

# **TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE RITES OF BENDEGHE EKIEM OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA, 1900-1999**

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## **Abstract**

African traditions are rarely taken seriously nowadays not because they are of no use but merely because of wrong impressions already created in the African over the years. Most young men and young women, for reasons of ignorance and lack of courage simply write off their cultures/ traditions and choose to grow in utter confusion instead. Yet some traditions are highly unavoidable, especially marriage activities. Traditions must be studied and understood before assessing how dangerous, destructive, or even supportive such traditions could be. Lack of documentation introduced confusion in Bendeghe traditional marriage rite. This work studied the traditional marriage rite of Bendeghe Ekiem in Cross River State with the purpose of letting the original method interact with modern marriage activities. The instruments of study included mainly primary sources of oral interview and discussion. Secondary sources in form of published articles and books were also consulted, and information gathered proved useful. The results were eye opening, and mind blowing to know that much of the present practices in Bendeghe Ekiem marriage activities represent a distortion of the old. The study was concluded by highlighting the original aims and practices of Marriage in Bendeghe Ekiem.

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### **Introduction**

Human societies are used to doing things in certain ways accustomed to them. This is in order to achieve peace and happiness. People in different parts of the world establish their norms according to varied factors, including but not limited to: perceived world views, historical antecedents, former leadership escapades, political expressions, social tastes, environmental influence, and others like emergency situations such as plagues, intra-communal and inter-communal crises, among others. People express themselves in various ways including their mode of dressing, eating habits, language, dance steps, funeral rites, naming ceremonies, and marriage rites.

Norms are established in every society to enable members of such a society to behave responsibly. Marriage rites are established, to preserve decency, and, to do away with unwelcomed attitudes and perceptions. It is done to preserve morality and minimize immorality. The aim of the present research is to search former ways of doing traditional marriage in Bendeghe Ekiem and follow the knowledge up to the present day. In doing this, we are conscious that some loopholes could still present reasons for future research activities. Another aim of studying a tradition such as Bendeghe Ekiem marriage rite is to possibly make an in-depth appreciation of the norms before challenging the excesses, immorality and other unreasonable attitudes which may have been imported into Bendeghe environment in the name of marriage. For ease and convenience, the paper is divided into four sections. The ongoing introduction followed a historical survey of the Bendeghe. This is followed by a review of the traditional marriage rites of the Bendeghe up to 1900. The third section examines the changes and continuities in the traditional marriage rites of the people. The penultimate section discusses some negative dimensions in traditional marriage rites, especially in contemporary period. The study is concluded in the fifth section.

## **Okoro: Traditional Marriage Rites of Bendeghe...**

### **The Bendeghe People in Historical Perspective**

The people of Bendeghe originated in the Mamfe area of the present-day Western Cameroons. They emerged from the Ejagham people of that region and migrated west. It is not known from what village they came, but their original location must certainly have been near to Etabo and Ayugaba, from which villages came the present People of Abia and Etome respectively, with whom Bendeghe Ekiem shares the Ejagham language. The Ejagham people are not only limited to Mamfe area of Cameroon. Some Ejagham people are found settled in Ghana. But many of them exist in Calabar, Akamkpa, and Etung, all in Cross River State. Etung Local Government Area of Cross River State is basically of the Ejagham people. And, Etung which is made up of sixteen communities is sub-divided into two: Northern and Southern Etung in unequal parts. Bendeghe Ekiem belongs to the North with her Mbuma brothers of Abia and Etome. The rest of other five communities of Northern Etung are referred to as Nta. The communities are Agborkim Obi which is severally identified with a prominent natural waterfall of a tourist status, and therefore to be known as Agborkim waterfall; Effraya; Ekimaya; Ekughatai; and, Ajasor. In any case the movement of the Bendeghes long preceded that of their neighbours –Abia and Etome.

