

A Feminist Analysis of the Themes of Bride Price Practice in Sutherland's Marriage of Anasewa and Sofola's Wedlock of The Gods

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the issues of bride price practices projected in the plays of two African playwrights. These are Sutherland's *Marriage of Anasewa* and Sofola's *Wedlock of the gods*. In the former play, Anasewa uses his daughter as a means of solving his economic problems through her bride price. In the later play, some consequences of exorbitant bride price are projected. These include forced and unhappy marriages. These plays project the practice in some parts of Africa whereby the practice of bride price has become commercialized. This has become a concern of African feminists as the practice demeans women and subjects them to maltreatment such as domestic violence. There is therefore need for concerted efforts by stakeholders such as the government and NGO's to bring an end to the practice of exorbitant bride price.

Keywords: Feminism, High-bride price, Commercialization of Women, Negative Impacts

Introduction

One of the global focuses in recent times is the effort to emancipate women from maltreatment by the society. Discrimination and bias against women have been in the human society since early times as reflected in the teachings of the influential philosophers such as Aristotle and St. Aquinas. Aristotle declared that the female is by virtue of a certain lack of qualities while St. Aquinas believed that woman is an imperfect man (qtn by Seldon 1993: 203). This attitude towards women is reflected in many societies worldwide.

Women have therefore been seeking for a change of societal attitude towards them. They seek for an acceptance of the fact that women and men have equal potential for individual development. One movement behind women's struggles is feminism.

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It is concerned with a fundamental re-examination of the role of men and women in all social, political, economic and cultural institutions. It views women as an oppressed group and traces the origin of this to male defined and male dominated social institutions and value systems.

Issues on feminist agenda encompasses several major areas. First and foremost, it encompasses the economic status of women and issues associated with women's global poverty, such as educational opportunities, industrial development, environment racism, employment policies, prostitution and inheritance laws concerning property. Political rights for women such as gaining the vote rights of assembly, office holding and basic human rights violations such as rape and torture constitute a second area of concern. A third area of global concern is marital and family issues such as marriage and divorce laws, child custody policies and domestic labor. Women health and survival and Aids is another area of global feminist concern. (Collins, electronic material, <http://www.sistahspace.com/nommo/wom509.html>)

Since the springing up of feminism as an organized force from the radical anti-slavery movement in the early 1830, it has spread to different parts of the world including Africa. It has been an umbrella body for the expression of women's needs. According to Marilyn French:(442) Feminism is the serious, coherent, and universal philosophy that offers an alternative to patriarchal thinking and structure ... feminists believe that women are human beings, that the two sexes are (at least) equal in all significant ways, and that this equality must be publicly recognized. They believe that qualities traditionally associated with men – the masculine principle – and that this equality must be publicly recognized. In Africa, literary works have been major avenues for the expression of feminist concerns. A major focus has been negative social-cultural practices against women. This is due to the fact that the prominent factors for male justification of oppressive gender relations are found in traditions and customs of the people. In line with this Modupe Kolawole (1998: 2) believes that "The hold that tradition has on some African people is so tremendous that they will place cultural acquiescence over existing laws designed to facilitate women's mobilization".

Okpkeh Okpencil laborates Kolawole's view by stating that: It is the cultural determined discriminatory practices which are reinforced by other factors inherent in the society that breed the marginalization, oppression and consequently give rise to the exploitation of women by men. Against this backdrop of their disadvantaged position in the configuration of gender relations and culturally established matrix, women in Nigeria are oppressed and exploited as producers and reproducers of labour in addition to being oppressed and exploited as a class. It is obvious that any attempt to address female emancipation in Africa is bound to fail if the cultural factor is not put into consideration. In contemporary Africa negative cultural practices against women still exist. These include early and forced marriages, high bride price, harmful widowhood rites, female gentile mutilation and non inheritance from parents and husbands. This paper focuses on the practice of bride price in some parts of Africa projected in two plays-Efua's Marriage of Anansewa and Sofola's Wedlock of the gods.

