

TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE IN MBUTU, ABOH-MBAISE LGA, 2012-2020.

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GOU/U22/HIS/076

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

FACULTY OF ARTS

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JULY, 2026

TITLE PAGE

TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE IN MBUTU, ABOH-MBAISE LGA, 2012-2020.

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A PROJECT RESEARCH SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR
THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A) DEGREE IN HISTORY AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES.

SUPERVISOR: DR KELECHI COLLINS OKORO

JULY, 2026.

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research, titled “TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE IN MBUTU, ABOH-MBAISE LGA, 2012-2020” was carried out by EZE CHINENYE SONIA with the registration number. GOU/U22/HIS/076, under the supervision of DR. KELECHI COLLINS OKORO. I have given due acknowledgement to all the sources from which the constructive ideas and inspirations were taken from. The project is free from any plagiarism and has not been submitted anywhere for publication. Therefore, this will be submitted to the Department of History and International Studies, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu.

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APPROVAL

This project is approved for the award of Bachelor of Arts (B.A) Degree in History and International Studies, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu.

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DEDICATION

This work is humbly dedicated to my parents for their support and unending care throughout my years of study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to God Almighty whose love, mercy, and guidance have seen me through a successful undergraduate journey. Reaching this significant milestone in my academic pursuit fills me with immense joy and fulfilment. It is truly an honour, and I extend heartfelt appreciation to everyone who played a part in the success of this work. I sincerely appreciate Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu, for providing a conducive environment and the knowledge that contributed significantly to the successful completion of this research. I am grateful to the University for the opportunity to pursue my academic goals.

With sincere gratitude, I thank my supervisor Dr. Kelechi Collins Okoro for his patience, support, contributions, and supervision throughout the completion of this project. I also thank my esteemed Head of Department, Assoc. Prof. Ifeoma Ezedinachi, for her invaluable support. I also thank the Dean of the faculty of Arts and Education, Rev. Bro. Prof. Ekene Osuji, thanks for your support and encouragement.

My appreciation also goes to all the lecturers in the Department of History and International Studies for their remarkable inputs throughout my academic journey. Prof. Ngozi Ojiakor, Dr. Ugochukwu Okoji, Dr. Hope Iwuchukwu, Dr. Leonard Nnoli, Dr. Eyeh, Dr. Ani, Mrs. Winifred Ojiego, Mr. Christopher Uwakwe and our amiable secretary, Mrs. Edith Chinwendu thank you all for your kindness and support.

To my dearest parents, Dr. Eze Matthew Nwosu and Mrs. Philomina Eze-Nwosu, I am immensely grateful for your prayers, your belief in me, your unconditional love, encouraging words, support, and constant attention. I love you deeply. To my wonderful siblings Emeka Eze-Nwosu, Chiamaka Nwaigwe, Chibuzor Eze-Nwosu (my sponsor), Chisom Eze (my guy) thank you for always checking up on me and showing your support.

Finally, to my amazing friends Onuoha Isioma, Agber Angel, Maduagugbuo Immaculate, Nweke Nkiruka, Ozoemena Chidinma, Ogoh Chiamaka, Ike Gibson, Ihekwaba Kachisicho, Okoro Thompson, Onyibo Ebuka, Nwagor Pascal, Oko Joseph, Agu Ijeoma, Ihuoma Charles, Nwachukwu Victor, and all my course mates Onyemaechi Irene, Achine Victor, Augustine Favour, Nnachi Daniel, Oparaocha Elvis your presence made the journey worthwhile, and to everyone I encountered during my research your contributions are truly appreciated and acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

This research assesses traditional marriage in Mbutu community, Aboh-Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State between 2012 and 2020. Traditional marriage remains an important aspect of Igbo culture, serving as a means of establishing legitimate family relationships and preserving cultural values. However, misconceptions regarding the nature and cost of bride price in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise have generated debates and different perceptions among both the indigenes and non-indigenes. The objective of this research is to trace the historical background of Mbutu, analyse why the people of Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise uphold or criticise traditional marriage, and their perceptions on traditional marriage and the changes that have occurred overtime. This research adopts the historical research method, utilizing primary, secondary and tertiary sources of data. Primary sources include oral interview, archival materials, secondary sources include books, journal articles while tertiary sources comprise of internet materials. Findings reveal that bride price in Mbutu traditionally serves as a symbol of appreciation, family alliance, and social legitimacy rather than commercialization of women. The research further finds that modernization, Christianity, education, and urbanization have influenced traditional marriage practices, leading to modifications in certain customs. The research concludes that traditional marriage remains significant aspects of Mbutu heritage and recommends the preservation of beneficial customs while discouraging excessive financial demands associated with marriage ceremonies.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Marriage which is a union between man and woman has always stood as a central institution in African societies. It is not just the union of two individuals but the coming together of families, lineages, and communities. In Igbo culture, particularly in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State, traditional marriage has long ago represented a sacred bond rooted deeply in customs, rituals, and collective identity. Traditional Marriage also known as *Igba Nkwu* is more than just a personal affair, it is a cultural heritage that strengthens communal bonds, transmits values and preserve family honour. The elaborate ceremony ranging from the bride-price negotiations to the bright display of dance, music, and communal feasting demonstrates the cultural pride of the people. Paul Uche Mbakwe in “The Traditional Mbaise Society: Perspectives on Igbo Socio-Cultural History (1500-1900)” observes that marriage is one of the most fundamental institutions in Mbaise society, shaping its values, norms, and identity. He emphasises that traditional marriage is not merely a union between individuals but a social institution that links families and sustain the cultural continuity of the people.¹

According to Onyedikachi Evelyn Ekeoma, Kanayo Nwadiakor, and Lawrence Nwankwor in their study “*Perceptions and Impacts of Traditional Marriage Customs in Aboh-Mbaise*”, in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise traditional marriage holds deep cultural importance, mainly in relation to bride wealth. However, the traditional marriage practice has been widely misinterpreted and misunderstood, as many individuals see it to be greatly expensive. The authors argue that such perceptions has negative impacts which include discouraging prospective marriage and even leading to shattered relationships among young people.²

In the same vein, Princewill Uzochukwu Anyanwu in his work on “*Marriage Bride Price as a Woman Authority and the Implication of Non-Payment of Bride Price in Mbaise*” asserts that bride price is symbolic rather than commercial. He explains that its payment legitimises marriage and confers dignity and authority on women within their marital homes³.

The Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise people, like all Igbo people were against celibacy, as it was seen as contrary to societal and natural laws. Marriage between relatives was prohibited and serious efforts have been made to make sure that intending couples are not biologically related. Marriage was also regarded as an obligation. A man who was of marriageable age was considered fully responsible when he took a wife, while an unmarried man who passed the age of settling down was considered worthless *efulefu* among his kinsmen. In addition, if an unmarried man dies, he was buried without the traditional rite accorded to his peers. Marriage was the ultimate expectation of every 'ripe' woman. A woman is considered ripe for marriage from the age of 18 (Eighteen) to about 25 (Twenty-Five), beyond this age anxiety and stigma set in not only for the woman but also her entire family, especially her mother, because an unmarried woman was seen as lacking good morals, home training, or not being from a good family, which is considered shameful.⁴

Ernest Nnagbo in "*Ethnography of Traditional Marriages (Igbo Nkwu) in Southeast Nigeria*" this work explains that traditional marriage ceremonies serve as platforms for the display of culture, uniting families, and social bonding. However, he also explains that modernisation has led to increased financial demands and changing practices, which few times affect the obtainability of traditional marriage.⁵

The advent of Christianity, urbanisation, and globalisation, perceptions about traditional marriage are changing. While some continue to uphold it as a source of dignity and identity, some view its financial demand as excessive or its practices as outdated. This explains individual perceptions about traditional marriage, how some individuals see it as an origin of dignity and identity others view it as a waste of money and resources. Aaron A.R. Nwabude in "Traditional African (Igbo) Marriage Customs and the influence of Christianity significantly influenced traditional marriage systems. He notes that while some aspects of traditional marriage have been modified, the core cultural values and beliefs still persists."⁶

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Notwithstanding the cultural importance of Traditional marriage in Mbutu, challenges have emerged. Starting from the elaborate nature of the marriage rites which most often places a heavy financial burden on families, so many families struggle to meet up with the financial

demands as regards to traditional marriage customs, making marriage inaccessible to some young people.

Also, there are emotional strains between preserving traditional practices and embracing modern religious or legal alternatives, for example; court marriages or church weddings. For some people, traditional marriage represents the preservation of heritage; for others they view it as creating barriers and reinforcing inequality. This contrasting perception now raises the question of how significant and sustainable traditional marriage remain in contemporary Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise society.

There is the misconception and stereotype surrounding the high cost of bride price in traditional marriage customs among the people of Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise, saying that it is financially burdensome and exorbitant, and that Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise parents are believed to regain their investment in their daughters through high bride price. These misconception and myths have spread, blurring the lines between reality and fictions over the years. The exaggerated perception of bride price has also promoted gender inequality and reinforces patriarchal structures within the community and also deter potential suitors from seeking marital relationships within the Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise community and also hindering the cross-cultural bonds. There is little or no documented work that focuses specifically on Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise, especially on the perceptions and impacts of traditional marriage practices, hence the writing of this paper.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to discuss the traditional marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise. The research objectives include, to;

- Trace the historical background of Mbutu.
- Analyse why the people of Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise uphold or criticise traditional marriage.
- Evaluate how Mbutu people perceive traditional marriage and major challenge inherent.
- Assess changes that have occurred over time in terms of bride price.
- Analyse the stereotype of high cost of bride price and its effects.

