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The Evolution of Marital Practices among the Tiv: A Critical Appraisal

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Abstract

Marital practices among African communities have evolved over the years. Colonialism, urbanization 'inter-ethnic blending' and globalization has proved to be the most prominent factors influencing these processes. Among the Tiv of central Nigeria, the evolution of the concept of marriage has mirrored the transforming social-cultural fabric of an African people. The Tiv marriage system embodied the philosophy that created bonding within the '*tyo*' (kindred), however, with the far-reaching changes that emerged in the colonial and post-colonial era, that concept is presently at risk of losing its relevance among the Tiv. The giving away of the bride was based on the '*Yamshe*' (Exchange) system of marriage. Yamshe which literally means exchange or trading in value demanded the equalization of value in a marriage contract and ensured the preservation of that value. The theoretical frame of cultural change presents the most valid methodology of examining this phenomenon in this research. The paper traces the various cultural incarnations of marriage systems among the Tiv and how this evolutionary process has produced a hybrid culture. It argues that the collapse of the '*Yamshe*' system may have enabled the cultural integration of the Tiv with other Nigerian marriage systems. Nevertheless, it fractured the cultural collective consciousness of the Tiv people. This cultural consciousness, on the other hand, is being rebuilt within the larger social construct of the 'Nigerian culture'

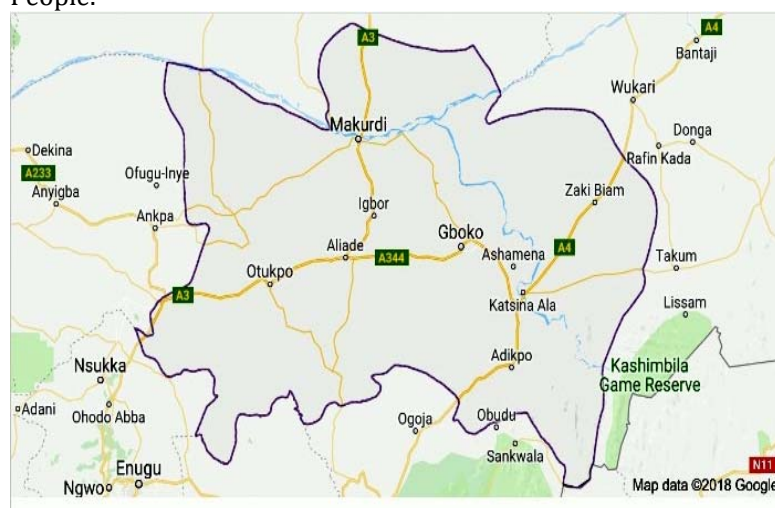
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Introduction.

The Tiv constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in present-day Nigeria. They number close to 6 million and are largely settled across the middle belt region of the country as illustrated in figure 1.1 below. The demographic spread of the Tiv people cut across Benue and Taraba states. with few exceptions in Taraba, the Tiv are predominantly farmers who possess a rich warrior tradition and were considered

restive by early colonial writers on Tiv history. The Tiv, a subset of the Bantu language group, migrated to their present settlements in the Benue river basins in Present-day Nigeria. Early traditions trace Tiv migrations from *Swem* across *Bamenda* highlands in present-day Cameroon over the rivers *Moan* and *Mkomon*. (Makar, 10)

Figure:1.1 Map of Benue State which predominantly Inhabit Tiv People.



Source: Google Maps.

The Tiv also possess unique marital institutions that form the core of the Tiv social structure and also determine the position of women within Tiv society. Marriage represents a key aspect of Tiv culture that enabled social cohesion. This paper will discuss the relevance of Tiv marital systems within the cultural context of pre-colonial society and then appraise the manner in which they have evolved. Largely this has occurred through the instrumentality of cultural copulation making the end product a hybrid. The practices to be considered include the following: Exchange marriage (*Yamshe* or *kwase u musan a musan*); Unending Bride Price (*Kem*); Consensual Kidnapping or eloping (*Yevisse yem nom*); 'Bastard marriages' and Wives as hospitality Packages. The above shades of cultural dynamics in Tiv marital systems are not the exclusive variations available. The 20th and 21st century has ushered in new realities regarding the marriage systems in Nigeria as a whole that

are still in their evolutionary process. Expectations in this regard are discussed in the concluding portion of the paper. The Understanding and 'problematization' of the discourse within this paper is presented on the platform of the theoretical framework that dominate cultural change and transformation.

