

# **A PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE ON THE PRE-CONDITIONS FOR MARRIAGE AND RITUALS OF DIVORCE AMONG THE Ogoni OF EASTERN NIGER DELTA**

**Burabari Sunday Deezia<sup>♦</sup>**

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**Abstract:** *Among the Ogoni of Eastern Niger Delta Nigeria, ii-ii wa (traditional marriage) is a sacred institution inextricably linked to their traditional religion, thus the intricate rituals before, during, and after the marriage process. However, divorce appears to be particularly prevalent among the modern generation. This has placed the institution of marriage in jeopardy, slowly losing its value, and eroding the pride and delights that the people once took in the institution of marriage. This paper analyzed the pre-conditions for marriage and rituals of divorce among the Ogoni. Using the descriptive method, the study argued that divorce is on the increase because the people have abandoned the pre-conditions for marriage and rituals of divorce as practiced in the Ogoni pre-modern society. Consequently, individuals often fake being in love, marry with or without their parents' permission, live together only when everything is going well, and*

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<sup>♦</sup> Lecturer, Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Port Harcourt, Nigeria. [burabari.deezia@iaue.edu.ng](mailto:burabari.deezia@iaue.edu.ng)

*choose to leave or separate when there are disagreements or when a difficult circumstance develops. This study recommended that the solution to the problem was not to keep people together in unhappy marriages, but to prevent unwise marriages. Thus, the need to revive the rituals attached to traditional marriage process.*

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**Keywords:** Divorce, Family, *II-ii Wa*, Religion, Rituals, Traditional Marriage

## **Introduction**

There is no doubt that marriage has a significant place in human society. Its centrality as the nucleus of society is the under guiding factor for the comprehensive rites and rituals among the Ogoni of Eastern Niger Delta Nigeria. As such, *ii-ii wa* (traditional marriage) is much more than a legally recognized union of a man and a woman in Ogoni traditional society, as it is conceived as a mystery and frequently linked to rituals like spiritual clearance and puberty rites preparation for the marriage maidens which is popular in the area.

In other words, *ii-ii wa* (traditional marriage) is a sacred institution inextricably glued to the Ogoni traditional religion. Given the fact that marriage is a fulcrum in Ogoni traditional society, there are elaborate ritual ceremonies performed before, during

and after the bride is formally handed over to her husband (Obodoegbulam, 2019). The ceremonies are many, from the initial visit to knocking on the door, through the several negotiations and final public ceremonies following the birth of a child, and the fact that on cessation of the union of life, certain rites have to be executed to ensure sustained bond between the families and communities and even the continuation of life. In other words, marriage is one acceptable institution that promotes the continuation of kinship and the transfer of life. Everyone participates in the play as an actor or actress rather than merely as a viewer. It is the point where all members of a certain community, including the community of ancestors and the unborn, come together. Here, all the dimensions of time collide, and the whole of human history is reproduced, revived, and renewed (Mbiti, 1969).

Throughout Ogoni, traditional or cultural marriages which offered the richness of natural continuity of life are fast fading out due to the influx of the alien Western culture. In other words, despite the importance of marriage and family values, the Ogoni society is faced with situations in which marriage fails, and the couples cannot tolerate living together. The

aftermath of this, is divorce. According to Mbiti (1969) divorce is a delicate accident in marital relationships. Given that marriage is a process, in Ogoni society, that process is complete only when the first male child is born, or when all the marriage presents have been paid or even when one's daughter married. Once the full contract of marriage has been executed, it is extremely hard to dissolve it.

Today, the inter-connectedness of marriage and family values within the Ogoni socio-religious themes is no longer distinct. The fundamental changes in the Ogoni contemporary society in the last few decades have had some various impacts on marriage and family system. The advent of westernization and its agents introduces a new dimension in both the concept and process of marriage in Ogoni. They have change divorce from being rare to common routine, because of the liberalization of the Ogoni traditional society, occasioned by modernity which encourages a change of attitude towards marriage and divorce as well as matrimonial norms and taboos. The new culture of sexual liberty, privacy, and autonomy have largely replaced or replaced traditional marriage rites, practices, procedures, forms, and philosophy. Marriage

is viewed increasingly at law and at large today as a private contract to be formed, maintained and dissolved as the parties deem fit. The requirements for parental and extended family approval and witness for the formation and dissolution of marriage contracts, as well as the necessary waiting periods for thorough inquiries by families of both parties, have largely disappeared.

