Secondary Marriage and Tribal Solidarity in Irigwe, Nigeria

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This paper endeavors to do two things. The first section describes how co-husband relationships enjoyed by the traditional Irigwe system of secondary marriage helped in former days to keep the tribe's twenty-five ritual units at peace with one another. The second section examines an instance of legislated social change clearly related to the development of an Irigwe tribal administration in recent decades, and to its continuing effectiveness today. In 1968 both the traditionalist "pagan" majority and the change oriented Christian minority on the Irigwe Tribal Council voted to outlaw all future secondary marriages. The paper considers both political and underlying structural factors which may have led to this action.

THE IRIGWE, numbering around 17,000, live on the western edge of the Jos Plateau. They have their own distinctive language and social traditions which set them apart from all neighboring tribes. In recent years a substantial number of Irigwe have found occasional employment as laborers in or near the towns of Jos and Bukuru around twenty miles to the east, but most Irigwe still gain their subsistence principally from practicing their traditional system of hoe agriculture. Irigwe is divided into twenty-five semi-autonomous sections, and there is no indication that traditionally there was either a pan-tribal chiefancy, or any fixed arrangement of tribal political or military leadership. The tribe could and did, however, on occasion act as a unit vis-a-vis neighboring hostile tribes both in matters of defense and in mounting head-hunting vengeance raids. Indeed the Irigwe were successful enough in their forays against their neighbors so that the British quickly came to regard them as a major threat to their rule, and felt called to "pacify" them by burning many of their huts and granaries in a punitive expedition in 1905. The British thereafter established a centralized tribal chiefancy which, backed as it was by British arms, effectively put an end to Irigwe warfare and headhunting. So far as I can ascertain it was several decades before this British fostered tribal administration displaced the section elders as effective peacekeepers and arbiters of intra-tribal disputes, but nowadays the authority of the section elders prevails only in matters of a strictly religious and ritual nature.

Irigwe from differing sections frequently harangue each other, sometimes brawl at beer parties, and on occasion individuals attack each other with knives or spears; but disputes always stop short of murder or homicide, and never involve more than a few people at a time. Apparently this has been the case for as long as Irigwe can recall. Thus one is led to ask what was the traditional basis for tribal unity manifest not only in times of warfare but also in times of peace that prevented serious inter-section and other types of intra-tribal strife. Also, after 1905, what curtailed conflict between sections during the interim decades before the tribal administration became effective? Two factors, I believe, were, and have remained until recently, crucial to this traditional tribal unity and freedom from feuding. First the twenty-five sections are united by each section having exclusive responsibility for one or more of the many rituals which are...
concerned with farming, hunting, or health, and which are believed to be necessary or important for the well being of the tribe as a whole. Second, cross-cutting affinal and cognitive bonds mediated by the Irigwe's system of both primary and secondary marriages serve strongly to suppress inter-section violence. In the first section of this paper which follows, I shall focus particularly on one element of Irigwe marriage, namely the cohusband relationship resulting from secondary marriages, and its probable significance to inter-section peacekeeping. I shall start by briefly outlining the principal tribal subdivisions and the traditional marriage system.

The twenty-five agnatically based Irigwe tribal subdivisions or "sections" (rekla) each have a sacred shrine house (branyi), presided over by a senior man of its seniormost lineage, where enemy and animal skulls and other relics of warfare and hunting are preserved. Most Irigwe sections are subdivided into several exogamous lineages (renhicie), and these in turn are further subdivided into clusters of agnatically linked extended family groupings (reari) whose members live together in euphorbia hedged compounds. Every compound is under the ritual headship of an agnatically senior old man (baeri). Farming is carried out principally by extended family units, each with its own granary, which unite with other units of their lineage from time to time for various large work group farming activities.