The eponymous founder of the Bendeghe people was Okomba, who led them over the Cross River and into their present place of abode area. Their first settlement was called Obobikae, located at Ekim Njok, a stream about three miles south of present-day Bendeghe Ekiem<sup>1</sup>. At a place called Echibitop, meaning “muddy place”, situated at the source of the stream to the south of the present town, where the people now bathe and draw their water, there was ‘ndeghe’ fibre, which came to be used to string the beautiful new beads, Mbare and Afufu, found right beneath the ground. The place came to be Ndeghe Atem Afe. In the course of time, the stringing of these beads into girdles for sale became a sort of local industry for which the town became well known. When a merchant began his work he would request his servant “bindeghe”, meaning “bring the ndeghe fibre down from the peg”. In around

1918, Bendeghe was known as Bendeghe Ayuk, to make them different from other Bendeghe towns like Bendeghe Afi and Esor Bendeghe both of which still exist in Cross River State. The reason for this suffixation is probably because around 1918, Bendeghe Ekiem had a man named Ayuk – an interpreter to a European District officer. Thus, it became convenient for the village he came from to be identified by his name. When it became obvious that the said Ayuk grew proud in later years, the community decided to drop the “Ayuk” suffix for “Ekiem” which seems to convey a complete idea of bringing the ndeghe fibre here as has been explained above. Finally the settlement itself became known as ‘Bendeghe’ following an Anglicized input.

Oral tradition<sup>2</sup> has it that one day a hunter named Ogbang was walking north from Echibitop when he came upon the spot where Bendeghe Ekiem is staying presently. He was attracted by the white sandy soil of the area, so he took a sample of it and went back with him to report to his people. The villagers all agreed that the new place would be a much sandier and drier location, compared to where they were as at then, and so they followed Eta Ara to settle there, naming the spot Ebare Nsi (white soil). Another attraction of the new place was the prominent hill it featured. The hill was surrounded by valleys, and therefore made a good fortress, since retreating enemies could be trapped and captured in the valleys by the surrounding allied peoples. For brief periods, under the leadership of Etta, the Bendeghe peoples were away from Ebare Nsi. Soon after their arrival there, they suffered an epidemic of influenza, and moved about a mile to the north, settling at a spot called Obioku. Then moving back southward they stopped for a few years at Emeeh, meaning grassland’. Finally they returned to Ebare Nsi, where they have remained ever since. The population of Bendeghe Ekiem, has grown to 18,000 in 2006 and a locally assumed 30,000 in 2020<sup>3</sup>.

Like some of their brothers and neighbours, Bendeghe people are hardworking: in the early years, they tried to be industrious and earned themselves the name Bendeghe as has been described above. Let us still recall that the major reason for the

## **Okoro: Traditional Marriage Rites of Bendeghe...**

choice of their present settlement was the texture and fertility of the soil. In this soil, different food crops do grow with minimum farming stress. Cocoa yam, yam, cassava, pepper, and all kinds of vegetables do very well in their soil. The main food crop of Bendeghe Ekiem is plantain and banana. These have been exported in large quantities from time immemorial<sup>4</sup>. Their main staple food is plantain which is prepared in various ways. Planting of cocoa in Bendeghe began at a time we find difficult to remember. But it was not in large commercial quantities until the reign of Michael Okpara in the former Eastern Region of Nigeria during the First Republic. The then Eastern Region comprised of the present South East and South-South states of Nigeria. He, the governor set out to plan the Eastern region and to make it special in Nigeria depending on needs and resources. Aba was created an Industrial zone due to availability of manpower<sup>5</sup>. Enugu was the administrative capital. Onitsha and Aba and Port Harcourt became business hubs. Port Harcourt was for petro-chemical activities. And, the areas north of Calabar were earmarked for Agriculture because of abundant land space, among others. With this arrangement, cocoa estate was created for the Eastern Regional Government on the land provided by Agborkim Obi, Bendeghe Ekiem, Etome, Abia, and other communities who could afford the land. This was championed by the Eastern Nigeria Development Corporation (ENDC) in the years of 1959 to 1964<sup>6</sup>. Apart from the government cocoa estate, commercial cocoa farming was introduced in Bendeghe when the natives immediately found out how lucrative cocoa was. This cocoa agriculture automatically placed the Bendeghe Ekiem local economy on a different level. Many Bendeghe natives began to construct storey buildings in the 1950s<sup>7</sup>. They sent their children to good schools at Abakaliki, Enugu, Onitsha, Umuahia, Lagos, and overseas due to favourable economic conditions. The introduction of commercial cocoa had to bear on sharing of inheritance, property acquisition (even by the women). This implied undue power to the women folk which gave several women control impetus over some men folk, especially the non-indigene residents. However, the disadvantage which followed was going to ruin a number of

Bendeghe cultural attitudes especially marriage, in rude shock, during future years as we shall soon discover in this work.