1.2 Conceptualization of Bride Price

Bride price may be defined as gift or payment in various forms such as natural produce, labour or monetary form given to a parent or guardian of a female person for a marriage which is intended or has taken place. According to Wikipedia – the free encyclopedia, bride price also known as bride wealth or a dower is an amount of money or property paid to the parents of a woman for the right to marry their daughter. Or the payment is an exchange for bride's family loss of her labour and fertility within her kin group.

Most African marriages are authenticated by bride price. These include cows, goats, tobacco, money, clothes, local brew, chicken and food stuffs (Goldschmidt 1976). Reasons for bride price in Africa include viewing it as a sign of appreciation to the parents of the bride and also as a sign of bond that ties the two families together. According to a research by the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW) (p.7) groups justify the practice by claiming that the wealth received compensates them for time and trouble taken to raise a daughter who will be sent off to live with another family. For others, it is viewed as compensation for loss of a daughter's economic services or for the children she adds to her new family.

The view of Tabitha Naisiko is that bride price in Africa is about acceptance, exchange of gifts, introduction and exchange of resources between families. Naisiko further states: In African cultures, the practice of bride payment transcends marriage issues and gets tentacles to issues directly connected. This is in terms of distribution of resources such as land, animal husbandry and poultry which are means of production. It also deals with entitlement, distribution of goods and services. Bride price also plays significant social and moral roles which too are very significant to economic development. (p.2)

Naisiko also adds that the practice appears to have become commercialized and to have lost much of its traditional value in many instances. In Nigeria, historically bride price took the form of labour by a suitor for the parents of his wife-to-be. Such labour was rendered in addition to a small cash payment and drinks. But with the advent of modern cash economy bride price took the predominant form of money payment. At the same time, payment in other forms of property became a rare occurrence. Across Africa, the trend is as follows; according to research carried out by BBC News(www.bbc.com, world-africa-33810273): In South Africa bride price is known as "Lobola". The groom's family presents either money or cows to the bride's family as a gesture of his willingness to marry her.

The term Labola is also used in Southern Zimbabwe, while in Shona communities it is known as "roora". The tradition originally was to give cattle, this is now often replaced by cash. The amount is subjected to negotiation. However, there is no sense that the bride is being bought. In Senegal, a small amount of money and Kola nut is given to the bride's family at the mosque. Additional money is given outside the mosque from less than \$100 to tens of thousands. The Kenya constitution outlaws the obligation of bride price but it is still being practiced. Pastoral communities insist for the payment to be through cattle. This has been cited as a cause for cattle rustling.

There is a sense that a transaction has taken place over the bride. In Burkina Faso bride price is largely a symbolic act. There is no set amount to be given, but it is mainly in goods such as kola nuts, drinks, and cigarettes. Some ethnic groups may give a goat. A bride's family is not normally too demanding. In Niger Republic, there is an official maximum rate for a bride price of 50,00CFA (\$83, £54) but many pay much more than this.

2.1 Bride Price Issues in Marriage of Anansewa

This is a folktale about the Ananse eternal trickster who weaves stories around his own great mental abilities and material wealth based on the Akan story telling tradition. The story is presented in a light hearted and self-mocking manner. It consists of the ingenious schemes that Kweku Ananse devises to secure the most suitable husband for his daughter from the list of four suitors. At the beginning of the story Ananse laments about his financial position and formulates a plan to use his daughter without telling her what it is all about. He makes her type four letters to four different chiefs promising each of them 'the object of your interest' and hoping they will do the proper thing. He had recently traveled the length and breadth of the country showing her photographs to the chosen chiefs. All the chiefs show interest and are to collect their prize at the same time. To get out of the situation, Ananse engineers Anansewa's 'pretense death' to ascertain who truly loves her. It is in the course of each of the chiefs sending emissaries to commiserate with Ananse that the situation in the homes of these chiefs is revealed and what would have been Anansewa's position if she had married them. Chief-who-is chief passes the test and is rewarded with Anansewa as she miraculously re-awakens from the dead. The chief has proved himself to be a 'true lover'.

