

## GENDER ISSUES IN AFRICAN BRIDE WEALTH PRACTICES

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### **Abstract**

Gender inequality is the unequal treatment of the sexes with respect to recognition, allocation of rights and opportunities. To reverse issues of gender inequality, the feminist struggle has canvassed for gender equality through gender mainstreaming. Whereas the feminist struggle refers to the efforts to combat all manners of misrepresentation, subjugation and marginalization of the female sex; gender mainstreaming simply means giving equal opportunities to both sexes as a way of forestalling the imbalance of the marginalization of one sex especially with respect to, recognition, work, education, ownership of property and other civil/legal rights. In this context, the impact of bride wealth on gender relations in Africa has divided scholars in recent years. On the one hand, are feminists who claim that bride wealth is a predominant cultural practice that contributes to the marginalization of women in Africa. Their claim is that the predominantly patrilineal nature of African society means that in most cases, men pay the bride wealth of their wives. Consequentially, these men see their wives as articles bought with their monies that they can treat anyhow and even dispose at will. There is therefore a call for the abolition of bride wealth as an important step in the quest to emancipate African women. On the other hand, are anti-bride wealth abolitionists who argue that abolition is not the way to go because bride wealth is the single most important element that legitimizes marriage and enhances the status of women in Africa. Using the documentary method and concept analysis for data collection and interpretation respectively, this study investigates the impact of bride wealth on the status of married women in Africa. On the one hand, the study discovered that there is a link between bride wealth and women subjugation in Africa. On the other hand, it found that bride wealth contributes immensely to the recognition and protection of the rights of married women in Africa. Amidst this apparent tension between the negative and positive contributions of bride wealth to gender relationship in Africa, this study argues that in spite of the importance of bride wealth in legitimizing marriage in Africa, the current practice that encourages the abuse of the fundamental human rights of African women is not desirable. Thus, while not calling for a blanket rejection of bride wealth as that would be harmful to the cause of women, the study recommended the deconstruction of African ontology of women as the pathway to reform subjugation of women in Africa.

**Keywords:** Africa, Gender, Culture, Feminism, Bride Wealth, Marriage

### **Introduction**

In recent years, the attention of philosophy has been drawn to gender issues. In fact, currently, Gender philosophy is taught as an undergraduate course in most universities both within and outside Africa. Gender Philosophy addresses the problem of gender inequality from a philosophical perspective. One way it does this is by introducing into philosophy, the contributions, inventions and thoughts of women (past or present). It takes into cognizance, women's experiences as victims of subjugation, misrepresentation and marginalization. This is why Gender philosophy is more or less feminist philosophy

because it borders on the issues discussed in feminist metaphysics, feminist epistemology, feminist political philosophy, feminist ethics and feminist philosophy of science and technology. One can say that:

Gender Philosophy is about the philosophical responses of women and professional feminists to the problems of gender inequality, sexism, marginalization, women subjugation and misrepresentation and other issues bordering on the unequal distribution of rights and privileges on account of socially misconstrued prejudices and stereotypes; and how philosophy should be done in respect to the achievement of the feminist struggle (Oduwole, Egun, 2022, p. 4).

Bride wealth and polygyny are some of the two most widely discussed features of marriage among contemporary African gender philosophers, early missionaries and colonial administrators (Phillips 1953, p. 195 & Waheed, A., et. al., 2014). For both colonial administrators and early missionaries, bride wealth and polygyny were seen as instruments of male domination and symbols of women's inferior status. Of the two elements, bride wealth received more attention and was often interpreted as "purchase money" (Torday, 1929 & Olusina, et., al., 2008). It was therefore regarded as contradictory to Christian morality and the British sense of justice and became an obstacle to the legal recognition of African "customary" marriage (Harris 1953, p. 360; Phillips 1953, pp. xxvi, 195, 332).