### **Traditional Marriage Rite Rites in Bendeghe Ekiem up too 1900**

The understanding of marriage is fairly universal. It has been described first as, a union of two or more people that creates a family tie and carries legal, social, and religious rights and responsibilities and second, as (often specifically) the union of only two people, to the exclusion of all others<sup>8</sup>. It has been said that another term for marriage could be ‘life’ because life does not begin until one is coupled with his life partner<sup>9</sup>. Traditional marriages in almost all African societies refer to the union of a man and a woman or a man and some women. Bassey Ubong in the case of Ibibio marriages notes that

Marriage is regarded as a complex of social, political, religious, and economic systems in Ibibio land. It covers diverse aspects of the society as family and community relationships, sex and sexuality, inheritance, and even political power (as rulership particularly in the past resided in specific and designated families both the secular and the religious)<sup>10</sup>.

Florence Undiyaundeye<sup>11</sup> presents three different types of traditional marriage practices found in Cross River North Senatorial District. These include free marriage implying that young men and young women agree to marry and simply inform their parents casually, and begin to marry; Oliti marriage which is done to settle unpaid loan using a grown up lady; and, money marriage which she explained as attracting huge price that might not be paid at the same time. Ann Nwoghemo<sup>12</sup> adumbrates the effects of money marriage on the part of the lady to include: lack of right to formal education, lack of voice in the society, etc. Such ladies are easily inherited by late husband’s brother in case of death with no body’s intervention. Parents replace them with another daughter of theirs in case of her death. Girl children can be ‘sold’ even before they are born. Aboni

## **Okoro: Traditional Marriage Rites of Bendeghe...**

Bendeghe (children of Bendeghe) from the olden times seemed ruled by decency to a great extent. This decency was replicated in their cultural exhibitions including but not limited to Marriage attitudes. Thus the marriage arrangement of the ancient Bendeghe man and woman like in many other African societies began with parents and relatives of the would-be couple. Part of Bradley's work expresses what obtained, regarding how the Bendeghe man conducted his marriage<sup>13</sup>.

### **Courtship and Consolidated Labour**

When any girl reaches the age of six or eight, she was of the age for an older man to become interested in her, and expresses the desire to reserve her for marriage until when she comes of age. He would make his first advance by sending some female members of his family to rob her with cam wood. When this has been done, she would be told which man has sent this token of interest. If she reacts very negatively, crying and complaining, then his courtship was rejected, and he should no longer persist. But if she accepts this advance with interest and pleasure, then the man is encouraged; in which case he would send her a present comprising a piece of cloth to cover her nakedness. If she accepts this gift, she has consented to be his wife. The man's next step is to secure the favour of the parents<sup>14</sup>. He first took palm wine to the mother of the girl. When she had assented to the marriage in their presence, they would drink the wine. The suitor will soon repeat this same process with the father. If agreement is reached here too, then the man was assured. From this time until when the girl came of the age, the prospective husband must be at the willing service of her parents; willing to help, especially with farm work, without payment. Finally, when the girl began to develop breasts, the parents get her circumcised in preparation for marriage. This must be done while she was still a virgin<sup>15</sup>.

### **Circumcision and Final Rituals**

On the appointed day, a special woman who performed circumcision arrived at the compound of the girl's parents. All her best friends would come to help. They will take her to the backyard

of the compound, lay her on the earth, and hold her tightly while the operation is performed. She would then be removed to the 'fattening room', where she will remain without leaving the compound for a healing period of six months or a year. On the day of circumcision, the mother paid the circumciser a token amount of money, a leg of meat, a calabash of distilled palm wine, and kola nut, with which she will perform sacrifice for health right there in the fattening room.

