clan. It is the ritual that empowers the woman to possess her own kitchen in her husband’s house and to participate actively with other out-married women (called *umuada*) of her clan. The significance of kitchen in conjugal relationship indicates that a woman has secured her place with rights and obligations in her husband’s household. It implies that on the one hand, a woman is only recognized in her father’s clan through marriage, and on the other hand marriage bestows on her certain rights in her husband’s house. The ritual also confers both couples the right to sexual relationship as legitimate husband and wife with the ultimate aim of procreation.

The essence of the ritual is to strengthen the bond of marriage and affinity, as well as to guide against infidelity and promiscuity especially on the part of the woman. The ritual is precisely an alliance between two couples, but its ordinance is predominantly channeled on the side of the woman. The ritual also confers the husband’s clan with the power to enforce the rules guiding the marital fidelity and the imposition of reparation sacrifices where the rules are broken.

The witnesses to the ritual bond are the living and the 'living-dead' (Mbiti, 1975) of the community. The living-dead consist of the ancestors that have the power to communicate with the local deities and the Supreme Being. An eldest man of the clan (*Onyishi*) or a priest of the deity (*AttamaMma*) stands as the receiver of the consents on behalf of the ancestors. He plays the mediation role between the couple and ancestors.

The ritual process begins with the cooking of food with 'dry fish' (called *asuĩsĩn* in the native language) bought by the mother of the bride on their marital journey to the husband's house. The bride prepares a delicious soup together with pounded yam on the already prepared cooking tripod of hearth-stones. The use of the dry fish symbolizes sweetness and intimacy. In fact, dry fish is a delicacy in the region because it sweetens the food. The general conception is that any soup that is cooked without fish cannot appeal the people and the gods. That is why in any ritual sacrifice in Obimo, a particular type of dry fish (*asuĩsĩ*) is used for the cooking otherwise the food may be rejected, not only by the humans but also by the spiritual agents.

After the cooking, the bride puts the food in a plate or tray carries it on top of her head, accompanied by her bridegroom, her parents, groom's parents and the witness, to the clan shrine (*onũala* [the mouth of the land] or in some cases to *Obu*[clan hall]). After series of incantations or libation to the spirit of the ancestors by the *onyishior attama*, the food is then used to initiate the couple into marital bond. Significantly, the fertility of the woman is enlivened by the food – that is; giving of life. Firstly, the head of the fish is cut off and placed on the shrine for the ancestors to accept. Of course, the head is reserved to the ancestors because they are the head of the clan. The remaining part is given to the couple to eat. This rite is called *igõasu* (ritual of fish). And for the woman, the people would say that a fish has been killed in her hands (in the local language: *egburuasun'akanwanyiin* Igbo).

The bond of marriage is sealed after the couple has eaten the fish together with the food. Thereafter, the bride is clothed with a new loin cloth, which indicates that she is now an *okwurukpo* (i.e. a marriage woman). The ritual tie to the deities through incantations and libation makes the bond potent and the assurance of its observance. It is left for the spiritual agents to dispense justice if the bond were in any way broken.

2.2 Breaking the Bond and the Purification Rite

From the very day the ritual of *ikpuekwunwanyis* performed, the woman cannot venture to have sexual relationship with any other man apart from her husband. If she does otherwise, she defiles herself, her properties and the ancestral land. This defilement is called *ebõn'ekwu* (literally translates as 'two in one kitchen'). It implies that the woman has built herself a second kitchen in defiance of the first. The breaking of the bond through desecration of her conjugal fidelity is regarded as a sacrilege or abomination (*iru-ala* or *nso-ala* – literally meaning the defilement or pollution of the land) both against the gods and the community. It is a crime against the land, which threatens the cosmological order. It is on that note that Long (2000, p. 31) explains that the ancestral spirits may act on their own by punishing a person for the taboos, which distort the web of relationship between the material world and the spiritual world.

The consequences of breaking ritual bond could vary depending on the circumstances surrounding the occurrence. On the one hand, if it were by accident such as rape, the victim could move directly to the eldest clan daughter by marriage (called *OnyishiNyomu Di* in the native language), who is regarded as the primus inter pares among the clan daughters, for an urgent remedy. On the other hand, if the offence were intentional with concrete evidence, the woman must be expelled immediately from the community. And the condition of bringing her back to the clan is the performance of purification rituals. The ritual is what maintains a harmony between the material world and the spiritual world and thereby forestalls calamities in the community.

