word *ejder* can mean dragon as well as snake. See Skjærvø, Khaleghi-Motlagh, and Russell, "AŽDAHĀ," 191,192; *Cumhuriyet* 2 Kanun-i evvel 1341 [December 2, 1925], 1. Nurredin Paşa, wearing a Kalpak, a symbol of Turkish Nationalism, especially during the Turkish War of Independence, is depicted in the wide-open mouth of a snake. He could either be interpreted as a tooth of the snake of reaction himself, or as a victim of reactionism, swallowed by it and lost to the nationalist cause.

75. *Cumhuriyet*, September 2, 1341 [1925], 1.
76. A member of an Islamic mystical order or fraternity.

CHAPTER 12

"Youth of Awo-Omama Will Boycott Their Girls": Men, Marriage, and Ethno-Cultural Nationalism in Southern Nigeria, 1920–1956

Saheed Aderinto

The title of this chapter is the headline of a news report in the January 8, 1948, issue of the *Nigerian Spokesman*, one of the newspapers published by Nnamdi Azikiwe, a foremost nationalist and one of the founding fathers of independent Nigeria.[1] The newspaper reported about a resolution an assemblage of young unmarried men had passed in December 1947 about bride price in Awo-Omama, a community in southeastern Nigeria. According to these men, bride price had "soared to the Olympian summits, inaccessible to most youths without difficulties and strains." The youth, under the auspices of the Awo-Omama Patriotic Union (Lagos Branch) accused their elders and chiefs of "profiteering and traffic in conjugal" affairs and "burning the candle at both ends by sucking marriageable youths dry."[2] They resolved not to marry women from their town unless the elders reduced bride price to £15 and £25 for educated and uneducated girls, respectively. They also threatened to ostracize members who contravened this resolution.[3] A similar organization, the Ngwa Youth Association, after a two-day convention held in Aba (also in southeastern Nigeria), in 1953, directed its members not to pay more than £25 for a bride, regardless of the educational status of the girl. So heated was the atmosphere at the convention that one of the elders demanded that "the temper of the youth be controlled by elderly and

more experienced brains."[4] Thus, conflict over bride price, a sociocultural obligation and prerequisite for traditional marriage, was emblematic of intergenerational and social-class crisis in post–World War II Nigeria.

The published text of the youth's resolution fitted adequately into the prevailing culture of negotiating choice in the wake of economic and political exploitation by powerful people and institutions. Indeed, the word "boycott" was generally used in the 1940s and 1950s to extol economic nationalism. It denoted a rejection of European merchandise for Nigerian-made ones, because foreign goods were usually expensive and exploitative. Hence the term, popularized by leading cultural nationalist Mbonu Ojike (nicknamed, the "King of Boycottables"), carried a significant tone of subordination in changing and unequal power relations.[5] The youth literally reduced or equated marrying a wife to "purchasing a merchandise." But beyond the relationship of marriage to economic choice, the youth were also reinforcing cultural nationalism, by making intra-ethnic marriage their first choice in a multiethnic colonial state of Nigeria. Yet the story of exorbitant bride price was not unique to Awo-Omama or Ngwa: individuals and groups across southern Nigeria persistently lamented the impact of high bride price on gender and generational relations. By the late 1920s or earlier, bride price was among the highest expenses incurred by unmarried young men in southern Nigeria. Indeed, one of the deliberations at the 1937 conference of Yoruba chiefs was the need to impose a uniform bride price across the towns and communities in southwestern Nigeria.[6] By 1954, the problem had become so serious that the government of Eastern Region set up a committee to "investigate the social effects of the payment of bride price" and to "make recommendations for the removal of any anomaly or hardship."[7]

This chapter is about the representation of the bride price controversy in a number of southern Nigerian daily newspapers—including the *Eastern Nigeria Guardian*, *Nigerian Spokesman*, *Southern Nigeria Defender*, and *West African Pilot*—between 1920 and 1956, when the Eastern Region House of Assembly enacted a law limiting bride price to £35. It examines how young unmarried men (predominantly wage earners) used the print media to express the relationship between marriage and ethno-cultural nationalism and to contest the exorbitant bride price imposed on them by their community.[8] I demonstrate how the junior men constructed a subordinate status for themselves as they negotiated the hegemonic masculine power of the senior men (the chiefs and patriarchs) who moderated marriage relations and served as cultural gatekeepers. I then link this struggle

between hegemonic and subordinate men to the theme of cultural nationalism. As young men presented their perspectives over marriage payment, they advertently and inadvertently unveiled a host of sociocultural and economic matters that connect powerfully to the broader social change under British imperialism. Hence, the debate over bride price cannot be understood in isolation from the political, economic, and gender history of a rapidly modernizing colonial society.

