

**THE DRAMA IN CROSS-CULTURAL  
MARRIAGES AND STEREOTYPES  
IN CENTRAL NIGERIA:  
The Tiv-Igede Paradigm in the Global Age**

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**Introduction**

As cultures from the sub-region of (Nigeria and then Africa), a continent which falls under those parts of the world that have experienced great political, economic, social and religious turbulence and restiveness, care must be taken in examining their systemic progression in a world that has become a global village. Under globalisation, the challenge is thus to bring to its barest minimum, social inequalities, poverty, displacements, environmental degradation, human and civil rights abuses, war, hunger and disease which in their entirety constitute problematics to the world today. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) defined globalisation as

The rapid integration of Economies worldwide through trade financial flows, technology spill overs, information networks and cross-cultural currents” (IMF 101).

This definition has come under close scrutiny with scholars alleging that, globalisation is not about the ‘integration of’ but the ‘opening up’ of all economies and all productions, services, natural resources, cultural and other sectors to the business operations of expansionary global corporations (Keet 4). The intellectual muscle seeking to open up the authenticity and/or sincerity of the globalisation movement is not remotely our concern in this study. Rather, the conviction

that, globalisation would if properly managed, encourage development through best practices, is the premise upon which the arguments in their works are anchored.

Global trends today are geared towards mobilising people and nations towards a common identity, at least, as it concerns development goals and objectives. This perhaps, underscores the fact of oneness in commission, vision and mission. At this level of growth and development, all parties concerned aspire to the same heights, view from the same point and as such point to the same direction. Regrettably however, even among people of the same nationality, this objective is a far cry. Discrimination, apathy, deprivation, stereotypes and social justice rage significantly amongst people and ethnicities. Sequel to this, the study is undertaken on the firm belief and conviction that, for sustained and harmonious global relations, these intra/inter cultural prejudices and stereotypes must be addressed to pave way for easy negotiations for a healthy global union. It is against this backdrop that, this study proposes to examine the seemingly not so socially acceptable marriage relationship between the Tiv and Igede people of Benue State in Central Nigeria.

### **Marriage as an Institution**

Marriage as an institution is recognised globally as a matrimonial relationship and or union of person(s) who most often are usually of the opposite sex. Today, legal proceedings are being cited and endorsed by some nation's recognising same sex marriages, but with this research, we are concerned essentially with the most widely accepted type of marriage which is the type contracted between man and woman.

As a system, marriage is consummated, following a series of monumental procedures as practiced and understood by cultures of the parties involved, 'the process may on mutual terms, be relaxed temporarily to make for certain aspects of cultural precedence, and

preeminence, but this does not in any way negate, the systemic configuration of the institution. For instance, bride price is not paid on a pregnant woman in Tiv land; this perhaps runs across most cultures of the middle-belt region. At such instances, parties may be allowed to go on and contract the marriage, and pay the bride price after safe delivery.

Different communities recognise patterns and types of marriages according to their cultural/social worldview. When therefore, parties of different cultural extractions get attracted to each other to a level of marital possibilities, such a union is referred to as cross cultural marriage. Typical of humanity, cultural interaction, produces in the main- culture conflict, which generates in many folds suspicion, tension, disagreement, ethnic pride and identity, inadvertently forcing reconciliatory processes in the forms of dialogue and mutual negotiation. Depending on how deeply entrenched, these conflicts which are usually a curious manifestation of sentimental proclivities of a people, prejudice and stereotypes play a huge role on the negotiation table.

Proceedings, at such instances are quite dramatic in the sense that they afford fanatics or cultural conformists the opportunity to rehearse and rehash "wise counsels" crafted from native wisdom and intelligence. In any case, the marriage institution whether cross cultural or intra cultural is caste in the whims of fascinating drama's and funfair that generate occasional moments of hilarious excitement and celebration.

The main import and thesis of this research, is predicated on the stereotypical foundations which have created over time, a friction at least as it concerns marriage between the Tiv and Igede ethnic tribes of Benue State in the Central region of Nigeria. The intention is to look at what constitutes a cultural stereotype and how this has come to bear on the marriage relationship of these ethnic groups.