Hunting, carried on throughout the dry season, is organized principally on a section basis, but it is usual for the section in charge of a particular hunt to invite other sections to join if they wish. The high point of the hunting season is a three day ceremonial (hii riihii) to purify and praise hunters who during the preceding season have killed big game (and formerly human enemies) and brought their heads to their section shrine houses. Only heads of certain dangerous game are preserved as relics thereby qualifying their takers to be honored as "heroes" (suu) of the hunt.

Irigwe notions of heroism are not confined to hunting. Men renowned for their skill as farmers are called "heroes of the hoe" (sua icie). No special ceremonial honors "heroes of the hoe," but everyone agrees that being known as a great farmer is a major asset in attracting wives. Men who have many wives are known as "heroes of women" (sua mbru), or sometimes less reverently as "heroes of the vagina" (sua sua). Every time a man consummates a new secondary marriage his accomplishment is honored by his friends and fellow section members who hold a beer party and dance for him and sing his praises. The hero cult has a direct bearing on Irigwe marriage because a keen sense of competition exists between sections not only to bag the most big game, but also to take the greatest number of wives in secondary marriage.

There are two basic types of Irigwe marriage (Sangree 1969:1049-55). One type, arranged by the parents of the couple prior to their adolescence, is known by the men as "taking a girl" (fo 'wena) and by the women as a "from-to" (nyinyira). The other type, initiated ideally by the couple rather than the parents, is called a "wife take" (fo mbru) by the men and a "sing-sing" (vwevwe) by the women. I call the former type "primary marriage," since it ideally starts both a boy's and a girl's conjugal careers, and the latter "secondary marriage." Although a girl is never engaged for primary marriage to more than one boy, it is common and held to her credit, for a popular girl as she reaches
puberty to become engaged for secondary marriages to several other men even prior to the consummation of her primary marriage. A primary marriage is preceded usually by bride service performed by the boy together with his lineage age mates for his father-in-law-elect for several successive planting seasons. Then, generally shortly after the girl reaches puberty, the marriage is consummated with her taking up residence with her espoused in his father’s compound.

The initiative in arranging a secondary marriage is taken by the suitor himself. Sometimes his first overtures are with the father of the woman he is seeking in secondary marriage, or with the marriage guardian her lineage has assigned to be in charge of her secondary marriages instead of her father; but more often the suitor first sounds out the woman using a male go-between, and if she encourages his advances, he then seeks the permission of her father or marriage guardian. In either case, the father or marriage guardian usually agrees to the union unless the woman expresses her unwillingness, or unless the union would violate an Irigwe rule of incest or exogamy. The agnatic lineage group is exogamous, but the section is not; primary marriages in particular are often contracted between section mates as well as between other consanguines. The basic additional marriage prohibition applying to secondary marriage is that a woman cannot have more than one husband from the same section, or as Irigwe put it, “You can take a daughter, but never a wife, from your own section.” Also a man cannot take a wife from his mother’s section or his mother’s mother’s natal compound; that is, he cannot contract a secondary marriage with a woman who is already married to any of these categories of his kinsmen. Secondary marriage arrangements are, by Irigwe custom, formally concluded and become binding when the suitor makes a marriage payment of thirty to forty shillings to the woman’s father or marriage guardian. After that, she is committed to leave her prior husband and spend at least one night with her new secondary husband at his compound; and she usually does this before the year is out. Ordinarily her prior husband calls her back after she has spent one night with her new husband, but her reputation will suffer if she is not willing to return to the new husband overnight on at least two or three additional occasions. She probably will not go to the new husband a fourth time, however, unless she has decided to shift her residence from the prior husband to his, and at this juncture the prior husband usually does not bother to call her back any more.

