

“When studying behaviour, the best we can do is to describe and explain it from the point of view of those involved” (Livesey, 2006:3).

DECLARATION

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the School of Social Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others.

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ABSTRACT

Research on the practice of girl marriage has been extensive with studies recommending local strategies that are peculiar to the countries involved. According to this extensive body of research the continued practice of girl marriage is concerning given the harms associated with it at community or societal level, especially for girls and women. While the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions are however relevant for these local strategies, very few studies have focused on these decision makers (parents and community leaders) within a cultural context.

This gap in the research is addressed in the current study, which presents the perspectives of 25 community leaders and parents (21 men and four women) who are involved in girl marriage decisions, and five policy stakeholders whose roles include the enforcement of Nigeria's 2003 Child Rights' Act. In-depth interviews and observations were used to collect data in answer to the research question - how do the key decision makers explain the practice of girl marriage? Denzin's (1989; 2001) construction of Interpretive Interactionism was employed as a framework for analysing and understanding the socio-cultural contexts within the study.

While the findings of the present study suggest that strong cultural explanations underpin the continuity of girl marriage practices in Northern Nigeria, it also argues that this practice is strengthened by patriarchal power structures and the male exercise of control over the lives of women. This study suggests that the tendency to generalise about the practice of girl marriage in developing countries misses the relevance of individual country's differences in historical backgrounds, political, legal, socio-economic and cultural context – all of which interact in complex ways to influence the age at first marriage in different countries. These

findings have implications for the Nigerian constitution and policy stakeholders in terms of the need to institutionalise an approach which will address the issue of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria with the consciousness of the people involved in these marriage decisions.

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to God Almighty, the author and the finisher of my faith, without whom, I probably would have been dead during the course of this study. It's a long story!

I am very pleased to acknowledge and express my deepest gratitude to those who helped me in many ways in the course of my doctoral research.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AU-African Union

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CRA- Child's Rights Act

CV- Cultural Violence

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

NICO- National Institute for Cultural Orientation

NMEC - National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education

OPEC- Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries

UN- United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

VVF – Vesicovaginal fistula

WHO – World Health Organisation

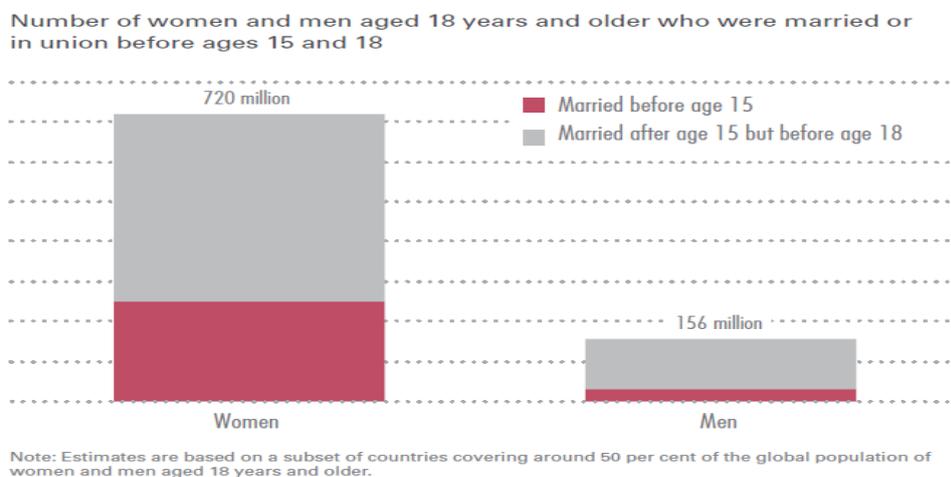
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“Give a girl an education and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without further expense to anybody” - Jane Austen.

Child marriage can be defined as a formal or informal union before the age of 18 (UN, 2004). While child marriage affects boys and girls all over the world, studies reveal that girls are involved to a greater degree (Human Rights Watch, 2017). This is evident in UNICEF’s (2014) study which set out to determine the proportion of children impacted by child marriage globally. UNICEF’s findings, as presented in fig. 1.1 (see below) shows that 720 million girls were married or in a union before ages 15, while 156 million boys were married or in a union before age 18. For this reason, this study will concentrate on the girl-child. For clarity, throughout this study, the term ‘Girl marriage’ will be used to refer to marriage of girls before the age of 18.

Figure 1.1: Indicates that child marriage affects girls in far greater numbers than boys (UNICEF, 2015:2)



1.1. Rationale for the study

The main aim for embarking on this study is to explore the factors that underpin the continuity of girl marriage practises in Northern Nigeria, within a cultural context, from the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions.

A number of current concerns have influenced the issue under investigation.

- My research interests have developed from my personal and professional experiences working as a local community officer in the Northern part of Nigeria. I had the opportunity to observe different traditional practises in these communities. Although I found most of the cultural practises interesting, some seemed disturbing: one of such disturbing practices is the marriage of young girls (aged 8-18) to older men. I observed some girls leave free education to get married, and it appeared most were soon pregnant and had few basic skills to support themselves financially later on in life. Some of the consequences of this traditional practice were evident in the living conditions of these girls. For example, some girls suffered poor health as a result of early childbirth. A particular case that has remained with me is that case of Adija. Adija was an orphan in the care of her uncle. At age 9 she was married as a third wife to a much older man. At age 10 she was pregnant.

Adija had a stillbirth after a prolonged labour, which then turned into urinary and faecal incontinence. At age 11 Adija was excluded from her husband's house because of the malodorous nature of her condition. She had to live in a small shelter made from wood and black polythene: she begged for alms to sustain herself. Although I gave Adija some money and gifts as often as I could while I worked in her community, her situation was very disturbing. I spoke to one of the female

community leaders about Adija and she promised to do something about it, but nothing was done as at the time I left that community. The question of what the future holds for Adija and many other girls in similar situations was on my mind for a very long time. While Adija's case is a clear demonstration of one of the consequences of the traditional early marriage practise, exploring the factors underpinning the continuity of such marriage practises was more puzzling for me if the consequences are as disturbing as in Adija's case.

- Since 1948, the UN and other international organisations (such as UNICEF, CEDAW etc.) have attempted to stop girl marriage practises (Nour, 2006). The first attempt was through Article 16 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 16 states that “marrying persons must be of full age and marriage shall be entered into only with the ‘free’ and ‘full’ consent of the intending spouses” (UN, 2016:5). However, the 1948 UDHR did not specify a particular age. Further, the UN, in Articles 1, 2 and 3 of the 1962 Convention of Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages passed into law that countries establish a minimum legal age for marriage and that all marriages be registered (UN, 2016). Yet again, there was no specific international legal minimum age of marriage. In 1979, the UN, through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), declared the practice of girl marriage illegal and required that a minimum age of marriage be specified internationally. However, the international legal minimum age of marriage was not defined until 1989 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 1 of this defines children as persons below age 18 (UN, 2016). Finally, in 1994, the International Conference on

Population and Development specified that age 18 should be enforced as a minimum age of marriage internationally, and that all forms of discrimination and coercion against women should be eliminated. Marriage should be entered into with free consent and as equal partners, and the education and employment of girls should be encouraged (Principle 9, Action 4.18, Action 5.5) (ICDP, 1994). Although the UN specified age 18 as the legal marriageable age, each country has the legislative jurisdictions to stipulate their own legal marriageable age. Therefore, the legal marriageable age in some countries differs (CEDAW, 2006). Table 1.1 below (see pages 18-21) presents the minimum legal age at which marriage can take place in different countries. The implication of these differences is that, it is possible for a girl to get married below the age of 18 (with parental consent) depending on her country's legal marriageable age. While these inconsistencies make the issue of girl marriage a complex one, CEDAW (2006) clarifies that, all marriage contracts should be in accordance to the legal marriageable age of the country a marriage is taking place. Yet, the practice of girl marriage is widespread; particularly in developing countries.

Table 1.1: 23-1 Minimum legal age at which marriage can take place (UN, 2012:2-5)

23-1 Minimum legal age at which marriage can take place				
Country or area	With parental consent		Without parental consent	
	Groom	Bride	Groom	Bride
Africa				
Botswana	18	18	21	21
Burkina Faso ²	18	15	20	17
Egypt	18	16	21	21
Ghana			18	18
Liberia	16	16	21	18
Libya ³	18	18		
Malawi ⁴			18	18
Mauritius	16	16	18	18
Morocco ⁴			18	18
Namibia	18	18	21	21
Saint Helena ex. dep.	16	16	21	21
Senegal	Under 18	Under 18	18	18
Seychelles	16	16	18	18
Sierra Leone ⁴			18	18
South Africa	18	15	21	21
Uganda ^{4, 5}			18	18
Zimbabwe	16	16	18	18
America, North				
Anguilla			18	18
Aruba	18	15	18	18
Bermuda ⁴			18	18
Canada ⁶	16	16	18	18
Cayman Islands	16	16	18	18
Costa Rica	15	15	18	18
Cuba	16	14	18	16
Dominican Republic	17	16	18	18
El Salvador	15	14	18	18
Greenland ⁷	16	15	18	18

Country or area	With parental consent		Without parental consent	
	Groom	Bride	Groom	Bride
Jamaica	16	16	18	18
Mexico ⁸	16	14	18	18
Montserrat ⁹	16	16	18	18
Netherlands Antilles			18	18
Panama	16	14	18	18
Puerto Rico	18	16	21	21
Trinidad and Tobago ¹⁰	Under 18	Under 18	18	18
America, South				
Brazil	16	16	18	18
Chile	16	16	18	18
Colombia	14	14	18	18
Ecuador	Under 18	Under 18	18	18
Suriname	17	15	21	21
Uruguay	14	12	18	18
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) ⁴			12	12
Asia				
Armenia			18	17
Azerbaijan	18	17		
Bahrain			15	
Cambodia			18	18
China, Hong Kong SAR	16	16	21	21
China, Macao SAR	16	16	18	18
Cyprus	16	16	18	18
Georgia	16	16	18	18
Indonesia			19	16
Iran	18	15		
Israel ⁴			17	17
Japan	18	16	20	20
Kazakhstan	16	16	18	17
Kyrgyzstan	16	16	18	18
Malaysia ¹¹	18	16	18 and 21	16 and 21
Nepal	18	18	20	20
Occupied Palestinian Territory ¹²		14.5	15.5	
Oman ⁴			18	18
Philippines	18	18	21	21
Republic of Korea	18	18	20	20
Singapore ¹³	Under 21	Under 21	21	21
Tajikistan	17	17	18	18
Turkey	16	16	18	18

Country or area	With parental consent		Without parental consent	
	Groom	Bride	Groom	Bride
Uzbekistan			17	17
Europe				
Aland Islands ⁴			18	18
Albania	18	16		
Austria ¹⁴	16	16	18	18
Belarus ¹⁵			18	18
Belgium	Under 18	Under 18	18	18
Bosnia and Herzegovina			18	18
Bulgaria	16	16	18	18
Croatia	16	16	18	18
Czech Republic	16	16	18	18
Denmark	15	15	18	18
Estonia	15	15	18	18
Finland ¹⁶			18	18
France ⁴			18	18
Germany ¹⁷	16	16	18	18
Gibraltar	16	16	18	18
Greece ¹⁸			18	18
Hungary	16	16	18	18
Iceland ⁴			18	18
Ireland ^{4,19}			18	18
Isle of Man	16	16	18	18
Italy	16	16	18	18
Jersey	16	16	18	18
Latvia	16	16	18	18
Liechtenstein ¹⁴			18	18
Lithuania ²⁰	15	15	18	18
Luxembourg			18	16
Malta			16	16
Montenegro	16	16	18	18
Netherlands	16	16	18	18
Norway	16	16	18	18
Poland ²¹			18	18
Portugal	16	16	18	18
Republic of Moldova			18	16
Romania ⁴			18	18
Russian Federation	16	16	18	18
Serbia	16	16	18	18
Slovakia ²²			16	16

<i>Country or area</i>	<i>With parental consent</i>		<i>Without parental consent</i>	
	<i>Groom</i>	<i>Bride</i>	<i>Groom</i>	<i>Bride</i>
Slovenia	15	15	18	18
Spain	14	14	18	18
Sweden ²³			18	18
Switzerland	16	16	18	18
TFYR of Macedonia	16	16	18	18
Ukraine	15	15	18	17
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	16	16	18	18
Oceania				
Australia	16	16	18	18
Cook Islands	16	16	21	21
New Caledonia			18	18
New Zealand	16	16	18	18

Following the UN's prohibition of girl marriage in 1989, the Nigerian Government, in agreement with the African Union (AU), adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in 1990. This comprehensive instrument sets out the rights of the African child and prohibits girl marriage practises (Kaime, 2009). However, it was only 13 years later (2003) that the ACRWC was formally endorsed into the Nigerian constitution. It was termed the 'Nigerian Child Rights' Act' (CRA) (Ebigbo, 2003). The Nigerian CRA defines a Nigerian child to be below the age of 18 and prohibits any marriage below this age. Nevertheless, girl marriage is widespread, normative practice in Nigeria (Obili, 2011; Archibong, 2014 & Akpan, 2003). Nigeria ranks 3rd globally on 'the highest number of girl marriages' in the world index with 3,306,000 girl marriages in 2016: 17% of these girls married before age 15 and 43% married before age 18. Statistics indicate that 76% of these marriages take place in the north-western region of Nigeria, while 10% take place in the south-eastern region (UNICEF, 2016). As a result of the continuity of girl marriage practises in Northern

Nigeria, fistula is a large and growing problem in Nigeria (UN, 2013). Although the exact prevalence rates of fistula in Nigeria is not certain, a recent study shows that Nigeria may have one of the highest rates of fistula in the world (UN, 2015). There is an estimate of 800,000 Nigerian women living with the condition, with another + 20,000 new cases each year and 80% of these girls are aged 10-20 from the Northern region (UNDP, 2015), 77% of the young girls in the practice of girl marriage suffer fistula in conjunction with their first vaginal delivery (UNDP, 2015). Although the Nigerian government and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) give aids to fistula patients, new cases of fistula occur faster than the existing ones awaiting repair (Meyer, *et al*, 2007).

- Prior research suggests that the factors that underpin girl marriage include the political and legal context, religion, tradition, patriarchal social structures and socio-economic factors, with particular emphasis on poverty and level of education (these will be discussed in Chapter 2). Based on this information, the UN and other policy stakeholders have proposed programmes such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which emphasise legal and policy-based recognition of gender inequality, increased access to education for girls, poverty alleviation schemes, and other possible solutions for the communities involved (Unterhalter, 2007). Yet the practice of girl marriage continues. UNICEF (2016) reveals that 39,000 children get married every day. I am curious about why this practice continues.

- While the issue of early/child marriage is being researched in Nigeria, most studies have focused on issues such as the consequences of early/child marriage. Turkur, *et al.*, (2015) for example focused on the health implication of early child bearing noting that the majority of the patients that developed fistula during their first delivery had early marriage (before age 20 years) with median ages at first marriage of 15 years and at presentation in hospital of 16 years. Archibong (2014) found that early marriage for girls results in dropping out of school and total disorganization of their educational prospects. Fagbola (2011) and Akpan (2003) focused on the health risk involved in early pregnancies and, specifically, the fate of the girls who are affected by fistula. There are also studies on experiences of adult Nigerian women (Callaghan *et al.*, 2015) and married adolescent girls (Erulkar & Bello, 2007). These studies explored the experiences and interpretations of early marriage in Nigeria's Northern region from the perspective of the women involved.

Further, James (2010) examined the socio-cultural context of adolescents' (15-19 years) motivations for marriage and childbearing in north-western Nigeria. James found that adolescents' attitudes are largely pronatalist and influenced by social norms and parental pressure. Gayawan & Adebayo, (2014) and Adebowale *et al.*, (2012) used data from the Nigeria Demographic and Health Surveys to investigate the first age at marriage within different regions in Nigeria and found that it is associated with education, religion and urbanization. Some scholars have also associated the practice of girl marriage in Nigeria with domestic violence (Fawole *et al.*, 2016; Kidman, 2016; Nnadi, 2014).

While prior studies have been extensive, little attention has been paid to the perspectives of the people who are involved in girl marriage decisions. Existing studies have focused on the experiences, consequences or impacts of girl marriage and not the underlying reasons why the practice continues. In addition, most studies have been conducted from the perspectives of girls/women who have married at an early age and have tended to overlook the views of key decision makers such as community leaders or family members, especially male community leaders or family members such as fathers. This study seeks to address this gap. Notably, in the context of developing countries, understanding girl marriage practises from the perspectives of the decision makers is relevant in any discussion of determinants, consequences, or possible solutions. Understanding the factors that perpetuate girl marriage from the perspectives of the people involved in decision making will place policy stakeholders and community leaders in a better position to challenge it.

1.2. Research question

To achieve the aim of this study, I have developed a broad research question which is.

- How do the people who are involved in girl marriage decision making in Northern Nigeria explain the practice of girl marriage?

It is my hope that findings from this study will add to knowledge on the factors that underpin the continuity of girl marriage and provide insights about the views of the people involved in girl marriage decisions. In addition, I hope to contribute to the academic discussion of girl marriage and gender issues in Nigeria. Through this thesis, I am hoping to introduce a new discourse to the Nigerian Child's Rights Act; particularly in relation to girl marriage.

Although the Nigerian government has passed the 2003 CRA at the federal level thereby emphasising the gravity of this practice in Nigeria, the Nigerian government needs to

institutionalise an approach or programme which will address the issue of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria with the consciousness of the people involved in these marriage decisions. Finally, I hope this study will elucidate the interpretations of the people involved in girl marriage practises thereby providing policy stakeholders with comprehensive information that can be used to frame local strategies aimed at reducing and eventually eradicating this practice in Northern Nigeria. In addition, knowledge gained here could also be used to inform research and development work in other areas of the world where girl marriage is still practised. The next section presents the approach that will be employed in this study.

1.3. Approach

Based on the research question, this study takes an interpretive approach. It will explore the perspectives of key decision-makers involved in the reproduction of girl marriage practises in order to identify the factors that underpin its continuity from a cultural perspective. An interpretive stance is appropriate to explore the socio-cultural context within the study, and to obtain a first-hand observation of the people involved.

More so, the usual design of studies on girl marriage is one in which the women or girls are the focus and they are in most cases studied at maternity health centres, or at fistula operation centres, or in their communities via focus group discussions, or through studies associated with low-school enrolment, or maternal and mortality rates (see Callaghan, *et al.*, 2015; Gayawan & Adebayo, 2014; Adebowale, *et al.*, 2012; James 2010; Erulkar & Bello, 2007). As highlighted in section 1. 1, while these studies have been extensive, the perspectives of those who make the marriage decisions have been neglected.

For these reasons, this research was carried out through in-depth interviews and observations with policy-makers whose roles include the enforcement of Nigeria's 2003 Child Rights' Act, and community leaders and parents (particularly men) who are involved in girl marriage

decisions in Kano (Fagge and Dalla communities) and Lagos (Agege community) state. The overall structure of this thesis takes the form of eight chapters. This structure is presented in section 1.4.

1.4. Thesis structure

The first part of this thesis sets out the rationale for the study and places it in the context of the wider theoretical and empirical literature. The second part of the thesis is devoted to the empirical data, explaining the beliefs and motivations that underpin decision-making about girl marriage. The third part considers the findings and places them in existing knowledge as well as explores their implications.

1.4.1. Part one

Chapter 1 is an introduction to this study identifying the rationale for this study, research question and the approach employed to conduct the study.

Chapter 2 explores girl marriage practises within the wider field of research; it reveals the suggested causes and consequences associated with girl marriage. These suggestions are employed in Chapters 6 and 7 to analyse the research findings within a comparative context.

Chapter 3 is a theoretical construction of culture; the chapter defines culture as a concept, reveals its characteristics and its usage. These theories are then employed as a theoretical lens to interpret the research findings in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 4 is an historical analysis of Nigeria's girl marriage practises through a review of different periods in the history of Nigeria. This chapter demonstrates that, despite the changes different periods brought to the country, most communities in Nigeria continue to adhere to their cultural practices: specifically, traditional marriage practices. While there are various traditional marriage practices in Nigeria, most of them have similar social structures.

Chapter 5 discusses the methodological approach employed in this study. Firstly, I argue for the appropriateness of a qualitative method and then describe the various data collection methods to ensure the relevance and richness of the information. This chapter further outlines the theoretical framework involved.

The second part of the thesis contains the empirical chapters presenting the findings of this study which consists of two chapters: Chapters 6 and 7.

1.4.2. Part two

As the overall aim of this study is to investigate how the people who are involved in girl marriage decision making in Northern Nigeria explain the practice of girl marriage within a cultural context, Chapter 6 presents the perspectives of relevant policy stakeholders on girl marriage practises in Northern Nigeria and how they are enforcing the 2003 Child Rights' Act.

Chapter 7 addresses the main research question. It provides an analysis of how Northern Nigerians explain the practice of girl marriage. While this chapter addresses the research question from the perspectives and practise of the decision makers, it also interprets the findings by placing them in the context of past research and identifying the clarifications, contradictions, or corroborations in relation to prior studies.

1.4.3. Part three

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter, where the perspective of key decision makers in the practice of girl- marriage is discussed and a summary of the key findings of this study is presented. This chapter also demonstrates the implications of the findings theoretically, practically and within the policy context. This chapter concludes with an acknowledgement of the limitations of this study and a plan for future studies.

In summary, this study presents the factors that underpin the continuity of girl marriage practises in Northern Nigeria, within a cultural context, from the perspectives of the people involved. The next chapter will review the literature on the history and practise of girl marriage globally. This is pertinent for a comparative analysis of the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 2

Understanding the practice of girl marriage around the World

This chapter introduces the reader to the general understanding of girl marriage practices; exploring global history and suggesting causes and associated consequences. This exploration will enable a clearer comprehension of girl marriage practises around the world. It will also enable a comparative analysis of the findings in the empirical chapters.

Prior research suggests that the practice of girl marriage in developing countries is influenced by political and legal context, socio-economic contexts (with particular emphasis on poverty and lack of education), religion, tradition and patriarchal social structures. Importantly, this research highlights some human-rights, health and education consequences to the practice of girl marriage in developing countries. However, little attention has been paid to the perspectives of people who make these marriage decisions, and the cultural context within which this happens. This study seeks understanding of girl marriage practice in Northern Nigeria from the perspectives and practice of the people involved.

To this end, this chapter is divided into three main sections. Section 2.1 will review the global history of girl marriage. Section 2.2 will explore the suggested causes of girl marriage practices globally, particularly in developing countries. Finally, Section 2.3 will illustrate the consequences associated with the practice of girl marriage.

2.1. Global history of girl marriage

Although there are limited published data on the global history of girl marriage, available studies posit that, in the 14th century, the practise of girl marriage was common in medieval Europe, Southern and Northern America (Brewer, 2005). The marriageable age at the time

was either for the family to decide or a matter of tribal customs (McLaughlin, 1997). In some cases, however, family alliances or properties were at stake in medieval girl marriages (Power, 1975). Herlihy (1985) reveals that medieval-girl marriage was not limited to a particular group; it was practised by all sectors of society. Nevertheless, in the 18th century, attitudes began to change, and the practise of girl marriage began to diminish in the West (Lewis, 1992). Reasons that led to this change of attitude include the growing recognition of childhood as a distinct and important phase of the life course, concerns about the protection of children from harm and ‘a concern for the future of the nation and of the race, and children were seen as holding the key to both. As they were moved centre stage, the movement to give all children a proper childhood was established’ (Hendrick, 1997:11). This change of attitude prompted the moral reformers and the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship in England to call for the age of marriage to be raised to 16 years old (Robertson, 2002).

Consequently, Parliament revisited the ‘Age of Marriage Act’ in 1929 and increased the age limit to 16 in England. This great development motivated reformers in the United States and Europe to push for similar legislation. By the 1930s, the age of marriage was raised in every state in America, ranging from 14 to 18-years-old, with most states settling on 16 or 18 (Robertson, 2002). Thereafter, the call for increasing the age of marriage which was developed in the west was then incorporated into international standards and regulations. As illustrated in Section 1.2, the UN since 1948 has continued in its attempts to stop girl marriage practises globally, particularly in developing countries (Nour, 2006).

Recent statistics from UNICEF (2016) indicate that 1 in 3 girls in developing countries are married before the age of 18 and, if there is no reduction, the global number of ‘child brides’

will increase to 1.2 billion by 2050. UNICEF (2016) emphasise the need to accelerate progress to stop girl marriage practises in the affected regions.

Summary: This section has reviewed the global history of girl marriage and noted that while there are limited studies on the global history of girl marriage, there is evidence that girl marriage was historically practised in the West. However, attitudes began to change, leading to the implementation of laws that prohibited girl marriage. The UN and other international organisations have since attempted to stop girl marriage practises in different parts of the world. Increasing concerns about the practice of girl marriage in some developing countries have prompted the UN and different researchers to investigate the continuity and causes of girl marriage practices.

2.2. Causes of girl marriage practices

Prior studies suggest that girl marriage practices are influenced by legal and political contexts, socio-economic factors (with an emphasis on poverty and lack of education), religion, tradition and patriarchal social structures. The legal and political context will first be examined.

2.2.1. The influence of the legal and political context

Studies of human rights' discourses describe the practice of girl marriage as a violation of basic human rights. Article 1 of the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriages and Registration of Marriages emphasises that consent cannot be free and full if one or both of the marrying couples are not mature or able to make a decision about their life partners (UNICEF, 2008). However, this law is not enforced in most developing countries as UNICEF's (2016) report suggest that the use of laws in regulating the practice of girl marriage in developing countries is not sufficient. According to the UNICEF (2016), there is an inconsistency between the legal age of marriage and the actual age of marriage in a

number of countries and most of the cases are rarely reported. More so, Boyden, *et al.*, (2012) suggest the lack of prosecution of girl-marriage practice offenders in some countries is due to a low level of public awareness in most countries that this practice is prohibited. Studies (Gaffney, 2011; Shehada, 2008) therefore suggest that the use of formal law prohibiting girl marriage be accompanied by local strategies that are peculiar to the countries involved.

While some developing countries fail to implement the legislation, studies (Mark, 2013; Jayaraman, *et al.*, 2009; Randall, 2005) further suggest that the age at first marriage in some countries influenced by political contexts such as insecurity and instability, particularly at war or crisis times, can influence the age at first marriage. For example, Jayaraman, *et al.*'s (2009) study in Rwanda suggest that an estimated 500,000–1,000,000 Rwandan men lost their lives as a result of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The shortage of men at the time is described to have led to a later age at first marriage for women in Rwanda; before the 1994 genocide the average age for first marriage was 12 but after the genocide the age for first marriage ranged from 21-24. By contrast, the 1959 conflict in Mali encouraged the practice of girl marriage; the people of Western Mali maintained their traditional marriage behaviour throughout the conflict as a reinforcement of identity that separated them from the 'others' (Randall, 2005). Similarly, Mark's (2013) analysis of sexual violence against women in Sierra Leone claims that girl marriage is used as a 'weapon of war'; it was used as an antidote for sexual abuse. Girls got married at an early age to protect themselves from the possible sexual violence of other men (Mark, 2013).

Equally, Johnson, *et al.*'s (2009) study in Palestine points out that the warlike conditions in Palestine (an uprising against the Israeli colonial rule) were able to influence the age at first marriage for some girls. According to Johnson, *et al.*, (2009), marriage arrangement for girls changed during the '*first intifada*' (which lasted from 1987-1993) and '*second intifada*'

(2000-2005) to accommodate the political changes in Palestine. During this time, political engagement was a major consideration when choosing a marriage partner; parents arranged the marriage of their daughters at an early age to men with political influence during the '*first intifada*' because of the deteriorating economic conditions at the time. However, when the people realised the continuity of such conflicts, they soon returned to their prior traditional marriage arrangement and celebrations. For example, during the '*second intifada*', although marriage is still important, families' reasons for girl marriage varied and the age at first marriage increased.

Summary: The above section explored how the legal and political context within a country can influence the age at first marriage. Although most developing countries have a stipulated legal minimum age of marriage and laws that prohibit offenders, studies maintain that the use of law in regulating girl marriage practices is not sufficient. The above section further suggests that the practice of girl marriage in some communities can be influenced by political insecurity and instability. However, these factors (political insecurity and instability) can either delay the age at first marriage or encourage girl marriage practices in some communities. As well as legal and political contexts, socio-economic factors may also influence the practice of girl marriage.

2.2.2. Socio-economic factors

Several studies (UNICEF, 2017; Agaba, *et al.*, 2011; Nobles & Buttenheim, 2008; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002) associate the practice and continuity of girl marriage in developing countries to socio-economic factors: poverty, illiteracy, employment and urbanization with particular emphasis on poverty and illiteracy. Employment and urbanization factors will first be examined.

Prior research (Agaba *et al.*, 2011; Nobles & Büttenheim, 2008) claim that urbanisation and availability of employments for women and girls are able to influence the age of first marriage in some communities. For example, Garenne's (2004) study which reviewed a 5-year demographic data on 32 sub-Saharan African countries argues that the age at first marriage remained lower in rural areas compared to the urban areas, linked to employment opportunities. Likewise, Sivaram, *et al.*'s (2008) study which analysed 2972 marriages in rural areas and 1180 marriages in urban areas of North Arcot Ambedkar district of South India, during 1982–88 suggests that the childhood residence of a girl has a great influence on her age at first marriage. Sivaram, *et al.*'s (2008) findings imply that the proportion of girls that got married before attaining the legal age of 18 was higher among the rural community (36.8%) than in the urban community (28.9%). Nobles & Büttenheim (2008) also support this argument by using a 'cost-benefit marriage model' to analyse the age at first marriage in Indonesia. According to Nobles & Büttenheim (2008), Indonesian women who live in urban communities are able to delay their marriage in relation to the availability of employment and health information for girls about sex and early childbirth. Nevertheless, a study on age at first marriage in Egypt suggests that despite urbanisation and the availability of employment opportunities, marriage is highly valued. Young Egyptian women work in order to afford the needed material goods for marriage (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004).

While the above discussions on early marriage practices are relevant in some communities, most of the studies are unclear about the decision-making process and the people involved. These factors are however, relevant in the study of girl marriage practise. A comprehensive understanding of all factors involved is relevant in a complex issue such as girl marriage. For instance, several studies (Brown, 2012; Shehadeh, 2008; Sah, 2008; LeBlanc, 2008; UNICEF, 2005, 2001; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002) suggests that illiteracy or limited level of primary

education is one of the main causes of girl marriage practices in developing countries. Indeed, education is seen as one of the most effective ways of breaking the cycle of girl marriage in developing countries (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002).

Studies suggest that girls with at least secondary education and minimum participation in the work force are more likely to get married at a later age (Singh & Samara, 1996). Supporting the argument, Manda & Meyer's (2005) study in Malawi suggests that the age at first marriage is higher among a younger cohort of educated women compared to a generation ago when women were kept out of school. Older educated women were found to positively influence the age of marriage among younger girls. Similarly, Bates, *et al.*, (2007) claim that educated mothers are less likely to give out their daughters in marriage before the legal marriageable age in their countries because they are aware of the consequences. According to Bates, *et al.*, (2007), educated mothers are able to use convincing arguments to persuade their husbands against the practice of girl marriage.

Similarly, Nasrin & Rahman's (2012) study of determining factors of early marriage and early conception of women in the slum areas of Rajshahi city in Bangladesh suggest that girl marriage is predominant amongst the uneducated. Nasrin & Rahman (2012) argue that educated men are unlikely to be involved in girl marriage practices. Archambault (2011) also maintains that Maasai men hold education in high esteem but difficulty in accessing schools for girls and lack of confidence in the educational sector are contributing factors for girl marriage practices in Maasai, Kenya. Lack of education as a determinant of girl marriage is further illustrated in Kamal's (2011) study of socio-economic determinants of age at first marriage of the ethnic tribal women in Bangladesh. Kamal (2011) argues that poor education relates to earlier age at first marriage and women with education and pre-marital work status are likely to delay their age at first marriage in comparison to women without education.

Equally, Agaba, *et al.*'s (2011) study which looked at the effects of various socioeconomic variables on the timing of age at first marriage among women in Western Uganda suggest that the age at first marriage varied depending on the woman's level of education, girls' easy access to education and information on reproductive health. According to Agaba, *et al.* (2011) these opportunities provided girls in Western Uganda with basic life skills, enabling them to avoid early marriage. Likewise, Gurmu & Mace's (2013) study of determinants of age at first marriage in Ethiopia posits that there is a delay in the timing of marriage in some Ethiopian communities where there is availability of education for girls.

In contrast, however, some other scholars argue that educational empowerment does not necessarily change the tradition or people's perceptions of the value of marriage. Studies in Indonesia and Sri-Lanka (Malhotra, 1997; Malhotra & Tsui, 1996) suggest that modern social contexts, such as education, do not change families' preferences for joint family living or parental roles in their children's marriage choices. Tremayne (2006) also rejects the positive association of availability of education and age at first marriage. According to Tremayne's (2006) study of Iran which covers an area with high rates of literacy amongst women in three generations, preference for early marriage remained significant amongst the surveyed three generations despite their high level of literacy. Tremayne (2006) therefore suggests that unless education is combined with fundamental change in a girl-child's life, it adds little to her quality of life and might not free her from entrenched social bonds.

While most of the studies above suggest that illiteracy and limited level of primary education are key determinants of age at first marriage in some developing countries, few other studies suggest that education alone cannot change the significance or marriage value for girls in some countries. The implication of this is that, various factors determine the age at first marriage in different countries; what is relevant in one country might not necessarily be

relevant in another. Having examined illiteracy and limited primary education, an exploration of poverty as a contributing factor to girl marriage is undertaken.

Poverty is argued as one of the driving forces of girl marriage practices globally (UNICEF, 2017 and Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002). Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi (2002) suggest that girls are regarded as an economic burden; hence, they are given in marriage to older men at an early age in exchange for economic gains. For example, the payment of a bride price (in the form of cash, livestock, and properties) by the groom's family to the girl's family is indicated as a contributing factor to girl marriage practices (UNICEF, 2012), particularly amongst the poor (UNICEF, 2005). Several studies (for example, Nasrin & Rahman, 2012; Sah, 2008; UNICEF, 2001) also argue that giving a girl in marriage at an early age is a form of 'survival strategy' for families in need. In Bangladesh, for instance, Schuler, *et al.*, (2006) argue that girls get married at an early age due to economic pressure; families arrange these marriages in Bangladesh hoping their daughters will have better lives in their in-law's families. Similarly, Bakhtibekova's (2014) study in Tajikistan implies that most families eagerly look forward to the time their daughters will get married, with the hope that their daughters' new family will support them financially. Likewise, Sah (2008) suggests that, in Nepal, girl marriage is common amongst women from low-income households; some girls get married as early as age 15, while the age of marriage is delayed in families that possess great landholdings. In Sub-Saharan Africa, girl marriage is encouraged because the brides' families get livestock as a bride price from the groom's family (Bart, 1994). In the same vein, Chowdhary & Deeba (2004) used a 'profit motive model' to examine the factors that influence girl marriage practises in rural Bangladesh and conclude that the profits from the traditional bride price influence the continuation of girl marriage in Bangladesh. The findings from Sah's (2008) study of some communities in North Africa also suggest that girl marriage

practices are largely influenced by the economic transactions involved. Archambault's (2011) study of early marriage in the Maasai community of Kenya further suggests that girl marriage should not be portrayed as cultural because, to the people, girl marriage remains one of the important mechanisms through which families draw on financial support and it is used as a way to ensure their daughters are well protected in good homes.

Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi (2002) hold the view that poor families practice girl marriage to reduce their economic vulnerability; they shift the welfare of their young daughters to the husband's family. Although this strategy, in some instances, places the girl in a wealthier family environment (Bakhtibekova, 2014), Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi's (2002) study in parts of sub-Saharan Africa argue that negative effects of this strategy reinforce the girl's vulnerability to poverty in her marital home. Another study that surveyed the determinants of early marriage from the perspectives of married girls in Iran suggests that while marriage is regarded as the only avenue to obtain an identity in Iranian communities, poverty, plays a major role in the age at first marriage in Iran (Montazeri, *et al.*, 2016).

However, in contrast to the above studies, Aryal's (2007) study of the differentials and determinants of female age at first marriage in rural Nepal found that a high socioeconomic status is not able to limit the age at first marriage for girls from the Brahmin caste in Nepal. According to Aryal (2007), the risk of getting married early was found to be higher among females of high socioeconomic status compared with those of low socioeconomic status. Reasons being that high socioeconomic status families are motivated, for religious and prestige reasons, to get their daughters married at an early age.

Summary: Discussion in this section suggests that to a large extent, the practice of girl marriage is influenced by the lack of education and poverty rather than the lack of

employment opportunities and urbanisation. It is therefore crucial to examine the broader context where girl marriage decisions are made. The next section examines religion, tradition and patriarchal social structure as determinants of girl marriage practices.

2.2.3. Religion, tradition and patriarchal social structures

Religion, tradition and patriarchal structures have also been suggested as contributing factors to girl marriage practices in some developing countries. Although these three factors are interconnected, for clarity, I will analyse each of them separately, starting with religion. Nevertheless, they may be analysed in relation to the other.

Religion: Prior research suggests that religion is a key determinant of age at first marriage.

For example, Wayachut's (1993) comparison study of age at first marriage among Muslims and Buddhists in Thailand suggests that girl marriage is practised, more often, in regions with Islamic beliefs than regions with Buddhist religion. Similarly, Gangoli & McCarry's (2009) study in the United Kingdom (UK) argue that girls born into Muslim families are more likely to get married between ages 16-24 than girls born into other religions. In line with this school of thought, Enright (2009) argues that the practice of early and forced marriage among South Asian Muslim communities in the UK' signifies a preference for their religious beliefs than shared 'British' values.

Further, Aryal's (2006) study in rural Nepal and Nagi's 1993 study in Rajasthan, India suggest that early marriage practises are influenced by the Hindu code of conduct. According to these studies (Aryal, 2006; Nagi, 1993), in the Hindu code of conduct to acquire '*Punya*' (merit), i.e. to have a place in heaven after death, one should give *Kanya-Daan* (donation of a virgin). Therefore, the search for partners starts at an early age (after menarche) in adherence to that part of Hindu scripture. Nevertheless, while Aryal (2006) explains that this part of the

Hindu scripture is observed by the Brahmin caste in Nepal, Nagi (1993) concludes that the adherence to that part of Hindu scripture is mostly observed by the 'uneducated' Hindu worshippers.

UNICEF's (2013) report however debunks the argument that girl marriage is underpinned by a particular religious sect. Table 2.1 (see below) "which measures religious belief across countries, reveals that of the UNICEF top 20 countries for girl marriage practices, ten are countries with a majority Christian population, eight are majority Muslim, and two are predominantly Hindu" (UNICEF, 2013:1). Similarly, Shehada (2008) argues that some families use Islamic laws as a justification when in reality they themselves determine at what age their daughters can get married, which depends more on the overall socio-economic and political factors. Bahramtash & Kazemipour (2006) also rejects the general assumption that girl marriage is underpinned by Islamic religion. Bahramtash & Kazemipour's (2006) study in Iran argue that although Iran functions under one Islamic law, people in the less modernized and poverty-driven areas of the country are more likely to practise girl marriage than those living in urban areas with education and employment opportunities.

Table 2.1: The practice of girl marriage by religion in 20 countries (UNICEF, 2013:1)

Top 20 countries for child brides, major religious affiliations						
Top 20	Country	Per cent of women 20-24 years who were child brides ¹	Religion, per cent of the population ^{2b}			
			Islam	Christia n	Other Major	Other minor
1	Niger	75	98	>1		2
2	Central African Republic	68	8	90		2
3	Chad	68	55	41		4
4	Bangladesh	65	91	>1	8 Hindu	1
5	Guinea	63	84	11		5
6	Mali	55	94	2		4
7	South Sudan	52	6	60	33 Folk religions	1
8	Burkina Faso	52	62	22	15 Folk religions	1
9	Malawi	50	13	83		4
10	Madagascar	48	3	85	4 Folk religions	8
11	Mozambique	48	18	57	7 Folk religions	Unaffiliated & other 18
12	India	47	14	2	79 Hindu	5
13	Eritrea	47	37	63		>1
14	Somalia	45	99	>1		1
15	Sierra Leone	44	78	21		1
16	Zambia	42	>1	98		1
17	Nicaragua	41	>1	86		14
18	Nepal	41	5	>1	81 Hindu	Buddhist 10, other 4
19	Dominican Republic	41	>1	88		12
20	Ethiopia	41	35	63		2

While some studies above suggest that girl marriage is predominantly practised by Muslims, some other studies argue that the practice of girl marriage is not limited to the Muslim religion or a particular religious affiliation. People from different religions practise girl marriage. This suggests perhaps that religion may be one influencing factor, but that other issues are also involved. In the next section, the role of tradition is explored.

Tradition: Tradition is often used as an explanation for a range of community or family practises (Wayachut, 1993). Traditional reasons associated with the practice of girl marriage

in developing countries include the preference for polygynous unions, pronatalist attitudes, avoidance of promiscuity, maintenance of sexual purity, family honour (UNICEF, 2005), and marriage at puberty (Nagi, 1993). Each of these is examined below.