### **Cultural Stereotypes**

Culture is a home in which family ethics, codes of conduct, conditions, aspirations and mannerism are accommodated. Every member of this home therefore learns unconsciously the ethos and provisions there from without much difficulty. It is a book chapter that articulates rights, wrongs, failures, successes, sanctuaries, sanctities, secular and profane thoughts, individual yearnings and cravings, the just and equitable behaviour, and above all a mask and mark of identity that is worn by members that constitute the segment. In more penetrating wordings, Wa Thiong'o (20) describes culture as;

...a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment. It is the sum of their art their science and all their social institutions, including their system of beliefs and rituals... such values are often expressed through the peoples songs, dances, folklore, drawing, sculpture rites and ceremonies. Over the years these varieties of artistic activity have come to symbolize the meaning of the word culture.

However, this culture is dynamic and open to change as a people progress and thus come in contact with different other groups living remotely around (sharing boundaries) or interactions in the Diaspora. Depending on the particular aspect of culture, change may be a rigorous and a Herculean task to embark on. This is because, a people's total history is shaped by their cultural antecedents and change may prove to be a fraction of a dislocation in the corporate vision of the people. Ochefu (77-78) further projects culture as:

Values acquired overtime, and influenced by both internal and external factors. Its beliefs and

intellectual and artistic achievements and accomplishments are also core compliments of culture. It is here that perceptions of other people and their culture are perceived. It is also here that stereotypes are created.

The Microsoft Encarta Electronic Encyclopedia as quoted in Ochefu (78) defines stereotypes and it's operative word 'prejudice' as;

...a preformed and unsubstantiated judgment or opinion about an individual or a group either favourable or unfavourable in nature. In modern usage, however, the term most often denotes an unfavourable or hostile attitude toward other people based on their membership in another social or ethnic group. The distinguishing characteristics of a prejudice are that it relies on "stereotypes" (over simplified generalizations) about the group which the prejudice is directed.

Stereotype is thus a set of traits or general character, typifying a group where each member is believed to operate within the same social reality, vision and values. In their discussion on stereotypes, Preiswerk and Perrot (173) maintain that:

Subtlety has no place in the field of stereotypes. What is right for the group is IPSO facto right for the individual and for all members of the group, the result being that any individual ends by representing the group as a whole. This phenomena could be summarized in the popular formula. "When you've seen one, you've seen then all". The aspect of generalization is dominant here, and it remains to be seen how the specimen in Question

has been “seen”. It is probable from the facility with which the generalization was made, that, the observation was the result of an outrageously selective perception, for only an extreme simplification can lead to, or justify such a generalization.

Stereotypes may be positive and favourable where it describes the strengths, viability and or industrialism of a person, race or ethnic group involved. On the other hand, it may be negative, unhealthy and unfavourable where it celebrates in high measure the weaknesses, fraudulence and ineptitude traits of a race, group or ethnicity. Yet stereotypes could also be contradictory where different views about the same people are upheld by a particular group.

Most propelling of the entire basis for cultural stereotype is ethnocentric assertions. Our methods, procedures and processes, should suffice for all other cultures. That we eat yarm with palm oil renders suspect and hence unsuitable a relationship with other cultures that eat theirs with groundnuts. Based on truth or not, stereotypes once formed are sustained by the generating community with or without adequate mechanisms for evaluating the validity or not of such claims. That you do things the way you do is unique to you, in the same vein, the process adopted by the other person is also unique to him, what is needed therefore is for you to try to understand how both approaches in times of need can interplay to produce a way forward. As Ochefu 78 observes:

Throughout history, examples abound to show that, where a group is “stereotyped” and hence classified as barbaric, inferior, dishonest or too acquisitive, prejudice is induced and results in some form of discrimination.

In summation, Eriksen (1993) as referred to in Ochefu (78) contends that:

Cultural stereotyping is therefore, an adversarial, local or world view which occurs when a group fails to understand the complexities of a culture or society. The tendency therefore is for a quick classification of such a society on the platform of being primitive.