An Irigwe woman has the right to refuse a secondary marriage proposal prior to the marriage payment from the suitor to her father or marriage guardian, but she can never contract a marriage without her father’s or marriage guardian’s consent. Furthermore, a father or marriage guardian feels it is within his rights to arrange and have his daughter or ward consummate at least three marriages; a woman can expect “anger in the heart” of her father or guardian to bring her or her children illness if she persistently refuses all marriage proposals, or if she fails to consummate a marriage where the marriage payment has been made. Traditionally there is no divorce in Irigwe. Prior marriages are never terminated by a wife’s switching to another spouse; she may return to any of her spouses at any time, and usually find herself welcomed back and given a hut and everything she needs for housekeeping. In a census I took of five compounds totaling over 250 persons, all women past their teens had at least one secondary as well as primary marriage. It is rare to find a middle-aged Irigwe man or woman who does not have two or more living spouses, and not uncommon for them to have half a dozen or so.

A husband in effect competes with his co-husbands (wives’ other husbands) both for his wives’ sexual services and the children they bear. The question of paternity is settled for each pregnancy by the infant being bestowed, usually without contention,
upon whichever husband the woman is resident with when she is pregnant and bears the child.

The Irigwe believe that if a man who is ill or injured is visited or approached closely by a man with whom he has shared a woman’s sexual favors (if, for example, he is visited by a co-husband), he will quickly take a turn for the worse, and probably die. This belief enjoins men to be very sure they know a woman’s living husbands before taking her in secondary marriage so as to avoid inadvertently becoming the co-husband of anyone such as a friend or section brother with whom casual and friendly relations are desired or ritually prescribed. This belief is also a prime factor in keeping hunting parties organized principally on a section basis. A prudent man chooses his hunting partners with care; he avoids hunting near a co-husband, and whenever he is hunting with people of another section he seeks out a friend or close uterine relative to lend him assistance if he should accidentally be injured.

A man can be and often is openly hostile towards any new suitor of his wife or wives. They may fight at beer parties, sometimes involving their respective kin groups, and they may “accidentally” nick each other on the arms and legs with knives and spears during a hunt when disputing over the division of game, but so far as I could ascertain these fights always end short of homicide; also, interestingly enough, I never heard of open accusations of witchcraft and sorcery in Irigwe between rivals for a woman. Once a wife has gone to sleep with her suitor and thus has consummated the marriage all hostility between the new co-husbands is replaced. once and for all, by the most formal show of amity when avoidance is not feasible.

Repeatedly during my field work in Irigwe (1963-65) I heard complaints about the number of fights at beer parties. People noted that fights were often between men of differing sections over women sought in secondary marriage, and that frequently the tribal administrative headmen had to be called in to control and settle these disputes. Although literally hundreds of beer parties were held during the period of my fieldwork, to my knowledge there were not more than a dozen occasions on which the tribal administrators had to take action to break up the fighting; also I could not find any evidence that the fights had grown more frequent or violent in recent years. Thus I found the continual complaints about fighting a puzzle. I also found it puzzling that people would often end their complaints about the fighting by vigorously proclaiming that the section elders were the real peace keepers of the tribe. When asked what they meant by this they would usually assert that the section elders intervene with admonitions of tribal “family unity” and, if necessary, with sanctions threatening supernatural retribution when hostilities between men of differing sections threaten to get out of hand. My observations at many beer parties initially led me to believe that these were assertions of what should be, or perhaps of what had been true in former years. During my stay in Irigwe section elders did indeed intervene to cool rising tempers on special occasions such as the annual “hero” ceremonies, but they were among the first to call the administrators or tribal police to break up a beer party brawl. Thus the elders, even though they still were given credit as peace-makers, in practice had themselves come to depend on the tribal administrators as peacekeepers.

