

## EXAMINING CULTURAL SYNCRETISM AND MARITAL DYNAMICS IN SELECT HOLLYWOOD FILMS

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### Abstract

This study investigates the impact of Western cultural influence on traditional Nigerian marriage institutions, focusing on the dynamics of cultural syncretism and its effects on marital relationships. Utilizing cultural imperialism theory as a framework, this research explores how Western cultural values and practices have been imposed upon and assimilated into Nigerian marriage institutions, resulting in shifts in cultural norms, values, and practices. The cases of *Wrong Marriage* and *Mr & Mrs* serve as focal points for this analysis. Through a critical evaluation of existing literature and empirical data, the study uncovers the intricate power dynamics at the intersection of Western and traditional Nigerian cultures, illuminating the tensions and contradictions that emerge from cultural syncretism. The findings contribute to a more profound understanding of the role of cultural imperialism in shaping marital dynamics in Nigeria, with significant implications for cultural preservation, exchange, and development.

### Introduction

The history of Western culture in Nigeria has its roots in the colonial period when the British government intruded into the country and whole of West Africa as Dare, Arowolo observed

"Western civilisation and culture began to creep into African socio-cultural milieu, first, with the contact of Europeans with Africa, a consequence of Berlin conference in the quest for imperial pilfering of African resources and, later, consolidated by the unstoppable wave of globalisation" (2)

It was the intrusion of the British people that marked the beginning of Western civilization in Nigeria. The presence of British colonization of Nigeria lasted between the 19th century to 1960. In 1914, following the amalgamation of the southern and Northern protectorates into one political administration by the British people under the leadership of Fredrick lord Lugard, the Europeans intruded into the country with their selfish interest which according to Ojiakor, Crowder et al as paraphrased by Samuel C. Okeke and Nwachukwu J. Obiakor say "...that the Europeans (British) came into Nigeria in three forms: explorers, missionaries and traders" (24).

The missionaries would focus on the ways to convert the people into Western religion. Thus, the foreign language, educational system, culture and marital procedure began to envelop the Nigerian society. Western culture has a huge influence on the Nigerian marriage system through Islamic and Christian religious practices. Nigeria's Cultural Practices started deteriorating when Foreign religions crept into the country and officialised their ways of life.

First of all, the concept of Western culture refers to all the totality ways of life in the Western part of the world, it encompasses the political, social, religious and cultural practices like arts, language, literature, norms, customs, dressing style and marriage system of the Europeans. The process of Western cultural encroachment can be termed Westernism. According to Christopher, Sibani,:

Westernism is a coinage from the word westernize which refers to the act of bringing ideas or ways of life that are typical of Western Europe and North America to other countries. Therefore, western culture connotes the knowledge, belief, morals and way of life of the Western world. (59).

The introduction of the Christian religion by the British missionaries catapulted many Nigerians to the faith. This was what brought about changes in religious practices and beliefs, as well as social norms, marital practices and language decline. The Nigerian traditional marriage system was not left untouched by the Western culture. All over West African countries, the Western government was impacted negatively.

Stella and Tobias says that:

The agents of Western education and civilization in Igboland were the missionaries. Through evangelism they introduced western cultures and values, and the Igbo were made to accept them as a better way of life. (84)

and gullible or freely we embraced the unpredictable western culture. However, some believe that the western education and religion may have been forcefully installed into Igboland and Africa nations at large as notes:

They gradually imposed western culture on Igbo traditional culture. The viable approach adopted by the missionaries was the introduction of schools and this certainly radicalized the ground work of Igbo society. In fact, education in modern historiography has been acclaimed as being responsible for the massive conversion to Christianity (84)

The introduction of western marriage system (White wedding as it be called) which researchers has not emphatically traced its first history, has outrageously over grown and dominated almost all the indigenous system of African society just as Blessing, Onyima noted that:

All over the world the introduction of Christianity through missionary activities has brought lots of changes in most indigenous/traditional societies and this is the root cause of the conflicts of values and the entrenchment of pluralistic values. (179).