1.4 Significance of the study

This research work is of great importance because it would offer great benefits to succeeding generations, researchers, scholars and also students studying African History. The following constitute the possible benefits;

- Another contributions of this research is that it will increase the knowledge about the history of Mbutu, recovering and documenting aspects of the community's past that might otherwise be lost to the passage of time.
- Similarly, this research will be relevant to the general interested reader especially those interested in traditional marriage as a cultural institution.
- This research is significant because it contributes to both academic knowledge and practical understanding of marriage as a cultural institution within African societies.
- By situating traditional marriage within its proper communal context, this research succeeds in deepening the understanding of traditional marriage as a cultural institution within Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise, demonstrating that it is far more than a private ceremony but a pillar of collective identity.
- It examines how traditional marriage operates within the specific context of Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise, highlighting its meanings, values, and evolving nature. By doing so, this research not only enriches existing theories on marriage but also provides insight that can guide individuals, communities, and policymakers in preserving and adapting cultural practices in a changing world.
- Most importantly, this research makes a compelling case by explaining that bride price is not merely an economic transaction but also a profound symbol of honour, legitimacy and the sacred bond forged between two families.

1.5 Scope of the study

This study essentially covers Mbutu autonomous community of Aboh-Mbaise. The work focuses on traditional marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise, and how it has evolved over the years.

The timeframe for this study spans from 2012 to 2020. It was in 2012 that there was a turning point in South-East region of Nigeria, including Mbutu in Aboh-Mbaise, due to the rise in public discourse on the perceived high cost of traditional marriage. During this period, there was increased discussion in community meetings, media platforms and others about the financial

demand associated with bride price and marriage ceremonies which delayed marriages and as a result, some families reduced bride price demands. The study terminates in 2020 due to the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had far-reaching effects like the reduction in large gatherings which changed people's perception of what constitutes a proper traditional marriage and whether all customary and necessary rites are still meant to stand on social and cultural practices, including marriage ceremonies.

1.6 Methodology and Sources of Data

This study employs qualitative historical method. Information was gathered through field survey and in-depth interviews, these interviews provide firsthand accounts of challenges that comes with the views of traditional marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise. The information offers insights into social, economic and cultural factors that influenced traditional marriages and high cost of bride price in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise. Also, historical analysis provides a detailed understanding of traditional marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise; perceptions and impacts, 2012-2020. To establish the historical context, archival research is conducted by reviewing community documents, official record and important historical texts.

This study on traditional marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-mbaise: perceptions and Impacts, 2012-2020 is also based on primary sources which includes oral interview, documentary evidences and archival documents. These interviews yield valuable narratives and personal experiences that illustrate the impacts of traditional marriage and high cost of bride price.

The secondary sources include published books, journal articles and newspaper that are relevant to the topic. Oral interview were conducted to augment the written sources. This aspect of fieldwork involved meeting and interviewing some of the village heads, elders of the community, business men and women. These works also provides theoretical frameworks and comparative insights that allows for the examination of similar trends in other rural communities.

Tertiary sources such as materials gotten from the internet that are relevant to this research were adequately used. However, together these sources form a robust foundation for this study, ensuring a detailed exploration of historical evolution, current practices and the perceptions surrounding traditional marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise.

1.7 Literature review

There is no doubt that so many scholarly works exist on African traditional marriage systems, socio-cultural history, and indigenous institutions, particularly among Igbo communities in Southern Nigeria. Most available studies discuss Mbaise culture in general or examine Igbo marriage without isolating Aboh-Mbaise as a distinct case study. The aim of this literature review is to examine the contributions of various scholars on themes such as traditional marriage, bride wealth, cultural values and social impacts, while identifying the gaps that this study seeks to address.

Paul Uche Mbakwe in, “Perceptions and Impacts of Traditional Marriage Customs in Aboh-Mbaise”. This work specifically examined how traditional marriage practices are perceived both within and outside Mbutu society. The paper points out that marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise is often misrepresented as excessively expensive due to exaggerated claims about bride wealth and ceremonial demands. It further explains that such misconception sometimes leads to delay in marriage or discouraging potential suitors. While the work provide the above information it does not extensively explore the historical evolution of these practices.⁷

According to Paul Uche Mbakwe in, “The Traditional Mbaise Society: Perspectives on Igbo Socio-Cultural History (1500-1900), provides a historical overview of Mbaise society, including its cultural institutions, belief system, and marriage practices. It emphasises that marriage is a central institution in Mbaise culture, serving not only as a union between individuals but also a link between families and lineages. He also discussed the influence of Christianity and colonialism. Although the work is useful for understanding the broader cultural context of marriage in Mbutu, it does not specifically address contemporary perceptions or the socio-economic impacts of marriage practices in Mbutu.⁸

Princewill Uzochukwu Anyanwu in his work, “Bride Price and Its Implications in Mbaise society” examines the role and significance of bride wealth in traditional marriage. He argues that bride price in Mbaise is largely symbolic and serves to legitimise marriage and strengthen social bonds between families rather than commercialize women. It also highlights that the payment of bride price confers respects and recognition on women within their marital home. However, the study respects that modern economic pressures and societal expectations have contributed to the rising costs, which may negatively affect young people’s willingness to marry. While this work provides valuable insight into the socio-economic implications of marriage. It

focuses mainly on bride price and does not fully explore other dimensions such as perceptions and cultural transformation.⁹

According to Ernest C. Nnagbo in, “Ethnography of Traditional Marriages (*Igba Nkwu*) in southeast Nigeria” His work examined key rituals such as bride wealth negotiation, and the *Igba Nkwu* (wine carrying ceremony), emphasizing their symbolic and cultural significance. It also discusses how modernisation, urbanisation and globalisation have influenced traditional marriage practices, leading to changes in values and increased financial demands. It offers a useful comparative framework for understanding similar practices. However, he did not discuss in detail, localized analysis of traditional marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise, as well as attention to impacts these have made.¹⁰

C.N Anyanwu in his book, “Traditional Procedure and Systems of Marriage among the Mbaise Igbo”, provides a detailed account of the stages involved in traditional marriage, including family investigations, negotiations, bride wealth payments and final rites. It explains the importance of marriage as a social institution that ensures continuity, legitimacy and social order within the community. While this work is valuable for understanding the traditional structure of marriage in Mbaise, it is largely descriptive and does not address contemporary issues such as socio-economic impacts.¹¹

According to Openstax, “Introduction to Sociology” beyond Mbutu-specific studies. This work explains how marriage functions to regulate relationships, ensure social stability and promote cultural continuity. It further highlights how societal changes, including modernisation and economic development, influence traditional institutions. Although not pertaining to Mbutu, this work provides a useful framework theoretically for analysing the perception and impacts of traditional marriage practices.¹²

According to Victor Uchendu, marriage among the Igbo is not merely a union between individuals but a structured alliance between families and lineages, governed by customs and reciprocal obligations. While this work explains what marriage is in the igbo society, it fails to point out if marriage practice in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise actually aligns, follow or differ from the general Igbo pattern.¹³

According to Elizabeth Isichei, traditional marriage ceremony involves elaborate stages such as introduction, negotiation of bride wealth, and public celebration, each carrying symbolic and social meanings.¹⁴ These stages show the cultural richness and difficult understanding of marriage rites within Igbo communities, including Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise, but does not address the present day implications, perceptions and socio-economic effects of these practices in communities like Mbutu.

In a work by Ifi Amadiume, she argues that African marriage system, especially in Igbo societies, are dynamic and shaped by gender roles, economic factors, and historical changes.¹⁵ Her analysis remain largely generalized and does not focus on how these transformations are specifically experienced in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise.

John S. Mbiti, conceptualized marriage in African societies as a sacred institution that links both the living, the dead, and the unborn.¹⁶ He fails to examine how these spiritual beliefs are interpreted or possibly reducing in contemporary local communities such as Mbutu.

In summary, most of the available literature focuses on Igbo marriage systems or Mbaise society in general, with limited specific limited specific attention given to Aboh-Mbaise, particularly in relations to perception and impacts. There is therefore a clear gap in detailed, community-based studies that adds both cultural practices and their contemporary implications. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a focused analysis of traditional marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise, examining not only its structure and significance culturally but also how it is perceived and the impacts it has on individuals and society.

1.8 Organisation of the study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one contains introduction which consist of background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, methodology and sources of data, literature review and organisation of the study.

Chapter two offered a thorough overview of the geo-historical survey of Mbutu community which includes geographical location and physical features, history of Mbutu community. It also explores socio-cultural institution of Mbutu community, political institution of Mbutu

community, economic institution of Mbutu and also how traditional marriage institutions has impacted this study.