Theory of Cultural Evolution and Tiv Marriage Systems

Understanding the theory of cultural evolution begs the question of the true nature of culture itself. To this end Roger M. Keesing argues that "we can no longer say comfortably that 'culture' is the heritage of learned symbolic behavior that makes humans human...we can no longer say comfortably that 'a culture' is the heritage people in a particular society share."(73) His doubts arise from advances in society that have placed the burden of evolution on culture. This has led Keesing to believe that an important expansion of cultural theory has come from viewing cultures in evolutionary perspective. It is in this light that Tiv marital systems are examined in this paper.

In this regard, historians, anthropologist, ethnographers and sociologist seem to be coalescing towards a unified theory of cultural change that is underplayed by evolutionary synthesis. This is true in The light of the fact that the idea that evolution is not limited to the biological realm, but also applies to culture has a long history, and goes back at least to Darwin (Darwin)(Atkinson & Gray, 513-526)(Mesoudi et al. 1-11). Darwin saw clear analogies, for example, between the way in which languages and species evolve, noting that "proofs that both have been developed through a gradual process are curiously parallel". This brings to fore the possibility that biologically implied changes to a group of people like the Tiv can engender parallel cultural evolution. This helps to better understand the impact of the cultural demands of the *Yamshe* system on Tiv youths during the colonial period as discussed in this paper.

The theory of cultural evolution as expressed by the likes of Richerson is thus essentially an evolutionary theory of social change. It is anchored on the view of culture as "information capable of affecting individuals' behavior that they acquire from other members of their species through teaching, imitation and other forms of social transmission".(Richerson) Cultural evolution is the change of this information over time. Consequently, the information regarding marriage and the power relations embedded in this contract was changed and transmitted from one generation of Tiv society to the next and as the theory demands, it affected individual and group behavior to

the extent of transforming their convictions on what to further transmit or discard. Just like Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection, cultural evolution socially selects the cultural traits (information) to pass on via some form of social Darwinism.

In support of this theoretical position, Wenseleers et al argue that 'in spite of opposition to the parallels of biological and cultural evolution by other academics, many of the alleged peculiarities of cultural inheritance in fact do have analogues in biological evolution'.(Wenseleers et al) Consequently human culture evolves through broad Darwinian processes, involving variation and selective retention. (Nelson 2). Tiv Marital systems have also taken this path of evolution with evidence of selective Darwinian characteristics. The *Kem*, marital system bears out this fact.

In the case of the evolution of marital practices among the Tiv, this theoretical framework remains true to the extent to which it engendered change. Within the confines of Tiv cultural consciousness, the crises of modernity that cultural evolution brings is construed in conflicting terms. For the fabric of Tiv traditional society, it is 'seen as problematic as it replaces traditional ways of life with uncontrollable change and unmanageable alternatives.' (Smith)(Mawere and Mawere 229). On the other hand, the young growing Tiv middle class of the colonial period saw this as liberating. A detailed examination of these Tiv marital practices and the process of their evolution sheds more light on the interplay of conflict and progress in the 'crises of modernity'

Exchange Marriage *Yamshe*

The most prominent feature of pre-colonial Tiv marriage institution was the *Yamshe* or exchange system of marriage. Based on the principle of trade by batter, the underlying rationale was the need to receive in return for giving away your daughter, a woman of equal worth as a replacement. So the woman received in exchange represented a bride price of some sort. Essentially a man got married by exchanging a female member of his family to obtain a bride from another family, lineage or clan. Since modern world views place a high premium on individual consent in marriage it is assumed that the *Yamshe* system essentially abused the individual's rights to choice. This system was viewed by the younger generations as not only restricting individual liberty but also cultural plurality.