The legal and religious problems presented to colonial administrators and missionaries by the bride wealth payment stimulated anthropologists to study the phenomenon. From the beginning, anthropologists rejected the "purchase" theory, yet African women have not emerged from their analysis with a much higher status than they were accorded by the early missionaries and colonial officials. In fact, their analysis is what has come to inspire contemporary feminists who see African women as commodities of exchange than as marriage partners with reciprocal rights and obligations. For example, H. K. Schneider, who rejects the extreme economic interpretation given by Gray (1960), still says that it is "more typical of African marriages that rights in a woman are not sold but leased, and usually only in part. In other words, most African marriages are processes of hiring the services of a woman rather than sales or purchases" (Schneider 1964, p. 741). However, whether the emphasis is placed on "total purchase" or "hiring/leasing", fundamentally, the common denominator in these interpretations is that a woman is a thing to be bought or hired.

Perhaps the feminists' treatment of African women as an exchange commodity and their discussion of bride wealth in terms of men's interests are as a result of the anti-feminist bias that Lebeuf (1963, p. 93) says characterizes anthropological study of women's political role in Africa. Briefly, she says that Western anthropologists tend to regard men alone as equal to the task of government; therefore, they prejudge women's participation in the political affairs of their societies, fail to make careful inquiries about it, and simply relegate women to the spheres of domestic chores and private life.

Nevertheless, in surveying contemporary literature on African marriages, especially the aspects dealing with bride wealth, one finds that these matters have been studied primarily from two perspectives: the point of view that bride wealth is a tool of the marginalization or domination of women and the contrary view that it legitimizes marriages in Africa thereby making women more secure in their marriages.

Since Torday (1929) first published a paper on the subject and thereby initiated a continuing debate on the functions of bride wealth, the major conclusions all stress the rights accruing to the man and can be summarized as follows, the functions of bride wealth payment in Africa are:

- to secure legal rights for the husband over his wife (Torday 1929)
- to secure for the man rights over the domestic and sexual services of his wife (Fortes 1962)
- to secure for the man rights over the offspring of his wife (Ardener 1962)
- to ensure the permanence of the arrangement under which the man will enjoy the above services (Leach 1961), and
- to compensate the woman's male kin for the loss of her labor (Longmore 1959).

A summary of these five points will be that bride wealth payment in Africa is a tool of oppression of women by men. This has led to the call for the abolition of the tradition.

The other claim is that the primary function of bride wealth is the legitimation of marriage and that by legitimating marriage bride wealth functions to enhance, not to diminish the status of African women. Unlike the bride wealth abolitionists, scholars who hold this second position are anti-abolitionists who contend that the practice of bride wealth in Africa should be upheld because of the positive impacts it has on the status of women.

The questions this study will be addressing Include: does bride wealth lead to the marginalization of women in African societies? What rights if any does a woman acquire through the payment of bride wealth in African societies? Will abolishing bride wealth end women marginalization in African societies or will it make the situation worse and finally, is there any other way of improving the condition of married women in Africa without abolishing the payment of bride wealth? Before addressing these questions, it necessary to conceptualize the key concepts in this study especially, marriage and bride wealth

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Marriage**

Establishing definitions in this type of study involving cultural practices is important because terminology can differ between cultures and it is important to use the same definition in order to obtain consistent results. Since bride wealth is marriage transactions, it is important to understand, what marriage means before going into the definition of bride wealth.

How to define marriage has long been a thorny issue in anthropology (Gough 1959) and the long debate has yet to be resolved. A part of the problem seems to be the insistence on making the legitimacy of children a key element in the definition. The criterion of legitimacy is not always applicable in Africa, where children in some societies are accorded full legitimate status whether or not they are born within marriage (Goody 1962, p. 20).

The most general definition of marriage is: a publicly recognized union established between one man and one or more women, or between two women, or between a woman and one or more men, in accordance with the defining rules of a given society or social stratum ... given legal status by the society and enjoys protected rights, privileges, and obligations by virtue of having been established according to recognized rules (Ogbu

1978, p. 243).