This is because when two opposing forces come in contact with each other, the result is chaotic eruptions and in controversy. Some Nigerian Nollywood films has always portrayed the influence of western culture on the traditional marriage system of the Igbo society. Such film like Mr & Mrs is a perfect paradigm of the above assertion.

However, some Igbo people still stick to the traditional marriage system of the Igbo people. Our people say that Bitter cola lasts long in the mouth of those who know its value. That is to say that the traditional Igbo marriage practices still exist in the minds of those who know its importance. The people who refuse to render themselves into perpetual western cultural slavery, embrace the Igbo version of marriage since it is one of the ways of cultural preservation.

The influence of western culture is drastically reshaping indigenous film industries and helps to increase the threats which the western marriage system poses against the indigenous marriage lifestyles. Nigerian film such as “Mr & Mrs produced by Chinwe Egwuagu, directed by Ikechukwu Onyema and “Wrong Marriage”(2020) Produced by....highlight how today’s marriages imitates western marital styles and how it affected the lifelong of the legal Union. The main consequences of the above articulated is mostly divorce or break up. This is because everyone abandons their roles as partners while trying to be more Europeanize than the Europeans.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cultural imperialism theory suggests that when Western cultures come into contact with non-Western cultures, they tend to dominate and overpower the native culture, leading to a loss of cultural identity and a homogenization of the world. The concept of cultural imperialism was developed by Edward Said in his book "Orientalism," published in 1978.

Relating it to the Nigerian traditional marriage system, this theory would suggest that the dominance of Western gender roles has led to a loss of the traditional roles and values that were once present in Nigeria.

Considering how Western gender roles and family structures have been imported into Nigerian society. For example, traditional gender roles in Nigeria emphasized the importance of the extended family and collectivism, while Western culture has tended to emphasize the individual and nuclear families. This has led to changes in the way that families are structured and the way that men and women interact within them. This also has implications for other aspects of the traditional marriage system, such as inheritance and property rights. Okey Ndibe states:

"Traditionally, the extended family served as a primary source of support and guidance for the individual in Nigeria. However, the introduction of Western culture has led to the erosion of the extended family and the rise of the nuclear family. This has had a profound impact on the traditional marriage system, leading to conflicts between generations and a breakdown in the transmission of cultural values." (253)

Understanding the effect of the influence of western culture on Nigeria traditional marriage system and for one to comprehend the possible ways of eradicating such influence from our culture. The traditional marriage system in Nigeria has long been rooted in indigenous customs, Values, and practices. However, globalization and the increasing connectivity with the western world have brought significant changes to the traditional marriage landscape. The Western culture have had negative effect on traditional marriage in Nigeria as it has led to divorce, single Parenthood, and women autonomy. The Advent and adoption of Western culture due to the coming of the colonial masters in Nigeria brought with it the introduction of a foreign culture which was accepted with open arms due to the fact that the administration of the country was in the hands of the colonial masters.

According to Berry and Sam : "Acculturation is the process by which migrants to a new culture develop relationships with the new culture and maintain their original culture (97).

Therefore, Western culture brought Western Civilization and the issue of white weddings and made our traditional marriage loose it's potent, even after they have left, we still practice their marriage and that's why you will hear the Igbo's comparing traditional marriage and white wedding, some will even proudly tell you that they can forfeit their traditional marriage as long as he or she will be having their Church wedding, many will not even invite you to their traditional marriage as you will hear them say 'The traditional marriage is not a must, it's just few family and friends, I will be needing your presence in the wedding more' how pathetic.

J.Spiel Vogel, Jackson opined that: "The development of the Western culture was the introduction of Christian influence in Nigeria over the Nigerian traditional cultural system"(24).

The influence affected various aspect of life including the marriage institution. Traditional culture is defined as the customs and practices in a particular culture. The Nigerian traditional marriage culture constitutes the traditional marriage customs of the Nigerian traditional society.

### **The Influence of Western culture on Nigeria society**

Culture is a continuous process of change. It changes exactly the same way as the human being change. It is dynamic, learned, acquired, transmitted or diffused through contact or means of communication flow from generation to generation.

The Nigeria culture is observed to be fading out as a result of the acceptance and adaptation of the mode mist's solution onto underdevelopment. Cultural imperialism is a term used to describe the imposition of Western culture on the culture of people in developing countries. Cultural imperialism often refers to America's cultural influence on the countries, for better for worst.