Revisiting Men, Wage Labor, and Nationalism in Africanist Literature: The Blind Spots

This chapter sits at the intersection of literature on marriage, gender and masculinity, nation and nationalism, and labor history of Africa.[9] Historians of Africa have documented the transformation of marriage as part of the wider sociocultural and economic impact of colonialism.[10] The core idea running through this large and growing body of work is that the entrenchment of colonialism led to the monetization of the society and the rise of urban centers, mining and military camps, and plantation—the epicenters of imperial economic power. Bride price, a symbolic payment made by a man to the family of his prospective bride, which used to be made with agricultural produce and farm labor in precolonial times, was substituted with cash under colonial rule. Thus, marriage payment became "monetized" or "commoditized." Rural communities imposed new financial obligations on young men who were expected to work in the cities, mines, or on plantations to raise money for bride price and other marriage-related expenses. The exorbitant marriage payment was just one of the numerous aspects of what some scholars such as Brett Shadle have called "marriage crises" in Africa.[11] New colonial laws, such as those on divorce, empowered women, giving them the opportunity to leave unhappy marriages; the improvement of communication and transportation networks also increased women's presence in the city and decreased the grip that rural patriarchy exerted on them.[12] Using an array of sources, including court records, scholars have shown that disputes over marriage were emblematic of larger tensions over contraction of or unequal access to political and economic resources, which manifested themselves in conflict across and within generations, gender, social class, and even ethnicity.

This chapter does not counter the established historical fact that marriage underwent significant transformations that varied from one part of Africa to another. I will not revisit the well-known ambivalent

situation it created as people responded in accordance with how it affected them. Rather, I want to open up new perspectives for investigating the impact of colonialism on African masculinities and on generational relations by retrieving the voices of young Nigerian men from the pages of newspapers. To be sure, existing scholarship has relied almost exclusively on colonial archival documents, courts records, and oral history. The credibility of these sources is not questionable. However, by deploying newspapers, a useful genre of sources for researching marriage politics that historians have grossly overlooked, this chapter offers the following methodological and theoretical perspectives in order to shed light on the masculinized politics of marriage and ethno-cultural nationalism in Africa.

First, the representation of men and marriage in southern Nigerian newspapers took the debate over conjugal affairs from its conventional domains—in the inner chambers of the colonial courts, in the correspondence among colonial officers, in private family and town hall gatherings—to a much bigger public arena, providing young unmarried men literate in English the opportunity to criticize their subordinate situation—sometimes using pseudonyms in order to escape the sanctions or the punishment their actions could cause. In fact, the newspaper was a significant site through which youth masculinities were performed, produced, and reproduced. Second, the print media as a space for holding public debate not only gave young men the opportunity to exchange information about marriage across ethnicity and space, but also allowed them to create what I call an "imagined community of victims of marriage racketeering." To underestimate the impact of the print media on youth's consciousness about marriage is to downplay the role that self-consciousness and self-fashioning played in the everyday lives of colonial subjects in Africa. Third, when young men wrote about exorbitant bride price, they invoked the language of victimhood. This language of subordination pitched them consistently against the hegemonic power or influence of the rural elders, mostly men, accused of exploiting "hardworking" young men, and preventing them from fulfilling cultural obligation and rite of passage from a young person to an adult.

This third perspective demands rereading the term "masculinity" in colonial Africa. Africanists have acknowledged the relevance of R. W. Connell's celebrated work *Masculinities* in reconceptualizing men's role, identity, and status.[13] They have yielded to her admonition by recognizing that "not all men have the same amount or type of power, the same opportunities, and, consequently, the same life trajectories."[14] In addition, they have complicated her work by noting

that diverse forms of masculinities existed within the ranks of the colonialists (hegemonic men) who maintained imperialism as a male-centered edifice, and the African men they colonized.[15] Local and foreign ideals of gender roles, modernity, work place and bodily habits, and sociocultural obligation produced complex outcomes for how men saw themselves and were treated at various stages of their lives and under shifting circumstances. Indeed, colonialism not only produced new forms of African masculinities through the entrenchment of wage labor and missionary education, it also transformed the preexisting ones, creating new sets of often contradictory standards for achieving and maintaining masculine roles.[16]

Drawing insight from Connell's seminal work, the politics of marriage payment in southern Nigeria allows us to identify two types of masculinities, namely the hegemonic men, that is the rural patriarch who imposed bride price, and the subordinate, that is young men who worked in the cities, mines, and on plantations to acquire the resources to fulfill marriage rites and obligations. Yet, this typology needs to be deployed with caution. The subordinate status of a young unmarried man was situational and relational—that is within the context of bride price payment and his status as an unmarried, young male. The same young man would exhibit hegemonic masculinity if he supervised other men at work or mentored new "boys" who had just moved to the city or joined the numerous ethnic associations that provided self-help and mechanism of acculturation in multiethnic urban space. He would not be a subordinate man if he fulfilled other cultural obligations—such as paying communities dues, helping to educate his kinsmen, or serving as an English interpreter in his community. This same logic applied to the hegemonic men, the rural patriarchs, who exerted power over the young men. In mainstream colonial paternalism, he was a "boy" regardless of his age and legitimate cultural status—such as being a priest, chief, or custodian of his community's heritage—because he was an African in need of European fatherhood, couched in the vocabulary of civilization.