The ritual of purification goes thus: firstly, if a woman committed adultery in her husband's house or clan, she must be taken to the village shrine (called *onũala* or *ihuokike*, which literally means the mouth of the land or the face of the creator) for cleansing. She would go to the shrine only with the eldest clan daughter or in some particular instances with a widow or a virgin girl at a time and a place in which nobody would see them. The required item for the sacrifice is a small chicken, and the sacrifice is called *igbuĩshu* (the ritualize killing the abomination) (Bell, 2009, p. 173). Secondly, if the adultery were committed outside of the house or clan, the woman could go to any other place of her choice for cleansing, either on a lonely road or in the bush for the sacrifice. The most important thing is that the family must be aware of the cleansing ritual. In the process of the purification ritual, the woman in question would remain nude. The duty of the eldest clan daughter is to pass a small chicken across her head and around her loins a number of times before throwing it away in the bush. The adulterer must at the same time throw away the loin cloths or inner wears she wore when the sacrilege was committed. After the sacrifice, the woman puts on new clothes and then goes back to her husband's home. Through the ritual of purification, it is evident that the wrongdoing of one woman affects the community and by implication it confirms the communal ownership of wife.

III. RITUAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE

The Igbo people are very receptive to cultural changes, as change is part of their very essence (Njaka, 1974). The coming of Christianity brought many changes in the social system. According to Schapera (1950); “there have been several other changes in marriage law, owing mainly to contact with Western civilization and especially Christianity” (p. 150). The changes have modified some of the ritual performances among the indigenous people. But notwithstanding that some of the rituals of ‘transfer of being and things’ have been modified, yet some of the values placed on the rituals still remained efficacious. It stands to be argued that the majority of the people of the Obimo still believe in the efficacy of *ikpuekwunwanyiritual* even if the couples do not actually perform it in its original practice. In the late sixties, about 94% still perform all the rituals of marriage. By the early 1990, only about 30% still performed the last ritual of *ikpuekwuas* a necessity for marriage bond. By 2010s, the percentage startlingly reduced to 8%. It reveals the complex picture of marriage rituals as influenced by Christianity.

In tackling the question whether the *ikpuekwuritual* bond is binding on those who do not partake in the ritual before their conjugal life. The following observations were made: about 70% of the people in Obimo strongly believe in the efficacy of *ikpuekwuritual* bond. For them, the bond is already presumed in marriage because of the pact previously reached by the fore-fathers. A surprising thing according to one of the informants was that even though many couples absconded from participating in this ritual due to Christian influence, there seemed to be some effects on women that engaged themselves in the acts of infidelity. But what exactly informed the effects on the women remains obscured. Though the belief suggests that once the husband eats the food cooked by his wife after their marriage, the rule of conjugal fidelity takes effect automatically.

However, the survival of this ritual would still be in doubt in so far as about 92% of the people who presently contract marriages do not actually perform the *ikpuekwuritual*. Though most Christians that were interviewed supported the upholding of this traditional marriage ritual without any recourse to idolatrous practices, because of the perceived value it gives to the marriage alliance. The insistence of most Christians in participating in the traditional rituals of marriage also indicates the role of traditional customs to social relationship (Gyekye, 1996; Mulago, 1991; Pobee, 1998). Unfortunately, that insistence does not actually delimit the influence of Christianity.

From the evidence gathered, there were divergences of opinion mostly from women both young and old whether the *ikpuekwuritual* should be encouraged. About 60% of the women asked saw the practice as an avenue of women subjugation. 40% of women saw the practice as positive cultural heritage for the sustenance of clan relationship. The position of men differs drastically from the women. About 90% of men interviewed strongly supported the continuation of the ritual practice even if it was not performed in its customary form. The remaining 10% were indifferent or in support of the abolition of the ritual. The implication of these findings reveals the perpetuation of men’s dominance in the society. It is unfortunate that more than 90% of the married men both Christians and non-Christians did not see their faithfulness to their wives as part of their obligation; rather they inclined to the traditional custom which gave them advantage over women. When asked why the law of conjugal fidelity should remain the way it is, one would be accused of destroying the traditional custom.