The emphasis in this definition is twofold. First, a marriage is a publicly recognized union given a legal status by the society and enjoys protected rights, privileges, and obligations by virtue of been established according to recognized rules. Most African societies have two or more forms of “unions” but in each society, only those unions established according to recognized rules are regarded as marriage by members of the society. For instance, the former Kingdom of Dahomey in present day Benin Republic has thirteen different forms of unions but recognizes only six as forms of legal marriage (Ibid. p. 245).

The second point in the definition is that marriage is established in accordance with a defining rule or rules. If a union is competing with other forms of unions and is to be publicly recognized as marriage, there has to be some socially agreed way of distinguishing it from these others. The means by which such a public recognition is bestowed will vary from society to society. For instance, the Maori of New Zealand and the Yao of Malawi establish their marriages by public acclamation, whereas Americans and Europeans establish theirs by issuing a state license for a fee, and following it with a secular or religious ritual. Many African societies, however, require the payment of bride wealth followed by a religious ritual before recognizing a union as marriage.

### **Bride wealth**

In sub-Saharan African societies, there are three major forms of marriage payments or exchanges in the course of marriage, namely: uxorial payments, viroral payments, and mutual exchanges. Bride wealth is associated only with the viroral payments, although not all viroral payments are counted as bride wealth. What constitutes the bride wealth is that part of the payments that Fortes (1962, p. 10) calls “prime prestations.” He defines them as that part of the marriage payments that constitute the *sine qua non* for lawful marriage and which are, strictly speaking, the *sole jural* instruments for the transfer of marital rights. Fortes (1962, p. 9) calls other marriage payments made by the groom “contingent prestations” and says that these serve only to establish and maintain good relations with the groom’s affines. In African societies, the contingent prestations often begin long before the actual marriage takes place and continue after it. In the long run, these payments may exceed the bride wealth, but it is only the bride wealth proper that makes marriage legal. The size of the bride wealth varies from society to society, although rating it as low, moderate, or high depends on its relation to the relative wealth of the average member of a given society.

### **Consequences of Bride Wealth Payment on Women Feminists/Bride Wealth Abolitionists**

As already acknowledged above, in the arguments surrounding the debate on the consequence of marriage on the status of women in African society, two schools of thought have arisen about the payment of bride wealth: bride wealth abolitionists and anti-bride wealth abolitionists. The first school holds that the payment of bride wealth in Africa signifies that married women are properties of their husbands. Advocates of this position think that the belief finds expression in the ways many Igbo men tend to control their wives, which includes but is not limited to beating and other manners of domestic violence.

Abiola et al, (2011), carried out a study on the perception of African men on domestic violence, especially wife battery, based on the 2014 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). The analysis of the survey shows that the majority of Africa men, especially men from Southeast Nigeria perceive wife beating as justified if she disobeys or argues with her husband. The researchers conclude base on their findings that this may

not be surprising to anybody that grows up in core Igbo land given the prevalence of the belief in the culture that men own their wives and have the right to control and even chastise them if they question their authority or refuse to acquiesce to their wishes.

According to Abiola et al (2011), this cultural belief is one of the reasons that prompt some men to engage in the attitude of controlling their wives' earnings, her social life, and relationships with other people, including her family members, religious affiliation, choice of profession, and participation in politics. Some African men stretch this belief too far by demanding that their wives account for every expense she made, her whereabouts whenever she goes out, and the type of dress she wears. It is also the case that this sense of obedience inculcated in the mindset of the woman may be one of the reasons some of them perceive control and beating by their husband as "normal and justified."