Our discussion of the fluid meaning of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities leads to that of nation and nationalism. One cannot agree less with scholars of African nationalism and politics that the rise of urban centers, mines, and military bases as well as the expansion of educational facilities created "de-tribalized" men and women who lived in a multicultural colonial society.[17] If the British colonizers' main goal for creating urban centers was economic and political, the unforeseen consequences manifested in the fusion of cultures from diverse backgrounds. In theory, the detribalized men were

expected to jettison ethnocentrism for the ideology of a culturally and politically united colonial state. They were expected to embrace European culture and take pride in the idea of a united Nigeria, and not emotionally invest in their ethnicity to the detriment of the emerging nation-state. Indeed, the term "tribalism" in mainstream colonial culture resonated with the stereotypes of "primitivity," "retrogression," and all manifestations that contravened what colonial civilization stood for or was expected to obliterate. For instance, the numerous political cartoons and satire produced by Akinola Lasekan and published in the 1940s and 1950s in the *West African Pilot*, the best-selling nationalist newspaper in colonial Nigeria, provide the most graphic insight into how the educated elites believed Nigerians across ethnic groups should be thinking about their status as "ethnic/tribal" and "national/detribalized" bodies. However, scholars rarely acknowledge the fact that as the colonial state emerged as a melting pot of cultures, so did the expansion of space or avenues for exclusionary intra-cultural interaction that contravened the ideals of a "tribaless" society. Indeed, scholars who have written on "ethnic," otherwise called "tribal," unions rarely acknowledge that the agenda of these associations promoted "ethnic nationalism," which disregarded the idea of a united nation-state that the leading nationalists men advocated for during the 1940s and 1950s.[18]

What is more, historians have paid limited attention to the relationship between social class and masculinized nationalism. Indeed, the idea of a united multicultural colonial state was largely the project of hegemonic or "big" men, that is, educated, upper-class, male nationalists, most of whom doubled as frontline professionals and public intellectuals. Most single, lower-class men who felt the negative impact of marriage payments among other economic avarice of colonialism were mostly concerned about fulfilling cultural and financial expectations within their immediate communities and ethnic alliances than embracing the idea of a united colonial state, which at best was far removed from their daily struggles. If the elites exhibited political nationalism in their anticolonial activities and sought independence from Britain as the solution to the problem of imperial exploitation, the unmarried young men exalted ethno-cultural nationalism and directed their grievances at their own kinsmen, calling for a fair system that reduced the hardship of meeting the financial requirements for marriage. Ethno-cultural nationalism manifested in several shades—from the choice of residential neighborhood to dress and socialization. Arguably, it was in the selection of spouse that it was most visible. Marriage, as a process through which family was formed, was central to the preservation of sociocultural identities that guaranteed protection. The unmarried southern Nigerian men who registered their grievances about marriage payment on the pages of the newspapers were not concerned about development in other communities and cultures. As the titles of their articles clearly demonstrate (see notes and references), they decried the cost of marriage in their ethnic groups, because they cared more about their ethnicity than what obtained in other communities.

I am not suggesting that all young unmarried did not believe in the idea of a "detribalized" Nigeria. There were several exceptions. It would also be naive to conclude that all the upper-class, educated elites believed in a united colonial state, where ethnic boundaries collapsed to give way for a borderless culture mix. Indeed, several well-respected nationalists among whom were doctors and lawyers extolled the supremacy of their ethnic group over others. Herbert Macaulay, the so-called father of Nigerian nationalism, was both a cultural nationalist and a firm believer in a united Nigerian state.[19] Thus, nationalism did not parade as a uniform ideology shared by all. Rather individuals and groups at different stages of their lives and under a range of situation exhibited a variety of nationalisms (economic, political, ideological, and ethno-cultural, among others) to satisfy their self-fashioning and the obligations imposed on them by the groupings they belonged to. As men's social status changed at different stages of their lives, so also was their perspective toward their position within diverse space. Thus, a young urban man who criticized his elders for exploitation could later in life become a highly educated and influential leader pushing for a society, where the interest of the larger national state superseded the ethnic.

Contextualizing the Marriage Crises: Wage Labor and the Making of New Masculinities

It is impossible to understand the masculinized politics of marriage payment exhibited on the pages of Nigerian newspapers without acknowledging that one of the enduring legacies of colonialism was the emergence of new working-class men, whose identities were shaped by the kinds of work they did, the income they made, where they lived, and the social expectations imposed on them by individuals and institutions that wielded enormous power. As a male-centered edifice, colonialism erected structures that placed men at the center of state-making. By the late 1940s, tens of thousands of the new African men were to be found in the new sites of imperial power such

as the mines, the military camps, and the cities.[20] Mine, military, and railway workers were predominantly unskilled and semiskilled labor. Much of Nigeria's skilled workers were to be found in government offices working as book-keepers, secretaries, clerks, interpreters, or teachers. By 1960, the year of Nigeria's independence from Britain, there were half a million registered wage employees in a country with a population of over 50 million.[21] Although many men sought jobs in the government establishments, the largest percentage worked in informal sectors of the economy as artisans and traders. Men, not women, monopolized the urban sector of "domestic-helpers" popularly called "houseboys" who performed such chores as cooking, child-care, and gardening. Indeed, the house-helper job was one of the most popular city jobs, attracting a stream of unskilled laborers from the villages. They were generally well paid, lived free-of-charge in their masters' (usually European and African elites and expatriates) home, and enjoyed most of the splendors of quality life found in high-class segregated neighborhoods and recreation facilities.

