

## **The Symbols and Process of Traditional Marriage of Ekpeye People**

**By**

**Victor .O. A. Elleh**

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,  
Faculty of Humanities,  
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,  
PMB 5047, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt.

[ellehvictor@gmail.com](mailto:ellehvictor@gmail.com)

08033216945

### **Abstract**

*When you look around the history of human civilization and see the tradition of marriage that stands independent of time, race, geography and culture. It means it is an aspect of civilization, humanity and human culture. Marriage historically has been used in political unions between nations, between different ethnic groups to secure peace, trade and development. And marriage is one thing that unites African culture, although two marriages will never be similar. You can marry in a church, a mosque, in the bush, by a priest, an Imam, minister of justice, underwater on a tree; the core thing is marriage is a contract of commitment with rules and regulations that represent the person's culture.*

*Therefore in tracing the Ekpeye marriage system the use of observation and sociological research method is used in this article*

## **Introduction**

Marriage is a relationship between husband and wife. It is not a tie of kinship (Obowu 1972). Therefore its continuance depends mainly on the consistency of character and love of the husband who choose the wife and upon the steadfast love and loyalty of the woman who accepted the man as her husband. Secondly, the continuation of the covenant; depends on the persistent mutual understanding, therefore, the acceptance of each other and respect for each other's opinion (Ohia & Onyedibia 2003). The marriage of man and women commits them into an agreement. It is a tradition that has been accepted for generations. (Ellah, 1995).

### **The Process of Traditional Marriage of –The Ekpeye Ethnic Nationality**

The Ekpeye Ethnic Nationality are the people of Ahoada East local Government with the headquarters in Ahoada Town, the Ekpeye has four groups of people, who are believed to be the four sons of Ekpeye. Viz Ubie, Igbuduya, Akoh and Upata, Ubie and Igbuduya been the first 2 sons, Ubie been the first and Igbuduya the second. Akoh and Upata the last two, Akoh been the 3<sup>rd</sup> and Upata the fourth, (Oguzor).

Ubie and Igbuduya belong to Ahoada West Local Government; they also have the same culture and Tradition. But they all speak the same language with very little difference in naming/semantics e.g. the Ubie and Igbuduya call 'Always"- "Guru" while Akoh and Upata say "Gile"- little/small for Ubie and Igbuduya is Nweji while Akoh and Upata say Ntokor kitchen stool Ubie/Igbuduya call it kachie while Akoh and Upata call it Ekwe kitchen is called Udho-Oku by the Ubie/Igbuduya while Akoh/Upata calls it Udho-Ite. (Uwana 2010)

Likewise there is a slight difference in the traditional marriage system, the process is the same but the demands are not the same. In Upata marriage will not cost you more than (sixty thousand naira) N60, 000 for everything, while Akoh is higher than Upata, Ubie and Igbuduya has the highest. The items are the same all over, the process also the same. (Krama M. 2018).

## **Marriage Items**

The following are items or symbols used at the traditional marriage of Ekpeye people with their meaning:

1. Palm Wine- There can be no meaningful discussion without wine from God. The Ekpeye people believe palm wine is a gift from god.
2. Schnapps and local gin-to ease tension and the only drink the forefathers can drink and is easy to penetrate the body and the earth.
3. Beer-ceremonial
4. Mineral- ceremonial
5. Cigarette-to ease tension
6. Snuff/Tobacco-to ease tension
7. Cimeilo (cent for snuff)
8. Palm oil-Any meal without oil is not fit for consumption.
9. Salt-taste
10. George (Ijele)-honour and symbol for old age
11. A walk stick – a wish for long life
12. A hat- recognition as head
13. A chieftaincy gown or caftan- (Don and Owokoh)- to live long and enjoy his children and children’s children. (Godfrey 2018).

## **For Brides Parent**

1. Bitter Kola- sincerity and truthfulness
2. Kolanut- blessing for good life
3. Alligator pepper - unity even under pains
4. Gin or schnapps- to ease tension and for libation
5. Palm wine-the drink from God meant for discussion.
6. Ekpadu: the bag of life and prosperity. A sealed bag with the following items in it. 5 tubers of yam, kitchen knife, dry fish, cooking pin, N50.00
7. Hen (fowl)-productivity. ( Uyata kingdom bye-law 2018).