The main idea of the above play is a daughter being regarded as a means of material acquisition through her bride price. Anansewa is seen by her father as property to be sold to the highest bidder. The play revolves around the decision of who to marry amongst a stream of expectant suitors each with good material prospect ready to spend money to acquire Anansewa's hand in marriage. According to Michael Etherton (1982:p21): At the beginning of the story we find Ananse complaining about his poverty. He is battered by life's cares and woes. He is unable to find the fees to enable his only daughter Anansewa to continue her course at EP's secretarial school, or to pay the installments on her typewriter. Where is the money to come so that he can lift himself out of the mire of poverty and acquire the consumer durables and social perquisites which are the mark of a successful Ghanaian?

The issue of bride price, particularly when it is high, has been of concern to feminists since it reduces women to the level of articles for sale. In line with this Charity Angya (2002: 146) states: For centuries, women have been regarded more in the light of property and seen as a tool to be used by parents their get-rich quick scheme. In countries the world over, the issue of cultivating the right marriage, in this sense, the one that is more materially rewarding, can be seen as a primary focus of many expectant parents. In Africa, a number of parents believe that a beautiful daughter is an asset that ensures the flow of good things in perpetuity from would-be suitors and husbands. (146).

However, the play is not set in contemporary times but an article by David Akana online shows the practice of bride price in contemporary Ghana. According to Nana Alhaji, a member of a royal family in Ghana, bride price in some areas of Ghana include drinks, clothes, necklaces, earrings and other ladies' items. If the girl is from the northern part of Ghana, the bride price may also include salt, kola nut, goat, guinea fowl, sheep and cattle. A cash component is invariably part of the bride price. An interview by Akana (online) with two newly wedded couple in 2011 revealed the following: Ntonghawah a native of Cameroon wedded a Ghanaian lady.

He stated that he was asked to provide a box containing eight unsown clothes, a ring, a Bible, bra, Jewellery, four bottles of liquor and anything that would make the wife beautiful. Initially he was asked to pay \$5,000 but after negotiation the family accepted \$2,000. George Mason wedded Bonsu Stephanie on 16th July, 2011. He states: "My wife is from Northern part of Ghana and it is very expensive to wed a woman from there. They asked for \$10,000 excluding the clothes and other bask things. But I ended up paying about \$7,000". Mason's statement shows that bride price in some parts of Ghana can be quite high with it's attendant challenges. This is similar to other parts of Africa.

2.2 Analysis of the Theme of Bride Price in Sofola's Wedlock of the gods Synopsis of the Play

Two Lovers, Ogwoma and Uloko though deeply in love are frustrated in their attempt to get married. This is due to the fact that Uloko cannot afford the required amount of money for Ogwoma's bride price. Ogwoma's family needed the money to perform the rites necessary for the healing of Ogwoma's brother. She is therefore forced to marry Adigwu whom she hates. Fortunately for her, Adigwu dies after three years of marriage. Rather than complete the required three months period of mourning and be inherited by her husband's brother as tradition requires, she gets pregnant for Uloko in the second month of mourning. This is regarded as an abomination in the land. All the families involved are scandalized and some are also filled with dread due to the expected repercussions on the lovers. Odibei, Ogwoma's mother-in-law is bent on revenge for her son whom, she believes is intentionally killed so that the lovers can marry. The lovers struggle for survival but eventually Ogwoma is killed by her mother in law through diabolical means. Uloko revenges by killing her and then drinks the same poison that Ogwoma had either drank thereby committing suicide.