This position is what informs the basis for most of what looks like stereotypical images on certain cultures. These stereotypical impressions come with the attendant problems of prejudice and misrepresentations thus introducing a strain on the various levels of relationship between communities. One of such relationships that has been affected and has attracted our critical perusal in this work is the marriage relationship between the Tiv and Iggede ethnic groups of Benue State. First, let us look at the marriage system found in these two areas.

### **The Tiv-Iggede Marriage System**

As earlier stated, the series of monumental processes and procedures that characterise the consummation of a marriage is what is referred to here as the marriage system. More similarities in terms of common approaches are found in both cultures than do exist in differences in their marriage systems.

Summarily speaking in both cultures, the system usually begins with the activities of a match maker who on spotting some positive attributes in either the boy or the girl facilitates the initial meeting between the two, one of whom he or she (match maker) shares some form of relationship with. This is however, not to lose sight of the consequences of modernity with wider avenues for interaction where would-be couples meet on sight without a match maker. A date is then set for both parties to meet and do a preliminary seeking of consent. This first meeting which the man attends in the company of at least one of his friends is referred to in Iggede as “Oka ye ahu”, and in Tiv as “Za ye”. In Iggede traditional

society, the costume to be worn at this meeting was usually a semi-nude attire with only a piece of loin cloth tied around the waist. This according to Edo (22) is:

To identify any physical defects or skin disease on either of them with a view to enabling them have a fair opinion of each other. Any scar on the body of either of them is thoroughly explained. For instance, scars on the man's legs might depict matchet or hoe cut which in turn signifies he is a good farmer. This could be an added advantage since the bride would implicitly be assured of abundant food.

As with the Tiv people the story is slightly, different. The whole body is observed to ascertain how well endowed the bride is. This observation is usually carried out secretly as the woman goes to take her bath. Emphasis is usually on the buttocks, eyes, pubescence and of course how hairy the woman is generally. All these combine to give a summary picture of beauty to the man.

This first meeting, accords the man, the opportunity to commence courtship, depending of course, on the opinion of the girl in question. Courtship here may range from sending gifts of recent pictures, meeting at market places, to farming for the family of the would-be-bride as a sign of commitment, dedication persuasion and as well as loyalty and generosity. This period of courtship enables both families to do proper investigation and in house cleansing. There is provision for the position of a go-between whom the Tiv people refer to as "ishuul" and the Igede "oleru". Differences however exist in the mode of appointing a go-between. With the Tiv people, it is the family of the bridegroom that is required to produce the "ishuul" whereas for the Igede people it is the family of the bride who appoints the "oleru" upon acceptance of their daughter to marry the said groom. Should the girl decline (which is usually very rare) the "oleru" is not appointed, and the girl's,

indecision is given as an excuse.

A date is then set aside for payment of the bride price which is celebrated amidst heavy feasting, and merry-making- what is technically referred to today in English as traditional marriage. (The Igede refer to it as "Uga nya' ahu" and the Tiv- "Kem kwase"). In both cultures, one is not expected to complete payment of whatever is mentioned as the bride price, which leaves room for sustained (friendly) understanding relationship between the two families. "Kem Kwase ngu been ga" and "Ahu ka mi oyeye ka" are adages used by the Tiv and Igede respectively during the bridal settlement which literarily translated means, you cannot finish to pay the named bride pride. With peaceful settlement, a date is then appointed for the bride to be taken to her husband's house. This date usually coincides with the market day in the grooms place to allow for much local publicity and a show of support and solidarity to the young lady. This date may not be strictly adhered to and as Edo (23) explains:

The idea is not only to keep the bridegroom in suspense and arouse greater interest in his betrothed, it is also intended to give time for the girls psychological preparedness and the parents of the bride to offer her gifts, blessings and pieces of advice on how best to relate with her husband and In-law.