Before its abolition in 1927 by the colonial authorities, the *Yamshe* system of marriage remained one of the contested issues that created social tensions within Tiv society involving the *Ityor* (Elders) and the youths. The emergence of a colonial economy had created a new working class who were predominantly young people economically empowered by the new system. Exposure to other marriage systems that were transacted with money unlike the *Yamshe* system and afforded greater liberty of choice encouraged the new elite to support the British on the abolition of the *Yamshe* system. Furthermore, the Dutch Reformed Christian Mission spearheaded the drive through the colonial authorities because they viewed the system as being unchristian.

A critical appraisal of the *Yamshe* system affords a better understanding of its gradual shift in status. To begin with, the *Yamshe* or exchange marriage system evolved among the Tiv in pre-colonial times as a mechanism for social cohesion and marital security. The people reasoned that a daughter which had to be given out in marriage to another family must have a replacement who would produce children to compensate for the daughter given out in marriage and secondly it ensured against maltreatment of women in their marital homes for fear of reappraisals on the daughter or sister who was used for the exchange. (Torkula 70)

The procedure for this kind of marriage was actually quite simple although the ceremonies involved differed slightly in variations amongst the clans. If a man saw a young woman he desired to marry he would approach her parents and declare his intentions to exchange her with his female relation as a wife. Her parents, in turn, would direct the suitor to obtain the consent of the elders of the family (*Ityo*) since the parents' consent alone was void without that of the elders. (*Ityo*) Upon obtaining the consent of the elders the suitor presented his *ingyor* (Female Ward) who is the female relative he intends to use for exchange with the family of his intending bride. According to tradition the *ingyor*, (female ward provided by the suitor) must be acceptable for marriage to a male *Tien* i.e the paternal guardian of the bride in the intending bride's family or the exchange process would be halted. On the other hand, the *ingyor* must also be willing to accept the husband presented to her. In effect, if the situation was unacceptable to any of the four parties involved the exchange would not take place. (East 115) However, if all were in consonance, an elaborate marriage ceremony was conducted and the vows sealed with a commitment to take care of each other.

It is noteworthy that neither of the two girls involved in exchange marriage was ever forced into the marriage. The choice of the women was respected because the peace and cohesion of both families involved depended on the stability of the marriages. The new wife was hence treated as the replacement of the daughter or sister that was given out in exchange and as such accorded the same rights and privileges. This guarded against wife battering for fear of reprisals on the sister that was used for the exchange and peradventure the exchange wife was found to be barren her family would have to replace her with another. Often the children produced by the exchanged wife have to be equalized on the other side of the divide. Exchange marriages were thus seen as an alliance between families, clans and even exogamous communities.(Torkula 64) Once contracted the connection between the two families was difficult to dissolve since a divorce essentially sparked a wider family dispute and could hardly be contained within the localized family unit.

The elders in a family were responsible for distributing available females among the men for the purpose of exchange. The older members were first allocated an *ingyor* (Female wards) before the younger ones and consequently, shortages often arose which had to be covered from the daughters of an exchanged wife that was married into the family. Sometimes uncles who were already waiting to get married received allocations before sons got a chance to get married. This later caused tensions regarding youths who felt they were kept too long in waiting.

Evolutionary Influences Shaping Tiv Marriage Systems

Prior to the incursion of Christianity into Tiv land, *Yamshe* marriage system was highly regarded and strictly adhered to. However, by the early 1900s when Christian missions began to penetrate Tiv society, respect for this system began to erode. Since the elders administered Tiv society through a system of witchcraft and magic called *Tsav* and *Akombo*, the people adhered to the system for fear of *Tsav* retribution. Christianity and missionary education, however, started casting aspersions on the legitimacy of the system which essentially bared converts to Christianity from marrying in the Tiv traditional way. Apart from this, the younger men who felt held to ransom by the elders in the area of marriage felt a need for change.