- Polygyny is the union of a man with more than one wife (White & Burton, 2009). Studies (UNICEF, 2005) suggest that polygynous attitude is a contributing factor to girl marriage practises in Nepal, Haiti, Yemen, Ghana, Cameroon, Togo and Zambia. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 (see below) compare the proportion of women aged 20–24 in polygynous and monogamous unions who were married by age 18 (UNICEF, 2005). The figures suggest that polygynous unions are more common in countries with high rates of girl marriage. Similarly, the African Union’s (2015) study of the prevalence of girl marriage practices in Ghana, Benin, and Togo imply that the prevalence rate of girl marriage is high in these countries because it is considered prestigious for a wealthy older man gets married to a young girl, particularly when the girl is his second, third or fourth wife

Figure 2.1: Proportion of women aged 20–24 in polygynous union by age 18 (UNICEF, 2005: 7)

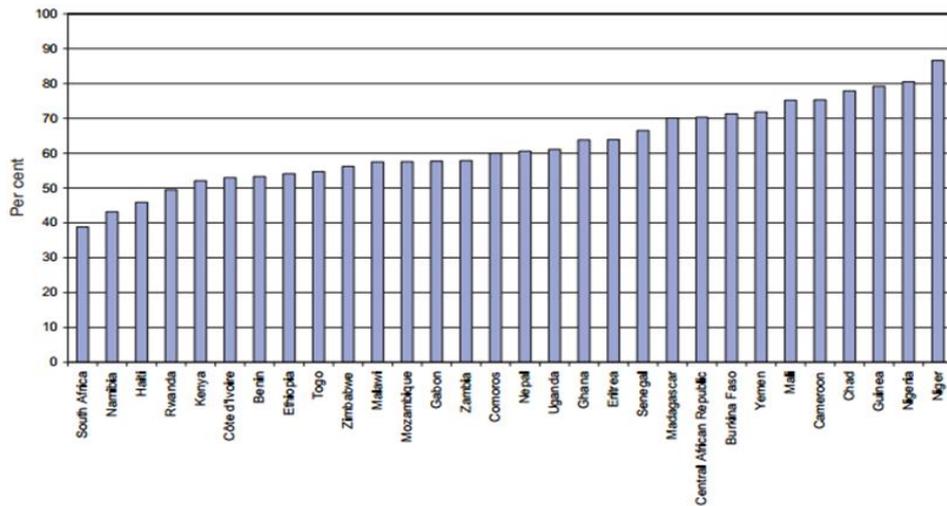
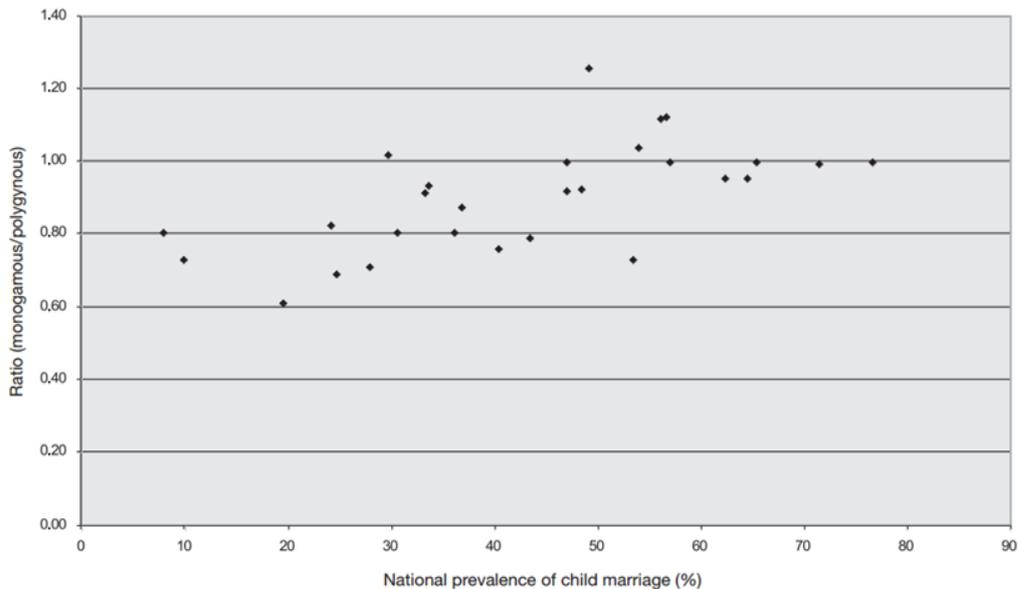


Figure 2.2: Proportion of women aged 20–24 married by age 18, by whether union is polygynous or monogamous (UNICEF, 2005: 8)



- Pronatalist attitude, which is the belief that a woman’s worth or social value is based on her production of biological children (Parry, 2005) is suggested as a contributing factor to the age at first marriage in some countries (Wolf *et al.*, 2008 and Belcher *et*

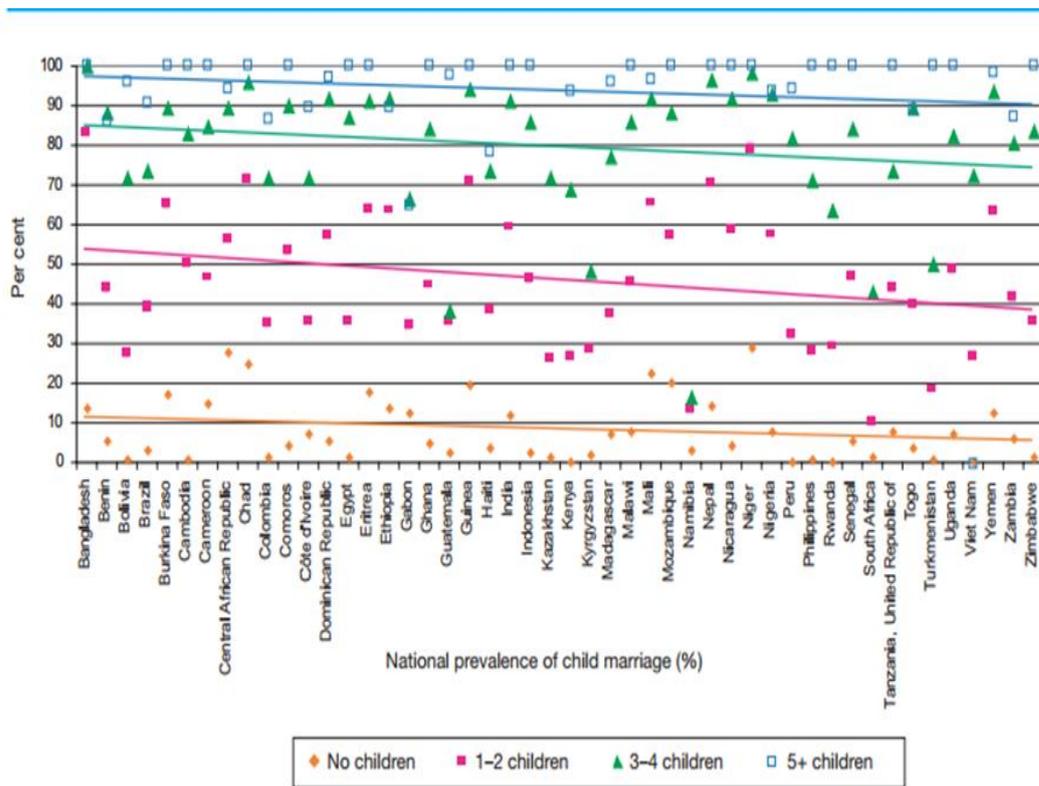
al., 1978). Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe (2013) claims that childlessness in marriage is stigmatised in some Asian and African communities, with the stability of marriage dependent on the birth of children, particularly a male child. For example, Figure 2.3 and Table 2.2 (see below) indicate the ‘proportion of women aged 20-24 married by age 18, according to the number of their children’ (UNICEF, 2005: 8). These illustrate the association between girl marriage and high levels of fertility (UNICEF, 2005: 8).

Table 2.2: Proportion of women aged 20-24 married by 18 according to the number of their children (UNICEF, 2005:8)

Country	No children	1–2 children	3–4 children	5+ children
Bangladesh	13.8	83.3	100	100
Colombia	1.4	35.4	72.2	86.8
South Africa	1.6	10.7	43.1	NA
Viet Nam	0.5	27.1	72.5	NA

NA: Not available

Figure 2.3: Illustrates the relationship between girl marriage and the number of children a woman has (UNICEF, 2005:8)



- Another school of thought (AU, 2015; Schuler *et al.*'s, 2006) suggest that the age at first marriage in some countries is influenced by the need to avoid girls engaging in promiscuous activities. Promiscuity is defined as the practice of being indiscriminate in the choice of sexual partners or the habit of having casual sex regularly with different partners (Widom, 1996). The African Union's (2015) study in the rural areas of South Africa, particularly the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal suggest that promiscuity of girls/women is rebuked and discouraged while promiscuity of boys/men is culturally encouraged. In these communities (Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal), a bride is expected to show her bloody sheet (to indicate her virginity) after the wedding night to avoid being banished by her husband or her family shame. Equally, Schuler *et al.*'s (2006) study in Bangladesh claims that some

parents arrange their daughters' marriage at an early age to protect them from being indiscriminate in the choice of sexual partners.

- While very few studies suggest maintenance of sexual purity is a determinant of age at first marriage, it is closely related to the above argument (avoidance of promiscuity). Sexual purity is believed to be the state of a girl's body and mind as a result of not having sexual activities outside the bonds of marriage (Satter, 1999). Kaur (2014) suggests that the concept of sexual purity is deeply rooted amongst Asian Indian communities and this notion has an influence on the age at first marriage. Women are regarded as carriers of social values and family honour, hence they are given in marriage at an early age to maintain that sexual purity. This notion is also closely related to family honour.
- Family-honour is more to do with the reputation of a girl's family. Chowdhry (1997) describes family honour as a concept that involves a perceived quality of worthiness which affects the social standing and evaluation of a family individually or collectively. According to Raj, (2010) and Sev'er & Yurdakul, (2001), girls are married out at an early age in Bahrain to maintain social worthiness. Kaur (2014) also argues that the first to third generations of Indians living in the United Kingdom are attitudinally more Indian than Western because there were not many problems in convincing children to marry early or to marry someone from within the community or someone from India. Kaur (2014) claims that these marriages are arranged through parents and relatives to maintain family honour. According to Kaur's (2014) report about 1000 British Asian girls are forced into early marriage every year.

Discussion in the above section suggests that some traditional beliefs are able to influence the age at first marriage in some communities. However, these traditional beliefs might not be relevant in all the communities where girl marriage is practised. More so, traditional beliefs are prone to change over time and may be embedded in patriarchal social structures that encourage girl marriage practices.

Patriarchal social structures: Past studies argue that girl marriage continues to exist based on the patriarchal structures that govern some developing countries (Kambarami, 2006; Chowdhury, 2004; Moghadam, 2002 and Kasturi, 1995). Patriarchy is “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990:20). It can also be defined as “a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, whereby the father is the head of the family and men have authority over women and children” (Aina, 1998:3). While patriarchy is described as male domination of women in public and private spheres, it is also used to describe the paternalistic position of men in the home. As a concept, patriarchy helps us to understand women’s realities (gendered power) (Sultana, 2011). This section explores the contribution of patriarchy in state policies and in the home to girl marriage practices (Hossain, 2016; Sultan, 2012; Mobaraki & Söderfeldt, 2010; Bogalech, 2007).

In patriarchal societies the institutionalisation and manifestation of male dominance means that men are in positions of authority in important institutions (Sultan, 2012). Hence, institutions are established in such a way that enable men to dominate women (Kambarami, 2006). Take political parties or systems for instance - men are in most cases key gatekeepers to women’s political participation (Cheng & Tavits, 2011 and Kasturi, 1995). Gender shapes institutions and these affect the distribution of power, meaning that women are in some cases in subordinate positions where they are unable to influence or contribute to social policies

(Koesta, 2015). This is evident in Saudi Arabia (Mobaraki & Söderfeldt, 2010), for example, where the government have some reservations for policies that concern women and girls; women are limited to specific types of work, healthcare, and educational opportunities. The state policies in Saudi Arabia affect women's health care at many levels: "There is a Ministry of Health law preventing a woman from being admitted to a government hospital unless she is accompanied by her male guardian" (Mobaraki & Söderfeldt, 2010:24).

In relation to girl marriage practices, however, it is not certain if having women at the head of government is able to influence the gendered or patriarchal social structures in some countries. In Bangladesh for instance, a woman has been Prime Minister since 2009, yet UNICEF (2016) reports that this country has one of the highest rates of girl marriage practices in the world (74% prevalence). In addition, Hossain's (2016) case study of rural Bangladesh also indicates that the continuation of girl marriage and domestic violence against women is perpetrated by the patriarchal order present in communities and homes.

Nevertheless, it may be that while a woman is the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, her field of influence may be limited by the gendered structures within which she works, ensuring that the policies and laws in Bangladesh are determined mainly by a male perspective. Patriarchal ideology is so powerful that "men are usually able to secure the apparent consent of the very women they oppress, they do this through different institutions (i.e. schools, religious organisations and the family), each of which justifies and reinforces women's subordination to men" (Millet, 1977: 35). In some cases, patriarchal ideology in a system or community is reproduced in the home and this is seen as one of the determinants of age at first marriage in developing countries (Hossain, 2016; Kambarami, 2006 and Moghadam, 2002).

Regarding patriarchy in the home, in some communities in developing countries, the oldest male in a family is often portrayed as a patriarch (head); he is expected to represent his

family or kinsmen in the community, the patriarch takes the role of ensuring that family members, both men and women are well-behaved (Minces, 1980, Poliakov, 1992) and every member of his family is expected to obey him. In patriarchal communities, the boy-child is raised to demonstrate control, power and authority while the girl-child is groomed with the rhetoric that marriage is a compulsory and important stage in a girl's life-time (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2012). According to Sultan (2012:3), traditionalists in patriarchal communities believe that men are born to dominate and women are born to subordinate, they believe in the generational existence of this hierarchy, and "like other rules of nature this one too cannot be changed".

Although patriarchy is a social construction and not derived from the natural world, the historical assumption of men or the male-child as the superior human form further underpins girl marriage practices (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013). This line of argument is evident in Buberwa's (2016) study of early marriage in Tanzania. According to Buberwa (2016), in Tanzania, boys are trained to be strong-willed, dominant and powerful and to grow into future patriarchs, while girls should be quiet, submissive and get married rather than going to school. Similarly, Bogalech's (2007) study on the decision to marry was carried out in a patriarchal community of Ethiopia; the study suggest that girls are pressured to get married, instead of going to school, by their parents and community elders. Bogalech (2007) found that 55% of women reported that they were pressured into marriage; 91% of the participants were pressured by their fathers, 88% by their mothers and 22% by the community elders (Bogalech, 2007). Nevertheless, studies reveal that women's and girls' role in patriarchal families is articulated in two ways. While some of the above studies (for example, Hossain, 2016 and Buberwa, 2016) describe the women in patriarchal communities as entirely submissive with no voice of their own, several other studies have rejected this argument.

According to these studies (Archambault, 2011; Ahmed, Reavey, & Majumdar, 2009; Majumdar, 2007; Harris, 2004; Abu-Lughod, 1999 & Joseph, 1999; Said, 1978), it is not possible for women to live under such dominance. These studies reject the representation of young brides as passive and helpless victims, and suggest that most of the girls involved in girl marriage practices resist total dominance through early marriage prevention programmes in their communities. Studies (Margolis, 2015 and Archambault, 2011) argue that women and girls are able to resist harmful cultural practices without the rescuing activity of external agencies through different mechanisms of resistance such as community-based child protection mechanisms with a particular focus on child marriage, shelter facilities or other mechanism to protect girls' and women's rights and provide shelter for abused girls. The problem however is how widespread such help is in developing countries.

Further, Archambault (2011) critiques discourses that depict girl marriage as a violation of human rights or discourses that portray their fathers as patriarchs who are motivated by culture, greed or tradition. Archambault's (2011:638) discussion of early marriage practices in Enkop (Kenya) suggests that such marriage decisions are underpinned by "love, concern, and insecurity". While some of the parents value the education of their daughters and make great investments in educating them, several obstacles (difficult access to school for the girls, poor quality learning, curriculum bias and low achievement of girls) hinder them (Archambault, 2011). Although this argument might be relevant in the context of Maasai in Enkop, Kenya, it is unclear if it is relevant in all countries where girl marriage is practised. More so, there are some communities where the factors suggested by Archambault (2011) do not exist, yet, there are cases of girl marriage practices. This is evident in Tremayne's (2006) study of Iran which covers an area with high rates of literacy amongst women in three generations (see Section 2.2.2). While access to education is not similar to that of Kenya,

Tremayne's (2006) findings indicate that there are cases of early marriage in this community. The implication here is that the availability of education is not enough to remove the significance of marriage in some communities. Nonetheless, Archambault's discussion also acknowledges that some of the suggested reasons for girl marriage in Enkop reveal injustice in gender inequality;

“The situation of early marriage in Enkop nevertheless, reveals a real injustice in gender inequality. It is unjust that the ‘modern’ path of a good education followed by job opportunities and free partner choice is so insecure for both boys and girls, but especially the girls. In the current context in Enkop, young boys can have an earlier start at schooling because they are believed to better withstand the difficulties and risks associated with long travel to and from school. Unlike girls, boys do not bear the responsibilities of out-of-wedlock parenthood and consequent withdrawal from schools (Archambault, 2011:639).

While dominance in patriarchal communities does not always mean oppression or that the girls are totally powerless, it does suggest that men are in control. The gendered identities in some institutions (i.e., schools, political parties, religious organisations and families) reinforce women's subordination to men, as does the practice of girl marriage. Why is the practice predominant for girls, not boys? However, it should not be acceptable for either. These are the questions that need to be answered by the people involved in girl marriage decisions.

While some studies in this section suggest that the age at first marriage is influenced by patriarchal social structures in the home and state policies, portraying women and girls as

entirely submissive with no voice of their own, other studies argue that girls and women living in such communities are not completely passive - rather they perceive girl marriage as one of the important mechanisms through which they can draw on support and security, hence its continuity.

Summary: This examination of religion, tradition and patriarchal social structures as determining factors for the age at first marriage for girls in developing countries indicates that:

- girl marriage is repeatedly associated with poverty and the lack of education.
- while girl marriage is predominantly practised by Muslims in some communities, it is also practised by other religions
- the age at first marriage is not limited to a particular traditional belief
- patriarchal social structures in the home and in the state system are thought to influence the age at first marriage, however the practice of girl marriage is not solely dependent on patriarchal social-structures

This continued practise of girl marriage is concerning given the harms associated with it, especially for girls and women. The next section of this chapter examines the associated consequences of girl marriage practices in different countries.

2.3. Consequences of girl marriage practices

While the current study is not focused on the consequences of girl marriage but on the people involved in decision making, awareness of its humanitarian, health and educational consequences initiated the study. It is therefore important to consider the consequences associated with girl marriage. Past research has shown that girl marriage is associated with

the violation of human rights, several health and education consequences. Each of these areas of concern is outlined below.

2.3.1. Violation of human-rights

The UN over the course of ten years (1979-1989) drafted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which recognizes that children are entitled to human rights in their own right.

Hence, the CRC (1990) reflects a move away from the view of a child as a recipient of privileges bestowed at the discretion of the family, community and the state, towards a more progressive view of the child as the bearer of legal rights under international law (UNICEF, 2008). The CRC stipulate that all countries should have the best interests of the child as a primary consideration; a child should be given maximum support for survival and development (UNICEF, 2008). However, the practice of girl marriage denies the girl-child such support UNICEF (2016). The fact that the girl is denied the right to express her views or opinions of her life-partner (see Section 2.2.3) violates Article 12 of the CRC: the right to express her views freely in all matters.

Similarly, UNICEF (2016) suggest that girl marriage denies the girl-child the right to protection from maltreatment, exploitation and, in some cases, slavery. Turner's (2013) study of rural Haryana in India suggest that due to a shortage of women in rural Haryana, it is acceptable to buy young girls trafficked from other states and subject them to slave marriage. As a result of this practice, young girls are exploited, maltreated and some of them suffer health consequences (Turner, 2013). Related health consequences are explored in the next section

2.3.2. Health consequences

Girl marriage is associated with considerable health consequences for the girl involved.

These involve both physical and mental health issues such as the health consequences of early child-bearing (fistula, maternal death and child mortality), un-protected sexual relations (HIV and cervical cancer), domestic violence and psychological issues (suicidal thoughts).

- One of the greatest health challenges associated with girl marriage practices is Vesico Vaginal Fistula (Fistula) (Svanemyr *et al.*, 2012). Fistula is an injury sustained between the vaginal wall and the bladder, which may cause the affected tissue to necrotize (die), leaving a hole that results in a continuous leaking of urine/faeces (WHO, 2002). While fistula is a large and growing problem across the world (UN, 2013), the exact prevalence rates of fistula globally is not certain, because the prevalence rates are often based on self-reporting, studies by advocacy groups, reviews of hospital services and personal communication with surgeons (WHO, 2014). While these data sources are problematic based on their validity and accuracy, the World Health Organisation (2014) estimate that over 1 million women suffer obstetric fistula globally. Although there are cases of fistula all over the world, studies suggest that there is a high incidence of fistula in developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Southeast Asia (UNDP, 2013). These regions are also characterised by a high prevalence rate of girl marriage. Indeed 77% of the fistula cases in these regions involve young girls in girl marriage practises (UNDP, 2013). Table 2.3 (see below) shows the knowledge and prevalence of fistula in 11 countries within 2008-2013 (WHO, 2015). Most fistula patients experience stigmatization and social isolation as a result of the malodorous nature of this condition (Fagbola, 2002). It is, however, important to note that fistula can occur at any age and can also result

from hysterectomy, cancer operations, violent rape, radiation therapy and cone biopsy (WHO, 2002). Nonetheless, it is predominant in early childbirth for young women whose pelvises have not fully developed (Meyer, et al, 2007).

Table 2.3: Knowledge and prevalence of obstetric fistula in 11 different countries- 2008-2013 (WHO, 2015:4)

Country	Year(s)	% of women aged 15–49 years ^a	
		Heard of obstetric fistula	Had obstetric fistula ^b
Burkina Faso	2010	30.9	0.1
Cameroon	2011	23.2	0.4
Congo	2011–2012	17.4	0.3
Guinea	2012	41.8	0.6
Kenya	2008–2009	NA	0.9
Malawi	2010	NA	0.6
Niger	2012	44.1	0.2
Nigeria	2008	30.7	0.4
Senegal	2010–2011	22.2	0.1
Uganda	2011	NA	2.0
United Republic of Tanzania	2010	67	0.5

NA: not available.

- Maternal death is also a key issue. Research shows that girls below the age of 18 are 5-7% more likely to die during childbirth than the women above age 19 (Nour, 2006). For example, a case study in Ethiopia indicates 6% higher maternal mortality rate amongst those under age 16 than those aged 20–24 years (Ransom & Yinger, 2002). In most cases such deaths occur during or within 24 hours of childbirth. Reasons include

untreated haemorrhaging before, during and after birth. Some young girls go untreated when infections occur because of their poor knowledge of health complications, absence of health facilities in rural areas and their low decision-making powers (WHO, 2015).

- Studies indicate that the child mortality rate amongst mothers giving birth before age 18 is 60% higher than mothers giving birth after age 18 (Jain & Kurz, 2007). In addition, Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi (2002) argue that babies born to underage mothers, particularly in developing countries, are more likely to be premature or become stunted and underweight in early life than the babies born to mature mothers. This is because most underage mothers lack the maturity, health care and parenting skills or methods regarding the birth and care of their babies. Similarly, discussions by Dangerfield *et al.*, (2017) and UNICEF (2015) suggest that most of the girls in girl marriage practices are physically immature and are psychologically unready for motherhood. Their inadequate knowledge and immaturity is apparent in the welfare of their children.
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the immune system and weakens the ability to fight infections and disease (NHS, 2014). While HIV is commonly associated with unprotected sex, researches also associate the practice of girl marriage to a higher risk of HIV (Bruce & Clark, 2004). For example, Nour (2006:3) suggests that “the HIV prevalence rate for girls 15–19 years of age was higher for married (89%) than single girls (66%); for those 15–29 years of age, HIV

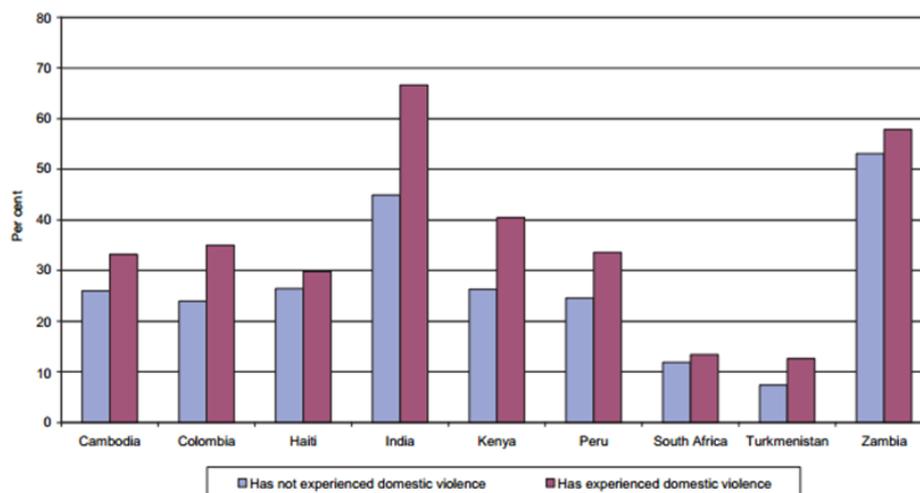
prevalence was 28% for married and 15% for single girls”. A hypothesis relevant to this finding is that:

“a young girl may be physiologically more prone to HIV infection because her vagina is not yet well lined with protective cells and her cervix may be more easily eroded. Risk for HIV transmission is also heightened because hymenal, vaginal, or cervical lacerations increase the transmission rate, and many of these young girls lose their virginity to HIV-infected husbands” (Nour, 2006:4).

- Cervical cancer, a harmful growth that can develop in a woman's cervix (the entrance to the womb from the vagina), is reportedly higher amongst girls who marry before age 18 (Chaouki *et al.*, 1998). Although most developing countries do not have the capacity to effectively screen for cervical cancer, studies carried out in Mali and Morocco shows that 97% of cervical cancer patients were either married as children or they have had a long-term use of oral contraceptives. Nevertheless, other studies suggest poor hygiene is one of the main determinants of cervical cancer (Nour, 2006).
- Domestic violence is also explored in the literature, which indicates that the practice of girl marriage creates a power imbalance between spouses. This is evident in Jensen & Thornton's (2003) research into underage marriages in 16 sub-Saharan countries; which found that the age difference between the men and their wives, an average of 10-years, creates a power imbalance. Most of these girls are more likely to accept that their husband has the right to beat them, and therefore do not report their experiences of domestic violence. In addition, after some years in the marriage, some men due to old age may no longer have the financial means or vigour to satisfy the sexual urge of

their younger wives, this could result into some girls becoming vulnerable and easy prey to prostitution (Jensen & Thornton, 2003). Some girls become vulnerable to prostitution because they lack the financial means to cater for themselves and their children. Figure 2.4 (find below) shows that the percentage of girls who married by age 18 and had experienced domestic violence is significantly higher than the girls who have not (UNICEF, 2005). In India for instance, approximately 70% of girls married by age 18 had suffered domestic violence (UNICEF, 2005). Similarly, in Zambia, approximately 60% of these girls had suffered domestic violence (UNICEF, 2005), a trend which is similar in other countries. (UNICEF, 2005). Equally, Speizer & Pearson (2011) suggest that underage married girls are likely to face the risk of being a widow at an early age. In this case, the young bride is likely to suffer additional discrimination or violence. This is predominant in India, young widows are in some cases held responsible for the death of their husbands, hence, they are ostracised by their community and sometimes denied property rights (Speizer & Pearson, 2011).

Figure 2.4 Proportion of women married by the exact age of 18, by experience of violence (UNICEF, 2005: 22)



While much research has explored harm to girls' physical health, fewer studies have explored psychological harm associated with girl marriage practices. However, Gage's (2013:654) study of girl marriage practises in Ethiopia suggests that some married underage girls have "increased probabilities of suicidal thoughts", and a greater risk of anxiety and depression. These, according to Gage (2013) are as a result of marital stress, and a burden which appears too much for a young girl to bear. Similarly, UNICEF (2001) associates denial of freedom and forced sexual relations, which are believed to be part of the experiences of the girls involved in girl marriage, with psychological issues. The educational consequences are discussed below.

2.3.3. Educational consequences

Prior research suggests that girl marriage limits girls' education because most of the girls in this practice leave school at an early age 8-9 which can be detrimental to their knowledge and ability to make healthy choices (Minh & Quentin, 2014). Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi (2003:42) suggest that the girls involved in girl marriage practises lack the knowledge to enable an independent financial stand, which contributes to the "feminization of poverty". For example, statistics show that over 1 billion people live below the poverty line (Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi (2003). The majority of these are women and children living in rural areas of developing countries, and large percentages of these women married early and are without basic education (Minh & Quentin, 2014).

"This form of poverty is characterized by a lack of human social capital such as livelihood skills, education, interpersonal skills, good health and well-being. Married adolescent girls, especially those from rural settings, are at most risk of being poor and will therefore manifest most of these characteristics of poverty" (Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi, 2003:14).

Abdul (2011), however, argues that marrying out a girl whose parents cannot afford educational fees in some cases can be beneficial to the girl because there is the possibility of her being sponsored by her husband. More so, formal education is not the ultimate. Historically, some girls have married early and succeeded without a formal education. Nonetheless, Petroni (2012) argues that such expectations in most cases are not realistic because most of these girls are coerced into sexual activities after marriage, some get pregnant and, in some cases, end up with health complications (i.e. fistula) that leave them socially isolated.

Summary: This section has noted that the consequences associated with the practice of girl include the violation of the rights of the child, some health consequences of early child-bearing (fistula, maternal death and child mortality), un-protected sexual relations (HIV and cervical cancer), domestic violence, psychological issues (suicidal thoughts) and educational consequences. According to the studies discussed here, these consequences limit the girl-child from self-actualisation and perpetuate a cycle of poverty rather than provide security and support for the child. While it is important to be aware of these consequences, addressing them will be incomplete without a thorough investigation of all the factors that underpin girl marriage practices in developing countries.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to introduce reader to the practice of girl marriage, to explore the suggested causes and examine the associated consequences in a global context. While this chapter did not focus on Nigeria (this is discussed in Chapter 4), the discussion provides an overview of the history and practise of girl marriage in different countries. There are different perspectives and arguments surrounding the practice of girl marriage. Nevertheless, most of the studies suggest that the practice of girl marriage is largely influenced by socio-economic

factors, specifically poverty and limited access to education. While poverty and the lack of education might be relevant in some developing communities, the oversimplification of these particular factors is problematic. Arguably, not all the people in girl marriage practices are poor or uneducated; this is evident in my discussion in Section 2.2.2. The present study critically examines this view in Nigeria's Northern region. While I do not intend to argue that girl marriage is solely underpinned by deeply rooted patriarchy or that the girls involved in this practice are completely powerless (although some may be), I do argue that the practice of girl marriage reinforces the subordination of women, particularly the girl-child. Its continuity indoctrinates gendered identities and if it is continuously oversimplified as an economic or illiteracy issue, it is likely to promote cultural violence (see Chapter 3).

As highlighted in Section 2.2.3, some women who married by age 18 reported that they were not informed about the marriage before the decision was made by their parents and/or community elders. However, very little attention is paid to the perspectives of these decision-makers. What are the perspectives of parents and community elders? The perspectives of these decision makers are important to explore in any discussion of the determinants of girl marriage practices. This study therefore, aims to explore the perspectives of these decision makers in Northern Nigeria within a cultural context. To examine girl marriage within a cultural context, we will need to understand the meaning of culture. The next chapter defines culture and explores its theoretical construction.

CHAPTER 3

Theoretical construction of culture

This chapter will consider definitions of culture, examine its characteristics and explore related cultural theories. Culture holds a pivotal role in the context of girl marriage practices because as previous studies (Parson, 1961; Boas, 1940) have suggested, culture affects human behaviour and all human beings are a product of the culture in which they are raised: ‘The structure of cultural meanings constitutes the “ground” of any system of action’ (Parson, 1961:963). Hence, Nigeria’s cultural context, particularly the culture of the people involved in girl marriage practices is relevant in the study of girl marriage. To this end, this chapter is divided into two sections. Section 3.1 reveals different definitions and characteristics of culture and Section 3.2 explores relevant cultural theories, cultural determinism, cultural relativism and cultural violence.

3.1. What is culture

Culture is described as a complex and problematic concept (Barber & Badre, 1998). The complexity of culture is evident in the various ways people refer to it (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1963). Grove (2005) identifies over 164 different definitions of culture and argues that the different definitions and usage of culture help us to understand the concept in different contexts. For example: Boas (1940) suggests that there are various people of different cultures and societies, all human beings are a product of the culture in which they are raised. People are not simply a product of their physical attributes or race, a person is not primitive based on his/her body shape or skin colour. Rather, a person is primitive because his/her culture is primitive. People are what they learn (cited by Hollins, 2015). While Franz Boas’s

(1940) definition of culture is typically associated with a universal tolerance and respect for cultural differences (details in Section 3.2.2), scholars have continued to define culture in different ways, drawing attention to different characteristics of culture. Ward (2004) described culture as a learned part of human existence, which includes beliefs, languages and practices which are passed on from one generation to another within a specific group of people. Similarly, North (1990, cited by Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2012:1) defines “culture as the set of beliefs people have about how the world (both nature & society) works as well as the norms of the behaviour derived from that set of values”. North’s (1990) definition indicates that culture is not limited to social norms but to economic behaviour (the propensity to save or innovate, investment in education choices etc.). North’s (1990) and Ward’s (2004) definitions of culture are associated with collectivism - a political, economic or cultural system that privileges the norms, beliefs and interest of the community or group above that of an individual. In a collectivist community, the individual is regarded as subordinate to a social collectivity such as a social class, race, nation or a state. The collectivist way of life or type of organisation is more predominant in the African and Asian countries (Bochner, 1994). Hofstede (1994:5) defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another”. This particular definition is associated with the notion of individualism, somewhat different to Ward’s (2004) definition. The individualist “construes persons as separate entities, clearly distinguished from their social milieus” (Bochner, 1994:273). The individualist way of life is typically associated with the ‘West’. Further, Schwartz (1992, cited by Avruch 1998:17) argues that culture:

“consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations

(meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves”.

This places the definition of culture within an historical context, that is, it describes culture as a learned way of life which is passed from one generation to the other. McLellan (1984) also associates the dominant culture in a society with the ruling class (es) in that society.

According to McLellan (1984), the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas. For example, the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. Culture in this view is connected to some forms of social power, synonymous with ideology. It helps to reproduce the power of dominant classes by defining reality in ways that suit their interests (Inglis, 2005; Collins, 1986). Likewise, Triandis (2002), Avruch (1998) and Driver (1961) define culture as a human-made part of the environment which is socially constructed. According to these scholars (Triandis 2002; Avruch, 1998; Driver, 1961), culture is subjective; it is a way of life, or a collective way of doing things. It is the sum of values, attitudes, goals, and practices shared by individuals in a group, organization, or society. Akhil & James (1997) further suggest that culture involves human activities which can be practised differently in diverse communities; culture varies over time, between countries, geographic regions, and among groups and organizations.

In summary, culture is the milieu into which we are born, it is all of those values, beliefs and practices, it presents the socially constructed as ‘natural’ but is clearly a product in time/space determined in some cases by the powerful (Storey, 2015).

Of these different definitions of culture, that of Ward (2004) and North (1990) will be suitable for the analyses of this study because these two definitions describe culture as a learned part of human existence that is passed on from one generation to the other within a

specific group of people. As illustrated in Section 2.1, the practice of girl marriage has been in existence for many generations with different perspectives and arguments underpinning its continuity. Further, North (1990) describes “culture as the set of beliefs people have about how the world (both nature & society) works as well as the norms of the behaviour derived from that set of values” (cited by Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2012:1). An aim of this study is to explore the practice of girl-marriage from the perspectives of the people involved in girl-marriage decisions. Ward’s (2004) and North’s (1990) definitions of culture are therefore useful because they portray the practice of girl marriage as a learned generational practice which has beliefs and meanings. These beliefs are reflected in their perceptions and continuity of girl marriage practices. The next section considers the characteristics of culture in detail to provide understanding of the features or traits of culture in relation to the practice of girl marriage.

3.1.1. Characteristics of culture

The above definitions of culture indicate that culture is a learned concept; culture contains meanings, it differentiates a group of people from the other; culture motivates people to act in certain ways; culture shapes a community or society; culture is subjective and it is connected to some forms of social power. This section illustrates these characteristics of culture in relation to girl marriage.

Culture is learned: Culture is learned, not inherited (Ward (2004). Cultural practices, beliefs and symbols are passed or transmitted from one generation to the other (Hofstede, 1994; Galtung, 1990). The learning process can take several years, months or days during which the learned values, ideas and beliefs of their group are internalised (Galtung, 1990). These beliefs and values become habits; such habits are taken for granted and generally interpreted as ‘natural’ rather than learned (Inglis, 2005). Similarly, when examining girl marriage

practices, it is important to note that the practise of girl marriage is learned and passed from one generation to the other with cultural explanations of why this has to be so. This is evident in the history of girl marriage (see Section 2.1), girl marriage has been in practice since the 14th century (Brewer, 2005; McLaughlin, 1997) and its practice is seen as the norm in some of the communities involved.

Culture contains meanings; it differentiates one group from the other: While some aspects of culture are visible or observable (artifacts, signs and gestures), it is often difficult for an ‘outsider’ to interpret their cultural meaning. Culture is a ‘collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another’ (Hofstede, 1994:5). People from different society can interpret a particular sign, gesture or symbol differently. Therefore, to understand everyday life of a particular community it is necessary to understand how that community is structured and organized (Inglis, 2005). According to Weber (cited in Inglis, 2005:6) “the culture of a group makes sense of the world for people in a particular group; it is the framework through which they experience and understand the world around them”. What is accepted in one cultural context could be interpreted differently in another. Hence, understanding of the cultural context of a practice or beliefs in a society should precede judgement or actions. Although studies associate girl marriage practices with some health and educational consequences (see Section 2.3), it is important to understand that in such a study, girl marriage can have different meanings for the people involved.

Culture motivates people to act in certain ways: Culture is comprised of values and norms which motivate people to act in certain ways that are consistent with or meet the expectations of the wider social structures in which they live (Akhil & James, 1997; Parsons, 1961). “The structure of cultural meanings constitutes the “ground” of any system of action” (Parson,

1961:963), that is, “culture is made up of more general values, which generate specific norms, which in turn guide people to act in ways congruent with the ‘needs’ of the wider social structures in which they operate” (Inglis, 2005:7). This is evident in all societies; individuals are encouraged to embed and conform in a larger group, i.e., Platteau (2000) illustrates a collectivist culture in the context of African countries. According to Platteau (2000), collective punishments exist in some African communities and they are used to penalise any individual who does not conform to the community beliefs or practices. These punishments can take the form of fines, social ostracism, loss of status, or even violence. This characteristic of culture is relevant in the study of girl marriage because Nigeria is a collectivist community and the fact that girl marriage is predominant in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern region (see Section 1.1), suggest that the practice of girl marriage is comprised of values and norms which motivate the people involved in girl marriage decisions.

Culture shapes a community or society: Culture is able to shape the expectations about attributes and behaviours appropriate to women or men and about the relations between women and men within a particular cultural context. Gender identities and gender relations are critical aspects of culture because they shape the way daily life is lived in the family, the wider community or workplace (Schalkwyk, 2000). An example of how gender shapes a society or community is dependent on how a community perceives the roles of women and men. Schalkwyk (2000) suggests that a gendered culture is evident in the division of household chores; some communities have a clear pattern of work for men and women, thereby tagging the work as ‘women’s work’ and ‘men’s work’ and some of these communities also have a cultural explanation of why this should be so. Patterns and

explanations differ in different communities, and the work patterns are subject to change over time. Nevertheless, studies suggest that:

“The general pattern is that women have less personal autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal, and limited influence over the decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives. This pattern of disparity based on gender is both a human right and a development issue” (Schalkwyk, 2000:1).

Notably, such disparities and attitudes are not limited to developing communities: there is always a ‘supposed’ reason why men/boys should be privileged above women/girls (Aina, 2011). In relation to the practice of girl marriage, gendered culture or communities that perceive women/girls as the ‘lesser other’ are likely to promote the practice of girl marriage. A community’s perception of the girl-child is able to influence the age at first marriage for girls in that community.

Culture is subjective: Culture is not a product of the natural environment; it is socially constructed and, as such, can be considered as subjective (although it is objectively manifested). Avruch (1998) argues that culture is the result of human activities; while it can be practised differently, it is the way the people of a society or community have accepted to behave or express their beliefs. For example, this can be the lighting of a candle at a funeral, dressing in a specific way, how to behave in relation to people, when and how to get married etc. Culture is both an individual construct and a social construct (Matsumoto 1996). That is, culture can be created by an individual, small or large group of people. Accepted expressions, behaviours or practices connect the people or an individual with the social form in a way that allows them to feel that connection. The culture being expressed, then, affects how the

individual sees and experiences the world. Nonetheless, an individual, who is a member of a community or society, may to a certain degree refuse to adopt the values and beliefs that constitute his community (Schalkwyk, 2000: Matsumoto 1996). While this is acceptable in some individualistic communities, such an individual could be penalised in some collectivist communities. As highlighted above, these punishments can take the form of fines, social ostracism, loss of status, or even violence (Platteau, 2000). However, culture is subject to gradual change (Inglis, 2005). While it is possible for some technologically simple or preliterate societies to change at a slower pace than the modern and industrialised complex societies, Driver (1961) suggests that it is impossible for a culture to remain completely static year after year; this has been shown in relation to the concept of cultural diffusion. Cultural diffusion can be defined as the borrowing of cultural traits, beliefs and social activities from one group to another through communication, marriage, migration and technology (Ellis, 2008). Nevertheless, some cultural traits are more easily diffused than others. By and large, technological innovations are more likely to be borrowed than are social patterns or belief systems, largely because the usefulness of a particular technological trait can be recognized quickly. To a certain degree, change appears to be a constant feature of all cultures. In relation to the practice of girl marriage, the notion that culture is subjective implies that the practice of girl marriage is both an individual construct and a social construct. Moreover, the practice of girl marriage is not natural, it is a formulated and accepted way of life by the people involved. This suggests that the people involved in girl marriage decisions are able to delay the age at first marriage for girls if they choose to. They are able to practise their marriages differently.