Consequently, the Church authorities in Igboland have started to question the rationale behind the rule of conjugal fidelity that affects only women. The response of the Church could be seen as a mechanism of social transformation as well as a reaction to inequality production in the society. The Christian tradition questions the efficacy of the ritual practice not only on religious basis, but also on social grounds. If the spiritual agents were responsible in dispensing justice if the bond was broken, why was the insistence of the human agents on the matters pertaining to the gods? If a Christian is found guilty, must (s)he be subjected to traditional religious cleansing ritual or could (s)he as a Christian be answerable to her/his Christian faith? What is the possibility of taking her/him to the church or spiritual healing grounds where prayer for deliverance from the powers of the evil spirits could be offered? The Christians also argue from the Christian concept of sin, which is an individual act. Based on the consequence of breaking the ritual bond, could it be imaginable that the transfer of responsibility moves from individual to collective consequences? Does that not take away the moral responsibility of the ritual action? These questions have been the burning issue of controversy between the Christian faith and Traditional Religious beliefs.

It could be argued that the law of conjugal fidelity as practiced in Obimo community is against the teaching of the Christian faith that places mutual faithfulness between husband and wife as a marital virtue. This virtue makes both parties responsible to each other. Unlike the *ikpuekwunwanyiritual* bond, the keeping of the Christian marital vow is not restricted to one party, but rather creates an equal obligation of love to each other. One could say that the traditional ritual bond tends to negate the equal status of the couples as propagated by the Christian marital vows. In the Christian perspective, infidelity is seen as a threat to marriage union (Code of Canon Law 1152, para. 1 & 3).

The vows make the protection of the union not only binding on both parties but also bestow them with equal dignity. The exchange of rings after the vows though performed as a human act however symbolizes a spiritual union. In Catholic marriage for instance, partners exchange vows with each other, make solemn promises that are binding for the whole of their lives. The exchange of vows is an outward sign of the work of Jesus Christ who joins in the unbreakable bond of marriage. The vows already made by a woman and a man during wedding cannot be made to another while both of them are still alive (Code of Canon Law 1057, 1134, 1135). The companionship involved in marriage cannot be achieved outside of marriage. Therefore, the unconditional lifelong commitment made in marriage makes it quite different from just living together as co-habitants.

3.1 Toward Cultural Integration or displacement in Marriage Rituals?

The contact of Christianity with the pre-existent Igbo culture has brought in with it, a radical change in the perception of things and beings. The two ways of life have been in contact over a century; looking for ways of arriving at a reconciliation. Obviously, the reconciliation of these diverse beliefs about life becomes difficult, because of the different philosophies of life governing the different systems: Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion.

This work argues that the coming of Christianity in Igboland instead of being perceived as the agent of ritual destruction should be viewed as using the already indigenous ritual practices to suit with the time-frame of Christian rituals. This is because; those rituals in question could also be seen in Christian rituals. As some of the rituals have been accommodated or redefined in the today's Church. The Church has been able to recognize that the people's culture is quite important to faith confession. For instance, the life-cycle rituals such as birth, marriage and death constitute the major aspect of Christian initiation accompanied by stages of passage rites, whereas the indigenous society view them as cultural patterns of socio-cosmological relationships that create ties, which are inalienable between the people and their ancestors (Turner, 2008). But both perspectives could be seen as products of social relationships rather than a way of diminution of one's traditional norms and practices. The cultural integration however goes beyond religious affiliation towards the existence of social groups and social reproduction characterized by collective identity. It could be said that the coming of Christianity in Igboland did not actually result to a total break off from the traditional religious beliefs, but it paved the way and became a route to a future harmonization of both cultures and their ideals towards the formation of social relations.