Historians have documented why men across generation and class sought wage labor by abandoning agricultural work, trekking hundreds of miles from their villages to the cities and mines.[22] For instance, the acute land shortage in eastern Nigeria inhibited reliance on subsistent farming.[23] Men were attracted to the colonial army both in war and peacetime, not just because its wages were better than most offered in many low-cadre employment, but because it provided the opportunity to exhibit valor and muscular masculinity. Some people embarked on permanent and seasonal migration to acquire money to pay taxes and other levies imposed by the government and their communities. In addition, the new consumerist cultures, which took strong root as Nigeria was firmly integrated into the world-capitalist system, also fueled the need for cash. Access to cash was important for negotiating new social and political relations: men who had cash stood a better chance of vying and wining important chieftaincy titles, accumulating and maintaining large political patronage, and playing important roles in their communities. The attractiveness of the city complemented its reputation as a major employer of labor. Not only did the city present men with the opportunity to experiment with new social and sexual relations, which the village would frown against, it also boasted of modern amenities such as electricity, pipe water, and educational institutions rarely found in the countryside.[24] However, several unmarried men went to work in the city and mines for bride price. A 1950 survey revealed that many of the Igbo men in Lagos aged 15 to 34 came "in search of the high bridewealth

[bride price] demanded in their home communities."[25] Carolyn Brown, in a detailed study of labor and masculinity in Nigerian coal mines, has noted that most young, unmarried men risked the unsafe environment of the mines, "to earn income to pay bride price."[26] Kenneth Little has also argued that the search for bride price pulled most young men to the city.[27] According to the Eastern Nigerian government's "Report of the Committee on Bride Price," which was released in 1955, men enlisted in the Nigerian army during World War I because the military was paying marriage allowance. After the war, the demobilized soldiers returned home with so much cash that "men with daughters of marriageable age were dazzled by the money they were offering and often made their daughters marry them, irrespective of the fact that they had already been betrothed to others and in complete disregard of the girls' wishes."[28]

Workers' compensation varied widely, mirroring the wide economic inequality across social class and generation. The government's annual minimum wage in the 1940s was £36. Most semiskilled employees working with high school diplomas or certificates as book-keepers and clerks earned around £48 per annum. The highest-paid Nigerian workers belonged to the minority group of highly educated elites, including doctors, lawyers, and newspaper editors. During the 1940s, an African magistrate's maximum annual income was around £720, a stark contrast to the £48 earned by most middle-class Nigerians working with a high school diploma.[29]

The epileptic character of the colonial economy that manifested strongly during such periods as the Great Depression and the world wars, and poor working conditions, prevented men from fully maximizing the gains of working away from home. Thus, between the 1930s and the 1950s, workers embarked on strikes to demand better working condition.[30] Unemployment was strife. At least twenty thousand unemployed people registered with the government labor office in Lagos during the early 1920s, and these numbers increased during the depression decade.[31] High cost of living worsened the financial status of most young men, preventing them from fulfilling monetary obligations to their families and communities. Between 1939 and 1942, the cost of living in Lagos jumped from around 50 to 70 percent.[32] In summary, wage labor did not automatically create wealthy colonial subjects; in fact, very few people accumulated wealth through it. Rather, it provided access to regular pay checks, which helped people to meet basic daily needs such as food and shelter, but was inadequate to generate wealth or satisfy high financial demands such as marriage payment, without sacrifice, long years of labor, and

distress. In addition, wage inequality meant that some men would be able to afford bride price, while several others would not.

Marriage, the Print Media, and Ethno-Cultural Nationalism

As previously mentioned, when men criticized their elders in the newspapers for imposing exorbitant bride price, they extolled cultural nationalism by privileging intra-ethnic marriage over interethnic marriage. Their writings provide clear insights into the advantages of an intra-ethnic marriage conducted in the village, not in the city. First, it enjoyed cultural legitimacy because newlywed couples would not have to negotiate the cultural, linguistic, and sometimes religious barriers evident in interethnic marriages.[33] A man who married within his community stood a better chance of competing favorably for chieftaincy titles or traditional offices. Intra-community marriage alliances helped strengthen bond between clans and lineages. More so, it maintained existing conflict among communities since interethnic marriage could revive old disputes and create problems for the new family. Bert, a newspaper contributor and an advocate of intra-ethnic marriage, believed that interethnic marriage was not only an aberration, but that people usually entered into it under coercion. He thought that interethnic marriages ended up in a disaster: "If a Nupe man marries a Diobu girl and expects to be happy with her," Bert wrote, "he is mistaken, because such marriage has always been, not for love, but for the errors committed through questionable habits. Moreover, what does a Diobu girl care about the welfare of a Nupe man? A stranger is a stranger, no matter whatever amount of confidence is reposed in him or her...Who but a fool would expect a happy home from such marriage?" He advised men not to risk interethnic marriage.[34]