Chapter three focuses on traditional marriage in Mbutu which consist of the origin collection of the bride price, evolution of bride price, and also explains the effect of modernity on traditional marriage/bride price and how to tackle the challenges of bride price in Mbutu, together with the contribution of bride price to the development of Mbutu.

Chapter four explains the perceptions and impacts of traditional marriage in Mbutu which highlights the stereotype of high cost of bride price, together with the effects of the stereotype on ladies and the proffered solutions to the stereotype.

Chapter Five contains summary and conclusion of the research.

Endnotes

1. Paul Uche Mbakwe, *The Traditional Mbaïse Society: Perspectives on Igbo Socio-Cultural History (1500-1900)*(Owerri: Springfield Publishers,2012),45
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CHAPTER TWO

GEO-HISTORICAL SURVEY OF MBUTU COMMUNITY

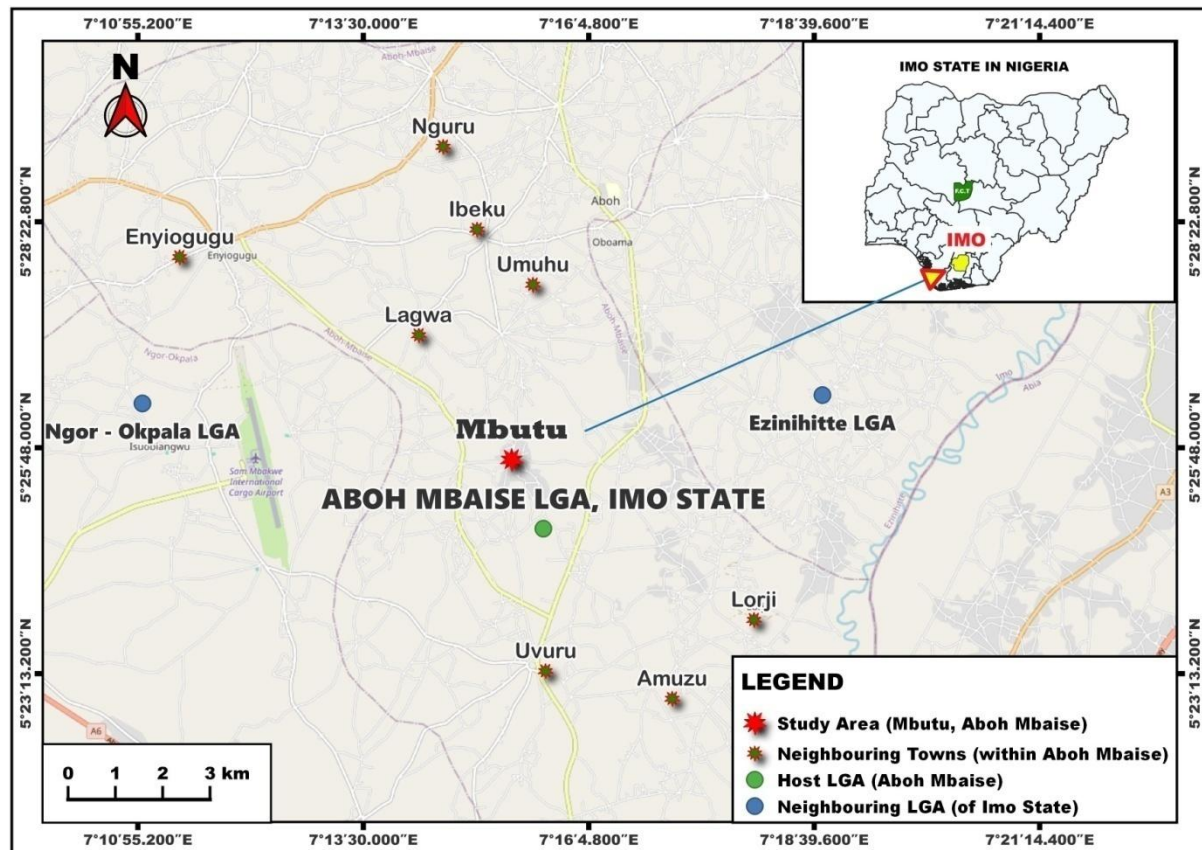
2.1 Geographical location and physical features

Mbutu is a lively and culturally rich society situated in the Aboh-Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State, South-Eastern Nigeria, which lies approximately on latitude 5°25'24" North and longitude 7°15'04". The broader area of Aboh-Mbaise itself is situated in latitude 5.43° N and longitude 7.25° E. Thus, the above coordinates clearly indicate the geographical location of Mbutu in the Aboh-Mbaise region.¹ Aboh-Mbaise is one of the three major clans. There are other two major clans besides Aboh-Mbaise Local Government Area. They are Ahiazu-Mbaise and Ezinihitte-Mbaise.²

The area belongs to the humid tropical climate zone, where there is a predominance of high temperatures and heavy rainfall in all seasons. Similar to other places in southeastern Nigeria, Mbutu has two distinct seasons, that is, the wet season (March to October) and dry season (November to February). Due to the high level of rainfall, there is abundant vegetation and agricultural production all year round.³ As stated by A.I Nzimiro, the Igbo people occupy lands that possess fertile soil conditions and good climatic factors for cultivation. These traits are all present in the Aboh-Mbaise area.⁴ There are oil palms, raffia palms, and fruit trees among the vegetation found in Mbutu. The vegetation has traditionally sustained both subsistence and commercial agricultural practices that form the bedrock of the economic activities in the area. Some of the crops grown include yams, cassava, maize, and vegetables. Palm trees are especially vital owing to their economic and cultural significance.

Mbutu is surrounded by several communities in Aboh-Mbaise Local Government Area and even within the Mbaise area itself. These communities include towns such as Nguru, Amuzu, Umuome and Ogbe, which have had a long history and culture that is related closely with that of Mbutu. The historical significance of these communities lies in the fact that they are part of a larger group called the Mbaise cultural bloc which is said to have come from one common

ancestry. In essence, therefore, Mbutu is surrounded by several historically important communities whose links have helped shape the socio-cultural institutions of marriage. It should be noted that Victor C. Uchendu stresses that the physical environment of Igbo societies is closely related to their cultural institutions.⁵



SOURCE: GOOGLE EARTH & OPEN STREET MAP 2026 MAP BY: CENTURION TERRA MAPPER - 08139695427

2.2 History of Mbutu Community

There was a discovery of the existence of a dense forest to the south, capable of providing security of lives and properties. In the forest, next to Imo River, was a discovery of a suitable place named Umunume. But who were the individuals responsible for this discovery? Some of them include; Mbutu, Ehioko (son of Mbutu), Ohiagu and Orji (brother of Mbutu), among many others. Mbutu and Ehioko assumed control of this area through ownership while Ohiagu and Orji ventured out to establish their own areas. Ohiagu established Umuohiagu whereas Orji established Lorji kingdom. We have seen how they maintain their relationships as brothers.⁶

The construction of Mbutu therefore commenced. As the picture was getting clear to Mbutu and his son Ehioko concerning their mandate after thirty-seven years, Mbutu assumed control of this Umunume, Obo, Umunocha, Umuigba, Umuobioha and Umuaku kingdom (Mbutu Ama-Isi) which were later renamed and fell under the autonomous community of Mbutu. During the course of my interview with Nze Evang. Onwusukwu Nelson A., he remarked, "Mbutu consist of eight villages which are; Amawo, Umueze, Awaka, Isiala, Ubahi, Ihitteoha, Aronta, Ozara and they are governed through the mayorship system."⁷

The Mbutu people underwent major transformations during the colonial period spanning the beginning and end of the twentieth century owing to the implementation of administrative strategies of the British which led to the restructuring of the local political systems via the appointment of warrant chiefs and subsequently native authority system.⁸ The Mbutu, being a faction of the Mbaise people, encountered the disruption of colonial domination, including Christianity and western education, thereby transforming their indigenous worldview completely.

2.3 Socio-cultural Institutions of Mbutu Community

Socio-Cultural institutions of Mbutu comprise of organization based on indigenous institutions that control social activities, sustain identity, and ensure proper transfer of values from one generation to the next. This institution is not only composed of administrative organs but it is that which gives shape to the existence of Mbutu society. Just like any other place in Igbo land, Mbutu society is a patrilineal society.⁹

Archival documents have proved that families were the key socio-cultural institutions in the Mbutu community. Marriage ensured lineage continuity and perpetuation of tradition.¹⁰ Families in Mbutu communities are usually extended, with umunna being the basic unit of social organization, which ensures cohesion within families across generations. Another social institution that is important in Mbutu society is *otuogbo* Age grade system. *Otuogbo* refers to groups comprising young men and women of the same age who gradually increase their social roles as they mature into adulthood. They participate in communal work, security, peace-making, and organizing cultural events.¹¹

The roles of religion and spirituality cannot be overemphasized in the socio-cultural setting of Mbutu. In pre-Christian times, the people were devoted to worshiping various deities, including

Ala (the earth goddess), *Amadioha* (god of thunder), as well as their ancestors through oracles and shrines. However, although Christianity has become the dominant religion, some elements of the traditional practice can still be found in festivals and rituals. Christianity came to Mbaïse including Mbutu with the establishment of the Anglican Church through The Church Missionary Society (CMS). CMS was first established in its first station in Ife Ezinihitte and Ubonukam Onicha Ezinihitte, Mbaïse in 1911 as the first Christian church denomination.¹²

It did not just erase whatever was there. The two systems rather got involved in a complicated and sometimes contentious relationship. Nevertheless, they have found ways of existing alongside one another. Today, many Mbutu pray at the church every Sunday but still offer libations to their ancestors; they baptize their children but continue consulting the *dibia* whenever they get into difficult situations. All of these are manifestations of adaptation rather than contradiction. Festivals and rituals are also important social and cultural institutions among the Mbutu people examples of festivals includes *Iri ji* (New yam festival) which marks the end of a yam farming cycle and the beginning of a new farming season and also *Iwa Akwa* (Cloth Wearing festival) it is a festival that shows that a boy has become a man.