Furthermore, the new colonial economy as earlier mentioned replaced trade by barter with legal tender hastening the process of change. Tiv youths expanded their earning power through the railroad construction projects in the Makurdi area and new Tin mines in Jos. Marriage through bride price factored in money became increasingly attractive and coupled with problems of unredeemed exchange pacts, the colonial authorities summoned district heads and elders to Abinsi in 1927 to give their consent to the abolition of exchange marriage within seven days or face deportation to Kaduna.(Torkula 75)

Prior to the colonial period when Tiv society was preoccupied with communal cohesion the system of exchange marriage seemed ideal with its various safeguards against wife battering, divorce and infidelity. According to Akiga it was "an institution of paramount importance and lies at the basis of the whole tribal organization...in fact, the existence of the tribe is dependent on exchange marriage and the rites which are associated with it".(East 100) However, the realities of the fast-evolving post-colonial society compelled a paradigm shift which according to Akiga bothered essentially on liberty. He recorded that the abolition was hailed by the young people in the following words. "The dance is merriest when the dancers are of the same age. Let the old men run after the old women and leave us to find husbands among the companions of our youth."(East 167) From this it is clear that though the *Yamshe* system supposedly protected the women's liberty of choice, the truth was that they hardly refused the husbands they were given to during the exchange process since they clearly did not want to fall foul of their families or risk the wrath of a *Tien* (paternal guardian) who has been denied a new bride because of her refusal.

Notably, the role of increasing population and shifting demographics must also be recognized in the slow evolution of this marital tradition. The Tiv people were largely sedentary farmers who were closely knit and maintained very strong clan allegiances. It was only natural that the exchange system *Yamshe* helped to cement this form of relations within an ethnic group that were few and were not known for migrating. The colonial and post-colonial era, however, saw a sharp increase in the Tiv population. The introduction of new farming methods and techniques are likely factors responsible for increased food production and a parallel increase in population. The change in demographics affected the exchange system in the sense that the slow process of the *Yamshe* system came under pressure to meet the

demands of a growing and restless population of younger people. This was also a contributory factor in its un-sustainability.

The colonial era had opened up Tiv society to a greater degree of intertribal relations with intertribal marriages becoming increasingly likely. Although other forms of marriage systems like purchase and Bride price systems existed, they featured very insignificantly in the cultural landscape of the people. The *Yamshe*, on one hand, made it quite difficult for an intertribal marriage to take place because of its unique process which is only acceptable among the Tiv. This growing need for ethnic plurality in colonial Tiv society and all the factors previously mentioned compelled the inevitable evolution of the system of marriage among the Tiv.

Unending Bride Price *Kem* and Evolutionary Trends in the Colonial and Post Colonial Era

The *Yamshe* system was replaced as expected by the bride price (*Kem*) system. Since the exclusive bride price system itself was a cultural hybrid and not indigenous to the Tiv people it developed its unique characteristics. After the abolition of exchange marriage, vestiges of the culture still lingered within Tiv society. Families giving their daughters away in bride price marriage still demanded a female in return (*Isheikyo*) at a later date especially after their daughter had proved fruitful. (Torkula 85) The need to secure their daughter's safety and dignity informed this new trend. *Ishekyo* literally meant "eyes behind your head" connoting security. This among other aspects of the old marriage system somehow found their way into the new concept of bride price giving it a unique blend that characterized the evolution of marital systems among the Tiv.