Culture is connected to forms of social power: Culture is also suggested to be connected to forms of social power (Inglis, 2005). “Social power is a capacity to produce effects through

another self' (Rummel, 1976:1), it is instrumental for achieving culturally nurtured goals (Inglis, 2005). A school of thought which includes Marxism and Weberianism suggests that culture is influenced by the ruling class or powerful institutions (for example, law makers) in a society. However, the individuals in these institutions may or may not be aware of their influence (McLellan, 1984). According to Marx (cited in Inglis, 2005:7), "the dominant culture in a society is associated with and generated by the ruling class (es) in that society. The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force". If the ruling class, or any individual in a powerful institution (for example a law maker, traditional ruler, or a community head) is in the practise of girl marriage, it is likely for such individual to promote the cultural practise of girl marriage in his community. That is, the continuity of girl marriage in some communities probably serves the interest and reflects the power of certain group of people in the community.

The discussion of how culture is connected with some forms of social power will not be complete if the meaning of power is not examined. This is relevant because the connection of culture and social power is able to influence the 'generationalisation' of culture in some communities. Weber's definition of power is used as the focus for this discussion because it has been the starting point for many sociologists.

According to Weber (cited by Thompson, 1994:1), power is "the ability of an individual or group to achieve their own goals or aims when others are trying to prevent them from realising them". Weber's definition suggests that power can be either coercive (physical and psychological power) or authoritative (social power). Welding authoritative or social power constitutes exercising power which can be seen as legitimate; and by being legitimate it is effective because those who are subject to the power do so with consent. In contrast,

however, coercion or physical power is where someone exercises power through force, compulsion or intimidation, a case where one is forced to do something against one's wishes (Schoenmakers, 2012). This study will focus on social power because 'dominant norms and attitudes are closely associated with structures of social power; they are typically policed and enforced by persons in positions of authority, such as male heads of households' (Yarrow *et al.*, 2015:7). According to Weber (cited in Thompson, 1994), social power manifests itself in three forms:

- Charismatic authority – this type of social power is based on 'charisma', for example the personal qualities an individual has in order to influence a group or person.
- Traditional authority – also known as traditional domination, is a form of social power that comes from established customs passing power down on a hereditary basis – for example British monarchy.
- Rational-legal authority – this form of social power comes from certain groups having certain positions of power over subordinate groups – for example a policeman giving directives.

Weber (cited in Storey, 2015), however, noted that in history these three types of authority always seemed to occur in combination. The notion of traditional authority is particularly relevant to this study because traditional authority is connected to established norms and practices that are passed from generations to the other such as the practice of girl marriage.

Weber relates traditional authority to patriarchs, their households, and ancient culture communities. In this context, the head is culturally a male who is designated in accordance with the rules of inheritance. He, in some cases, has no need for an administrative staff, nor

any machinery to enforce his will by force alone, he depends on the willingness of subservient group members to respect his authority and they obey him based on the belief that this is their duty, sanctioned by tradition (Thompson, 1994). Therefore, the way of life or beliefs of such individual, in most cases, are reflected in the laws, customs or beliefs of his community. In addition, his personal qualities (charisma) or attitudes are able to influence a group or person in his community (Yarrow *et al.*, 2015). In some cases, his way of life automatically becomes the standard for the community (McLellan, 1984). For example, if the traditional head of a community inherits a polygynous or pronatalist attitude, and this attitude serves his interests, there is the tendency for him to reproduce this attitude into a new generation; i.e., culture reproduced across time. In relation to this study, the practice of girl marriage in some communities is closely associated with structures of social power and may be policed and enforced by persons in positions of authority, such as the male heads of households, community elders or anyone involved in girl marriage decisions.

Summary: Discussion in this section suggests that social norms and beliefs underpin the practice of girl marriage and these are culturally constituted, therefore we need to understand the role of culture and/or the cultural context in which girl marriage practises take place. Such cultural contexts may involve an entire community's beliefs and actions rather than simply those of individuals and their families. This could be one of the reasons girl marriage is predominant in Nigeria's Northern region. Moreover, culture changes over time, so we need to focus on how culture changes and this is linked to notions of power. Therefore, to properly understand girl marriage practices we need to know about the cultural context and the power relations behind it. The next section considers some cultural theories that are related to norms and practices, these theories are relevant to study and interpret the practice of girl marriage.

3.2. Cultural theories

There are many different theories of culture and cultural reproduction, and the definitions of culture that underpin these tend to be very broad and therefore difficult to work with. Thus, different paradigms (in the social sciences) that underpin understandings of culture have led to different research approaches (Hofstede, 2003). This section will explore three cultural theories that are closely related to girl marriage (beliefs, norms and practices) - cultural determinism, cultural relativism and cultural violence. These cultural theories are employed as an analytical lens to view the practice of girl marriage.

3.2.1. Cultural determinism

The theory of cultural determinism posits that a person's emotions and behaviour is determined by the culture in which the person is raised, this means that we are dominated by socio-environmental influences instead of biologically inherited traits (Barber, 2008). While anthropologists focus on differences in religion, bodily decoration, sexuality, marriage, language etc., sociologists and social psychologists focus on differences that include class differences and attitudes to women and minorities (Barber, 2008). These variations, according to cultural determinists, are the main evidence that cultural differences influence societal differences. A person learns or adopts the values, ideas and beliefs of his group and goes on to behave like the members of his/her group or society. These 'rules', in most cases, are passed on first by oral tradition, and subsequently by written and electronic media in developed countries (Schoenmakers, 2012). Nevertheless, changes are made to these rules over time due to accumulated thoughts such as errors, implications, religious traditions and bodies of law (Graham, 2010). Determinism concerns the degree of freedom people have; we are able (to some extent) to have some choice in how we act, we are free to choose our behaviour, in other words we are self-determined (Barber, 2008). For example, people can make a free choice as to whether to commit a crime or not (unless they are a child or they are

insane). This does not mean that behaviour is random, but we are free from the causal influences of past events (Schoenmakers, 2012).

According to cultural determinism, a person is responsible for their own actions, people are the bearers of structure. However, cultural determinism faces some criticisms, critics argue that cultural determinism lacks validity and that its explanations are mostly circular or moralistic. For example, cultural determinism is critiqued for attributing violent crime to a culture of violence, without an explanation of what causes some societies to be more violent. Similarly, on the issue of polygamous marriage in some societies, cultural determinism is critiqued for suggesting some moralistic explanations such as patriarchal attitudes, oppression of women and ignorance, while evidence reveals that the scarcity of males in some communities is the reason for polygamy (Barber, 2012). Therefore, while cultural determinism may provide some insights into girl marriage practices, it does not provide a means to examine the reasons behind the continuation of the practice. Having examined cultural determinism, an exploration of cultural relativism as an analytical lens to interpret the practice of girl marriage is undertaken.

3.2.2. Cultural relativism

Franz Boas (1940), who is often referred to as the father of American anthropology, identified the notion of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism posits that the customs of different societies are all that exist and the view of 'universal truth in ethics' is a myth (Rachels, 1999). Truth is only considered to be universal or absolute if it is valid at all times (for example, in the field of Mathematics). However, it is believed that there is no universal truth in ethics because 'there is no independent standard; every standard is culture-bound' (Rachels, 1999:14). According to cultural relativists, there are no independent standards for considering right or wrong, by which people may be judged; there is no universal 'right way'

of being human because the 'right way' of one society could be the 'wrong way' of another (Rachels, 1999). Hence tolerance is the proper attitude of an informed mind (Benedict, 1934 cited by Graham, 2010). William Graham Sumner (1906, cited in Rachels, 1999:14), the great pioneering sociologist puts it this way:

“The 'right' way is the way which the ancestors used and which has been handed down. The tradition is its own warrant. It is not held subject to verification by experience. The notion of right is in the folkways. It is not outside of them, of independent origin, and brought to test them. In the folkways, whatever is, is right. This is because they are traditional, and therefore contain in themselves the authority of the ancestral ghosts. When we come to the folkways we are at the end of our analysis”.

Cultural relativism posits that negotiations are likely to succeed when the values, beliefs and practices of a society are understood. This approach calls for caution when dealing with the beliefs and customs different to our own. Nevertheless, while poststructuralists and postmodernists celebrate cultural relativism, it is viewed negatively by moral conservatives who regard it as the end of participation in civic affairs and the demise of moral obligation (Horowitz, 2004). Political and moral conservatives reject the shift of cultural relativism away from “objective, identifiable standards as the measure for all truth claims. Their concerns centre on the way that cultural relativism makes it difficult for people to assert how one set of practices, or truths, is (morally) better than others” (Horowitz, 2004:4).

An example of the dilemma posed by cultural relativism is the issue of female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM is “a procedure where the female genitals are deliberately cut, injured or changed, but where there's no medical reason for this to be done” (NHS, 2016:1).

While FGM is condemned as a patriarchal practice (see Section 2.3) and associated with health consequences, the people involved in this practice interpret it as “a symbolic practice that signals a rite of passage embedded in culturally salient idioms of purity, embodiment, sexuality, and fertility” (Howson, 2009:4). Through the lens of cultural relativism, it is difficult to describe FGM as immoral, because what is immoral in the West is not necessarily understood as immoral in the communities involved in this practise. Cultural relativists, argue that Westerners that criticise some non-Western cultural practices such as FGM do not do so through:

“any universal standards of morality or understandings of pain and suffering, but through a particular, local cultural framework (i.e. Western) that universalises experience and standardises what is considered right and what is not; that views its reaction as universally rational when, in the framework of cultural relativism, it is in fact particular and local” (Howson, 2009:4).

Nevertheless, Kanarek argues that “cultural relativism sanctions the worst manifestation of violence and oppression” (2013:10) because it makes some victims of cultural practices (such as FGM) morally defenceless against those who harm them by sanctioning the actions of the aggressor (Kanarek, 2013). Similarly, Perusek (2007) argues that cultural relativism disarms men with its argument that there are no standards by which cross-cultural judgment is at all possible. The claim of cultural relativism “that there is no meaningful way to judge different cultures” (Kanarek, 2013:10) implies that individuals and their ideas or practices cannot be judged. It morally sanctions the aggressor by validating their actions. Cultural relativism posits that all ways of life are equally valid “because there are various cultural ideas and practices and there is no way to adjudicate them, then the source of their validity lies in the fact that they are cultural practices” (Kanarek, 2013:12).

The implication of cultural relativism is that a culture that protects individual rights for all men and women is as equally valid the culture that treats women as the insignificant 'other' (Howson 2009). Consequently, cultural relativism has been "appropriated by third world bourgeois-nationalist elites to undermine pre-colonial rights of members of various non-Western communities" (Prasad, 2007: 589). Kanarek (2013:13) reiterates that:

"cultural relativism is destructive in both theory and practice. In its theoretical denial of reason and objective reality, it sanctions the worst forms of violence and oppression in practice. This is unsurprising; a theory that adamantly denies reason and reality cannot be suitable for the latter, nor be sound according to the former".

A cultural relativist approach has several consequences for understanding girl marriage practices (Perusek 2007 & Howson 2009). Applying the cultural relativism lens to the practice of girl marriage would validate fistula, maternal death, child mortality, domestic violence, psychological issues and the educational consequences of girl marriage (see Sections 2.3.2 & 2.3.3). As such, cultural relativism can be seen to sanction violence or harmful cultural practices (Nafisi, 2006). Johan Galtung (1990:1) refers to this as 'cultural violence': "aspects of a culture that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence". The next section examines cultural violence in detail.

3.2.3. Cultural violence

Cultural violence is when a person is harmed as a result of practices that are part of their culture (Galtung, 1990): Cultural violence is "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence - exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) - that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence" (Galtung, 1990:291). Such practises have been on-going for generations

and while there are visible forms of violence and oppression in such cultures, these practices have come to be the accepted standard of living for everyone in the communities involved (Galtung, 1990 and Galtung, 1969). As highlighted above, if cultural relativism is espoused in its entirety, the implication will be sanctioning violence or harmful cultural practices.

Galtung (1990:292) argues that,

“One way cultural violence works is by changing the moral colour of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable: an example being murder on behalf of the country as right, on behalf of oneself wrong. Another way is by making reality opaque, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or at least not as violent”.

This is evident in Archambault’s (2011) argument of early marriage as a decision made out of love, concern, and insecurity” (see Section 2.2.2). While Archambault’s (2011) argument might be relevant in the case of the Maasai in Kenya, I argue against this view. Archambault (2011) emphasised that some girl marriage decisions in Enkop are underpinned by “land and resource fragmentation and dispossession, increasing climate instability, continuous state neglect and lack of confidence in the education system” (2011:640). One might ask why these factors are not able to hinder the boy-child from attending schools or getting married at the age the girls in Enkop are getting married, or better still, why a different solution might not be found than one which damages girls and women. While I do not take lightly the plights of the people in Enkop or argue that the girls in Enkop need to be rescued, I argue that prioritising the education of the boy-child over that of the girl-child based on the reasons highlighted by Archambault (2011) is in a way authorising gendered identity (see Section 3.1.1) and maintaining existing power relations, so that a cultural practice has become socially acceptable.

One solution to cultural violence is a commitment to the idea of universal standards. Universal standards can be described as ‘a global yardstick against which to assess and objectively compare the wellbeing of the population of concern’ (UNHCR, 2006:16). Nevertheless, some researchers (for example, Li, 2007) argue that it is possible for one to adopt a cultural relativist stance without abandoning human rights or a commitment to the idea of universal standards. “Cultural relativism needs to be seen as a methodological position that explains the practices and ideas of other cultures within the terms of their own cosmologies, without necessarily sanctioning them” (Howson, 2009:4). Therefore, while I argue for the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria to be examined within a cultural context, I do not aim to sanction the practice, neither do I argue that the girls involved are completely powerless or passive. However, I do argue that the continuity of this practice reinforces women’s subordination to men, thereby maintaining the culture of inequality.

Summary: This section explored cultural determinism, cultural relativism and cultural violence. The usefulness of these ideas to understanding girl marriage practices was explored. It was argued that it is possible for one to adopt a cultural relativist stance without sanctioning cultural violence.

Conclusion

This chapter has defined culture and examined its characteristics: this will inform this research into the continuity of girl marriage, within a cultural context, from the perspectives of the people involved. While culture has diverse definitions and characteristics, Ward (2004) and North (1990)’s definitions will be suitable for the analyses of this study because of their inclusive description and recognition that culture includes norms, beliefs and values which have meanings and these meanings can be transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves (see Section 3.2.3).

This research will explore the practice of girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region as a cultural practice. Cultural relativism, as a theory, is drawn upon methodologically to explain the practice of girl marriage from the perspectives of the people involved.

As highlighted in this chapter, to understand the everyday life or cultural practice of a particular people, it is important to understand how the society in which they live is itself structured and organized (Inglis, 2005). This study aims to provide understanding of the cultural practice of girl marriage from the perspectives of the Northern Nigerian people involved. To this end, it is necessary to understand how the community under investigation is structured and organized. The next chapter will examine the community involved; its history and cultural practices of girl marriage.

CHAPTER 4

Girl marriage in Nigeria

This chapter examines the history and present day practice of girl marriage in Nigeria to see how socio-economic issues, political, religion and cultural context have influenced the age at first marriage in Nigeria. In examining the impact of these factors, the chapter reveals how, particularly in Northern Nigeria, the practice of girl marriage has continued over time.

The chapter is divided into five sections; Section 4.1 provides a brief introduction to Nigeria as a nation. Section 4.2 examines Nigeria before its colonisation by the British, whilst Section 4.3 explores Nigeria's transition from British colonial rule and independence (1850-1960). Section 4.4 focuses on the years following independence up to the year the Nigerian government passed the 2003 CRA (1960- 2003). Finally, Section 4.5 looks at Nigeria's Northern region, the CRA, and prior studies of girl marriage in Nigeria. Each section describes the political, legal, socio-economic, religious, cultural and marital patterns and gender relations at the time. While the focus of this study is on Nigeria's Northern region, relevant studies in other regions of Nigeria are also referred to in order to draw attention to any similarities or differences.

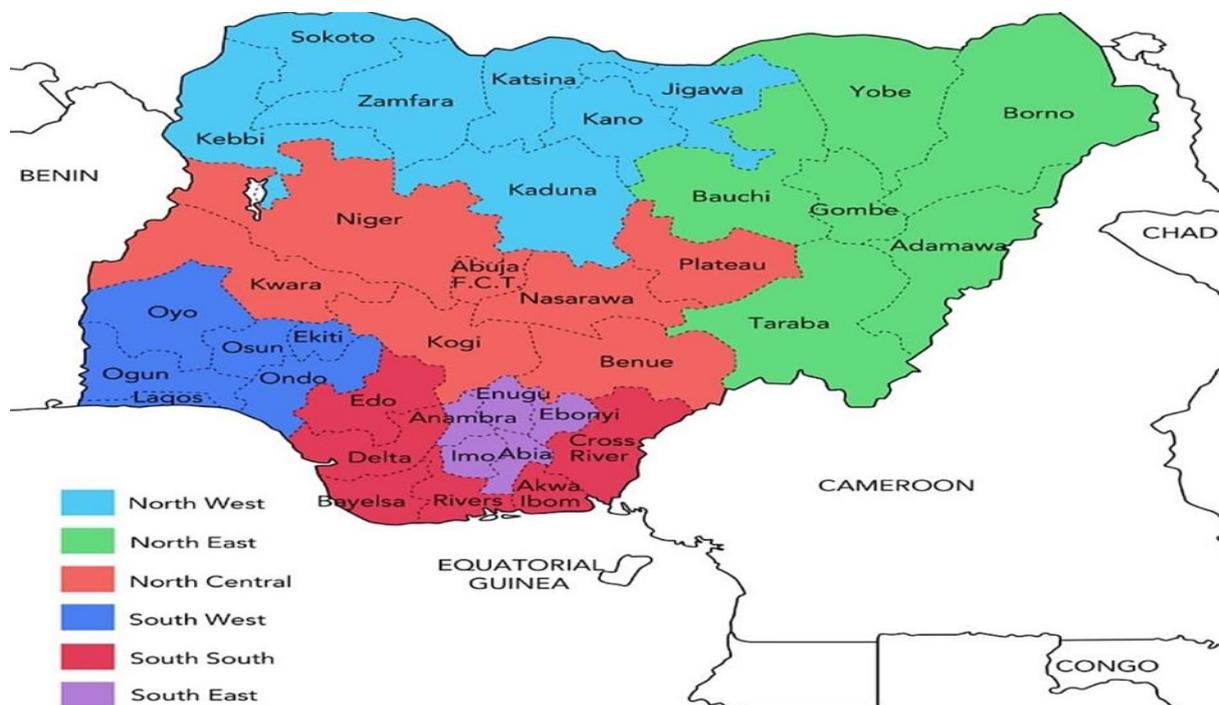
4.1. Nigeria: overview

Nigeria is a West African country located on the Gulf of Guinea with an estimated population of 193.3 million (NPC, 2017). There are 36 states in Nigeria and they are divided (see Nigeria's map below) into 6 geo-political zones:

- The North Central States (Kogi, Niger, Benue, Kwara, Plateau, Nasarawa and the Federal Capital Territory).

- The North-Eastern States (Taraba, Borno, Bauchi, Adamawa, Gombe and Yobe).
- The North-Western States (Kaduna, Kebbi, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kano, Jigawa and Katsina).
- The South-Eastern States (Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Abia and Anambra).
- The South-Southern States (Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Edo, Cross Rivers and Delta).
- The South-Western States (Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, Ekiti, Kwara and Osun).

Figure 4.1: Nigeria's geographical map (NPC, 2017:4)



While there are over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria with different dialects, Nigeria is shaped by its 3 largest ethnic groups, the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo (Imobighe, 2003). These ethnic groups represent 71% of Nigeria's population and are evident in Northern Nigeria.

However, the Hausa-Fulani ethnicity out numbers every other ethnic group, accounting for 82

two-thirds of Nigeria's population (Falola & Heaton, 2008). There are 3 predominant religions in Nigeria: 49.3% of Nigerians are Christians, 48.8% are Muslims and 19% have indigenous practices (idolatry). In the Northern region (which is the focus of this study), 71.7% are Muslims, 9.7% are Christians and 18.6% belong to other religions (Falola & Heaton, 2012). Falola & Heaton (2012) suggest that some who identify as Christians or Muslims still practise the indigenous beliefs of their tribes. This can be seen in their ways of life which includes traditional attires, staple foods, superstitious beliefs and practices, cultural celebrations and marriage practises (Hodgkin, 1969). This is evident also in both the diasporic and transnational types of Nigerian migrants. While these people have travelled and settled in different part of the world, studies (Falola & Heaton, 2012) suggest that some have maintained their social and cultural connections to their homelands. This is evident in the yearly homecoming of Nigerians from around the world for the cultural celebration of the 'Osun Oshogbo' in the South-western region of Nigeria, the new-yam festival which is celebrated in most of the states in Nigeria, and the 'Eyo' festival in Lagos state. While the 'Eyo masquerade' (see pictures below) is believed to represent the 'spirit of the ancestors', it is celebrated by Christians and Muslims in Lagos state. Although "colonial institutions and exposure to 'modernity' undeniably contributed in shaping Nigeria's culture and marriage practises, Nigerians have rarely lost connections and commitments to their families, villages and cultural values" (Falola, 2006: 17).

Figure 4.2: Eyo festival (National Institute for Cultural Orientation, 2017:1)



Therefore, to understand the practice of girl marriage in Nigeria, the history and socio-cultural backgrounds of the people involved should be incorporated. The next section will explore the legal, political, socio-economic, religion and marriage pattern in pre-colonial Nigeria.

4.2. Pre-colonial era in Nigeria

Any discussion of Nigeria's pre-colonial past encounters the problem of a lack of empirical primary sources due to the oral tradition practised at that time. However, this section will employ the few available historical records to locate the marriage patterns in Nigeria in relation to the legal, political, economic, religious and cultural context of the time.

While it is anachronistic to refer to the period before the European colonisation of Nigeria as 'pre-colonial', general histories of Nigeria tend to refer to this period as such.

"Archaeological evidence indicates that human societies have been constantly present in all regions of Nigeria for several thousand of years" (Falola & Heaton, 2012:16). Over the course of human history, several groups of people, societies, vast empires and states have migrated in and out of Nigeria. Hence, the history of Nigeria's social interactions is certainly

not meaningless before the colonisation of Nigeria by Britain in the early 19th century (Falola 2016).

In the early 9000 BCE -1500 CE, Nigerians were largely an agricultural people; they were food self-sufficient and exported a variety of their produce with the African region (Falola 2016). According to the historical record, during this period Nigerian women contributed enormously to the production and distribution of agricultural produce (Attoe, 2002).

Although most women from Northern Nigeria were often secluded based on Islamic religion in the region, some were involved in household food processing and harvesting on the farms (Attoe, 2002). Local trades were structured by gender, men learned farming and cattle rearing while women learned local trades such as weaving of baskets, tie and dye, food processing, etc. depending on their interest (Olaniyan, 1985).

In terms of education in Nigeria at the time, children were taught some practical skills which was needed to function successfully in traditional society. For example, from the age of 4 or 5 years, the child was taught the customs of their community and assigned specific duties around the village (Falola 2016). As the children grew older, boys were introduced to farming and more specialized work such as wood carving and drumming (Attoe, 2002). Girls, on the other hand, would learn farming and domestic skills. Also in some regions, particularly the north, studies suggest that basic *quranic* schools were established for boys by the Arab merchants who traded in the Northern community at the time (Junaid, 2005). These schools were strictly religious in nature. In each Northern community at the time, it was common to see a '*mallam*' (learned scribe) teaching boys as young as 5 years old Arabic alphabet and the Qur'an (Junaid, 2005).

Regarding religion, studies suggest that Nigerians were predominantly traditionalists (idolatrous). However, in the 11th century, Arab merchants who had settled in the north introduced Islam to this region (Junaid, 2005). Most Northern rulers accepted Islam due to the political and trade advantages it brought: Islam connected the region to the Islamic world and Europe; it offered the Northern leaders a strong relationship with other Islamic powers in Sahara, North Africa and Sudan (Falola & Heaton, 2016). Despite these important connections to the Islamic world however, historical studies suggest that the Islam practised in some of the Northern states at the time was not orthodox or ubiquitous. Most people living in rural areas were yet to be converted, they maintained their indigenous practise of 'Bori cult of local spirits' (Falola & Heaton, 2012). During this period, Northern Nigerians were often accused of being only 'nominal' Muslims that accepted the tenets of Islam because of the prestige, power and trading relationship the religion had to offer (Junaid, 2005).

On the other hand, Christianity was introduced to Nigeria by the Portuguese in 1350 (Erivwo, 1979). A Portuguese priest is believed to have settled in the south-western region, but links to the slave trade limited conversions to Christianity at that time (Erivwo, 1979). Religion is important to note here because of links to marriage patterns and gender relations.

4.2.1. Marriage patterns and gender relations

Nigeria was shaped by a culture of gendered roles before its colonisation. This is evident in the pattern of marriage practices and gender relations at the time. While the age at first marriage during this era is not certain, Crowder (1979) suggests that it was common for parents to choose a husband for their daughters as soon as they attained puberty which for some girls could be at age 10 or 12. Inter-marriage (marriage between people from different regions and religions) was common in the pre-Colonial era because of inter-regional trading activities, making cultural-barriers very porous: "Indeed, many origin myths in the societies

of the Nigerian region speak to the antiquity of the inter-group relationships that existed in Nigeria at the time” (Falola & Heaton, 2012:37). For example, the Idoma and the Efik from the south-eastern region claim their origin in inter-marriage between the Niger delta and the west. Similarly, the Igala people in the middle belt, further eastern region, have similar traditions to the Yoruba in the south-western region. Therefore, marriage at puberty was the norm for most Nigerians at the time (Ikpe, 2004; Harunah, 2003; Abaronye, 1997; Okojie, 1994). Nevertheless, it is not certain if these girls had sexual intercourse immediately after marriage (Ezenweke, 2015).

Oral tradition suggests that the reason for marriage at puberty during Nigeria’s pre-colonial era include:

- Polygamy and pronatalist culture: during this period, a man’s wealth and status was shown by the number of wives and children he had. Much more, if a man is able to marry a younger girl as a 3rd or 4th wife during his old age. Having a young wife indicates that a man is wealthy in cattle or agricultural farmland and has a traditional status (i.e. chieftaincy title). This practice was predominant amongst traditional rulers, chiefs and community elders (Okojie, 1994).
- Similarly, girl marriage was encouraged during Nigeria’s pre-colonial era to ensure older men have a young wife who would care and support them during their old age (Ogunniran, 2010).
- It was acceptable for families to give their daughters in marriage as a form of gift to a traditional ruler or, in some extreme cases, in exchange for debts owed (Ukwuoma, 2014).

With regards to gender relations, Nigerian women were confronted with many cultural beliefs concerning their gender role. Typically, the marriage institution defined many aspects of gender roles. “Women had no proper status in the community, being simply creatures of man to be exploited and degraded” (Njoku, 2012:55). For example, it was not acceptable for women to take major decisions without the consent of a patriarch, specifically the head of the family. Women also had limited rights to the land they cultivated; during this period, landed properties were exclusive rights of men (Omadjohwoefe, 2011). While the cultural explanations for such gender roles is not clear, there are speculations that the rationale behind this practice was that girls would one day get married and go to their husband’s home to inherit his property (Omadjohwoefe, 2011). This however, is dependent on the woman’s ability to have a male child. In a case where a woman is unable to give birth to a male child, her husband’s property will be transferred to his kinsmen (Crowder, 1979).

Summary: In the pre-Colonial era both Islam and Christianity were introduced to Nigeria, although traditional practices also continued. Marriage at puberty was the norm and this practice was not limited to a particular region, because there was inter-marriage amongst people of different regions. Nigerian women were limited to some traditional gender roles. Historical records suggest that poverty was not the main reason for marriage at puberty for girls. The next section will explore Nigerian under the British colony.

4.3. Nigeria 1850-1960: the British colony

British Christian missionaries initially migrated to Nigeria with the aim to convert the area to anti-slavery, ‘legitimate’ commerce and, ultimately, to their ideas of Christian ‘civilisation’. However, in the second half of the 19th century, the British interest in Nigeria focused more closely on the local affairs of the indigenous communities (Falola & Heaton, 2012).

Indigenous leaders courted British missionaries and political agents in the hope of finding

valuable allies who could help them achieve greater power against their local rivals (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Missionaries became influential in Nigeria's local politics and established churches and Christian societies (CMS) in some states (Abaronye, 1997). The spread of Christianity occurred most in the south-western and south-eastern states. In the 1880s the British missionaries and the American Southern Baptist mission established some missions in the Northern regions of Zaria, Bida and Yola. However, they were unable to penetrate into the Islamic territory of the Sokoto Caliphate (even after British rule was established in the 20th century) (Falola & Heaton, 2012).

Two factors are thought to have contributed to the success of the Christian missionaries throughout the coastal and forest zones of Nigeria (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Firstly, indigenous leaders thought that accepting the Christian god would place them at supernatural advantage above their local rivals in time of political unrest and economic transformation. Secondly, from a commercial standpoint, the schools established by the missionaries focused on reading and writing English language, which was needed to trade more effectively along the coast during this time (Falola & Heaton, 2012).

While the British missionaries continued with their propagation of Christianity, the activities of the British traders in Nigeria also led to a deeper involvement of the British into the politics of indigenous states. The Nigerian people resisted the British colonial rule for several reasons. For example, the Nigerian people were forced to work for cash and the colonial officials commandeered labour on a regular basis without consent of the people (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Similarly, some gendered roles in the communities were re-fashioned to meet the needs of the colonial economy (Yakubu, 2005). Most women, particularly in the north,

became more involved in farm work and agricultural trades; they were entering a more male-dominated area of work. Traditional rulers found that they maintained their power at the behest of the colonial officers, who ensured that colonial directives were enforced at all times. Indigenous rulers who tried to resist the injustice of the British colonial officers were ousted and their places taken by more malleable replacements (Falola & Heaton, 2012). The British colonisation of Nigeria was completed in 40 years after a series of British manoeuvres (Yakubu, 2005). Nevertheless, the continuous pressure from several nationalist groups led to more constitutional reforms that finally increased “Nigerian self-governance at the regional levels and ultimately resulted in complete independence for Nigeria from British rule on October 1, 1960” (Falola & Heaton, 2012:136). The next section will briefly discuss the effect of the British colonial rule on Nigeria’s socio-economic, religion, culture and marriage patterns.

4.3.1. Impacts of the British colony in Nigeria

The Nigerian economy expanded under the British colonial rule. The British economic framework focused on Nigeria’s cash crop and mineral production, thereby expanding Nigeria’s import and export market (Falola & Heaton, 2012). Nigerian cities grew rapidly and people moved to the urban regions for better jobs in either commercial forms or civil services. Commercial infrastructures were expanded, promoting trade throughout the Nigerian region. There were large scale improvements to the telecommunications and transportation systems (Harunah, 2003). Nigeria witnessed a change from the indigenous trading system to an international system of trading under the British colony (Arikpo, 1967). Nigeria’s educational sector was also transformed during the colonial rule. The number of primary and secondary schools increased in all regions of the country, and there was also the creation of free access universal primary education in the southern region. The education

sector in the Northern region varied to that of other regions due to the strong hold of Islamism there. In the Northern region, the colonial administration set up more Islamic schools (19,073 schools and enrolled 143,312 students) that included other subjects aside from Islamic studies, such as maths and science. However, boys and girls did not have equal access to education in the Northern region. Girls were not included in formal education (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Studies suggest that while Christianity had an effect on the behaviours and beliefs of some Nigerians (majorly in the south-western region), most Nigerians continued in their traditional practices (Falola & Heaton, 2012; Junaid, 2005). The Islamic religion and the 'Bori cult of the spirit' had a stronger hold in the north (Junaid, 2005). European-educated middle-class Nigerians consciously portrayed a mixed identity of the 'traditional' and the 'modern', they embraced their indigenous culture while continuing to believe in the benefits of the Christian missionary education (Falola & Heaton, 2012). While they worked as teachers in the missionary schools they also promoted the use of indigenous language in the schools and encouraged the teaching of Nigeria's history (Falola & Heaton, 2012). Further, Nigerians converts to Christianity were reported to adapt their teachings to fit the cultural peculiarities of the Nigerian communities. While preaching Christian values, they were tolerant of polygamy in the community churches, and incorporated indigenous cultural elements such as using traditional drums and singing traditional songs (Falola & Heaton, 2012).

4.3.2. Marriage patterns and gender relations

Although the British authorities introduced the English Law (via ordinance No 3 of 1863) upon the creation of the colony of Lagos-Nigeria in 1862, British colonial rule did little to prevent pronatalist attitudes, the practise of polygamous marriage, or strongly gendered roles (Falola, 2008; Uweru, 2010). However, in 1949 the British emphasised a marriageable age

which stipulated age 14 for boys and 12 for girls (Akanbi, *et al.*, 2015; Uweru, 2010). The reason for the specific ages stipulated in the 1949 Marriage Act is however not clear. Neither is it clear if Nigerians adhered to the 1949 Marriage Act, but British missionaries were successful in converting some Nigerians (mainly in the Lagos colony at the time) who married in accordance with the 1949 Marriage Act (Nwogugu, 2014). The 1949 Marriage Act was replaced with the 1970 Marriage Act after Nigeria gained independence (Pearl, 1997). The 1970 Marriage Act invalidated the 1949 Marriage Act (this is detailed in Section 4.4.1).

As regards gender relations, Arikpo, (1967) suggests that British colonial policies were not favourable to the Nigerian women. The British made little attempt to alter Nigeria's gender role tradition. Rather, the colonial education policy followed the Nigerian traditional pattern of limiting women and girls' access to education and hence reinforced traditional and restrictive gender roles (Yakubu, 2005). British colonial administration limited women/girls to domestic science classes to enable them to become good homemakers, while boys and men were able to learn technological and clerical skills to enable them become income earners (Nwogugu, 2014). Men were also encouraged to travel out of Nigeria to study, thereby creating an educational gap between men and women (Falola & Heaton, 2012). More so, as labour was divided at the time to meet the needs of the colonial economy, most Nigerian women were located on the farm, with south-eastern women increasingly responsible for food production, while south-western women were involved in food processing (Uweru, 2010). Similar to the pre-colonial era, women had no legal rights to the land they cultivated (Ezejiofor, 2011). However, studies reveal that the limitations imposed by the colonial government reflected gendered traditions operating before colonial rule. For example, Nigerian women had traditionally been responsible for food preparation (Arikpo, 1967). Nevertheless, the women increasingly benefited from the colonial economy as many began to

make money as traders in their own rights and began to get involved in Western education after the 10-year plan of the British colonial rule which created more schools and free basic education (Attoe, 2002).

Summary: The colonial era was a time of significant change in Nigeria's political, legal and socio-economic sectors. It was also a time of religious change. Colonial rule was more focused on economic gains than altering indigenous practises. Nonetheless, the Marriage Act of 1949 stipulated a marriage age for the first time. The next section will examine the years after independence up to when the Nigerian government passed the 2003's Child Rights' Act (CRA) to explore changes in Nigeria's legal, political, socio-economic, religion, culture and marriage patterns.

4.4. After independence: 1960 - 2003

This section will briefly explore changes in the years after Nigeria gained independence, up to when the Nigerian government declared a specific marriageable age in 2003. An exploration of this period is needed to enable a detailed understanding of the continuation of girl marriage practises in Nigeria and what triggered the passing of Nigeria's 2003 Child Rights Act (CRA), which stipulates 18 as the marriageable age for both boys and girls.

4.4.1. Legal and political changes: 1960-2003

After Nigeria achieved independence from British colonial rule in 1960, expectations were high for the future of the country (Falola & Heaton, 2012). In particular, the discovery of commercial quantities of petroleum in the Niger delta region in 1958 increased Nigeria's potential for economic growth. Nigerians were at the forefront of African affairs and the country became a beacon of hope and progress for other colonized Africa countries emerging from alien rule (Uweru, 2010). Following independence in 1960 there was a problem of national unity. Scholars, artists and politicians tried to construct a unique Nigerian culture

through their writings, speeches, arts and legislation, with the aim to bring Nigerians closer together politically, economically and culturally, and to promote commonalities and downplay differences (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Attoe, 2002).

These efforts were not successful due to strong regional identities and a weak national identity, people from different regions feared they would be side-lined from governmental positions and many came to believe that the federal system was dysfunctional (Attoe, 2002). By 1970, the stability and prestige of Nigeria had been greatly damaged by a decade of political corruption, economic underdevelopment, and military coups. Much more damaging was the culmination of the problems from a two-and-a-half-year civil war from 1967 to 1970 (Falola & Heaton, 2012). The civil war divided the country along regional and ethnic lines; approximately 1- 3 million people were killed which almost destroyed the fragile federal bonds that held the Nigerian state together (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

The geographical area which is now known as Nigeria was not created by the indigenous peoples themselves, it was created by the British colonial administration in 1914 (Falola & Heaton, 2012). In reality, this designation meant little to most people, particularly those in the rural areas, whose lives continued to be primarily centred on local communities which had existed for hundreds and thousands of years before the colonisation (Njoku, 2006). The British colonial government's 1950s Constitution in Nigeria undermined the development of a unified national consciousness by determining that access to power at the national level should be determined from holding power at the regional level (Uweru, 2010). Therefore, the largest ethnic groups in each region – the Yoruba (western region), Igbo (eastern region) and Hausa/Fulani (Northern region) came to dominate their respective regions and contested power at the federal level (Falola & Heaton, 2008). This structure however was not favourable to other minor ethnic groups, hence; they often opposed the political domination

of the large ethnic groups. As a result, these minority groups felt increasingly alienated from Nigeria's political process, creating further sub-divisions of identity that was reduced from the development of a single, encompassing Nigerian national identity (Njoku, 2006).

Nigerian leaders commenced self-governance by revisiting most of the constitutions and laws that were put in place by the British colonial rule; including the 1949 Marriage Act. Studies suggest that the motive behind this was to replace the British policies with Nigeria's indigenous customs and practices (Falola & Heaton, 2012; Njoku, 2006). More so, there was need to build a unified national identity which included the customs and practices of all the regions in Nigeria at the time (Uweru, 2010). Therefore Nigeria's 1970 Constitution was designed to be inclusive. The 1970 Marriage Act was passed to replace the British-influenced Marriage Act of 1949. The Nigerian 1970 Marriage Act acknowledged customs of the Nigerian people by legalising customary marriages (commonly called traditional marriage), Islamic marriages and constitutional marriages (s) (Brimah, 2014; Yakubu, 2005). Notably, however, Nigeria's 1970 Marriage Act did not stipulate any marriageable age as was specified in the 1949 Marriage Act (see Section 4.3); rather it required parental consent if the girl is below 21 years of age (Byfield, 2001). While it is not clear what the Nigerian government meant by below age 21, it suggests that it would be acceptable for a girl to get married at any age. Further, the 1970 Constitution included some gendered expectations and roles for the Nigerian women (this will be discussed in Section 4.4.4).

Despite the supposedly inclusive Constitution in 1970, by 1990, Nigeria had experienced five coups d'état (Falola & Heaton, 2008). The Nigerian military finally relinquished power to a democratically elected government led by Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. It is, however, relevant to note here that before the military regime relinquished power in 1999, some additions were made to the Marriage Act, including in Part 1, section 61 that

“Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or customs, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or customs in worship, teaching, practice and observance” (cited by Braimah, 2014:3).

This section of the Nigerian Constitution is interpreted as, “the Nigerian federal government cannot interfere with Islamic and customary marriages” (Braimah, 2014:1). While the reason for this is not clear, studies suggest that this section of the Nigerian Constitution is a contributing factor to the continuation of girl marriage practises in Nigeria (Braimah, 2014; Ukwuoma, 2014).

Nigeria witnessed several changes under Obasanjo’s civilian regime (1999-2007). Obasanjo aimed to restore Nigeria’s economy and international image (Braimah, 2014). In 2003 the agreement that was made with the UN (in 1989) and the African Union (in 1990) on the adoption of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was revisited (see Section 1.2), leading to the 2003 Child Rights Act (Braimah, 2014; Ukwuoma, 2014). One of the aims of this Act was to prohibit the practice of girl marriage in Nigeria by stipulating a marriageable age (Okpalaobi & Ekwueme, 2015). However, while Nigeria passed the CRA in 2003 and declared the Nigerian child as under 18, Nigeria is yet to scrap the 1970 Marriage Act which does not stipulate any marriageable age. In addition, the Nigerian constitution permits legislative jurisdictions on issues concerning children to be an exclusive right of the states (see Section 1.2). This inconsistency in Nigeria’s Constitution makes the issue of girl marriage in Nigeria complex (Braimah, 2014; Ukwuoma, 2014).

The above discussion is a brief illustration of some changes in Nigeria's legal and political context after its independence from British colonial rule from 1960 to 2003. The next section will briefly examine some changes in Nigeria's economic and educational sector during this period.

4.4.2. Economic and education changes: 1960-2003

This section will first examine economic changes, then educational changes.