But not all newspaper commentators shared Bert's view about the danger of an interethnic marriage. An editorial that was published on August 24, 1946, in the *Eastern Nigeria Guardian*, lamented: "We see nothing against people marrying outside their towns."[35] Another writer who self-identified as "Bee-Bee-Jay" not only extolled interethnic marriage, but viewed popular preference for intra-ethnic marriage as an obstacle to a united Nigeria free of ethnic discrimination. "I was shocked to think," he wrote, "that despite the various sermons on mental emancipation, tribal discrimination and all that call for a united Nigeria, there are still some who cannot see the good that is in other tribes." Bee-Bee-Jay then went on to criticize the assumption

that interethnic marriage was susceptible to failure: "Unhappiness, therefore is not to be attributed to inter-tribal marriages."[36] There was a social-class dimension to marriage across ethnicity. Little has shown in his *African Women in Towns*, that members of the upper class were more likely to marry across ethnic groups than working-class Nigerians. Although Little did not detail why interethnic marriage was common among the elites, one could suggest that the lower-class men preferred intra-ethnic marriage because it enhanced protection against socioeconomic problems.[37]

Second, marriage conducted abroad, especially in the city (even when both the bride and groom came from the same ethnic group) posed some problems for male authority. Some men's general assumption was that village girls were better behaved than their city counterparts who were exposed to excessive Westernization and its consequences such as "bad" mannerism (drinking and smoking) and exotic fashion such as wearing sexually provocative and body-revealing dresses and charred hair.[38] Village girls, several writers believed, were much easier to control than their city counterparts. They were the real African woman, equipped with all the skills to run a good African home. A writer who simply identified himself as TY was explicit in his preference for a bride from his community. After enumerating how he changed jobs five times within a year to raise his £50 bride price, he concluded that "a village girl is not like a Lagos girl. She would not leave the house just because of a disagreement. She will wash your clothes, cook good food. You won't miss the village life."[39]

City girls, in the men's writings about love and romance in the Nigerian newspapers, were best for enjoying fast, social life in a transient relationship. What is more, city girls were likely to be educated and in favor of female socioeconomic independence, which was widely promoted in the growing advice manuals in the newspapers during the 1940s and 1950s.[40] Gleaning from the debate over marriage and female independence in the newspapers, the idea of women's financial independence was not popular—even though some men wanted a educated, working-class girl as a wife. The contrast between "sophisticated" city girls and "primitive" village girls is well represented in early African written literature. In the *People of the City* (1954), the first Nigerian novel in English language to gain global recognition, Cyprian Ekwensi described the contrast between Lagos and village girls as well as the dilemma faced by bachelors like the 26-year-old newspaper crime reporter Amusa Sango, the novel's main character who struggles with parental pressure to marry: "Of women Sango could have had his pick, from the silk-clad ones who wore lipstick in the European manners and

smelled of scents in the warm air to the more ample, less sophisticated ones in the big-sleeved velvet blouses that feminized a woman."[41] Yet, not all village girls were uneducated. Indeed, many had primary and secondary school diplomas and participated in love letter writing—a significant aspect of colonial literary culture that defined the idea of modern romantic passion.[42] It would appear that the longer women stayed single in the city, the more morally corrupt they would be, in the men's framing of moral respectability.

The third element of the relationship of marriage and ethno-cultural nationalism was the difference between native/traditional marriage and the English/church marriage, introduced through colonialism. The crisis of marriage payment took the dimension it assumed partly because middle- and lower-class men tended to prefer native marriage over English ceremonies. Both men and women were aware of the advantages of English marriage, which some thought was less expensive because it did not have to be conducted in the village. Men could circumvent cultural obligations of marriage if they married in the city before the magistrate or in the church. But English marriage, otherwise called "Ordinance or white marriage," was not as culturally legitimate as the traditional ceremony. While traditional marriage enhanced patriarchy, English marriage was more favorable to women, not only because it criminalized polygamy, but also because it gave women enormous power in matters of inheritance, divorce, and socioeconomic mobility.[43] Writing in support of what he called a "moderately refined" bride price, one Ligbor contrasted European and native marriage in terms of opportunities and liabilities accruing to husbands and wives if divorce happened: "Girls who insist upon the European forms of marriage should have no dowry or bride price paid on their behalf, but rather they should bring something to their husband's house as dowry, so that when the evils of that one sided law of alimony arise, the man can have only one loss to suffer."[44]

The debate over the advantages and disadvantages of native/traditional and English marriage predates the 1930s. Between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the subject of English marriage created complex politics, predominantly among the educated elites who were also Christian converts in colonial Lagos.[45] However, in the 1940s and 1950s, the debate over native versus English marriage in the newspapers was grafted into the politics of marriage payment among lower-class and semi-educated men who consistently weighted their options.[46] Like the debate over inter and intra-ethnic marriage, preference for or against English or native marriage had a class dimension. It would appear that English marriage was more popular among

members of the upper class, who sought to use it to gain access to colonial privilege. One editorial titled "Imported Marriage" plainly established the prevailing idea that European marriage was strictly an elitist preference: "It is to our way of thinking ridiculous to maintain that the imported [English] form of marriage is the only one fit for decent people as some of our girls seem to hold." It went on to exaggerate the level of acceptance of African marriage: "As a matter of fact we are definitely of the opinion that for every 100 Africans it is difficult to have one who would find the European form of marriage suitable.[47]

