

THE INFLUENCE OF EXOGAMY MARRIAGE SYSTEM IN TRADITIONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract

Marriage is one of the most important and interesting institutions in every culture. More interesting is the custom and laws regulating the practice. Exogamous marriage as a marriage outside one's clan is found in almost all Igbo society today. This study exposed the role exogamy played in resolving conflict in traditional Igbo society in the past which has upheld its existence till date. The work illustrates the process of establishing peace and broadening social bonds and ties through intermarriage. This descriptive and expository research, traced the origin of exogamous marriage in Igbo land to a time when societies and cultures were still enclosed, when communities were waging wars against one another. The conflicting interests can be over resources, identity, power, kingship supremacy or boundary. Such is the case in Igbo land, where inter-tribal conflict over boundary and trade, marital conflict, conflict over inheritance and chieftaincy title tussle all exist. The work identified three theories in favour of exogamy marriage as a means of conflict resolution which includes; Survival value, conflicting loyalties and alliance theory. It concludes that exogamous marriage is a method of conflict resolution in Igbo society which has created peaceful co-existence amongst warring communities. The aim is to unite, promote and sustain social harmony. It establishes cordial relationship with neighbouring community which was perceived hitherto as "enemy." Thus, exogamy was a method adopted by weaker community to make peace path with stronger community in Traditional Igbo society.

Keywords: Exogamy, marriage, traditional, peace, conflict resolution

Introduction

Primitive African society is a society inundated with conflict. History records stories of conflict between members of the same society and wars between communities especially neighbouring communities. The peaceful resolution of such conflicts and wars is at the heart of every African society, as they are aware of the negative effect of

conflict. Conflict resolution then is the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict. It can be thought to encompass the use of nonviolent resistance measures by conflicted parties in an attempt to promote effective resolution. Conflict is resolved based on the way disputants understand and view the conflict, the beliefs, perspectives, understandings and attitudes. There are however, different methods and procedures for addressing conflict in human society, which may include inter alia, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, diplomacy, and creative peace building.

Marriage as an institution in human society was one of the areas where conflict emerged during the primitive era. Marriage is a strong and powerful tradition with an ontological balance in African society. Formerly, Igbo society is culturally adhesive and enduring due to its lasting endogenous marriage system as a cultural heritage, which was then admired and envied by other societies in Nigeria and beyond. But today, Igbo marriage institutions are marked by extensive prohibitions on unions between close relatives and the use of marriage obligations to interlink basic social groups within numerous and widely scattered communities.

The interest of this paper is to inquire into the sudden change from endogamy to exogamy marriage system in Igbo traditional society. The focus will be studying the origin, emergence and theories of exogamy marriage system as a method of resolving community or clan conflicts in Igbo society. Survival value, conflicting loyalties and alliance theories all subscribes to the modern socio-cultural viewpoint on exogamous marriage. The projection is that exogamous marriage system today stands as one of the tested and trusted tools for peace building and conflict resolution in Igbo society in particular and African societies at large, especially as regards community conflicts.

Conflicts In Africa

Conflict is the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. It is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. Conflict in the traditional African society has always been caused by supremacy and lack of natural resources. In the past, according to Huntington (1993), conflicts...were largely among princes-emperors, absolute monarchs and constitutional monarchs attempting to expand their bureaucracies, their armies, their mercantilist economic strength and, most important, the territory they ruled (pp.22-23). Later, conflict now shifted from quest for power and expansion of territory to struggle for scarce natural and human resources. Conflict over natural resources arises when parties disagree about the management, ownership, allocation, use and protection of natural resources. The conflict has always been based on a division between the "us" and the "them," otherwise one would not know whom to shoot. But it is not group loyalty that makes

the conflict. Rather it is conflict that makes group loyalties. Archeological findings in Africa include larger regional populations that increased competition; more anchored living that prevented people from moving away from conflict; social structures such as clans that provided flexible frameworks for splitting into “us” and “them”; the emergence of distinct political elite with its own interests; trade in goods that provided something to fight over. Conflict itself is not a negative phenomenon; indeed, well-managed conflict can be an essential component of social change and development. While competing interest over human resources can be a source of conflict, they can equally be a shared opportunity for cooperation, confidence-building and sustainable development. This is the case with inter-clan conflict that has resulted to the emergence of exogamy marriage in Africa.