In the new system that emerged, the courtship period was characterized by the offering of gifts to the bride and her parents. From the early colonial period, these gifts ranged from beads, yarns of clothes, farm produce and livestock. The bride price itself paid on the day of the ceremony also included a wide range of gifts and an amount of money representing the bride price itself. The nature, format and amount of money or the gifts presented during these ceremonies have since evolved over the years. The striking feature of the new system, however, is the fact that the payment of the bride price is unending and difficult to complete. This feature has imputed "faultlines" in the Tiv version of the bride price system. From 1927 the colonial authorities

fixed the standard bride price at £4 or £5.(East 169) This would change shortly as the value the Tiv people attached to the girl child could not be equated with this new monetary standard set by the colonial authorities.

The original Tiv concept of marriage was based on exchange in value, thus *yamshe* in itself was derived from the expression "*Yemen Ishe*" which means purchasing or trading in value.(Bohannan 61) Consequent upon this a bride given away in marriage is perceived to be "value offered" which must receive equivalent value in return. In the light of this, the colonial imposition of the *Kem* or bride price system on Tiv society was deconstructing the paradigm on which social cohesion in Tiv society was based on. It was, in essence, devaluing the worth of the girl child. Within the new construct of *Kem*(Bride Price), Tiv society still strived to retain some vestiges of the "value exchange" system (*Ishe Yamen*) by spreading out the cost of the *Kem* (Bride Price). Since the value of the girl child was vested in her ability to procreate, the concept of *Ishe Yamen* (value trading) was extended to her children, in other words the bride price incorporated the price of her children. The extent to which she is valued is directly proportional to the number of children she would produce. Since the number of her children could not be determined at the onset of marriage, the bride price was extended indefinitely 'in kind' while the cash was pegged between £10 and £25, Paul and Laura Bohanan even maintain that it was often extended to as much as £30 among clerks and girls that had never married before.(Bohannan & Bohannan 72)

After a couple settles down in marriage the father of the bride (*Ter kem*) or her paternal guardian (*Tien*), was expected to return for more bride price once the couple started bearing children. A separate bride price had to be paid for each child lest the children and their mother will be carried back to their *igba* (Maternal home).(Torkula 122) This aberration evolved in an attempt to extend the concept of value trading "*Ishe Yamen*" into the new colonial construct of bride price. Paul Bohannan records that by 1949 some lineages took £2 for a boy child and £3 pounds for a girl child. Furthermore, a man getting a new wife will demand the bride price he is supposed to pay for his new wife from the husband of his daughter or ward(*ingyor*) which he had earlier given into marriage. If he does not receive this sum he would go as far as withdrawing his daughter or her children.(Bohannan & Bohannan 72) This was also another aspect of the *yamshe* system that survived and became integrated into the bride price system. The

women folk tended to bear the brunt of this aberration since some of these threats were actually carried out and families dislocated.

Although stories of the damages to family structures that this system caused abound in Tiv land, very few of these have been documented. An instance in the Iho family lineage of Mbakor Taakar LGA supports this position. Accounts reveal that the family patriarch Iho met a girl who had been married to a man from another clan. But since her husband could not complete her bride price and those of her two children, her father took her home along with her two children pending when the husband was ready to claim them.(Fyanka). During the years of waiting, however, she met Iho who married her and also claimed her two children by rights of tradition. Unfortunately, he also could not complete the bride price on the children she bore for him hence the children born to Iho had to be returned to their *Igba*, (mother's clan or lineage).(Fyanka)

The failure to reclaim the children by their father's clan resulted in their growing up, marrying and settling among their maternal clan. The downside of this development is the fact that they are refused certain privileges in their maternal clan that they can only enjoy among their paternal kinsmen. These privileges which include certain rights to land and legibility for local royalty have proven to be sources of tensions between both clans. (Fyanka) These events have spanned three generations running through pre-colonial to contemporary times. In more recent times this culture has been abused and exploited, putting families at the mercy of in-laws who employ these marriage rights for personal enrichment. The price tags on bride prices have also increased and the gifts more varied and diversified.