Economic changes: After independence, increasing numbers of rural Nigerians attended school. Once educated, most of these children were less likely to work on family farmlands; most of them went for 'white collar' jobs, resulting in a declining agricultural labour force (Falola & Heaton, 2012). Studies suggest that Nigeria's economy as a whole was improving slowly after independence, with national incomes growing at an average rate of 5 % between 1963 and 1966 (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s however, Nigeria's economy started to suffer from corrupt authoritarian military regimes (Falola & Heaton, 2012). The global decline in international crude oil prices and the temporary closure of oil wells in the Niger Delta further contributed to Nigeria's economic downturn (Njoku, 2006).

From 1999 to 2007 however, during Obasanjo's regime, Nigeria's economy started to witness a revival. In 2006, Obasanjo struck an agreement deal with the Paris Club (a group of nineteen countries), and reduced the "total foreign debt from \$35 billion to \$5 billion" (Falola & Heaton, 2012: 198). While Obasanjo's economic policies improved Nigeria's international reputation, particularly with international investors and donors, domestically the majority of Nigerians struggled with poverty. One possible implication of this is that the practice of girl marriage would be on the increase (particularly amongst the poor) as a form of 'survival strategy' for families in need. As discussed in Section 2.2.2, girls in some communities are

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regarded as an economic burden; hence, they are given in marriage to older men at an early age in exchange for economic gains (Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi, 2002).

Educational changes: Following the successful execution of the 10-year plan by the British colonial administration (see Section 4.3), Nigeria's education sector continued to expand and more Nigerians over the years have become educated, including women (Falola & Heaton, 2012). This is evident in the expansion of formal education facilities during this period.

While the curricula and structure of schools continued to follow very closely the British models that were developed during the colonial era, the overall access to formal education increased in the 1960s. In 1976 the Nigerian government passed a law-making education compulsory for all children between the ages of 6 and 12, and by 1980, approximately 15,607,505 students of this age group were enrolled in primary schools (Falola & Heaton, 2012). This was a significant increase, from 37% in 1970 to 98% in 1980. However, during the military regime, little attention was paid to the maintenance of schools, hence the quality of education deteriorated nationwide. By 1985 approximately 3.8 million primary school-aged children did not have access to a primary school (UBE, 2017). The situation improved in 1994, however, with investment in the education sector (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

In the 1970s the Nigerian government took over both Islamic and Christian missionary schools. The purpose of this was to ensure a uniform curriculum in all schools (Falola & Heaton, 2012).

In 1999, Obasanjo launched and established the Universal Basic Education (UBE) for Nigerian children. This is a 9-year educational programme which involves a free access to nine years of formal basic education (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Studies suggest that the purpose this programme was to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty, particularly in the

north region (Sokoto state) where there was a low level of school enrolment (UBE, 2017).

The Nigerian government described the UBE programme as Nigeria's strategy for the achievement of Education for All (EFA) and the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, while the UBE was launched in 1999, it was only passed to law in 2004 (UBE, 2017). The success of the UBE programme was however low in the Northern region (particularly for the girl-child) because of the complexity of gender equity. Boys were rather encouraged to take the UBE opportunities while girls were given in marriage (UBE, 2017; Falola & Heaton, 2012). Moreover, there was no programme in place to monitor school attendance of girls at the time (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Having examined the socio-economic status, religious and cultural changes in Nigeria (1960-2003) will be examined. It was in this period that the Nigerian government prohibited girl marriage.

4.4.3. Religious and cultural changes: 1960-2003

This section, will first examine the religious changes during this period, followed by the cultural changes.

Religious changes: While some Nigerians who had converted to Christianity or Islam continued in their faith, studies suggest that others returned to their traditional worship following the exit of the missionaries (Falola & Heaton, 2012). During the recession of the 1980s and 1990s, studies suggest that many Nigerians turned to Christianity as the answer to the problems of their society (Falola & Heaton, 2012). The redemptive power of charismatic and evangelical Christianity and fundamental Islam was beginning to be attractive to some Nigerians. In the 1990s, churches of the charismatic movement in Nigeria started to grow exponentially, particularly in the southern region. By 1991, these evangelical charismatic churches were estimated to be 6 million in Nigeria, with the largest single charismatic

organization, called Deeper Life, claiming between 330,000 and 400,000 members by 1994 (Falola & Heaton, 2012). However, most of these charismatic churches tend to be based in urban areas, making their congregations very multi-ethnic (Falola & Heaton, 2012).

During this period, Muslim and Christian religions became more politicised. Particularly under the Abacha regime, Christian and Muslim civil society organisations often clashed over government policies (Braithwaite, 2014). In some cases, some of them were seen attending political functions or pulling the support of their congregations for a particular political party. Over the years, this politicisation of Christian and Muslim identity has resulted in increased violence between Christians and Muslims, particularly in Northern Nigeria (Falola & Heaton, 2012).

Studies also reveal that inter-marriage within different regions in Nigeria at the time played a major role in the spread of Christianity and Islam (Haruna, 2003). Following developments in the urban areas, particularly Lagos (south western state), some Nigerians (Muslims from the Northern region and Christians from eastern region) moved to the cities for better jobs, and some married people of a different religion. This is evident in the south western part of the country, where the majority Yoruba population is more or less split between Muslims and Christians. Notably, Christians initially dominated this particular region (Ukwuoma, 2014). Similarly, some Nigerian Christians relocated to the Northern region for better job opportunities, thereby mixing with the Islamic religion and the traditional practices in the region. By 2003, Nigeria had become a mixed religious country with Christians, Muslims and indigenous traditional worshippers (Falola & Heaton, 2008). However, it was not uncommon for some Christians and Muslims to take part in indigenous traditional practices. This is relevant in the study of girl marriage because inter-marriage within different regions and religions in Nigeria at the time played a major role in the spread of girl marriage in Nigeria.

This suggests that girl marriage practices in Nigeria are not totally dependent on region, religion, education or poverty. As discussed in Section 1.1, although girl marriage is predominant amongst the Northern Muslims, girl marriage is a widespread, normative practice in Nigeria (Archibong, 2014; Obili, 2011 & Akpan, 2003).

Cultural changes: Following independence, Nigerians began to search for ways to “develop a distinct and recognisable national culture to bring Nigerians together as a single people and to grow national pride by contributing something distinctly Nigerian to world culture in general” (Falola & Heaton, 2012:204). For example, Nigeria’s secondary school national curriculum includes learning the indigenous languages of Nigeria’s three major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) and the cultural practices of these regions (Njoku, 2012), indicating an attempt to maintain indigenous cultural heritage and practices. This is important in understanding the continuation of girl marriage in Nigeria because while the teaching of some indigenous cultural heritage and practices in Nigerian schools might promote national pride or bring Nigerians together as a single people, some of these indigenous cultural heritage and practices are gender based (see Section 4.2), these teachings give the students cues about what sort of behaviour is believed to be appropriate for what sex. One of the possible implications of this is that, it is able to promote the continuation of some indigenous cultural practices such as girl marriage.

In the Northern region, the gendered identities for women arising from the intersection of patriarchal Hausa cultural values and Islam which were in place before colonial rule were maintained in the 1960s to 1970s (Coles & Mark, 1991). According to Osaghae & Suberu (2005), following independence the first step towards the re-establishment of gender identities in the north was to pressure urban girls and women to abandon European clothes in

favour of their restricted traditional costumes; the female traditional attire in the Northern region is 'abaya' blouses, head ties, shawls and hijabs.

Islamisation of the Nigerian Northern region in the 1960s and 1970s provided Hausa women an opportunity to leave labouring in the fields to develop craft skills. However, in the 1980s, the observance of seclusion started to coincide with class and educational distinction, seclusion being limited to middle class-women, wives of craft men and merchants (Coles & Mark, 1991). In the rural areas, however with dispersed compounds and villages, where the need for labour involved many peasant women directly in subsistence farming, women were minimally secluded, if at all. Poor Northern women in urban areas, however, lived in conditions where seclusion was difficult to maintain. It was common to see Northern women in different Nigerian regions sharing compounds with other unrelated family members and carrying out income earning subsistence activities as a result of the recession in the Nigerian economy at the time (Coles & Mark, 1991).

By 2003 some Northern Nigerian women had started to get involved in public affairs (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Although some Northerners still refused to send their children to Western secular education (they preferred the Islamic schools), increasing numbers of educated Northern women entered new occupations as a result of their training, entering commercial works, becoming teachers, giving voice to their creative talents etc. (Falola & Heaton, 2010). The following section explores marriage patterns and gender relations in Nigeria after independence.

4.4.4. Marriage patterns and gender relations: 1960-2003

The traditional marriage values that were criticized and targeted by the 1949 Marriage Act were strengthened by the 1970 Marriage Act (Callaway, 1986). The 1970 Marriage Act however did not stipulate a minimum marriageable age, but required parental consent if the

girl below 21 years old. The Marriage Act was revisited in 1999 and some amendments were made, however not to the marriageable age. Rather, Nigeria's 1999 Marriage Act recognises 3 types of marriages: Statutory Marriage, Customary Marriage and Islamic Marriage (Ukwuoma, 2014; Braimah, 2014). The recognition of 3 types of marriages by the Nigerian government can however be conflicting because it raises questions as to which legal system should be applied to the people in the practice of girl marriage. For example, the customary law recognises the marriage customs and beliefs of the Nigerian people which include the practice of girl marriage (Braimah, 2014). It is believed that this is one of the factors underpinning the continuity of girl marriage in Nigeria. I will start by examining Statutory Marriage.

Statutory marriage: According to Nigeria's 1999 Marriage Act, statutory marriage is designed specifically for the celebration of marriage between a man and a woman, and the marriage is expected to be a monogamous one (Anzaki, 2014). A monogamous marriage has been defined in 'Section 18' of the 1999 Marriage Act as "a voluntary union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others during the continuance of the marriage" (Ukwuoma, 2014). There are requirements in terms of age, consent and previous marriage:

- **Age:** While the Act does not specify any minimum age limit, it states that where either of the marrying couple is under the age of 21 years, there is a need to obtain the written consent of either the parents or guardians. Further, in section 49, the Act states that whoever shall marry or assist any person to marry a minor under the age of 21 years shall be liable to imprisonment for 2 years (Anzaki, 2014).
- **Consent:** While the only legal requirement is the parental consents of both the male and female parties in cases where either or both of the parties are under the age of

twenty-one years, the 1999 Marriage Act is silent in relation to the consent of parties themselves (Anzaki, 2014).

- **Subsisting Marriage:** The Act requires that the marrying couples are not married to another person at the time of the present marriage contract. The onus lies on the Marriage Registrar to ensure and be satisfied that there are no subsisting marriages before conducting the ceremony (Anzaki, 2014).

Although statutory marriage has some similarities to the colonial administration's 1949 Marriage Act in the sense that it leans towards Christianity, it does not stipulate a minimum age for the marrying couple.

Customary marriage: There are over 250 ethnic communities in Nigeria and all these groups have their own marriage customs (Anzaki, 2014). One aim of the 1999 Marriage Act was to promote national unity amongst all the regions in Nigeria. As part of this aim therefore, the Nigerian 1999 Marriage Act recognised a customary type of marriage (Ukwuoma, 2014).

Customary marriage law acknowledges a union which involves marrying couple's families. In this case, the woman is regarded by the members of her husband's family as having been married not solely to her husband but also the family (Bramah, 2014). The husband on the other hand is not so regarded by the wife's family. The customary type of marriage is however largely polygynous, that is a man is not limited to a particular number of wives (Anzaki, 2014). The legal requirement of the customary marriage is that intentions to get married should be communicated between the two parties concerned and also between their respective families (Anzaki, 2014). However, both families may also carry out discreet

inquiries about the family's social and health background and character (Ukwuoma, 2014).

The 1999 Marriage Act outlines a number of characteristics of a customary marriage:

- Engagement: Engagement decisions are more dependent on the decisions of the kindred, if the families concerned are convinced that there are no facts that could hinder the marriage, followed by the giving of gifts (cash or kind) by the man to the woman and her family (Nwogugu, 2014).
- Capacity of the parties: The patriarch of a bride's family is in the position to conduct a customary marriage in most cases and the marriage does not involve the signing of a marriage register, neither is the bride's age a priority, which means there is no minimum age of marriage (Nwogugu, 2014). While the implication of this type of marriage is that a girl of any age can get married in as much as the Patriarch has given his consent, it indicates a return to the marriage practises in Nigeria before colonial rule. According to UNICEF (2013), customary marriage is one of the factors that underpin girl marriage practices in Nigeria because it is largely polygynous and there is no minimum age of marriage under this type of marriage.
- Bride price: Another requirement of statutory type of marriage is the payment of a bride price. The bride price can be in the form of cash or a gift such as agricultural produce or property; this is usually dependent on the capability of the groom (Nwogugu, 2014).
- Solemnization of the marriage: An essential ingredient of a valid customary law marriage is a solemnization or celebration, after which the bride is handed over to the bridegroom and his family (Nwogugu, 2014).
- Consummation of the marriage: Consummation is essential under native law and custom. Native law and custom means a body of laws based on the traditional law and

customs of the indigenous peoples (Ukwuoma, 2014). This is expected to take place on the night of the marriage and the groom in most cases will announce his exploits to his family and state if his wife was found 'intact' or not (virginity) (Nwogugu, 2014).

Islamic marriage: Islamic marriage in Nigeria is similar to customary marriage. The Islamic marriage is also polygynous. It allows the man to take up to four wives and there is no minimum age for Islamic marriage (Nwogugu, 2014). Requirements of a valid Islamic law marriage are:

- **Consent of the parties:** While the marrying couple under Nigeria's Islamic marriage must freely consent to the union, a father has the right to conclude a marriage on behalf of his infant sons and virgin girls under the Maliki School of Islamic Law. This commonly referred to as '*Ijbar*' (Brammah, 2014).
- **Parental consent:** Similar to the customary law, parental consent is required at any age and is necessary for the validity of marriage under Islamic law (Brammah, 2014; Nwogugu, 2014).
- **Bride price:** Under Islamic law the bride price is commonly called 'saduquat' (or 'sadaki') or dower and this is paid to the bride's parents (Brammah, 2014).
- **Solemnization:** This marriage needs to be solemnized by an Islamic cleric and the presence of at least two Muslim witnesses (Nwogugu, 2014).

These marriage types are important to consider in relation to the continuation of girl marriage practises in Nigeria because they reveal the complexity of girl marriage in Nigeria. Although prior studies (Ukwuoma, 2014; Brammah, 2014) suggest that one of the factors underpinning the continuity of girl marriage is a lack of political will coupled with multiplicities of laws, the recognition of these types of marriages by the Nigerian government further reveals the

value of culture and religion in the Nigerian community. These issues accounts for non-apprehension and prosecution of girl marriage offenders, it allows them to hide under the customary marriage and Islamic marriage. Having discussed the changes to the marriage pattern in Nigeria after Nigeria's independence in 1960 up to when girl marriage was prohibited in 2003, gender relations in Nigeria during the period will now be considered.

Gender relations: Studies suggest that Nigeria's 1970 Constitution included Nigeria's traditional gendered identities (Braithwaite, 2014; Ukwuoma, 2014). While women in Nigeria at the time started to get more involved in community services, the 1970 Constitution included several limitations for Nigeria women. These (Anaba, 2005) include:

- married women were requested to obtain written permission from their husband before obtaining an international passport;
- women were not allowed to stand bail for a suspect, and
- Section 55 (1) (d) of the 1970 Constitution declared that, it is acceptable for a man to correct his child, pupil, servant or wife.

However, by 2003, some of the laws that limited women to particular gendered roles and expectations were removed from the Nigerian Constitution, leaving a few which include the 'Penal code - Section 55 (1) (d)': this law accepts that it is right for a man to correct his wife so long as this does not result into a permanent dislocation of tooth or bone, deprivation of any part of the body or injuries that can endanger the victim's life or an injury which can cause the sufferer to be in bodily pains during the space of twenty days (Anaba, 2005). Anaba (2005) suggests that this law is one of the factors that underpin gender-based violence in Nigeria.

Nonetheless, while Nigerian women were challenged by patriarchal social structures before and during colonial rule, Nigerian women are now able to own the land they cultivate or make major decisions without the consent of a patriarch. Falola & Heaton (2012) suggest that more girls have been enrolled into formal education, from which a large number of elite women have emerged. From 1999 to 2003 the proportion of women in Nigeria's Senate House of Representatives increased from 3.19% to 5.33%. However, there are regional differences in gender relations. The highly stratified community and relations of inequality in the Northern region are rooted in traditional class hierarchies and in the wider status-prestige system (Terwase & Ochanja, 2015). Structured inequality affects the Northern women, particularly in relation to marriage, 'one cannot take the male status system and apply it directly to females (Yeld, 2013: 124). According to Smith (1959, cited in Yeld, 2013:124), in Northern Nigeria,

'women are legal minors and both legally and economically the wards of men. Under Islam they have a religious duty to marry, and all unmarried women, including widows of child-bearing age, are considered anomalous and referred to as prostitutes. Hausa marriage is polygamous and patrilocal. Within polygamous households, co-wives are ranked in seniority by reference to marriage order to the common husband. Divorce rates are high and can be obtained by a simple repudiation of his wife by the husband'

While this reveals the high status of men in Nigeria's Northern region, it also highlights the importance of marriage in the region. Marriage is regarded as an important step in the life of every woman; it determines the status and social acceptance of women in the community. This possibly underpins the continuation of girl marriage in the Northern region.

Nevertheless, the Nigerian government legalised the Child Rights' Act (CRA) to prohibit girl marriage. The next section explores the CRA.

Nigeria's 2003 Child Rights Act: As highlighted in Section 4.4.1, Nigeria's government approved the CRA in 2003 (Braithwaite, 2014). Part 111 of the 2003's CRA stipulates that marriages below age 18 should be annulled and offenders or promoters of this practice will be liable at conviction to a term of five years' imprisonment or a fine of N500,000, or both (UNICEF, 2007). However, studies reveal that it is difficult to penalise offenders or promoters of child-marriage because the Nigerian government has left the legislative jurisdictions on issues concerning children to be an exclusive right of the state (UNICEF, 2013). Moreover, Part 1 Section 61 of the 1999 Marriage Act indicates that the Federal government may not interfere with the customary and Islamic laws of any state (Ukwuoma, 2014). Although this contradiction makes the practice of girl marriage in Nigeria more complex, 24 states are reported to have ratified the CRA while 12 states are yet to pass this Act (Braithwaite, 2014). Nevertheless, statistics (Erulkar & Bello, 2007; Akpan, 2007) indicate that the practice of girl marriage is widespread in all the Nigerian states. Table 4.1 (which is the most recent figure) indicates the prevalence rate of girl marriage practises in Nigeria as at 2007 (4 years after its prohibition). The states that are yet to ratify the 2003 CRA are: Enugu (eastern region), Zamfara, Katsina, Gombe, Bauchi, Kano, Borno, Kaduna, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Adamawa state (all in the Northern region). As emphasised, the present study is focused on the region (Northern region) with the highest prevalence rate.

Table 4.1: Prevalence of girl marriage in Nigeria by region. (Source: Erulkar & Bello, 2007:3)

	Median age at marriage	Married by 15			Married by 18		
		Urban	Rural	All	Urban	Rural	All
North Central	20.6	11.0	18.0	15.3	23.4	43.9	35.7
North East	16.8	30.5	48.5	41.0	58.7	81.1	72.3
North West	15.8	29.3	65.1	54.3	64.7	88.2	81.3
South East	24.0+	1.1	1.7	1.4	11.3	7.5	9.1
South South	24.0+	3.0	7.3	5.9	8.9	23.4	18.9
South West	23.8	1.3	4.3	2.5	11.0	16.9	13.2

**Among those aged 15 to 24; life tables used to adjust for censoring*

Although the practice of girl marriage is prohibited in Nigeria, it still remains and this is particularly the case in Nigeria's Northern region.

Summary: Girl marriage has been in practise in Nigeria since colonial rule (and probably before this time). Despite girl marriage being prohibited in 2003 the practice continues. The inconsistencies of Nigeria's Constitution and Marriage Act contribute to the continuation of girl marriage in Nigeria. The following section examines the continuity of girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region 13 years (2003-2016) after its prohibition by the Nigerian Government.

4.5. The Northern region and the CRA: 2003-to date

The aim of this section is to explore the continuity of girl marriage in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern region, in order to understand how the Nigerian government is reacting to the continuity of the practise and to examine if there has been changes to this practice since its prohibition. The first sub-section will examine the steps taken by the Nigerian government

since 2003 to curb girl marriage in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern region. The second sub-section will briefly explore the prior research on the continuity of girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region.

Following the Nigerian government's prohibition of girl marriage in 2003, a statistical analysis of the prevalence of girl marriage practises was conducted by the Nigerian Population Council in 2004. The findings indicated that at that time, "in Nigeria, 20% of girls were married by age 15, and 40% were married by age 18" (Population Council, 2004:1). However, the most recent statistics of the prevalence of girl-marriage practices in Nigeria which was conducted in 2016 indicate that 17% of girls were married before age 15 and 43% before age 18 (UNICEF, 2016). An analysis of this statistics indicates that while there has been a 3% reduction amongst the girls married by age 15, there has been an increase of 3% amongst the girls that got married by age 18. The statistics reveal an increase in the practice of girl-marriage in Nigeria 12 years after its prohibition. The steps taken by the Nigerian government since 2003 will now be examined.

4.5.1. Nigerian government policies

Following the prohibition of girl marriage by Nigeria's government in 2003, studies suggest that the Nigerian government continues to take different steps to curb its continuity (Nwonu & Oyakhiromen, 2014; Braimah, 2014; Ukwuoma, 2014). The following discussion will start by examining the legal steps followed by the education and financial steps.

Legal steps: Section 4.4.4 shows that contradictions in Nigeria's Constitution make it possible for 12 states in the Northern region not to comply with the 2003 CRA. From a legal stand point, Braimah (2014:37) suggests that Part 1 Section 61 of the 1999 Constitution null and voids the 2003 CRA:

“As Nigeria operates a tripartite legal system with statutory, customary and Islamic law operating simultaneously, in relation to marriage the federal government has no control over customary and Islamic marriages but only marriages conducted in a civil manner. What this means is that, according to Part 1 Section 61 of the 1999 Constitution, when a person marries a child under Islamic law in Northern Nigeria and is consequently in contravention of the CRA, such a person cannot be prosecuted because the federal government would be interfering with an Islamic marriage and would be in violation of Part 1 Section 61 of the 1999 Constitution. Therefore, in relation to child marriage, Part 1 Section 61 of the 1999 Constitution renders the CRA useless, as the 1999 Constitution serves as the supreme law of the land in Nigeria, overriding all other legislation”

Nevertheless, the Nigerian government have continued to pressure the 12 Northern states to comply with the CRA (Braimah, 2014). In 2010, the Nigerian government set up a CRA committee to examine why the states in the Northern region have refused to ratify the CRA. Findings from this committee reveal that these states have refused to comply based on their own definition of a child: the Northern region forum have defined a child to be a person who is yet to attain puberty (Chindah, 2016). While such definition contradicts the Nigerian CRA which stipulates age 18, the definition is also not age specific, implying that a girl in Nigeria’s Northern region can get married as soon as she attains puberty, which can be at age 8, 9 or 10 for some girls. The CRA committee concluded that girl marriage in Northern Nigeria is underpinned “by the culture and religion of various tribes” (Chinda, 2016:1).

In 2013, however, following the marriage of a Northern Nigerian senator (Ahmad Sani Yerima) to a 13-year-old girl, there was uproar by the public and some international organisations. As a result, Nigeria's Senate Committee recommended that the Marriage Act be reviewed. Following this recommendation, the majority of senators voted in favour of deleting Section 61 of the 1999 Constitution. This vote was however challenged by the particular senator, on the grounds that the deletion of this section discriminated against Muslim women. According to Ahmad Sani Yerima, Muslim women are considered 'of age' once they are married (Braithwaite, 2014). Following his challenge of the vote, the Committee's recommendation was put to vote for a second time but on this occasion, the vote was not successful (Braithwaite, 2014).

While the above discussion shows that the practice of girl marriage in the Northern region is not, in itself, illegal, the central argument of this thesis is that since culture and religion are socially constructed, the manner in which girl marriage and gender roles are defined in the Northern region can be and are challenged. Moreover, the Nigerian government, as the federal democratic arbiter is in the position to set out the legal standards for the country, the extent to which girl marriage practices in Northern Nigeria comply with the CRA can be assessed.

Educational and financial steps: As highlighted in Section 4.4.2, the Nigeria government implemented Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 2004 to enable the Nigerian child to have free access to education. While the UBE programme was developed in 1999, it was not formally passed into law until 2004. Basic education comprises 6 years of primary school and 3 years of junior secondary school. These first nine years of basic education are mandatory (UBE, 2019).

While the UBE is implemented in all the regions, the Nigerian government took further action in the Northern region due to the prevalence of girl marriage practises there (Ibrahim, 2014). According to Ibrahim (2014), the Nigerian federal government steps taken through the UBE programmes to ensure that children, particularly girls, in the Northern region have access to free education, include,

- Establishment of all girls' schools to encourage the enrolment of the girl-child in the Northern region (Ibrahim, 2014).
- A 'Safe School' programme for ensuring retention of students in school in the face of insurgency in the region (Ibrahim, 2014). The Northern region in particular is susceptible to insurgencies (see Section 4.5.2).
- Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) to encourage enrolment and retention of girls in school (UBE, 2016).
- A Federal Teachers' Scheme aimed at reducing the dearth of teachers and improving the quality of basic education delivery in the Northern region.
- Investment of N493, 902,151,000 between 2005 and 2014 towards the UBE programme in the Northern region. The Office of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has also contributed N51.8bn to the implementation of UBE programme in the Northern region (UBE, 2016).
- In 2014, the provisional allocation of UBE matching grants for each state in the Northern region was N952, 297, 297.30 per state (UBE, 2016).
- A number of '*almajirai*' ('destitute') boarding schools have been constructed for out of school pupils in the north where food, textbooks, uniform and library's facilities are provided to the pupils by federal government (UBE, 2016)

A report submitted by the UBE, however, suggests that six states in the Northern region (Gombe, Bauchi, Borno, Kebbi, Sokoto and Yobe) have refused to benefit from this programme. It is however not clear why this is the case (Ibrahim, 2014). While the Western-influenced policies of free access to education might work in some regions in Nigeria, the complexity of gender equity in the highly gender-determined Northern region of Nigeria is a mitigating factor (Falola & Heaton, 2012). Northerners would rather send boys than girls to (mostly Qu'ran) schools (Ibrahim, 2014). This is particularly relevant in the continuation of girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region because it suggests that inaccessibility to education or lack of education is a secondary factor in the context of Nigeria's Northern region. Table 4.2 shows out-of-school children and adolescents. Ten times more female children and female adolescents of primary or junior secondary school age are out of school in the North East and North West compared to regions of the South. Girls living in Nigeria's Northern states are among the least likely to ever attend school (British Council, 2014).

Table 4.2: Out of school children and adolescents in Nigeria (British Council, 2014:16)

	Male	Female	North-East	North-West	North-Central	South-South	South-East	South-West	Urban	Rural
Children (%)	26	32	53	52	22	5	5	7	36	12
Adolescent (%)	25	32	54	53	21	6	4	9	36	12

The following section explores prior research into the causes that underpin the continuity of girl marriage in the Northern region. This is relevant for a comparative discussion of the findings of this study.

4.5.2. Prior research and the continuity of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria.

As highlighted in Section 1.1, while the practice of girl marriage is predominant in the Northern region, there are few empirical studies that are specifically focused on its practices in the Northern region. More studies refer to girl marriage practises in Northern Nigeria when addressing gender issues such as, domestic violence, poverty, fistula, maternal mortality, subordination of women, low school enrolment and school drop outs. Nevertheless, some studies (UNICEF, 2015; Ukwuoma, 2015; Braimah, 2014; British Council, 2014; James, 2010; Erulkar & Bello, 2007) have specifically examined the practice, particularly causes and consequences, of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria.

Causes of girl marriage in the Northern region: Past studies on girl marriage in Nigeria suggest that legal context, socio-economic issues, religion, culture and patriarchal structures underpin this practice. Regarding the legal context, some studies (Fayokun, 2015; Braimah, 2014 & Ukwuoma, 2014) argue that contradictions in the Nigerian Constitution are a contributing factor to the age at first marriage, and recommend that the Nigerian government revisit the 1999 Marriage Act. Nevertheless, some authors (for example, Gaffney, 2011) have argued that the use of laws or international treaties cannot themselves secure a reduction to the practice of girl marriage and that they need to be “accompanied by appropriate local strategies” (Gaffney, 2011:370).

In terms of socio-economic issues, several studies (Tukur *et al.*, 2015; UNICEF, 2014; Archibong, 2014; Fabgola, 2011; Ntoimo, 2012; Adebowale *et al.*, 2012; Field & Ambrus, 2008; James, 2010; Erulkar & Bello, 2007; Ebigbo, 2003) argue that the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria is underpinned by socio-economic issues such as poverty, illiteracy or lack of education beyond the primary level. These studies outline a range of potential strategies to address the issue, including: empowering girls with information, skills

and support networks; educating and rallying parents and community members; providing economic support to parents and girls, and the development of supportive laws and policies. However, discussions in section 4.5.1 indicate that some of the states in Northern Nigeria refuse to benefit from Nigeria's free access educational programmes.

Further, James (2010), Akpan (2003) and Alabi, (1990) have explored the role of religion and culture in girl marriage in the Northern community. James (2010) investigated the contexts of adolescent motivations for marriage and childbearing in North-Western Nigeria. Some participants in the study reported that

“we are not going to follow the culture and tradition of the west, any girl who has suitors means that her time has reached to be married. Let's just depend on God as Christians and Muslims knowing that anything that happens to us is his wish” (James, 2010:272).

While this study suggests that some Nigerians will uphold Nigerian cultural practices over Western practices, it also indicates that girl marriage is not limited to a particular religion in the Northern region. Similarly, Akpan's (2003) study in eastern Nigeria found that to a large extent, girl marriage is about cultural continuity. Akpan (2003:72) found that most participants gave various reasons in support of child marriage in eastern Nigeria,

“but ultimately, it became clear that those reasons were, and still are, based on age-old customs and traditions. Conformity with tradition is one of the reasons why young girls are married off early or forced into unacceptable marriage relationships. Some parents, especially in the village circle, do not wish to violate the traditions and customs of the elders that favour early marriage”.

While Akpan's (2003) study suggests that girl marriage in the eastern region of Nigeria is underpinned by customs and traditions, such corroboration further validates the discussion in Section 4.2.1 that girl marriage has been historically practised in all regions of Nigeria.

Ntoimo & Isiugho-Abanihe (2013), Allanana (2013) and Sultana (2010) have linked the continuity of girl marriage in the Northern region to patriarchal social structures and the discrimination and subordination of women. These authors hold the view that the Nigerian community is not favourable to women, particularly the girl-child; women are often victimized and do not have a voice, hence the continuity of girl marriage. However, some studies (Callaghan *et al.*, 2015; James 2010) have disputed this interpretation of the Northern women involved. According to Callaghan *et al.* (2015:18), despite powerful cultural scripts to which the women felt they must conform, and the bleak description the women gave of their lives, the women in the study were able to "articulate resistance to the construct of early marriage itself, by using the very limiting cultural discourses of womanhood available to them". However, it is not clear to what end these women achieved autonomy. James (2010) also found that some adolescent girls in his study were supportive of the idea of early marriage, and emphasised the importance of family and women's role in the family. However, James (2010:272) also recognised that a "sense of vulnerability and fear" clearly existed in some of the focus group discussions that involved female adolescents, calling into question the data produced:

"in this study, adolescents clearly reported their powerlessness and lack of levirate to confront appropriate authorities including their parents lest they incur the wrath of curse because they desire parental blessings. Teenage marriage might not be right, but who are you to stand up against your parents' wishes; they will curse and disown you, and every child in this environment

seeks parental blessings in everything, so even if it is displeasing to us to marry at teenage age, we still obey and comply. If we can find our way, our parents should allow us to acquire formal education, and with that we will find something doing to take care of ourselves and our children if the worst comes” (Focus group participant, James, 2010:273)

Clearly, an analysis of Callaghan *et al.*, (2015), James (2010) and the discussion in Section 4.4.4 indicates that some Northern Nigerian women and female adolescents are not voiceless. What is not clear, however, is the age at which these women are able to voice their opinions on girl marriage. For example, the report from James (2010:273) implies that some girls cannot go against their parents’ decision for the “fear of being cursed or disowned”. This report reveals the use of coercion as a facilitator of cultural continuity (see Section 3.1.1). In addition, these scholars (Callaghan *et al.*, 2015; James, 2010; Erulkar & Bello, 2007) found that some women were not aware of their marriage plans before getting married. While I do not argue that the Northern Nigerian girls are passive or powerless, this argument of powerlessness or being passive is more dependent on the age of the girls under discussion. Arguably, there is very little a girl of 8 or 9, such as Adija (see Section 1.1), can do in the context of Nigeria’s Northern region. Another example is the case of a 14-year-old Northern Nigerian girl who was arrested in 2014 for using rat poison to kill her 35-year-old husband (she was initially charged with murder before it was overturned to juvenile detention). According to the Nigerian Punch newspaper (2014), Wasilat was pressured by her parents to marry Umar Sani (who has 3 other wives). Following her refusal:

“Wasilat told the court that she was forcefully taken to Umar’s house at night, where he proceeded to tie her to his bed and raped her through the night. Over the next few days, Wasilat thought of a plan and sent her younger sister to the

store to get some rat poison which she put into Umar's food. This poison killed Umar and two other friends that eat from the food'

While Wasilat's case further shows that some Northern Nigerian girls or women are not completely passive, it also reveals the extreme situations that forced girl marriage can entail. Although not every 14-year-old girl would be as bold as Wasila, resistance may take a variety of forms, girls can report cases of forced/early marriages to relevant authorities, participate in programmes that will empower them with the information, skills and services they need to be healthy, educated and safe, helping them make a successful transition to adulthood (UNFPA, 2014). However, some of these strategies are not prevalent in most developing countries (UN, 2015). Again, within the Nigerian context such resistant strategies might be difficult without the involvement of the decision makers in the communities. According to the British Council's (2014:38) study of girl education in North East and North West of Nigeria 'there are two major actors in the decision to enrol and retain girls in primary school: family heads and community leaders. These are authoritative male figures in the household and in the community'. The British Council's (2014) finding further reveals the power relations in the Nigerian community, it shows the deeply rooted patriarchal social structures which on the other hand is able to influence the age at first marriage for girls.

According to the British Council (2014), 67% mentioned that both family heads and community leaders are dominant in girl-education decision making while women take responsibility for ensuring the execution of those decisions, 44% women report that their husbands are in charge of making household decisions while over half of all husbands corroborated these allocations of decision making. This finding is particularly relevant in the study of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria because it suggests that male parents and community leaders have a major role to play in girl marriage decisions. The British Council's

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(2014) study further validates the discussion in Section 4.4.4 that Nigeria's Northern region is a highly stratified community and relations of inequality in this region are rooted in a traditional hierarchy of classes and gender relations. However, very little is known from the perspectives of the men involved in girl marriage decisions. This study is focused on the motives and intentions of the men involved.

Summary: We discussed in this section that some studies (British Council, 2014; Erulkar & Bello, 2007) have examined the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria and found that male parents and community leaders have a major role to play in girl marriage decisions. Similarly, James (2010:271) argues that, in the Northern region, 'early marriage is usually performed without the informed consent of the girl'. Therefore, these studies (British Council, 2014; Erulkar & Bello, 2007) suggest local strategies (awareness programmes and discussions) which include male parents and community leaders for the communities involved.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Nigeria as a nation, particularly in relation to the marriage institution and gender relations in Nigeria's pre-colonial era, colonial era, years after independence to when girl marriage was prohibited by the Nigerian government in 2003. There was also consideration of Nigeria's Northern region and prior studies of girl marriage practises in the region. The chapter illustrated how, particularly in the Northern region, over the years the cultural practise of girl marriage has continued. Determinants of age at first marriage were discussed in Chapter Two and this chapter explored suggested determinants which are political and legal context, socioeconomic context (education, poverty and modernisation), tradition, religion and patriarchal social structures, in the context of Nigeria.

As became apparent in this chapter, the issue of girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region is a complex one, and socio-economic factors, religion and legal context are secondary factors in the context of Nigeria's Northern region. These factors were not always the main reasons for girl marriage practices in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern region. The discussion illustrated how Nigeria was indigenously shaped by patriarchal power structures and gendered identities through family relationships to the Nigerian Constitution. Similarly, studies of domestic violence in Nigeria attribute this to the Penal Code. Nonetheless, over the years, Nigerian women have witnessed several changes from increase in educational status to political status.

Further, studies in this chapter reveal that parents and community leaders make marriage decisions for young girls. However, far too little attention has been paid to the perspectives of these decision makers. In the context of developing countries, understanding girl marriage practices from the perspectives of the decision makers is relevant in any discussion of determinants, consequences, or possible solutions. Prior research suggests that Nigeria's 1999 Constitution contradicts the CRA, making it powerless until amendments are made. Nevertheless, prior studies also suggest that such laws themselves are not enough to secure a reduction in girl marriage, these laws need to be "accompanied by appropriate local strategies" (see Section 2.2.1). Such strategies need to include the people involved in making and enforcing girl marriage decisions. This study aims to provide an understanding of girl marriage practices in Northern Nigeria, within a cultural context, from the perspectives of key decision makers. The next chapter outlines the research approach that this study employs.

CHAPTER 5

Research methodology

This chapter presents methodology and the methods used to explore the perspectives of decision makers involved in girl marriage practises in Northern Nigeria. The chapter is divided into eight sections. Section 5.1 outlines the research question and how it was formed. Section 5.2 reveals the philosophical paradigm. Section 5.3 illustrates the research method employed. Section 5.4 presents the population, sample and recruitment techniques. Section 5.5 explains the pilot study. Section 5.6 illustrates the research procedure and data processing. Section 5.7 explores the researcher's positionality. Section 5.8 discusses the ethical considerations that guided this study.

5.1. Research question

A research question or the process of defining one is crucial: it is the key determinant of the research topic, method for collecting data and data analysis (Merriam, *et al.*, 2015; Mason, 2002). Defining a research question which is related to my research topic went through a spiral trajectory of literature review and fieldwork investigation. The research question first addressed a general research topic and was later divided into some specific research questions which are related to the research topic (Robson, 2002; Mason, 2002). The next section explains how the research question was formed.

5.1.2. The formulation of research question

In the early stages of a research project, the research topic is, in most cases, broad. At this stage some researchers find it quite difficult to give a concise explanation of what their research is about to others (Merriam, *et al.*, 2015; Mason, 2002). This was similar to my

experience in the process of formulating my research question, which passed through three stages. The very first research topic focused on ‘violence against the girl-child’, this was generated from the findings of a literature review after my Master’s programme and focused on how Nigeria is attempting to conform to the UN’s declaration on the elimination of all forms of violence against girls and women (UN, 2012). During this stage, the major question was ‘how is the Nigerian government upholding the rights of the Nigerian child?’. This was later refined after a comprehensive literature review to focus on ‘cultural violence against the girl-child in Northern Nigeria’, driven by the research question: ‘how is the Nigerian government enforcing the 2003 CRA which prohibits child marriage?’ However, this changed over time because it was not deemed feasible to the people who are actually involved in girl marriage decisions, responses to this particular research question would not provide the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage practises.

At the third and final stage of formulating my research question, I reflected upon the sensitivity of the research topic, specifically the use of the term ‘child-marriage’, how the prospective research participants would react to the term, findings from my continuing literature review and feedback from colleagues and networking. Subsequently, the research topic was finally refined to ‘Understanding the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria from the perspectives of key decision makers’ and the main research question was reconstructed to:

- How do the people who are involved in girl marriage decision making in Northern Nigeria explain the practice of girl marriage?

Answering this research question is relevant to an understanding of the factors that underpin the continuity of girl marriage practices in Northern Nigeria, within an everyday cultural context, from the perspectives of key decision makers such as parents and community leaders. As highlighted in Section 4.5.2, prior studies (James, 2010; Erulkar & Bello, 2007) which took place within the Northern region of Nigeria suggest that a particular group of people which includes parents and community leaders are the key decision makers about age at first marriage in Nigeria's Northern region. Interviews were not sought from the girls themselves as it is not clear how far they are involved in decision making, as well as to maintain emotional sensitivity throughout the thesis. This does not suggest that the girl's perspectives or indeed the husband's perspectives are not important. On the contrary, it is important that such work is done with utmost sensitivity, in a study which is entirely focused on them. As highlighted in Sections 1.2 and 4.5.2, there is limited understanding of the perspectives of key decision-makers involved in the reproduction of girl marriage practises. Answers to this question will provide understanding regarding how key decision makers perceive girl marriage and why it continues. The understanding will be used to make recommendations to key policy stakeholders.

The present study is underpinned by a qualitative interpretive paradigm and the notion of symbolic interactionism in the attempt to understand a complex and culturally embedded practice. This philosophical paradigm is illustrated in the next section.

5.2. Philosophical paradigm

My philosophical approach is underpinned by symbolic interactionism, which recognises that people react or respond to an issue according to their interpretation of the particular issue or practice. Several scholars (Mead, 1934; Dewey, 1930; Thomas, 1931; Baldwin, 1981; James, 1929; Cooley, 1902) have contributed to this intellectual approach (Blumer, 1969).

“Symbolic Interactionism is a down-to-earth-approach to the scientific study of human group life and human conduct. Its empirical world is the natural world of such group life and conduct. It locates its problems in this natural world, conduct its studies in it, and derives its interpretation from such naturalistic studies” (Blumer, 1969:47). For example, to conduct a study which involves the history and life experience of a people, or a study of the cultural practices of a group of people, as in this case, the research in most cases will involve going to the actual setting or group of people. This methodological stance is a direct exploration of the empirical social world.