Moreover, Christian marriage is a sacred union, instituted by God. This union involves two persons donating themselves to each other; in order to enjoy the fullness of humanity in a life lived in companionship and trust. This sacred institution can experience disintegration when it is devoid of the virtues of patience, love, selflessness, understanding, ideological sharing and sacrifice. When this union is lived in mutual understanding and in symbiotic relationship, spouses begin to appreciate the being of each other and the marital love is increased with the bond of marriage being strengthened. Unfortunately, these ingredients are not pronounced in traditional Igbo marriage system that is communitarian. According to Willoughby and James (2017), the Christian marriage is individualistic. They state that "there has been a shifted norms of individuals valuing their right to choose their own partner irrespective of whether their choices conform to 'normative' behavior" (p. 7).

The Christian marriage should therefore integrate some values in Igbo marriage ritual. These are the values of communal spirit, which draws couple to the community and remain attentive to her community, because of the consciousness of her being the foundation of marriage. Also the value of loyalty; that is, the loyalty not only to the husband but between the spouses. Christian couple should understand that no individual could be without the community; with regard to this, spouses should be extensive in their relationship. Kinship system is a valuable factor that must not be despised in marriage. In Christian marriage, man and woman willfully make a choice of partnership. That contradicts the cosmological idea of Igbo traditional marriage that is communitarian. Hence the happiness of any marriage is increased by the support of kinship system.

As Christian marriage projects its value of steadfastness, love and sacrifice, the traditional marriage projects its value of communal solidarity. It is in mingling of these ideological differences that a perfect and sustainable marriage is achieved. The marital life is fortified when couple realizes that the union, in which they are involved, is divinely and culturally instituted. The recognition of this divine authorship and the communal assistance of marriage alliance should influence the couple in their relationship with one another, in achieving a sustainable marriage, transparent in its expression of love.

IV. DISCUSSION

We began the study by making the objectives known as well as the research tools applied. Those steps gave the opportunity to understand the systems involved in marriage rituals in Igboland as communalistic. Through various transfers of gifts, the rituals of marriage are understood as ways of construction of affine relationships (Onwuejeogwu, 1975, p. 85). The rituals are performed in order to reproduce the society through social relationship (Crossley 2004). It is important to elucidate that the individual autonomy is very irrelevant in the performance of rituals. This idea could originate some contradictions, but for the fact that the individual alone cannot perform a ritual and cannot also refuse the ritual, makes it more concrete. This is because a ritual reproduces itself not only on the objects but also on the subjects, which is not limited on the individual but creates a relational link between the living and the spiritual agents. It is right to suggest that the Igbo marriage ritual is the key to understanding the social relationships between families and descent groups in which the individuals play prominent roles that extend to community ownership of wife.

Of course, one has to acknowledge some sorts of disillusionments within the Igbo communities due to external influences on the local customs. For the indigenous people, the conviction is that the influences not only challenge their traditional beliefs but also endanger their cultural heritage. As a result, one of the cultural complexities, which Christianity has not yet well grasped as it pertains to marriage ritual in Africa, is the nature of clan structure. In clan structure, it might seem that conflicts occur among individuals but in the actual sense any conflict that touches individuals is not limited to them but extends to their families and clans. It may result to one family against the other or a clan against another or one village against the other. This is experienced in such conflicts like land or marriage disputes. In such disputes, individuals cannot act without the consent of the family or clan. This structure explains the aspect of the community life in which individuals find their essence. It is also in the same way that marriage alliance is not individual affairs as articulated by the Christian conception but community affairs. Therefore, it is important to understand the likings of both cultures and integrate what should be integrated and disperse what ought to be dispersed.