Social conflict is a conflict that arises from interactions between individuals in a social group. Social relations are basically sets of expectations which define rights and obligations, as well as statues and roles. Thus, social conflict occurs when competing interest of groups tie conflict directly into the social, economic and political organization of society as well as the nature and strength of social networks within and between community groups. It cannot be completely separated from the inter-relationships that exist among individuals and communities. It is often argued that because human beings are by nature competitive and aggressive, there will always be conflicts amongst them. Conflicts will always occur due to ideological, political, social and economic differences which usually resulted in competition and rivalry. Conflict resolution aims at restoring social harmony, mending breached social ties, performance of rituals and offering apologies or compensation to ensure that the status quo before the dispute is restored. The pre-colonial Igbo society cannot be said to differ as individuals and communities engaged in one form of interaction or the other - a situation which at times led to conflicts (Ezenwoko and Osagie, 2014, p. 135). Thus, inter-tribal conflict over boundary and trade, marital conflict, conflict over inheritance and chieftaincy title tussle all exist in Igbo land.

What Is Marriage?

According to Stritof (2019), Marriage is defined differently, and by different entities, based on cultural, religious, and personal factors. In their book “*Cultural Anthropology: The Human Challenge*,” Haviland, Prins, McBride and Walrath, (2011), avers that Marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock, is a culturally recognized union between people, called spouses, that establishes rights and obligations between them, as well as between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws. The Encyclopaedia Britannica (1768), **defines Marriage** as a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring (if any). Sociologists conceives marriage as a socially supported union involving two or more individuals in what is regarded as a stable, enduring arrangement typically based at least in part

on a sexual bond of some kind (Crossman 2019, p.1). The universality of marriage within different societies and cultures is attributed to the many basic social and personal functions for which it provides structure, such as sexual gratification and regulation, division of labour between the sexes, economic production and consumption, and satisfaction of personal needs for affection, status, and companionship. For Chidili (1992), marriage is “Any formal commitment between a man and a woman to cohabit more or less permanently. Any ceremony either religious or legal formalizing the union of man and woman as husband and wife is also defined as marriage (p.1).” Marriage is also defined based on the nature; as a ceremony, act or contract by which a man and a woman become husband and wife. It is a covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and is by nature ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring. It is a union between a matured man and a matured woman who give themselves totally for life.

Stritof (2019) opines that, “A commonly accepted and encompassing definition of marriage is the following: a formal union and social and legal contract between two individuals that unites their lives legally, economically, and emotionally.” Some forms of marriage have been found to exist in all human societies, past and present. Its importance can be seen in the elaborate and complex laws and rituals surrounding it. Although, these laws and rituals are as varied and numerous as human social and cultural organizations are, some universals do apply. A marriage, however, does not simply exist between the married partners, but rather, is codified as a social institution in legal, economic, social, and spiritual/religious ways. Marriage has several social functions that are important within the societies and cultures where the marriage takes place. Most commonly, marriage dictates the roles that spouses play in each other's lives, in the family, and in society at large. Typically these roles involve a division of labor between the spouses, such that each is responsible for different tasks that are necessary within the family. But prominent in almost all societies of the world today is exogamy marriage.

Exogamy Marriage

The word Exogamy comes from the Greek word exogamous. Exogamous is from two compound words '*exo*' and '*gamous*.' *Exo* could mean 'out', from outside or external, while '*gamous*' is a noun meaning 'marriage', 'wedding', 'bridal', 'matrimony', 'nuptial' or 'wedlock'. Put together, exogamy means outside marriage or external marriage, that is, marriage outside one's clan. It is the custom or tribal law, which prohibits marriage between members of the same tribe; marriage outside of the tribe as opposed to endogamy. Exogamous marriage or exogamy is the custom of marrying outside a specified group of people to which a person belongs. According to Paul (2020), Exogamy is the term used to denote the body of laws and customs prohibiting marriage between members of the same tribe, clan, village or family. The term 'exogamy' is the antonym of endogamy; which is marriage within a social unit, but the two sets of customs are not mutually exclusive and sometimes supplement

each other. Exogamy as a concept was first used by John Ferguson McLennan, a Scottish ethnologist in 1886. He opines that marriage by capture is the origin of exogamy. He sees marriage outside the group, as in bride capture between warring tribes and argues that exogamy was originally due to scarcity of women which obliged men to seek wives from other groups, including marriage by capture, and this in time grew into a custom which became established as the law.

Exogamous marriage is the social norm of marrying from outside one's social group or clan. The group defines the scope and extent of exogamy, and the rules and enforcement mechanisms that ensure its continuity. In social science, exogamy is viewed as a combination of two related aspects: biological and cultural. Biological exogamy is marriage of none blood-related beings, regulated by forms of incest law. In biology, exogamy more generally refers to the mating of individuals who are relatively less related genetically: that is, outbreeding as opposed to inbreeding. This benefits the offspring as it reduces the risk of the offspring inheriting two copies of a defective gene. Increasing the genetic diversity of the offspring is thought to improve their chances of surviving to reproduce themselves. While cultural exogamy is the custom of marrying outside a specified group of people to which a person belongs. Thus, persons may be expected to marry outside their ancestral clan(s) or other groups, in addition to outside closer blood relatives. For Chidili (1992) "Relationship between direct ancestors and descendants are not allowed. Both civil, canon and even customary laws regulate that people who have blood relationship of any form cannot contract marriage (p. 26)." Cultural exogamy has origins in groups or classes trying to maintain the survival of family lineage. In the past, cultures which had smaller groups with less clan members were forced to marry outside their group. This was done not only to increase the number of their clan but also to form allegiances with larger or more powerful groups.