Nigeria which is made up of rich and diverse cultural values is beginning to lose most its cultural ideals especially through the adoption of foreign culture showcased through the mass media. Nowadays, it is observed that our youth have abandoned our local attires such as the 'Adire' and 'Ankara' for alien attires. It is common to see young people (youth) walking across the streets half nude putting on micro-mini skirts, handless top, trousers and other outfits that are not part of our cultural identity.

Africans and indeed Nigerians have their traditional attires especially the three major tribes in Nigeria, but how many youth proudly abide by the culture and wear such traditional attires today? A visit to banks in The Igbo speaking part of the country will give you a perfect example. In fact, it is mandatory in the banks that you wear a suit except on Fridays that you are allowed to wear native attire. The question we must answer is whether wearing of suit part of Nigeria culture or western culture? Must we copy everything western? Can't we promote our rich cultural and traditional outfit so our local industries can boom?

One of the negative roles the western culture plays in our today's society is the dominance and propagation of violence particularly on television and video film industry. A lot of the foreign film content on television is mainly scenes of violence. The actors who engage in murder and other violent actors are portrayed as heroes. Home video, which is very popular now with Nigerian films, also carries the same theme. Research has shown that children who watch violence on screen are most prone to violent behavior in adulthood.

According to Nnonyelu: "Nigeria culture following its contact with lifestyle constantly portrayed by the media appears to have caved in" and continues to do so as years go by". (99).

The tendency for people to imitate, emulate and copy what they see (in the media) is a major cause of this situation especially as seen in the emerging culture of the country's youth. The youths try to sheepishly copy the lifestyle of the western world as presented by the media. To dress, walk and do anything resembling western way of life is seen as a significant index of one's social standing. Ojiha observed that, this can be attributed to the fact that "the closer a person's attitude is to western norms and values, the greater the opportunity open to the person and the higher the person's position on the social ladder"(48). The youths are deluded to think that they have vast individual choices and opportunities to believe, think, behave and dress as presented by the media. Unfortunately, the addiction to this borrowed lifestyle leaves the individual without an identified culture and this eliminates him/her from the society.

The sad side of the exposure to foreign media on the culture of a society is that the glorification of western lifestyle goes side by side with condemnation of the local culture. This creates a situation where Nigerians are becoming more British or America than the Americans or British themselves and this invariable, creates marginal individuals to the extent that they are neither here nor there.

Nigerian marriage traditions require that an older sibling marry before the younger one. For some tribes, this is for men only while others ladies are also part of it. The younger siblings will postpone their weddings until their older siblings have married. But this days the reverse is the case, one hears the younger ones saying that overtake is allowed.

However, in the recent time, a new wave of marriage practice has begun to emerge among many educated Africans. This is marriage without family consent, contradicted as a result of direct influence of the 'Christian-Western' culture brought about by well travelled and educated Africans who see traditional practices as inhibiting and narrow-minded. Their new adopted way of life being responsible, stood between two traditional and cultural values.

This effect was as a result of western influence which made most Nigerians believe that having much children usually contribute to poverty as it concerns having many mouth to feed. The Western culture also made Nigerian youths believe that marriage is not necessary and this mostly affects most Nigerian women as they believe that single parenthood is better than being married.

Okafor Benjamin says

"Nigerian families have changed significantly in the last few decades, and these changes have been largely driven by the influence of Western culture. Families are becoming smaller, with many couples choosing to have fewer children, and marriage is becoming less common as more people choose to remain single. There is also a growing trend of women entering the workforce, which has led to a shift in the balance of power within the family unit". (54)

In the core Nigerian society, a man is usually the bread winner of the family who provides and protects the home while the woman is the homemaker and caretaker of the family as well as well as ensuring there is peace in the family but the influence of western culture has made women abandon this culture and focus more on career pursuit and competing with the man leaving the home and kids without adequate care.