REFERENCES

- [1] Allen, N. J. (1989). 'The evolution of kinship terminologies'. *Lingua* 77:173–185.
- [2] Balkenhol, M. & Schramm, K. (2019). 'Doing race in Europe: Contested pasts and contemporary practices'. *Social anthropology/Anthropologie sociale* 27 (4): 585-593.
- [3] Bell, C. (2009). *Ritual theory, ritual practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [4] Coriden, J. A., Green, T. J & Heintschel, D. E. (Eds.) (2000). *The code of canon law: a text and commentary*. London: Chapman
- [5] Crossley, N. (2004). 'Ritual, body technique, and (inter)subjectivity'. In: Schilbrack, K. (Ed.): *Thinking through rituals: Philosophical perspectives*, pp. 31-51. New York: Routledge.
- [6] Dumont, L. (1957). 'Hierarchy and marriage alliance in South Indian kinship'. *Occasional Papers of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 12. Sussex: Ditchling Press.
- [7] Eboh, S. O. (1993). *The gospel of Christ and African culture: Ozo title institution in Igboland (Nigeria)*. Munich: African University Studies.
- [8] Eller, J. D. (2007). *Introducing anthropology of religion*, New York: Routledge.
- [9] Emerson, R. M. (2011). 'Four ways to improve the craft of fieldwork'. In: Atkinson, P. and Delamont, S. (Eds.). *SAGE qualitative research methods II*. London: SAGE Publications.
- [10] Gyekye, K. (1996). *African cultural values: an introduction* Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company.
- [11] Hughes, G. (2019). 'European social anthropology in 2018: An increasingly recursive public'. *Social anthropology/Anthropologiesociale* 27 (2): 352-372.
- [12] Kayongo-Male, D. & Onyango, P. (1984). *The sociology of the African family*. London/New York: Longmans.
- [13] Keesing, R. M. (1981). *Cultural anthropology: A contemporary perspective*, (2nd ed.). Holt, Rinehard & Winston: CBS College Publishing.
- [14] Kuper, A. (1982). *Wives for cattle: Bridewealth and marriage in Southern Africa*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- [15] Kuper, A. (1988). *The invention of primitive society: Transformations of an illusion*. Rutledge.
- [16] Leach, E. (1995). *Culture and communication: The logic by which symbols are connected*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- [17] Lévi-Strauss, C. (1969). *The elementary structures of kinship* (edited by Needham, R. and translated by Bell, J. H. & von Sturmer, J. R.). Boston: Beacon Press.
- [18] Long, M. W. (2000). *Health, healing and God's Kingdom: New pathways to Christian health ministry in Africa*. Carlisle, CA: Regnum Books.
- [19] Mbiti, J. S. (1975). *An Introduction to African Religion*. London: Heinemann.
- [20] Mbiti, J. S. (1989). *African religions and philosophy*(2nd ed.). Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- [21] Megasa, L. (1997). *African religion: The moral traditions of abundant life*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.
- [22] Metu, E. I. (1985). *African religions in Western conceptual schemes*. Ibadan: Claverian Press.
- [23] Mulago, V. (1991). 'African traditional religion and Christianity'. In Olupona, J. K. (Ed.). *African traditional religions in contemporary society*. New York: Paragon House.
- [24] Njaka, M. E. N. (1974). *Igbo political culture*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- [25] Nwaogaidu, J. C. (2013). *Globalization and social inequality: An empirical study of Nigerian society*. Muenster: LIT Verlag.
- [26] Nwaogaidu, J. C. (2016). *Jesus Christ – truly God and truly Man: Towards a systematic dialogue between Christianity in Africa and Pope Benedict XVI's Christological conception*. Muenster: LIT Verlag.
- [27] Onwuejeogwu, A. M. (1975). *The social anthropology of Africa: An introduction*. London: Heinemann.
- [28] Opoku, A. K. (1978). *West African traditional religion*, Accra: FEP International.
- [29] Paris, P. J. (1995). *The spirituality of African peoples: The search for a common moral discourse*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- [30] Platenkamp, J. D. M. (1992). 'Transforming Tobelo ritual'. In: De Coppet, D. (Ed.). *Understanding rituals*. London & New York: Routledge.
- [31] Pobe, J. (1998). *West Africa: Christ would be an African too*, Geneva: WCC Publications.
- [32] Ray, B. C. (1976). *African religions: Symbol, ritual and community*. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- [33] Schapera, I. (1950). 'Kinship and marriage among the Tswana'. In: Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. and Forde, D. (Eds.) *African systems of kinship and marriage*, pp. 140-165. London: Oxford University Press.
- [34] Shorter, A. (1998). *African culture, an overview: Social-cultural anthropology*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.
- [35] Turner, V. (2008). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*, 2nd print. New Brunswick & London: Aldine Transaction.
- [36] Weiner, A. B. (1992). *Inalienable possessions: The paradox of keeping-while-giving*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford: University of California Press.
- [37] Willoughby, B. J. & James, S. L. (2017). *The marriage paradox: Why emerging adults love marriage yet push it aside*. Oxford: University Press.