While symbolic interactionism allows the researcher to meet the basic requirements of an empirical study, it is not misled by the belief that one needs to design a study to fit a pre-established empirical inquiry such as devising in advance a fixed logical mathematical model, or adopting the procedure of advanced physical science, or imposing a statistical or mathematical framework on the study i.e. it is not positivist (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism recognises that the genuine mark of empirical study is to respect and be conscious of the nature of its empirical world; “to fit its problem, its guiding conception; its procedures of enquiry, its technique of study, its concept and its theories to that world” (Blumer, 1969:48). A symbolic interactionist approach assumes that the determination of problems, theoretical schemes, concepts and research techniques should be conducted by a direct exploration of that research setting rather than with a simulation or a pre-set model of the research setting.

Critics (see Meltzer et al. 1975; Stryker 1980; Reynolds 1990) of symbolic interactionism argue that this approach lacks the appropriate scale to gauge the interpretations of gestures, signs and symbols or the right procedure to bring the ‘generalised other’ into the frameworks of procedures such as, system analysis, stochastic analysis or operational research. However,

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they miss the basis of symbolic interactionism. It is impossible to test the validity of the above premise (research question) without going to the actual group for a direct examination of the community or without presenting the findings in the terms of the people under investigation. This is similar to the current study, understanding the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria from the perspectives of the people involved in decision making cannot be conducted in a contrived laboratory setting. It needs a direct observation or examination of the people in their real world. Symbolic interactionism was deemed suitable to answer the research question and achieve the aim of this study. The use of symbolic interactionism in this study will help to guard against the admitted deficiencies of individual accounts or pre-established images of research scholars about the people involved in girl marriage decisions. This approach is deemed suitable for the formation of policies and programmes that will benefit the communities involved in girl marriage practices, which is one of the objectives of this study,

As highlighted by Denzin (2001), some policies or programmes fail because the policy stakeholders do not consider the perspectives of the people the policies were formed for. Such observations about policies are relevant in this particular study, the practice of girl marriage is prohibited in Nigeria and Nigerians, specifically the Northerners (see Section 4.4), have free and easy access to formal and informal education. Yet, girls leave school as early as age 8 or 9 to get married. Rather than generalise the determinants of this practice, it is relevant to interview the people involved in their natural setting and provide the interpretations of this practice from the perspectives of the people involved. Such exploration will not only add to knowledge, it will also enable policy stakeholders to formulate policies and programmes within the perspective of the key people involved in girl marriage decisions.

To this end, it was decided that data should be collected in the communities where the practice of girl marriage is predominant. The next section illustrates the research method that was adopted in this study.

5.3. Research method

For some research questions, such as the one for this study, Griffin & Phoenix (1994:296) suggest that the qualitative method is ‘the only method that can allow in-depth analysis because it can deal with apparently contradictory data and provide insight into participants’ perspectives that are rendered invisible by quantitative methods’. Therefore, it was decided that interviews shaped by Denzin’s (1989; 2001) construction of Interpretive Interactionism was the most suitable for data collection and analysis. Interviews -compared to questionnaires- are more powerful in eliciting narrative data that allows researchers to investigate people's views in greater depth (Kvale, 1996; 2003). Cohen, *et al*, (2007: 29) also reveal that interviewing is “a valuable method for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings in a natural setting”. Interviews are used in the present study to explore the interpretations of girl marriage from the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions without meaning being imposed on them externally (Brewer, 2000). Further, Denzin’s (1989; 2001) construction of Interpretive Interactionism, which can be defined as ways of revealing participants’ interpretations of their personal lives or lived experiences, is also a suitable framework for analysing the socio-cultural contexts involved in this study.

A topic guide (see appendix 3) was used during the interviews to ensure all relevant areas (i.e. research questions) are covered. The topic guide also allowed for in-depth probing while permitting the participants and me to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study (Berg, 2007). Participants were asked about their motives to get girls to marry before age 18 and all the participants narrated their stories and lived experiences. The

findings have been presented in participants' own words alongside their emotional expressions and psychological impacts. This is reflected in the empirical chapters, while there may be some contradictions in the narratives of participants, Denzin's interpretive interactionism has a self-conscious concentration on understanding the representation of experiences from a cultural context (Denzin, 2001, 1989; Schwandt, 1998). Nevertheless, studies (for example, Riessman, 2004) argue that most participants' narratives are flawed because participants are relied upon to narrate their stories and give interpretations to their lived experiences in interviews. The interpretive stance recognises that each research participant's experience varies and in some cases, may not always cohere, however, they remain important (Denzin, 2001). In a study where the aim of the researcher is not to impose his/her meaning over the voices of the research participants, the researcher and participants are co-producers of the narratives. The researcher is highly dependent on participants' knowledge about the phenomena under study, and on their willingness to share (Horner, 2016). Narratives from each participant have been interpreted and produced; the data are co-constructed with the research participants (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). As Karp (2006: 10) states, 'the researcher is not the expert, regardless of their knowledge of the literature, the participants are the experts on their own situation'.

Further, Fontana & Frey (1994) question the ethical implications of interviewing, arguing that there is a balance of power between the interviewer and participant. The interviewer gets to determine which questions to ask and the answers that will be used in the analysis. It is pertinent to note that this power is balanced by the participant's willingness to answer or refuse to disclose information (Blodgett, *et al.*, 2005). Some steps were however taken to balance the power differential between the researcher and the researched in this study: Participants in this study determined the location and time of their interviews; the intent of

this research and research questions were made clear to the participants (Bravo-Moreno, 2003); participants were made aware of how the collected data will be used and stored; participants were informed of how their privacy will be protected including who will have access to the collected data; the use of pseudonyms to protect their identities and their right to opt out of the research at any time and respect for their beliefs (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005; Berg 2001). These steps are illustrated in detail in Section 5.8.

While interviewing as a method of data collection is suggested to include observations (Kvale, 1996), observation of participants during their individual interviews was particularly emphasised in the present study. Observation of participants while interviewing them was relevant based on my findings during the pilot study. During the pilot study, some of the pilot participants were very brief in their narrations and appeared uncomfortable discussing girl marriage (see Section 5.5). Observation of participants while interviewing them enabled me to record participants' attitudes and behaviours while discussing girl marriage, attitudes that may otherwise be inaccessible or achieved through other methods (Spradley, 2016). More so, the interpretive stance which is employed in this study suggest a range or combination of techniques—from interviews to ethnographic or observation—may be applied to produce qualitative data (Denzin, 2001) and reduce biases to the lowest level (Bodgan, 1972). While I believe that research cannot be value free, researchers should try to make their assumptions, influences and values transparent, while striving as far as possible to be neutral and non-judgemental in their approach. Weber (cited in Zecha, 1992) suggests that to achieve value neutrality, researchers must be conscious of their own personal values.

‘Value neutrality does not mean having no opinions, it just means that sociologists must strive to overcome personal biases, particularly subconscious biases, when analysing data. It also means that sociologists must

avoid skewing data in order to match a predetermined outcome that aligns with a particular agenda, such as a political or moral point of view' (Weber, cited in Zecha, 1992:4).

The findings of the present study have been presented from the perspectives of the people involved without omitting or distorting significant data. This is evident in the results of the current study which contradict my personal view and some widely accepted beliefs about girl marriage and the people involved. As discussed in chapter 2, poverty and lack /low-level of education are the main factors that underpin girl-marriage practices but as the findings of this study suggest, these factors are secondary in the context of Nigeria's Northern region.

Summary: The above discussion reveals the appropriateness of interviews and observation methods of data collection for this study. These methods provide a suitable framework to answer the research question and enable the study of cultural systems, such as girl marriage, from both emic and etic perspectives. The discussion above also demonstrates the suitability of Denzin's (1989, 2001) interpretive interactionism framework for data collection and analysis. This approach enables understanding of the 'top down' imposition of cultures by the people involved in girl marriage decisions. As shown in the empirical chapters, it enabled this study to interpret the decision makers' accounts within the right context.

To this end, it was decided that data should be collected in the communities where the practise of girl marriage is predominant. The next section presents the communities and participants that were studied, their characteristics, size, qualifications to be part of the study, sampling technique, its appropriateness and limitations the research.

5.4. Population and sample

As explained in Section 1.2, prior research (UNICEF, 2012) shows that girl marriage is predominant in the Northern region of Nigeria. Hence, the research was designed to focus on Northerners living in Kano (Northern region) and Lagos state (South western region).

Although Lagos state is geographically located in the south-western region and not in the Northern region of Nigeria, it was decided that recruitment and data collection from Lagos state would enable a credible comparative analysis (Glaser, 1967).

5.4.1. Population

Berg (2001) suggests that for a researcher to access a community or organisation successfully, the researcher needs to negotiate with the right individuals or authority. To achieve this, I contacted some community workers who were my previous colleagues in the Northern region and consequently, snowball sampling was carried out in 2014 and two states -Kano and Lagos were identified for recruitment and data collection before the actual data collection in 2015. Nonetheless, this initial contact, which was adopted based on the sensitivity of the topic, was almost of no relevance, as we will see in the course of discussion, I had to renegotiate the agreement and consent of all gatekeepers before I was allowed entry into Kano and Lagos states.

Kano state in the Northern West of Nigeria was chosen for recruitment and data collection.

While Kano state was chosen based on ‘opportunity or convenience research setting’, which involves recruiting participants from communities where a researcher has easy access (Cohen *et al.*, 2000) or in communities where access is offered (Woods, 1996), this should not suggest any bias in the nature of the choice made because, as explained in Section 4.5, the practice of girl marriage is widespread in all the Northern states in Nigeria. Moreover, one of

the recruitment criteria ensured recruited participants, although living in Kano, were from different states within the Northern region. This was to enable a comprehensive sample.

Kano state is believed to be the most populous state in Nigeria. During the 2006 census, which is the most recent, Kano state was found to have a population of more than 9.3 million (NPC, 2017). There are 44 local governments in Kano state and its state capital is Kano-city. There are six local councils in Kano-city (Dala, Nasarawa, Fagge, Tarauni, Gwale and Kano Municipal) and these six local councils have virtually merged into what is commonly called Kano metropolis (Orewa & Adewumi, 1983). Kano metropolis is the commercial nerve centre of Kano State and, indeed, the whole of Northern Nigeria. It is highly populated by indigenous people from other Northern states and immigrants, mainly Yorubas and Igbos (NPC, 2017). Recruitment and data collection were limited to Fagge and Dala local councils in the Kano metropolis based on accessibility. Fagge and Dala communities are considered as urban compared to other local councils in Kano state. Hence, it was suggested that recruitment and data collection in these two communities would enable easy recruitment of participants from different economic, religious and educational backgrounds. These factors were considered based on the suggestions from prior research that they are able to influence the practice of girl marriage in developing countries.

Lagos state, a modern and religiously mixed city, was an important data collection site as it provides access to Northern Nigerians living in an urban south-western region, that is, outside of the Northern cultural context of girl marriage. This provides an opportunity to explore how Northern Nigerian views concerning girl marriage might be affected by this context.

Recruitment and data collection in Lagos state focused on Agege local council where there is a large Northern population.

In these two locations (Lagos and Kano state), the aim was to explore the motivations and interpretations of key decision makers involved in girl marriage decisions. Having discussed the communities adopted for recruitment and data collection, the next section will present the sample, their characteristics and justification of these.

5.4.2. Sample

The study was based in Fagge, Dala (in Kano state) and Agege community (in Lagos state). It was decided that homogeneous and criterion sampling techniques be adopted for recruitment. Homogeneous sampling was relevant to enable this study focus only on participants who practise girl marriage and criterion sampling was also relevant to enable selection of participants who meet specific criteria that would provide the required data.

Findings from prior studies (see Sections 2.2.3 and 4.5.2) indicate that men make most girl marriage decisions. As the current study is focused on the motives and intentions of the people involved in girl marriage decisions, it was relevant to have more males in the sample. Nevertheless, a few women (one community leader and three parents) were included to have a diverse view.

Other eligibility criteria were:

- Community leaders in either Kano (Fagge & Dala communities) or Lagos (Agege community) state: this criterion was suggested for three reasons: (i) findings from prior studies (Bogalech, 2007; Erulkar & Bello, 2007) suggest that community leaders are involved in some girl marriage decisions, hence it was relevant to include them in the sample; (ii) as this study explores the practice of girl marriage within a cultural context and, as discussed in Section 4.4, community leaders are held in high esteem in Nigeria, they are seen by community members to represent 'indigenous values and

authority, their roles involve governing their communities with authority over different aspects of life, ranging from social welfare to judicial functionaries. iii) Further, some community leaders are traditionalists and knowledgeable about different cultural practices in their communities. Therefore, this group of participants were relevant to provide comprehensive interpretations and motives that underpin the continuity of girl marriage practises in their communities. In addition, it was suggested that familiarity with the community leaders would help to avoid obstacles during the course of the study in their communities.

- Parents/guardians of girls who have either witnessed or practised girl marriage: as highlighted in Section 4.3, prior research (James, 2010; Bogalech, 2007; Erulkar & Bello, 2007) indicates that some girl marriage decisions in the Northern region are made by the parents or guardians. Hence, it was decided that these specific people would be suitable to provide an understanding of the motives and intentions behind girl marriage decisions. Similarly, recruiting these particular people would enable information from people (men) who married their wives before Nigeria's legal marriageable age, or (women) who themselves were married before Nigeria's legal marriageable age.
- Northerners living in either Kano or Lagos state: the reason for this criterion was to enable recruitment of participants who live in Kano/Lagos state but are indigenes of other states within the Northern region. However, they should be parents/guardians or community leaders who are involved in girl marriage practises. This would enable data that would include the perceptions of sample members from different states in the Northern region.

- Northerners from different religious and educational backgrounds: this criterion was relevant to provide data which would help investigate if the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria is influenced by religion or educational factors.
- Above the age of 18: this criterion was suggested because the aim was to specifically study adults who make girl marriage decisions.

In addition to the recruitment of parents and community leaders, it was also decided to recruit some policy-stakeholders. Policy stake-holders are personnel who are involved in the policy formation and processes of a country or organisation (Schmeer, 1999), in this case, Northern Nigeria. To enable diverse views, policy-stakeholders were recruited from different government parastatals (organisations). The policy stakeholders recruited:

- Marriage registrars that work in government marriage registries. This sample enabled investigation how marriages are or are not conducted in accordance with the Nigerian constitution in relation to the age of the marrying couple.
- Law enforcement agents: This sample enabled an investigation of how law enforcement agents are or not enforcing the 2003 CRA which prohibits girl marriage practises.
- Health officers: This was to examine how health officers provide health advice such as birth control to the girls involved in girl marriage practises.
- Child Rights officers: This sample enabled investigation of how these officers are or not promoting the awareness of the tights of the child and programmes such as the prohibition of girl marriage practices
- Law makers/legislators: As discussed in Section 4.4.4 contradictions in Nigeria's Constitution makes it possible for 12 states in the Northern region not to comply with

the 2003 CRA (Brammah, 2014). Hence this sample enabled an investigation of girl marriage practises from a legal stand point.

Below is the recruitment process and justification.

5.4.3. Recruitment of participants

Considering the sensitivity of this research topic, the first contact or recruitment was the policy stakeholders. This was relevant so that the policy stakeholders could provide access to the community leaders and other members of the community. As it is with some studies, gatekeeping can be problematic with researchers having limited or no access to sites (McFadyen & Rankin, 2016). In the present study, to recruit policy stakeholders, community leaders and parents, a number of gatekeepers limited and denied access to potential participants. In particular, some of the community leaders denied me access to their communities and potential participants (parents) despite ethical, professional and council approval received from their local government council. In response to this challenge, I incorporated some techniques (discussed later in this section) which worked in some communities. However, it is pertinent to note that the attitudes of these gatekeepers limited this study in a number of ways (see Section 8.4). Two factors were found to influence the action of these gatekeepers (community leaders): their level of understanding about this research and fear or anxiety about the findings. These factors are similar to those found in other fieldworks (see McFadyen & Rankin, 2016).

Table 5.1: Recruitment of policy stakeholders in Lagos and Kano State

Number approached	Appointments made	Took part in the study
10	10	5

The initial snowball sampling (illustrated in Section 5.5) was of little relevance as some of my initial contacts in 2014 had retired from their official appointments and others had been transferred out of the Northern region to other regions in Nigeria. However, my experience as a local community officer in Nigeria facilitated my access to some of the public offices in Kano metropolis and Lagos state. I personally approached six policy-stakeholders (all were child rights promotion officers) who introduced me to four other policy stakeholders from different government organisations (one legislator, one police officer, one marriage registrar and one health officer) (see Table 5.1). I explained what the study was about and distributed participant information sheets to them (see Appendix 4) and they all agreed to take part in the study. However, five of the child rights promotion officers opted out of the study. They gave different reasons for their inability to participate: two said they had very busy schedules and the other three reported that they were involved in some political functions, so were unable to participate. Therefore, I was only able to recruit five policy stakeholders (three in Lagos and two in Kano) - one legislator, one police officer, one child rights promoter, one marriage registrar and one health officer.

Data from only five policy stakeholders however limits this study in that it cannot be generalised as the views of all the policy stakeholders as they affect the practice of girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region. However, the recruited policy stakeholders are from

different government parastatals and their contributions, as we will see in Chapter 6, were detailed with expertise and experience.

Studies reveal that while some communities are highly accessible for research purposes, some can be very restricted (McFadyen & Rankin, 2016; Shaffir *et al.*, 1980). However, Sixsmith, *et al.*, (2003); Berg (1999); Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that a researcher can gain entry into a difficult community by being familiar with the community, its people, rituals and practices. While it was somewhat difficult to gain entry into Fagge and Dala community for research purposes, my 16 years' experience as a community worker was quite helpful during my field-work. One of the policy stakeholders who also took part in this study introduced me to the chairmen of the Fagge and Dala local councils. After my first meeting with these chairmen, I requested that I be introduced to the officers in charge (civil servants) of community meetings in Fagge and Dala districts. On meeting with the officers-in charge of the Dala and Fagge community meetings, I made some enquiries about the community leaders' meeting days and times. I also requested to speak with all the community leaders during one of their meetings at the local council. At my first meeting with the community leaders from Fagge and Dala communities, I explained what my research was about and distributed participant information sheets to all 23 community leaders present at the meeting. They asked several questions about the significance of the study and I explained to them that their information was needed to enable understanding of the motives and intentions that underpin girl marriage decisions. I also explained that I needed participants who met the eligibility criteria in Section 5.3. After my meeting with the community leaders of Fagge and Dala communities, the main head of all the community leaders requested that I give them some time to think about taking part in the study. It was agreed that I should return the following week for feedback.

On arrival at the community leaders' meeting for the agreed feedback, the officer in charge (civil servant) called me aside and explained that most had refused to take part in the study. However, he advised that I speak with them again. During my second meeting with the community leaders from Fagge and Dala communities, I asked them about their concerns. The head of these community leaders reported that that all had similar beliefs and traditional backgrounds, hence, recruiting all 23 community leaders would be a repetition of similar information. He advised that I speak with only one or two community leaders. However, after further deliberations with the community leaders, I was able to schedule appointments with eight community leaders (five men and three women). We exchanged mobile telephone contacts and agreed to meet in their respective community town halls. However, prior to these meetings, I received phone calls from five of them (three men and two women). They decided to opt out of the study with no clear reason given for their decisions. Therefore, I was only able to recruit three community leaders (see Table 5.2) (two men and one woman) in these communities (two from Dala and one from Fagge).

Table 5.2: Recruitment of community leaders in Kano State

Number approached		Appointments made	Took part in the study
Men	17	5	2
Women	4	3	1

Recruitment of only three community leaders in Kano however limits this study in that the perceptions of these community leaders on girl marriage decisions may not be generalised as the perceptions of all the community leaders in Kano state. Nonetheless, the three community leaders who took part in this study were amongst the most senior by hierarchy in

the Fagge and Dala communities, and their 20-38 years' experience and expertise in these communities are of value to this study.

Following this, and based on my previous experience of working in these communities (I sensed some reluctance in the community leaders), it was important to speak with the zonal head of all the community leaders to facilitate entry into Fagge and Dala communities to recruit some parents. I met with the zonal head's personal assistant and requested to schedule an appointment with the zonal leader. After this appointment was scheduled, I met with the zonal leader on the scheduled date, introduced myself as a former local community worker, now a researcher, wanting to recruit some participants for my research programme. After some deliberations with the zonal leader, he contacted (via phone call) the community leaders in Fagge and Dala community and requested that I be allowed into these communities for research purpose (the implications of this approach are discussed later on in this section).

Table 5.3: Recruitment of parents in Kano State

Number approached	Appointments made	Took part in the study
Men- 21	21	18
Women- 20	9	2

Having received permission to recruit participants, I went into Fagge and Dala communities, met with community leaders and confirmed that I was allowed to go into these communities for research purposes. Despite these permissions however, it was somewhat difficult to recruit participants, particularly the women. Some men were reluctant based on the sensitivity of the topic and some women refused to take part in the study after consulting their husbands.

However, I was able to recruit 20 parents who met the eligibility criteria (Section 5.4.2). The recruitment process in the Fagge and Dala communities is outlined below.

Fagge Community is a local area in the suburb of Waje. Fagge has a population of 198,828 (Agbu, 2017). Some participants were recruited in Fagge with the help of their community leader who personally approached different people in the community (the limitation of this approach is discussed later in this section). However, to avoid bias in the community leader's choice of participants, I bypassed the gate-keepers and recruited some civil servants at Fagge local council secretariat. I explained my research to them and asked them to introduce to me people who met the eligibility criteria for this study. Using this approach, I was personally able to recruit three participants at Fagge community, while the community leader in Fagge introduced me to five other participants who volunteered to take part in the study. In total, eight participants (all men) were recruited in Fagge community, Kano state.

Dala Community is the largest local government area in Nigeria. Dala is in the North-west part of the Kano metropolis with an estimated population of 718,777 (Agbu, 2017). Similar to the recruitment process in Fagge, the community leader in Dala community facilitated the recruitment of some participants. She personally approached people and seven participants (men) gave their consent. I also recruited some civil servants at Dala local council. At Dala council, I was able to recruit six further participants (four men and two women) by word-of-mouth. Another woman who initially contacted me about taking part in the research was unable to take part in this study because her husband forbade her. Nevertheless, she referred me to one further female participant. In total, 14 participants (11 men and three women) were recruited in Dala community. The next section will illustrate the recruitment of community leaders and parents in Lagos state.

Recruitment in Lagos State: In the case of Agege community in Lagos state, I will discuss the recruitment of the community leaders and parents together because data collection was obstructed in this community. While my experience in Lagos state has some limitations for this study, it also contributed to the findings of this study. This particular experience and limitations are discussed in Section 8.4.

Table 5.4: Recruitment of community leaders in Lagos state

Number approached	Appointments made	Took part in the study
Men – 7	7	1
Women – 5	5	0

Table 5.5: Recruitment of parents in Lagos State

Number approached	Appointments made	Took part in the study
Men - 10	9	0
Women - 20	14	1

Agege community: This local council is geographically located in the Northern part of Lagos state. Lagos state is the largest city in Nigeria and Africa, and it is dominated by people from different parts of the world and regions of Nigeria. While Agege community in Lagos state is dominated by Northerners, there are also western, eastern and southern Nigerians in this community. This mixed population has brought about religious and cultural diversity to Lagos state.

While previous interactions with policy stakeholders in Lagos state facilitated my access to the community leaders in Agege, my interaction with participants in Dala community (in Kano state) facilitated my recruitment of parents in Agege, Lagos state. Unfortunately, however, my study was obstructed in Agege community, Lagos state. Although it is not certain if all the scheduled appointments (see Tables 5.4 and 5.5) with the community leaders and parents in Agege would have taken place if this study was not obstructed, out of the 11 appointments scheduled with community leaders I was only able to complete one, and out of the 23 appointments that were scheduled with parents in Agege community, I was also only able to complete one. My experience in this community is discussed in Section 8.4.1.

In summary, 30 participants (see table 5.6) were successfully recruited: five policy stakeholders, four community leaders and 21 parents. Table 5.6 provides a summary of recruited. The next section will discuss the appropriateness of the overall sample for this study.

Table 5.6: Participants' summary

Research Communities	Policy Stake holders	Community leaders	Parents
Kano state (Fagge and Dala)	3	3	20
Lagos (Agege)	2	1	1

5.4.4. Appropriateness of sample size

While reasons such as resources, accessibility of participants and particularly my experience in Lagos state (see pg.13 for my research experience) limited the recruitment of more participants for this study, the recruited sample size (five policy stakeholders, four

community leaders and 21 parents) is adequate for this study. As highlighted in Section 5.2, this study adopted an interpretive approach, which is characterised by a small sample size, an exploratory nature of enquiry, and a qualitative interpretation of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Further, while several studies (Creswell, 2013; Charmaz, 2006; Guest *et al.*, 2006; Bernard, 2000; Sandelowski, 1995 and Morse, 1994) debate how large a qualitative sample size should be, very few studies present evidence for their recommendations. However, the study of Guest *et al.* (2006) on an HIV prevention programme in two different sites (Ghana and Nigeria) suggests that a sample size of 6-12 will suffice. Guest *et al.* (2006) recruited 60 participants from Ghana and Nigeria (30 participants from each site), while the sampling criteria was similar in the two sites and all the participants were asked identical questions in the same sequence the interviewer probed on key responses. By the end of the analyses, Guest *et al.*, (2006:73) found that “of all the sixty interviews, a total of thirty-six codes were applied with high frequency to the transcript. Of these, thirty-four (94%) had already been identified within the first six interviews, and thirty-five (97%) were identified after twelve”, suggesting that the importance of themes does not change with the addition of more data, as important themes in most cases emerge early. Therefore, a sample size of 30 is appropriate for the current study.

Summary: This section has described the population under study, the sample and how they were recruited. Nigeria’s Northern region was chosen based on the prevalence of girl marriage practises in the region. However, recruitment of participants for this study took place in Fagge and Dala communities in Kano state and Agege community in Lagos state. A total of 30 participants from three groups (five policy-stakeholders, four community leaders and 21 parents) were successfully recruited, with a particular focus on men as research

participants. Although the decision to focus on men as research participants is based on findings from prior research that men make most girl marriage decisions, particularly in Northern Nigeria, the choice for male dominated participants was aimed at filling a gap in this field of study. While several studies (see Chapters Two and Four) on girl marriage recommended that men should be incorporated into awareness programmes that are aimed at reducing girl marriage practises, very few studies have focused on men and community leaders. This study therefore provides insights into the motives and intentions of some men involved in girl marriage decisions. The next section illustrates the pilot study done in preparation for the complete study.

5.5. Pilot study

I went to Nigeria for the pilot study in January 2014. The pilot study was needed to test the research questions and identify potential issues that might arise during the actual fieldwork. The pilot study was also relevant to test how to identify the people involved in girl marriage decisions. I stayed in Lagos state where I intended to interview some policy stakeholders, community leaders and few parents. During the pilot study, I conducted snowball sampling with the assistance of some previous colleagues (local community workers) which enabled me to interview six pilot participants in Lagos state: two policy stakeholders (males), two community leaders (1 male and 1female) and two parents (1female and 1male) who are involved in girl-marriage practises. The pilot study revealed two faults: with the research location and the interview questions.

It was initially planned that the study should take place in Borno state, north-eastern Nigeria. However, the pilot study revealed that it will be difficult to access potential participants in Borno state. According to some policy stakeholders, if I wanted to focus on Northern Nigerian men's perspective in the study, I might not get this opportunity if I went to Borno

state. My contacts anticipated that it would be impossible to negotiate potential participants in Borno state because the state is known for its religious extremism and they could find it inappropriate for a young woman travelling alone to speak to the opposite sex. While it could be different for a foreign female researcher, for me as a Nigerian, such actions could be interpreted negatively. As a result, by the end of the pilot study the locations for the study were selected: (1) Kano (Fagge and Dala communities) state; (2) Lagos (Agege community).

After administering the questions to the pilot participants in exactly the same way as it will be administered in the main study, it was observed that some of the questions were ambiguous and difficult for them to understand. I was asked to clarify some terms and phrases which made some of the interviews take longer than planned, some took 1 hour, 30 minutes as against the 40 minutes planned. Hence, it was relevant to: discard all difficult and ambiguous questions; re-word questions that were not answered as expected and examine all the responses received if they can be interpreted in terms of the information that is required for this study. I decided that: (a) wording should be open-ended to allow potential participants to choose their own terms when responding to the questions; (b) avoid wordings that might influence answers, i.e., judgmental and evocative wording (Turner, 2010).

During the pilot study, I also observed that some of the male pilot participants exhibited some arrogance and were not detailed in their responses even when I asked some probing questions. Hence, an emphasis on individual interview observation was suggested for the main study, to enable me to record participants' attitudes and behaviours that may otherwise be inaccessible (Adler & Adler, 1994). The systematic process of data collection for this study is now described.

5.6. Procedure

As emphasised throughout this chapter, semi-structured interviews and observations were used for data collection. All the participants in this study were interviewed face-to-face and their responses recorded using a voice recorder. Observations during individual interviews were also noted. For ease, the interviews and observations were conducted in stages. The first stage involved the policy-stakeholders, the second stage involved community leaders in Kano state followed by the parents in Kano (this was done to save cost and time), and the last stage involved the community leader and parent in Lagos. The following discussion is structured according to these stages.

Interviews and observations with policy-stakeholders: After I had received ethical approval for this study from the University of Northampton, I began the process of data collection by sending a reminder to all the potential participants, reminding them of the scheduled interviews and observations. After this participant information and consent forms (see Appendix 4) were distributed to ensure that all the participants were aware of the aim and purpose of the study, venues and durations of interviews and observations. It was also necessary to re-confirm if the potential participants were still interested in taking part in the study.

Following positive responses from potential participants, I started with the policy stakeholders. While all the policy stakeholders were asked similar questions during their interviews, probes were used according to the responses of each policy stakeholder. The themes that were explored in these interviews are socio-economic factors, cultural, religious, political and/or contextual factors such as displacement and risks associated natural disasters and internal armed conflict (see Appendix 3). Each policy stakeholder was allocated a

number at the start of their interviews to ensure anonymity, e.g. Civil Servant 1 to Civil Servant 5.

All the interviews with the policy stakeholders took place in their offices; three took place in Lagos while two took place in Kano state. The policy stakeholders in Lagos were the first to be interviewed (Civil Servant 3, Civil Servant 4 and Civil Servant 1) and the policy stakeholders in Kano (Civil Servant 2 and Civil Servant 5). The policy stakeholder interviews were approximately 40 minutes long. They all deliberated on the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria in relation to their official roles. All the interviews with the policy stakeholders were audio-recorded and observation notes of attitudes were taken, with the exception of my interview with the police officer who refused to use the audio recorder. The police officer appeared uninterested throughout the interview; he intermittently looked at the wall-clock in his office. However, he responded to most of the questions.

Following my observation and interviews with all the policy stakeholders, I proceeded to interview and observe the community leaders and parents in Kano state. At this stage, I restructured my interview schedule based on my experience and written reflections with all the policy stakeholders. However, the content of the questions did not change but I rearranged them, creating a more flexible schedule which clearly formalised the introduction and conclusion of the interviews.

Interviews and observations of community leaders in Kano: I spent the first two days in Fagge and Dala communities rescheduling parents' and community leaders' appointments because some of them wanted to change their time slots and venues. After organising these to suit all the community leaders and parents in Fagge and Dala communities, I proceeded with my interviews and observations of the two community leaders in Dala, after which I

completed the interview and observation of the community leader in Fagge. Each community leader was allocated a number at the start of their interviews to ensure anonymity, for clarity, community leader participants are referred to as CL.1, CL.2, CL.3 and CL.4.

Similar to the policy stakeholders, the interviews with the community leaders in Kano state were audio recorded and observations noted about attitudes and behaviours. All the interviews took place in Fagge and Dala community town halls. This meant the lighting was appropriate, it was comfortable to sit, and the interviews were uninterrupted. Each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes. After studying the community leaders, I proceeded with my interviews and observations with the parents in Fagge and Dala communities.

Interviews and observations of parents in Kano: Interviews with parents in the Fagge and Dala communities took place in their homes. However, I took some security procedures to ensure my personal safety (informed the neighbourhood watch and the local police of my presence in the community). While interviewing participants in the presence of their family members can have implications on the quality and content of the data (McDonald and Rosier, 2011), this was not the case in this study. Most of the participants in this study are men and as part of the customs of the Nigerian community, other family members are not expected to interrupt when the male family head is talking. Interviewing participants in their homes meant that I was able to observe mundane interactions between couples and ask questions on areas that needed clarification. Observations were hand written while all interviews were audio-recorded. This was to enable me to conduct the interview effectively without obstructing my observations. Pseudonyms were assigned to all the parents at the start of their interviews to avoid me using their real names in this study. In the case of the parents, each participant chose their pseudonyms. Most of my interviews with the parents in Kano were very brief (typically 15 to 20 minutes). Some participants appeared uncomfortable discussing

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this sensitive topic at the start of the interviews. However, most soon relaxed as the interviews and observations progressed.

I proceeded to Lagos state at the end of my data collection in Kano state. With regards to my data collection in Lagos, I will discuss the process adopted with the parent and community leaders together due to the small size of this sample.

Interviews and observations of participants in Lagos: The interview and observation of participants in Lagos state started with the parent (a woman) who had been recruited in Kano. The interview with this parent took place in her house. While all her interview questions were similar to the ones asked of parents in Kano, I probed inductively on key responses. A pseudonym was assigned at the start of interviews. The interview and observation took approximately 35 minutes.

After my interview and observation of the parent, I proceeded with my interview and observation of the community leader. The interview with this community leader took place in Agege community town hall. The interview went smoothly. The interview questions were similar to the ones used in Kano state; however, I further prompted him based on his key responses. The data collection was obstructed after my meeting with the first community leader in Agege community of Lagos (this experience is outlined in Chapter 8).

Throughout the data collection for this study, I adopted the technique of talking less and listening more (Hertz, 1997) and after each interview I used clarifying statements such as “what I heard you say is that you feel fulfilled, is this correct?” This was relevant to ensure I understood their decision making with regards to girl marriage practices and, to ensure participants reviewed the representation of their views and if need be, expanded on them or

withdrew any comments. This procedure further helps this study to maintain its commitment to ethical research.

While participants were aware that their interviews were audio-recorded, the recorder was not placed in their view during the interviews. It was felt that having the audio-recorder in the view of participants, especially the parent participants, would make the interviews too formal and affect the familiarity between myself and the participants. Apart from the observational field notes and audio-recorded interactions, I also produced reflective field notes where I recorded my responses and role in the process of data collection and analysis. Although I wrote as much as I could in my field notes, I tried not to be too analytical, the aim here was to have a clear record of my interviews. Field notes were later transferred into a computer file, allowing further time for reflection. I regularly examined the collected data, highlighting repeated concepts and differences in the reflective field notes. Hertz's (1997) and Van Maanen's (1988) guidance on reflectivity was a useful guide during my field work; I actively constructed interpretations of field experiences and questioned my interpretations.

Observations and interviewing of participants require great sensitivity. Moreover, arranging and conducting or analysing them were not always straightforward. Hence, I reflected on these experiences to enhance my understanding of the research process (Taylor, 2001).

Nevertheless, I was careful not to descend into 'methodological angst' (Seale, 1999).

My reflective field notes were updated regularly during the field work, especially when there was a need to reflect on an insight or a change. I produced 21 reflective entries and I separated these into 4 different categories – theoretical suggestions, observations, how to improve or what to include in future interviews and self-analysis (Gobo, 2008). These entries were relevant to enable me to think critically about my research decisions; from the conducting of individual interviews to the final representation of research participants in the

thesis. I reflected on how I could have improved on the strengths and weaknesses. Notably, Gobo (2008) suggests that this process of observations, in-depth interviews and reflection notes enables understanding of data. I was aware of the need to present participants sensitively, I am conscious that they are not just 'data' to be analysed but human beings with lives outside of this research study. Moreover, the sensitivity of this research topic and the accounts of research participants, specifically from the female participants, emphasised the need to be sensitive to participants as people.

Conducting observations for a relatively small scale thesis was problematic due to the sheer volume of material produced. Despite Denzin's (2001) Interpretive Interactionist guidance, it was difficult to bracket my thickly descriptive memos. Although I was able to analyse the key points in depth with the use of the methods outlined in Section 5.3., the need for concise academic writing in the PhD thesis itself limited me from using most of the context. Rather than the concept of reaching 'saturation' in data collection, as mentioned above, this study was constrained by an obstruction during data collection in Lagos state. Data collection (recruitment, observation and interviews) was planned with the aim of starting on 30 September 2015 to end on the 30 December 2015 but the collection of data was brought to an abrupt end on the 30 October 2015 (see Section 8.4). While there may be some implications (see Section 8.4) for the abrupt end of the data collection, my whole field experience appears to corroborate Marxist and Weberian arguments that culture is influenced one way or the other by either the ruling class of a society or by a powerful institution within a social structure (McLellan, 1984). After the collection of data, my field notes and interview recordings were transferred into a password locked computer file, to enable me more time for reflection. The process of data analysis is discussed in the next section.

5.6.1. Data processing

As explained in Section 5.6, I conducted a preliminary data analysis during the data collection process. Data analysis actually begins in the field and the act of asking a ‘follow-up question’ or asking for clarifications (Section 5.3) does not shape the interview, it constitutes a form of analysis (Berg, 2001). For analysis, data from the policy stakeholders was separated from the key decision makers’ (community leaders and parents) data because of their different roles and perspectives of girl marriage. Nevertheless, a similar data processing was followed for both groups. Discussion in this section will however be limited to the data analysis from the key decision makers (parents and community leaders) being that the present study is much more focused on their perspectives.

For data analysis, I employed an inductive (looked for patterns in the data) and a deductive (developing a hypothesis (or hypotheses) based on existing theory) thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which was driven by both my research question and my theoretical assumptions. A Thematic approach to analysis in the present study is deemed suitable because it is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes one’s data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). I am aware of the need to choose a method that is appropriate to my research question, rather than falling victim to “methodolatry” (Braun & Clarke, 2006), where one is committed to method rather than topic/content or research questions (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Indeed, thematic analysis is a flexible approach that can be used across a range of epistemologies and research questions.

Thematic analysis is deemed suitable as against content analysis, grounded theory etc. because it is not particularly attached to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and so it can

be used within different theoretical frameworks such as Denzin's. It can be used to report experiences, reality of participants and the ways individuals make meaning of their experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013; 2006), which is the aim of the present study.

The first thing I did was to familiarise myself with the collected data, this involves reading and re-reading my material (data) in its entirety. I made notes of thoughts that spring to mind and wrote summaries of each transcript including my observations. My aim was to condense all of the information to key themes and topics that can shed light on my research question. Secondly, transcripts were arranged under individual profiles and observational field notes. After this, short profiles of participants were written (presented in the empirical chapters), stating educational background, economic/employment status, age and religion. These were considered based on suggestions made by prior research that girl marriage is mostly practised by illiterates and poor people. Subsequently, for clarity, I separated all the transcripts according to group (policy stakeholders, community leaders and parents). A process of thematic coding was employed. I started with seven transcripts that I considered to be very different, based on their profiles – Mustapha (an accountant); Jaleel (a journalist); Aisha (a teacher); Musa (a human resource officer); Majeed (a teacher); Youssef (a journalist) and Kamill (an engineer). I read these participants' transcripts closely and made a list of phrases and words that I felt encapsulated their reasons for girl marriage decisions and its continuity. This process can be described as “noting relevant phenomena; collecting examples of those phenomena; and analysing those phenomena in order to find commonalities and differences” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996:29). A list of twenty-five initial codes was produced; from this list using a deductive and inductive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I looked for themes already identified in the literature (such as socio-economic issues, religion, political and legal context) and for additional explanations of the continued practise of girl marriage

that had not been identified in previous studies. From an Interpretive Interactionist perspective, this stage involved moving from bracketing to construction (Denzin, 2001). In Grounded Theory, this form of analysis is referred to as moving from open coding to axial coding (Charmaz, 2006). The same process was used to analyse the three transcripts that contained detailed experiences of girl-marriage practises, those of Hawuwa, Aishat and Modinat (aside from the female community leader, these 3 were the only women in the study). I noticed that some themes shown in these transcripts matched those of the initial seven transcripts analysed. The themes identified through this process were then used to analyse all the other transcripts.

Thirdly, interview transcripts can be complex and to maintain the context of study, Saldaña (2009) explains that codes should be applied to sizeable sections of data. To ensure consistency in each group across all transcripts, a brief meaning of each coding category was written. For further consistency, and to examine if the identified key themes were the same and coding broadly similar, there was a comparative analysis of the initial codes on one transcript and the version coded with the final structure. During the coding process, as I came across likely codes that were previously unidentified, these were written in a spread sheet and reviewed after all the transcripts were coded according to the initial framework. Where applicable, I altered the coding framework to capture other motivations and interpretations of girl marriage practices that were previously not considered. Consequently, all transcripts were re-coded in line with the further revised structure.