The unfair traditional practices revealed in the play include forced marriage, and high bride price. These two are inter related since the forced marriage comes about as a result of Ogwoma's lover's inability to pay the bride price demanded by her family. Her uncle Udo describes the manner she was taken to her husband's house Udo: ... Ogwoma was taken to her husband's house still protesting and I did not as much as look through the door to see if she was tied and carried to Adigwu or whipped along the way like a ram to the alter (Sofola: p.26) Ogwoma also reveals her disgust towards her parent's action: Ogwoma: No, it is not the way others are given away to their husband that you and father threw me away to Adigwu. No, mother, you and father were so hungry for money that you tied me like a goat and threw me away to a man I hated. (Sofola: p.18)

Ogwoma's parents' action is due to the fact that the bride price is to be used in treating her sick brother. This makes her to be viewed as an article that is to be used to raise money. Her feelings about the forced marriage are not of concern to her parents. As a result of being forced to marry Adigwu, Ogwoma goes through three years of an unhappy marriage and is greatly relieved when Adigwu dies. She considers herself free to pursue the desires of her heart, that is marriage to Uloko and therefore resumes her relationship with him while still observing mourning rites for her husband. This brings about several consequences including her death, that of her lover and her mother-in-law. The play depicts some of the consequences of high bride price. A common reason for forced marriage is the high financial gain to be obtained by parents through the marriage. There have also been unhappy marriages due to women being forced to abandon their lovers to marry men they do not love but who can afford the financial demands of their parents. Ogwoma's resumption of her relationship with Uloko while still mourning her husband can be likened to adulterous relationships, one of the consequences of being in an unhappy marriage.

In contemporary Nigeria, there are some communities where bride price is very high. An example is some parts of Igbo land. A typical bride price list obtained online from Naijapals.com is as follows: Section A; Umuada (All kindred daughters) wrappers and blouses -(George/Hollandis/Nigeria wax), jewelry-(Gold plated earrings, necklaces), Head ties and shoes (Different types and colours), and others. Section B; NmanyaUkwu (Big Wine) – Kinsmen (Umunna) Bottle of Seaman's Schnapps, Kolanuts, Gallons of Palmwine, Cartons of Beer, and others. Section C; N'MepeUzo (Opening of gate) 30 tubers of yam, 2 bags of rice, 2 bags of salt, 2 cartons of beer, 25 loaves of bread, and others. Other cash gifts that may be demanded during the course of the ceremony "Ego nfortuite" (cash to bring symbolic cooking pot) - ₦1,000, "Ego Ogocherem" (money for the inlaws) - ₦50,000, "Ego maternity"(money for future maternity) - ₦1,000, "Ego OnyeEze" (money for village chief) - ₦1,500, Ogwe Ego" (lump sum) - ₦5,000.

Example of a bride list in Tiv land obtained in 2017 from a suitor is as follows: Men's requirements; Giving seat - ₦10,000, Knowing your inlaws - ₦15,000, Courting the girl - ₦50,000, Mat for seating - ₦5,000, Drinks in cash - ₦10,000, The main bride price - ₦200,000, and others amounting to ₦430,000. Women's requirements; To open the mother inlaws mouth to speak - ₦6,000, Handkerchief on which the money will be laid on - ₦3,000, Eye glass, paper and the biro used for writing the list - ₦3,000, To know the mother inlaws - ₦10,000, and others amounting to ₦232,000. In addition to the following: Palm oil 5 jerrycans, 8 bags of salt, 1 carton of magi, 3 carton of malt drinks for women, 1 pig, wheel barrow, and others. Meeting all these needs amounted to a million naira.

Examples of other African countries where bride-price is high include Uganda. Niasiko in her research on the practice of bride price in Uganda (p.6) states that unlike what obtained in the past, the practice appears to have become commercialized and to have lost much of its traditional value in many instances. Bride-price can appear to be the buying of a wife as a commodity, which can result in abuse towards a woman if she does not fulfill her 'value' or if she attempts to leave and the bride-price cannot repaid.

Naisiko further quotes an Ugandan government official who stated that the practice of bride-price in Uganda: has resulted in poverty since it is costly and over charged and sometimes boys are left with nothing after the payment of bride-price, and therefore suffer after marriage because all the money that would be used to feed the family was used to marry.