Education in Mbutu was greatly shaped by the indigenous and western systems of knowledge transmission. Prior to the arrival of the missionaries, education took place through family education, age grade societies, apprenticeship and community based organizations in which people were taught various skills and morals that enabled them to live together as members of the same society. The CMS mission came into being in 1911 and the Roman Catholic Mission in 1915 bringing western education to Mbutu in mission schools. With increased education, there emerged opportunities of upward social mobility for teachers, clergymen, government officials and other professionals from Mbutu and environs.¹³

Not even the female population was left without strong organizations. The *Umuada*, which consist of daughters who were born in the soil of Mbutu and went to marry in other societies, constitute one such institution. Whenever they come back to their community, it is not as visitors, but as custodians of morality whose power is respected even by strong men. Accompanying the daughters are the women who had become part of the community *Iyom di namba*. They create their organization to help resolve family disputes and give support to each other during difficult times.¹⁴

The conventional marriage institution was another esteemed social institution which operates not only as a partnership between a male and female but also as a bond between two families. One of the most significant aspects of this marriage ritual was the giving of the bride price, which acted as an indication of recognition and respect. This rite of passage involved significant ceremonies like the wine carrying ceremony, in which the bride publicly recognized her husband, along with other rituals like dancing, praying, singing, and gift-giving.¹⁵

Social obligations and expectations is also present during marriage among Mbutu, with the husband being expected to take care of his family while the wife is expected to sustain her family, this indicates a sense of maturity and social position among Mbutu. The impact of Christianity, Western-style education, and modernity has brought changes to certain traditional rituals through the adoption of church marriage and legal marriage. Traditional marriage still stands as an essential element of culture that maintains the traditions of the people of Mbutu.¹⁶

2.4 Political Institution of Mbutu Community

The political organization of the Mbutu community, like other Igbo communities, is one that had always been decentralized in character. The existence of a centralized government that wielded any kind of absolute power over the people prior to the advent of colonialism did not exist. Instead, governance is performed using a system of collective governance through the use of the elders, lineage heads, age grades, titled men, and village councils.¹⁷

The council of elders constitutes one of the significant political institutions found in Mbutu society. The elders are accorded high respect by virtue of their age, wisdom, experience, and familiarity with customs and traditions. The elders had significant roles to play when it came to maintaining law and order, conflict resolution, enforcement of custom, and decision-making that was aimed at improving the welfare of the people. Decisions relating to the welfare of all the people would be discussed openly before they were decided on by all.¹⁸ According to the colonial intelligence reports, the role of elders in overseeing marriage negotiations and settling domestic conflicts was mentioned frequently. This role still made sure that their political authority was within the indigenous system of governance.¹⁹

In addition, the family institution played an important role in the political organization of Mbutu. This is because the extended family was organized with each one having a patriarch or oldest

male in the family referred to as the family head. The family head served as the spokesman of the family in the community and oversaw domestic matters in the lineage.

Village assembly is yet another institution that was very significant in the politics of Mbutu communities. Adult men from the community attended discussions in the village assembly where crucial issues were sorted out including land disputes, festivals, communal labour, and developmental activities. People used this forum to air their views openly and participate in decision-making processes.²⁰

Apart from the roles played by age grades socially, the age grades also performed administrative duties. The age grades facilitated the enforcement of law and order within the community. Not only did the age grades facilitate law and order but they were also involved in activities such as road maintenance and security services among others.²¹

Title holders also played an important role in the political and legal issues faced by the society. Thus, the title system helped increase the power and prestige of the traditional political system. In the case of traditional Mbutu society, religion and politics were intertwined. The traditional priest who was a custodian of the shrine was often responsible for performing various activities to safeguard the society from disasters and other negative influences. Oaths, sacrifice, and rituals could be used to solve conflicts in the community and enforce the rules that were imposed.²²

The establishment of colonialism resulted in fundamental shifts in the traditional politics of Mbutu people. The adoption of warrant chiefs and the system of indirect rule by the British changed the existing political order among the locals. This led to the loss of significance for certain traditional political systems because of the imposition of alien practices.²³

2.5 Economic Institution of Mbutu Community

Mbutu's economy has been traditionally agrarian, centered on subsistence agriculture and the production of basic foods such as yam, cassava, cocoyam, and vegetables. The cultivation of yam holds a unique status in terms of both its cultural significance and economic importance. Yams are not only the basic food but also serve as a means of establishing prestige and ritual exchange within the community.²⁴

The four-day market system known as Eke, Orie, Afor, and Nkwo, which is commonly practiced in most parts of Igboland, determines how business is done in Nkwo-Mbutu. These markets offer places for the exchange of agricultural products. The inhabitants of Mbutu have always been farmers, only a few men and women are traders, others engage in diverse handicrafts, proving that the people of Mbutu are hardworking.²⁵

As L. E. Njoku says, “Mbaise man has always been a peasant farmer, trying as hard as he can, along with his wife and family, to scrape together a precarious existence within the harsh environs of the community.”²⁶ Since the region provided excellent soil as well as climatic conditions suitable for growing various crops, the people in the area engaged themselves in farming activities where the main focus was on producing yam, cassava, cocoyam, maize, melon, vegetables, and palm produce. In particular, yam had immense social and cultural importance among the Igbo people.

Apart from agriculture, palm produce was an additional important economic institution in Mbutu. The palm tree produced palm oil, palm kernel, palm wine, and other products used by the people and traded in local markets. The production of palm oil contributed significantly to the income earned and businesses conducted in Mbutu. The other economic institution included trade and commerce. Market places played a central role in facilitating trade and communication with neighbouring communities. In the marketplaces, traders exchanged agricultural produces, crafts, domestic animals, and foodstuff. Mbutu engaged economically in trade with other communities near and far outside the region of Aboh-Mbaise.²⁷

The other significant aspect about the economy of the community was the communal labour and assistance system. People in age grades, family units, and village groups worked together on various activities such as farming, constructing homes, road constructions, and community projects. Such practices promoted unity and lessened the suffering of the community members economically.²⁸

The other important aspect about the traditional economy of Mbutu community was the production of craft goods. Individuals engaged themselves in producing various craft items like basketry, carving, iron smelting, pottery making, and mat making. The materials thus produced could be used locally or could be traded in nearby market places.²⁹ Given the trend of increasing urbanization and urban rural migration, the Mbutu population living in urban areas and in

diasporic locations have become significant secondary earners, shaping the consumption habits and investment decisions of housing and education.³⁰

The contemporary Mbutu economy encompasses a blend of the traditional and modern economies. Although agricultural activities remain vital, most people practice agriculture in combination with other forms of economic activities such as trading, business ventures, transport services, and employment. Development associations and cooperatives have been instrumental in promoting the economy and developing infrastructure.³¹

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CHAPTER THREE

TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE IN MBUTU COMMUNITY

3.1 Evolution of Traditional Marriage

However, traditional marriage practices among Mbutu have changed drastically over time due to various social, economic, cultural, and religious changes that have taken place in the society. Traditional marriage, even with its many negative implications, continues to be one of the core aspects of marriage practices among Mbutu communities. Nevertheless, the process, commodities involved, and perception of traditional marriage have undergone tremendous changes since the colonial days.¹

Traditional marriage during the ancient times comprised of commodities other than cash. Agricultural produce, palm wine, livestock, local wraps, and other traditional items were commonly used during marriage ceremonies. The objective was not to accumulate wealth, but to ensure that there is friendly interaction and marriage union between families.² In an interview with Dr. Matthew Nwosu, he explained that “the evolution of traditional marriage will continue to exist because the requirements of traditional marriage of now is not the same with what existed then and what will be in the future.”