It became clear early in my fieldwork that Irigwe’s multiple marriage system produces a fantastic number of cognatic and affinal ties between varying compounds, lineages, and sections, and I collected census and genealogical material on five large compounds in differing sections to exemplify this, being careful in the process to gather voluminous material on the minutae of agnatic, cognatic, and affinal relationships, and also co-wife interaction. But Irigwe do not use a special term for co-husband, simply referring to him as “my wife’s man,”
and since co-husbands always live in differing sections, and seemed never to interact on a regular social or ceremonial basis, they neither figured in my census data, nor in any other systematic quantitative inquiry about social interaction. It was not until long after leaving Irigwe and many months spent working over my data that I perceived the unusual and perhaps crucial aspect of Irigwe marriage as a peacekeeping mechanism, namely that wife-taking, while on the one hand fostering intersection rivalry, on the other hand serves directly to enhance tribal peace by effectively proscribing open hostility between co-husbands, who, of course, are always of differing sections. Fortunately, I had recorded a good many statements and haphazard observations about co-husband relationships during my twenty months stay in Irigwe.

The supernatural sanction of death, or at least serious illness, to the man injured or ill in the presence of his co-husband is believed to continue unabated over the lifetime of the co-husbands. Nevertheless co-husbands by no means completely avoid one another. They greet each other, for example, and exchange words concerning sick children of their mutual wife, although on such occasions they are noticeably constrained and formal in their behavior. Younger co-husbands rarely casually fraternize or even drink beer in the same large group; on the other hand, there is no formal prohibition against such contact, and older men who are co-husbands not infrequently drink beer at the same gathering.

Most Irigwe men, as they grow older, find themselves invited with increasing frequency to beer parties, their way paid by their daughters’ and their marriage wards’ husbands; for every man knows that generosity and hospitality towards a wife’s father or guardian is almost a sine qua non for keeping a wife resident or having her return to him from another husband. Also many Irigwe men continue to acquire new secondary wives of their own right up through middle age even as they become busy with the secondary alliances of their daughters and wards. Thus one or more pairs of elderly co-husbands quite by chance frequently find themselves not only at the same hero cult gatherings and the like but also together at many public beer drinks. These old men each have vital and immediate personal reasons, of course, for seeing that things remain peaceful whenever they are in the same gathering. The co-husband relationship in effect enjoins older men at public gatherings to make sure their younger potential co-husbands do not engage in fighting that might actively involve and thus endanger any co-husbands who happen to be present. In addition, even if co-husbands do not happen to be present together, public gatherings afford opportunities for older men to be approached and treated to beer when it is available, not only by their sons-in-law, but also by other younger men aspiring to marry their daughters and marriage wards. In short, fighting in public places not only is believed particularly to endanger the lives of co-husbands present, but also it inhibits transactions between marriage guardians and both their marriage wards’ spouses and suitors.

In August, 1968, one of my literate Irigwe friends wrote me that the Irigwe Tribal Council, which has some Christian members, but is composed primarily of traditionalist “pagan” Irigwe, had just voted in effect to abolish all future secondary marriage. Starting in September, 1968, it would become an offense, punishable by fine or imprisonment, for a woman to go to a new husband without first returning to her parents and obtaining a divorce from the tribal court. I have not been able to find out what the effects of this law have been, but I find it both interesting and mildly ironical that the Tribal Council, composed mostly of pagan traditionalist Irigwe, each with several secondary marriages to their credit, should have passed such a law, thereby asserting the effectiveness (perhaps) of the tribal administration which had rendered the latent peacekeeping functions of secondary marriage obsolete. The remainder of this paper will
examine some underlying social factors which may have fostered this 1968 Tribal Council decision.

II

I found no evidence during my period of fieldwork in Irigwe (1963-65) that the Irigwe Tribal Council was considering the outlawing of secondary marriage, but in retrospect it seems likely that many of the pagan traditionalist Councillors as well as the several Christian Councillors might even then have regarded the abolition of secondary marriage with some favor because of a growing concern with the occasional violation of the rule never to take in secondary marriage wives of men of one's own section. In order to explain this, I must first summarize briefly the structure and development of the Irigwe tribal administrative bureaucracy, the makeup of the Irigwe Tribal Council, and also the administrative balance of power in 1965.