Waheed, et al (2014) in their own survey research share the outcome of Abiola et al research. Accordingly, they blame the traditional practice whereby a man pays a bride wealth to the family of the bride as one of the reasons that nurtures the idea of this popular belief of sense of ownership of the woman. The view "the exchange of bride wealth as evidence of a commercial transaction both between the man and the woman and between their two families." There is also an emerging notion that the payment of a bride price is to compensate the bride's family for their expenses and effort in nurturing her. This perception is reinforced by how expensive it is to get married in many African societies. Based on this, Waheed, et al (2014) aver that, "The payment of bride wealth as an African culture is like having cultural access to such a person, and immediately the bride wealth is paid, the woman becomes your property." Similarly, Adewunmi and Aluko-Arowolo (2007, p. 7) argues:

In modern times, the bride price symbolizes sale of the girl and ownership by her husband and his family and due to this misinterpretation of customary law, the woman is regarded as the property of the man who is entitled to discipline her as he thinks fit.

Waheed, et al (2014) claim that this belief in the sense of ownership of a woman by her husband hinders the effective implementation of the principle of gender equality in Africa. The former Chairman of the Nigeria Bar Association, Ikeja Chapter, Barrister Dave Ajetomobi, hints on this when he states that, "There are many laws against domestic violence, in Nigeria but they are not working because of the cultural belief that a man owns his wife. Even the police hold this belief and that is why nobody takes enforcing these laws seriously" (Waheed, et al 2014).

Similar conclusion was made in a survey research commissioned in South Sudan by the United States Institute of Peace and conducted by Marc Sommers and Stephanie Schwartz (2011). The survey discovered that the most prominent thing about the situation of South Sudanese youth concerns the sculpting impact of the "dowry economy," which has expansive financial and social significance. Male and female youth must marry to be recognized as adults; however, male youth are under severe pressure to meet escalating dowry costs. High unemployment, low levels of educational accomplishment, and disturbances in trade with Sudan have significantly diminished avenues for economic success. An unpublished UN report (2011) states that dowry prices have grown by 44 percent since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005.

The desire of parents to profit when their daughters marry contributes to rising bride wealth. This is not necessarily an expression of greed. "Dowry prices are based on market

forces,” a longtime foreign resident of South Sudan explained. Parents naturally see it in their interest to maximize their wealth in exchange for marrying off a daughter. One man described the logic that informs high bride wealth prices: “A daughter has been brought up by her family and is their source of income.” This issue was widely reported and helps escalate bride wealth demands. “The only property parents have is their daughter,” a county commissioner explained. “You give away your daughter for dowry and then you are [financially set].” Fathers in particular are known to command bride wealth negotiations (Marc Sommers and Stephanie Schwartz, 2011, pp. 4-5)

According to the authors, although placing a high economic value on daughters in South Sudan is nothing new, the current situation has created a frightening series of realities for female youth. Widespread economic dependence on bride wealth and the objectification of women often leave female youth with limited control over their lives. As a government official explained, “Paying bride wealth for a woman is like slavery. You have no voice before your husband if he pays bride wealth for you.” Arranged marriages for young girls, moreover, remain common. A high-ranking government official explained that “once girls reach puberty, potential husbands come and apply [to marry them]. If the girl is found with a boyfriend, her family can kill her. If she is impregnated by a boyfriend, she can be beaten to death (Marc Sommers and Stephanie Schwartz, 2011, pp. 4-5).

Some interviewees also noted that high bride wealth is related to domestic violence. As one female youth interviewed in Bentiu said, “High payment of bride wealth has increased the pain. Another observes that [The husband is] paying so many cattle [for you], so he mistreats you.” This mentality also seems to justify adultery committed by husbands. Caught in this web of severe threat and control, some girls and women reportedly escape by committing suicide. “Sometimes a girl can hang herself because she’s forced to marry a man she doesn’t like,” a government official stated. In Unity State, one female youth explained that young wives who poison themselves are making a rational decision because death allows them “to go to a better life” (Marc Sommers and Stephanie Schwartz, 2011, pp. 4-5).

The culmination of these assaults on African bride wealth system by these authors is the call for the abrogation of the practice. Abiola et al, (2011), Waheed, et al (2014), Adewunmi & Aluko-Arowolo (2007) and Marc Sommers & Stephanie Schwartz, (2011) are particularly of the opinion that any activism or government policy that wants to improve the condition of women, especially in Sub-Saharan African must take the issue of doing away with bride price serious.