It is due to commercialization of bride price in Uganda that in 2004 Mifumi –an International Development Agency in Uganda organized a conference in the Ugandan capital to discuss the reform of the bride price. The organization issued a strong condemnation and called for its abrogation. The research on bride price in Kenya by CREAM also shows that the demand is very high in some parts of the country. Among the Gusii tribe animals such as cattle, sheep and goats feature prominently as the mode of payment as traditional symbols in marriage rituals though most recently, part of these are converted into cash most of the men struggled to meet this demand. Among the Tigania bride price “include a heifer, a bull and three goats in addition to certain other item that has to be presented to the girl’s home before collection of the girl and this include a gourd of honey, a goat and a ram” (p.15).

It is due to a bride price been high in some part of Nigeria that the limitation of Dowry Law 1956, regulates the quantum of bride price in the four Eastern states of Nigeria. These are Anambra, Imo, Cross Rivers and Rivers State. Section 3(a) of the law prescribes that sixty Naira shall be the maximum bride price payable in respect of marriages where no incidental expenses are involved. Similarly, the marriage, Divorce and Custody of Children Adoptive By-laws order, 1958152 which applies to Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo and Delta States of Nigeria, prescribe a standard bride price of twenty naira. However, the enforcement of these laws have been problematic.

3.0 Consequences of High Bride Price on the Society

The consequences of high bride price are several. One of them is domestic abuse of women by husband who regard them as properties that can be treated in any way desired by the owner. According to CREAM (p.1)

The practice of bride price has in recent times begun to lose its original symbolic meaning, function and significance and assume the form of a wife – for property exchange... Most husbands who continue to abuse their wives always justify their actions by claiming that they purchased their wives, which gives them property rights over her. The property rights of course include the right to use, misuse and abuse. In many African communities, bride price must be returned before a woman can leave the husband.

Many women are therefore forced to remain in an abusive marriage because their family cannot afford or are not willing to refund the bride price paid by the husband. This is a kind of enslavement of women. Another consequence of bride price is that in situations whereby the practice has become commercialized, (particularly the uneducated) parents are often eager to marry off their daughters even when they are very young. The research by CREAM among two Kenyan communities states that: The need for parents and kin to make financial gain out of bride price is best manifested by the increase in the number of early and forced marriage among certain communities in

Kenya for example in Nyanza where child marriage is also relatively common. One out of three women aged 20 – 24 is married by age 18 (p.4).

Early marriage as further stated by CREAM was a major obstacle to nearly every millennium development goal:

- Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger
- Achieving Universal Primary Education
- Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women
- Reducing Child Mortality
- Improving Material Health

High bride price can also result in economic instability for families. Some men use up all their savings that should be used in starting off new homes for bride price. Others have to start paying off debts incurred immediately after marriage. In a field research carried out in western Uganda by Muthegheki, S. Kule, C. Naemah in 2012, some participants expressed the following views:

A government official said: 'it has resulted in poverty since it is costly and over charged and sometimes boys are left with nothing after the payment of bride price, and therefore suffer after marriage because all the money that would be used to feed the family was used to marry'. Young men spoke about how bride price affects them financially. "we suffer so much because we pay a lot of money". He thought this was a form of financial mistreatment". Another noted how men often get into financial trouble due to bride price and said: "the man may have to borrow substantially and go into debt and impoverishment in order to pay bride price and may have no income".

In many instances where the bride price demand is very high there are occurrences of delayed marriages. It is usual to find men and women unable to get married for a long period due to inability to afford bride prices or on the part of the women, not getting men to marry them. For example in some Igbo communities of Nigeria, men have to labour for many years to be able to get married. Some consequences of this are elopement and cohabitation, with the attendant social problems such as children born outside wedlock and spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

There have also been reported cases of rape and abduction of girls by men unable to acquire enough money for bride price. CREAM (ibid p.71) reports that one highly contentious result of high bride price according to a North American anthropologist Robert Levine, was two famous mass outbreaks of rape in Gusii-land (Kenya) in 1937 and 1950. According to this research the bride price in both years had soared beyond the reach of young Gusii men. CREAM further reports that a Gusii-born associate professor at Jackson State University said although marriage by abduction is not as common as it has been, it does still exist. (18 September, 2003a)

4.0 Feminism and Bride Price Practices

Feminists who have been on the fore front for the advancement of women rights have been opposed to the commercialization of bride price as it reduces women to the same category as commodities for sale. This has negative effect on women empowerment efforts at it causes low self-esteem in women.