Since its inception by the British in 1905, the Irigwe tribal administration has consisted of two Districts: (1) Kwol District lying south of the River Ngell, with ten traditional ritual sections, and (2) Miango District, north of the River Ngell, with fifteen ritual sections. Nadzie Section, centered south of the Ngell, and Irigwe's largest, has supplied all the successful Kwol District chiefs—officially called "District Heads." Nadzie Section forms, in effect, the principal political block in Kwol District. Similarly, Tahu Section, north of the River Ngell, and second only to Nadzie in size, has supplied all the successful Heads of Miango District; and Tahu Section is the major political block in Miango District. Kwol and Miango Districts are in turn both divided into four Sub-districts, each with a Headman responsible to his District Head. It is noteworthy that the Kwol and Miango District Heads also hold the office of Headman of their respective Subdistricts, thus in effect assuring each District Head of the unequivocal official support of one of his four Subdistricts. Each Subdistrict contains compounds belonging to several sections, and in most cases not all the compounds belonging to a section are found in a single Subdistrict. Nevertheless most Subdistricts are dominated politically by whichever section has the most compounds within the Subdistrict boundary, and usually it works out that the Subdistrict Head is a member of the numerically dominant section of his Subdistrict.

Elsewhere (Sangree 1970:33-37) I have sketched aspects of the traditional Irigwe tribal ritual hierarchy and have noted how the British introduced centralized tribal political administration indirectly builds upon and in many ways effectively complements the traditional tribal ritual hierarchy. It is sufficient here to reiterate three points. First, the two ritually most powerful sections in Irigwe (Nuhwie and Rae) have clearly for many generations been in terms of population among the smaller sections of the tribe. Second, the two sections of the tribe with the largest populations (Nadzie and Tahu) have had relatively minor roles in the tribal annual ritual cycle since long before the establishment of pax britannica. Third, for reasons that the Irigwe perceive as being directly related both to their large numbers and their minor ritual statuses, these two largest sections formerly had dominant roles both in intertribal warfare and in intertribal diplomacy; thus it does not seem surprising or entirely inappropriate to the Irigwe that each of these two largest sections has formed the dominant political block in its respective tribal administrative District.

Now I shall examine briefly the nature of the Irigwe Tribal Council. As of 1965 the Council consisted of the appointed Heads of the two Districts, the other appointed Headmen of the Subdistricts as noted earlier, four additional appointed Headmen representing the Hausa and Fulani minorities in each District, and the elected Councillors. The elected Councillors were chosen by popular male franchise from each of the eight Irigwe
Subdistricts, and also from the two Hausa and two Fulani minority group Subdistricts. To my knowledge this arrangement was still operative in 1968.

The elected Councillors, as well as disagreeing with each other on many issues, often have found themselves opposed to policies promulgated by the District Heads and Subdistrict Headmen; and both of these groups have in turn frequently clashed with the traditional Irigwe ritual leaders who as such have had no representation on the Tribal Council. These disagreements have been more frequent over internal issues than over matters involving the tribe's relations with other tribes or with the multi-District Divisional and Regional authorities. During the period of my fieldwork, however, the appointed administrators, elected Councillors, and ritual elders, were all united on one internal issue; namely, they all decried the occasional cases of wife-taking between Irigwe men belonging to the same section.

The Fulani and Hausa minority Headmen and Councillors denounced all secondary marriage because its polyandrous aspect violated their Muslim ethic. The small minority of Christian Irigwe Headmen and elected Councillors had themselves all given up polygamy, including secondary marriage, as antithetical to Christian morality. These Christians, following the lead of the devout Christian who has been Head of Miango District since 1957, while generally refraining from commenting on the ethical or moral aspects of the situation, have frequently pointed out that wife-taking between pagan men of the same section has led to much bitterness and sometimes fighting; and they have decried it as a threat to tribal peace and tranquility. The pagan majority of administrators and elected Councillors, together with the traditional ritual leaders—all of whom were pagans—strongly concurred with this view of the Christians, and in addition they asserted that such actions "spoiled tribal ritual" (adzio tede) and could ultimately "kill" the tribe.