In view of the increasing role of trade and business in Igbo societies, the practice of money exchange became prevalent in the marriage transactions. Moreover, the arrival of colonial economy and Western style of doing business increased the tendency towards monetary payment for the traditional marriage ceremony. Consequently, some of the traditional gifts required during marriages started to give way to monetary payment.³

The influence of Christianity and western education was another factor that played an important role in the transformation of the practice of bride price in Mbutu community. In this regard, Christian missionaries disapproved of some of the traditional practices regarding marriage because they seemed to go against the teachings of Christianity. Thus, some people began simplifying their marriage rituals in so many ways, economically because traditional marriage ceremonies often involve many expenses, including bride price, gifts, food, entertainment and so many more. Desire for privacy also because some couples prefer marriage ceremonies that focuses more on commitment to each other rather than extensive community expectation, etc.⁴

The development of traditional marriage also involved the influence of both urbanization and migration. Many of the Mbutu natives who had moved to cities and elsewhere in Nigeria took up different ways of life and changed their economic orientation. Consequently, this impacted the manner in which their marriages were conducted.⁵

The next phase in the evolution of traditional marriage entailed a rising tendency to think that marriage ceremonies in Mbutu was very expensive. Stereotypes arose regarding Mbutu marriages, as people began saying that traditional marriage in Mbutu was too costly. This led to discussions about the authenticity of customary marriage in Mbutu.⁶

However, despite the above criticisms, many elders and keepers of culture emphasized that the practice of traditional marriage was never meant to exploit women or put financial burden on intending husbands. In fact, the system was developed with the aim of maintaining dignity and respecting family values. Therefore, attempts have been made in recent times to regulate marriage expenses and alleviate unnecessary financial burden in marriages.⁷

3.2 Stages of Traditional Marriage in Mbutu

There are various stages involved in traditional marriage in Mbutu, these stages are followed in an orderly manner which shows the importance of traditional marriage in Mbutu. The first stage of traditional marriage in Mbutu is *mmanya ajuju* which means inquiry drink. This refers to the drink presented by a groom and his family during the initial visit to the bride's family to formally declare their intentions and inquire about marrying their daughter. In an interview with Dr. Matthew Nwosu, he made it clear that "the young man would come with his parents or father or his uncles as the case may be and they would come with a jar of palm wine, a carton of beer, and

eight pieces of traditional kolanut.”⁸ The father of the young man then declares their intentions, so that it would be known to both the kinsmen and parents of the bride and then receives approval from the bride on whether the gifts should be accepted or not.

The next stage of traditional marriage in Mbutu is *ihe umunna* which means Things of the kindred. Due to some present changes and also availability of time, most men combine everything together and carry them out on the same day. After this, there are also provisions made in terms of list for the men, women and also the youths. Things for the men is called *aku amala* which means wealth of the land, things for the women is called *ibu efere* which explains the act of the groom’s family bringing ‘loads for the bride’s mother.” In an interview with Mr. Azunna Nwosu, he made it clear that “there are also provisions made for the father and mother of the bride which translates to *ihe nne na nna* which means things for the father and the mother, which is also a necessity for the traditional marriage process”⁹

The collection of lists is another important stage in the traditional marriage process of Mbutu people, as it provides formal record of the items, gifts, and obligations expected from the groom’s family before the marriage is concluded. After the initial introduction and acceptance of the relationship between both families, the bride’s family presents a marriage list *ihenwanyi*, which contains cultural requirements such as money, food items, drinks, clothing and other symbolic materials.

The purpose of this list is not merely economic but also to demonstrate respect, commitment, and the ability of the groom’s family to fulfil customary responsibilities. In Mbutu, as in many Igbo societies, the items on the list represent the cooperation between families and the recognition of marriage as a social bond involving the wider kin group rather than only the couple.¹⁰

The payment of bride price *ime ego nwanyi* is another stage in the traditional marriage process. Bride price has long been recognized as an important institution in Igbo society because it legitimizes marriage, strengthens family relationships, and promotes social cohesion within the community. According to Victor C. Uchendu, among the Igbo, bride wealth was traditionally not regarded as purchase of a woman but as a symbol of gratitude and a means of establishing cordial relations between the families involved in the marriage process.¹¹

One of the oldest and significant practices in the tradition of marriage in Mbutu society is the payment of bride price. This was part of the institutions of marriage that had been traditionally used to regulate and maintain social relations within families in the community. Traditionally, bride price is believed to have been paid as a form of gratitude to the family of the bride for nurturing the woman before she became someone else's wife.¹² As far as historical perspective is concerned, it can be said that the practice of bride price within Mbutu society stems from the cultural tradition where marriage is seen not only as a matter between a man and a woman but as a union between two families. As a result, the practice of paying for bride price became an accepted custom since marriage had economic and social implications on families.¹³

During the early stages, bride price did not involve money as the primary component. The items exchanged during marriage ceremonies between families included yam tubers, palm wine, livestock, kolanuts, wrappers, and produce from farming. These were a reflection of the agricultural way of life in the society and showed goodwill and respect towards the other party.¹⁴ Bride price was also a practice of great importance and significance in Mbutu traditional society for several reasons. First, it was proof that the marriage ceremony was sanctioned by the two families and their respective societies. A marriage was only considered legitimate when all the rites and payments of bride price had been done according to traditions.¹⁵

The next stage is the *igba nkwu* which is the traditional marriage proper, where friends and families of the bride and groom are called to witness the occasion, and joining of both the bride and groom traditionally. Blessings are also given by both parents of the bride and groom to their newly wedded children.

3.3 Effects of Modernity on Traditional Marriage

The impact of modernity is felt strongly on the marriage institution among the Mbutu people. There have been changes brought about by Christianity, western education, and other modern practices such as globalization in the marriage culture in Mbutu. While some of the traditions are maintained in their integrity, others have undergone modification due to the prevailing modern conditions.¹⁶ According to Solomon O. Ademiluka, he explained that the practice of traditional marriage among African societies served as a cultural mechanism for legitimizing marriage, establishing alliances between families, and recognizing the social obligations created through marriage. However, modern economic changes, Christianity, education and commercialization

have transformed the practice, resulting to debates over whether contemporary traditional marriage practice still reflects its original cultural meaning.¹⁷

One of the impacts brought about by modernity is the simplification of the traditional marriage ceremony. Before, marriage ceremony was very complex with many aspects of rituals and material needs. But with modernity and lifestyle changes, most people have chosen to simplify most of these traditional aspects in order to facilitate the marriage ceremony.¹⁸

Another religion that greatly impacted the traditional marriage in the Mbutu society is Christianity. Some teachings from Christianity have discouraged some traditions that were fetish or conflicting with the church's beliefs. For this reason, couples who want to marry today incorporate their marriages with both traditional and church aspects.¹⁹

Moreover, western education has contributed to shaping people's attitudes regarding traditional marriage practice. Western-educated people are against extravagance in marriage affairs and any marriage arrangement that imposes any financial burden upon the future husband. Western education has helped people interact with those from different ethnicities and religions, and hence, marriages across ethnic and religious lines become common; these marriages bring changes to traditions as well.²⁰

Furthermore, urbanization and migration have affected the structure of the family and social relations in the community. Now, many youths have been moving away from their villages to cities, where they work. As a result, wedding arrangements have been modified or curtailed due to various reasons including economic hardship and contemporary life style.²¹

Commercialization of marriage is another major impact of modernity. While the marriage rituals in the past were mostly symbolic, the marriage celebrations of today in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise sometimes cost much money for receptions, decorations, dressings, and expenditure. This trend has created an impression in people's minds that marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise is expensive.²²

The advent of new forms of communication and social networking has also had a considerable effect on the marriage traditions of the Mbutu Community. The ceremonies are advertised online through videos and photographs taken at the events. Social media has brought many more traditional marriage rites into the public eye.²³

In spite of the effects of modernity, traditional marriage is still held in high esteem within Mbutu society. Traditional rituals such as family introduction, giving of bride-price, and wine-carriers continue to be performed by most families. Such rituals serve as cultural markers and heritage within the community.²⁴

3.4 Challenges of traditional marriage in Mbutu

Despite the significance of marriage practices in Mbutu community, there are many problems being experienced today in connection to traditional marriage institution in the community. Such problems are caused by financial hardships, changing social attitudes, modernization, and some misconceptions about the culture of Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise marriages.²⁵

One of the problems facing the practice of bride price in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise is the idea that marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise is too costly. There exists a stereotype that a man who wants to marry an Mbutu woman, needs a lot of money as well as other material things. Such a notion has tarnished the culture of traditional marriage in Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise.²⁶ High cost in the traditional marriage list solely depends on the family or rather family members of the bride not Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise in general.²⁷

Poverty is another challenge facing the traditional marriage institution in the Mbutu community. Poverty resulting from unemployment and increased cost of living has seen many young men failing to satisfy the financial obligation that goes with marriages. This has had an impact on delaying marriages due to the burden placed on prospective couples and their parents.²⁸

Westernization contributes to the erosion of some of the values that are traditionally held by the community regarding marriage. Young members of the community regard some of marriage practices in Mbutu as out-of-date and unnecessary. These attitudes are responsible for causing loss of interest in certain cultural traditions.²⁹

A related issue is the commercialization of marriage ceremonies, whereby there are instances where some family members want too much property and other gifts to be exchanged during marriage negotiations. This often leads to misunderstanding, disputes, and even monetary burdens among the two families involved. The excesses of the marriage demands makes it appear as if marriage becomes a commercial affair.³⁰

The religious aspect has also brought about challenges to traditional marriage practices. For instance, some of the Christian denominations discourage some of the rites that are part of the traditional practices, such as bride price and respect for ancestors.³¹

