

THE ROLE OF FAMILY UNIT IN SUSTAINING OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

By

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Introduction:

It was told that at the beginning, the Creator made man and later, a woman who formed a partner with him. We were not informed that such partnership resulted to marriage. However, it was told that the first man and woman produced children. It was understood that production of children continued without the institution of marriage. What this means is that “Primitives” were sexually promiscuous, incapable of having families because children would not recognize their fathers. At that time, any woman could choose any man with whom to produce a child or children and could choose as many as she wanted at different times; producing children of different fathers who do not recognize their products. At that time, one could have sexual intercourse with one’s blood relation without knowing it and even when one knows it, one does not feel to have committed incest. This could be how humanity increased from one man and one woman. During the time, children of such interactions were recognized by their mothers’ names and not the fathers’. Then, the men folk used to behave like animals that would impregnate the women folk and go away and could not care about the result of their relationships as in Yunang Province of China and Botswana. They do not have a group of people related by blood with father and mother as members.

It should be known that before the 17th century in Europe, there was no term for people related by blood or marriage and sharing residence. It is learnt that the word, family came from the Latin word familia = household and famulus = servant. Family therefore includes the master of the household (pater familias), his servants, and his descendants. The wife of the pater familias could be either a part of her husband’s family or part of her birth family (marriage in manu or sine manu). In the late 17th century, “family” began to denote parents and their children.

In African society, everybody knows what a family is, but trying to find a widely accepted definition is actually very hard. I’ve been looking at how various writers define families and the following are some examples. I’m not going to comment on them except to say that historically, like today, families take many forms¹ and so I believe we need to have inclusive definitions of family that recognises the diversity of experiences in relation to families. (Some of the following do not pass this test!) It is worth remembering that defining family can be a political strategy to exclude some people. For example, in 2004 the Australian Marriage Act was amended by the Howard Government to specifically exclude same sex couples from marrying.

Definitions of family

A group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit... A group of people related by blood or marriage.² The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially

¹ Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Reinventing the family: In search of new lifestyles*. Malden, Mass.: Polity Press.

² Oxford Dictionaries

approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting couple.³

Two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who are usually resident in the same household.⁴ A family is a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family.⁵

A group of persons directly linked by kin connections, adult members of which assume responsibility of caring for children.⁶ Two or more people who share goals and values, have long-term commitments to one another and reside usually in the same dwelling.⁷ A network of related kin.⁸ Family signifies the subjective meaning of intimate connections rather than formal, objective blood or marriage ties.⁹

A family is a group of individuals in which there is a generational connection present (i.e., a parent-child relationship is found). Additionally, family members provide close intimate contact (usually characterized by deeply held commitment, trust, respect, and a sense of longer term obligation. It is assumed that sexual intimacy is an element of the relationship between the parents and that this family group seeks to achieve goals by acquiring, allocating and distributing resources (i.e., time, money, space, and close personal contact).¹⁰

A family is “a psychosocial group constituted by at least one adult member and one or more others who work as a group toward mutual need fulfillment, nurturance, and development.”¹¹ A family care giving unit might consist of a couple; a mother, father and children; a single parent and child; grandparent and grandchildren; a sibling group; a circle of friends; or **however that family defines itself.**¹² **Perhaps in the broadest sense of the word, a family is a group of people who have intimate social relationships and have a history together.**¹³

Institution of family

There is a belief that once one is born, one must beget another for continuity of humanity. It is on this that Igbo people do everything they can to make sure that every marriageable adult gets married. To Basden, Marriage has a foremost place in Igbo social economy. It looks upon the horizon of every maid and youth as an indispensable function to be fulfilled with as little delay as possible after reaching the age of puberty.¹⁴ Since the Igbo are a patriarchal people, marriage is deemed an indispensable factor for the continuation of the family line of descent. It has been observed that children occupy the central point in Igbo marriage. The first and foremost consideration is the fertility of the couple. Parents long for this and

³ Murdock, 1949 quoted in Steel, L., Kidd, W., & Brown, A. (2012). *The family* (2nd ed.). Houndmills, Basingstoke England: Palgrave MacMillan.p.2

⁴ The Australian Bureau of Statistics.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau

⁶ Steel, L., Kidd, W., & Brown, A. (2012). *The family* (2nd ed.). Houndmills, Basingstoke England: Palgrave MacMillan.