According to Amadiume

"Westernization has led to a shift in the way that women are viewed in Nigerian society. In traditional Nigerian culture, women were seen as caretakers and homemakers, while men were seen as the primary breadwinners. However, with the influence of Western culture, women are now starting to challenge these traditional gender roles, and many are choosing to pursue careers outside of the home." ( 116)

Before the era of colonialism, traditional marriage in Nigeria was a very serious custom that the couple must perform all the marriage rites before they can be together as husband and wife but after being influenced by the Western culture most Nigerians now see traditional marriage as outdated ceremony and holds the western white wedding as the most important one

Adejoro, Babatunde, and Taiwo (2019) wrote:

"The introduction of Western influences has led to a decline in the importance of traditional marriage customs, such as the payment of bride price and the ritual of a bride leaving her parents' home to live with her husband. Many young Nigerians now see these customs as outdated and irrelevant, and prefer to marry in a more modern, Western-style ceremony." (29)

The Western culture made most of Nigerians believe that love is the first thing to be considered before getting married but in the Nigerians traditional marriage system before the Colonial era was based on arranged marriage. Arranged marriage was usually done to maintain friendship between family and family or community and another community. And it was the duty of the parents to find a suitable spouse for their child.

Olukoju maintains:

"Westernization has also had an impact on the concept of love and marriage in Nigeria. In traditional Nigerian culture, love was not seen as a necessary component of marriage, and marriages were often arranged by the parents of the bride and groom. However, Western culture has introduced the idea of romantic love as a key factor in choosing a spouse, and many young Nigerians now place more importance on finding a partner who they love and are compatible with." (73)

Another way that the Western culture has caused harm to our way of marriage is the decrease in the importance of traditional marriage customs and rituals such as bride price as well as the practice of a bride moving in with her husband's family. Nowadays most families do not allow their daughters to move in with her husband's family after the traditional marriage and they believe that it is not right until the white wedding is completed.

Augustine Onyeka says that:

"It is evident that Westernization has had a significant impact on the traditional marriage system in Nigeria. The shift towards a more modern, Western-style marriage system has led to a decrease in the importance of traditional customs and rituals, such as bride price and the practice of a bride moving in with her husband's family. While some have argued that this is a positive change, others have raised concerns about the loss of important cultural traditions." (531)

One other major change that has been brought about by the influence of Western culture is the idea of "love marriage" or "choice marriage." In traditional Nigerian society, marriages were typically arranged by the parents of the bride and groom, and there was little or no input from the individuals themselves. However, Western culture has introduced the idea that people should be able to choose their own partners based on love and compatibility. This has led to a shift in attitudes, with more and more Nigerians choosing to marry for love rather than for social or economic reasons.

One specific example of how this shift in attitudes has played out is in the area of bride price.

Bride price is a traditional custom in which the groom's family pays a sum of money or goods to the bride's family in exchange for her hand in marriage. In the past, this custom was seen as an important part of the marriage process, as it was seen as a way to compensate the bride's family for the loss of her labor and her value to the family. However, as the idea of choice marriage has become more prevalent, many young Nigerians have begun to reject the custom of bride price. They see it as a relic of the past that is no longer relevant in today's society. Instead, they believe that marriage should be based on love and mutual respect, rather than on the exchange of goods or money. This has led to conflict between traditionalists and those who advocate for a more modern approach to marriage. Ebere Onwudiwe, stated that:

"The influence of Western culture has led to a shift in the way marriage is viewed and practiced in Nigeria. The traditional practices of arranged marriage and bride price are being challenged by the notion of 'choice marriage,' which emphasizes love and compatibility over social and economic factors" (223)

### **Synopsis of *Mr. and Mrs. and Wrong Marriage***

A marriage that started on love and trust suddenly nosedived into the ditch of wealth and opulence and the marriage went sour. An African woman's struggle to retain and sustain her marriage knows no bound. Susan Abbah, a humble woman who maintains her duty as a wife receives maltreatment and suppression from the husband Kenneth Abbah who feels that his wife's family background is way below and he started suppressing her and using her like a housemaid. Another side of the story has the family of Mr. and Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Brown who pays less attention to her family affairs but dedicates most of her time to her career as she leaves her husband and the kids under the care of the housemaid whom her husband uses as a substitute to his wife. In *Wrong Marriage*, a couple struggle to fix and keep their marriage after the death of their son which was as a result of their carelessness mostly on the side of the woman who focuses more on her job more than her marital life living her husband lonely and depriving him of his marital rights and this led to the death of their son David. The man struggles to fix their love back while the wife finds it difficult to heal from the pain of being childless. As the man kept having hope that reconciling with his wife is still possible the wife, Olivia Bassey finds it hard to forgive and accept her husband back but only wants a divorce and to move on with her life. On the side of the husband he finds it hard to move on.