The social pressure exerted on the community is another form of challenge experienced by the institution. The family is always under pressure to arrange elaborate wedding ceremonies in an attempt to uphold their social standing and community reputation. This social pressure might compel individuals to indulge in unnecessary expenses during marriage rituals.³²

In addition to this, the issue of migration and urbanization has reduced the involvement of people in the marriage traditions due to which the natives who live elsewhere may be unfamiliar with the traditions and would rather conduct modern-style weddings than participate in tradition-based ceremonies.³³

Notwithstanding this, there are still many elderly people, cultural groups, and community leaders who believe that traditional marriage rituals should be preserved. There is an attempt to discourage the practice of asking for too much money and also uphold the cultural value of bride price.³⁴

3.5 Contribution of Traditional Marriage to the Transformational Growth of Mbutu

The practice of traditional marriage has played a great role in the social, cultural, and economic development of Mbutu community. Besides being an institution, traditional marriage is also a key cultural practice that promotes unity and social continuity.³⁵

Promotion of family relationship and unity is one of the most important contributions of traditional marriage. Marriage negotiation and ceremony helps families establish lasting ties and foster social bonds within the community. Therefore, traditional marriage ensures cooperation, peaceful coexistence, and interaction among families and villages in Mbutu.³⁶ In an interview with Dr. Matthew Nwosu, he stated that “there is a section on the traditional marriage list that is solely for *umunna*, which through them helps in the development of Mbutu or if there is an ongoing project in the community, the groom’s family has to contribute to that development.”³⁷

Traditional marriage practice also ensures that the cultural heritage of the community is protected. The marriage customs ensure that the culture, language, traditional music, dances, and cultural

beliefs are passed down from one generation to another. Through such practices, the people are able to protect their cultural heritage.³⁸

The other important role that is played by the institution of traditional marriage is ensuring that people take up the responsibility of living morally disciplined lives. According to tradition, marriage ensured that the man was mature enough, disciplined and responsible. Marriage customs were used to ensure that young men worked hard and saved enough for marriage.³⁹

Economic benefits that come out of marriage ceremonies include those involved in the local economic activities of the community. In traditional marriages, there are economic activities related to the marriage ceremony that involve food sellers, traders, musicians, decorators, transporters, and other people who offer various services. Economic activities generate income for members of the community.⁴⁰

Marriage has also helped increase population and continuity of families among the Mbutu community. Marriage is supposed to bring about family continuity. The children born through marriage are acknowledged as members of their families and communities.⁴¹

Moreover, traditional marriage ceremonies emphasize community involvement and a sense of community belonging, and community members such as relatives, friends, age grades, and community organizations tend to be involved in the marriage ceremonies in a participative way through monetary contribution, cooperative work, and interactions. This is important in enhancing community solidarity and cooperation among community members.⁴²

Traditional marriage practice also acts as a tool for solving conflicts within the society. In view of the fact that marriage is not an individual affair but a family affair, conflicts that occur within marriages can be solved through discussions involving the family as well as interference by elders in the community.⁴³

Though many developments have occurred in the modern world, traditional marriage remains one of the institutions that positively impact the development of Mbutu society both socially and culturally. It is viewed as one of the symbols representing respect and cultural values. Therefore, attempts are consistently being made to ensure its preservation through adaptation to modern life.⁴⁴

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CHAPTER FOUR

STEREOTYPE AND ITS IMPACTS ON TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE IN MBUTU COMMUNITY

4.1 Stereotype on High Cost of Bride Price

Traditionally, the institution of marriage in Mbutu community of Aboh-Mbaise Local Government Area has been a subject of debate due to the view that traditionally, marriages especially paying bride price cost too much. One of the stereotypical views about Mbutu traditional marriage revolves around the view that paying bride price costs a lot of money. This has caused a stereotype among many Nigerians to the effect that getting married to an Mbutu woman costs a lot of money and material things. Nevertheless, the stereotype can only be explained by looking at the history and cultural meaning of bride price.¹

According to tradition, bride price in Mbutu was not intended to be a system that would give economic value to women and make marriage a business affair. Instead, it was seen as a symbol of gratitude, respect, and acceptance by the two families. In the Igbo culture, marriages involved relations between two families or lineages and not just two people. Bride price was therefore a cultural practice that showed respect by the family of the groom to the family of the bride.²

The notion of expensive bride price for the people of Mbutu came up as a result of different social and economic factors. Among the main reasons is the misinterpretation of many traditional demands made in an Igbo marriage ceremony. Traditionally, marriage negotiations in Mbutu

took various stages, among them introduction, investigation, gift giving, and other ceremonies. For those not conversant with these traditions, these many demands gave rise to the idea that Mbutu women were “expensive.”³

Yet another reason that contributed to the development of this stereotype is the change in the economic importance of the rituals of marriage. As time passed by and there were new changes brought about by monetary economy, westernization, and lifestyle, money also became an important part of bride price payments.⁴

Modern society’s economic challenges have also shaped views on the concept of bride price in Mbutu. Higher cost of living, unemployment, and the need to have elaborate wedding parties have made marriages costly in general. Yet the rising costs of organizing modern parties, dressing, and entertainment activities tend to be incorrectly perceived as arising only from bride price alone. This has further reinforced the view that marriage customs practiced in Mbutu are the cause of marriage’s high costs.⁵

Stereotypes about Mbutu women have also been perpetuated through public discourses, social media platforms, and popular stories that have surrounded Mbutu women in relation to marriage expenses. The discourse around such stories creates an overall perception among people that Mbutu women make unrealistic demands in terms of marriage dowry. Such stories do not take into consideration that some requirements may be traditional and ceremonial in nature.⁶

According to scholars who have studied Igbo society, the payment of bride price should not be taken to mean that the woman herself is being bought. As noted by Victor C. Uchendu, the Igbo people associate marriage with family ties and the maintenance of bloodlines. Thus, the transaction associated with marriage forms part of a bigger system of culture aimed at establishing family connections.⁷ Barr. Emeka Nwachukwu, a retired police officer and indigene of Mbutu community, explained that the belief that Mbaise women are expensive to marry is largely a misunderstanding of the traditional marriage system. According to him, bride price in Mbutu was never designed to make the bride’s family rich but to establish respect and unity between two families involved. He also made it clear that the increasing perception of high bride

price is partly caused by the addition of unnecessary demands which were not part of the original system by some families.⁸

Moreover, the cultural significance placed on women in Mbutu culture has also impacted the high bride price. Women had important duties in agriculture, childcare, managing households, and ensuring the continuation of the family lineage. Due to these duties, marriage was accompanied by a sense of respect for women's value in society. At other times, however, the cultural regard that women received through marriage customs has been misunderstood as attempts at making unreasonably high financial demands on the future husbands.⁹

Another aspect of the stereotype concerns the belief that the bride price tradition has made the woman become the property of her husband owing to the amount paid for her. This stereotype has provoked arguments concerning the relationship between gender roles and female autonomy. Nevertheless, according to the tradition among the community of Mbutu, bride price has not served to transfer possession over the woman to her husband but has set certain relationships between the two families.¹⁰

Stigma associated with a high bride price has also influenced the external perception of Mbutu women. The reason being some individuals, who have heard about the stigma attached to the community's bride price, may fear marrying an Mbutu woman due to the idea that it is too costly for them to afford. This perception has led to negative perceptions of Mbutu women and their families.¹¹

In spite of the prevalence of such a stereotype, findings from research on the marriage customs of the Mbutu demonstrate that the situation is more complicated than it appears to be. Even when wedding rituals include a number of cultural requirements, the main objective behind paying a bride price is to acknowledge socially the union and ensure the legitimacy of marriage.¹²

Mbutu people have continued to make changes to their marriage system to reflect contemporary reality. Many families today have advocated for moderation in marriage expectations so as to avoid imposing unnecessary financial strain on the prospective suitor. It is also important to note that cultural leaders have stressed the importance of preserving cultural relevance of bride price without making unnecessary demands that might damage the image of the system.¹³ For that

reason, it would be right to understand the perception that Mbutu bride price is overly expensive in its own cultural perspective. Traditional marriage in Mbutu is mainly founded on social relations rather than economic dealings. This makes it easier for people to understand why it is perceived that way by other outsiders.¹⁴

4.2 Effects of the Stereotype on Women

Stereotyping women from Mbutu community, as being too expensive as wives has resulted in a number of social, economic, and cultural effects on women. Despite the purpose of bride price as strengthening family ties and honouring marriage, the stigmatization associated with the practice has had an impact on how women from the community are perceived both inside and outside of the community.¹⁵ Uche Gloria Oboko argued that, the perception surrounding bride price in Igbo society has generated debates concerning women's social status, as excessive commercialization of the practice may create the impression that women are valued based on economic considerations rather than their personal dignity and contributions to society.¹⁶

Another effect is that it leads to unfavourable attitudes regarding the identity of Mbutu women. There are some sections of the society in Nigeria where females from Mbutu have been characterized as being too expensive to marry owing to misconceptions regarding bride prices. These attitudes degrade women to mere economic considerations associated with marriage and not the attributes, personality, and accomplishments of the women themselves.¹⁷ An oral tradition has it that, many people form opinions about Mbutu women based on stories they have heard rather than their personal experiences with the individuals or families involved. These assumptions can make women feel judged because of their cultural background, even when their families do not place unreasonable demands during marriage negotiations.¹⁸