Consensual Kidnapping or Elopement (*Yevisse yem nom or Kwase u yevese amin*)

Cultural aberrations often result from unsuccessful attempts to circumvent rules or guidelines in the system. As marriage systems evolved in Tiv-land, the new challenges that the bride price system introduced spawned a rare kind of elopement which can best be described as 'consensual kidnapping.' Alfred Torkula claims that consensual kidnapping or elopement was a fall out of the abolition of exchange marriage, he posits that the inability of the suitor to meet the demands of the bride price set the stage for elopement. If the girl involved was willing to risk all to marry her love then she conceded to

be kidnapped.(Torkula 87) According to Tesemchi Makar a variant of this form of marriage system was practiced in pre-colonial Tiv society especially between communities that had an *iye* peace treaty (an agreement not to go to war.).(Makar142) Paul Bohannan held that the *iye* treaties were concluded between fairly large clans e.g the *Ukum* and the *Ugondo*, for example, permitting mutual capture of wives without resorting to war. The purpose of the treaty was, however, to expand the scope of exchange to a higher lineage level. For instance, a man from *Ukum* whose *Ingol* (ward) was captured by a man from *Ugondo* would also capture a girl from *Ugondo*, thereby leveling the exchange. .(Bohannan & Bohannan 71) It is however clear that the practice took on a new dimension after the 1927 abolition of exchange marriage. The system became more widely practiced as evidenced by the fact of its increased popularity in post-colonial era to the present.

Consensual kidnapping as opposed to kidnap within the *iye* treaties of the pre-colonial era often had the secret consent of the girl's mother while the courtship was often facilitated through friends of both parties. Although the details of this practice have evolved considerably over the years, the market place which holds a key position in Tiv social and cultural structure was used as a meeting place, streams and bathing ponds also featured prominently. The couples avoided meeting at each other's homes since it was important that the affair is kept secret. The day of elopement was traditionally placed on the village market day since this was a day wards were allowed by parents and guardians to stay long hours away from home till the market closes at nightfall.

To avoid suspicion the girl in question often left home with little of her belongings. At the market place, she is escorted by friends of her suitor and taken into hiding preferably in another clan a good distance away from her home. The suitor would traditionally take her to his *igba* (mother's clan). If a girl did not return from the market place after nightfall the common question on the lips of all is "*a yevese yem nom o?*" This means "has she eloped?" Traditionally, this question was answered not by the suitor himself but by the friends or relatives of the suitor who would visit the girl's compound in the cool of the evening the next day and informed the parents that their daughter was safe and they needed not to look for her.

What had necessitated the elopement in the first place was either inability to pay bride price requirements or parental objections. However, it is reported in most of Tiv land that the moment the parents were told their daughter was safe they would entertain the guest and

bid them a safe journey home. Clearly, they first desired peaceful relations for the safety of their daughter and a good report about them to their potential in-laws. Since their daughter was clearly in agreement no objections would suffice considering the fact that she would not be found unless she so wished. Immediately the girl got pregnant the parents of the suitor would approach the parents of the bride and offer to pay her bride price. This always came in installments and continued traditionally with the birth of each child.

Elopement did not always come in the form of consensual kidnapping because in pre-colonial Tiv society R.C. Abraham observed what he referred to as "marriage by theft"(Abraham 132) This caused wars between communities that had no peace pacts (*iyé*). Here the market place also remained the stage on which the drama is played out. Since trade between clans and communities were carried out at both markets prying suitors often had a wide range of beautiful maidens to pick from. In this case, they were forcibly carried away and put under lock and key. These barbaric acts were hardly sustained even in pre-colonial Tiv society since the ensuing conflict was undesirable, disrupting the peace fabric of both societies.

Today, consensual kidnapping is very pronounced in the rural areas of Tiv-land mainly because of the debilitating economic situation. Parents who are opportunist are cashing in on the bride price factor to enrich themselves and as a result, reducing the chances of low-income rural dwellers meeting bride price obligations. This narrows down the options available to them, making Consensual kidnapping a more attractive option.