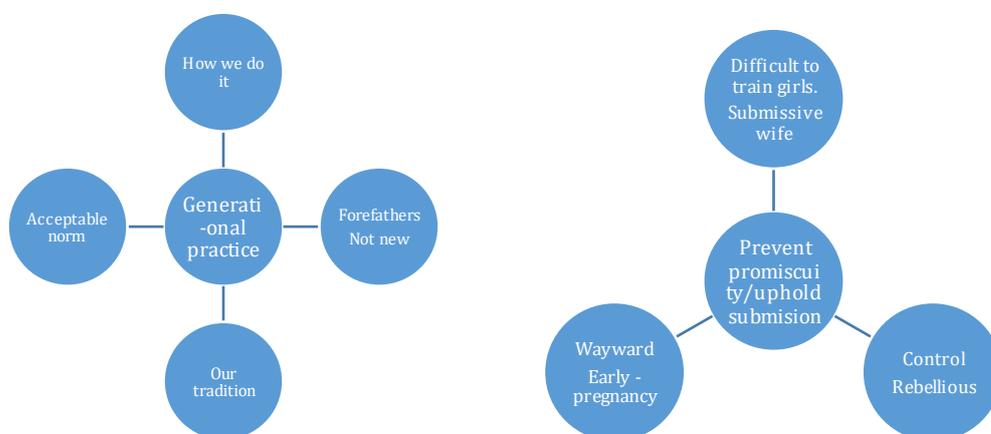
After the above thematic coding and thinking about the key themes for the analysis, I decided to write a narrative account of one of the participants (Modinat). Modinat is the youngest (24) amongst the participants in this study and her story was particularly disturbing (see Section

7.3.1). Although the focus of this study is not on women, Modinat's narrative of how she was

forced into marriage, forced to have sex and later rejected by her husband helped me to re-examine some emerging concepts I had identified. I was also able to connect my initial approach to data analysis with the themes outlined at the coding stage, comparing my impressions of girl marriage practises with the themes in the analysis. Critics argue that coding methods can decontextualize personal responses. However, my approach of preserving background information in the codes, participant narratives and the participant profiles ensured this was not the case (Geertz, 1973).

Finally, having established the six factors (themes) that influence girl marriage decisions from the perspectives of the Northern Nigerian community leaders and parents in this study (presented in chapter 7), I again examined some transcripts in relation to the themes to ensure clarity and coherence - See a developed thematic map below, showing three main themes (final analysis presented in the empirical chapters). Denzin (2001:84) suggests ‘the finished product must be both coherent, and understandable to research participants, representing their experiences in a way that they understand.

Figure 5.1: Developed thematic map: showing examples of two main themes



The next section will illustrate the reflective approach adopted throughout this study.

5.7. Researcher positionality

Several studies have emphasised the importance of the positionality of a researcher either from the perspective of an ‘outsider’ who is conducting a study in a foreign culture (Boddy, 2014, Milgram, 2012; Ryan *et al.*, 2011; Malam, 2004) or from the perspective of an ‘insider’ who is conducting a study in his/her home country or native culture (Sirnate, 2014; Ryan *et al.*, 2011; Shubhangi, 2010; Alcalde, 2007; Abu-Lughod, 1999). In this section, I discuss my positionality as a researcher going back home to conduct this study. Being a Nigerian and sharing some of the same values as the participants of this study had its positive and negative sides.

A researcher is positioned by his/her gender, age, ‘race’/ethnicity, sexual identity and so on (Hastrup, 1992), each of which are able to limit or broaden the researcher’s understanding of others. Certainly, my position depended on how I was perceived by the participants of this study. Certain characteristics of my status, such as being a female Nigerian, a wife and a former local community worker now with a Western education were emphasized during my interviews depending on which characteristic was more important to one or the other participant.

At the same time, I struggled with the personal tension I felt throughout the study that influenced my stay in the field and possibly the approach I adopted during the interviews and observations. Similar to the feelings described by Leila Abu-Lughod (1999), I found myself under male superiority dominance (that a male-head’s decision is final in every situation) once again, which I thought I dealt with few years ago while working in these communities. I came back to Nigeria and to Northern male dominance/superiority attitudes after spending some years abroad, which were beginning to change my perception as a female. I had moved

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from a female who would sacrifice her happiness or interest for the opinions/decisions of the male-head or her extended family to one who now understands that my well-being and goals should carry a greater weight. Moreover, my husband who is also a Nigerian, fortunately for me, does not believe that a woman is secondary in the home, he believes in reciprocity in marital relations. Living a 'free' life where I am able to speak when I want to and make certain decisions the way I want, I believed that I, as a woman born and raised in a patriarchal society, had long since dealt with the feelings of being a subordinated female in a Nigerian society. Although, in no time, I was back to who I used to be, while I chose to adopt again many characteristics of a Nigerian woman to make my data collection run smoothly, such as wearing traditional attire throughout my stay in the research communities or indicating respect by bowing my head and knees, or referring to the male participants as *babban dan'uwa* ('big brother'), other characteristics came back unintentionally and perhaps even unconsciously, perhaps because I needed information from men in a patriarchal community. Therefore, I felt unable to probe some responses from the men, particularly the community leaders. I felt restricted in my actions and manner of conversation (in this case, I relied more on my observations). This position as a Nigerian woman, as a result had positive and negative influence on my overall research, apart from the personal struggle I felt.

One positive side of me being a Nigerian and a former local community worker was my familiarity with the hierarchy and customs of the Northern region. Knowing what was expected and how things worked helped me in arranging meetings with the community leaders and meeting participants in their homes. However, some of the participants, particularly the policy stakeholders were familiar with being interviewed. Although some of the participants were excited at being interviewed about their culture, very soon they lost interest in the research as they realised I was there to talk to them about girl marriage. Some

reported that they were not comfortable with people talking about this practice as if they were committing a crime. I however responded that this was one of the reasons for conducting this study; I explained we needed to provide understanding of girl marriage from the perspectives of the key decision makers involved. I explained to them that it was time people heard their side of the story.

Being an 'insider' and sharing the same beliefs (communities where elders and patriarchal heads play a central role) helped me to get closer to most of the participants in this study. I was able to understand what was happening in a family by only observing a particular scene, while for an 'outsider' most of the observed scenes would not make sense. At the same time, some of the participants, particularly the women, were disappointed that I could not assist financially (researchers are believed to be financially advantageous), but they also felt they did not have to worry about being 'judged' or misinterpreted. My understanding of the culture and therefore certain practises and expressions has enabled me to interpret the findings and draw valid conclusions.

I had some depressing experiences during my field work in Lagos (most of which will be discussed in Chapter 8). In Kano, I was lectured on my position as a wife and a mother. The female community leader in particular asked me to leave the research and mind my 'own business' (taking care of my husband and children). I was also poorly judged for spending nights in the community hotels, which apparently questioned my loyalty to my husband. Some of the community leaders (knowing I was a former community worker) thought I was there to influence the women and the girls negatively about the practice of girl marriage. I was perceived positively by most of the women, particularly because I shared similar identities (a Nigerian woman) with them.

Growing up in the shared culture, I felt the patriarchal hierarchy evident in each household and could relate to it and often, involuntarily, became subject to it. Although I was probably raised in a less patriarchal family than the families I met during the fieldwork, in order to gain trust and to relate to the stories the women told me, I shared my own experiences when similar to those the other women experienced. My own actions and behaviour such as having or visiting males friends were also controlled (particularly before I got married) by my male relatives. Like other women in the field (Bakhtibekova, 2014; Sirnate, 2014; Shubhangi, 2010), I returned to some traditional behaviour. For example, I would get to my feet along with other younger girls when an older man or woman entered the room. I did not dare to make eye contact with some of the participants (particularly the male community leaders) and I behaved in the 'expected manner' of a 'polite' and soft spoken Northern Nigerian woman. All these similarities allowed me to become closer to the participants of this study. Nonetheless, most of them were disappointed by my research interest, they considered it as another topic about 'male-female equality', a topic which is frowned at in the Northern community. Some participants were less open, they would often create an image of being 'extremely busy' and therefore unavailable for a long conversation. Mixed with my own tensions of 'feeling male dominance', arranging interviews with men for this study was a rather distressing experience. The educated male participants (journalists, engineers, teachers etc.) were particularly difficult, I had to 'hunt' them down, went back to their houses several times a day in order to conduct the interviews. I was playing around their schedule which most of them seemed to create just to avoid discussing the practice of girl marriage with me. Surprisingly, however, I had an easy flow of conversation with the less educated men. In any case, my own position influenced my research experience throughout the month I spent in Nigeria doing the fieldwork. It has also influenced my own reflection on the study, I

tried to stay neutral during data collection but I do not deny feeling certain ways towards the women and girls I met during the fieldwork. Perhaps because I was allowed to choose my husband, I was emotionally affected and touched by the accounts of some of the female participants in this study (not all of these accounts are included in the empirical chapters as they did not relate to the research aim).

I found myself spending personal money, to help satisfy certain needs (such as food-stuffs and some foot wears) for one of the female participants in this study. I could not stop myself from sharing the pain of the youngest of all the participants in this study. I found myself in tears. Definitely, all the emotions and sympathy in the world are not going to enable me to understand the travails of this female participant. I persuaded myself that I am making a difference to this community through my research by presenting my findings without prejudice. I tried to stay positive that my research findings would reveal a compelling picture of the cultural practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria, to reveal the inequalities experienced by the girl-child and women and to see how these support current cultural practice. Although some of the families I studied appeared impoverished, they prioritised the welfare of male children, as most attended the government's free access further education colleges or vocational centres. Another realisation was the fact that the girls were denied access to the free available education and vocational centres.

Further, I consider it necessary to reflect on my fieldwork experience while collecting the data for this study because this experience has emphasised the need for the issue of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria to be researched. I was abducted during my fieldwork and held for 5 days. It became apparent after my kidnap that I was abducted because of this research. Although I had carried out a risk assessment and was familiar with the area, I would advise future researchers to very carefully plan research in this context. While my fieldwork

experience shows the power relations involved when working with these communities, it also reveals that if researchers challenge existing power relations and structures, those who benefit from the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria may act to protect their privileges.

As this section has illustrated, researcher positionality is not only important but also useful to recognize. Through reflecting on my own position as a Nigerian and a female married researcher, I experienced positive and negative emotions, relationships with participants and an experience that will live with me for a very long time. The next section explains the ethical considerations underpinning this study.

5.8. Ethical considerations

Many studies have informed the ethical considerations of this research project. The principles of ethical behaviour in regional research require that researchers act in culturally sensitive ways (Bell, 2008; Reeves, 2009, van Blerk & Ansell, 2010). All research involving human participants has ethical implications and this section provides an overview of these. The Ethics Code and Procedures (respect; competence; responsibility and integrity) of The University of Northampton was reviewed and incorporated into this account. Ethical permission was gained through The University of Northampton's Research Ethics Committee on 2nd July 2015.

Informed consent: Participation was voluntary for this study; to ensure clarity and avoid any form of deception, a written information sheet which explains the aims and nature of the research was given to all research participants (see the Appendix). Participants were asked to confirm that they understood the aim of research by signing the consent forms. There was no deception in this study.

Withdrawal: Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time without giving specific reasons, and that their information would be destroyed.

Confidentiality and anonymity: Anonymity is paramount to this study; the data in their entirety is only accessible to the supervisory team and me. The identities of research participants were anonymised and where quotes are used, all identifying details have been removed. Importantly, research participants were assured that the information they provided would not be linked or traced back to them in presentations, reports or other forms of dissemination. The ethical duty of confidentiality includes obligations to protect information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss or theft (Reeves, 2009). For this study, collected data has been stored in a password locked computer. Nevertheless, their information has been stripped of direct identifiers to avoid future re-identification or re-linkage.

Privacy: Participants' right to be free from intrusion or interference was respected throughout this study. They were informed of their privacy rights in relation to their personal information, expressed thoughts and opinions, personal communications with others, and spaces they occupy. All the participants of this study had the opportunity to exercise control over their personal information by consenting to, or withholding consent for, the collection, use and/or disclosure of information.

Respect: Interviews were recorded with each participant's permission and they were not compelled to reveal anything they did not wish to. As Harold *et al.* (1995) recognise, storytelling can be an emotional experience and, as such, care and respect for each participant was paramount, particularly throughout the interviews with female participants. Participants were not forced to answer questions they feel uncomfortable answering, I was culturally

sensitive. During the study, I monitored the participants (particularly the female parents) to make sure that they do not look distressed. Each participant's wish, beliefs and ethical view was respected throughout the research.

Protection from harm: In order to ensure an adequate degree of security or protection for the researcher and participants, the Nigerian police and the community Neighbourhood Watch associations were informed about the nature, time and venue of research. In addition, my student identity card from the University of Northampton was also carried at all times. No one faced any significant harm by taking part in this research, all the research participants are above the age of 18 and they all consented willingly. Nevertheless, I had a concern about the youngest (24 years) female research participant, I reported my concern (with her consent) to the counselling unit in her local council area and I have continuously kept contact with her. Although none of the participants' life was at risk of significant harm, the research was stopped abruptly because my own life as the researcher was at risk (see Section 8.2). With the advice of my supervisory team, I have since registered with a counsellor.

Debriefing: Before and at the end of data collection, participants were given debriefing sheets (see the Appendix) which showed when and how to obtain the results or conclusions of the study. Although there was no verbal debriefing, the email addresses of the researcher and supervisory team were on the debriefing sheets and left with the participants. Notably, this was only possible at Fagge and Dala community (Kano state) because data collection was stopped abruptly in Lagos state as discussed in Section 5.4.3.

Exiting the research setting: While it is possible to maintain a professional distance between the researcher and the participants when distributing questionnaires, this is not always possible with the use of in-depth interviews and observations (particularly on

sensitive issues as with the current study). This is because of the familiarity that in most cases most have developed during the study, hence, care must be taken by the researcher when leaving the field (Chadwick *et al.*, 1984). Berg (2001) explains that there are two ways of 'getting out' - physically and emotionally. These steps were employed in this study. I physically left the communities as soon as I had finished data collection. However, it has been difficult for me to detach emotionally from the participants, specifically the females. Although I referred them to some counselling centres, I have since kept contact with them, referring them to some early school leaver instructors who also update me on their welfare. This is similar to other field investigators. For example, Letkemann (1980) indicated that he continued to stay informed about the welfare of his subjects even after 10 years and being more than 800 miles away, because of the strong commitment and attachment he had developed with them. It is pertinent to note here that these steps were only applied to Kano State for reasons that will be discussed later on in the thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology and the methods used in the current study. The suitability of interview and observations for collecting data from policy stakeholders, community leaders and parents has been indicated. A rationale for employing Denzin's (1989; 2001) construction of Interpretive Interactionism framework for analysing the collected data has also been presented.

It was highlighted that the present study is a response to the call of prior studies on the need to include men and community elders (as decision makers) in local strategies that aim at reducing the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria. While the perspectives of these decision makers are relevant in the discussion of such local strategies, very little prior research has focused on their perceptions within a cultural context. The current study

therefore presents the perspectives of some Northern Nigerian men who are involved in girl marriage decisions.

The data gathered for this study are presented in the following two empirical chapter and conclusion. Chapter 6 explores the perceptions and challenges of policy stakeholders as regards the continuity of girl marriage in the Northern region. Their views are relevant to the discussion of the policy implications of the findings of this study; Chapter 7 presents answers to the research question - how do the people who are involved in girl marriage decision making in Northern Nigeria explain the practice of girl marriage? Their views are relevant to any discussion of determinants, consequences, or possible solutions and local strategies. Chapter 8 discusses and concludes this study.

CHAPTER 6

Facing the challenge

This chapter presents the views of some policy stakeholders from different governmental sectors in Nigeria on the continuity of girl marriage practises in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern region. As highlighted in Section 5.4.2, these policy stakeholders were incorporated in the current study to enable diverse view to emerge from different government organisations; marriage registries, legislators, law enforcement, health care and child rights promotion. The policy stakeholders involved in this study described the practice of girl marriage at both a personal and professional level. The thematic analysis is placed within the context of the political situation in Nigeria as it affects the stakeholders and the government organisations they represent. Also, the themes will be considered within the context of prior studies where appropriate. Direct quotations as reported by participants are used to provide evidence of interpretations made.

I begin the analysis with Section 6.1 which is an outline of the policy stakeholders' profiles and the observational notes of my interviews with them. Section 6.2 presents the three themes derived from an analysis of the interviews with the policy stakeholders as follows:

- Generational practice;
- Inconsistencies in the constitution
- Poverty and religion.

However, only a brief interpretation will be given of the last two themes (poverty and religion) as they were also identified (similar perspectives) during my interviews with the

community leaders and parents who are involved in girl marriage decision-making. These themes will therefore be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

6.1. Policy stakeholders' profiles

While Table 6.1 (below) presents the profile of the policy-stakeholders that participated in this study, it also maintains a balance between protecting participant anonymity and creating a descriptive picture. For this study, each policy stakeholders' name has been replaced with a pseudonym in the form of numbers and significant details that could identify participants have been excluded. Nevertheless, for clarity, the official status and the years in practice of all the participants have been maintained.

Table 6.1: Profiles of the policy stakeholders

Pseudonym	Status	Years in practice
Civil Servant1	Marriage registrar	More than 19 years
Civil Servant2	Senior Police officer	More than 21 years
Civil Servant3	Senior Health officer	More than 30 years
Civil Servant4	Child Rights promotion officer	More than 15 years
Civil Servant5	Law maker/legislator	More than 7 years

As highlighted in Section 5.4.3, data from only five policy stakeholders limits this study in that, arguably, the views of five policy stakeholders cannot be generalised as the view of all the policy stakeholders in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the five policy stakeholders provided insights on their understanding of the factors that underpin girl marriage decisions in the Northern region which are of contextual value. Observational notes concerning the policy-

stakeholders' interviews regarding how the people who are involved in girl marriage decisions in Northern Nigeria explain the practice of girl marriage are now considered.

6.1.1. Stakeholders' interview observations and data analysis

Part of the role of policy stakeholders is to implement the laws of a country or institution. Within this particular framework, they are there to ensure that Nigerians adhere to the 2003's CRA. Therefore, a similar topic guide (see Appendix 3) was used in my interviews with each stakeholder and each of them discussed the issue of girl marriage in various ways depending on their professional field and what was shared. Although all the policy stakeholders interviewed for this study hold the view that the 2003's CRA and Nigeria's Policy on Education has reduced the practice of girl marriage in Nigeria, recent statistics of non-attendance and school drop-out of girls in Nigeria (see Section 4.5.1), particularly in the Northern region, upon reaching puberty (British council, 2014) suggests that this view may not accord with actual practice. While all the participants condemned the continuity of girl marriage in the Northern region, they also shifted the blame onto inconsistencies in Nigeria's constitution and recommended that Nigeria's lawmakers revisit the constitutions to make amends. Civil Servant 5 (a Law Maker) however pessimistically reported that revisiting Nigeria's constitution would make little difference:

“Nigeria has diverse ethnic groups and each group has a right to their beliefs and traditions. I am not sure we will make headway by revisiting the constitution, you see (he pauses to put his glasses on), we have to look for other strategies in eradicating this problem. If you are the one whose beliefs are about to be eradicated from Nigeria's constitution, how will you feel”
(Civil Servant 5).

While Civil Servant 5's extract suggests that a more ground-up movement would be needed rather than a top-down approach in eradicating the complex issue of girl marriage in Nigeria, the extract is also consistent with prior studies (Gaffney, 2011) that to secure a reduction in girl marriage practices, appropriate local strategies need to include the people involved in girl marriage decisions. The extract further corroborates existing studies (James, 2010; Akpan, 2003) that the practice of girl marriage in Nigeria is underpinned by beliefs and traditions. Nevertheless, Civil Servant 5 was unclear about the strategies the Nigerian government would be putting in place, neither was he clear about the beliefs and traditions he was referring to. In contrast, Civil Servant 2 (Senior Police Officer) responded to most of the interview questions while standing, looking at his wall clock at every opportunity. He appeared uncomfortable discussing the issue. Civil Servant 2 however reported that girl marriage practises are rarely reported therefore, they are unable to make arrests:

‘It is difficult to penalise an offender if the offence has not been reported, isn't it?’

Although Civil Servant 2's report confirms existing knowledge (Matendere, 2016; Boyden, *et al.*, 2012), that cases of girl marriage practices are rarely reported, he was unclear if young girls are empowered to report decisions of girl marriage or if they are aware that the practice is prohibited in Nigeria. Civil Servant 2's extract and indifferent attitude to the discussion (as a Senior Police Officer) seemed like he was trying to get himself off the hook. ‘I can't do anything because they don't report’ could be a justification for non-action or genuine. Such an indifferent attitude by a law enforcement agent can impede effective policing in these communities by breaking down trust and inhibiting young girls from reporting cases of girl marriage.

In contrast, Civil Servant 1 (a Marriage Registrar) appeared passionate about the issue of girl marriage. She stressed that she does not conduct any marriage of girls under age 18 in her local council. At a point, she reached for the Local Council Marriage Registrar to show me the ages of the women whose marriages have been conducted under her watch and it was observed that the marriages recorded in the register involved women above 18. Similarly, Civil Servant 3 (a Senior Health Officer) was also disturbed about the health consequences of some girls involved in girl marriage practices. She was of the opinion that some of these marriages are forced for financial gains:

“Although it is an old cultural practice, I do not think people will continue to do this if they do not have something to gain, a particular girl’s parent that gets me really angry is... (She mentions her name), their first daughter died during a fistulae operation, yet, the woman and her husband have given two other daughters out at age 10 and 9. What do you think will be the reason if not financial gain” (Civil Servant 3).

The above report is in line with prior knowledge (i.e. Montazeri, *et al.*, 2016; Bakhtibekova, 2014; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002) that girl marriage decisions are based on financial gains. Civil servant 3 holds the view that the girl’s parents practise girl marriage for economic gain. Part of the report also corroborates existing knowledge (James, 2010; Bogalech, 2007; Erulkar & Bello, 2007) that some parents are involved in girl marriage decisions. Nevertheless, at present, the motives and intention of the girl’s parents are unclear.

Civil Servant 4 (a Child Rights’ Promotion officer) was also passionate against the issue of girl marriage in the Northern region; he however portrays the issue of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria as a complex one:

“We have a long way to go in our pursuit at reducing the practice of girl marriage among the Northerners. You see, the constitution is not helping, the religion and cultural beliefs in this region are also very strong”.

Reflecting existing knowledge, Civil Servant 4 reports that inconsistencies in Nigeria’s constitution (Braimah, 2014; Ukwuoma, 2014), religion (James, 2010) and cultural beliefs (Erulkar & Bello, 2007; Akpan, 2003) contribute to the continuation of girl marriage practices in Northern Nigeria. A common view amongst all the policy stakeholders in this study is that girl marriage is just an issue for Northerners in Nigeria. While this perspective reveals the peculiarity of girl marriage to the Northern region, it may also act as an enabler to the people involved and as a barrier to girls’ agencies in resisting the practice. For example, some girls may remain silent about girl marriage decisions with the understanding that it is peculiar to their region.

My observational data indicate that whilst some policy stakeholders are passionate about curbing girl marriage practises in Northern Nigeria some others indifferent to the issue. A possible explanation for such indifferent attitude (particularly by Civil Servant 2) might be rooted in the inconsistencies in Nigeria’s constitution or the acceptance of girl marriage as a norm in the Northern region. The next section reveals the themes that emerged in the interviews with policy stakeholders.

6.2. The way we see it

This section explores three themes that emerged in the interviews with policy stakeholders: (1) Generational practice (2) Inconsistencies in the Nigerian constitution (3) Poverty and religion.

6.2.2. Generational practice

A recurring theme from the interview analysis with the policy-stakeholders is a description of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria as a generational practice. While some of the participants described girl marriage as an illegal generational practice, others represented girl marriage as a generational practice which differentiates the Northerners from indigenes of other Nigerian regions. Such interpretation of girl marriage is in line with our definition of culture for this study, that of Ward (2004), which describes culture as a learned way of life which can have meanings and can be passed from one generation to the other. Hofstede (1994:5) and Inglis (2005) also describe culture as ‘a collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another’ (see Section 3.1).

“Oh! That is their practice (referring to the Northern Nigerians), although it is illegal in Nigeria, it is acceptable in the Northern region. As marriage registrars (referring to herself and her colleagues), we do our part in discouraging it but it is difficult because that is the way it (referring to girl marriage practices) has always been in that region” (Civil Servant 1).

The practice of girl marriage is interpreted as socially acceptable in the Northern region based on its longevity. However, there was a sense of ‘othering’ in the accounts of most of the policy stakeholders: the continuation of girl marriage in the Northern region is perceived to differentiate Northerners from indigenes of other Nigerian regions. Such perceptions of Northerners can be described a way of casting a group of people into a role of the ‘Other’ on the basis that their culture and beliefs are fundamentally different to the rest of society. Nonetheless, Inglis (2005:6) suggests that “the culture of a group makes sense of the world for people in a particular group”. The cultural practice of girl marriage, which is regarded as ‘out of the ordinary’ or illegal in other regions in Nigeria has meanings for the Northern

Nigerian people involved and it is the framework through which they experience and understand the world around them. The perception of girl marriage as a generational practice echoes prior studies (Brewer, 2005; Robertson, 2002; McLaughlin, 1997; Lewis, 1992; Herlihy, 1985 and Power, 1975) that girl marriage has been in existence over the space of many generations in some countries. However, while there has been a change of attitude in some countries, girl marriage continues to exist to date in some other countries.

Examples of girl marriage as a socially acceptable practice in the Northern region were also prominent in the discussions of some policy stakeholders.

“It is not a new practice, in the olden days, our fathers used to get married that way but you see civilisation is here. However, it is still practised here in the north; it is very common for you to see a Hausa (referring to a Northerner) man married to a girl with small breasts (referring to puberty stage)” (Civil Servant 3).

“The enactment of the CRA which prohibits child marriage has given a wake-up call to this dastardly cultural practice. We never knew the problem was this much in Nigeria. But now, I believe we are getting on top of it. We have a lot of programmes in place to curb it but several obstacles on the way. In addition to the poor gendered relations in the Northern region, Nigeria’s political situation is also not helping matters. We have the issue of the 2014 attack by the Boko Haram (meaning Western education is a sin) organisation in the Northern region. Look at the way they abducted over 250 girls from a secondary school in Chibok community, the present challenge we have now is that most girls are scared of going to school, all these are mitigating factors.

Moreover, the states in that region do not want to hear about the Child Rights Act” (Civil Servant 4).

While Civil Servant 3 interpreted girl marriage a generational practice which is waning, she explained that the practice is very much in place in the Northern region. However, another policy stakeholder reveals the challenges the Nigerian government is facing in the Northern region. According to Civil Servant 4 the 2014 Boko Haram’s kidnap of over 250 girls in a secondary school in the Northern region contributes to the non-attendance and school drop-out of girls in the Northern region. While this issue might have contributed to the non-attendance and school drop-out of girls in the Northern region, this report is contradictory to the history of girl marriage practices in the Northern region (see Chapter 4). Several cases of girl marriage have been recorded in Nigeria (Falola & Heaton, 2012; Akpan, 2003), particularly in the Northern region (James, 2010; Erulkar & Bello, 2007) before the 2014 Boko Haram’s kidnap of over 250 girls thus, it is not clear how this issue can be used as an excuse to stop girls attending school/for girl marriage.

Nevertheless, my finding suggests that the Nigerian government is failing in its duties of protection. If Nigeria’s Northern region girls continue to feel threatened and are therefore unable to go school, there appears to be very little the Child Rights Promotion Officers can do. Based on these responses, particularly the report from Civil Servant 4, it was relevant to ask Civil Servant 2 (senior police officer) some questions about the safety of girls in school. However, Civil Servant 2 had a slightly different explanation:

“Although child-marriage is illegal in Nigeria, some states are yet to domesticate the law so it is somewhat difficult to arrest offenders, especially in the states where it is yet to be prohibited. Take the Northern region for

instance. Most of the states in that region are yet to pass the law that prohibits child-marriage, this makes us powerless. In addition, in the states where the law has been passed, very few reports are made. Do you make arrests when you are not knowledgeable of an offence? If they report, then it becomes an offence” (Civil Servant 2).

The above report reveals some of the challenges faced by policy stakeholders in their bid to enforce the CRA in Nigeria’s Northern region: it implies that a local strategy is needed which is specific to the context of the region - free access to education and laws prohibiting girl marriage (see Section 4.5.1) are however not sufficient to reduce the practice of girl marriage in Nigeria’s Northern region. This complex situation reflects my argument for the needs to explore girl marriage, within a cultural context, from the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions. Civil Servant 3 gave a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of girl marriage practises in Nigeria’s Northern region:

“I have worked as a health practitioner for over 30 years and I can authoritatively tell you that it is a cultural practice mixed with financial gains for the girl’s family. We have seen a lot in this hospital; you see (she opens up some files on her table). We have records of girls as young as 9, even 8 giving birth as a result of child marriage. Some of them survive child birth while others do not, yet, the practise continues. It is so common that we have lost count and the Nigerian constitution is not helping matters. Anyway, most of the people who practise it are also in power. Have you heard of the Northern senator? Have you? (expecting a response from me), Oh! He married small, small girls all over the place. People only got to know about the last one

because it was a big celebration, the young girl was very pretty and he wanted to show off. So, they all practice it, it's a tradition" (Civil Servant 3).

The report by Civil Servant 3 comes from her years of experience of dealing with the medical and social outcomes of girl marriage in the Northern region. While the above extract indicates that there is an official recognition of girl marriage as a traditional practice, girl marriage is also associated with people in power because of the Northern Nigerian senator who was also discussed in Section 4.5.1. Although the senator tried to hide his other marriages to young girls from the public view because he is aware of the implications, such association of a cultural practice to the people in power reflects McLellan's (1984) argument (see Section 3.1.1) that culture in some cases is connected with some forms of social power. The way of life or beliefs of a person in authority are in some cases reflected in the laws, customs or beliefs of his society (Thompson, 2013). Prior research (Braithwaite, 2014) shows that the senator referred to by Civil Servant 3 was the one that challenged the vote of deleting Section 61 of the 1999 Constitution which renders the 2003 CRA null and void. The example of the senator who is involved in girl marriage decisions and also responsible for challenging the decision to delete Section 61 of the 1999 Constitution which renders the 2003 CRA null and void shows how an individual can set the tone of what is acceptable or not within society. The report from Civil Servant 3 who has worked in Northern Nigeria for over 30 years is consistent with prior research (Braithwaite, 2014), it raises the possibility that the continuation of girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region is connected to social power, against which it appears very few people can protest. For example, fatalistic acceptance or, indeed, agreement (McLellan, 1984).

While findings in this section corroborate prior studies that girl marriage has been in practise over the years, it also adds to knowledge that its 'generationalisation' can be associated with

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forms of social power. Some participants also referred to Nigeria's constitution as a barrier to moving forward to reduce girl marriage. The issues related to the constitution are discussed in the next section.

6.2.3. Inconsistencies in the constitution

The policy stakeholders complained that although the Nigerian government has prohibited girl marriage with the enactment of the 2003 CRA, it is difficult to penalise perpetrators. Most of the policy stakeholders repeatedly referred to the 1999 Constitution which they claim legalise Customary and Islamic laws which accommodate different traditional marriage practices, particularly the practice of girl marriage.

“The Nigerian government through the 2003 CRA have prohibited child marriage but the Nigerian Customary and Islamic laws accommodate the customs and traditions of the citizenry, one of which is girl marriage practice. This inconsistency appears to contradict the stance of the Nigerian government. You can imagine different laws saying different things. The problem is not as easy as people think” (Civil Servant 2).

Nigeria's Customary and Islamic laws supersede the civil laws because these laws are acknowledged in the 1999 constitution which on the other hand serves as the supreme law in Nigeria. This implies that girl marriage will continue in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern region, unless the religious and customary laws are changed. However, Civil servant 5 (a Law Maker) was pessimistic about revisiting the constitution (see Section 6.1.1). According to him, a top-down situation- in which decisions are made by a few people in authority rather than by the people who are affected by the decisions will not work. Civil servant 5 however, concludes that the Nigerian government will have to adopt other strategies in eradicating this problem. These other strategies remain hypothetical at present. Another participant revealed

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her experience with the 1999 constitution when she tried to sue some perpetrators of girl marriage:

“There was a time my former boss actually tried to arrest some perpetrators because that particular girl confided in her that she was not interested in the marriage but the case never ended, they kept going to the court every day until my boss got tired. My boss’s life was also in danger; the girl’s husband threatened her. Finally, the lawyer she contracted told her that she might not win the case because Nigeria’s 1999 constitution supports customary marriages which accept the girl’s marriage to the elderly man. Kano state is yet to pass the law forbidding child marriage... You see, it is not that simple to eradicate. The Nigerian government needs to show more commitment, they need to use different other measures if they really want to stop this practice” (Civil Servant 3).

While the 1999 Constitution serves as the supreme law of the land in Nigeria, overriding all other legislation, rendering the CRA ineffective, some policy stakeholders indicate that some cases of girl marriage are actually reported but the offenders are left unpunished. Civil servant 3’s report contradicts Civil Servant 2 (Senior Police Officer)’s report (see Section 6.1.1) which claims that girl marriage practices are rarely reported therefore, they are unable to make arrests. Although Civil Servant 3’s report reveals that the reported case was obstructed with the use of coercive power which was exerted by the girl’s husband, the use of coercive power by some of the people involved in girl marriage decisions can be described as a mechanism for continuing the practice that clearly works; i.e. it scares people off. This finding can be related to my fieldwork experience (see pg. 14). Nevertheless, a scrutiny of civil servant 2 and 3’s reports implies a lack of stakeholder buy in reducing the practice

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because they perhaps do not see it as an important social issue. However, another participant implies that girl marriage is hidden from official view:

“Despite the inconsistencies, we can still penalise perpetrators, we can penalise a parent that decides to give an under-age girl out in marriage. However, the problem is that these marriage ceremonies do not take place in government registries; they take place in private homes and community halls. Therefore, offenders get away with it. An inconsistency in the marriage constitution does not mean offenders have the right response to it. However, we as Child Rights promoters will continue to press until the people respond adequately. Most importantly, until the right organ of the government can function adequately to the perpetrators of this great evil. It is a great evil, it depends on how you love Nigeria as a country, if you love Nigeria, you will respond against the practice of girl marriage. We need to train the girls into a peculiar treasure that God has made them to be. When you train a man, you are training a family but when you train a girl, you are training a nation because she will produce boys and girls? That is why the issue of girl marriage needs to be taken seriously in Africa and especially our country, Nigeria”
(Civil Servant 4).

Nonetheless, findings reveal that the issue of girl marriage is not limited to the inconsistencies in the Nigerian constitution, Civil servant 4 suggests there is also a partial commitment towards the eradication of girl marriage within some parastatals in the Nigerian government; some policy stakeholders are hypocritical about the enforcement of the 2003 CRA. A lack of commitment by the right organ of the Nigerian government can be seen as

one of the mitigating factors against the enforcement of the 2003 CRA. Several questions remain unanswered at present.

While discussion in this section corroborates prior studies (Brammah, 2014; Ukwuoma, 2014) that inconsistencies in the Nigerian constitution are contributing factors to the continuity of girl marriage in the Northern region, findings from this section further reflects the notion of social power and how it impacts on cultural practices. For instance, Civil Servant 3 presented evidence of a girl who was forced into marriage. The matter was taken to court but not followed to completion because the life of Civil servant 3's boss was in danger; she was threatened by the girl's husband and her family. The use of threat in this case indicates the wielding of coercive power (Weber, cited by Thompson, 2013) by the girl's husband; dominant norms and attitudes are in some cases enforced by male heads of households (see Section 3.1.1). In addition to the earlier narration (see Section 6.2.2) by Civil Servant 3 which reveals authoritative power, the evidence here reflects that different types of power manifest in different settings. The data indicates that the 'generationalisation' of girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region is strengthened and continued by the exercise of both coercive and authoritative power. Further, some participants also identified poverty and religion as contributing factors to the issue of girl marriage in the Northern region. These themes are explored in the next section.

6.2.4. Poverty and religion

As highlighted in the introduction of this chapter, these two themes, poverty and religion, will be discussed briefly in this chapter (examined in detail in chapter 7) because these perspectives are similar to that of the community leaders and parents who are involved in girl marriage decisions. The role of poverty in perpetuating girl marriage will be discussed first.

Policy stakeholders who had directly been in contact with some of the community leaders and parents on issues of girl marriage practices talked about the financial difficulties some of the community members were going through. When Civil Servant 4 (Child Rights promotion officer) recounted a conversation he had with a parent, he talked about girl marriage being used by some parents as a means of economic survival.

“The payment of a bride price has further encouraged this practice; some parents look forward to the payment of their daughter’s bride price. This bride price can be in form of cash, kind or livestock. Largely it is the economic pressure on some parents because there are instances where we have had to intervene. But, the parent revealed to us that they had debts that needed to be paid and they did not have other means of paying these debts so they had to marry out their daughter to a wealthy man with the aim of using the dowry to offset their debt. You see, this is a form of trade by barter; this is like bartering with the future of the girl” (Civil Servant 4).

The above extract suggests that girl marriage is practised for economic gains, a serious weakness with this argument, however, is that how do poor Northern Nigerian men marry if girl marriage decisions are based on economic gain. Nevertheless, the report also reveals the poor gender relations in the Northern region where women/girls are positioned as a type of goods or services that can be sold to better the lives of other family members. While I do not take lightly the financial plights of some of the people involved in girl marriage practices, the question that remains unanswered is; why does the girl-child have to bear the family’s financial burden? Such representation of the girl-child reinforces women’s subordination to men and is possibly one of the reasons for girl marriage decisions. Nevertheless, girl marriage as a means of economic survival is in line with past studies (Montazeri, et al., 2016;

Adebowale et al., 2012; Bakhtibekova, 2014; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002) which found that girl marriage is used by poor people as a form of ‘survival strategy’. However, when asked if girl marriage is limited to the poor, another participant said:

“Girl marriage practice is not limited to a class of people. I am a marriage registrar, and in my 19 years of practice, I have seen different class of people in this practice. You will notice this when you get to the community. Although, some rich men exploit some low-class families, they entice them with a high bride price and the families who are in financial need often fall into such enticement and would rather give their daughters’ hand in marriage to the richer suitor. It is sad” (Civil Servant 1).

While the above report suggests that different class of people practise girl marriage, it also clarifies the earlier extract that girl marriage is some cases practised for financial reason. Civil Servant 1 identified that some poor families make girl marriage decisions due to the economic situation in Nigeria. Surely, if the Nigerian government stands up to its responsibilities, for example, giving some stipends to its citizens as a form of child benefits/care, it might be less easy for such men in Civil Servant 1’s narration to exploit low-income families. Why is the Nigerian government not standing up to its responsibilities? This relates back to the patriarchal social structures in Nigeria (see Section 4.4.4). Further, some participants also associate girl marriage decisions in the Northern region to some religious beliefs, the influence of Islamic religion on girl marriage practices echoes findings from older studies (Gangoli & McCarry, 2009; Enright, 2009; Wayacut, 1993) that girls from Islamic homes are more likely to get married at an early age.

“Most of them marry young girls based on Islamic religious tenets. For example, a respected Islamic prophet’s wife was 6 years old at the time of

marriage. Prophet Muhammed's wife was 6 years old at the time of marriage. Child marriage is very complex; it may be easy to stop a man from practising child marriage if it is his tradition or culture, but it might be difficult to stop him from practising it if it is the man's religion. It is even mixed for some others, their culture accepts it, their religion encourages it" (Civil Servant 2).

The practice of girl marriage is positioned as a commitment of some people to the Islamic tenets. The extract however does not fully explain why some Northern Nigerian Christians make girl marriage decisions. As we will see in chapter 7, some of the parent participants in this study are Christians and they are also involved in girl marriage practises.

In contrast, Civil Servant 4 is of the view that girl marriage is not limited to a particular religious belief.

"In addition, we find out other factors, which include religious misinterpretation. They misinterpret what the Islamic tenet says; the tenet did not say they should not prepare their children for adulthood. Rather the tenet advised them to marry out their daughters as soon as they are matured but if a child is not matured physically to cope with the challenges of marriage, then such thing should not be encouraged because it can affect the child for the rest of her life" (Civil Servant 4).

The above finding is consistent with prior studies (UNICEF, 2013; Bahramtash & Kazemipour, 2006) which found that girl marriage is not limited to a particular religion. My findings indicate the possibilities of a misinterpreted religious tenet. As seen in the account, the Islamic tenets "advised them to marry out their daughters as soon as they are matured but if a child is not matured physically to cope with the challenges of marriage, then such thing

should not be encouraged". It is however also possible that some parents believe their daughters can cope with the challenges of marriage at such young ages.

Notably, Civil servant 2's extract also reveals the possibilities that some of those who associate girl marriage decisions with religious beliefs do so because religious-based morals and norms are effective in maintaining conformity and control in the society, religious norms are rarely questioned.

Section 6.2 demonstrates diverse factors that underpin the continuity of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria from the perspectives of some policy stakeholders. These factors include: a perception of girl marriage as a generational practise hence, its continuity; inconsistencies in Nigeria's constitution, this inconsistency renders the 2003 CRA null and void; religious beliefs that sanction girl marriage, and poverty, poor families use girl marriage as a 'survival strategy'. Nonetheless, it can be suggested that the continuity of girl marriage decisions in Nigeria's Northern region is strengthened by coercive and authoritative power which is somewhat exerted by the ruling class (for example, the senator) in society and some of the people involved in girl marriage decisions (i.e. husbands and parents). As highlighted in Section 2.2.3, patriarchal ideology in a system is, in some cases, reproduced in the home. The historical assumption of men or the male-child as the superior human further underpins the continuity of girl marriage.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the views of policy stakeholders in the Nigerian government in relation to the continuity of girl marriage practises in the Northern region of Nigeria. The finding shows that the practice of girl marriage in the Northern region has been in practice over the span of many generations. The policy stakeholders described girl marriage as a prohibited generational practice which is socially acceptable in the north of Nigeria. Findings

in this chapter also suggest that inconsistencies in the Nigerian constitution underpin the continuity of girl marriage in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern region. Participants suggested that these inconsistencies appear to have nullified the 2003 CRA which prohibits the practice of girl marriage in Nigeria. Similar to past studies, participants' accounts also highlight that the continuity of girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region is partly a product of poverty and economic gains on the part of the girl's family.