For the next seven days, the girl's best friends lived in the compound, primarily for the task of grinding cam wood. After the initial seven days of healing, her family would begin to rub the cam wood on her every day. Her friends must prepare enough to last perhaps four or five months. The grinding is tedious, a very hard work. Thus, the friends must be well-cared for by the girl's parents. Also, during this first week, friends of the husband are responsible for helping at the compound, particularly in hewing of firewood, pounding fufu, and providing light. If they failed in their duties the women there could fine them. The payment, in fact, came from the husband's pocket. Three days after the operation, the husband would give his wife two shillings as a sign of compassion for the suffering she endured lying on the sand for her circumcision. Treatment began during the first week. A special healing medicine is prepared by boiling a variety of herbs together, resulting in a bathing solution which is applied daily to the private part<sup>16</sup>. Palm kernel oil is then rubbed on the wound.

Seven days after the operation, the initial healing is expected to have taken place, and many friends would come to the compound to drink wine and dance. The bride herself, most importantly, will be expected to dance for everyone, to prove that she is making progress. On her ankles she will attach several 'okpuha' rods, which make a rhythmic rattling noise when she dances. For the purpose of dancing, the rod is twisted around the leg in the form of a bed-spring, and in that shape is called 'agut', a spiral spring cone-shaped<sup>17</sup>. Throughout the girl's period in the fattening room, friends continued to visit her on weekends. She would be expected to dance with increasing ease /dexterity, and



## **Okoro: Traditional Marriage Rites of Bendeghe...**

always the father had to provide wine. After some time the father of the girl would perform a sacrifice to the ancestors called 'ebiri nkim', for her proper healing. He used a part of red-deer, a jar of up-wine, two kola nuts, and a bowl of palm oil. When he finished, the food and wine was shared to relatives and friends present. Sometime later the mother was required to perform the same sacrifice<sup>18</sup>.

The performance of a sacrifice by the husband included to give sixpence to the girl's best friend, and seven shillings to the wife herself. Then came the sensitive moment when he and the parents decided the dowry or bride wealth. If he had worked very hard willingly for them, they might not charge him much, perhaps four or five pieces of cloth, costing about ten shillings each. But if he had been proud, obstinate and uncooperative they might make it very hard term for him, demanding as much as ten pieces of cloth. If he did not have the money, another man with sufficient money might step in at this point and take the girl for his wife<sup>19</sup>.

In any case, a time was set when the girl would finally come out of the fattening room. The husband and the father both contributed to make a great feast, inviting the whole town. The activities will continue for an entire night, and while everyone danced, the highpoint of the event would be the dancing of the new bride, who showed that she was completely healed and able to dance freely. She was at this stage ready to go and live with her husband. The husband threw money into the crowd, and many people scrambled for them. Finally a group of the husband's friends picked the bride up and carried her to his compound, nevermore to return to her parents. When they reached the husband homestead, a gun is fired, announcing to the town that the marriage is sealed<sup>20</sup>.

### **Changes and Continuities in Traditional Marriage Rites in Bendeghe Ekiem, 1900-1999**

By The 1940s changes began to be noticed in Bendeghe marriage rites. These would soon shape the entire marriage understanding of an average Bendeghe inhabitant including free born and non-indigene residents. This historical interlude has to be presented in bits for proper understanding and digestion.

**Bi Gba Etibim (Lets rock Together)**

Young people in moon light nights went out according to their age mates. The boys sat out in a row while courageous young ladies went to demonstrate interest according to their individual choice of the young boys. And the pairs went into their different hiding places, to show up when they became willing to do so. Ata Obi notes:

That is how I think youths began to get out of hands of parents. And I think that they did make love to themselves in such hiding corners. So it became a way of dating to them in those days<sup>21</sup>.

**Young men and women woo each other**

Generally, the young men began to woo their lovers among interested young women while in their parents' houses. They usually went to work for such girls' parents, especially during bush clearing, making of heaps, and palm nuts processing until the one who is chosen began to enjoy special favour of the said young woman. Then, other suitors simply allowed the accepted young man to continue. The chosen one continued befriending until the lady gets circumcised and enters into the fattening room. While in the fattening room, the accepted man was equally free to have sex and spend nights with the bride<sup>22</sup>. The woman stayed at home for upward of one year and kept staging dances with other young ladies who were circumcised around the same period with her. In the course of time, **ebiri nkim** sacrifice was performed and bride price paid by the accepted young man. The bride price was not to be more than five shillings then. On the outing day, the bride would dance in the town square while people showed appreciation by giving her gifts, and at the end of the show, the **moni nkim** (newly circumcised/bride) would be carried off to the husband's house<sup>23</sup>.