### **Influence of Western culture in *Wrong marriage***

The Western culture has eaten deep in the life of Nigerian marriage system today mostly on the side of the women one way that Western values have influenced some Nigerian women to prioritize their careers over their families is through the idea of individualism. In Western cultures, individualism is often valued over collectivism, and people are often encouraged to pursue their own goals and ambitions rather than putting the needs of the group first. This has influenced some Nigerian women to focus on their careers and personal success, even if it means sacrificing time with their families.

This individualistic mindset has led some Nigerian women to feel like they have to choose between their career and their family. In some cases, they may feel like they have to put their career first in order to be successful, and this can lead to tension within traditional families. In the traditional Nigerian family structure, women are often expected to be homemakers and caregivers, and when they prioritize their careers instead, it can be seen as going against cultural norms and expectations. In the movie “wrong marriage” produced by Uchenna Mbunabo. The movie mirrors the lifestyle of a woman who is more concerned about her career and pays less attention to the feeling of her husband and the affairs of the family. This could be seen in her conversation with her husband When her husband came to her in the night and found out that she was still working on her system trying to finish an office work but when she husband asked her to give him attention and leave the work she told him that she was made the managing director in a Male dominated entity which shows that she is in race with men leaving her primary duty, several nights she denied her husband the attention and gives him excuses which the man (Peter Bassey) got tired and decided to hang out with his friend Henry which was where he met the side chick which he was supposed to sleep with that night to satisfy his sexual urge which his wife was denying him but along the line he realized that he can’t cheat on his wife and decided to leave the lady and go home on getting home he still found the wife working on her system in the middle of the night.

They kept on having issue because Susan Bassey the wife doesn’t care about the affairs of her home or her husband emotions and needs but is more concerned about her work and how to beat all the men in her company this is because she believes that a woman should be successful also and shouldn’t depend on her husband or trying to prove that she can be the best, even when she got promoted the issue got worst as she was always giving the excuse of having more work to do.

Furthermore, another way in which Western values have influenced some Nigerian women to focus on their careers is through the idea of material success. In Western cultures, success is often measured in terms of material wealth and possessions. This idea has influenced some Nigerian women to pursue careers that will bring them financial success, and this makes them to pay less attention to the family affair. This can also create tension within families, as traditional values often prioritize family relationships over material success.

So, when a woman prioritizes her career over her family, it can have a big impact on her husband and the kids. In many traditional Nigerian families, the husband is seen as the head of the household, and his wife is expected to support him and take care of the home and children. When a woman prioritizes her career, it can be seen as a rejection of this traditional role, and it can put a strain on the marriage. It can also lead to resentment from the husband, who may feel like he is not being supported or respected.

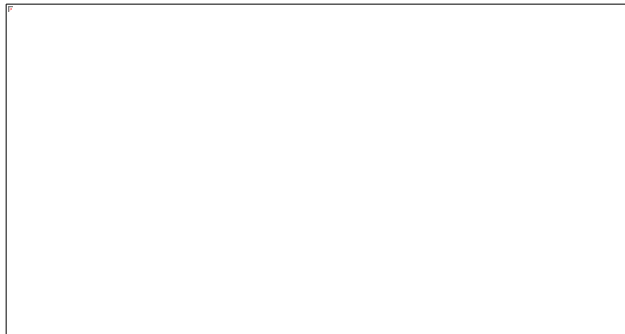
It's also important to consider how a woman's career choices can affect her children. In a traditional Nigerian family, the mother is often seen as the primary caregiver, and children are expected to be close to their mothers. When a woman prioritizes her career, it can lead to a lack of bonding and emotional support for her children. This can have a lasting impact on their development and can lead to feelings of abandonment and resentment. Additionally, children

may feel like they are not a priority in their mother's life, which can lead to insecurity and low self-esteem.