The stereotype has also had an impact on the ability of some Mbutu community's women to marry. There is likelihood that some men who would like to marry women in this community may shy away from doing so because they feel that the costs of fulfilling the requirements for marriage are too high.¹⁹

There is also the issue of burden on women and their family members during marriage talks. As a result of the fact that it is assumed that people of Mbutu extract too much money as the dowry

price, some women might try to prove that they are not going to make unreasonable financial requests from potential husbands. This puts additional emotional stress on women who already face some problems during marriage preparations.²⁰

Another factor that the stereotype has contributed is the misinterpretation of the tradition of bride price. There are some people who have considered the tradition of bride price as a process that grants power to men over their wives. Such an attitude towards marriage might make it seem like women need to obey unconditionally since money was paid at the time of marriage. Nevertheless, the traditional Igbo perspective does not imply the deprivation of women's rights and dignity in this case.²¹

Also, the stereotyping influences the image of the Mbutu ladies within the larger Nigerian society. Assumptions regarding high bride price have at times caused discrimination, jokes, and derogatory remarks being made to women originating from the community. This stereotyping may impact the perceptions that people have concerning women even before engaging with them personally.²²

When marriage is defined largely by economic terms, the cultural and emotional dimensions of marriage may be sidelined. As a result, women are often seen in terms of their economic contributions rather than being recognized as individuals who make social and emotional contributions to family formation.²³ The impact on families would also include the tendency of some families to alter or lessen some of their practices within marriage due to unfavourable perceptions in society. Although adaptation is always present in any process of cultural change, the focus on external perception would only lead to the inability to sustain some culturally significant practices beneficial to the family.²⁴

The stereotype has also affected conversations around women's independence and freedom. For example, it is argued that the practice of paying bride price could result in inequality of genders by instilling the idea that women are going to be dependent on men post-marriage.²⁵ This notion, however, has been debunked as studies suggest that Igbo women were independent both economically and socially and so the belief does not apply to them.²⁶

Stereotypes can also influence the younger generation in terms of shaping their views regarding marriage and cultural practices. Young women may develop the fear that due to their cultural background, they are not good candidates for marriage, whereas young men may get incorrect perceptions of the financial aspects involved in marrying girls from Aboh-Mbaise communities.²⁷

It should also be understood that this stereotype affects women differently. Their individual experiences are shaped by their family backgrounds, level of education, socio-economic status, and personal interactions. There are many women from the Mbutu community who get married happily and enjoy good family relations notwithstanding the existence of stereotypes like this.²⁸ In other words, the problem must be viewed in a balanced manner. It is about separating the original significance of bride price from exaggerations and false beliefs about it. This would help retain the culture and its positive traditions without causing women to lose their self-worth.²⁹

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

This study examined the traditional marriage institution in Mbutu community, Aboh-Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State, with particular emphasis on the perceptions and impacts of bride price between 2012 and 2020. The research was undertaken to understand the historical background of the community, the nature of its social institutions, and the role traditional marriage has played in sustaining cultural identity and social relationships among the people. This study established that marriage in Mbutu is not merely a union between a man and a woman but a social institution that involves families, kinship groups, and the wider community. It also highlighted the objectives, significance, and methodology of the research, providing the foundation for examining the place of traditional marriage within the cultural history of Mbutu community.

The historical and geographical examination of Mbutu community provided an understanding of the origin of the people, their physical environment, socio-cultural institutions, political organization, and economic activities. This study revealed that the social structures of Mbutu were built around kinship, communal cooperation, traditional leadership, and economic interaction. These institutions shaped the values and practices of the people, including their understanding of marriage, family relationships, and social responsibilities. The traditional institutions of the community served as important mechanisms for maintaining order, preserving identity, and transmitting cultural values from one generation to another.

The study further explored the traditional marriage institution in Mbutu community, particularly the origin, meaning, and evolution of bride price. It revealed that bride price was historically not established as a means of purchasing women but as a cultural practice that symbolized respect, appreciation, and the formation of relationships between two families. The study also demonstrated that the institution has undergone changes due to factors such as colonial influence, Christianity, Western education, urbanization, and economic transformation. Despite these changes, important aspects of traditional marriage, including family participation, negotiations, and cultural ceremonies, continue to remain significant among the people.

The study also investigated the perceptions surrounding the alleged high cost of bride price in Mbutu community and how such perceptions have influenced the social image of women. It revealed that the stereotype of expensive bride price has largely developed from misunderstanding, exaggeration, and the increasing commercialization of marriage ceremonies. Many expenses associated with modern weddings have sometimes been wrongly attributed to traditional bride price, thereby creating negative impressions about marriage practices in Aboh-Mbaise communities. This study showed that this perception does not fully reflect the cultural meaning and purpose of bride price, which is primarily based on family relationships and social recognition.

Furthermore, the research examined the effects of this stereotype on women from Mbutu community. It established that negative perceptions surrounding bride price may influence how women are viewed by outsiders and may create assumptions about their cultural background. However, the study also revealed that women in Mbutu continue to make important contributions

to family development, economic activities, and community advancement. The study demonstrated that the identity and value of women should not be determined by misconceptions surrounding marriage expenses but should be recognized through their social, economic, and cultural contributions.

The study revealed that addressing the stereotype of high bride price requires a balanced understanding of traditional marriage practices. Cultural education, moderation in marriage negotiations, and the involvement of traditional leaders were identified as important measures for preserving the positive values of bride price while reducing practices that contribute to negative perceptions. The research concluded that traditional marriage in Mbutu community remains a significant institution that reflects the history, values, and identity of the people, while also adapting to the changing realities of contemporary society.

5.2 Conclusion

Traditional marriage in Mbutu community represents an important aspect of the social and cultural organization of the people. The institution has historically provided a framework through which families establish relationships, preserve lineage, and maintain social continuity. Although modernization and changing economic conditions have influenced the form and practice of marriage, the fundamental values attached to marriage, including respect, family cooperation, and cultural identity, remain significant among the people of Mbutu.

The study has demonstrated that bride price occupies a central position in traditional marriage, but its meaning has often been misunderstood because of the stereotype associated with high cost. Traditionally, bride price was not intended as a commercial exchange or a means of placing financial value on women. Rather, it served as a symbolic expression of commitment, respect, and unity between families. The negative perception surrounding the practice has largely emerged from changes in marriage expectations, commercialization, and inadequate understanding of its cultural significance.

The study further shows that stereotypes surrounding bride price have affected the perception of women from Mbutu community. While some women have experienced negative assumptions because of these beliefs, the study emphasizes that women remain important contributors to

family stability, economic development, and community progress. Therefore, cultural practices should be understood within their historical context, while efforts should be made to remove aspects that create unnecessary challenges or social misconceptions.

Finally, the traditional marriage institution in Mbutu community remains a valuable cultural heritage that continues to perform important social functions. Its survival depends on the ability of the people to preserve its meaningful values while adapting to contemporary realities. A proper understanding of bride price and the elimination of unfounded stereotypes will contribute to strengthening marriage relationships, improving the perception of women, and promoting greater appreciation of Mbutu cultural traditions.

5.3 Recommendations

Combating the stereotypes of high bride price among the Mbutu people can be achieved through a combination of cultural education, community sensitization, modernizing marriages, and responsible involvement of family members and individuals. Due to the fact that most of the stereotypes are exaggerated and are products of misunderstandings, it is important to correct these misconceptions so as to save the culture of the community.

One possible solution is the education on the true definition of bride price in the context of traditional Mbutu society. There are many misconceptions regarding the practice due to the poor understanding of its cultural significance by those who do not belong to the community. Through educational tools and academic work, it can be emphasized that bride price is meant mainly to honour the bride's family and recognize their ties to one another. The community leadership has a critical part to play as far as combating the stereotype is concerned. Being the keepers of the traditions, they should advise moderation when entering into marriages to prevent unnecessary economic difficulties. They should be able to ensure that the requirements for marriage are moderate to uphold the good image of the tradition.

In an interview with Barr. Emeka Nwachukwu, he emphasized that the best way to address the negative perception of Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise bride price is through proper understanding of the tradition. According to him, community leader should continue to educate families that bride price is a cultural requirements meant to unite families and not a means of placing financial

burdens on young couples. He further stated that reducing unnecessary demands during marriage negotiations would help protect the reputation of the community's marriage institution.

An additional way would be controlling the demands which become very excessive in the marriage ceremony. Although the marriage customs should be kept intact, those aspects which have evolved as a result of competition in the society and the modern world must be controlled. According to Victor C. Uchendu, great understanding of Igbo cultural institutions requires looking properly at their social and historical context. He argues that practices such as bride price should be interpreted as mechanisms for strengthening family relationships and social obligations rather than being viewed only from economic perspectives.

Furthermore, public enlightenment could also go a long way in improving the negative image of the Mbutu women. Through community groups, cultural societies and schools, programmes may be organized so as to drive away any myths about the marriage customs and the women of this region. This would improve social relations between the Mbutu people and others.