It is also difficult for women to claim equality with men who have gotten them as wives with their hard earned money as high bride price creates the impression of a transaction taking place. The view of T. U. Akumadu (98: 71) a Nigerian feminist is that:

Many of the negative cultural practices under survey appear to be founded on the idea of inferior status of women as symbolized by the traditional marriage in that the woman is seen as an article for sale after marriage she is treated as an article purchased. Practices such as wife-inheritance, marital rape, the denial of inheritance and custody right, and lack of economic independence are founded on the idea of women being the property of the man.

Collaborating Akumadu's view, Tiyambo Zeleza (1997: 85) view women in situations of high bride price demand as "pawns and commodities distributed by male elders". Zeleza also states that others label the practice as "circulation of women as currency" or "purchase price". The haggling involved in negotiating for bride price certainly presents the woman as an article being bargained for. This at times lasts for a long period as the groom and his family negotiate for what they can afford. An example of this was reported by Patience Akumu from Uganda(online) concerning her sisters' marriage (28th August, 2015).

I would like to romanticize it as a discussion between gentlemen who had the best interest of my sister at heart. But I would be lying. This was a full blown haggle brutal and brush. If the groom could not afford all that was asked of him, the solution was simple. He could simply forget about the marriage. We, the girls and women, were locked out. Through the glass doors, I saw my father gesture and disagree outside and paced nervously, hoping the prospective-in-laws would cave in. My sister cried. My mother said this is how marriages are supposed to begin, with the bride feeling emotional and hopeless as her male relatives decided her fate.

Another ugly aspect of bride price payment is the graduating of the amount according to educational level of the lady involved. This is similar to the cost of a product being according to its value. This greatly contributes to bride price being exorbitant. Similarly, the practice of refunding bride price when a marriage fails implies that it was a business transaction that was not successful. In line with this Akumadu (1998: 34) states: The bride price symbolizes a man's payment to purchase a wife. Upon the dissolution of the marriage in event that the man is not satisfied with the purchased 'item', or other reasons for that matter, the woman continues to be his property until the bride price is returned to him. The exploitation of women in Uganda due to bride price was also reported in the research referred to earlier by Muthegheki and Co (2012: 13)

A clan leader identified among others the impact of bride price on women and said it enslaves the women ... disrespects her because the women were bought through bride price. A religious leader mentioned that bride price was a human rights offence and said 'it is not right to put human being on the commercial market, bargain for them and when one is fed up, dump them leaving the woman psychologically tortured. Women lose their dignity, have to do endless hard labour –and then failure to produce children becomes a big crime once you have been paid for.

This exploitation was also mentioned by a government official who said 'a woman turns to the property of the man after paying bride price and she is exploited to the maximum and this deprives her of her rights.

5.0 Some Reasons for High Bride Price Practice

One of the reasons for high bride price demand is the fact that the contemporary materialistic society has abused a practice that was initially symbolic and regarded as a means to bind the families involved. Some parents view their female children as means to fortune and affluence through their bride price. Often they influence the choice of husbands such that their daughters are given out to the highest bidder. Another contributory factor for high bride price demand is the poverty level of many in the African society. High bride price demand is more common among low income earners and the uneducated. A poverty stricken family who has labored to train their female child can easily view a suitor as a messiah who would elevate their economic status. They therefore demand exorbitant bride price.