#### **Conservatives/Anti-Bridewealth Abolitionists**

The second of the two groups debating the influence of bride wealth on the status of women in African is the anti-bride wealth abolitionists. This group emphasizes how bride wealth enhances the status of women by legitimizing the institution of marriage in Africa. Their position therefore is that the practice should be upheld in spite of the shortcomings because scrapping it would undermine the very foundation upon which African marriage is built.

A key advocate of the position is Ogbu (1978). He argues that feminists’ discussion of the rights conferred by the payment of bride wealth at marriage does not convey an accurate picture of woman’s status in Africa. For in Africa as in Europe and America, marriage confers certain publicly recognized rights and obligations on the husband as well as on the wife, the violation of which is subject to sanctions. The fact that in one case marriage is established through the payment of a state license fee and in another through the payment of bride wealth is beside the point.

According to Ogbu (1978), the primary role of bride wealth in Africa is legitimization of marriage and this legitimization generates reciprocal rights that are bestowed upon husbands and wives at their marriage. These reciprocal rights are supported by public authority, however defined, which also authorizes or administers sanctions when they are violated.

Arinze (2017) also argues that ethnographic literature is also biased in its documentation of the rights conferred on men in marriage. To make this point clear, he contends that an examination of the reasons husbands and wives seek divorce in sub-Saharan African societies indirectly reveals the rights, especially conjugal rights women gain in marriage. In order to ascertain the conjugal rights of husband and wives in African society, Arinze (2017) analyzed a list of reasons why men divorce their wives and a list of the reasons women divorce their husbands. In doing this, he noted that these reasons are not necessarily conditions that have to occur before a divorce can be granted, but rather reasons that justify a wife seeking to divorce her husband or a husband seeking to divorce his wife. The point therefore is that these incidents can be interpreted as sufficiently serious violations of the reciprocal conjugal rights as to lead one or the other of the marriage partners to seek the termination of the marriage. Overall, Arinze's (2017) claim is that bride wealth payments establish marriage as legal and confer reciprocal conjugal rights on husbands and wives, who are held accountable for violations of these rights. It therefore follows for him that bride wealth is the pivot on which African marriages revolve and scrapping it would be tantamount to scrapping the marriage institution itself.

Usman (2019) located the effects of bride wealth payment on the status of African women on what he called four key functions of bride wealth. These are, legitimization of marriage, conferring of conjugal right, keeping the marriage stable and affiliation of children. According to him, in legitimization of marriage, bride wealth elevates the man to the status of a husband and the woman to the status of a wife. As a husband and a wife they incur reciprocal rights and obligations for which they are held accountable. Thus, we cannot talk about the rights a man acquires in the woman he marries by payment of bride wealth without also talking about the rights the woman acquires in the same marriage.

Underlining legitimization of marriage as the fundamental function of bride wealth, Usman (2019) argues that the man's right to keep the children born to the marriage is a secondary function. This is because men pay bride wealth in societies in which they have no right to keep the children just as they pay bride wealth in other societies in which they can keep the children. Moreover, the children can be affiliated with their mother's group in both types of societies, even though no bride wealth has been paid for their mother-that is, when there has been no legal marriage. Thus, both husband and wife acquire certain rights in and obligations toward children born during their marriage, and these rights and obligations do not terminate at divorce.

Going further, Usman (2019) contends that once we recognize that the primary function of bride wealth payment is the legitimization of marriage, we begin to see why it cannot at the same time ensure the stability of the marriage. Most conflicts that eventually lead to divorce arise after the marriage has been established, that is, after bride wealth has been paid in part or in full. The size of the bride wealth cannot be used to predict the nature of these conflicts. In fact, many of the conflicts between spouses and between couples and their respective affines are probably the same whether marriages are established by bride wealth or by other means. Nor does the payment of bride wealth prevent a woman from seeking to end an unsatisfactory marriage, since she can usually find another man who is both willing and able to return the bride wealth-a situation that makes her less dependent

on her kinsmen. Consequently, bride wealth payment, far from being a symbol of inferior status, enhances the status of the African woman insofar as it is used to legitimate her marriage, through which she achieves the status of a wife vis-a-vis the man's status as a husband. Usman is also of the opinion that the higher the woman's social status the larger is the bride wealth payment expected and paid.