From this point, for the Tiv people, the rest is celebration and merry making which may last for one week depending on how late the man is marrying or two days if he is married at the "right time". But for the Igede people, the woman is considered married only after a gunshot is fired at least once on arrival of the bride at the husband's house. Where the burial of an elderly person who should be buried with the rites of the cult of "Achukwu" is pending in the village, no gunshot can be fired here. Rather, the gun is taken to the neighbouring village to avoid the wrought of the evil

spirits on the young woman. Edo (23) further explains that, “the soot from the gunshot must be taken to make a mark on the chest of the new wife”. This according to him is an outward sign of invocation of the wife’s devotion to the husband and also marks the latter’s customary right to the wife. The following morning after the night’s entertainment, if she is the man’s first wife, her father-in-law takes both the wife and husband before the elder god (ohe ogbadogogo) and joins them as husband and wife, by slaughtering a hen while the gizzard and kidney is given to the couple to eat. This according to Edo is the Igede traditional marriage sacrament which makes it very unusual for a man to divorce his wife.

This is perhaps, the formal approach to marriage in these areas. However, unorthodox methods also exist along this conventional type such as abduction and/ or elopement, but the traditional and more accepted form is that which we have elaborately discussed. Let us now look at the impact of stereotypes on the marriage relationship of these two cultures.

### **Stereotypes and the Tiv/Igede Marriage Relationship**

This is probably the most important segment of this work. This segment attempts to x-ray the status of marriage as it concerns the Tiv and Igede people of Benue State in Central Nigeria. In spite of the huge similarities that exist between the two systems, prejudice in terms of marriage between these two cultures exist on a substantial scale. As for the Tiv people, not much discrimination is noticed as per who and where one can aspire to marry from. This explains why most Tiv men even of prominent status are married to other tribes and cultures. They include Iyorchia Ayu, Gabriel Suswam, Terhembra Shija, Charles Vajime, David Ker, India Garba to mention just a few. Those mentioned above, have served the Nigerian nation as Minister, Governor, Member House of Representative, Vice Chancellor and Army General respectively.

Most exemplary and outstanding of it all is the fact that the royal home of the Tiv people (Tor Tiv Palace) is at the moment being mothered by an Idoma woman as the only surviving wife of the royal father of the Tiv people-Tor Tiv. There may be pockets of resentment here and there, but the measure is so negligible to pass for stereotype. However, there seems to exist an age long friction which forbids the Igede consummating a relationship with people of Tiv extraction. Curiously though, it was discovered in the course of this research that the Igede people are only more comfortable with the Iyara people of the Upper Cross River State in marriage. The reasons of course are more historical than social. As it concerns the Tiv people, no authoritative statement explaining the reasons for this friction is offered. Every one interviewed seems to be of the view that “it is a thing that cannot be readily explained”. Even educated and well travelled Igede people who could not explain the reason(s) for this, are not ready to break this cultural taboo. Speculatively though, some theories seeking to explain the reasons for this friction and cultural stereotype have been advanced.

The first of these theories is the “Gender insensitivity theory. This theory holds that, a long time ago, the Tiv and Igede people were involved in a communal clash. At a point, the fire power of the Tiv people became unbearable for the Igede warriors. Armed with the law of natural justice and common understanding that women should be spared during wars, the Igede warriors fled leaving behind their wives. To their utmost dismay and amazement their wives were killed by the Tiv warriors. This then formed the stereotypical impression that the Tiv man has no respect for womanhood, and as such, was not going to be allowed to marry their daughters. Plausible as this theory seems, it can be challenged on two fronts. Firstly that, the man should act in defence of the woman, so rather than run away and leave behind your wife, you should have asked her to go ahead of you as you run to take refuge somewhere. Secondly, this friction is not only for the Igede female,

even the male Igede person is forbidden to marry a Tiv woman. How then can we argue this out?