The participation of women in debates on marriage reforms is just as essential. As women are affected by how the bride price stereotype influences them, their insights should help address problems related to the practice. Female interest groups and community forums are capable of bringing in a new perspective on the matter that helps to reconcile the idea of culture with justice and respect.

Education is yet another way to deal with the bride price stereotype. Educated persons would find it easier to analyse traditional practices and separate authentic traditions from those that emerged because of social pressure. Education might help younger generations to appreciate cultural importance of the practice without thinking of it in terms of money.

In addition, modern technology may serve as an instrument for correcting the myths associated with these cultures as well. The use of social networks, online media, videos, and cultural websites enables the people belonging to the Mbutu community to provide the right information regarding their wedding traditions, which will be beneficial for debunking all exaggerated stories.

Moreover, interaction between members of different communities and cultural exchange will help in eliminating stereotypes. People who have developed personal contacts with others due to studying, working, and even marriage will know more about their culture. Consequently, they will not depend on rumours anymore.

There is also the issue of the involvement of religious organizations in promoting balanced perspectives on traditional marriage. Religious organizations can advocate the preservation of cultural identity while discouraging the participation of individuals in activities that make their lives difficult. Working together with traditional institutions, religious organizations can create a better marriage system.

It is also important to engage young people in the effort to preserve and revitalize culture. Because they will be shaping the future of the community, it is important that they have a good appreciation of their own traditions regarding marriage so that they can either retain good traditions or discard bad ones. With proper education, they will learn to retain their culture in light of changing circumstances. In the end, overcoming the stereotype about expensive bride price in Mbutu depends on more effective use of the tradition. It would be better to retain bride price and make it signify respect, unity, and culture and not competition. With moderation and education, the stereotype around Aboh-Mbaise marriage can slowly be alleviated.

The traditional marriage culture in the Mbutu people is still a significant element of the community's heritage. Even though there are problems arising due to modernization and changes in social perception, the institution plays a crucial role in promoting social stability, improving family relations, and sustaining the identity of the community. Clarification of the misconceptions regarding bride price will, thus, be beneficial both to women's dignity and marriage traditions.

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2	Hon. Raymond Aliri	61	Former counsellor of Mbutu	Mbutu, Aboh- Mbaise	January 3,2026
3	Dr. Eze Matthew Nwosu	66	Chartered Accountant	Abuja	March 14,2026

4	Mr. Azunna Nwosu	45	Businessman	Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise	June 10,2026
5	Barr. Emeka Nwachukwu	66	Retired Policeman	Mbutu, Aboh-Mbaise	June 10,2026
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APPENDIX

UMUEZEORJI AWAKA MBUTU – ABOH MBAISE L.G.A., IMO STATE.

CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE LIST

DATE: 29/01/22

A. MMANYAAJUJU:

1. 1 Jar of Palm Wine
2. 1 Carton of Beer
3. 1 Bottle of Hot Drink
4. 16 Kolanuts

5. ₦2,000 Ngwagbu Manyi

B. GIVING OF LIST:

- 1 Jar of Palm Wine or 1 Bottle of Hot Drink - ₦2,000

C. AWAITING DEPOSIT:

₦20,000

D. COMPLETION OF DRINKS:

1. ₦500 Opening of Register
2. 8 Jars of Palm Wine
3. 8 Cartons of Beer
4. 8 Bottles of Hot Drinks
5. 8 Heads of Tobacco and Potash
6. 1 Bottle of Grinded Tobacco
7. 32 Kolanuts (8 Igbo Ones)
8. ₦16,000 Mixture of 8 Jars of Palm Wine (₦2,000 each)
9. ₦2,000 Ego Igirigi
10. ₦1,000 for the Kindred Head, 1 Bottle of Hot Drink & 4 Kolanuts
11. ₦2,000 for the Titled Men with a Bottle of Hot Drink
12. 4 Rolls of Matches
13. 1 He Goat

E. THE YOUTHS:

1. 1 Jar of Palm Wine
2. 1 Carton of Beer
3. 1 Bottle of Hot Drink
4. ₦5,000 Cash

F. SHOWING OF THE HUSBAND TO BE & RETURNING OF CUP:

G. THE BRIDE PRICE:

₦100,000

**UMUEZEORJI AWAKA MBUTU-UKWU AUTONOMOUS
COMMUNITY –ABOH MBAISE IMO STATE**

LIST OF IVU EFERE UKWU

29/01/2022

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Opening of Register | N1000 |
| 2. Ihe Ogugu | N5000 |
| 3. Ego Igirigi | N2000 |
| 4. Ego Ntope Uzo | N2000 |
| 5. One Jar of Palm Wine with Ngwagbu | N2000 |
| 6. Four Bottles of Eva Wine | |

7. Four Creates of Maltina
8. Four Creates of Mineral

Materials

9. One big Trunk Box
10. Two Big Stainless Basins
11. Two Umbrellas
12. Two Big George Wrappers
13. Two English Wax
14. Two Big Head Ties
15. Two Pairs of Head Ties
16. Two Sets of Original Chains and Bangles
17. Two Wrist Watches
18. Four Nigeria Wax
19. Four Blouses or Blouse Materials
20. One Big Lantern
21. Two Hand Bags
22. Four Cups of Body Cream
23. Two Bed Sheets
24. Original Weavon Wig
25. Two Big Tins of White Powder
26. Two Tins of Coloured Powder
27. Four Bottles of Pomade
28. Four Roles of Matches
29. One Rubber of Kerosene
30. One Carton of Bar Soap
31. One Carton of Toilet Soap (Lux)

FOOD ITEMS

1. Hundred Tubers of Yam
2. Hundred Bulbs of Onion
3. Two Bags of Salt
4. Two Bags of Rice
5. One Rubber of Red Oil
6. One Rubber of Groundnut Oil

7. Two Carton of Tin Tomatoes
8. Four Tins of Bournvita Drink
9. Two Roles of Packet Sugar
10. One Carton of Peak Milk
11. Five Big Loaves of Bread
12. Two Big Tails of Stock Fish
13. 100,000 (One Hundred Thousand Naira for the Box)
14. Eight Tins of Geshers

OZARA MBUTU NWENKWO AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY
CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE LIST

A. Mmanyà Ajuju:

1. 1 Jar of Palm Wine
2. 1 Carton of Beer
3. 1 Bottle of Hot Drink
4. 16 Kolanuts
5. ₦3,000 Cash

B. Giving of List:

- 1 Jar of Palm Wine
- 1 Bottle of Hot Drink
- ₦5,000 Cash

C. Awaiting Deposit: ₦20,000

D. Completion of Drinks:

1. ₦2000 Opening of Register
2. 6 Jars of Palm Wine
3. 8 Cartons of Beer
4. 6 Bottles of Hot Drinks
5. 6 Heads of Tobacco and Potash
6. 1 Bottle of Grinded Tobacco
7. 16 Kolanuts (8 Igbo Ones)
8. ₦12,000 Mixture of 6 Jars of Palm Wine (₦2,000 each)
9. ₦3,000 Ego Igirigi
10. ₦1,000 for the Kindred Head, 1 Bottle of Hot Drink & 4 Kolanuts
11. ₦2,000 for the Titled Men with a Bottle of Hot Drink
12. 4 Rolls of Matches
13. 1 He Goat

E. The Youths

1. 1 Jar of Palm Wine
2. 1 Carton of Beer
3. 1 Bottle of Hot Drink
4. ₦5,000 Cash
5. Showing of the Husband to be & Returning of Cup:

F. List for Ivu Efere Ukwu

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Opening of Register | N1000 |
| 2. Ihe Ogugu | N5000 |
| 3. Ego Igirigi | N1000 |
| 4. Ego Ntope Uzo | N2000 |
| 5. One Jar of Palm Wine with Ngwagbu | N1000 |
| 6. Three Bottles of Eva Wine | |
| 7. Three Creates of Maltina | |
| 8. Three Creates of Mineral | |

G. Others

1. One Big Box
2. Two Big Basins (Stainless)
3. Two Umbrellas
4. Two Big George Wrappers
5. Two English Wax
6. Two Big Head Ties
7. Two Pairs of Head Ties
8. Two Sets of Original Chains and Bangles
9. Two Wrist Watches
10. Three Nigeria Wax

11. Three Blouses or Blouse Materials
12. One Big Lantern
13. Two Hand Bags
14. Three Cups of Body Cream
15. Two Bed Sheets
16. Original Weavon Wig
17. Two Big Tins of White Powder
18. Two Tins of Coloured Powder
19. Three Bottles of Pomade
20. Three Roles of Matches
21. One Rubber of Kerosene
22. One Carton of Bar Soap
23. One Carton of Toilet Soap (Lux)

Food Items

1. Hundred Tubers of Yam
2. Hundred Bulbs of Onion
3. Two Bags of Salt
4. Two Bags of Rice
5. One Rubber of Red Oil
6. One Rubber of Groundnut Oil
7. Two Carton of Tin Tomatoes
8. Three Tins of Bournvita Drink
9. Two Roles of Packet Sugar
10. One Carton of Peak Milk
11. Four Big Loaves of Bread
12. Two Big Tails of Stock Fish
13. Eight Tins of Gesher
14. The Bride Price:100,000(One Hundred Thousand Naira) only