Nevertheless, Usman (2019) is not by this arguing that African women do not occupy inferior positions vis-a-vis African men. They do, just as European and American women occupy inferior positions compared to European and American men. The inferior status of Western women is still symbolized at church weddings by the act of "giving away" the bride. In the past, a Western woman could not be married without the consent of her male guardian. Today her status has increased tremendously but still does not equal that of a Western man, as evidenced by the current feminist movement. In Usman's (2019) documentation, although bridewealth payment was once practiced in Britain (and probably elsewhere in Europe), it cannot be assumed that the higher status of women in Britain today is due to the disappearance of bridewealth-or of dowry-payment. Rather the explanation is to be sought in the increased educational and economic opportunities for women.

He therefore suggested that the relatively inferior status occupied by African women is probably due to their relative lack of economic independence. In many traditional African societies, women do not inherit such property as land and cattle, which are the major sources of subsistence production; nor do they readily acquire such property on their own behalf as adults. Consequently they are economically dependent on their kinsmen before marriage and on their husbands after marriage. Such economic dependence affects their social and political status as well. We know, for example, that in some West African societies, such as those of the Dahomeans, Ibos, and Yorubas, women had greater opportunities to achieve economic independence through property inheritance and property acquisition in their own rights and through trading and related activities; they also had higher social and political status in these societies. At the same time, the relatively high status of women in these societies coexisted with bridewealth payments. It is therefore Usman's (2019) contention that there is need to study the influence of other forces such as women's economic status before calling for the abolition of bridewealth as the key determinant of the marginalization of women in Africa.

#### **A Philosophical Analysis of the Effects of Bride Wealth on the Status of Women in Africa**

The two theories on the effects of bride wealth on the status of women in Africa as we have seen, have compelling supports in extant literature. On the one hand, there is abundant evidence, both empirical and theoretical to strongly suggest, that the payment of bride wealth influence the negative way many African men relate to their wives. At the same time, there is corresponding evidence that payment of bride wealth is so important to the marriage institution in Africa that it cannot just be scrapped. Nevertheless, while acknowledging this seeming tension between marginalization and legitimation roles of bride wealth, it has as well to be appreciated that allowing the current situation is not recommendable as it is likely to escalate and further undermine the quest to enhance the condition of women in Africa. Therefore, to deal with the problem of the commodification of women through bride wealth and other cultural practices that inspire the marginalization of women in Africa, there is need to realize that these practices, including bride wealth are mere manifestations of an underlying cause, which is African ontology or metaphysics of women.

Buttressing the ontology that encourages the marginalization of women in Africa, Nulufer Kale (2011, p. 8) writes:

Gender socialization takes place in the family when mothers and fathers treat their female and male children in different ways such as promoting gender stereotypical behaviour, praising appropriate personality traits for their genders, encouraging them to play different toys.

Chinua Achebe (1958, pp. 2-3), in *Things Fall Apart*, is even more forthright on this and his position is worth quoting in details:

He [Ikemefuna] was like an elder brother to Nwoye, and from the very first seemed to have kindled a new fire in the younger boy. He made him feel grown-up; and they no longer spent the evenings in mother's hut while she cooked, but now stay with Okonkwo in his Obi, or watched him as he tapped his palm wine. Nothing pleases Nwoye now more than to be sent for by his mother or another of his father's wives to do one of those difficult and masculine tasks in the home, like splitting wood, or pounding food. On receiving such a message through a younger brother or sister, Nwoye would grumble aloud about women and their troubles. Okonkwo was inwardly pleased at his son's development, and he knew it was due to Ikemefuna. He wanted Nwoye to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father's household when he was dead and gone to join the ancestors. . . . And so he was always happy when he heard him grumbling about his women. That showed that in time he would be able to control his women-folk. No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man. He was like the man in the song who had ten and one wives and not enough soup for his foo-foo).