## **Marriage Process**

### **Formal Visits**

According to Sampson in an oral interview (2018), there are 4 (four) acceptable visits to the bride's family and one private visit to the Bride alone which is the starting point of marriage. The first visit of contact between the Groom and the bride is such a private one that only the brides' friend and the Groom's friend meet to commence the marriage process called Menye Ozu. At this time, the Bride having accepted to take the hand of the Groom in Marriage having investigated and studied the man and their family for a certain period of time, they meet to take the first marriage vow and covenant with the Groom called Unwo keshita Menye ozu. The sharing and acceptance of drink, usually a bottle of Local Gin or Schnapps is used in the presence of both party's friends-The drink so passed in a small glass the man drinks a little and give to the woman to drink the rest, the same will be done to the woman who drinks a little and give to the man to drink the rest. The friends will take a little and the remaining is given to the Bride with some accepted amount of money. The Bride takes the drink to the father to inform the father and mother that she has found a husband. This marks the beginning of the marriage.

### **2<sup>ND</sup> Process-Menye Ununu:**

The second very important process is the day of Menye Ununu, meaning brides front drink. This is the day the Groom with his family members will visit Brides family for the official recognition of the Groom and the bride and for the marriage to be declared public-

Usually a date is taken by sending at least three persons from the Groom's family to the Bride's family. The delegates will take a bottle of Gin or Schnapps with a jar of Palm wine to the Bride's parents requesting for a date for the Menye-Ununu (front Drink). As the date is settled, the Bride's parents inform their family members of this date while the Groom's parents also inform their family of this date. Saying that on these date 1,2,3, we

shall be going to the family of xxy, for the ceremony of Menye Ununu. The bride's parents will do the same to their family people.

At the appointed date the Groom and his family will proceed to the Bride's village or town and anchor in a friend's house or relation, who will host them properly before proceeding to the bride's family. The friend or relation is like the contact person between the bride and the groom. (Agbogi 2017)

At the bride's home, the parent welcomes the groom's family with the following items:

1. Kola Nut
2. Bitter Kola
3. Alligator pepper
4. A bottle of gin or schnapps
5. A jar of palm wine

The eldest from the groom's family accepts the offer, and makes a pronouncement of blessing to both families before the drinks and kola is served. By this time both families are already seated for the day's business. The groom's spokesman or the eldest will introduce the day's business by presenting the following items.

1. **To the Bride:** (a) An accepted or agreed sum of money  
(b) 1 bottle of local Gin  
(c) 1 bottle of schnapps.
2. **the family Men:** (a) An accepted or agreed sum of money  
(b) 1 bottle of schnapps  
(c) 1 carton of beer
3. **the family women:** (a) Accepted sum of money  
(b) 1 jar of palm wine  
(c) 1 bottle of local Gin  
(d) A crate of mineral (Ukanimadu 2017)

**N/B:** The drinks can be more depending on the area of marriage.

After this presentation the spokesman or eldest declares the motive of their visit by saying we have come to give your daughter Menye Ununu (front Drink) since they have taken the Menye Ozu (Back Drink) and you are very much aware of it. In response by the bride's family if all that was presented i.e. money and drinks, is accepted the eldest or spokesman from the bride's family will respond saying: we are aware of your visit and have accepted everything as presented, we therefore request to see the groom and the bride come out and seat in the middle of the two families (2 families).

The family of the bride turns to their daughter and questions her in this manner, XX, did you say this man Mr. XXY is the man you want to marry? Are you sincerely asking us to drink this wine they have brought? You are aware that, the moment we drink this wine we shall not for any reason vomit it, meaning as we give you to this man, you will not come back to say, you are not marrying again because of one flimsy reason. Marriage is for better for worse and is for life. As she answers in the affirmative, the wine (Gin or schnapps) is served to the man (groom) who drinks a little from the small glass and gives it to his bride who finishes it, likewise the bride is served the same wine (Gin or schnapps) with that same Glass, she drinks a little and serves it to her groom who drinks the rest and the marriage is declared contracted or entered for life. After this merriment follows at the end of it the groom leaves without the bride. ( Orlu-Odun 2018).