⁷ LoveToKnow Family

⁸ Steel, L., Kidd, W., & Brown, A. (2012). *The family* (2nd ed.). Houndmills, Basingstoke England: Palgrave MacMillan.P. 2.

⁹ Lindsay, J., & Dempsey, D. (2009). *Families, relationships and intimate life*. South Melbourne,: Oxford University Press. P.6.

¹⁰ Day, R. D. (2010). *Introduction to family processes* (5th ed.). New York: Routledge. P.14

¹¹ Edwards, A. P., & Graham, E. E. (2009). The Relationship Between Individuals' Definitions of Family and Implicit Personal Theories of Communication. *Journal of Family Communication*, 9(4), 191-208. doi: 10.1080/15267430903070147. P.193

¹² Family Ties.

¹³ Leeder, E. J. (2004). *The family in global perspective : a gendered journey*. Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage Publications.P.25

¹⁴ Basden, G.T. .Niger Ibos. Ibadan: Univesity Press

the father of the family requests this every morning in his kola nut prayer. The mother begs for it while giving cult to her *chi* (personal god) during annual festival. In other words, if one may ask the ordinary Igbo man or woman why he desires to marry, the spontaneous answer will be: "I want to marry in order to beget my own children, to get a family like my parents."

Unfortunately, sometimes, children do not come as people expect. When this happens and no pregnancy within three months of marriage, both families become apprehensive. They will start moving from one herbalist to another; from one prayer house to another; from one deity and or diviner to another, inquiring of what must have caused the delay and what must be done to salvage the situation. This is as Shawn Grover and John F. Helliwell assert that People typically enter into marriage with the expectation that their marriage and their relationship with their spouse will make their lives richer and more satisfying.¹⁵ In the course of searching for the reason and solution to the problems, the woman's position in the new family becomes unstable as the blame for sterility goes to her first. It is either she is accused of being involved in cult of changeling, incurred the anger of a god or in recent time, that she might have got involved in abortion through which her womb might have gone bad. It takes only the intervention of Providence for her to be washed off the accusation by suddenly getting pregnant and giving birth to a baby whether male or female though, male is preferred.

The appearance of a child in such a family however, ignites love into the already battered relationship among the couple and among the two families. This is visually seen and evidenced in the names given to children eventually born into such family. Such names are Nwadigo (Child has come), Nwabundu (child is life), Nwabundo (child is shadow), *Nwabụwa* (a child is the entire world). According to Celestine A. Obi, This name exposes the Igbo man's sentiment and the high-water mark of his ambitions.¹⁶ Among the Igbo, other things in life rank second to this desire.

Now that children have come into the family, it is the duty of the family to train them to become useful and belong to the society. Being useful and belonging have to do with learning all they need to know about their immediate environment and their external society. And what are the things they need to know about the society? They need to know their culture **which marks them out distinctively from other human societies in the family of humanity**. Culture, as it is usually understood, entails a totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it marks them out from other peoples or societies.¹⁷ These peculiar traits go on to include the people's **language, dressing, music, work, arts, religion, dancing and so on**. It also goes on to include a people's **social norms, taboos and values**. Values here are to be understood as beliefs that are held about what is right and wrong and what is important in life.

The Concept and Meaning of Culture

Edward B. Taylor is reputed as the scholar who first coined and defined culture in his work *Primitive Culture* (1871) and reprinted in 1958. Taylor saw culture as that complex whole which includes **knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs or any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society**.¹⁸ This definition captures the exhaustive nature of culture. One would have expected that this definition would be a univocal one – but this is not so. In fact, there are as many definitions of culture as there are scholars who are interested in the phenomenon. Culture embraces a wide range of human phenomena, material achievements and norms, beliefs, feelings, manners, morals