There were also cases in which marriages were contracted with foreign women from the neighbouring Boki villages. Some of the Boki women were taken by Bendeghe men who desired to do so either as second or third wives. In the case of marrying a Boki woman, a Bendeghe man was regarded as marrying a foreign wife<sup>24</sup>. There were no celebrations for it and the bride price was

## **Okoro: Traditional Marriage Rites of Bendeghe...**

equally said to be higher compared to those of the locals. It is not certain that much labour was expected on the marriage contract and it seems that this accounted for the higher bride price<sup>25</sup>. A Boki woman could merely pack into a Bendeghe man's house of her choice and wait for him to go and pay her bride price; that is, if the man accepted her. The Boki women who were formally married and had become tired of their former husband would reveal the amount involved in their bride price for the new man to go and refund their former husbands at Boki. And, after the traditional swearing to prove that the husband-to-be did not do adultery with the woman while waiting for refund of bride price, they married<sup>26</sup>. This part of the story adds that pre-marital sex was never challenged neither was getting of children out of wedlock seen as unusual.

### **Some Notable Changes in Bendeghe Traditional Marriage Rite**

This Section examines the notable changes in Bendeghe traditional marriage activities and attitudes. One notable change in the pristine way of contracting marriage among the Bendeghe is the use of marriage list. A typical marriage list among the Bendeghe is given below.

*A Sample of Bendeghe Ekiem Traditional Marriage Guiding /Working Paper by Ojua Bichene Abang (Justice)<sup>27</sup>*

#### **Item I: Knocking at the Door**

- i. Wine
- ii. Beer, and;
- iii. Native kolanut (no specific quantity)

#### **Item II: Labour**

- i. Labour for father
- ii. Labour for mother

#### **Item III: Dressing the In-laws**

- i. Dressing the father in-law to be
- ii. Dressing the mother in-law to be

**Item IV: Marriage rites Requirements**

- i. 7 native kolanuts, some of which must have three parts
- ii. 1 full part of Dry Red Deer meat
- iii. Some quantity of Red oil
- iv. Some quantity of Palm wine
- v. 1 life bullet
- vi. A coin and a clay plate

**Item V: In-house Refreshment for both sides of In-laws**

- i. Kolanuts
- ii. Assorted food
- iii. Drinks of any kinds (as can be provided)

**Item VI: Oyiba-ndip (Adjournment)**

In explaining the items in the list and their uses, we have to bear in mind that we have only captured the basic items for a traditional marriage rite of the Bendeghe people. It should also be explained here that marriage activities are not done without witnesses. This is the reason why the groom would never be the one negotiating at any level of the interaction. Whenever he is ready, he moved with his family members, elder mentors, or even friends. Knowledgeable indigenes of Bendeghe origin in traditional activities as well as young men who have directly experienced traditional marriage activities have made their inputs. Charles Andoya opines that,

In modern days, in-laws deal with themselves according to the way of their love for them. In other words, it is not only for the groom's party to bring. The bride's party equally get themselves prepared with wine with which to welcome their visitors and

## **Okoro: Traditional Marriage Rites of Bendeghe...**

their wine are usually emptied before those of the visitors<sup>28</sup>.

The first part titled 'knocking at the door' actually begins the marriage process. It is a time to present the groom publicly to the parents of the bride and neighbours with the basic message that someone has a marriage intention for their daughter. It is otherwise known as a day of formal introduction. This is the day list of items expected for the remaining marriage activities ought to be given. If there is need for adjustment, it could be done privately with the in-laws. It is the beginning of courtship. In the present practice of Bendeghe people, the groom has the right to take the bride home from that day after the introduction. Some already live together with children of their own before the door knocking. Others finish doing the knocking and relax for an indefinite period. In some cases, a man and a woman who have been seen together as husband and wife wake up suddenly and remember that they were not yet married, either because their daughters brought would-be husbands home and the parents are not entitled to eat the rite of their daughters' marriage, or because the woman died and the man feels the shame of burying her in her father's compound. This practice is exactly unlike the olden days when one had to wait patiently to the end of the marriage rite. Only a negligible number exercises such patience these days.