Bride price was determined not so much by the age of a girl, family background, or beauty, but by her literacy level and the "general prosperity of the people"—that is the level of development of her community.[48] Generally, the bride price for educated girls (mostly with primary or secondary school diploma) was higher than the one for uneducated brides.[49] The reason for this is not far-fetched. Some parents saw bride price as a compensation for investing in the education of their daughters.[50] In Owerri, in the mid-1950s, men paid about £100 for uneducated girls, £200 for girls holding primary school diploma/certificate; and £300 for those who acquired post–primary school certificate in teaching, nursing, and midwifery.[51] The bride price for uneducated and educated girls in post–World War II southern Nigeria generally ranged between £18 and £300.[52] The advantages of marrying an educated girl were legion. Not only did it fulfill the agenda of men who wanted to raise "modern" families patterned along European culture, educated girls also stood the chance of securing the highly regarded clerical jobs and contributing to family's income. As popular as the classification of girls into "educated" and "uneducated" for the purpose of bride price was, some contributors believed that "civilized humanity cannot but be rudely shocked at the suggestions of classifying girls as though they were specimens in a laboratory!"[53] Other critics thought that bride price should not be used to recoup educational investment. "The fact that certain parents spend a lot on the education of their children is conceded, but this fact we contend, is no justification for parents expecting to get heavy dowries [bride-price] from prospective husbands"(the *Eastern Nigeria Guardian* editorialized on June 13, 1940).[54]

The Print Media and the Moral Economy of Marriage Payment

Young men used the following methods to mobilize against exorbitant bride price: they selectively deployed certain aspects of African/

native marriage culture that they believed was "good" while criticizing those that were viewed as "bad"; educated their kinsmen in the village about their travails in the city; debunked the popular assumption that wage earners had a lot of disposable income; blackmailed their elders for monetizing marriage and associating marriage with slavery; highlighted the impact of exorbitant marriage payment on the individual, the community, and the nation as a whole. Let us take a closer look at these methods of mobilization against bride price, one at a time.

When men criticized their communities for imposing high bride price on them, they occasionally compared and contrasted European culture with African culture and contended that payment of bride price was not a requirement for marriage in Europe, the continent that served as a template for development in Africa. They tried to redefine the conditions for marriage by recommending that "marriage must be solely prompted by genuine love which is far from being a material object that can be purchased with money" and that the wish of the prospective bride and groom must supersede that of their parents.[55] This proposal attempted to individualize marriage by removing the extended family from interfering in conjugal matter in contravention of existing norms that treated marriage not solely a relation between two individuals but families, clans, and communities. The ideas of "individualizing" marriage or attempting to limit parental involvement resonated powerfully with other components of colonial culture and everyday life, which I have termed "selective modernity"—the notion that Nigeria can trail the path of advanced European states by selectively appropriating "positive" practices of social advancement and doing away with those constructed as "negative."[56] Selective modernity was riddled with inconsistencies, not because those who espoused it did not know what they wanted, but because both African and Euro-American culture presented contrasting benefits and demerits that Nigerians manipulated for different purposes and in changing context.

Hence, a young man like Timileyin of Ijebu who preferred intra-ethnic over interethnic and English marriage in an article that was published in the *Southern Nigeria Defender* on March 12, 1942, utilized the language of modernity by associating bride price with "backward" elements of African culture that had to be eradicated in the interest of "civilization" and "modernity." He asked the British government to intervene in the marriage crisis in his community by directing the chiefs to stop collecting bride price or return to the precolonial practice of paying it with agricultural product and labor.

Perhaps no other writing that I have seen demonstrates more effectively how selective modernity reflected in the politics of marriage than the opening paragraph of another article in the ***Eastern Nigeria Guardian***, which read more like a thesis statement: "Traditional customs are always coveted and much has been the controversy which has taken place in many places at any attempt to change them. History itself has it on record that custom must be respected but not without exception. Ethically, if the existence of a certain custom is not repugnant to the progress and the wellbeing of a community it would not justify any attempt to eradicate the same merely for the pleasure of doing so. At the same time, commonsense permits that if the retention of a custom threatens the progress of any people, that custom should be scrapped."[57] But as complex as the debate over "progressive/modern" or "primitive/retrogressive" was, it is apparent that most men wanted bride price to be reduced, not completely removed. They understood the importance of bride price as that component of traditional marriage that legitimized men's status as husband. Another writer named Obi clearly explained the impact of the nonpayment of bride price on gender relations in marriage: "A woman whose husband has paid no dowry [bride price] for her, usually takes undue advantage over him. She teases or abuses him on the slightest pretext. 'You regard yourself a man, what have you spent on me?' she would ask. These and similar remarks are common."[58]