¹⁵ Shawn Grover & John F. Helliwell HOW'S LIFE AT HOME? NEW EVIDENCE ON MARRIAGE AND THE SET POINT FOR HAPPINESS. NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH. Working Paper 20794. 1050 Massachusetts Avenue Cambridge, MA 02138 December 2014. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w20794>

¹⁶ Celestine A. Obi, *Marriage among the Igbo of Nigeria*

¹⁷ Gabriel E. Idang Department of Philosophy, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

¹⁸ Taylor, E.B. 1991. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*. 2nd ed. London: John Murray. P. 189

and so on. It is the patterned way of life shared by a particular group of people that claim to share a single origin or descent. In an attempt to capture the exhaustive nature of culture, Taylor sees it as the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours.¹⁹ Culture serves to distinguish a people from others, and Aziza asserts that: Culture...refers to the totality of the pattern of behaviour of a particular group of people.²⁰ It includes everything that makes them distinct from any other group of people for instance, their greeting habits, dressing, social norms and taboos, food, songs and dance patterns, rites of passages from birth, through marriage to death, traditional occupations, religious as well as philosophical beliefs. Culture is passed on from generation to generation. The acquisition of culture is a result of the socialisation process. Explaining how culture is passed on as a generational heritage, Fafunwa writes that: The child just grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people.²¹ He imbibes it. Culture, in traditional society, is not taught; it is caught. The child observes, imbibes and mimics the action of his elders and siblings. He watches the naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funeral obsequies. He witnesses the coronation of a king or chief, the annual yam festival, the annual dance and acrobatic displays of guilds and age groups or his relations in the activities. The child in a traditional society cannot escape his cultural and physical environments.

This shows that every human being who grows up in a particular society is likely to become infused with the culture of that society, whether knowingly or unknowingly during the process of social interaction. We do not need to have all the definitions of culture and its defining characteristics for us to understand the concept and meaning of culture. Even though there are as many definitions of culture as there are writers, there is an element of similarity that runs through them all. This singular underlying characteristic is the attempt to portray and capture culture as the entire or total way of life of a particular group of people. Etuk is of the opinion that an entire way of life would embody, among other things, what the people think of themselves and the universe in which they live – their world view – in other words, how they organise their lives in order to ensure their survival.²² It can be safely stated that there can be no culture without a society. It can also be said that culture is uniquely human and shared with other people in a society.

Culture is selective in what it absorbs or accepts from other people who do not belong to a particular cultural group. Culture is to be understood as the way of life of a people. This presupposes the fact that there can be no people without a culture. To claim that there is no society without a culture would, by implication, mean that such a society has continued to survive without any form of social organisation or institutions, norms, beliefs and taboos, and so on; and this kind of assertion is quite untrue. That is why even some Western scholars who may be tempted to use their cultural categories in judging other distinctively different people as “primitive”, often deny that such people have history, religion and even philosophy; but cannot say that they have no culture

Culture has been classified into its material and non-material aspects. While material culture refers to the visible tactile objects which man is able to manufacture for the purposes of human survival; non-material culture comprises of the norms and mores of the people. While material culture is concrete and takes the form of artifacts and crafts, non-material culture is abstract but has a very pervasive influence on the lives of the people of a particular culture. Hence beliefs about what is good and what is bad, together with norms and taboos, are all good examples of non-material culture. From the foregoing, it is obvious that culture is shared since it consists of cherished values or beliefs that are shared by a group, lineage, and religious sect and so on. Apart from this, culture is dynamic in the sense that it is

¹⁹ Bello, S. 1991. Culture and Decision Making in Nigeria. Lagos: National Council for Arts and Culture

²⁰ Aziza, R.C. 2001. “The Relationship between Language use and Survival of Culture: the case of Umobo youth”. Nigerian Language Studies. No.4. P. 31

²¹ Fafunwa, A.B. 1974. History of Education in Nigeria. London: George Allen and Unwin. P.48

²² Etuk, U.A. 2002. Religion and Cultural Identity. Ibadan: HopePublication.P.25

continually changing. Culture is not static. This paper is not alone in this observation as Antia states that culture is not fixed and permanent. It is always changed and modified by man through contacts with and absorption of other peoples' cultures, a process known as assimilation.²³ Etuk has also observed that cultures are not static, they change. Indeed culture needs to change; which wants to remain static and resistant to change would not be a living culture.²⁴ We can see that since culture is carried by people and people do change their social patterns and institutions, beliefs and values and even skills and tools of work, then culture cannot but be an adaptive system. Once an aspect of culture adjusts or shifts in response to changes from within or outside the environment, then other aspects of the culture are affected, whether directly or indirectly. It is necessary to know that each element of a culture (such as material procedures, food processing or greeting patterns) is related to the whole system. It is in this respect that we can see that even a people's technology is part of their culture.