The second part was supposed to follow knocking of door. It is nonetheless never automatic nowadays. The reason is either because, the man has been doing some work constantly before the official introduction, he has been with the girl for so long a time and his appearance is just to fulfill the requirement of an existing law, or he would simply monetize it. Any of the above applies. In any case, if the mother in-law is still living with the father in-law, the road is easier. If the two are living differently, the father in-law and mother in-law would have to be visited at different times accordingly. The next part has to do with preparation for the climax of the traditional marriage, the day of the traditional blessing. Different families treat this as they wish depending on disposition; exposure; mutual understanding; and perceived relationship with

would- be in-law. But it is expected that the groom's party takes pride in making their in-laws presentable.

The fourth part is the most important. The groom's party is expected to present substances according to the way they are found in the list they earlier collected. All the items found in the fourth column of the list are for necessary traditional rituals. The acceptable kolanut must be the traditional ones with various lobes like six, seven, five, etc. There must be some with three lobes for specific purposes. The dry meat is never accepted of another animal except red deer, even if they can afford bigger animals. This is so because, it has never been agreed to alternate it with any other type of meat. If the size of the meat is small, money can adjust it. Palm oil must be there because oil is a lubricant. Spiritually, the elders are said to apply lubricant to the marriage about to begin. No marriage is free of frictions. Water represents life and quenches an inferno. It must be used to bless the new union which is expected to bustle with fresh life. The coin is for the girl's best friend to use and break the kola nut of blessing as she expects her own day of marriage to depend on that. The money belongs to her after all. The clay plate signifies smoothness as the couple moves in to start eating together. The life bullet is for royal announcement that a Bendeghe daughter has changed her status. Except for the shooting of the gun which is done after everything, all other activities are done inside the house. When all the presentations are accepted, dowry negotiation starts. The collection of bride price has met a lot of changes with different developments including socio-economic and education<sup>29</sup>. Some families adjudge superiority in terms of their daughter's level of education, which goes with huge expenses (even though it is impossible to recover all their expenses on the girl through a token of bride price). Nevertheless, the tradition of Bendeghe is that when an amount is agreed, certain protocols must be observed.

First, the girl to be married is the one to collect the money, looks around in grand style, finds where the father is, and brings it to the father squatting down in humility and responsibility. This is perhaps to arouse her consciousness that she has been married from

## **Okoro: Traditional Marriage Rites of Bendeghe...**

that day, and should be conscious of her new status. The father tickles her a little by thrice asking if he can accept the bride price. When the answer is positively repeated three times, the man collects. Second, the man who collects the bride price (biological father or uncle, etc), calls his in-law and refunds a small part of the money demanding that that fraction should be kept for him until when he is in need of it. This was interpreted by Asu EttaTawo<sup>30</sup> to mean that the relationship between the two families remains ongoing. Third, the remaining part of the dowry traditionally is not meant to be spent. It is handed over to someone and is meant to be used to marry for one of the male children of the girl's family. The next is to explain how the blessing of the couple goes.

It is the sole responsibility of the father to bless his daughter and the in-law (the couple). The master of ceremony picks little fractions of the meat and kola nut into his left and right hands, cups them, and places his two hands in a cross form to signify that a union is about to be formed. He makes toward the girl's father who now acts as the chief priest. The priest (father) opens his two hands to collect the substances and begins his work. He starts by calling the ancestors while releasing fragments of the substances in his left hand to the floor, squeezing it, talking and dropping to the family ancestors to enjoy and be with the couple. After that, he repeats the same thing with the one in his right hand; this time, invoking life, health, prosperity, security, productivity, and all manner of blessings to the couple. Then, palm wine, palm oil, and water could be simultaneously poured on those items on the floor with the water actually coming last of them all. After these, he collects the water, pours into his mouth and blows to their chests back and front to show that they are starting a new life together<sup>31</sup>.