The negative effects of this aberration on contemporary Tiv society are reflected in the sharp rise in gender-based violence as evidenced in recent surveys in Gboko Benue state, sponsored by J.D and C.T MacArthur Foundation Chicago in 1999. The survey concluded that women who married this way "were resigned to submission...they tolerated domestic violence in brutal silence ...in complete isolation."(Obby-Odimegwu) This was clearly due to the fact that their parents had not advanced their consent at the initial stage and were often compelled to accept the status quo thereby isolating the girl and affording the man the impropriety of gender-based violence. The survey also attributed the high prevalence of divorce to this aberration claiming that since consensual kidnapping has been entrenched in the culture of the people a man could dissolve any relationship and elope

with another girl considering the fact that he is responsible to no one after kidnapping the girl. .”(Obby-Odimegwu)

New Evolutionary Trends in the Concept of “Bastard Marriages”

Pre-colonial Tiv society is very likely to have recorded very low levels of teenage pregnancies because of the entrenched system of *Tsav* and *Akombo* (Witchcraft and Magic). Since virgins were highly valued in the *Yamshe* process (Exchange marriage), parents went to extra length to prevent their daughters from getting involved in pre-marital sex. To achieve this, young maidens were secured by means of *yange -Ikyoor* (Prevention by the *Ikyoor* Diety.). A snail shell (*Ikyoor*) was tied around her neck to indicate that she was restricted (*yange*). In a situation whereby she was violated the guilty man was rendered impotent by the *Ikyoor* deity and she herself made barren; a situation which was only rectified through the appeasement of the *Ikyoor* deity.(Torkula 41)

Traditional Safeguards provided by the *Tsav and Akombo* system quickly evaporated after the colonial authorities initiated the *Namakaa* movement against *Mbatsav*, (practitioners of *Tsav* and *Akombo*) between 1926 and 1927.(Makar 144) Due to allegations of cannibalism, the colonial government initiated a sort of inquisition compelling the practitioners of *Tsav* to renounce it and surrender the articles of their trade.

Consequent upon the aforementioned, It is likely that a rising incidence of pre-marital pregnancies in postcolonial Tiv society initiated novel practices aimed at preventing or accommodating this trend. As it is in most cultures, damage control measures against potentially embarrassing circumstances do not necessarily produce the best results. In the case of Tiv society, a new trend evolved in a quest to curtail the damaging effects of pre-marital pregnancies. It will be referred to here as “bastard marriages.”

In more recent times, in order to avoid a child been born out of wedlock, the parents of the pregnant girl would offer her to an old widower or an older and wealthier man within the clan as a wife. For the young girl, it took care of her shame of being a single mother and also provided a father for her unborn child. On the other hand, the arrangement provided the man with a companion to take care of him in his old age. Tiv culture provided that any child born to a married woman belonged to her husband whether he is the biological father or not. As long as he had paid her bride-price, they would all retain her

husband's name even if she continued having children long after his death.

The flip side of this arrangement is the disadvantageous position it places the woman. Girls who marry in this manner create the polygamous end of the family structure and older wives who are better entrenched find it easier to oppress and mistreat them. Furthermore, such women are quickly widowed considering the age of their husbands. The young widow in question becomes a piece of property to be inherited by the grown-up sons or brothers of the deceased. The psychological trauma often creates dysfunctional relationships between the "bastard wife", her children and the rest of the family. This has scared family structures in most of Tiv land and impressed upon the society a unique and unsavory form of polygamy.

Wives as Hospitality Packages?

Analyses of evolutionary trends unique to Tiv marriage structures have come up with the fact that curious references have been made claiming that the Tiv, as part of their hospitality package offered their wives to visitors. These assertions are very difficult to substantiate given the fact that extensive literature on Tiv history and anthropology has never alluded to such a practice, even in a very remote manner. Early researchers in Tiv studies like R.C Abraham in his 1933 work entitled "The Tiv People" revealed that "wives are the personal property of a man while he is alive and the members of the village have not the right of promiscuous intercourse with one another's wives".(Abraham 201)

Pre-colonial Tiv Society was ruled through the elders who often used the practice of *Tsav* and *Akombo* to preserve justice. If a woman committed adultery, for instance, she ran the risk of the *idyugh* deistic visitation resulting in barrenness in the family.(Torkula 105) Warnings vested in ancient Tiv customs as recorded by Akiga, states thus, "...sleep with no man's wife. If you commit adultery with another man's wife you become his flesh debtor."(Abraham 201 & 344) This injunction had in time past created certain antecedents that may have been sadly mistaken for the rule and not the exception.