Idiong (1994: 46) opines that there are some misconceptions that are widely held about 'culture' as a word. Such misconceptions can and often lead some persons to have a negative perception of 'culture' and all that it stands for. Such persons raise their eyebrows and suddenly frown at the word 'culture' as they in their minds' eyes visualize masquerades, idol worshipping, traditional jamborees and other activities they consider bizarre that go with culture.²⁵ This "misconception", we believe, does not appear to be widespread but the posture may have arisen from a partial understanding of the meaning of culture because as we shall see, culture generally, and African culture in particular, is like a two-sided coin. It has soul lifting, glamorous and positive dimensions even though it is not completely immune from some negative outcomes. African culture, as Ezedike writes: ...refers to the sum total of shared attitudinal inclinations and capabilities, art, beliefs, moral codes and practices that characterize Africans.²⁶ It can be conceived as a continuous, cumulative reservoir containing both material and non-material elements that are socially transmitted from one generation to another. African culture, therefore, refers to the whole lot of African heritage. We could see that African culture embraces the totality of the African way of life in all its forms and ramifications.

Nando Culture and Values

Having looked at the concept and meaning of culture and having established the place of values in a culture, I want to bring this down to the Nando context. A culture is an embodiment of different values with all of them closely related to each other. That is why one can meaningfully talk about social, moral, religious, political, aesthetic and even economic values of a culture. Let us now look at these values piece-meal, as this would give us an understanding how they manifest in Nando culture and the importance being attached to them.

Social Values

Social values can simply be seen as those beliefs and practices that are practised by any particular society. The society has a way of dictating the beliefs and practices that are performed either routinely by its members or performed whenever the occasion demands. Hence, we have festivals, games, sports and dances that are peculiar to different societies. These activities are carried out by the society because they are seen to be necessary. Some social values, especially in Nando society, cannot exactly be separated from religious, moral, political values and so on. This is why we can see that in a traditional Old Nando society like in Dagama land (Ikem), festivals which were celebrated often had religious undertones – they ended with sacrifices that were offered to certain deities on special days in order to attract their goodwill on the members of the society. Social values are backed by customary laws. They comprise of those

²³ Antia, O.R.U. 2005. Akwa Ibom Cultural Heritage: Its Incursion by Western Culture and its Renaissance. Uyo: Abbny Publishers. P/17

²⁴ . Etuk, U.A. 2002. Religion and Cultural Identity. Ibadan: HopePublication.

²⁵ Idiong, S.O. 1994. Culture in Education. In Sociology of Education: A Book of Readings. Calabar: Edigraph Communications.

²⁶ . Ezedike, E.O. 2009. African Culture and the African Personality. From Footmarks to Landmarks on African Philosophy. Somolu: Obaroh and Ogbinaka Publishers. P.455

traditional carnivals that a people see as necessary for their meaningful survival. Let us illustrate with an example: the Ancestral festival (*alommuo*) as practised in Dagama land has a way of encouraging hard work and checking famine. It was a thing of shame for any man to buy yams for his family within the first two to three weeks after the festival. Doing so would expose a man as being too lazy. These festivals really discipline the society because nobody is to do anything when it is not time. For instance, new yam could not be given to any deity until *alommuo* festival has been celebrated. This is because the ancestors have to eat first before any other spirit or god.