This raises the question: Does the Ogoni older generation with closer ties to tradition have a way of preserving marriages that the present generation lacks? The above question about Ogoni marriage is an appropriate subject for philosophical investigation, especially in an age where that strong, socially acceptable core value of their culture and procedures of traditional marriage is gradually being eroded. This paper focused on the relevance of the pre-conditions for marriage and rituals of divorce in the contemporary Ogoni of Eastern Niger Delta.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The concept of marriage is derived from the Latin word *matrimonium*, which is a derivative of two Latin words *matris*, which means *mother*, and *monium* which means *duty*. Hence, marriage is a

sacred duty aimed at rendering a married woman a mother. This is in consonance with the Hebrew root word for marriage *kadosh* which also means sacred. Marriage, therefore, is a sacred institution. The ability of the spouses in the union to procreate is what gives marriage its sacredness. They take part in God's hallowed act of creation by being married. This is why Mbiti (1969) asserts that it is a sacred duty for every "normal" person to marry for procreation. From the African perspective, marriage and childbirth as being inextricably linked, making childlessness in marriage worrying and considered a misfortune. This is the view accentuated by Rahner and Vorgrimler (1965) they said that marriage is typically a legal union between a man and a woman for lifelong physical and spiritual relationship. Married spouses build a life connection between themselves that is spiritually and naturally ordered for their good and the procreation and education of their children as part of a spiritual covenant.

Greek thinking on form and matter began with the pre-Socratics, who used male and female as metaphors. The male was thought to represent the action of form, while the female represented inert,

formless matter (Daub, 2012). The first mention of this gendered conflict may be found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and "On the Generation of Animals." In the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and Saint Anselm of Canterbury, it subsequently made reappearance. It provided Francis Bacon with the fundamental task of philosophical inquiry: (male) reason had to rule and shape (female) nature (Daub, 2012). If the philosophical tradition consistently cited the ostensibly self-evident realities of gender and sexuality to support its hypotheses, often enough their thrust was inverted when metaphysics began to affect philosophers' perceptions of sexuality itself.

Men and women were now believed to relate to each other using the logic of form and matter, in addition to subject and object, form and matter behaving like men and women. Fichte can think of the union of the terms as being prior to those terms themselves by tying it to a model where the two *relata* constitute and "determine" one another (Daub, 2012). Fichte can also posit a "striving" for unification between the two *relata*, a union that is motivated by "feeling" and sanctioned as a goal, just as the "I" in

religion has the task of determining the Not-I, to render it identical to itself.

Without prejudice to the metaphysical foundations of marriage, it is noteworthy that almost all cultures contain examples of the kind of community that can only be fulfilled by conceiving and raising children as a family: a union between a man and a woman formed by their commitment to sharing their lives physically (including sexually), emotionally, and spiritually. Marriage is the term used traditionally to describe this kind of community. Logically, matrimony should have meant cultural heritage; or inheritance from a mother or female ancestor. Then matrimony was made to mean 'a state or condition of being married'.

Divorce, on the other hand, is a term derived from the Latin word *divortium* which means "to turn away or detach" (Suberu & Eluke, 2017). Divorce is the legal termination and dissolution of a matrimonial bond or marital union, which also annuls the obligations and liabilities of marriage and dissolves the bonds of matrimony between two persons. Given the importance of rituals in human societies, it must be



acknowledged that certain cultural notions are hard to define. Schneider (2007), who claims that articulating a definition of ritual is still a difficult undertaking for most ritual studies researchers, supports this idea. The fragmented state of ritual science is what gives rise to its complexity. While religious studies researchers like Ronald R. Grimes and William James have sought to explain ritual inside a tidy framework, Perry's (2015) article titled *The View from Hell* is of the opinion that their reduction has neglected certain crucial significant components of the primary human domain. This means that ritual, which is the execution of ceremonial activities commanded by tradition or by sacerdotal decision, may be seen as a manner of defining or classifying humanity. It refers to specific, observable mode of behavior exhibited by all known societies and can be expressed in words or action.

### **The Ogoni *ii-ii wa* (Traditional Marriage) System**

*Ii-ii wa* (traditional marriage) has a prominent position in Ogoni traditional society. Every maid and young person has it on their mind as a necessary task that must be completed as soon as possible after reaching adolescence. The idea of living a celibate life

does not find any favor at all; to the Ogoni, it is totally absurd and goes against the rule of nature. As a result, parents and family members are constantly available to remind young people of their societal responsibility.