### **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Process: Udho-Ugwo Idah L'inah**

#### **(Day of Payment for Father and Mother In-Law)**

This is the day the Groom with one or two of his relations visit the father and mother-in-law to seek their consent in payment of their entitlement as the tradition demands he will go with the following items;

**1. Father's Consent: Owayi Idah Mu-Onwo**

- (a) An accepted amount of money
- (b) 1 bottle of schnapps.
- (c) 1 bottle of local gin
- (d) 1 jar of palm wine
- (e) 1 head of tobacco
- (f) 1 farthom of cloth (Ijele) (George)

**2. Mother's Consent: Owayi Ina Muonwo**

- (a) 1 jar of palm wine
- (b) 1 piece of George wrapper (Ijele)
- (c) Agreed sum of money

**3. First Son's Consent: Owayi Akpanunwo**

- (a) An agreed sum of money
- (b) 1 bottle of schnapps
- (c) Packet of Cigarette (if he smokes)

NB. The drinks and other items could be more depending on the area. (Aham 2018).

**Fixing Of Date for Marriage Ceremony (Ugwushi-Egba Udhu Ogwo-Obodo)**

In most cases the fixing of date for Udhu Ogwo-Obodo (marriage ceremony) takes place on the day of Owayi Idah-Munwo with the following items:

- (a) An agreed sum of money
- (b) 2 jars of palm wine
- (c) 2 bottles of local gin
- (d) 1 bottle of schnapps
- (e) 1 carton of beer
- (f) 1 Crate of mineral (Ekiye 2009)

At the time of asking for the date of Udho-Ugwo Obodo, delegates from the Groom's family will meet with the Bride's family to find a suitable date for the final ceremony.

On presentation of above items the Groom's family will request from the Bride's family a date for the final visit called Udho-Ugwo Obodo. At this instance a calendar of the people is brought and a suitable date is sort, a date that will not fall on a sacred or special day of the people. When the date is fixed, the people return to their people and announce the date for the ceremony for the return of their wife. (Aham 2018).

### **The 4<sup>th</sup> Process: Udhu-Ugwo Obodo (Marriage Ceremony)**

This is the final visit to the bride's family, which attracts several persons. This day invitation cards are been distributed to friends and well-wishers, and other relations. At the end of this ceremony, the bride is expected to go with the Groom to his home or village. There is dancing and drinking, eating and presentation of gifts to the bride, gifts of cash and of several values. Series of prayers will be said both traditional libation and Christian prayers. The process/symbols for Udho-Ugwo Obodo are as follows:

#### **(1) Family Men Folk**

- (a) An agreed sum of money
- (b) 1 bottle of schnapps
- (c) 2 cartons of beer
- (d) 6 bottles of local gin
- (e) 6 jars of palm wine
- (f) 1 packet of cigarette
- (g) 1 tobacco head/ 1 box of snuff

#### **(2) Family Women Folk**

- (a) An accepted sum of money
- (b) 2 bags of salt

- (c) 2 jars of palm wine
- (d) 2 bottles of local gin
- (e) 1 box of Snuff (Precious Orlu 2018)

### **(3) Waking Up Of Bride:**

When the above has been settled the next stage is the interesting aspect of it. The groom will be asked to go and wake-up the bride, meaning that she has been sleeping all this while, even when she has joined in the preparation.

The groom will then go with one or two persons with a certain amount of money and a bottle of Gin or Schnapps. She wakes up to get dressed-up in readiness for her escorting to her new home. But she cannot go if the eldest of the family has not come meanwhile it is believed that the eldest is still sleeping. (Ihua-Maduenyi 1976)

### **(4) Waking Of the Eldest Man:**

Because his presence is highly needed even though he has participated in the whole ceremony he gets back to his house to sleep so that the Groom and one or two of his family members will come to wake him up, and this is done with an agreed sum of money and 1 bottle of schnapps. ( Ihua-Maduenyi 1976)

### **(5) Bride Price: (Owayi-Ishi-Ununwe)**

At the conclusion of the above, the bride-price is paid and an agreement written and signed. As a matter of fact the price in Upata kingdom is N60, 00 (sixty naira) only. If the agreement is signed, the next stage is the escorting of the bride with the following process, (using the Upata process).