Moral Values

Nando culture is embedded in strong moral considerations. It has a system of various beliefs and customs which every individual ought to keep in order to live long and to avoid bringing curses on them and others. Adultery, stealing and other forms of immoral behaviour are strongly discouraged and whenever a suspected offender denies a charge brought against him, he would be taken to a soothsayer or made to take an oath for proof of innocence. In Ikem for instance, *ita* (ordeal) is very popular as a method of crime detection. The *ita* handler who specializes in it, sets a bowl of water in front of *ita* god, asks the suspect to kneel and deny before it of not being guilty of the crime; deeps a cow tail into the water and inserts the drops into the suspect's two eyes. The guiltless can happily get up and go while the water drops inside the wrong doer's eyes, turns to a red/black colour grass seeds (*chichangene*). When this happens, one can rightly guess the kind of pains the culprit experiences. The fear of being made to go through such ordeal or to be stripped naked and taken round the community as in the case of stealing, adequately checks crimes of some sort. African proverbs and wise sayings have a rich repository of wisdom. The proverbs warn the African against evil conduct and, according to Mbiti, are therefore a major source of African wisdom and a valuable part of African heritage.²⁷ Nando culture has a moral code that forbids doing harm to a relative, a kinsman, an in-law, a foreigner and a stranger, except when such a person is involved in an immoral act; and if that is the case, it is advisable to stay away from such an individual and even at death, their corpses would not be dignified with a noble burial in a coffin and grave.

Religious Values

Religion in Nando seems to be the fulcrum around which every activity revolves. Hence religious values are not toyed with. Nando traditional religion, wherever it is practised, has some defining characteristics. For instance, it possesses the concept of a Supreme Being which is invisible and indigenous. It holds a belief in the existence of the human soul and the soul does not die with the body. Nando traditional religion also has the belief that good and bad spirits do exist and that these spirits are what make communication with the Supreme Being possible. Above all, it holds a moral sense of justice and truth and the knowledge of the existence of good and evil.²⁸ Nando religious values seem to permeate every facet of the life Nando person and the people believe that anything can be imbued with spiritual significance. The worship of different deities on different days goes on to show that the Nando people hold their religious values in high esteem. Sorcerers and diviners are seen to be mediating between God and man and interpreting God's wishes to the mortal. The diviners, sorcerers and soothsayers help to streamline human behaviour in Nando and people are afraid to commit offences because of the fear of being exposed by the diviners and sorcerers.

Political Values

Nando society definitely has political institutions with heads of such institutions as respected individuals. The most significant thing about the traditional society is that the political hierarchy begins

²⁷ Mbiti, J.S. 1977. Introduction to African Religion. London: Heinemann Books. P.8

²⁸ Umoh, J.O. 2005. Elements of Sociology of Religion. Ikot Ekpene: Iwoh Publishers. P.68

with the family. Each family has a family head; each village has a village head. From these, we have clan head and above the clan head, is the paramount ruler. This kind of political arrangement is observable in the Southern part of Nigeria. Prior to the coming of Western colonization and its subsequent subversion of the African traditional political arrangements, Nando had her council of chiefs with Nwa eze Nando as the head, advisers, Ndijichie, Irunaanọ, Ojiana, and so on. It is believed that disloyalty to a leader is disloyalty to God and the position of leadership is hereditary. I confirmed this while observing a meeting of one kindred in Enuagu, Akatọ and in objection to the head of family's ruling, one of the elders asked the family head to tell them who said all he told them; he said, "Ọ bụ Chukwu kwulu ya maka na ọ burọ mụ meli onwe mụ onyeisi unu. Ọ bụ Chukwu ka ọ masịlị na mụ ya-abụ onyeisi meli o ji wepu ndị toro mụ. Ya bụ na iva ọ bụna m kwulu nnonwa bụ Chukwu develi mụ ndu kwulu ye. However, despite the hereditary pattern of Nando traditional political leadership, there are still some checks and balances but there is nothing like one usurping powers. Antia writes that such checks and balances were enforced by the existence of ... societal norms, traditional symbols and objects.²⁹ Hence, with respect to political values, we can see that it is inextricably linked with religious, social, moral values and so on. It is the political value that a people hold which makes them accord respect to their political institutions and leaders.