Many pejorative labels are used to refer to adult Ogoni singles. Example of such names includes *Needam-Neewa* (male and female), and *Bia-be* for single women, which literally translates to "left in mother's hand." Regardless of one's age or financial status, an unmarried male is not viewed as a full grown adult in the society, even if he may be required to pay taxes. He is not given the chance to express his opinions in the gathering of adults. If he passes away, there is little long-term mourning, and sometimes buried the same day. Unlike a married man, who is required to lie in state at his home for at least a day.

Marriage is the center of life for the Ogoni people. It is the point where all members of a certain community come together, including the deceased, the living, and the yet-to-be-born. Here, all the dimensions of time converge, and the whole of human history is reproduced, revived, and renewed. Everyone participates in the theater of marriage as an actor or

actress rather than merely as a spectator (Mbiti, 1975). As such, marriage is a responsibility, a social demand, and a necessary component of life for everyone. Anyone who fails in that responsibility is seen as an outlaw, a rebel, or a "sub human," in addition to being odd in the society. An individual who refuses to get married under normal conditions has rejected society, and society has also rejected him/her. Consequently, one aspect of Ogoni culture that cannot be joked with is marriage. It is a widely held belief that if a male does not have a wife despite having money, building a home, and making other accomplishments, he is not considered to be a human person. According to this, a lady who has all the beauty in the world but is unmarried is not considered to be a human being (Barikui 2023, personal communication). Hence, the Ogoni have a saying that goes, *Dam lu te awandē* (husband is the prestige; an umbrella for the woman). The idea of being without a spouse causes the Ogoni lady to become afraid. She is all too aware of the shame that surrounds that sad circumstance. Such a woman suffers humiliated and is being ridiculed, particularly by other women, while her own instincts are outraged,

causing her to suffer both mentally and physically. Her failure would never be forgotten, not even in death.

## **Pre-Conditions for Marriage in Ogoni Philosophy**

In the Ogoni religious belief and culture, marriage incorporates rituals that make it a significant event, and this brings expectations. Thus, an oath of some kind is taken through which people declare that they now belong to each other. This pledge of undying fidelity carries with it the assumption that spouses will remain in a marriage under any and all situations. The pre-conditions for traditional marriage in Ogoni include:

### ***Gbi-Wa (Mate Seeking)***

Marital search involves observing the good, asking about the background and opinions from family and relatives, assessing their expertise, and sampling them. Marriage negotiations therefore are not completed in a day, hence such journey is in stages. The stage starts with the identification of the bride-to-be, either from "*dee-maa*," "*dee-wii*," or even "*dee-du*" (stream road, farm road, or market road) or via "*bii-e*-

*deē*" (moonlight plays). Sometimes, it also depends on recommendations from parents, relatives, and well-wishers (Deezia, 2020). Parents might also realize that their son is up to the age of getting married, he begins to search for the bride. Prior to this time, there is a possibility that either of the parents or the young man has seen a girl who appears attractive. Their parents are informed after both parties have expressed willingness. The parents will now take the expected steps (traditionally) based on the information provided by their children. Some families may follow up by asking the oracle to determine if the husband or bride is suitable or not. If the information is unfavorable, the marriage arrangements may be abandoned; but, if the information is positive, the marriage ceremonies will be performed as planned.

Another process or way of searching for spouses is through *Koo* custom. In certain villages, this is also referred to as *Nwikina-koo*. Unlike the male folk, the coming-of-age initiation rite for the female starts with the *Koo* ceremony. Every lineage head performs a libation at their shrine to inform the deities of their desires before the event, which takes place once a year. The typical age of an initiate is between 10 and 15 years

old, and depending on the resources available, they are housed for around three months on average. Within this period, the older women teach the young girls the traditional values associated with the Ogoni marriage institution. The young girls are not required to do any job, including farming, getting water from a stream, or shopping at the market (Igbara & Keenam, 2013). However, The *Yaa* (adulthood rite) ceremony is more extensive than this ceremony.

During the *Koo* period, which is regarded as sacred, movement is restricted in favor of better nourishment. The knowledge of the flesh was also forbidden at this time. Consequently, boys are not permitted into the place of confinement. The initiates' bodies are regularly rubbed with camwood, painted with indigo, and decorated with palm oil. They are all instructed on how to create a happy family and the virtues of women. At the conclusion of the confinement period, they are dressed with more body jewelry, including metal bangles on their wrists and legs and beads adorning their waist. After visiting the market, they all get together in the main town square to perform a unique dance called "*Gbayor*," which is performed to the beat of the *geregere* drum

(xylophone). They receive gifts from well-wishers, and a male relative carries each participant home on his shoulder at the conclusion of the event. Participants are treated to a special reception with entertainment, food, and beverages.