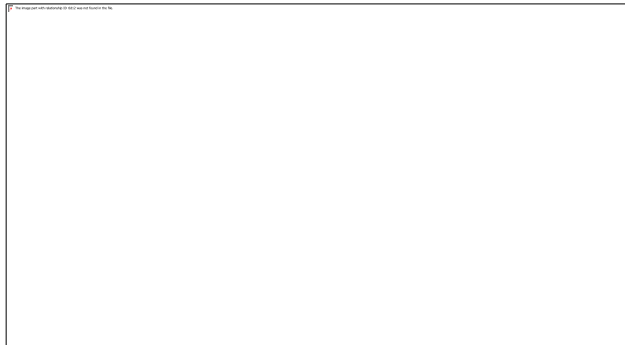
***Plate 1: Mr Peter Bassey Bassey complaining to his wife that she gives him excuses anytime he needs her attention.***

The picture above shows Mr. Peter Bassey the husband to Olivia Bassey in the movie wrong marriage complaining that his wife doesn't give him any attention as all her attentions are channelled towards her career.



***Plate 2: Mrs Olivia Bassey trying to make her husband understand that she has been made the managing director in a male dominated entity so she needs to keep up her game.***

This particular picture above in plate 2 shows Olivia the wife trying give the husband reasons for her lack of attention. In as much as this is affecting her home she still wants to maintain her career status and doesn't care the damage it could course to her home that is why in her conversation with her husband where the husband told her that if she continues like that then their sexual life will be dead she said that it should die, this shows that most of her wifely duties do not matter to her anymore as long as her career is concerned.



***Plate 3: Mrs Bassey firing for divorce after the death of their son who died as a result of their carelessness.***

This picture shows Mr and Mrs Peter Bassey in the lawyer's office where Mrs Bassey is asking for divorce after the death of their only son David who died as a result of their carelessness. Their son David was left alone at the pool side while the couple were busy arguing about who cheated and who didnt cheat. And it was practically the fauslt of the wife because if she was performing her wifely duty as a core African woman who is supposed to be supportive and paying more attention to home affairs the husband wouldn't have gone out to find peace of mind and attention which later resulted to the argument that made them leave their son at the pool side and he jumped inside the pool to get his toy that fell inside the pool.

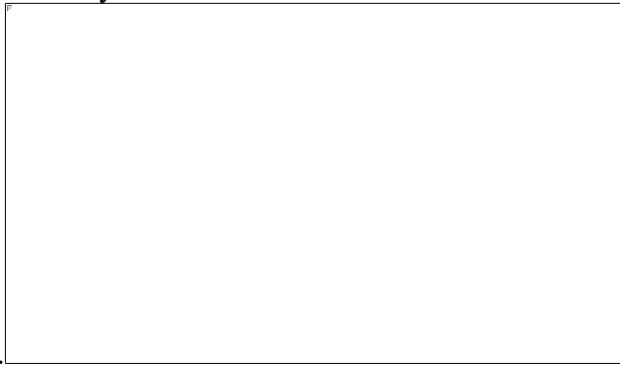
### **The influence of western culture in *Mr. and Mrs.***

The movie “Mr. and Mrs.” has a man who at initial stage was in love with his wife during their courtship stage but after their marriage everything changed the man’s behaviour changed towards his wife, he started reminding his wife of how wealthy his family is and how poor the woman’s family was before he married her. Mr. Abbah the husband reduced his wife to a housemaid and limited her movement and eventually filed for divorce.

In the days of our forefathers, husband and wife live together in harmony and respect each other, there was no comparison of any family background or social status whatsoever, a man loves his wife and shows her much care and attention and protects her at all time and a man who married a woman with a good character was seen as a lucky man. Also back in those days there was nothing like divorce when a man and woman unites together as husband and wife their live together forever because they know their duties and respect each other, But nowadays in many marriages any little misunderstanding the next thing you see is divorce not minding the effect the separation would have on the Children.