In 1965 it was widely felt that intrasection wife-taking was on the increase and thus was a matter that warranted great concern. I cannot be certain that wife-taking between men belonging to the same section had in fact increased in recent years. From my own observations and census data, and from informants' statements, I estimate that there were probably fewer than twenty instances of intrasection wife-taking out of a total of perhaps a thousand secondary marriages during the three or four years just preceding and including my fieldwork period. Also statements from different informants concurred in asserting that intrasection wife-taking has always occurred from time to time in Irigwe, and has sometimes produced lasting rifts—even the splitting of a section into two separate sections.

Elder Irigwe remember that in their childhood, Zobwo, a fairly large section important although not preeminent in tribal ritual, had had most of its lineages split off as a result of a case of wife-taking within the section. Subsequently these split-off lineages regrouped to form a new section, called Dara, with its own hunting and hero ceremonies. Zobwo and Dara do not work together on ritual matters and now regularly take each others' wives in secondary marriage; in short they act like as well as call themselves separate sections. This split occurred shortly before the coming of the British in 1905, elders assert, and is the most recent instance of a new section's establishment in Irigwe. Zobwo Section, if still united with Dara Section, would be the third largest section in Irigwe, and if not actually able to supplant Tahu's supremacy in Miango District from time to time, would certainly be able effectively to challenge and influence Tahu in the political arena. Zobwo Section leaders have repeatedly attempted, but have conspicuously failed, to achieve eminence in Miango District administrative affairs, and this lack of success is widely attributed by the Irigwe to the nonsupport of the majority of Zobwo's former section members who now form Dara Section.
Elder Irigwe informants cited other cases of intrasection wife-taking in former times that did not lead to section splits, but they asserted that these instances always also produced serious intrasection factions and strains whenever they occurred. Clearly intrasection wife-taking is not a new development; clearly also whenever it occurs it is widely perceived as a threat to a section's cohesiveness.

The Irigwe tribal administration has never recognized the twenty-five Irigwe ritual sections as discrete administrative units or entities; nevertheless section-based loyalties have probably been crucial to the attainment of political power and the maintenance of effective authority in the tribal administration since its inception in 1905. Campaign speeches and also discussions I overheard between individuals urging one another to vote for a District Council candidate because he came from the “right section” attest to their continuing importance. Since wife-taking between men of the same section has long been perceived as a major threat to section solidarity it is logical to suppose that Irigwe political strategists would conclude that intrasection wife-taking would be a major threat to section-based political support.

Until the middle 1940s, the Head of Kwol District was regarded as the senior chief of all Irigwe, in accordance, I am told, with the traditional Irigwe belief that sections south of the River Ngell were ritually and historically “senior” to the Miango sections. In 1965, however, the Head of Miango District was given a seat in the Northern Region House of Chiefs and was promoted to a higher chiefly rank than the Head of Kwol District. The official reason for the promotion was that the population of Miango District, as verified by several censuses, had grown considerably during the previous thirty-five years to exceed that of Kwol District; but it was widely felt in Irigwe that the Mango Head’s superior education and his better connections with Divisional administrators in Jos were the crucial factors in his promotion to a rank higher than that of the Kwol District Head. Thus in 1965, Tahu Section, with one of its members holding the highest administrative post in the tribe, came to be regarded as, in effect, politically more powerful than the numerically larger Nadzie Section. Consequently, the Kwol District Head’s tenure of office and effectiveness as a tribal leader came to depend more than ever on the monolithic backing of his fellow members of Nadzie Section.

Nearly half of the cases of wife-taking between husbands of the same section about which I have information occurred in Nadzie, Irigwe’s largest section, with approximately nineteen percent of the tribe’s total population. In contrast, I never uncovered any case of wife-taking between two men of Tahu, the second largest Irigwe section, with about fourteen percent of the tribe’s population, which has long dominated Miango District administrative affairs and recently has succeeded Nadzie as the tribe’s principal administrative power base.