Aesthetic Values

The Qmabala concept of aesthetics is predicated on the fundamental traditional belief system which gave vent to the production of the art. Now art is usually seen as human enterprise concerned with the production of aesthetic objects. Thus, when a people in their leisure time try to produce or create objects that they consider admirable, their sense of aesthetic value is brought to bear. If we see art as being concerned with the production of aesthetic objects, then we can truly say of Qmabala aesthetic value that it is immensely rich. Let us have an example: the sense of beauty of the Nando people is epitomized in their fattened maidens whom they call *agboghobia*. These fattened maidens are confined to a room where they are fed with traditional cuisines. The idea behind it is to prepare the maiden and make her look as good, healthy and beautiful as possible for her husband to be. This is usually done before marriage. It is a period when a mother takes time to appreciate her daughter for keeping herself the way God created her till she gets to ripe age of marriage. Sometimes, if a maiden gets married before her age mate's time for this ceremony, it is her husband's responsibility to do that in addition to rites of *ikene ogọ* for making her wife a woman. The Western model of beauty is not like this. It is often pictured as slim-looking young ladies who move in staggered steps. This shows that the Qmabala aesthetic value and sense of what is beautiful is markedly different. Aesthetic value is what informs a people's arts and crafts as it affects their sense of what is beautiful as opposed to that which is ugly. The aesthetic value of a society influences the artist in his endeavour to produce aesthetic objects that are acceptable to the society in which he lives.

Economic Values

Economic values of the traditional Qmabala culture are marked by cooperation. The traditional economy, which is mainly based on farming and fishing, was co-operative in nature. In Nando, for instance, friends and relatives would come and assist in doing farm work not because they will be paid but so that if it happens that they need such assistance in the near future, they will be sure to find it. Children were seen to provide the main labour force. That is why a man took pride in having many of them, especially males. The synergetic nature of Nando society is what made two or more individuals to

²⁹ Antia, O.R.U. 2005. Akwa Ibom Cultural Heritage: Its Incursion by Western Culture and its Renaissance. Publishers. P.145

pool their resources together and uplift each other economically through the system of contributions called *osusu* or *ọlụovuvu* (exchange labour). Apart from this, they even cooperated in the building of houses and doing other things for their fellow members. When any of them was in difficulty, all members rallied around and helped him or her. Hence, I can state without fear of contradiction that the economic values of the traditional Qmabala society such as the Nando were founded on hard work and cooperation. Having looked at some of the values that characterize the Qmabala culture, it is important to state here that these values are inextricably bound together and are to be comprehended in their totality as Nando (Qmabala) cultural values.

Igbo marriage process:

Before marriage, a young man who loves a girl would speak to his parents about her. The parents will examine not only her physical beauty, but also her physical, mental and moral fitness, then her resourcefulness, graceful temper, smartness and general ability to work well. Her parental background must also be investigated. Parents inquire very meticulously vices like murder, theft, lying, obstinate disobedience, wanton violence and other undesirable qualities would be introduced into their family. If the girl's mother is known to have been lazy, idle, gossipy, quarrelsome, way-ward, insubordinate to her husband, it may be concluded that the daughter would have these vices. This conclusion is based, for what it is worth, on the assertion that daughters usually take after their mothers. "All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his". It is necessary to note that the inquiry is done by both parties - that is, the family of the girl and that of the young man. Traces of insanity, epilepsy, theft, frequent, sudden and unripe death are also being inquired of among the two families trying to get connected.