### (6) Udu-Ununwe- (Escorting Of Bride)

Escorting of the bride in Upata Kingdom is based purely on the tradition laid down hundreds of years ago, with very serious important meanings. The following are required for the escorting of the bride- Ekpadu- arranged by the bride's parents- "Ekpadu" is a kind of Raffia Bag, designed for this purpose-

- Contents:**
- (a) 5 tubers of yams
  - (b) 1 big fish (Dry)
  - (c) 1 Kitchen Pin
  - (d) N50.00
  - (e) 1 hen (fowl) a wish for productivity (fruit of the womb) which the bride holds with her left hand on escortion.
  - (f) 1 kitchen Knife- Which she holds in her right hand to use in preparing food for the husband and children. In order not to starve the family no matter what. (Oguzor N. E 2011).

(7) **Libation:** Before she is escorted the family must libate to bless her and how new family. To do this 1 bottle of schnapps, 1 jar of palm wine, 1 bottle of local gin and N50.00 is required. Then the eldest man or the priest of the family will perform the Libation, where the family members are Christians, prayer will then be offered. When this has been done- the groom will be called to come and settle the following traditional rites

- I. *Uwashi-Ishi*- N100.00 payment for plaiting of brides' hair
- II. *Uyeshi Ukani*- N20.00 tying of wrapper (cloth) - for dressing the bride
- III. *Owayi Egbuluka* – N5.00- A particular leaf stem as a symbol of longevity (long-life)
- IV. *Ukpo-Uko Li Echekpa*- N 5.00 kicking of leg on the ground along the road to her husband village. In those days escorting is always on foot no matter the distance so it is believed that the road is not smooth and she will need to rest along the road.

- V. *Uyigboma- Ukwu-* N3.00. A period of blessings for the Bride performed by a family woman, who has at least, five living children, first son and first daughter living. 5 blocks of moulded sand is kept outside with money placed on top of it. The bride comes out and kicks the blocks with her legs one after each blessing.
- VI. Escorts- women N100.00, men N50.00 (Oguzor N. E 2011).

At the completion of all these, the woman is escorted to her husband's place in the company of her family women, girls and boys. On arrival at the husband's house, the woman carrying the Ekpadu takes the Ekpadu to any of her (bride's) relation in that village, but where there is none, a distant relation is traced and made possible before the date of escorting where the bag of life will be kept temporary before it will be retrieved by the Grooms family with a certain amount of money.

On arrival the Bride and the escorts are welcomed with; 1 packet of biscuits 1 jar of palm wine and 1 bottle of local gin before any other entertainment.

On return to their home, 3 bride's maid called Umu- Udhukata will stay behind with the bride for 4 days after which they will return with N300.00, N100.00 each. Before their return they would have made sure that, the groom had settled the bride with the following;-

1. *Owayi Unakata Liudho-* N100 payment before sleeping with the bride in one room.
2. *Usatu-Ekpadu* N100.00, 1 jar of palm wine, 1 bottle of local gin to retrieve the Ekpadu (bag of life) from where it is kept

At the conclusion of this the bride's maids return to their home leaving their sister with her new family. ( Egogbeke: Eze & Adaji 2018).

## **Conclusion**

This tradition is indeed universal in Ekpeye Great Kingdom, but wish to state clearly that the amounts and all the requirements here is specifically

as it is obtainable in Upata kingdom of Ekpeye-Ethnic Nationality. The amount, demand for all the other 3 groups is possibly higher but the process of marriage and symbols are the same- the researcher being the son of the soil, is writing out of personal experience as a married man who was born and brought up in the area of study. In respect of the above Obodoegbulam (2017) opine that marriage being a universal phenomenon is conceptualized to suit different cultural environment which makes this no doubt, makes this study unique as it focuses on the Ekpeye people of the Niger-Delta

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