Scholars in anthropology and sociology have argued ruminatively on the reason for exogamy marriage as a concept. Some have even propounded theories to support their argument. McLennan (1888) traced the origin of exogamy marriage to scarcity of wives. He posits that exogamy was due originally to scarcity of women, which obliged men to seek wives from other groups, including marriage by capture, and this in time grew into a custom. Edvard Westermarck disagrees with McLennan saying that exogamy marriage arose as the aversion to marriage between blood relatives or near kin, that is, in horror of incest. From a genetic point of view, aversion to breeding with close relatives results in fewer congenital diseases, because, where one gene is faulty, there is a greater chance that the other - being from a different line - is of another functional type and can take over. Outbreeding thus favours the condition of heterozygosis that is having two non-identical copies of a given gene. For Émile Durkheim the Sociologist, exogamy is derived from 'totemism.' He says it arose from a religious respect for the blood of a totemic clan, for the clan totem is a god and is especially in the blood.

Morgan (1871) maintains that exogamy was introduced to prevent marriage between blood relations, especially between brother and sister, which had been common in a previous state of promiscuity. Darwin with his survival of the fittest theory denies primitive promiscuous intercourse; and says exogamy arose from the strongest male driving the other males out of the group. Hill-Tout writes that exogamous rules arose for political reasons by marriage treaties between groups. Claude Levi-Strauss accepted Hill-Tout's position and introduced the "Alliance Theory" of exogamy, that is, that small groups must force their members to marry outside so as to build alliances with other groups. According to this theory, groups that engaged in exogamy would flourish, while those that didn't would die out, either literally or because they lacked ties for cultural and economic exchange, leaving them at a disadvantage. The exchange of men and/or women therefore served as a uniting force between groups.

Exogamous Marriage As a Method Of Conflict Resolution

In many African societies such as Igbo society, the choice of marriage partner is often limited to suitable persons from specific social groups. Endogamy as practiced by the Igbos is not the marriage of blood relation; this is an abomination in Igbo land. Chidili (1992) maintains that marriage of a woman is prohibited if the man she is planning to marry is or has been her ancestor, descendant, brother, father's brother, mother's brother, brother's son, sister's son (p. 27). Paul (2020) gives us more insight into this practice:

“The practice of exogamy is not, however, limited to marriages between near blood relations; it extends to instances where relationship by blood may be conjectural. In most societies such as the Igbo people of the East and South Eastern parts of Nigeria, people belonging to the same village, whether related by blood or conjectural are not permitted (sic) to marry themselves. People must not marry from the same village. It's an abomination. In some cases, villages that have bloodline linkages are not supposed to marry each other even when they are sparsely dispersed. Endogamy is an abomination among the Igbos and it constitutes incest. In a traditional Igbo community, endogamy is an abomination not only to the people but also to the gods of the land. In the ancient times, couple who commits endogamy is ostracized from the community even when it is committed ignorantly. But in recent times, civilization has bent the rule of the age-long practice (p.1).”

However, Tikkanen (1768) sternly believes that, “Endogamy, the practice of marrying someone from within one's own tribe or group, is the oldest social regulation of marriage. When the forms of communication with outside groups are limited, endogamous marriage is a natural consequence.” Cultural pressures to marry within one's social, economic, and ethnic group are still very strongly enforced

in some societies till date. Endogamy marriage within a social group was practiced for many centuries in Igbo land, when the society was still enclosed and no civilization but at the dawn of civilization and globalization, as people began to migrate from their immediate society/ancestral home, the need to intermarry and open up cultures to meet and interact with other cultures became a necessity. To this, Huntington (1993) asserts that the world is becoming a smaller place. The interactions between peoples of different civilizations are increasing; these increasing interactions intensify civilization consciousness and awareness of differences between civilizations and commonalities within civilizations (p.25). A typical example is the marriage among the *osu* (outcast) and *diala* (freeborn) in Igbo land, when an *osu* must marry an *osu* and cannot marry *diala*, and since there are not many *osu*, they marry themselves. With the advent of civilization some of the *osu* migrated and live in the cities than villages, because of the discrimination in their various villages at that time. But today with civilization, the story is different, as *osu* can now marry *diala*. Though, there are few places today in Igbo land where endogamy is still practiced. For instance, Amuzi is a village in Ahaizu Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State. There are nine clans that make up Amuzi, two out of the nine are not actually related to the rest, so anybody from the two clans can marry from the other seven. Those who enter this type of marriage amongst them are commonly refers to as *Omuru na olu lu na olu*, which means, 'born and married in the home.' This home could either mean clan or village. Another good example of endogamy in Igbo land is the Nkanu people of Enugu State. In this society, people marry even from their own clan, in as much as they are not siblings. Thus, apart from very few communities, Igbo people generally do not practice endogamy marriage.