In this quotation, Achebe hints at a thesis that has been an almost universal assumption, namely, that women are naturally created not only as inferior but also to be ruled over by men. This assumption has been the motivation behind the marginalization, subjugation and exclusion of women around the world but especially in Africa. For instance, the author of the letter to Timothy (2: 12-13) is acting on this assumption when he gives us a twofold reason why women should not have a voice in the affairs of a Christian community:

I am not giving permission for a woman to teach or tell a man what to do. A woman ought not to speak because Adam was formed first, and it was not Adam who was led astray but the woman who was led astray and fell into sin.

Similarly the author of Ephesians (2:22-25), warns:

Wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord, since as Christ is the head of the church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his wife; and as the

church submits to Christ, so should wives to their husbands in everything.

Some of the great fathers of the Church, who have been instrumental in forming our ecclesiastical tradition, have echoed this all-too-familiar theme and warned about the potential for evil that women possess unless they are kept at bay by men. The feisty St. Jerome warned: "Women are the gate of hell!" The late-second-century Christian jurist Tertullian before him harped on the same chord: "The judgment of God upon your sex endures even today and with it inevitably endures your position as criminal at the bar of justice. You are the gateway to the devil!" And the influential Clement of Alexandria cried out: "A woman should be covered with shame at the thought that she is a woman"! (Cited in Meyer, 1995). Consequently, the root of the marginalization of women in Africa is African ontology of women. Therefore, any struggle to end the abuse of women in Africa needs to start from the deconstruction and reconstruction of African ontology of women.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

This study sets out to examine the impacts of bride wealth on the status of women in Africa. To realize this objective, the study was divided into six parts, namely, Introduction, Definition of Terms, and Consequences of Bride wealth Payment on Women in Africa. The other parts are, Philosophical Analysis of the Effects of Bride wealth on the Status of Women in Africa and Conclusion and Recommendations. In the introduction, the problem of the study and the method of resolving it were outlined. Two basic concepts, marriage and bride wealth were defined in the second part. While marriage was defined as a publicly recognized union established between one man and one or more women, or between two women, or between a woman and one or more men; bride wealth was seen as that part of the marriage payments that constitute the *sine qua non* for lawful marriage and which are, strictly speaking, the *sole jural* instruments for the transfer of marital rights.

In part, three, the central question in the study, which is the effect of bride wealth on the status of women in Africa, was interrogated. The first theory, bride wealth abolitionists saw bride wealth as the prime cause of women marginalization and therefore called for its abolition. The conservationists or anti-bride wealth abolitionists are those who contended that bride wealth enhances the status of women in Africa and therefore should not be abolished. These two theories were identified, discussed and examined. In part four, which is the contribution of the study, it was argued that while the negative role of bride wealth in the marginalization of women in Africa maybe undeniable, however the primary cause of this marginalization is not bride wealth but African metaphysics of women which saw women as inferior to men. Consequently, it was argued that action aimed at bettering the condition of women in Africa must begin by deconstructing and reconstructing African image of women.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing, this study is making the following recommendations:

1. Governments in Africa need to initiate an education programme which will emphasize the equality and complementarity of men and women from primary to tertiary level, that will be sustained by enforceable laws that will combat negative perception of women as mere property due to the bride price transaction.
2. Religious institutions should organize marriage preparatory programmes which will inculcate the sense of equality between men and women; in order to minimize the severe conflict arising from bride wealth inflation and payments in Africa.

3. There is also need for a government regulation agency, especially at the local government level to work with traditional rulers and communities councils to minimize the unnecessary escalation of bride wealth because from the findings of the study, it appears that the more men pay to marry, the more they see their wives as commodities purchased with their money.

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