In pre-colonial times, if a foreigner visited a village he was traditionally taken to the compound of the *Or-ya* (Head of the compound) who would house and entertain the guest. Since most elders possessed a huge compound with several wives he would naturally ask the youngest wife to take care of his needs. In the event

that the stranger or foreigner slept with the wife of his host and was caught, he faced the possibility of death except if the ancient injunction was evoked. His becoming a flesh debtor translated into slavery to his host for a number of years.

It is possible that visiting foreigners in the pre-colonial era might have encountered Tiv hospitality in this format and assumed that it was customary to receive one of your hosts' wife as part of the hospitality packed or possibly myths created by a guest who got away with adultery became a byword.

'Nigerian Marriage': National Dynamics in evolving marital systems.

As society is dynamic so also is culture, making it difficult to retain certain traditional practices in their original forms. Once present realities confer obsolete status on certain practices, they must give room for more workable versions. This has been the case with marital practices among the Tiv. Even the supposedly current marital practices still retain "gender fault lines" and as such remain unbalanced to a certain extent.

The drawback on most evolving practices is the negative impacts they have on the social structure of the people thereby redefining the place of marriage in Tiv traditional society. The spread of Christianity is one influence on the evolutionary process that is seeking to create uniform marital practices across board where gender imbalances are addressed. This has not prevented the practice of both traditional and Christian marriage rites alongside each other since it had become the rule that before a church wedding is conducted, the traditional rites of exchanging marriage vows and bride price must first be fulfilled.

The growing dominance of the Christian marriage rites over the former is gradually gaining ground especially among urbanized families who have become dislocated from their home towns and as such fail to appreciate the need for communal cohesion that traditional marriage rites seek to enforce. Furthermore increased inter-ethnic marriages have also compelled a rethink of most marital practices among Nigerians giving room for more change.

As a consequence of the foregoing, a unique 'Nigerian' marriage system has begun to evolve all over the country. The various sub-ethnic varieties in traditional marriage rites have all dissolved into a melting pot of supra ethnic marriage rites. Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Edo, Tiv and others are slowly evolving a single marriage rite that is distinctively

recognizable. The interesting development is, however, the fact that the increased intermarriages has influenced an increased hybridization of marriage rites across the country. Couples with mixed ethnic parentage are increasingly incorporating different rites from their mixed heritage to meet the vast cultural requirements mixed parentage demands. In this regard, urban areas have become leading centres of this cultural revolution. Another crucial factor in this phenomenon is the role of population culture and entertainment industry.

Conclusion

C. Geertz noted in 1965 that "culture is best seen not as complexes of concrete behavioral patterns customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters...but as a set of control mechanisms, plans, recipes, rules and instructions for the governing of behavior" In this regard Tiv marital systems as viewed in this paper were more of a control mechanism and a recipe for governing behavior. It attempted to model the behavioral traits of the Tiv people in respect to gender relations to produce a more cohesive society. This nevertheless was to eventually unravel in favor of an evolving cognitive system that produced the latter forms of marital systems from social and environmental exigencies. At this point it's important to observe that analyses of cultures as cognitive systems have not progressed very far beyond a mapping of limited and neatly bounded semantic domains. Significant attempts have however been made by Frake (111-29); Metzger & Williams (1072-1101); Wallace; Spradley (20) and (Agar), and others to formalize the knowledge base in this area. The evolution of Tiv marital systems thus represents critical resources for such knowledge systems

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