Having done all these, joy and happiness seek expression. Note that no unmarried person is qualified to pour wine for people during a traditional marriage rite performance. This is the reason the groom must not bring along any such person inside the transacting room. The wine would be served to all in the house while the numerous invitees outside keep making merry on their own. As the gun shot is released, the newly married lady is carried

by the husband's people and the marriage is done. But **Oyiba-ndip** remains the closing. Oyiba-ndip is interpreted as the adjournment and closing. The elders who did the transactions jokingly demand that something be done to help them stand where their buttocks have gummed to their seats having sat long. Even a bottle of wine or anything at all can settle it provided it ends amusingly.

### **NEGATIVE DIM**

What we refer to as excesses are those additions presently seen with the new generation and which may not have been there in the traditional days of Bendeghe. These excesses began to appear with the passage of time due to: Westernization, education, foreign influences, economic advancement, inheritance matters involving the women folk, and Christianity, among others. Among the causes of the shift from traditional ways of doing things is on the inheritance matters involving the women folk. A. O. Tangban sounded to inform us that,

Before the advent of commercial cocoa production in Bendeghe, landed property were mainly for planting of food crops. Our men married as many wives as could help them do so. Women themselves were very submissive and only assisted their husbands according to traditional demands. By the time cocoa became a huge profit making issue, sharing the properties of late parents gave an undue advantage to women who simply began to see no difference between them and men. Some of the women could prefer to engage the non-indigene residents for working of their cocoa farms and later such male workers were making them pregnant only to abandon such children with their mothers who might not leave their inheritance to follow the strangers. The result became a mixed blood issue, and immorality increased to an uncontrolled proportion with a distortion in Bendeghe traditional marriage rite. Women's role equally introduced poor parenting as their activities seemed to suggest



## **Okoro: Traditional Marriage Rites of Bendeghe...**

that they can be with any man they like and drop whoever they decided for the next one as far as they could fend for themselves in their own fathers' houses<sup>32</sup>.

Second is the issue of cohabitation. The origin is traced from 1960s till date. Some men and women began to cohabit to the extent of producing all the children they need without attempting to get married. Some of them are forced to get married at old age by circumstances, as has been explained before. Now a mere introduction of the groom qualities a happy life together, yet, many do not do it at all. They simply "marry". This is a distortion and one of the dangerous excesses on Bendeghe traditional marriage rite. The causes of male /female cohabitation have been traced to social carelessness, over emphasis on procreation, and extravagant ceremonies which some persons cannot afford but stay to wait for the time they can. This elaborate celebration which many presently compete to do in Bendeghe traditional marriage activities is factored as the third in the line of identified excesses. This attitude was introduced as early as during 1990s due to exposure to other cultures like those of the Igbo nations<sup>21</sup>. Most people now invite several persons to their traditional marriage activities and killing a cow for cooking. This has made some to cohabit for a long time, only waiting for when they could make large amount as to do elaborate celebration. They prefer bearing children out of wedlock. Most young men presently place reproduction in front of marriage. Fourth is the greed and selfishness which has taken over in some families which the community finds a little hard to regulate. For reason of expenses made to see a lady through higher education, some families skyrocket the dowry. Finally, Christianity would not allow a modern thinking man to permit or do some rituals/pour libations to ancestors for fear that demons might be invoked in the course of such activities. The impact of westernization threatens gun shots during a traditional Bendeghe marriage rite. Those whose inaction is not because of Christianity are merely the fear of security agents. A few persons announce the success and conclusion of their marriage rite with a gunshot these days.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

So far, the paper has presented the various aspects and transition of Bendeghe traditional marriage. By our findings, it is clear that the modern practices are not assuming directly from the old. Stages of changes and adjustments were shown with clear explanations. The circumstances, situations and conditions responsible for the changes especially the major ones have been pointed out. The modern man in Bendeghe whether an indigene or stranger must know the original thinking and practice of the founding fathers first before carrying on with whatever useful adjustments that might suit reasonable situations.

The present study could be better placed to help regulate an age long tradition, and therefore recommends that the best of things should be fused and implemented while removing some unreasonable excesses. The Bendeghe people can adjust their cultural heritage to suit best practices. A society such as Bendeghe Ekiem can do it and achieve sweet environment for all and sundry. Furthermore, we all know that traditions are corrupted for lack of proper documentation. This document therefore could help reasonable minds in their quest for sound cultural heritage to be handed over to posterity.

## Okoro: Traditional Marriage Rites of Bendeghe...

### Endnotes

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