Gifts that are bought for a bride by her family using the bride price payment also contribute to exorbitant bride price. It is customary in many African societies for a bride to go to her matrimonial home with assorted gifts from her family. In several instances the bride price is used to acquire this. The gifts may consist of electronic household goods, kitchen equipment, animals, food stuff, expensive ward rope, a car, and even large sums of money. Often these are ostentatiously displayed. This is similar to robbing peter to pay peter. It is more appropriate to allow the new family to acquire their needs at their convenience.

6.0 Advantages of Bride Price Practice

Despite the several disadvantages of bride price practice in contemporary times, they are some positive sides of the practice particularly when it is more symbolic than a commercial venture. These include the fact that it's a means of appreciating a brides' family for her upbringing. It also symbolizes the fact that a union has taken place between a man and a woman, therefore authenticating a marriage. In addition, bride price practice unites bride and groom's families thereby building alliances and binding communities. Furthermore, in many African communities bride price brings about social security for wives, children, widows and orphans. It legitimizes a marriage, children are accepted as belonging to their father and widows and orphans also become the responsibility of a diseased family.

However, the view by some people that bride price is a source of social capital on which community is based is problematic. For example Naisiko (p.5) states that the process and act of paying bride price comprise cultural economic opportunities for the communities not only in the past and to date even in African communities. Naisiko also states that in Bagishu (of Uganda) the bride price is given back to the children of the couple when they too have a ritual to perform like when a son is undergoing a rite of initiation to adulthood, the material uncle who is in charge takes care of the logistics even when he is marrying, the material uncle gives his nephew the cows to give as bride price for his wife.

The problem with accepting Naisiko's view is that it makes bride price exorbitant in contemporary times. This is due to the fact that the amount of money or goods needed to meet the above needs is much. In addition, Naisiko also states that bride price has been a source in Uganda for groups to operate commercially, and link themselves to government programmes such as National Agricultural Advisory and Development Services, Saving and Credit Cooperative. However this can be achieved without bride price being involved as the practice is similar to negotiating for a price over a humans' worth.

The position of this researcher is that since bride price has some advantages such as being viewed as symbol of a covenant that helps the sustenance of a marriage, the practice should be majorly symbolic. This means that any contributions from a groom's family even it is kola nuts, dried meat and wine (as was the practice in some parts of Nigeria) can be seen as a symbol that authenticates a marriage and binds two families together. For example, there are parts of Africa where bride price is just symbolic and the marriages are legitimate with every benefit that marriages bestow on women and children.

Furthermore, gifts given by a groom's family in appreciation of the girl can be left to be a decision of the family rather than that of the girl's family. This was the case of the bible's example which is the oldest recorded example of bride price practice. The reference is Gen. 24:53-54. Abraham's servant offered gifts for Rebekah's marriage to Isaac (Abraham's son) without haggling and bargaining being involved.

7.0 Conclusion

In some parts of Africa, the practice of bride price has deviated from its original symbolic role to the commercialization of women. This has many negative effects. The global economic recession in contemporary times has compounded the problem. Young people are finding it very difficult to marry bringing about many anti-social vices. It is therefore important that concerted efforts be made by different stakeholders such as the government and women groups to bring an end to the practice of commodification of women through bride price.

8.0 Recommendations

It is obvious that there is need for reformation of the practice of bride price requirement in many parts of Africa whereby it has become a "wife-for-property exchange". The enlightened members of the African society can play a major role in this drive. The educated groups in Africa are becoming gate keepers in their families and communities. They can therefore speak against the practice of commercialization of bride price and also be exemplary when their daughters and other relations are being given out in marriages.

There is need for concerted efforts by different groups in the society to bring an end to the abuse of bride price practice. Female activists, NGOs and government agencies can carry out advocacy campaigns from the grass root levels. Poverty eradication would play a major role in bringing an end to the abuse of bride price practice. It is due to poverty that some families view their daughters as means to fortune and affluence.

It is therefore needful for the government of African countries to consistently carry out poverty eradication strategies. The media campaigns can be very effective in eradicating the abuse of bride price practice. All stakeholders can make good use of this avenue.

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