Once the inquiries have been satisfactorily completed, the two families now look forward to the settlement of the bride-wealth. Young people about to marry may exchange visits, which are regulated by custom and supervised by the parents and or guardian of either party. This is for them the occasion to know more and be more interested in each other. Basden here makes an interesting observation: The word 'Love' according to the European interpretation is not found in the Igbo vocabulary.³⁰ And in his other book on the Igbo he continues: "The nearest approach to the idea is *ifunaanya*. - That is, 'to look in the eye' in a favourable manner. Among the Igbo, the period of courtship comprises the first meeting, other meetings of the two people concerned, the mutual inquiries conducted by both extended families and the state of friendship leading into the actual celebration of the marriage. If by 'Love' Basden means mere sentimental **or** emotional feeling which sooner or later ebbs away with time, or the number of years of living together, then he may be right to say that the Igbo husband and wife do not love each other. For the Igbo, love is much deeper, more important than the emotional feigns. For -them love is not merely motivated by physical beauty. They accept completely the saying that: "Marriage, the happiest bond of love might be, if hearts were only joined, when hearts agree". Love is the sum total of the physical, psychological, economical, social and moral attraction which exercises a magnetic influence on the young man and the young lady, on the one hand and on their extended families on the other. Their attraction as we see here is not merely physical. There is in their love mutual trust, confidence and mutual self-giving. Each feels proud of and satisfied with having the other as partner in the difficult but noble task of raising a family. This is what the Igbo of the past and today generally understand by "*ifunaanya*".

Since the people live their lives together and since families are closely knit, courtship is not a private affair. The family of the young man invites the girl several times to stay a native Igbo week (four

³⁰ Basden G. T.

days) at time with them. During this time, she studies the man and his family while they in their turn observe and admire her ways.

The Young Man before Marriage

From all we have seen so far, it is evident that the Igbo do not step into marriage without preparation. It is a step which must be taken with the eyes wide open. In what therefore does the preparation consist? In other words, what education is a young man given as a preparation for his marriage? What should he know and how should he behave himself when he has grown to the age of marriage? This stage is well described by Spornkli as follows: "As soon as a boy comes to the age of reason, he undergoes a civic juvenile test by which he is initiated into the masquerade cult otherwise called *iba na mmụọ* (the walk to the spirit land)". By this ceremony he is initiated into the secrets of *mmanwụ*; the secrets which, he can never reveal to anyone of the female sex nor to the yet uninitiated of his own sex. This is an age-old ordeal meant to test the psychological balance and the sense of responsibility of the boy. It is a rigorous training in personal discipline and strict preservation of secrets. Any young man who reveals these secrets is counted a big disgrace to his family. In the past he would either be killed or sold into slavery to a distant town. His family would be subjected to the payment of many heavy penalties. Thus the young man must be able to think his thoughts and keep them to himself. Reason above all must govern his emotional life. He has to prove his worth. As the adolescent waxed into an adult man, according to a respondent, Adil Ajana, he must build his own separate hut in his father's compound. He has his own weapons, farm implements and a barn.... It was observed that such a young man has to distinguish oneself in competitive activities like wrestling, dancing, fighting, work and skill, especially when girls were among the spectators. These he should be doing some years after the initiation into the *mmanwụ* society. Of course Spornkli was not very accurate in his estimation of the age for initiation. It takes place years after coming to the age of reason (10-15yrs). After this then the youth begins to learn to tap palm trees for wine. At this stage he performs the ceremonial rites, for official entry into his age-grade. He thus gets into the category of those obliged to pay tax to the state.

Where the men have a lucrative occupation, like the people of Awka who were famous for black-smithing, people of Ikem and Nando who also are up to date traditional medicine practitioners, the young man joins the working group and so begins in time to earn money rapidly. In concord with this, Ogbalu observes that Nando people were the traditional medicine healers who went round to cure people of their illnesses.³¹ It was also observed that the men of Nri are the priests whose presence is necessary for a valid celebration of the ceremonial rites in connection with the coronation of kings and rites of purification whenever there is murder case. They travel far and wide', as Basden explained" in the performance of these priestly functions³². Basden also testifies that the men of Umudioka - Dunukofia go from place to place to practice their trade - as they were the renowned experts in the cutting of *ichi* (tattooing the face, as a sign of mature manhood) or tribal marks. Young men born in these towns on growing up follow the trade of the men and easily make money to build their own houses, pay the bride wealth, and make initial payments in some of the common titles.