At this event, a lot of would-be husbands choose such girls as their spouses and begin the process of marriage negotiations with their families. The ceremony described above has a few minor variations, but every community in Ogoni does something pretty similar. It is significant to note that, in contrast to their male counterparts, girls who did not perform the rite were not viewed with disdain. Because of the male's importance in leadership, this was the case. It is significant to note that the neglect of these processes have indirectly contributed to the rise in divorce in modern Ogoni society.

### ***Bib-a-Bib (Inquiry Stage)***

While choosing a mate, virtues including good character, behavior, and morals were prioritized. Equal consideration was given to the potential affine relatives' social histories. If there was any evidence of infidelity, incest, theft, etc., this might have harmed

the marriage. This is done to make sure the girl or boy was from a good family and had good morals, and to find out if her family had any blood diseases, such as epilepsy, or if they had any negative traits, like stealing, barrenness, promiscuity, curses, and hereditary illnesses, etc., or if there had been any sudden deaths in the past, and so on. When the parents of the suitor did not arrange the girl for their son, as was customary, these first enquiries were made. The practice also sufficed if the girl's family did not know the suitor's family well since they came from a different village or a faraway location. The two families often made these first queries. It was said that this approach lessened the likelihood of a break-up due to a subsequent revelation of anything that would jeopardize the foundation of the marriage. It is important to note that the Ogoni practiced both exogamous and endogamous marriages. In any event, the suitor's family's decision to begin a marriage proposal or not was based on the background investigation of the girl and her family. This means that Ogoni parents are very meticulous about their children's potential spouses.



## ***Kpogabu or Bib-Wa (Knocking of Door or Introduction)***

Following the inquiry stage, the suitor's family would often not spend much time before visiting the bride's family to show the seriousness linked to their marriage proposal and to prevent competition from any other potential suitor. *Kpogabu*, as its name implies, literally translates to "to knock at the door," implying that the suitor's family had arrived to knock on the door of their potential bride's home. The two families would have made informal arrangements prior to this encounter. The two families' elderly relatives and other accompanying visitors were usually involved. The potential bride is introduced to the two families during this occasion. But first, the bride's family would have secured their daughter's approval for the marriage proposal.

According to Nwideede (personal communication, 2023), the atmosphere of the meeting was usually that of 'strangers seeking direction.' The language of the suitor's family mirrored this. Upon their welcome into the house of the prospective bride, this was often signaled by the presentation of kola nuts to the guests. The father of the suitor or the most

senior male began by making some complimentary remarks usually in proverbs and wise sayings. But, the most important ones were usually: "please we are in search of a hen which we were told belongs to this family" or "There is a lovely flower in this household that we would want to pluck." The families would have discussed the purpose of the gathering informally before and set the date, thus this meeting and the language used during it were often ceremonial. On the other side, the girl's family would reply via her father or the oldest male present, asking: "We have so many chickens on this homestead; can you recognize the specific hen when you see it?" The suitor's family often responded in the positive to this question. The family of the girl will ask the suitor's family to go with their drinks, on the ground that they have to hear from their daughter. If upon the third visitation of declaration of intent with the bride to be, and the suitor's drink is still rejected, this is a mark of disapproval by the potential bride's family. They only proceed to the next level when the declaration of intent drink has been accepted by the prospective bride family.

## ***Yiga Wa (Confirmation of the Proposal)***

As the name implies, this was the point at which the bride's family officially informed their intended in-laws that they had agreed to give their daughter to them in marriage. After this confirmation, the potential in-laws sent the suitor's family the list of items needed for all phases of the marriage ceremony. At this point, the proposal had been made public, and the two families could now proudly refer to each other as in-laws. The bride was often permitted to visit the home of her in-laws. This was done as part of the ceremony so that she may get to know her future in-laws' family and for them to assess the character of the bride. The bride was put to the test in a typical traditional setting in a number of ways, including her ability to handle housework like waking up earlier in the morning to sweep the homestead, fetch water for the entire household, and any other task that would be required of her, such as cooking for the family (Nwanee 2023, personal communication). The purpose of the follow-up assessment was to validate her mother's training in cooking and other kitchen duties. She was supposed to visit them for a week before going back to her home. Following this point, the groom also

pays visit to his in-laws to assist out on the farm or with any other duties that his mother or father-in-law may assign him, such as getting firewood or clearing bushes for farming. Along with presents like fruit and farm vegetables, he also gave them "bush foods" like game.