But westernization has also made some men believe that one can only boast of his wife when she has a wealthy family background as was seen in Kenneth Abbah's conversation with the lawyer when he said that he can't go out with his wife because she is the daughter of a washerman

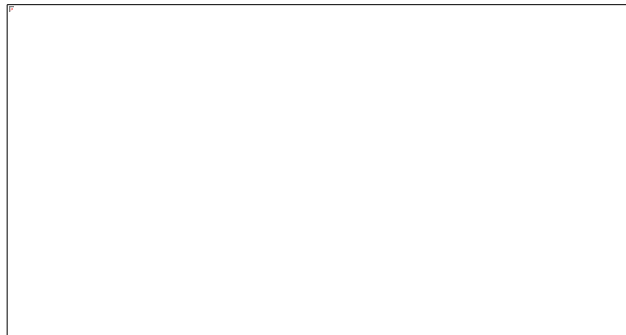
The second side of the movie has the family of Mr and Mrs Brown, Mrs Brown is a working class woman who has little or no concerns about the affairs of her family and the feelings or well being her husband and kids but pushes her responsibility as a woman to the hands of her house ma, she goes to work very early in the morning and returns at a late hour with the excuse of having a lot of work in the office and when she returns she will claim to be very tired and can't do anything with her husband, Mr Brown followed her like a fool and this made her believe that she has her husband under her control without knowing that the husband sleeps with the housemaid to keep himself busy since the wife is more concerned and interested in her career



rather than her marriage.

***Plate 4: Mr Kenneth Abbah Abbah complaining that he doesnt eat stale food.***

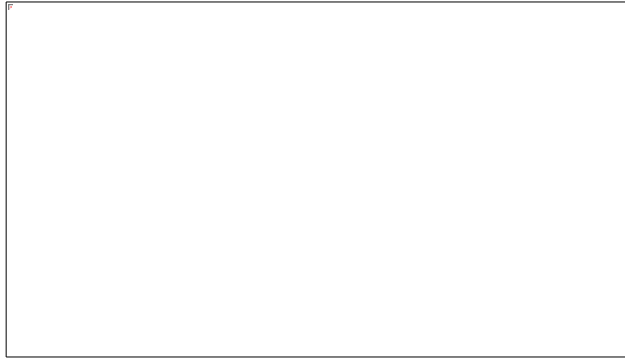
The picture above shows Mr and Mrs Kenneth Abbah where Mr Kenneth Abbah was complaining that he doesn't eat stale food while the wife explains to him that she woke up by 4am to prepare the food. As much as Susan Abbah tries, the husband doesn't cherish or value her effort and maltreats her like a nobody all because he feels that they are not of the same standard.



***Plate 5: Mrs Brown asking the husband to see the Children's teacher who requested for her presence.***

The plate two shows the family of Mr and Mrs Brown, Mrs Brown who leaves to work very early before the kids wake and comes back when they have slept asked the husband to see the

teacher of their children in school after dropping them off to school. She pushes her wifely duties to the husband and the house maid. This made the husband in the end to find comfort in the housemaid since the wife is more concerned about her career life.



***Plate 6: Mr Kenneth Abbah telling the lawyer that he can't imagine himself going out with the daughter of a wash-man.***

This picture above shows how Mr Kenneth Abbah suppresses his wife and limited her movement all because of her family status. He feels that it's improper for him to go out with his wife whenever he has a meeting with his friends who are married to high class ladies only because his wife is the daughter of a washman.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concludes that;

1. Western culture have had negative effect on traditional marriage in Nigeria as it has led to divorce, single parenthood and women autonomy

2. The Western culture has highly influenced the traditional marriages in Nigeria

3. The entrenching of traditional marital values through adequate marriage counselling can revive our African culture as it concerns our ways of marriage.

## **Recommendations**

The study recommends therefore that further studies should be conducted by researchers to identify the factors which have been preventing traditional marriage institutions from being negatively affected by Western culture. Finally, Nigeria movie producers should endeavor to expose more Western influence on the Nigerian traditional marriage system by producing movies that talk about culture and also

suggest a solution and how to prevent the influence of Western culture and embrace our culture

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