The Girl before Marriage

In the sub-title, love and courtship, we saw that inquiries are made by both parties to the proposed marriage. If the results are unsatisfactory, the marriage is dropped. To be able to pass the test of these inquiries both the youth and the maid have got preparations to make. We have seen the picture of the young man before marriage. About the girl before marriage, Basden has the following comment to make,

³¹ Ogbalu, F. C. Igbo Institutiond. Onitsha: Versity Press

³² Basden, G. T. Niger Ibos. Ibadan: University Press

'By the time they are nine or ten, they are regularly employed in fetching supplies of water. They take part daily in such duties as the sweeping of the compound, the rubbing of the house, the collection of firewood and the preparation of food. Soon after daylight the women folk leave the house in order to bring in the morning supply of water..... On market days, practically the whole female population move to the market place either to trade or to enjoy the general entertainment such gatherings afford... "From the age of four and five, the women are taught to balance tiny pots of water on their heads so that they have a stately carriage. The job that takes precedence over all others is the visit with the water pot to the stream or spring....". This is the initiation of the girl into household duties and her success in this field counts very much in winning her a suitable husband. The way she goes about her duties will recommend her as a suitable and capable housewife. Her family background and the character of the mother have a lot to add or to subtract as the case may be. Since in the past, practically all girls were meant for marriage, parents usually trained their daughters as future house-wives. They have their age-grades and dance groups. The Igbo girl at this stage begins to imitate the other girls of her age group and becomes more self conscious. Girls usually take pride in their physical features, especially where they have been fully developed and well-formed without natural defects. According to a respondent, No girl would go to the public assembly without first carefully adorning herself. "Wristlets, ear-rings, necklaces and rolls of *jigida* on the waist were the prominent and coveted ornaments. To these, Basden adds the following: "More widespread are the brass leg rings. For the complete outfit these are graduated in size from the ankle upwards, the number of rings depending on the size of the girl. Up to a certain age the rings must finish below the knees, at full age they must extend above the knees... These are worn prior to marriage and never after". Besides these, bracelets of ivory or sections of huge elephant tusks are worn by rich ladies or women of high rank. The anklets are about nine inches in depth by from two to three inches in thickness. It is not at all comfortable to wear these, but the girls have to put up with them as being imposed by fashion. It is not only the Igbo girls that have had to undergo acute physical discomfort to find a husband. It has been known that western women used to wear a steel-framed corset, while in China mothers used to bind the feet of their daughters very tightly in order to achieve the love-fetish and attraction which lay in small and dainty feet. All these are equally of "The village belles take particular pains to attract the attention of eligible young men and do not hesitate to advertise their personal charms. On gala days, every available ornament is brought into requisition. The girls revel in dancing and seize every opportunity of displaying their charms". Some Igbo girls add poise to their erectness by deliberately walking upright and chest-out giving room to pointed breasts.

In the choice of a wife, the Igbo gives preference to a girl with long thin limbs which are regarded as signs of fast growth and hugeness later on in married life. Whereas ideas of female beauty vary from people to people, the horror of disease or of physical deformity can be said to be universal. Nevertheless, what is beautiful to a European or to an Asiatic may seem repulsive to an African It is all a matter of taste. For instance in Western Europe, fashion may decide the position and width of women's waists, and corsets be used to emphasize them, while obesity in a woman goes against the established standard of female beauty. However among the Kirghiz of Central Asia and some West African peoples fatness in a woman is regarded as attractive. Also among the Igbo in the past, a prospective wife was set aside in a hut and fed and instructed without much exercise until she was well prepared physically and psychologically to assume the role of house wife and after a short time, that of a mother. This practice which no longer exists today was referred to *ineezi* (returning to the fattening house).

According to **Celestine A. Obi**,³³ as a general rule, fat young girls with stout brawny joined limbs (called *ukwu nchi* - grasscutters short legs) are not ranked among the beautiful according to Igbo standards. This is because such usually scarcely ever added an inch to their low stature later- in married life. A huge woman (not necessarily a fat one) is the choice of most people. This has many obvious advantages, for not only that she commands respect and is the pride of her husband, also she will be able to do farm work and in childbearing, she would generate her kind. Furthermore, it has an added social

³³ Celestine A. Obi. unpublished doctoral thesis submitted to Pontifical Urban University, Rome 1970

advantage. Such a woman because of her size is easily recognizable in the assembly of women. Given the average skill and intelligence she usually becomes the leader of her dance group or the president of the women's council.

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