### ***Kpe Mii Wa (Wine Carrying)***

The final stage of wine carrying is scheduled after the third stage. If the groom does not have much money or if the woman falls pregnant during the third stage, the ritual may end. Otherwise, everyone in the community—invited or not—is required to show up on the designated day. The groom's family brings items as much as they can afford. The majority of the things on the list, apart from those for the bride's father, neighborhood kids, and *Pya Gā* (members of the Clan), were typically feminine items like a box of dresses and wraps, jewelry like bracelets and bangles, and kitchenware. Powders, food products such yam tubers and cocoa yam, milk, vegetable oil, and other goods are also available for the other women in the family and clan. Moreover, livestock such as chickens and goats as well as other delicacies were there (Sira

2023, personal communication). Almost all of the women, men, young girls, and boys in the hamlet would often attend the elaborate ceremonies. It was marked by celebration, including drinking and eating as well as ladies performing traditional dance.

### ***Kpugi Wa (The Bride Price)***

Every marriage must go through a number of formalities and transactions with the participation of the two bodies of kin, or the families of the couple, in order for it to be considered legal and for the children it will produce to be recognized as having "legitimate" status in Ogoni land. Money was represented by broomsticks. As a result, the bride's family will first bring a large bundle of broomsticks, which represents the value of their daughter in their eyes. After some internal deliberation, the groom's party will return with a counter offer in the shape of a much reduced bundle of broomsticks. The bride's family will once again go there for their own meeting where they will settle on a somewhat lower sum. There will be more back and forth until a final count (amount) is decided.

An essential component of establishing legality is the transfer of goods, money, or services from the

groom's family to the bride's kin. What we refer to as the bride price is this payment, which is seen as a standard aspect of marital rituals. It is important to stress at this point that women are not commodities in the Ogoni worldview, which is why anthropologists studying Ogoni culture have rejected ideas like "bride price," "dowry," and "dower." This is due to the fact that the payment of commodities or money to the bride's family by the groom and his family in exchange for the bride was misunderstood by Europeans. In this view, a woman is seen as a commodity, whose ownership is exchanged from one kins-group to another for products or money.

This is undoubtedly false from a position of knowledge, which will persuade one that the bride is neither sold nor purchased. Given the pitiful sum that cannot accurately reflect a woman's true worth and the absence of commoditization of ownership as should have occurred in the case of anything purchased by a person, such as a slave, etc., a woman with a dignified position clearly has a different status altogether. After the marriage, she continues to have both her own and her husband's citizenship. The main purpose of the bride price is for the husband to have exclusive sexual

access to the woman and to be able to leave status and property to the union's offspring as heirs to the husband's group. It's crucial to remember that for the Ogoni, the days of birth, marriage, and death are all major events in people's life. Only the day of marriage is something individuals can choose for themselves out of the three; the other two are dependent on events outside of their control. The importance of marriage in the lives of all people in society is placed on the aforementioned pedestal.

### ***Nee a Kee-bee (The Role of the Middleman)***

In Ogoni, there are at least two middlemen—one for the bride and the other for the groom—who plays essential roles in the marriage rites and procedures. From the start of the negotiations to the point of death, he serves as an intermediary. In most cases, it is the intermediary's responsibility to find out everything about the girl or boy and her or his family and report back to the families as necessary. When both intermediaries are satisfied with their findings, marriage ceremonies can begin. Only then can the couple go to the girl's parents and make their intentions known, accompanied by one or two members of the groom's family. The intermediaries'

job is to make things easier for the reluctant or less enthusiastic party. This means that in a negotiated marriage, the intermediary arranges the formal details so that the girl's father is certain that the union has the approval of the groom's family. This middleman, also referred to as the marriage guide, steps in when demands become unreasonable, especially when it comes to lowering the bride price.

It is common practice among the Ogoni to have middlemen known as "*akee-bee*" (witness) who act as bridges between the families. Additionally, they aid in resolving disagreements between the couple, their parents, and other family members. In order for the expenses incurred during the process to be reimbursed to the husband's family in the event of divorce, he also keeps track of them (aside from entertainment costs like food and drinks). Since it will be recovered through *Nee a Kee-bee* if necessary, the bride price is typically passed through them. Even in the event of death, the husband's intermediary would deliver a dead hen to the wife's intermediary, who would then deliver it to the wife's family. This is the symbolic way of communicating the news of the wife's death. This is typically the final duty intermediaries; because these



are carried out on a family representative basis, even in the event of the intermediaries' death, their wards would carry out the duty. From the foregoing, it can be concluded that intermediaries are crucial to the marriage process.