I do not know who or what group instigated the 1968 Tribal Council ruling against secondary marriage, but I have been told that the Head of Kwol District and the other Kwol District Councillors, as well as both Christian and pagan Councillors from Miango District, voted for the legislation, and I was not informed of any dissenting votes having been cast. It is noteworthy that most of the Irigwe Christians live in Miango District, and to my knowledge there are no Christian Kwol District Councillors; thus the Christian element in Kwol can probably be ruled out as a significant factor in the legislation. Clearly different Councillors may have supported the move for one or more of several differing reasons; I think it is safe to conclude, however, that the Kwol District Head, and his section and District backers may have endorsed the legislation as part of their effort to assure the continued existence of Nadzie Section as a monolithic political unit and thus as a principal base of their political support.

It remains to be seen whether the legisla-
tion against secondary marriage will have the effect of preserving Nadzie's sectional integrity and political solidarity. We do not know whether the legislation will be very effective in stopping secondary marriage either between or within sections.

III

The co-husband relationship, which traditionally was an important, probably essential, aspect of intersection peace keeping, has been superseded in its peace-keeping functions by the British instigated tribal administration. Formerly, occasional instances of illicit intrasection wife-taking, when they occurred, sometimes led to the splitting of a section into two separate sections; but this did not seriously threaten the overall unity of the tribe. Now, however, the splitting of a section can pose a serious threat to existing political alignments, and thus to the effectiveness of the contemporary tribal administration. The institution of secondary marriage, because it sometimes leads to illicit intrasection wife-taking, may have come to be regarded by a majority of the Irigwe tribal council and many of their constituents as a threat to the stability and effectiveness of the tribal administration, and thus to tribal peace.

That Irigwe tribal leaders chose to outlaw secondary marriage perhaps attests to the high value they have come to place on the tribal administration as a mechanism for keeping the peace. My guess is the legislation reflects both this and also these leaders' judgment that this legislation would in effect help preserve rather than eliminate the time honored custom of secondary marriage. A new legal weapon is now available which can be used by traditionalists either against or to help individuals who attempt intrasection wife-taking. The law against secondary marriage can be utilized to punish those who do such a thing; on the other hand if a man induces a section mate's wife to get a divorce before he takes her in marriage (which the law against secondary marriage now prescribes whenever a woman leaves one husband for a new one), this may be seen as giving such an action a new mantle of legitimacy. Thus both the underlying patterns of Irigwe secondary marriage may be preserved, and the threat to the political status quo that it poses can be minimized. Perhaps divorce in Irigwe preceding remarriage will in many instances become divorce in name only; and co-ex-husband ties may remain essentially the same as those between co-husbands.

NOTES

1 This article is a revision and expansion of a paper read at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting at San Diego, November, 1970. The field research on which it was based, carried out between August, 1963, and July, 1965, was funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation.

2 There are either twenty-four or twenty-five sections, depending on the criteria used (see Sangree 1970:33, fn. 4).

3 Discussions with Laura Bohannan, Jean-Claude Muller, and Lucinda Sangree about the nature of Irigwe co-husband relationships were of particular help to me.

4 Elsewhere I have asserted that "ambiguity," bi-polar in nature, is a fundamental aspect of Irigwe world view (Sangree 1971). The Irigwe believe that every situation has its obverse aspect, and that the remedy for any difficulty generally lies in the proper utilization of its obverse or complementary attributes. Thus to institute divorce and legally abolish secondary marriage in order to preserve aspects of their marriage system which are in direct contrast to these two bits of legislation may well seem both logically and strategically sound to traditionalist Irigwe.

5 M. G. Smith has a recent article on the introduction of a divorce procedure in another central Nigerian tribe practicing secondary marriage (Smith 1969). There the question of a child's paternity, which was traditionally handled differently from Irigwe, appears to be a major factor in the application of the new divorce laws.

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