A particular finding which adds to knowledge was found in some participants' association of girl marriage with authoritative and coercive power. This finding suggests that the continuity of girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region probably serves the interest and reflects the power of certain group of people in the community. Such connection of culture with some forms of social power was considered important, particularly in relation to girl marriage practises in Nigeria's Northern region, at least from the perspectives of the participants in this study.

It can be concluded from this chapter that the continuity of girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region is a product of social power structures which enhance and maintain male superiority in the region and suppression and oppression of women, and particularly girls, by sanctioning such practices. Although the findings reveal that some parents including mothers engage willingly in this practice, possible explanations for this may be an exertion of coercive power by their husbands or the decision of a patriarch to which the culture expects them to consent.

The next chapter will provide understanding of girl marriage practices from the perspectives of the parents and community leaders involved in girl marriage decisions.

CHAPTER 7

Our traditional practice- Mixed blessings

This chapter presents the answers to the main research question of this study - how do the people who are involved in girl marriage decision making in Northern Nigeria explain the practice of girl marriage? As highlighted in Chapter 1, this study aims to explore the factors that underpin the continuity of girl marriage practices, within a cultural context from the perspectives of people involved in girl marriage decisions. To this end, participants were asked some open-ended questions and they all responded in various degrees of depth.

While this chapter is structured according to the themes of my findings from the perspectives of the community leaders and parents involved in girl marriage decisions, I have also indicated where the findings suggest an addition to knowledge, where it corroborates or contradicts prior studies and where the findings need clarifications. Data from the community leaders and parents have been put together because these groups of people are all involved in girl marriage decision making (James, 2010; Bogalech, 2007; Erulkar & Bello, 2007) and as presented in their narrations, they all have similar perspectives and beliefs.

Participants' own words or expressions ('thick descriptions') have been maintained in this analyses in accordance to Geertz's (1973) work on 'Thick Description' to avoid overly reductionist treatment of participants' interpretations of girl marriage practices. While there may be some contradictions in the narratives of participants, I have employed the discourse of culture (see Chapter 3) in understanding participants' stories.

It is acknowledged that there is a diversity of experiences and perceptions of girl marriage practices; hence, the findings of this study may not be applicable to all the people involved in girl marriage practices. Therefore, participants' accounts should be regarded as patterns that are visible and not a generalizable conclusion.

I begin the analysis with Section 7.1 which outlines the research participants' biographic profiles and interview observation notes. The research participants' biographic profiles are presented in order to reveal the richness of the sample in terms of their educational background, religion, profession and the constituencies (states of origin) they represent in the Northern region. Section 7.2 presents a discussion of the findings from community leaders and parents who are involved in girl marriage decisions. The findings are presented in six themes: it is our culture – that is our tradition; mixed blessings - myth and reality; girls' health; first menstrual cycle - morality and waywardness; prevent promiscuity and uphold submission; poverty and education.

7.1. Research participants' biographic profiles and observations

This section presents biographical sketches of each research participant. It shows that the research participants have very diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

However, a balance between protecting participant anonymity and creating a rich, descriptive picture is maintained. While there is no easy answer to this issue, it is important that the reader is aware that details have been changed to protect anonymity (Lipson, 1997). For this study, real names have been replaced with pseudonyms and particular details that could identify participants have been excluded. However, I have maintained the story that the participants told, as well as the exact age, religion and employment status of research participants because one of the emphases of this study is on age at first marriage, and

participants' actual religion and employment status are required for clarity and comparative analyses.

As indicated in Table 7.1, the research participants for this study:

- Are from seven different states within the Northern region: Kano state- five participants, Kaduna state (two participants), Yobe state (five participants), Bauchi state (two participants), Benue state (four participants), Borno state (three participants) and Katsina state (four participants).
- Have different educational and employment backgrounds: Journalists (two); School Teachers (four); Engineer (one); an Accountant in a bank (one); Human Resource Officer (one); Civil Servant at the local council (five); Livestock Farmers (three) and Merchants (6). However, two participants (1 male and 1 female) were unemployed - the male participant depended on income from family investments, while the female participant lived with and depended on her parent.
- Follow different religions: seven Christians, 16 Muslims, and two participants who did not disclose their religion.
- The youngest participant (a female) was 24 years old while the oldest (a male) was 66. Two participants refused to disclose their age.

Table 7.1: Biographical profile of female participants (1 community leader and 3 parents)

Pseudonym	Age	Age when married	Relevant Biographical data	Employment status
Hawuwa	31	10	A Christian. Married to a plumber, has two children and she is from Kano state	Trader
Aishat	40	11	She became separated from her husband after his marriage to two other women. Relocated to Lagos state. She is a Christian, has 5 children. She is from Kano state	Teacher
Modinat	24	12	Separated from her husband after a traditional operation on her privates by a 'Wanzan' (traditional barber). She lives with her parent. She is a Muslim and from Katsina state	Unemployed
Halima	44	11	Married to a Merchant man. She is a mother of 6. She is a Muslim from Kano state	A community leader in Dala and Business woman

Table 7.2: Biographical profile of male participants (3 community leaders and 18 parents)

Pseudonym	Age	Relevant Biographical data	Employment status
Mustapha	51	Married to 3 wives, he has 12 children. He is a Muslim. All his wives were between the ages of 9-15 at the time of marriage. He is from Katsina state	Accountant
Musa	57	He has two wives. He refused to disclose the number of his children and the age of his wives at the time of marriage. He is a Christian and from Kano state	A community leader in Agege, Lagos state and a civil servant with the Federal government.
Musiliu	49	Married to 1 wife and has 5 children. His wife was 10 years old at the time of marriage. He is a Muslim and from Yobe state	A community leader in Dala and a human resource officer at the local council
Taofeek	44	Married to 6 wives and has 18 children. Does not remember the age of his wives at the time of marriage but he disclosed that he married each of them after their first menstrual cycle. He is a Muslim and from Kano state	Cloth merchant
Rao	58	Married to two wives and has 4 children. He refused to disclose the age of his wives at the time of marriage. He is a Christian and from Bauchi state.	Gold merchant
Majeed	50	Married to 2 wives, has 6 children. His first wife was 8 years old and his second wife 12 years old at time of marriage. Refused to disclose his religion. He is from Katsina state	Teacher
Fadl	66	Married to 2 wives, he has 7 children. He does not remember the age of his wives at the time of marriage. He is a Muslim and from Borno state	Teacher and community leader in Fagge (Kano state)
Husaam	63	Married to 2 wives. He refused to disclose the number of his children and the age of his wives at the time of marriage. He is a Christian and from Benue state	Chef
Kamill	48	Married to 3 wives, he has children. He married his first two wives when they were 13 and he married his last wife when she was 10. He is a Muslim and from Benue state.	Engineer
Najeeb	undisclosed	Married to 1 wife and has 3 children. He refused to disclose his wife's age at the time of	Merchant

		marriage. He is a Christian and from Kaduna state.	
Rashid	47	He has three wives and 6 children. He does not remember the age of his wives at the time of marriage. He is a Muslim and from Kaduna state	Unemployed
Nurudeen	54	He has 1 wife and 5 children. His wife was 9 years old at the time of marriage. He is a Muslim and from Yobe state	Plumber
Yazeed	40	He has 2 wives and 4 children. Both of his wives were 10 at the time of marriage. He is a Muslim and from Katsina state	Caterer
Youssef	undisclosed	He has 1 wife and three children. He refused to disclose the age of his wife at the time of marriage. He is a Christian and from Yobe state	Journalist
Jaleel	46	He has 2 wives and 2 children. He refused to disclose the age of his wives at the time of marriage. He is a Muslim and from Benue state	Journalist
Adaz	52	He could not recall the age of his wives at the time of marriage. He is however certain he married his 4 wives after their first menstrual cycle. He is a Muslim and from Yobe state	Merchant
Fouad	38	He recently married his wife. His wife was 9 years old at the time of marriage. He is a Muslim and from Bauchi state.	A School teacher
Hamiz	52	Has 2 two wives and 3 children. His first wife was 14 and his second wife was 11 years old at the time of marriage. He is a Muslim and from Borno state.	Butcher
Tayeb	52	He has 2 wives and three children. He refused to disclose the age of his wives at marriage. He is a Muslim and from Benue state.	Poultry farmer
Zohei	60	He has 2 wives and 6 children. He refused to disclose his religion and the age of his wives at the time of marriage and from Borno state.	Livestock farmer

Nosiru	34	He has 1 wife and 1 child He wife was 14 at the time of marriage. He is a Muslim and from Yobe state	Livestock farmer
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I will now analyse and discuss the interview observations.

7.1.2. Participants' interview observations

My observations started with the community leaders as they were interviewed before the parents in each community. While it can be difficult to interview and observe participants simultaneously, the use of a voice recorder during my interviews helped enormously. My voice recorder was used for the data from the interviews while I jotted my observations in brief notes whenever I could, then expanded on them after the interviews. Observing and interviewing the research participants was advantageous in that I asked questions and received responses which gave additional insights into the things I observed. Below are the field notes from my interview observations, I have summarised these into two sections: the first interview observation note is a summary from the community leaders, while the second is from the parents.

7.1.3. Community leaders' interview observations field notes

As indicated in Section 5.7, four community leaders were interviewed and they all confirmed their roles as custodians of Fagge and Dala communities (1 female and two males) in Kano state and (1 male) Agege community in Lagos. Community leaders are seen by community members to represent 'indigenous values and authority, their roles involve governing their communities with authority over different aspects of life, ranging from social welfare to judicial functionaries (see Section 5.4.2). The observation of the community leaders took place during their interviews in the community halls. I had an uninterrupted interview with all the community leaders with the exception of one. Fadl (who is also a school teacher)

interrupted the interview on three occasions: the first time, to have lunch, the second time to attend to one of his students, and the third time he needed to take an urgent phone call.

During my interview with the community leaders, I observed that all the community leaders are educated, live an affluent lifestyle and are authoritative. This observation however, contradicts existing studies which describe the people involved in girl marriage as peasants (Montazeri, *et al.*, 2016; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002) and uneducated (Nasrin & Rahman, 2012; Brown, 2012). For example: the female community leader (Halima) has a display of her education certificates (on her wall) and recognition awards from the Nigerian government and Northern community as a reputable leader, on her table. Halima was adorned with what appeared to be expensive jewellery which she continuously drew attention to all through the interview. Halima described girl marriage practices with an appreciation for its practice; she referred to herself as an example of a successful woman who has benefitted from being married at 11 years old. While Halima was open about her support for the continuity of girl marriage, she was also in support of informal education for girls. She reported that:

“Girls’ education should not be limited to the classroom; girls can learn any vocational trade such as hair dressing, fashion designing, tie and dye, weaving and any other type of vocation when they are married. After all, this was how our mothers grew up. I only had a primary education certificate when I got married. After which I learned fashion designing, so classroom education is not the only way of teaching girls” (Halima, trader & a Community leader in Dala, Kano state)

While formal education is important, but not equal to success, Halima’s perspective (as a community leader) of formal education is relevant to this study. As illustrated in Section

3.1.1, a group or person in a community can be influenced by the personal qualities (charisma) or attitudes of their community leader (Yarrow et al., 2015). Halima's interpretation or attitude to formal education, particularly as a female leader, is significant in her community. This possibly explains why some girls are encouraged to leave free education and get married (see Section 1.1). Unlike Halima however, some of these girls are not given opportunities to develop basic skills to support themselves financially later on in life. Halima ended my interview and observation with her by asking me to leave the research and mind my "own business":

"My dear (referring to me), why don't you go and find something better to do with your time, you know (she smiles), like taking care of your husband and children if you have any" (Halima, Trader & a community leader in Dala, Kano state)

The present study was perceived by most of the community leaders as meddling into other people's marriage decisions; Halima holds the view that the upkeep of men and children rather than formal education should be a woman's priority. This finding suggests that Northern Nigerian women are aware of their particular positions within the patriarchal family structure and over the years they have become involved in reproducing patriarchal power relations within the home and in the community. Following my interview with Halima, I moved over to Fagge community to interview and observe Fadl (a community leader and a teacher).

Fadl is educated (a teacher) and just like Halima, Fadl is well respected in the community; the local council employees and some local people who visited the community hall stood up as soon as he came in. Although this is a sign of respect in Northern Nigeria, it is not clear if

their respect for Fadl was voluntary or not. However, Fadl also gestured as he walked past them into his office. I observed that Fadl was distant at the start of the interview; he however appeared relaxed as the interview continued. Twenty minutes into my interview and observation of Fadl, Fadl requested for a 15 minutes' lunch break. He was served '*tuwo da miya*' (Northern traditional food) by a woman who appears to be in her middle (45-50) age. Fadl left me in his office to have his meal on a native mat that was by the entrance of the community hall (I could see him from his office and he could also see me as he left his office door open). However, my interview with Fadl continued as soon as he had finished his meal. Ten minutes following our resumption with the interview, Fadl once again interrupted the interview to receive a phone call he referred to as urgent. We however continued with the interview after his phone call. Again, 15 minutes to the end of the interview, Fadl interrupted the interview to attend to one his students. I observed that Fadl exercised an authoritative and patriarchal power; he was somewhat arrogant in his directives and attitudes to me and the people around him. He was also irritated with my probing questions. Fadl's incessant display of superiority throughout my observation interview with him shows he is not used to being questioned or disobeyed; his attitude raises intriguing questions regarding the capacity to which some women/girls are able to resist girl marriage decisions that could be made by Fadl as a community leader.

Following my interview with Fadl, my next interview and observation was with Musiliu, Musiliu is also educated with a master's degree, he is a human resource officer and a community leader in Dala. Musiliu appeared to have a quiet but discreet personality, he was very cautious in the information he shared with me. On three different instances, he asked me to rephrase or restate my question which I did. However, he also refused to respond to probing questions by repeatedly saying: 'no comment', this attitude was similar to all the

male community leaders. Probably due to their authoritative roles in the communities, all the male community leaders were not comfortable with being questioned, particularly by a woman. Although with a muted volume, Musiliu had his office television on and he stared at it while responding to his interview questions. Similar to Halima, Musiliu had adorned his office with several awards from the Nigerian government and Dala local council. Musiliu ended his interview with the following comment:

“I think everyone is entitled to their opinion about our traditional marriage (refers to girl marriage), what matters more is the opinion and understanding of the people involved. If it is right for us, then that is it!” (Musiliu, Human resource officer & a Community leader in Dala).

All the community leaders were very defensive in their approach; they perceived this study as a criticism from another perspective. They emphasised that there is nothing wrong with the practice of girl marriage. Their argument is however in line with our discussion of cultural relativism in Section 3.2.3: that the ‘right way’ of one society could be the ‘wrong way’ of another (Rachels, 1999; Graham, 1906). The implication of this finding will be discussed later on in the chapter. Musa however, refused to respond to the probe on who girl marriage is right for.

While the next discussion is on my interview observation with Musa, a community leader in Agege, Lagos state, his interview and observation took place after all my interviews and observations with the participants (community leader & parents) in Kano. This was in order to save cost. Musa’s interview and observation took place in his office within Agege town community hall in Lagos state. Musa requested that I interview him in the presence of his secretary. He appeared uninterested in the research and was not detailed in his responses. He

responded briefly to most of the interview questions while taking his tobacco with his legs crossed, Musa looked at his watch intermittently and similar to other community leaders, Musa was of the view that research on girl marriage is a waste of time:

“I don’t know why you are going around asking questions about marriage. It is not a new issue, or do you just want to talk about it for the sake of it?”

(Musa, Civil servant & a Community leader in Agege, Lagos state).

Although Musa’s report is in line with prior studies (James, 2010; Akpan, 2003) which found that girl marriage is the norm in some communities in Nigeria, his attitude throughout the interview observation can be viewed as a display of power and superiority. Similar to other community leaders, Musa holds the view that the marriage of young girls is not a matter of concern.

Thus far, the present study supports prior studies (James, 2010; Akpan, 2003) which found that girl marriage is the norm in Northern Nigeria. However, it also contradicts past studies (Ahmed, *et al.*, 2009; Majumdar, 2007) which suggest that community leaders are one of the first contacts for girls’ agencies resisting girl marriage. The current study reveals that some community leaders practise girl marriage, therefore, they may not be of much assistance to girls’ agencies resisting girl marriage. This finding may help us to understand why cases of girl marriage are rarely reported. My observations during the parents’ interviews will now be considered.

7.1.4. Parents’ observations field notes

This sub-section has been divided into two (male and female parent participants) to enable clarity and since the aim of this study was to get the perspectives of men who are involved in

girl marriage decisions, we will first examine the participant observations of the men followed by the women.

Male participants' interview observations: For this study, 18 fathers who are involved in girl marriage decisions were interviewed and observed in their respective homes. Similar to all the community leaders, it was particularly difficult to use probing questions with the male participants of this study, some of them avoided answering personal questions; hence, my interview with most of them lasted a maximum of 30-38 minutes. A possible explanation why most of the male participants did not engage fully with the interview questions might be that they are not comfortable with being probed by a woman, their attitudes reflects the discussion in Section 4.4.4 that in Northern Nigeria women are positioned as legal minors and both legally and economically the wards of men.

My observation and interviews with most of the male participants in this study were rather upsetting. While I was lectured on my position as a wife and a mother, I was also judged for spending nights in the community hotels, which apparently questioned my loyalty to my husband. Growing up in the shared culture, I felt the gender relations of each household and could relate to it and often even involuntarily became subject to it. Although the less educated men were more accommodating (they cracked some jokes and responded to some of the probing questions), the educated male participants (particularly the journalists, teachers, engineer and accountant) were particularly difficult to interview. It was difficult to agree a time to interview them: I had to "hunt" them down, went back to their houses several times a day in order to conduct their interviews. Although they were aware and were often reminded that they are not compelled to take part in the study, they refused to withdraw from the study. Whilst it is difficult to explain why they behaved this way, it might be related to patriarchal power structures because some of them appeared to derive pleasure in cancelling and

rescheduling their interviews. For example: after a participant cancelled his interview, he 'grinned' saying:

'you are a young woman, don't be lazy, you should come back tomorrow...'

(Hamiz, parent and a Butcher)

Women, particularly young women were positioned to have limited decision-making power; they are expected to obey a man's orders without much resistance. The fact that I was a visitor/researcher in his community did not make any difference to him, being a woman is all that is needed to be controlled.

Another issue I observed with most of the male participants in this study was that they did not allow their wives to contribute to the interview, even though I had emphasised that their wives were welcomed to join in the discussion. For example, one male participant, Rao, scolded one of his wives when she offered to remind him of her age at the time of their marriage. As a result of his wife's interruption, Rao refused to disclose the age of his two wives at the time of marriage. Although it is possible that Rao was not sure of the age of his wives at the time of marriage, his attitude to his wife who joined in the discussion indicates power. Most of the men in this study exhibited a superior attitude during their interview observations. Similar to the feelings described by Leila Abu-Lughod (1999), I found myself under male superiority dominance. The next section presents the observation of the female participants.

Female participants' interview observations: As highlighted in Section, 7.1, three female participants were interviewed and observed for this study. While the youngest (24) of the three female participants in this study did not have a child from her marriage, she has experienced the practice of girl marriage. Contrary to the male participants of this study, all

the female participants discussed the issues in-depth in their interviews which lasted between of 40 minutes-1 hour.

Aishat, who is a Christian, a secondary school teacher and a mother of 5 (resides in Lagos state) spoke quietly but firmly while expressing her displeasure for girl marriage practices. She concluded her interview by emphasising the need for girls' education. Similarly, Hawuwa who is a trader and a mother of two emphasised the importance of girl's education. Hawuwa appeared excited that she was being interviewed. However, she reported that she did not want her husband to know about the interview because he would not approve of it. Therefore, she scheduled her interview to take place at a friend's house. Although it is not clear why her husband would not approve of the interview, her ability to take part in this study without her husband's knowledge is in accord with past studies (Callaghan, *et al.*, 2015; Archambault, 2011; Harris, 2004; Abu-Lughod, 1999 & Joseph, 1999), which found that some of the girls involved in girl marriage practises are able to resist total dominance and can speak for themselves. Nonetheless, Hawuwa's behaviour also indicates that she has very little power and resistance in that she had to participate in this study that way.

The last female participant and the youngest (24) was Modinat. Modinat got married at age 12 but she became separated from her husband after a traditional operation was carried out on her genital region by a '*Wanzan*' (traditional barber). Modinat is unemployed and lives with her parent, observation of her interview was particularly depressing (this is detailed later in the chapter). Modinat stared at the wall most of the interview time; she repeatedly blamed herself for her experience. I was particularly glad I had a voice recorder during Modinat's interview because her lived experience was very disturbing. I could not stop myself from sharing Modinat's pain. I found myself in tears. I will never fully understand the travails of this female participant. I also found myself spending some personal money for some of

Modinat's needs. After my observations and interviews in Kano State, I moved to Lagos state to continue with the scheduled interviews and observations with Northern Nigerians who have settled here. However, my interview and observation in Lagos state was disrupted (see Section 8.4). I was limited to only two participants, one male community leader and one female parent in Lagos state.

Summary: This section has presented the observations of the participants of this study. The section also described the community leaders and parents who contributed to the findings demonstrated in this chapter, the research participants' biographic profiles indicate that people of different educational and occupational statuses practise girl marriage. Participants were from different religions (Christians and Muslims), various socio-economic backgrounds, male and female, with a diverse age range across the sample. However, it was observed that the Christian participants were less likely than the Muslims to disclose the age of their wives at time of first marriage. The explanation for this is however unknown.

Section 7.2 presents the findings from my interviews with 4 community leaders and 21 parents who are involved in girl marriage decisions. As highlighted earlier, these two groups of participants have been grouped together because of the commonalities between them. For example; all the community leaders and parents have similar perspectives and they are all directly involved in girl marriage decisions.

7.2. Interview data analysis

This section will present my findings, within a cultural context, from the community leaders and parents who are involved in girl marriage decisions. The explored themes are:

- It is our culture – that is our tradition
- Mixed blessings; Myth and reality

- Girls' health
- First menstrual cycle; Morality and waywardness
- Prevent promiscuity and uphold submission
- Poverty and education

Ward (2004) described culture as a learned part of human existence, which includes beliefs, languages and practices which are passed on from one generation to the other within a specific group of people. North (1990:4) describes "culture as the set of beliefs people have about how the world (both nature & society) works as well as the norms of the behaviour derived from that set of values" (cited by Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2012:1). This chapter draws upon these definitions as an analytical lens to interpret and understand the practice of girl marriage as interpreted by the participants. The next sub-section will present the theme – 'it is our culture – that is our tradition'.

7.2.1. 'It is our culture – That is our tradition'

A recurrent theme in the interviews of this study was a sense amongst all community leaders and parents interviewed that girl marriage is their cultural practice. This theme surfaced mainly in relation to the discussion of 'how can you explain the practice of girl marriage'? While some of the accounts of the participants can be situated within the definition of culture (see Section 3.1), some of their responses also contradict their association of girl marriage as a tradition or cultural practice. However, to further understand this discourse within a cultural context, I draw on the definitions of culture by Ward, (2004) and North (1990). In their accounts, participants reported that:

"This (refers to girl marriage) type of traditional marriage is our culture; this is how we met our forefathers practicing it. It is not new and there is nothing wrong with it. You see, the way Allah created women; we are like a property

to our family. When a girl grows to maturity and Allah blesses her with a suitor, the suitor is expected to give a dowry in exchange of the girl. That is the tradition. More so, Nigeria's customary law acknowledges this tradition" (Halima, trader & Dala community leader).

The description of girl marriage as a cultural practice is in line with James's (2010) study which explored the socio-cultural context of adolescents' motivation for marriage and child-bearing in north-western Nigeria. James (2010) found that some adolescents describe girl marriage as an acceptable cultural norm whereby parents are expected to determine their daughter's suitors and age at first marriage, the study was however more focused on reproduction and fertility behaviour. The continuation of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria is also justified based on longevity and history which implies that the habit of girl marriage practises has over the years been socialised into some of the people involved in girl marriage decision making; it has been internalised as a way of life. Halima referred to the past as immutable. As highlighted in the interview observation notes (see Section 7.1.3), all the community leaders were very defensive of girl marriage, they emphasised that girl marriage is not wrong. While their argument reflects the theory of cultural relativism (see Section 3.2.2) which suggest that there is no universal 'right way' of being human, applying the cultural relativism lens to the practice of girl marriage would validate cultural violence (Galtung, 1990) or harmful cultural practices (Nafisi, 2006).

Women were also seen to be positioned as the 'property of the family', revealing the patriarchal social structure in Nigeria's Northern region. Women, in this case, can be likened to objects with the family or men defined as the absolute legal owners having the legal right to buy and sell them into marriage. Such rhetoric can have an effect on the self-esteem of some young girls thereby weakening their ability to question girl marriage decisions. While

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Halima's perception of girl marriage is in line with Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi's (2002) study which found that women who experienced girl marriage are more likely to give their daughters in marriage early, Halima is not impoverished like the participants in Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi's (2002) study. It can however be assumed that Halima supports girl marriage because she owes her position as a community leader to men. As discussed in Section 2.2.3, patriarchal ideology is so powerful and often implicit in everyday life that "men are usually able to secure the apparent consent of the very women they oppress" (Millet, 1977:35).

Finally, corroborating prior studies (Ukwuoma, 2014; Braimah, 2014) which found that Nigeria's customary law accounts for non-apprehension and prosecution of girl marriage offenders, Halima justifies girl marriage practices in her community with the customary law which accommodates indigenous practises. As discussed in Section 4.2, some of Nigeria's indigenous customs and traditions are shaped by gendered roles which are evident in the pattern of marriage practices at the time. The accommodation of customary laws that justify gender roles in Nigeria questions the conformity and commitment of the Nigerian government to the CRA.

A community leader gave a more nuanced understanding of girl marriage as a cultural practice. Musiliu described the cultural expectation of when the marriage should take place in a girl's life, this finding reflects our discussion in section 3.1.1, that culture is able to shape the expectations about attributes and behaviours appropriate to women or men. Musiliu however, added that the practice of girl marriage is not limited to Nigeria's Northern region; he suggests that there are cases of girl marriage in the Western communities:

"Marriage itself is a tradition; our belief is that a girl should get married after her first menstrual cycle. It happens everywhere, even in the Western

communities. We are aware they (referring to the Westerners) also sleep with small girls and hide it (he laughs). It happens all over; we are better because we do not hide our practice. We start to teach our girls about womanhood very early, so marrying them after their first menstrual cycle is not new, even to the girls” (Musiliu, Human Resource Officer & Dala Community Leader).

Musiliu’s attitude to the subject matter reveals his low perception of women as dependent on men for all aspects of learning; this is evident in his laughter while explaining the factors that underpin girl marriage decisions. Musiliu is normalising male behaviour by pointing out the similarities to some Western men’s practices, which deliberately hidden. He does not go so far as to explain that the practice of girl marriage in Western societies is against the law and the law is there to protect children. He is taking only one part of the issue, treating it lightly and then neglecting the other part, i.e. the part of the story which might show his own cultural practice in a poor light (not protecting children). The reference to cases of girl marriage in some Western communities indicates girl marriage is being justified as a socially acceptable practice or, acceptable for biological reason, i.e. men’s ‘needs’ perhaps

Further, the above narrative also reveals a sense of pride and righteousness in ‘we are better because we do not hide our practise’. Another justification given for girl marriage decision making is that girl marriage is positive education for the girls in terms of femininity and womanhood. While it is not clear how giving a girl in marriage at age 9 for example can positively contribute to femininity and womanhood, it is relevant to note here that this participant is educated (Human resource officer), economically comfortable, and as a community leader some of his community members are likely to be influenced by his attitude to women and his practice of girl marriage. As illustrated in Section 3.1.1, the notion of traditional authority is particularly relevant to this study because the way of life or beliefs of

such individual, in most cases, are reflected in the customs or beliefs of his society (McLellan, 1984). For example, Musiliu (a community leader) reports that the practice of girl marriage is not new to the girls in his community, while this report confirms James's (2010) finding that some adolescents are familiar with girl marriage practises, the finding also suggest the role of learned gendered identities in the Northern region. Ward (2004) describes culture as a learned way of life that can be learned and passed from one generation to the other. Hence, another possible explanation for the continuity of girl marriage practises is because it is a learned familiar practice, i.e., it is taken for granted and not questioned because it is the norm. The perception that Westerners also practise girl marriage was echoed by another community leader:

“There is no need to hide what we practise; we are not like the white men who hide behind laws. So, are you saying young girls are not married in the West? Answer me! Are you? It (refers to girl-marriage) is practiced everywhere but you people act as if the white men are saints. Well, I will rather promote my culture than live in deceit” (Fadl, Teacher & Fagge Community Leader).

A common perception amongst all the community leaders in this study is that girl marriage is also practised in the Western community, but Westerners pretend such wishes are deviant thereby criminalising the practice. While such perception indicates that some community leaders are aware that girl marriage is prohibited, it also shows that they are resisting being judged by outsiders, which is similar to James's (2010) study in Northern Nigeria James (2010) found that some participants were opposed to any ideas which they perceived as foreign (or western influence). In the same vein, Musa, a civil servant and community leader reports:

“It (referring to girl marriage) is our culture and our tradition, we are not paedophiles, it is the norm and unlike the ‘white’ men we are open about our traditional practices, we follow the right marriage procedures before sleeping with our wives. There is nothing bad in marrying a young girl” (Musa, Civil servant & Agege Community Leader)

Mirroring our definition of culture for this study, girl marriage decision making is interpreted as following cultural norms. North (1990) describes culture as the set of norms and beliefs people have about how the world works. While all the community leaders in this study justify girl marriage as their tradition and cultural practice, their accounts are somewhat contradictory. For example, Musa’s reference to paedophiles while explaining his cultural practice of girl marriage suggest that he is either aware that the girls are considered too young to get married by some, or that he is interpreting paedophilia as a cultural construction. Similarly, while Fadl justified girl marriage based on his culture, he also acknowledged that girl marriage is not practiced by ‘saints’. A shared perception in the interview analyses was a sense amongst all community leaders and male parents that ‘white men’ (Westerners) also practice the equivalent of girl marriage covertly, but they are treated as ‘saints’. Indeed, international laws must be accompanied by appropriate local strategies to address the issue of girl marriage (Gaffney-Rhys, 2010).

Girl marriage is justified based on Nigeria’s customary law which legalises customary marriage practises. These contradictions and justifications help us to understand that the people involved in girl marriage decisions have different ways of justifying the continuation of girl marriage. Nonetheless, some explanations of girl marriage practises is consistent with the discussion of culture (see Section 3.1.1) as comprising values and norms which motivate

people to act in certain ways that are consistent with or meet the expectations of the wider social structures in which they live (Akhil & James, 1997; Parsons, 1961):

“Marriage is a cultural thing and anything cultural will have beliefs and processes guiding it, we have our procedure on how we get married and these procedures are followed. The fact that girls are married at puberty in this region does not mean we pick them up from the streets. We follow due traditional processes of consultations and payments before the marriage is consummated. The white people (referring to the British colonial masters) brought the issue of law into marriage when Nigeria was colonised. It does not make sense, for example – if somebody wanted to marry you now, will he ask you of your age? No! Love knows no age. There should be no law relating marriage with age because marriage is love. But if you go the orthodox (referring to the Constitutional law) way, they will ask of your age and you will be told the dos and don'ts of a constitutional marriage. What (referring to the CRA) they are asking of us is not part of our culture” (Mustapha, an Accountant and parent).

The suggestion here is that there is a due process to follow in girl marriage and following this traditional process is all that matters. Mustapha is of the view that love knows no age, indicating that marriage can take place at any age, this is a very different form of justification from Mustapha however, refused to clarify if a child of 9 is able to know if they are in love with a man outside of their own context? It is not clear if Mustapha is just talking about adult male love. The 2003 CRA was also positioned as a continuity of a colonial rule; some of the people involved in girl marriage decisions perceive the CRA as a ploy to enforce a foreign culture upon Nigerians. While this finding echoes Braimah (2014)'s study in Northern

Nigeria which found that some participants were critical of international laws. Such interpretations of the CRA reveal that people from different societies can interpret a particular sign or gesture differently (Hofstede, 1991). However, an inaccurate interpretation of the 2003 CRA is possibly one of the factors that underpin the continuity of girl marriage decisions in the Northern region. The Nigerian government needs to organise programmes to interpret the 2003 CRA in the way the people involved in girl marriage will understand (this is discussed in Section 8.2). A flawed interpretation of the CRA is also evident in some other participants' report. For example, Musiliu (Dala community leader), Rao and Yazeed (parents) suggest that the 2003 CRA is an intrusion into Nigeria's customary practices:

“It is the West that has said ‘our maturity age is 18’; we do not believe that in our culture. How can you have a specific age for maturity and a specific age for you to get married? Well that is not our culture, the Nigerian constitution accepts the customary marriages and that is what we practice. Age 18 is the colonial masters' marriageable age. The most important thing every woman prays for is to get a good suitor for her daughter as soon as she has seen her first menstrual cycle. There are other ways of educating girls; an example is the domestic home training which prepares the girls for marriage. Formal education should not be compulsory for girls because our culture demands that their husbands should care for them. We will not throw away our heritage for the white people's cultures” (Musiliu, Dala Community Leader & Human Resource Officer).

The above argument is surprising particularly coming from an educated (human resource officer) person. Musiliu reports that age is irrelevant in a young girl's ability to accept the responsibility of motherhood and child-rearing, as well as her appropriateness to have sex.

While this argument might be justified in that Musiliu argues through education and desire of the girls themselves, this view has negative implications for the girl-child because it is not considerate of the concerns (see Section 2.3) of underage girls in marriage. Finally, it is interesting to see how education and girl marriage are implicated together. Musiliu legitimates girl marriage by describing it as a type of informal education. While underage marriage is not suitable for any child, one might want to ask why this type of informal education is not extended to the boy-child in Northern Nigeria. The justification of girl marriage as a type of informal education suggests a structure of inequality, a patriarchal ideology.

In the analysis of the interviews several issues emerged that positioned the continuance of girl marriage in the Northern region as a reclaim of heritage in a post-colonial era. Obviously, problems of imposed inferiority (during Nigeria's colonisation) and even a raging hatred for the coloniser and all they represent surface in the consciousness of the colonised people. Nevertheless, the continuation of girl marriage as a reclaim of heritage in a post-colonial era echoes the discussion in Section 4.4.4 that following Nigeria's independence, traditional marriage values that were criticized and targeted by the British colonial administration (through the enactment of the 1949 Marriage Act) were strengthened in different regions (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Callaway, 1986). While culture is subject to change (Inglis, 2005), the continuation of the cultural practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria indicates that culture can be reproduced across time. My finding reveals that some of the people involved in girl marriage decision makings are committed to traditional values and the reproduction of girl marriage. An allegiance to indigenous culture and a determination to continue in girl marriage practises was emphasised in Musiliu's closing statement: 'we will not throw away our heritage for the white people's cultures'. As a respected community leader whose role

involves governing his community and protecting community values and customs (see Section 7.1.3), Musiliu's view raises some concerns for the young girls and women in his community. This finding further confirms my interview observation note in Section 7.1.3 that some community leaders are able to influence the continuity of girl marriage practices in their communities.

I also found that marriage is positioned to be more important than formal education for every woman; such generalisation indicates the gender relations in Northern Nigeria. It helps us to understand why some states (Sokoto, Gombe, Bauchi, Kebbi and Yobe) in the Northern region have refused to benefit from the Nigerian government's free Universal Basic Education (see Section 4.5.1) for girls.

Interpretation of girl marriage as a commitment to indigenous culture was also echoed by other participants:

“I am a traditionalist; I cannot understand why the Nigerian government will choose to pass the laws given to them by the white (he was refereeing to the CRA). Anyway, we do not observe this in the Northern region (He pauses to have a drink), why will a person not follow his or her culture? Hhmm! Why? It is our tradition; it is a very old practice. It is our way of life and we are not doing anything wrong. The Nigerian customary law permits us to practice our beliefs and traditions; marriage is one of them” (Rao, a Trader & parent).

The above finding is consistent with one of the characteristics of culture in Section 3.1.1 which states that culture contains meanings; the cultural practice of girl marriage is highly esteemed by most of the male participants in this study. According to Weber (cited by Inglis,

2005:6), “the culture of a group makes sense of the world for people in a particular group; it is the framework through which they experience and understand the world around them.

Similar to the community leaders, Rao justifies his practise of girl marriage by introducing the concept of ‘right and wrong’ in his account. As highlighted earlier in the Chapter, the claim of cultural relativism that there is no meaningful way to judge different cultures morally sanctions the aggressor by validating their actions. The fact that this participant introduced the concept of right and wrong suggest that he is probably aware of the prohibition of girl marriage by the Nigerian government and some of the concerns associated with girl marriage practices but chooses to ignore these.

In the analysis of the interviews several issues also emerged that positioned girls as the property of men:

Yazeed frantically explained – “Why should her age be a matter of concern? It is the tradition: I did not steal her from her parent... did I? She is mine if I have paid her ‘sadauki’ (dowry). It is our tradition; there is no reason to be concerned, this has been the practice for generations. Marriage laws were introduced by the ‘white men’. Nigerians before the British colonial rule did not have a specific marriage age, we had our own marriage practices. Some regions have similar ones with the one we practice in the Northern region” (Yazeed, a Caterer and parent).

Getting the consent of a young girl’s parent is interpreted to be more important than the age of the girl before marriage. Again, these findings place men as a ‘significant other’ who has the power or right to own a woman or girl after the payment of a bride price (dowry). A right of ownership is a right to control; the perception of a right to control can be assumed as a

contributing factor to the continuity of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria. This finding also helps us to understand why some mothers support their husbands on girl marriage decisions; they are of the view that men have a legal right to control women. As discussed in Section 3.1.1, patriarchs are culturally designated in accordance with the rules of inheritance. He, in some cases, has no need for an administrative staff, nor any machinery to enforce his will by force alone, he depends on the willingness of subservient group members to respect his authority and they obey him based on the belief that this is their duty, sanctioned by tradition (Thompson, 2013). Although, some studies (Harris, 2004; Abu-Lughod, 1999 & Joseph, 1999; Said, 1978) have shown that it is not possible for women to live under such domination or control, some of the finding of this study suggests that some women/girls may possibly live in such condition. However, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be applicable to all the people involved in girl marriage.

Further, while the women (Hawuwa, Aishat and Modinat - parents) participants described girl marriage as a cultural practice, they were not in support of the practice. All the women (parents) participants in this study reported that they were not informed about their marriage beforehand. The evidence that some girls are not involved in their marriage plans has been well discussed (James, 2010; Erulkar & Bello, 2007). However, all the women participants in this study emphasised the need to involve the girls in their marriage decision making.

“It is a marriage tradition here in Kano to get married as a virgin. My husband is my father’s business partner and he takes good care of me but I am not happy that I was not informed about the marriage before the date. I think my father did that because he knows I will run away if I knew. But not every girl is as lucky as me to find a man that would take care of them, at least, I have a store of my own. So, we should be allowed to choose a suitor and know the

date. The government should stop this tradition if girls will not be told the date before marriage” (Hawuwa, a trader & parent in Kano).

The above extract helps us to understand that some girls are not involved in their marriage plans beforehand because of the fear that they might resist the marriage contract. While these finding echoes past studies (Harris, 2004; Abu-Lughod, 1999 & Joseph, 1999) that some girls are able to resist girl marriage, it also reveals that some decision makers are able to devise different ways/techniques to enforce girl marriage and avoid resistance from the girls.

Further, the above extract also indicates that some girls are not aware of the 2003 CRA.

While the fact that offenders of girl marriage practices are not prosecuted in some countries due to a low level of public awareness that the practice is prohibited has been found in past studies well discussed (Matendere, 2016; Boyden, *et al.*, 2012), the onus is on the Nigerian government/policy stakeholders to organise awareness programmes in the communities involved. While Aishat reiterated Hawuwa’s view that girls should be informed of their marriage plans, her report reveals that some women support their husbands’ girl marriage decisions out of fear.

“This marriage tradition has been in practice for a long time. I got married at age 11 and I was not aware I was to get married on that day, it came as a surprise to me and up to date, I find it difficult to trust my mother. I was very close to my mother before my marriage so I expected her to have told me but I forgive her (she smiles), I think she was scared of my father. Whatever be the case, girls should be allowed to choose their own suitors. Mostly, they should be aware of their marriage dates, it comes as a shock to some girls, like me, I was very surprised and this is not good. I missed all my friends and family

when I got married; I had to learn a new way of life” (Aishat, a Teacher & parent).

The association of fear to girl marriage decisions reveals that not all mothers are in support of marrying off their daughters early, but they go ahead with this practice because it is their husband’s decision. It is also possible that they support marriage decisions because it is accepted in their communities. While it is not clear what would have happened to Aishat’s mother if she had refused her husband’s girl marriage decision, the talk on culture in Section 3.1.1 shows that an individual could be penalised in some collectivist communities if the person refuses to adhere to some community beliefs and practices. According to (Platteau, 2000), these punishments can take the form of fines, social ostracism, loss of status, or even violence.

As illustrated in the discussion above, the present study found that while all the male participants subscribed to the view that girl marriage is a cultural practice in their community, some of their explanations were contradictory, as presented in the accounts of the three male community leaders. The male community leaders’ responses seemed very defensive of the practice, their continuous reference to the ‘West, Paedophiles, Saints, Right and Wrong’ suggest that they are conscious of the CRA. However, they also asserted that girl marriage is accommodated in Nigeria’s customary law.

In contrast, while the female participants described girl marriage as a tradition, they were not in support of its continuity. It could also be that they are agreeing that girl marriage is a traditional practice because that is how it is presented to them in order to diffuse opposition. The women participants however emphasised that girls should be informed of their marriage plans beforehand. While the female community leader surprisingly supported girl marriage

and justified its practice by virtue of Nigeria's customary law, a possible explanation for this might be because she owes her position in the community to men, and men support it.