### ***Doo doo-nu ii-ii Wa (Traditional Wedding Proper)***

This last rite, which completes the marriage, is held in the compound of the bride's family. The number of family members from the bride's and groom's sides is often limitless. Many hundreds or perhaps thousands of people attend the event, depending on the resources of the two families. As far back as they know; the whole extended family system is invited. Several cultures have rules on what the groom must give the bride's family.

The *ii-ii wa* ceremony begins when the groom's party shows up with drinks and other presents. They are directed to the location set out for them. The bride's family then emerges to welcome the bride's in-laws. The bride and her maids are getting ready inside the home in the meantime. The bride and her maids initially arrive after the majority of the guests have taken their seats. This is mostly to say hello to the in-

laws. They go around the hall dancing formally while family members throw cash at them. The groom's party gives their gifts to the in-laws once the bride appears. The bride's family members will inspect the things to ensure that they meet their requirements. Any omission normally requires the groom to make up the difference with cash. The kola nuts are cracked and distributed once the beverages and other presents have been received. The bride and her party may make a second appearance in certain areas. The significance of this ceremony is to demonstrate to the groom that the bride is capable of making money by trading. To get her father's blessing, the bride walks before him. After the blessing, the father fills a cup with palm wine and gives it to his daughter to present to the groom. In order to make it difficult for the bride to discover the husband, he is often carefully concealed amid the throng. The bride and her entourage will continue looking in all directions until they locate him. After she is finished, she will give him the cup of wine. To the audience's acclaim, he sips and hands back to the bride for her to sip as well.

The groom's family will sing a song to signal their impending departure as the celebration comes to

a close and their obligation to take their wife with them. Usually there are no problems, and the bride's parents give her their own presents to carry to her husband's house. The bride must eventually join her husband's party as they go back to their residence, which is always an emotional separation from the bride's family. Nowadays, the church wedding follows the *ii-ii wa* (traditional marriage) rites are almost immediately. Occasionally the church wedding occurs the next day or a few weeks after the *ii-ii wa*. This time, depending on the groom's financial capabilities, the groom's family is in charge of planning the wedding and the banquet that follows the ceremony.

### **The Concept of *Aa-Ba-Wa Ture* (Divorce) in Ogoni Traditional Society**

Divorce refers to the procedure through which two spouses separate. It has the literal meaning of being liberating, untied, or separating. It suggests that the shared marital relationship has legally ended. In Ogoni society, divorce is an increasing social ill, and as such frowned upon by the people. The Ogoni people only use it as a last resort after all other attempts to reconcile couples have failed. This is due to the fact that marriage was seen as a lifetime commitment in

traditional Ogoni society. Marriage was seen as permanent, social, and spiritual bond between a man and his wife, as well as their respective families, and was thus regarded as being inseparable. Divorce was uncommon, and marriage was nearly invariably stable. According to Ogoni tradition, the parents of a divorced lady not only feel let down by their daughter's failure to keep the marriage together, but they also feel disgraced by her. Such a divorce occurrence takes away their honor in the family and community at large. In other words, divorce elicits stigma in Ogoni traditional society, and the label of being a divorcee might limit one's opportunities.

Consequently, Ogoni women often feel a sense of belonging in their culture, but they also frequently feel rejected by it when it comes to the subject of divorce. Nonetheless, since failing to persist and instead opting for divorce makes them social outcasts, this fact often forces women to remain in abusive marriages. This is because the woman's family and society expect her to stick with or maintain her marriage despite all hardships.

Divorce was thus not a major issue in traditional Ogoni culture. (Beebari, personal communication, 2022) noted that the communal nature of marriage made it difficult for the male to reject his wife on a whim. Early Ogoni culture typically resolved conflicts among members of the community and families, preventing divorce in most cases. The family of a spouse was expected to learn of his desire to divorce and evaluate the situation on its merits while considering all possible outcomes. As a result, Ogoni traditional society, it was difficult for a man to divorce his wife considering the processes and rituals involved.

### **Ritual of Divorce and Remarriage in Ogoni Traditional Society**

Divorce is a difficult process in Ogoni traditional society, which deters individuals from getting divorced. The families of both couples will need to convene many times, just as they did to enter into the marriage. They meet not to dissolve the marriage but to talk about concerns with their children's family. However, divorce is inevitable when all attempts seem to be in vain and the partners are adamant about their wish to separate. The ritual and processes of divorce

and remarriage as practiced in the Ogoni traditional society includes:

### ***Pyā-Gā (Clan) Traditional Tribunal***

When a couple faces marital problems that are beyond their ability and that of the *Menē be* (family head) and relatives to handle, the customary laws and ethos of the Ogoni people permit *Pyā-gā* (made up of people or descendants from a common ancestor or ancestress) to constitute traditional tribunals for purposes of adjudicating all civil cases, including the marital problems. The divorce process would start if the aggrieved husband or wife of a failing marriage initiated a unilateral action for divorce. *Pyā-gā* is paid a token charge that might range from ₦500 to ₦10,000 along with a bottle of gin. The amount may however, differ from one community or clan to another.