When men wrote about the problem of marriage, they also attempted to educate their community about their ordeal in the city. They tried to repudiate the notion that urban dwellers, miners, and soldiers made a lot of money. Hence they saw communication as one tool to pressing home their demand for reduction of bride price. "Everyone who understands the true position of the economic life would support the spirit of his article," wrote Ndibe, who agreed with another contributor named Obiako that the bride price for educated and uneducated girls in Awka needed to be reduced.[59] The youths' narratives in the newspapers include the harsh conditions under which they worked in the city, the kinds of work they did, and everyday life of the working class, all of which made fulfilling marriage rites difficult. Chris Olisa provided a very textual writing about the toils of young men in the city by chronicling their experience at different stages of life as they struggled to meet societal expectation in a colonial society characterized by unpredictable economic circumstances: "After sending a boy to a college he comes out to find his living. Naturally, he is not worth a farthing because whilst in the college his parents were responsible for his fees and clothing. Now it happens that by the time he has finished

his studies, something inevitable befalls his parents and he could not therefore, pursue his studies. The young man comes out of the college to look for a means of livelihood. Whilst on this venture, he falls in love with a girl, who is fully matured. He has now succeeded in getting an employment and after making provision for a few odd things essential to life, he wants to marry his fully developed girlfriend. After complying with the necessary formalities, he is asked to pay a dowry aggregate to his year's emolument before taking his girl as a wife."[60] Other writers like A. L John, who wrote about marriage payment in Mbaise, was more confrontational in his rendition of how he thought his community wanted him to spend his hard-earned money: "Would it not be criminal folly to ask the young man to use-up all his eight years saving just to marry a wife?"[61]

Men realized that opposition to high bride price required the deployment of vocabularies capable of eliciting public opinion against their elders and community. The colonial culture of the English rhetoric developed partly because the print media was respected as a site through which people could hold public debate, demonstrate their mastery over language, while generating large volume of interesting information that increased readership and sale of the newspapers.[62] Critics consistently associated high marriage payment with slavery, one of the most emotionally charged words in a modernizing society that credited European "civilization" for helping to end the heinous trade in humans. They claimed to be speaking for the "hapless" young village girls who were "sold" into sexual slavery. "Every right thinking person will agree with me that it is purely slave trade," J. W. I. Wubani, an opponent of high bride price, argued.[63] Another writer, Chas H. Olisa, submitted: "To my mind, the dowry system is an indirect form of slavery."[64] To A. L John, bride price was a "shameful act of indirect slave dealing."[65] Such admonitions as the one by Ndibe of Awka, who argued that parents should "discover the intrinsic value of their daughters. They are not simply chattels for making money," or another that claimed, "Our women folk are thereby literally placed in the public auction for the highest bidder," were all meant to associate marriage with capitalism and unequal socioeconomic relations between junior and senior men.[66] Yet another writer made a moral case for marriage by drawing a relationship between humans and inanimate objects of trade: "The suggestion of grading [pricing] human beings for purpose of the holy institution of matrimony appears to us to be very scandalous for it lowers the status and dignity of man and removes all full stops separating human beings from mere and immobile commercial commodities."[67]

The problem of the "commercialization of marriage" went beyond monetizing bride price; it also extended to the success of marriage and the value of the wives being "bought" with meager wages. Payment of bride price and compliance with all traditional rites and expectations did not guarantee a successful marriage. The headline of a front-page article in the *Southern Nigeria Defender* spoke to the large number of failed marriages in the era of exorbitant bride price: "Marriage at Ibadan Costs Almost £40 and Yet no Safety."[68] Marriages failed because of numerous factors ranging from infidelity to incompatibility.[69] But men attempted to link marriage instability to payment of high bride price. They argued that it deprived new husbands of the resources needed to live a decent life after marriage. One Obi, among other writers, attributed domestic conflict to high bride price: "Many men use their hands, sticks or canes freely on their wives for the smallest offence. Such men, no doubt think that this is one way of getting their dowry [bride price] worth. They think of the dowry and become pugnacious. They regard themselves as lords over their wives, and therefore, flog them to their satisfaction."[70] Another writer from Port Harcourt who self-identified as Uzo, criticized the elders of Imuma for giving out "untrained girls who put their underwear on top of their gowns and can't correctly serve kola to any visitor nor say good morning."[71]

Beyond associating high bride price with slavery, men did highlight other negative consequences of inflated marriage payment on the individual, their community, and the city where they lived. Indeed, the more they were able to relate the problem beyond the narrow crises of a poor, working-class bachelor to that of the larger community and the colonial state, the more they invited debate from like-minded men or secure their sympathy. Some men were forced to practice interethnic marriage by "look[ing] for a thing where it is cheap" to use the words of Ben who wrote about his hometown Nkwerre. For him, the best means of preventing a community and their culture from extinction was intra-community marriage. Without referencing his sources, Ben went on to state the impact of late marriage on procreation: "Before young men could save enough money for marriage, they grew so old that even if they succeed in marrying, their issues [children] are either weak or unprogressive."[72] "Do you want increase of population? Are we not to marry our products?" another man, named Uzo, queried.[73]

But the most obvious implication of high bride price, which most of the writers pontificated, was the elongation of bachelorhood. When men could not marry within a culturally acceptable period of time,

they developed, in several writers' conviction, "disgust for marriage" and remained in perpetual bachelorhood, squandering their money and time on prostitutes and transient relationships. The situation was described as a vicious cycle. High bride price created a pool of unmarried girls who migrated to the city to become prostitutes after waiting endlessly for qualified suitors.[74] "Today, when we look around," one contributor wrote, "we notice prostitutes in great multitude swarming into cities from various villages. This is one result of the high bride price permeating the Iboland. Many young girls have found marriage in their towns unaccomplished."[75]