The second is the cultural extinction theory. Numerically the Igede people are among the least populated ethnic tribes in Benue State as compared to their Tiv and Idoma neighbours. The fear then is that, if they begin to procreate with the Tiv people in terms of marriage, they will in no distant time be consumed and subsumed culturally under the Tiv people. Example here is cited of the Etulo people found in Buruku and Katsina-Ala Local Governments of Benue State. This too cannot hold water because the unity and cultural identity of the Etulo people remains solidly intact even more intact than the Tiv people. They (Etulo) are more resolute in the defence of their culture than even the Tiv people- The yearly "Aketa" fishing festival readily comes to mind as an example of cultural promotion and preservation by the Etulo people. Also, the historical circumstances surrounding these two cultures vary considerably and should be reflected upon when expressing this fear of cultural extinction.

Third in this hierarchy is the professional service theory which reduces the Igede person to the stigma of a professional servant. The main import of this theory is premised on the fact that, the Tiv people once held an impression that, the Igede people are only good as servants either on the farm or in the house. As such, after marrying several Tiv wives, the Tivman will proceed to marry an Igede woman, who eventually will end up serving one or more of the wives. Obviously, this is a case of misconception and misrepresentation of facts surrounding the typical Tivman's family life. As a young wife, you are kept in the house of one of the eldest wives to undergo some level of apprenticeship, which is expected to furnish you with adequate knowledge on how you can pull through the huddle of marital life- this should not be misconstrued with servant hood.

These theories of Gender insensitivity, cultural extinction

and professional service, are all speculative attempts at explaining the friction in the Tiv/ Igede marriage relationship. This may be a far cry from the actual truth, but at least, it has provided us with a glimpse of the general nature of the problem with a view to attracting further research in this area.

### **The Irony of the Situation**

It is quite ironical that the Tiv and Igede people share a more cordial political and social relationship than do any of the tribes in Benue State, and yet cannot marry each other. Political calculations seeking to elect a Governor for the state rely heavily on the direction of Igede votes. If this is correct then it means, the Igede people align more politically with the Tiv people since all elected Governors in the State so far have been Tiv sons. A very good example can be cited of the 2007 PDP party primaries held in the state where the only Igede Gubernatorial aspirant conceded his votes to Hon. Gabriel Suswam (now Governor of the state). Thus far, it is difficult to understand why this friction should continue.

It is also ironical that, the people tagged as predominantly servants, have written their names in gold on the professional, educational and civil service charts of not only the state but the nation at large. Five years ago, Miss Naomi Agogo now Mrs. Naomi Doki was presented during the convocation ceremony of Benue State University as the best graduating student- she is an Igede daughter. Professor Ode Ojowu and Late Hon. Daniel Agogo have served as economic advisers to the President, and Secretary to the State Government respectively at different times. There are also several others who have served as Permanent Secretaries at some point or the other; some have served the state as Deputy Governors, commissioners, directors, etcetera. In the academia you have several professors and academics of repute amongst whom are Professor Silas Okita, Professor Gabriel Igwe, Professor Oga Ajene, Dr. Adagba Okpaga, Dr. Joel Eriba, just to mention a few.

It is also ironical that, both the children of Igede and Tiv respectively go to the same churches, same schools, same markets, same restaurants, same clubs etc, and yet cannot marry these same people who are their friends, their classmates, their mentors- the list is endless. Yet, it is an existing fact that possible couples meet at these above mentioned places. It is only rational that we should allow reason to prevail.

### **Conclusion**

The basis for marriage is love, love they say is blind, but no, it is the lovers themselves that are blind. It is therefore difficult to force lovers to open their eyes to cultural restrictions. Culture should therefore open its eyes to see love and the lovers alike. Whatever must have been responsible for this friction, we respect the position of culture as an arbitrator. The younger generations have suffered enough. There is need for the custodians of this culture to intervene especially as globalisation has brought us together as one and Christianity teaches us to love our neighbour as ourselves. Even politics recognises the party and votes, not the individual, therefore this paper stands to appeal for a repeal of this cultural decree so as to afford the upcoming generations the opportunity for a free and uninhibited marriage between the two cultures. Like religious adherents, we must prepare adequately as people from the less developed region to encounter the world on the global stage. We need to put our house in order. Let us purge ourselves of trivial sentiments and embrace the corporate vision of brotherhood and collectivism for only then can we effectively manage the terms and tenets of globalisation.

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