In light of this, the husband who wishes to divorce his wife does not instantly send her packing as the case may be, but first contacts his relatives. A notice message is then sent to the in-laws. In other words, both spouses' families are crucial to

maintaining the couples' cordial relationship. The families of both spouses would assemble together to try to reconcile the couples at stressful moments in a marriage, such as when the couple's relationship reached a rough patch. However, there is a constitutional route that either of the aggrieved parties might use if the marriage between the couples has irretrievably broken down and settlement attempts have failed. A husband may sometimes order his wife to leave the marital residence. In addition, the woman may run away from the husband's home and go live with her parents if she feels that the husband has mistreated her.

The husband or wife who is the plaintiff or defendant would give their statements of claims, and the respondent husband or wife would likewise file a statement of counterclaims. The chief in council would provide a decision on the case at the conclusion of the session after the witnesses for both sides had testified and been cross-examined.

***Lo Kpugi-loo Wa Ture (The Return of the Bride Price)***

The term *Lo Kpugi-loo Wa Ture*, which means "return of the bride price," is important to the divorce procedure in Ogoni traditional society. This rite is an

intricate part of the process of divorce and without it, divorce in Ogoni traditional society has not occurred. The couple's families assemble at the wife's paternal home to carry out this rite. The husband's family is entertained by the bride's family with food and wine. Do not mistake; this is not a party; rather, it is the proper method for the couple to part ways quietly and peacefully, without animosity on any side. The entertainment of the husband's family is seen as a way for the husband to make up for the costs he paid during the marriage ceremony. After this procedure, the husband receives the exact sum paid to the father of the bride, or whoever acted in his place (the middleman) to collect the bride price. At this time, the separation is final and the divorce procedure is said to have been completed.

What the husband can truly recover varies from family to family. The wife's family has the option to work out a suitable time to repay the money with her in-laws if the husband files for divorce. Often, a deal is found that would allow the money to be reimbursed. It is also possible that the man would agree to wait until the woman was remarried before the divorced husband sent a message through his lineage elder or the



middleman to the ex-elder wife's or middleman to demand the referred payment. In such cases, the bride price is treated as a debt, which is supported by oath or documents. If the woman files for divorce, the husband may demand an immediate and complete bride price reimbursement. *Pya gā* would provide a deadline for the bride price refund to be implemented. However, on the dissolution of the marriage both spouse have no right traditionally to enter into another marital relationship with any man or woman until the *Daa ba kē daa loo* (oath of marriage dissolution) ritual has been performed.

### ***Daa Ba Kē Daa Loo (Oath of Marriage Dissolution)***

It is believed that that reality is interconnected in the Ogoni religious philosophy. This interconnectedness implies a universe that is characterized by a unitary view. This brings to bear the underlying *Ziibalogzii* philosophy (Deezia, 2023)-seeing reality in terms of a universe of forces that interlinked together, and that are in constant interplay with one another. This unitary view of reality claims that the earth is an environment comprising of elements which are both material, mystical, visible and

invisible, physical and mental, corporeal and spiritual and each of these elements are so linked and interconnected with the other in such a way that they appear almost inseparable.

Among the Ogoni, the earth is address as a mother because it is believed to have the characteristics of a mother. This is seen in the way the earth bring forth, nurtures, and protect plants which serves as food for the sustenance of human and receive human through burial at death. Thus, the earth is perceived to be sacred and must not be defiled; else the earth as a way of punishment may unleash afflictions or death. She is the guardian of morality. Offences such as adultery, homicide, incest, suicide, stealing, sex in the bush etc., are regarded as abominations against the earth goddess. The profound confidence which the Ogoni people repose in the earth as a power which makes for righteousness is clearly manifested in the solemn oath of *Daa Ba Kē Daa Loo* (Oath of Marriage Dissolution).

*Daa Ba Kē Daa Loo* (Oath of Marriage Dissolution) is a crucial social control mechanism that has persisted throughout history and is still in use in the present Ogoni society. It is considered a solemn act

to the earth goddess or to demonstrate one's resolve to tell the truth or honor a vow. It is a conditional self-curse that highlights how conditional divine wrath hangs over the swearer heavily. It is a curse which a man or woman lies upon him or herself to take effect if what declared is false.