Conclusion

The central focus of this chapter was the representation of the politics of bride price payment in several southern Nigerian newspapers within the context of relations between subordinate and hegemonic men on the one hand and ethnic nationalism on the other. Young unmarried men turned newspapers into a site for performing subordinate masculinity by decrying the impact of high bride price on their ability to fulfill the conditions needed for marriage and rite of passage to adulthood. However, they also expressed strong notions of ethnic nationalism by promoting intra-ethnic and intra-community marriage in a multicultural colonial state of Nigeria. Thus, one of the main contributions of this chapter to African research on gender, masculinity, and nationalism is its use of newspapers to map out the contest among men of different social class and generation, and its relations to the significant theme of ethno-nationalism.

However, discussion about bride price in the newspapers is replete with numerous inconsistencies. These inconsistencies should be expected. Marriage expenses varied from one part of southern Nigeria to another. Most men preferred intra-ethnic marriage, yet they questioned the legitimacy of cultural obligations that had so much of an impact on their financial stability. The contradiction in the men's agenda cannot be divorced from the broader problem of colonial modernity. During the first half of the twentieth century, Nigerians selectively deplored the discourse of Western and African civilization in opposition and contradictory manner to satisfy their shifting positions on core issues, like marriage that affected them.

Nigerian masculinity studies is a viable area of scholarly research. Although some interesting works have appeared in recent years, there are still a lot of blind spots. For instance, we still do not know much about what it takes to be an ethnic man vis-à-vis a male member of the nation. Information about the transformation of ethnic masculinity under colonialism is replete with several literary and historical works.[76] But scholars need to pull these studies together to create strong narratives about the intersections of ethnic masculinity and the idea of nationality. In other words, how does the transformation of the ethnic construction of masculinity under colonialism influence people's understanding of their role and status as members of the nation? When and how does ethnic masculinity manifest itself in the discourses of nationality and nation-building? As I have highlighted above, the colonial man was not just an ethnic man, but a colonial subject or member of a nation-state that was comprised of several dissimilar ethnic groups.

In terms of periodization, much of the present work focuses on the colonial period. We need works that historicize the reconfiguration of the intersection of masculinity and nationalism since the demise of colonial rule in 1960. Did new forms of masculinities emerge after independence? What kinds of political and social conditions or changes pave the way for the rise or consolidation of new forms of masculinity? For instance, the rise of strong men through military dictatorship in postcolonial Nigeria introduced a new form of male authority, guided by a different set of ideologies about public order and obligation or loyalty toward the nation-state. Military nationalism also needs to be placed in proper historical perspective within the context of what is takes to be a man and a soldier from a particular ethnic group or community. It is a well-known fact that military masculinity worsened interethnic relation. But the dynamics of ethno-military nationalism need urgent attention. For example, what can military masculinity teach us about postcolonial gender relations and about the exercise and distribution of political authority? What is more, significant political and economic processes since independence have influenced virtually all areas of Nigerian life. We still need historical research on how new information technology, contraction of socioeconomic opportunities, the new diaspora, popular and expressive culture, expansion of educational institutions, among other developments since independence rule, have transformed masculinity and intergenerational relations.

Notes

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16. Stephan F. Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
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21. P. C. Lloyd, *Africa in Social Change* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1967), 120.
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23. Brown, "A 'Man' in the Village is a 'Boy' in the Workplace," 159.
24. Ayodeji Olukoju, *Infrastructure Development and Urban Facilites in Lagos, 1861–2000* (Ibadan: IFRA, 2003).
25. Lloyd, *Africa in Social Change*, 123.

26. Brown, "A 'Man' in the Village is a 'Boy' in the Workplace," 162.
27. Little, *West African Urbanization*, 7–23. In addition, the life history of four migrant men in the northern city of Jos documented by Leonard Plotnicov demonstrated that all the men married women from their ethnic groups. Plotnicov, *Strangers to the City*.
28. *Eastern Region of Nigeria*, 5.
29. "Salary of African Magistrates," *Daily Service*, October 28, 1944.
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33. "Youth Faces Old Time Conservatism," *West African Pilot*, September 19, 1945.
34. Bert, "Forced Marriage."
35. Editorial, "Bride Price at Awka," August 24, 1946.
36. Bee-Bee-Jay, "Forced Marriage."
37. Little, *African Women in Towns*, 130–132.
38. From the West African: "Moral Control," April 13, 1939; "Undesirable Women," December 6, 1939; "Unstable Women," July 5, 1939; "Female Drunkard," October 15, 1945; "Drunkenness among Women," May 28, 1942; "Our Girls and Ballroom Etiquette," November 23, 1945; "Our Girls and Ballroom Etiquette," November 29, 1945; "Our Ladies at the Cinema," October 16, 1945; "Nigeria Wants Night Club Reform"; "Police Raids for Night Clubs," April 3, 1948.
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52. Ibid., 1–10.
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57. Editorial, "Marriage in Ihube," March 12, 1942.
58. Obi, "Dowry and Native Marriages."
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63. Wubani, "Exorbitant Bride Price in Ngwa Clan."
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