Uchendu (2002) wrote that, “Different types of marriages existed in pre-colonial Igbo land. They included the normal marriage contract involving two exogamous families; marriage through pawning, which allowed fathers to use their daughters as collateral for loans but which was abolished during the colonial period by British legislation; concubinage; and marriage by abduction, practiced in Anioma (p.33).” In marriage by abduction, financially constrained young suitors abducted girls of their choice for marriage. This was done with the consent of the girls' parents, although not necessarily the girl's consent. Exogamous marriage can be a means to convert strangers into friends and of creating and maintaining personal and political alliances. Strangers according to Atifa (2013) are potential or actual enemies. Marriage is one of the primary ways of converting strangers into kin, of creating and maintaining personal and political alliances of affinity (affinal relationship). Going by Hill-Tout and Claude Levi Strauss position of “Alliance theory,” exogamous marriage was a kind of trade by barter. Where local rulers and very influential men contracted marriage by exchange for the purpose of establishing political, military, or economic links (Talbot 1967, p.193). Marriage by exchange required two men exchanging their children in marriage in order to form alliances necessary for the

political prestige and the military strength of the chief contractors who often were family or clan head. This type of marriage can also be called a pragmatic or arranged marriage in some cultures. Here, marriage is made easier by formal procedures of family or group politics. The chief planner and executor could be the head of family or clan or the clan chief priest who sets up or encourages the marriage; they sometimes engage a professional matchmaker to find a suitable spouse from the other group for an unmarried person in the clan. In some cases, the executor may choose a match for purposes other than marital harmony, such as to form a peace alliance with the other group or village.

Alliance theory became a necessity in Igbo land, when kingdoms, communities and clan were fighting wars. The war was on subduing a people and enslaving them, it was on expanding boundaries and increasing territories. It may also be on a particular piece of land or a natural resources found on the boundary or in a community. It was the case of survival of the fittest, thus the weak community tries to form alliance by marrying or giving out their daughter(s) in marriage to the other community to prevent conflict and make peace. During this period, exogamy marriage was an accepted response in many Igbo societies to resolving the conflicts. Kang (1979) avers that, "Modern theory of exogamy interprets the practice of exogamy as having survival value because it reduces conflict within and between exogamous groups and increases social solidarity." There are basically three theories in favour of exogamy marriage; Survival value, conflicting loyalties and alliance theory. Proponents of survival value theory like Darwin, argues that exogamy serves two primary functions: first, it reduces the likelihood of conflict within the exogamous unit. Second, it creates cross-cutting ties or alliance between exogamous units. Exogamy marriage saves a weaker clan from being annihilated by the stronger clan, because by marriage, the two clans have been bonded together as one. Hence, during conflict, fighting the neighbour is as good as fighting the self. Taylor (1888) as quoted by Atifa wrote that savage tribes face the alternatives of marrying out or being killed out and he quoted these lines from Genesis 34:16: "then we will give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people (2013, p.353)." Conflict loyalties theory (Colson, 1953) emphasizes and solidifies cross-cutting loyalties through affinal ties. Here, the weaker clan submit to the stronger one and become loyal to them just as a wife submits in loyalty to her husband. Alliance theory views marriage as the primary, elementary form of exchange. Kang (1979) believes that, "The positive value of exchange ensures alliances or promotes social solidarity among groups in the society. Exogamy relieves tension within the exogamous unit because it eliminates competition over its own women."

Conclusion

Marriage is one of the institutions which have a significant role in the functioning and keeping harmony within family and tribes in Igbo society. Exogamous marriage

plays a significant role in building political alliance with two different clans who are not related by blood or ancestor. In it, women play very crucial role in making peace within the restricted clans. It is a political or economic exchange of men and/or women for making peace and uniting different culture/ancestral group together. Endogamous marriage as practiced in the primitive days is an abomination in Igbo society today, though, villages take some exceptions. Therefore, exogamy was naturally orchestrated by civilization bringing people together and exposing closed cultures to the world, and by political alliance. Exogamous marriage as a method of conflict resolution in Igbo society creates peaceful co-existence amongst warring communities. The aim is to unite, promote and sustain social harmony. It establishes cordial relationship with neighbouring community which was perceived hitherto as “enemy.” Exogamy leads to communal unity, solidarity and avoids ethnocentrism. It also leads to love and sympathy between two opposing groups or tribes.

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