In some Ogoni communities, the Kinsmen and parents of both spouses congregate to the home of the middle man, who is seen to be a neutral third party who does not favor either of the parties involved, before a marriage is completely dissolved or shortly after it has been dissolved. Nwideede (2023 personal communication) added that the process of taking oath of marriage dissolution is being spear headed by the most elderly male from the ex-husband's family.

In preparing the oath of marriage dissolution, the items required include goat, fowl, fish, yam etc., other items include Nyā-ferefe (traditional plant), Apayākara- Nyabarisī (Ogoni traditional plant), *Oha* (*Pterocarpus*) leaf, *Okazi* (wild spinach) leaf, *ugu* (fluted pumpkin) leaf. *bung* (kolanut) etc. these items are being prepared. Both couples seeking for divorce will be required to take part of the prepared concoction, make some declaration statement with it

and finally eat it. Such declaration may be in this form; “from this day henceforth you are free, my ancestors/ancestress she is no longer our wife/husband, she/he is free to go his/her way and remarry, and if we mistakenly eat from the same pot, knowingly or unknowingly, may it have no effect on us, I will from this day have nothing to do with her or perpetuate any evil against her and children, if I lie may the earth goddess kill me” after which they eat the substance. While the remaining part of the goat, fowl and other items is being prepared and eaten by both family members. This process marks the final separation between couples.

### **Continuity and Discontinuity**

Modernization and its agents have had an influence on the Ogoni traditional marriage institution, resulting in several changes and neglect of the pre-conditions for marriage and rituals of divorce among the people. These modifications or threats suggest that the Ogoni adopt 'modern' methods of thinking, behaving, living, and consuming ways that are mostly western and sometimes at odds with the values that the Ogoni people hold dear. The rituals associated with marriage, the reason for marriage, marital

partnerships, and the breaking of the marriage vow have all been impacted by socio-cultural, political, religious, and economic developments. The Ogoni people are now separated from their traditional rural family networks and their value system as a result of contemporary living. The traditional value system has been weakened as a result of the loss or absence of physical closeness in relationships between the family and close relatives.

Currently, marital instability and divorce cases increased tremendously in Ogoni. This is due to the fact that the Ogoni modern generation has abandoned the pre-conditions for marriage and rituals of divorce among the people as practiced in the pre-modern Ogoni society. As a result, individuals often fake being in love, marry with or without their parents' permission, live together only when everything is going well, and choose to leave or separate when there are disagreements or when a difficult circumstance develops. If divorce is inexpressibly destructive and, nothing good results from it, the various social vices occurring today are majorly the fallout of broken homes and parents neglect of their responsibilities at the family level. This is because divorce dissolves

families and weakens belief in the family as an essential society unit. This is due to the fact that divorce destroys families and erodes faith in the family as a fundamental social unit. In other words, although divorce was awful, bad families were far worse. When a couple divorces, the affected adults become further poorer, and the children are put through psychological and financial strain, which may cause maladjustment and social deviance. This study suggested that the solution to the problem was not to keep people together in un-happy marriages, but to prevent unwise marriages. Thus, there is need to revive the pre-conditions for marriage and rituals of divorce in the Ogoni contemporary society.

## **Conclusion**

The thrust of this paper is the attention it has drawn to the pre-conditions for marriage and rituals of divorce among the Ogoni of Eastern Niger Delta. Given the fact that marriage serves as the fulcrum of Ogoni traditional society, there are elaborate rituals performed before, during, and after the bride is formally handed over to her husband. Nonetheless, it seems that the current generation is more prone to

divorce. This has placed the institution of marriage in jeopardy, gradually devaluing it, and eroding the pride and delights that the Ogoni people take or once took in the institution of marriage. Thus the relevance of the current study, as it contends that divorce rates are high because of the neglect of the pre-conditions for marriage and rituals of divorce in pursuit of modern styles and methods of marriage.

The study has widened the horizon of knowledge on the Ogoni socio-religious tradition by revealing the pre-conditions for marriage and rituals of divorce among the Ogoni. The study has brought to the fore the significant of marriage and divorce rituals as getting married to satisfy a social responsibility in society does not guarantee a good marriage. Rather, getting the couples enlightened on the pity, guilty of marriage sustains it. The paper therefore advocated on the need to revive the pre-conditions for marriage and rituals of divorce in the Ogoni contemporary society.

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