According to Kambarami (2006), institutions are established in ways that enables men to dominate women. More so, Northern Nigerian women are aware of their particular positions within the patriarchal family structure and over the years they have also become involved in reproducing patriarchal power relations within the home and in the community (see Section, 4.4.4).

Summary: While the justification of girl marriage based on socio-cultural norms has been discussed by prior studies, the present study further clarifies this understanding. As highlighted throughout this thesis, very little is known about the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions within a cultural context. Although the female participants (with the exception of Halima, the female community leader) reported that they would like the tradition of girl marriage to be stopped, all the participants of this study described girl marriage as their culture and traditional practice. Most male participants revealed a high level of resistance to the CRA, they hold the view that it is an imposition of a Western culture, to which they are not prepared to yield. The next section presents participants' talk of their motives and intentions concerning girl marriage decisions.

7.2.2. Mixed blessings; Myth and reality

Girl marriage was also justified as blessings. The community leaders and parents who are involved in girl marriage decision making, with the exception of the women participants, explained that girl marriage decisions are driven by 'blessings'. In the following extract, Fadl (a community leader) explained that girl marriage is a blessing because its practice prevents diseases and poverty in the community:

“What is the problem with the way we marry? Every region in Nigeria have their traditional marriage beliefs and nobody is talking about them. Our own traditional marriage (refers to girl marriage) has many advantages; it is a blessing in disguise. You can prevent diseases by marrying a young girl; you can help a girl out of poverty, you can also increase the blessings from Allah by marrying a young girl. This practice has been going on for many years and it will continue to be, I need to go for lunch now” (Fadl, Teacher & Community leader in Fagge).

While the above interpretation of girl marriage may not make sense to an ‘outsider’ based on the ill health some girls suffer because of it (see Section 2.3) and the fact that there are several other ways to assist a girl out of poverty (i.e., education), Hofstede’s (1991) definition of culture shows that people from different societies can interpret a particular practice, symbol or way of life differently. Nevertheless, it might also be that the people involved have given this interpretation to diffuse opposition, particularly as the above participant also justified the practice with history and longevity. The notion here is that because girl marriage has been in practise for generations (see Section, 4.1), therefore it should continue.

Fadl however, excused himself for lunch at the time he was told to clarify how girl marriage is a blessing to the girl-child. The clarification was needed because the above report shows that only the men benefit from girl marriage practises. The participant’s action at the time can either be interpreted as indicating his lack of interest in the topic or his awareness of the significance of girl marriage for girls’ health. As discussed in Section 1.1, the health consequences of girl marriage to the girl-child initiated this study. It was therefore important to understand how the people involved explain how girl marriage is a blessing to the girls involved. To this question, another participant’s report:

“This is real; a man who marries a girl immediately after her first monthly period (refers to menstrual cycle) will be more blessed than a man who does not, that is why you see everyone in this practice. It has nothing to do with education; this has been proved over time. The girl comes into your home fresh, this automatically improves your life physically, financially, and your overall wellbeing, the blessing comes naturally. The girl will be blessed, her husband, family and the whole community will benefit. It is difficult to explain to an outsider, you need to try it for you to understand, this practice brings the angel of blessings” (Kamill, a Council engineer and parent).

Another justification for girl marriage decision making is the view that the practice would make the people involved better off than those who do not practise girl marriage. Although Kamill’s report implies that the practice of girl marriage is comprised of values and norms which motivate the people involved to continue in its practice in certain ways that are consistent with or meet the expectations of the wider social structures in which they live (Akhil & James, 1997; Parsons, 1961), the report also reveals that only the men benefit from girl marriage practises. The representation of women/girls as tools or objects that can be used for men’s welfare validates prior studies (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2012) which suggest that men in patriarchal communities are taught to demonstrate control, power and authority over women. Nevertheless, as evidenced in the above extract, it is also possible that this cultural belief in ‘blessings’ is the reason why some educated men are involved in girl marriage. Another participant echoed Kamill’s view of girl marriage as a source of blessing:

“Nigeria, as a country has several traditional marriage practices and they are all accepted in the customary law. We definitely would have stopped our own (refers to girl marriage) if there was a problem with it; marriage after a girl

starts to be matured (referring to menstrual cycle) has a reward. It is a blessing for everybody” (Mustapha, Accountant & Parent).

Although it is not clear what Mustapha meant by ‘reward’, a possible explanation for this might be the physical, financial, and overall wellbeing that was mentioned by other participants. Nevertheless, a reflection on Kamill and Mustapha’s educational and socio-economic status raises intriguing questions. While it was observed that these two participants are economically comfortable which they are probably associating to their practise of girl marriage, it is not clear how people of their educational status and exposure would give such interpretation of ‘blessings’ to girl marriage practises. More so, their justification of girl marriage as a ‘blessing’ is gender related, it is therefore possible that this interpretation of ‘blessings’ is a justification for control. Youssef, journalist and a parent however gave a more nuanced understanding of ‘blessings’:

“Marriage to a girl who is at the start of maturity is a blessing. I do not think I can marry an old lady, who has been passed round by different men. God forbids! I am a good Christian and I will not sleep with a girl outside marriage either. You see, we all have our preferences, and no one should be racialised based on his/her belief. I believe in marriage to one wife but the marriage should be at the start of maturity after her first menstrual cycle. Then I am sure I am the first to sleep with her and the only person. By this, the ‘angel of blessing’ will stay in my home. This ‘angel’ wards off problems and misfortunes from homes and communities that have pure marriages (refers to girl marriage). Ever since I got married to my wife, I have been blessed, at least to God’s glory, I have two different cars, we live in a comfortable house, even my wife, she is doing well in her trade” (Youssef, journalist & a parent)

While clarifying how girl-marriage is a blessing, the above male parent reveals his preference for young girls based on 'sexual purity'. As highlighted in Section 2.3, sexual purity is believed to be the state of a girl's body and mind as a result of not having sexual activities outside the bonds of marriage. Youssef's report supports Kaur's (2014) study which found that the concept of sexual purity is one of the factors influencing early marriage amongst Asian Indian communities. Youssef however, associates sexual purity to some 'angelic blessings' like cars, comfortable houses and successful business which indicates that 'angelic blessings' are purely economic. Similar to some other participants above who justified girl-marriage as a 'blessing', Youssef is comfortable economically. He is a journalist, Christian and from middle-class backgrounds; considering the economic status of these interviewees, the interpretation of girl marriage as a 'blessing' is probably related to a justification for privilege. Other responses to the 'implication of girl marriage' included:

“Okay, let me try to explain it to you, it is just like when you buy a new car and your friend buys a fairly used car, the new car will have a better value than the old car. A girl that has just started menses (refers to menstrual cycle) is more valuable than the one who has done many menses that is why we marry like that. And when you marry like that, there is a reward for you (he makes some Arabic exclamations), the 'angel' of blessings will stay in your house, if not, you will struggle all through that marriage. So, that is why you see that everyone tries to marry a small girl who has just started her menses. Marriage with a small girl after the first menses attracts physical and spiritual blessings to the girl, to her 'Oga' (meaning superior or husband) and the community” (Hamiz, a Butcher and Parent).

In the process of justifying girl marriage decisions, Hamiz reveals his preference for young girls and compared marriage to underage girls with the purchase of new cars, such justification of girl marriage portrays women as objects, not as people. Hamiz's report further highlights the low perception of women by most of the participants in this study which strengthens previous studies (Ntoimo & Isiugho-Abanihe, 2013; Allanana, 2013 and Sultana, 2010) which link the continuity of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria to patriarchal social structures and the discrimination and subordination of women. Another key finding in the above report is the participant's description of marrying a girl after her first menstrual cycle as 'valuable', this description can be likened to a commodity that worth a great deal of money. A possible explanation for this description might be related to the required payment of a bride price and gifts in exchange for marriage at puberty.

Nevertheless, thus far, my findings contradict Archambault's (2011) study in Kenya which critiques discourses that portray the people involved in marriage decisions as patriarchs who are motivated by culture, greed or tradition. As seen in the above reports, women are portrayed as commodities and subordinates whose lives depend on the men, such description of women/girls indicate a deeply rooted patriarchal social structure. While I do not argue that women are totally passive and are unable to resist harmful cultural practices without the rescuing activity of external agencies, my findings suggest that men are in control. The gendered identities in Northern Nigeria reinforce women's subordination to men, so does the practice of girl marriage. As emphasised all through this thesis, why is the practice predominant with girls, why not boys? However, it should not be acceptable for either. These are the questions that remain unanswered.

As highlighted in Chapters 2 and 4, while studies associate the determinants of age at first marriage to different factors, the motives and intentions of the people involved in girl

marriage decisions are not clear. Due to this reason and following all the male participants' report of girl marriage as a cultural practice and a source of blessing to the girl, her husband, family and the community, the female participants were also asked to clarify the meaning of this 'blessing'. However, women participants', with the exception of Halima (female community leader) gave contrary interpretations to that of the men. For example, in the extract below, Modinat narrated her experience of girl marriage:

“This tradition (referring to girl marriage) is not good. I have been sad ever since I got married and was later sent away by my husband. It is not good”
(Modinat, Unemployed).

While Modinat opposes the view that girl marriage is a blessing, her account further shows that the male participants' justification of girl marriage must be viewed with scepticism. Although Modinat explained (detailed later in the chapter) why her husband sent her away after the marriage, if girl marriage is indeed a 'blessing' as interpreted by the male participants, Modinat's husband would probably not have sent her away because the mere fact of being married to her is a 'blessing'. In addition, Modinat's report of being 'sent away' from her marriage reveals the power imbalance in her marriage which is in agreement with Jensen & Thornton (2003)'s study of underage marriages in 16 sub-Saharan countries. Jensen & Thornton (2003) found that most underage girls have a limited decision-making power. They are more likely to accept that their husband has the right to beat them or probably send them away as in Modinat's case. It can therefore be assumed that some girl marriage decisions in Northern Nigeria are encouraged because it is relatively easier to control a younger spouse.

Women participants' report further reveals that some young girls in Northern Nigeria devise different means to resist girl marriage:

“I don't like this type of marriage because a girl does not know about the marriage plan. Once you see your first period (referring to menstrual cycle), you can get married anytime. But let me tell you a secret (she laughs and looks around), most girls now don't tell their parents when they see their period. They hide it because they do not want to get married (she laughs again) but you can't hide it for long. But my father explained to me that getting married when you see your first period brings some blessings from the angel who is watching over us” (Hawuwa, a trader & parent)

While the above report supports prior studies (for example, Archambault, 2011) which argue that some girls are able to devise different means in resisting girl marriage practises without the rescuing activity of external agencies, Hawuwa's explanation also reveals that some of these girls have limited capacity. A girl who decides to resist girl marriage by hiding her first menstrual cycle from her parents might only succeed in delaying her marriage for some time. Hawuwa indicates that parents' complicity in the myths surrounding girl marriage blessings: possibly, some parents in Northern Nigeria diffuse opposition from their daughters by presenting to them that girl marriage brings 'angelic blessings'.

Similar to Hawuwa, Aishat described girl marriage as an “evil act”:

“I am a mother of five (two boys and three girls) and I cannot imagine giving out these three girls in marriage to their father's age mates, at age 11 when I got married. Even in poverty, I will not. Some of my friends in Sokoto (a Northern state), give the excuse of poverty or urgent needs to do this, which

they later regret because some of the marriages do not work out the way my friends expected. It is an evil act that solely benefits the men. I left my husband after he took on the third wife, a 12-year old girl who is the same age with our first daughter” (Aishat, a teacher & parent)

In her rejection of girl marriage practices, Aishat explained that some girl marriage decisions are influenced by economic reasons some do not work out as expected. She further reports that she would not continue in girl marriage practices because it is not of benefit or blessings to anyone except the men involved. However, it might be possible for Aisha not to continue, perhaps, because she has left her husband and she is financially independent. Not many women may be in her position. While the female participants were negative about girl marriage, describing it as “an evil act” and “bad” because they were not involved in their marriage plans, all the community leaders and male participants held a mythical belief that the practice of girl marriage ‘attracts angelic blessings’. They hold the view that getting married to a girl after her first menstrual cycle “wards off problems and misfortune”, “brings physical blessings for all”, is “valuable like a new car” and it attracts an automatic physical and financial blessing. A question that remains unanswered is whether these men really believe these ‘angelic blessings’ or whether the practice of girl marriage just suits their purposes.

My finding in this section suggests that the cultural belief of “angelic blessings” constitutes a motivation which perpetuates the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria. Little has been written about these “angelic blessings” in the academic literature. Schwartz (1992) argues that culture is a learned way of life that is passed from one generation to the other, it can have meanings and these meanings can be transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves. While a cultural belief of “angelic

blessings” might not make sense or having meaning to an ‘outsider’ who is not in the practice of girl marriage, Max Weber (cited by Inglis, 2005:6) reveals that “the culture of a group makes sense of the world for people in a particular group”. What is accepted in one cultural context could be interpreted differently in another. Hence, understanding of the cultural context of a practice or beliefs in a society should precede judgement or actions.

It can therefore be suggested that the evidence about ‘angelic blessings’ is an addition to knowledge in this field of study. It is however important to bear in mind the possible bias in these responses. More so, some of the female participants do not share this view and this finding might not represent the view of all the people involved in girl marriage decisions.

Summary: While our finding in this section suggest an addition to knowledge that some of the people involved in making girl marriage decisions make some of these decisions based on their mythical belief of ‘angelic blessing’, the section also shows that some of the female participants do not share this view, all the women participants with the exception of Halima (a Trader & Community leader) felt the practice of girl marriage is bad.

Following these accounts from the participants, with justifications for girl *marriage* that obviously benefitted the men, I felt it was relevant to talk about one of the health consequences of girl marriage, such as fistulae. I was curious to know if they are aware that girls in girl marriage are associated to a higher risk of fistulae (Bimbola, 2013; Meyer *et al.*, 2007). The next section reveals participants’ accounts on health implications of girl marriage.

7.2.3. Girls’ health

The suggestion that girls involved in girl marriage practices are at a higher risk of vaginal fistula (see Section 1.1 and 2.3.2) was disputed by most of the community leaders and male parents, the issue of fistulae in married underage girls was associated with ‘fate’ and the

inadequacies of the Nigeria government. For example, the female community leader explained that she got married at age 11 but did not suffer fistula:

“These diseases and infections are everywhere. Take a look at me; I married at the age of 11, I am now 44 years old and I have not contracted any of these conditions. I am healthy, happy and successful. I have travelled to different countries and I have seen people with these problems in places where girls are not married as early as we do here. If only our government can respond to the medical needs of the people, there will be no problem. Let us stop putting the blame on our marriage traditions. Our fathers practised it and they did not have any of these conditions. What will be, will be, at least I can authoritatively tell you because I got married at 11 years old” (Halima, Trader and Community leader).

While Halima’s argument about fistulae is in line with the WHO’s (2000) report which shows that fistulae can occur at any age and can also result from hysterectomy, cancer operations, violent rape, radiation therapy and cone biopsy, Meyer, *et al.*’s (2007) submission on cases of fistulae in Northern Nigeria reveals that it is predominant in early childbirth and some young girls whose pelvis has not fully developed. Hence, Halima’s extrapolation from herself to other girls who marry early is lacking because she is using a single personal experience to explain the experiences of a group of people; without providing evidence to assess her case. Instead, Halima justifies girls’ poor health based on fate.

Fistula is interpreted by the people involved in girl marriage decision making as a condition which develops outside a person's control- ‘fate’. It is regarded as predetermined by a supernatural power. While the association of ‘fate’ with the condition of fistulae in married

underage girls by the people involved in girl marriage decisions might be unbelievable to an 'outsider', Hofstede (1994: 5) explains that culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another'. This interpretation makes sense to the people involved and probably explains why girl marriage continues despite the health conditions it causes.

Similar to Halima, Musa attributes girls' poor health to fate:

"There are no negative implications; it is an old traditional marriage practice which would have been stopped if there were negative implications. Any disease we suffer after marriage is destined to happen, not everyone suffers these conditions. We should not throw away our traditions for the white man's culture; a man without culture is dead. Every region in Nigeria have their own type of traditional marriage. There is nothing wrong with ours. Our traditional marriage practice attracts 'angelic' blessings for the girl, her family and the community" (Musa, Civil servant and a community leader in Lagos state).

Musa suggests that the longevity of girl-marriage in Northern Nigeria indicates that it has no negative implications for young girls and brings many blessings for everyone. However, the longevity of girl-marriage in Northern Nigeria might be because there are few reasonable alternatives for girls/women trapped in a bad marriage. The people involved in girl marriage hold the view that they need to uphold the cultural practice of girl marriage for the future generations.

The association of fate with the condition of fistula by the people involved in girl marriage decisions has implications for policy stakeholders, in terms of the need to organise programmes that will educate the people involved in girl marriage decisions about fistulae.

One community leader blames the growing rate of fistula on the inadequacies of the Nigerian government:

“These health issues you have raised can be prevented if the Nigerian government provide the right medical care for the people; we should not be held responsible for the inadequacies of the Government” (Musiliu, a Human resource officer & a Community leader).

Musiliu reports that the inadequacy of the Nigerian government is responsible for the high rates of fistulae in Northern Nigeria. Although it is possible that the Nigerian government is not doing enough for its citizens, the issue of fistulae in Northern Nigeria is quite alarming, as discussed in Section 1.1, although the Nigerian government and the USAID give aids to fistula patients, new cases of fistula occur faster than repairs are done (Meyer, et al, 2007).

While the above extracts reveal that some of the people involved in girl marriage decision making do not accept that the high prevalence rates of fistula in Nigeria are a result of girl-marriage, their extracts also reveal that they are adamant in their beliefs and understandings of girl-marriage practices. However, the women participants were not of this view, they all (except Halima, a community leader) shared negative experiences of girl marriage. Most of the women participants appeared to reveal a deep sadness, loneliness and desperation during the interviews. However, only one woman (Modinat) participant’s experience of girl marriage is shared in this thesis because this study is particularly focused on understanding the perceptions of the Northern Nigerian men involved in girl marriage decision making.

I decided to present Modinat’s experience because her story and condition was particularly disturbing. Modinat blamed herself for her experience and has refused to associate with her peers. She moved back to her parent’s house after she became separated from her husband.

Although some of interviewees described girl-marriage as a cultural practice which attracts a suggested mythical ‘angelic blessings for all’, Modinat appears to have a different perspective

“Oh Hawuwa! She is my friend, I trust her. I will only speak to you if Hawuwa sent you to me. I do not know why this practice continues but it is not a good one. This was 12 years ago, and I was 12 years at the time, I was in junior secondary 2 (year 8). This experience will stay with me for the rest of my life. I got married to Adamu a week after my first menstrual period but on our wedding night, it was very difficult for Adamu to enter me, it was very painful, and I cried all through the night. The following day, Adamu was still not able to enter me. Some days later, Adamu’s mother said there was something in my private part that is not allowing Adamu to enter me, so she took me to a *Wanzan* - (traditional barber). *Wanzan*’s job is to remove the thing that is disturbing Adamu from entering me. I pleaded with *Wanzan* and Adamu’s mother, but no one listened to me. They forced me on a mat, Adamu’s mother grabbed my legs very tight, another woman grabbed my hands too very tight, and *Wanzan* removed the thing in my private part with a razor blade. I shouted and cried continuously; maybe I fainted because I woke up to find myself in my father’s house. My mother was crying by my side on the bed; my private part was paining me. They put some cloths in-between my legs, the cloth was soaked in blood. I was in my room for so many days. Each time I urinated in a bowl my mother gave me; my private parts would pain me more, my mother treated me with some local herbs. But, my private no longer pains me but Adamu does not want to marry me anymore (she sobs). I always

have bad dreams and I shout in my sleep. I don't like going out because I think some people laugh at me (she stares at the wall with tears in her eyes). What are you going to do with my story? Will you help me?"

I unfortunately did not have any answer to most of Modinat's questions. Nevertheless, I referred her to a counselling centre.

As highlighted above, Modinat's story reveals a deep sadness, loneliness and desperation as she described her lived experience of girl-marriage. Modinat also requested that the practice of girl-marriage be stopped because 'it is bad'. Nonetheless, Modinat's narration corroborates Callaghan *et al.*'s (2015: 523) finding that girls involved in girl-marriage can speak, "even if their talk is highly constrained".

Findings from this section suggest that some of the people who are involved in girl marriage decision making, particularly the community leaders in this study, dispute the suggestion that girls involved in girl marriage practices are at a higher risk of vaginal fistula. Participants stressed that fistulae are not limited to Nigeria's Northern region. They argue that there are cases of these conditions in communities that do not practice girl marriage. Therefore, vaginal fistula in married underage girls in Northern Nigeria is regarded as 'fate' rather than a health implication of girl marriage. Although the women participants (parents) were not of this, this finding can be assumed as an addition to knowledge because it is the view of some of the people involved in girl marriage decision making.

Summary: While prior studies suggest an association between girl marriage and higher risks of fistulae (Bimbola, 2013; Meyer et al., 2007), participants' accounts in this section shows that the condition of fistula is interpreted as 'fate' and the inadequacies of the Nigerian government by the male participants in this study. Further, Modinat's lived experience of girl

marriage helps us to understand the realities for some girls involved in girl-marriage. It shows that some of these girls are not sufficiently physically mature for marriage.

In the next section, we will examine 'first menstrual cycle'. As obvious in Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2, first menstrual cycle is a common theme among the participants.

7.2.4. First menstrual cycle: Morality and waywardness

As we have already seen, a recurrent theme throughout my interviews concerned the first menstrual cycle. Participants emphasised the importance of the first menstrual cycle; according to them, a girl's first menstrual cycle indicates that she is mature for marriage and getting married in this particular time is what attracts the suggested "angelic blessings" discussed in Section 7.2.2. It was therefore relevant to ask participants if the first menstrual cycle was a type of local community law guiding traditional marriage practices in the Northern region. In answer to this question, participants revealed that marriage after the first menstrual cycle is not part of local community law.

"We do not have any written down laws. We know our marriage traditions and customs and we follow it without anyone having to tell us otherwise. We do not follow any English law about marriage. Are we English people? (He laughs) ... Are we? (expecting a response from me) No, so why would we leave our culture and practices for the English man's culture. Girls need to get married after their first menstrual cycle, it is the right thing to do" (Jaleel, Journalist and a parent).

While oral tradition (see Section 4.2.1) implies that girls were given in marriage at puberty during Nigeria's pre-colonial era (Crowder, 1979), reasons for this practice are, as yet, little understood. However, participants in this study reveal the significance of marriage at puberty

for girls in Northern Nigeria. The people involved in girl marriage decisions suggest that a girl's first menstrual cycle indicates that she is mature for marriage and getting married at this particular period is what attracts "angelic blessings". While my finding reflects Aryal's (2007) study in rural Nepal and Nagi's 1993 study in Rajasthan, India which found that early marriage is based on Hindu scripture which sanctions that girls are to be married either before menarche or immediately after menarche, my finding also contradicts these studies. While Aryal (2007) explains that this part of the Hindu scripture is mainly observed by the Brahmin caste in Nepal, Nagi (1993) concludes that adherence to that part of Hindu scripture is mostly observed by the 'uneducated' Hindu worshippers. It is however unclear if the participants in Aryal's (2007) study are mostly educated. Nevertheless, the participants in this study are not Hindus and most of them are well educated.

Further, the above extract strengthens the discussion of culture in Section 3.1.1 which suggest that a cultural practice, after some years, become habits which over the years can be interpreted as 'natural' rather than learned (Inglis, 2005). The practice of girl marriage, being learned, in the Northern community over the years does not need to be a matter of discussion before compliance. My finding raises the possibilities that young girls are taught to get married after their first menstrual cycle, with the aim that they will reject other beliefs which includes foreign laws like the CRA. This indoctrination is probably why the educated are also involved in girl marriage practices (detailed in Section 7.2.6).

As seen in previous extracts, Jaleel further justifies the continuity of girl marriage practices in his community with a cultural relativist view. While the relativist view calls for caution when dealing with beliefs and customs different to our own, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, it also makes the victims of harmful cultural practices morally defenceless against those who harm them by sanctioning the actions of the aggressor (Kanarek, 2013). Girl marriage is also

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seen to be justified based on moral issues, the need to prevent waywardness in young girls which indicates an act of inequality in the Northern community.

The need to indoctrinate the practice of girl marriage was also present in the accounts of some participants in this study:

“What has law got to do with tradition? We know the tradition by heart and it is followed, in the case where anyone needs clarifications in the community, an elder will be consulted, it does not have to be a community leader. There are so many elders in the community. More so, parents are expected to teach their children the traditions, what is expected of them and the things that are not expected” (Najeeb, a Trader and parent).

While Najeeb’s report suggests a rooted indoctrination of girl marriage practices in the community, it also reflects the discussion of how some cultural practices can be associated with social power (see Section 3.1.1). Yarrow, *et al.*, (2015:7) suggests that some ‘dominant norms and attitudes are closely associated with structures of social power; they are typically policed and enforced by persons in positions of authority, such as male heads of household’. As seen in Najeeb’s report, the continuity of girl marriage practices in Northern Nigeria is enforced by some community elders and parents.

Finally, Najeeb’s report also corroborates the discourse of culture (see Section 3.1.1) that culture is able to shape the expectations about attributes and behaviours appropriate to women or men and about the relations between women and men. While the patterns and expectations differ in different communities, and the patterns are subject to change over time, the general pattern is that women have less personal autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal, and limited influence over the decision-making processes that shape their societies

and their own lives (Schalkwyk, 2000). My findings show that some girl marriage decisions are based on societal expectations to which the people involved in girl marriage decisions feel many want to conform.

With regards to the clarification on whether the first menstrual cycle is a type of local community law guiding traditional marriage practices in the Northern region, all the participants agreed that although there are no written community laws, girls' first menstrual cycle appears to be a significant factor in the age of girl marriage. As a result, some girls get married younger (8-11) or relatively older (12-14), it depends on the age they see their first menstrual cycle. For example, the female community leader's reports:

“When a girl clocks the age of 10 or 11, the parents starts to search for a suitor for her. That is if she the girl does not already have one. Not all girls are lucky enough to have a suitor after their first menstrual cycle. Some girls that get married at age 14 or 15 in Kano must have seen their menstrual cycle within that age. However, several other reasons like waywardness or too much education can delay from getting married at the normal time” (Halima, Trader & Community leader)

While the female community leader, Halima, reveals that some parents that have female children start to pre-arrange the marriage of their children far in advance before the first menstrual cycle, she also explained that some girl marriage decisions in the Northern region can be delayed if a young girl is wayward or educated. Halima's association of 'education' to girl marriage practices, yet again, helps us to understand why some girls are encouraged to leave free education; to enable them to find suitors, which is considered as more important than formal education.

Further, the practice of girl marriage is also discussed in relation to ‘waywardness’, suggesting gender control. The biographical profile of the male research participants in this study shows that most of them are married to more than one wife, yet, this act is not interpreted as waywardness. The community however expects the girl-child to conform to some expectations of ‘decency’ by getting married after her first menstrual cycle which indicates that the practice of girl marriage is employed by some people to enable control. It suggests that educated girls are less likely to get married early because they are relatively difficult to control compared to girls who are not at school. It can therefore be assumed that some girl marriage decisions are underpinned by the desire to control women/girls.

Summary: Analysis of participants’ interviews in this section suggest that a girl’s first menstrual cycle is a key factor influencing age at first marriage for some people involved in girl marriage decisions in Northern Nigeria. Most of the participants also suggested that getting married to a girl after her first menstrual cycle would attract “angelic blessings”. The themes of promiscuity and submission also recurred throughout the interviews; these are discussed in the next section.

7.2.5. Preventing promiscuity and upholding submission

As with previous examples, girls’ first menstrual cycle is used to indicate maturity for the girl-child. However, in this case, the first menstruation is also linked with promiscuity and the need to ensure submission. The people who are committed to girl marriage decision-making are of the view that if a girl is not married after her first menstruation, there are tendencies for her to deviate from societal expectations and her husband’s instructions. Participants’ accounts in relation to promiscuity and submission are presented in the following extracts:

“If the marriage is not consummated after the first menses (refers to first menstrual cycle), the girl is likely to become wayward and you cannot control her” (Mustapha, Accountant and parent).

In line with these studies (African Union, 2015; Ukwuoma, 2014; Erulkar & Bello, 2007; Schuler, et al., 2006) which found that girl marriage is used to prevent female promiscuity and maintain female submission (see Chapters 2 and 4), Mustapha suggested that a girl is likely to become promiscuous and rebellious to her parents and future husband if she is not married after her first menstrual cycle. Girl marriage is seen to be used by some decision makers to enforce a patriarchal structure in the community. In their narratives of first menstrual cycle, the community leaders and parents drew on gendered identities that stemmed from the influence of the wider community:

“When a girl is not married after her first menstrual cycle and she sleeps around, she could get pregnant and no man would marry a wayward girl. No! The community does not accept that. Whoever marries such a girl would become a laughing stock. Everybody wants decent girl for a wife. You cannot pay the bride price of a wayward girl” (Majeed, Teacher and parent).

Girls who do not get married after their first menstrual cycle are positioned as wayward while it is considered an honourable act for men to marry young girls. Indeed, participants made no reference to the societal expectations of men, as suitors, in Northern Nigeria. Positioning girls in this manner reproduces the gender relations in the Northern community. It suggests that some girl marriage decisions are underpinned by men’s desire to control women. The finding also corroborates our discussion in Section 7.2.4, that some girl marriage practices are

influenced by male honour. The female community leader further elaborates the gender relations in her community:

“It is much more difficult to train girls than boys. A girl can easily be influenced by negative peers, we need to watch them so they do not get pregnant and bring shame to the family name” (Halima, Trader and Community leader).

A key point in the above report is that control is seen to be needed for girls but not boys. Such perception is clearly gendered, a rooted gender inequality, these findings further validate the discussion in Section 4.4.4 that Nigeria’s Northern region is a highly stratified community and relations of inequality in this region are rooted in a traditional hierarchy of classes and gender relations (Terwase & Ochanja, 2015).

Reflecting prior studies (Ukwuoma, 2014), the findings in this section indicate that some girl marriage decisions are made to prevent promiscuity in girls and deliver submissive wives. Participants’ interpretations of girl marriage practices reveal gendered expectations of appropriate behaviours and attributes in the Northern region which can be referred to as ‘exercising control’. As emphasised in Chapter 4, gender identities and gender relations are critical aspects of culture in some communities in Nigeria, particularly the Northern region, because they shape the way daily life is lived in the family and wider community. While the people involved in girl marriage decisions emphasise above that their decisions and practices of girl marriage are based on cultural explanations of “angelic blessings” in relation to the first menstrual cycle, their accounts in this section are contradictory. The themes emerging from this section relate specifically to ‘exercising control’. These themes are consistent with some of the justifications for girl marriage outlined by the policy-stakeholders in Chapter 6.

Summary: Analyses of participants' explanations of girl marriage practices in this section reflect prior studies that the needs to prevent promiscuity and have a submissive wife after marriage are contributing factors for girl marriage decisions. Most of the male participants and the female community leader reported that the menstrual cycle signifies maturity for the girl-child and if she is not married after her first menstruation, there are tendencies for her to deviate from societal expectations and her husband's instructions. In the next section, the socio-economic reasons that underpin girl marriage decisions will be examined from the perspectives of the participants.

7.2.6. Poverty and education

In their narratives on girl marriage processes, community leaders and parents emphasised the significance of the payment of a bride price which can be in cash or kind. Although participants did not categorically state that the continuity of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria was for economic reasons, their emphasis on the payment of a bride's 'sadauki' (dowry) before marriage can be related to economic reasons. Nonetheless, as emphasised all through this chapter, my findings reveal that girl marriage is not limited to peasants or the uneducated. These issues (poverty and education) will now be discussed in turn.

Poverty: Reflecting past studies (Guragain, *et al.*, 2017; Montazeri *et al.*, 2016; Bakhtibekova, 2014; Nasrin & Rahman, 2012; Archambault, 2011; Sah, 2008; Schuler *et al.*, 2006; Chowdhary & Deeba, 2004; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002; Bart, 1994), analyses of my interviews suggest that some girl marriage decisions are motivated by economic gain. In their accounts of girl marriage, some community leaders and male parents emphasised the benefits of a girl's bride price.

“The parents can invest with the 'sadauki'. The girl in some cases will live in a better environment where she will be well cared for and the community will

be full of happy and blessed people. I mean, there is no problem in this arrangement, why are we making so much fuss about it” (Kamill, Engineer and Parent)

As seen in Kamill’s report, girl marriage is used as a form of ‘survival strategy’ for some families in need and the concerns (see Section 2.3) of girl marriage practices is regarded as ‘making a fuss’, this sort of expression relegates the issue of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria as an unimportant one and it is clearly lacking consideration for the girls involved. The people involved in girl marriage decisions are concerned chiefly with their personal profit or pleasure. Fadl, a teacher and community leader explained the marriage processes and the payment of the bride price:

“Our traditional marriage cannot be faulted if the marrying couple adhere to the traditional marital rites before and after the marriage. Before the marriage, the groom is required to get the bride’s parents’ consent by presenting some kolanuts, fruits, sweet, salts, calabash and any other required item. The acceptance of these gifts by the bride’s parent and family shows that the groom’s proposal has been accepted. After which there is a payment of *sadauki* (dowry). The *sadauki* is an important part of the ceremony, the bride will not be allowed to go with the groom until the *sadauki* is paid. *Sadauki* can be paid in form of money, a good deed or livestock and in the cases whereby the girl refuses to go ahead with the marriage; the parents will have to refund the *sadauki*” (Fadl, Teacher and Community leader).

The need to follow procedures in girl marriage is particularly emphasised by all the participants; a traditional ceremony which involves the exchange of the girl-child with gifts

and a bride price. However, in most cases, the girl is absent from the marriage plans. In this case, girl marriage can be described as an economic transaction between a girl's parent/community leader and her suitor. The account below further illustrates a right of ownership after the economic transaction:

“I will give my daughters out in marriage at whatever age if her husband promises to abide by the tradition. I can choose to marry my friend's daughter and my friend can choose to marry any of my daughters if he so wishes. However, we must follow the marriage tradition. After meeting with the girl's parent, you are expected to pay the *sadauki*. The *sadauki* gives you the right over the girl. For example: my wife is my friend's daughter, you see... I met my wife when I went to visit my friend: I told the father that I love his daughter. That was how the marriage started. I went through the traditional rites” (Taofeek, Merchant in clothing and Parent).

While Taofeek, who is married to six wives, expressed his commitment to the continuity of girl marriage practices and justifies it as adherence to marriage tradition, he portrays the girl-child as a commodity that can be owned. Such representations of the girl-child gives the husband a complete right over the girl, enabling gender imbalance in the marriage. Although prior studies (Harris, 2004; Abu-Lughod, 1999 & Joseph, 1999) suggest that it is not possible for women to live under such dominance and authority, these findings contradict this view, i.e., participants reveal that any girl who refuses to comply with the marriage plans will be requested to refund the bride price:

“If you see a girl you like, you need to meet the parent and do the necessary things. You cannot sleep with a girl when you have not performed the marital

rites; we do not accept that! This is how the tradition is. A groom is allowed to sleep with his wife after the payment of *sadauki*. However, if you have paid the *sadauki* of a girl and she refuses to marry you or continue with the marriage, she or her family will be expected to refund the *sadauki*. If they are unable to pay, she will not be allowed to leave the marriage except her family would need to return my *sadauki* if she wants to end the marriage” (Jaleel, Journalist and Parent).

The above report reveals that it is possible for some girls to stay in abusive marriages because she, or her family, is unable to refund the dowry paid by her husband. It is however, possible in some cases that the girl’s parents are able to pay but choose to collude with the husbands in order to ensure the girl stays in the marriage. This is an important issue for future research.

While the above narratives lend support to prior research suggesting that some girl marriage practices are underpinned by economic transactions, Fadl’s (Teacher and Community leader) account indicates that not all girl marriage decisions are for monetary gain. According to Fadl, “a bride price can be paid either in form of money, a good deed or livestock”. While it is not clear what Fadl meant by a “good deed”, the discussion of marriage patterns and gender relations during Nigeria’s pre-colonial era in Section 4.2.1 shows that it was acceptable in Nigeria during that era for some families to give their daughters in marriage as a form of gift to traditional rulers (Ukwuoma, 2014). The educational background of all the participants in this study will now be discussed because past studies suggest that girl marriage is mostly practised by the uneducated.

Education: Similar to the issue of poverty, several studies (Rahman, 2017; Rutto, 2015; Nasrin & Rahman, 2012; Kamal, 2011; Sah, 2008; LeBlanc, 2007; Bates *et al.*, 2007; Manda

& Meyer, 2005; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002; Singh & Samara, 1996) suggest that illiteracy or limited primary level of education is a key factor underpinning girl marriage practices in developing countries. For example, Nasrin & Rahman's (2012) study which examined the determining factors of early marriage and early conception of women in the slum areas of Rajshahi city in Bangladesh suggest that educated men are less likely to be involved in girl marriage practices. Similarly, Rahman's (2017) study of determinates of early marriage in Bangladesh suggest that a limited level of education is a significant factor in the continuation of early marriage in Bangladesh.

Although the current study is focused on the motives and intentions of people involved in girl marriage decisions, one unanticipated finding was that some of the people involved in girl marriage decisions are well-educated, most of them are University graduates in Westernised employment and living in urban areas. As indicated in the biographical profiles (see Tables 7.1 & 7.2), participants included six people with limited primary education and 19 participants with Western education and exposure. It was also unexpected to find that some of the participants of this study are able to argue their views. For example, Musiliu, the human resource officer and a community leader is aware of his rights as a Nigerian citizen; this is evident in his argument (see Section 7.2.3) that "citizens should not be held accountable for the inadequacies of the Nigerian government". Although, the Nigerian government with the help of USAID has continued to give aid to fistula patients (see Section 4.5.2), the fact that Musiliu argued along this line is surprising for me, considering the way people in girl marriage practices are portrayed in the literature as uneducated and impoverished.

Similarly, some of the participants who are not University graduates were also able to make an argument for girl marriage, (e.g. the female community leader's argument in Section

7.2.1). While the men's arguments were contradictory in their bid to describe girl marriage as a cultural practice, Halima supported her argument by referring to Nigeria's customary law. My finding suggests that girl marriage practices or the making of girl marriage decisions are not limited to the uneducated or people with low levels of education. This is an addition to knowledge – that some University graduates in Westernised employment are also involved in girl marriage practices and decisions. Although it is not clear why some educated people subscribe to girl marriage practises, it may be related to the deeply rooted gender relations in the Northern region, or the indoctrination of girl marriage as a cultural practice (see Section 7.5.2). My findings imply that education, or an exposure to Western views, is not enough to change some cultural values and beliefs such as marriage choices. Some of the participants in this study were able to maintain their cultural practice of girl marriage despite their Western education and exposure. Nonetheless, this is not to suggest that all the people in girl marriage practices are as educated as some of the participants in this study or as well-travelled like Halima.

Summary: While findings in the above section corroborate past studies that some girl marriage decisions are motivated by desire for economic gains, it also contradicts prior studies as girl marriage is not limited to the uneducated or people with limited education. As demonstrated above, some of the people involved in girl marriage practices are well-educated and well able to defend and propound their own views.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored factors that underpin the continuity of girl marriage practices, from the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions. The chapter began by presenting the observational data from community leaders' interviews. It was observed that all the community leaders exhibited some relational power over women and an affluent

lifestyle. The show of affluence was most evident in the case of Halima (Dala community leader, Kano) while an exhibition of power was most evident in the case of Fadl (Fagge community leader). The powerful and authoritative attitudes shown by all the community leaders in this study is somewhat counter-intuitive because these community leaders, particularly the one woman included, are expected to be one of the first contacts for young girls attempting to resist girl marriage in the community. In addition, the interview observation of the participants of this study contradicts existing studies which describe the people involved in girl marriage as impoverished and uneducated. The educational and employment status of most of the participants in this study adds to knowledge in this field. It reveals that the practice of girl marriage is not limited to the uneducated or those with limited primary education. Nevertheless, since this study is focused on men, it is not clear if their wives married them for economic reasons or if girl marriage was limited to the girls due to limited primary education.

As demonstrated in this chapter, the factors that contribute to the continuity of girl marriage practices in Northern Nigeria, from the perspectives of some community leaders and parents who are involved in girl-marriage decision making are: the acceptance of girl marriage as a culture and tradition; a cultural belief in 'angelic blessings' (mixed blessings; myth and reality); the association of girls' poor health with 'fate'; the significance of the first menstrual cycle (morality and waywardness); the need to prevent promiscuity and uphold submission; and economic gains. Apart from the mythical belief in 'angelic blessings', the association of fistulae with 'fate' and the significance of the first menstrual cycle among non-Hindus, many of the factors identified have been discussed in existing studies. The perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions, particularly the men, have been limited in

literature. However, this study indicates its importance to the complex discourse of girl marriage.

It can be concluded from this chapter that while cultural explanations of 'angelic blessings' underpin the continuity of girl marriage practices in Northern Nigeria, this practice is also a product of patriarchal power structures which enhance and maintain male superiority in the region and the suppression and oppression of women, and particularly girls, by sanctioning such practices. The next chapter will conclude on the aim of this study and discuss the key findings.

CHAPTER 8

Discussion and conclusion

This study was conducted to understand how the people who are involved in girl marriage decision making in Northern Nigeria explain the practice of girl marriage. I felt that understanding this practice within a cultural context from the perspectives of key decision-makers would help the Nigerian government, particularly the policy stakeholders, to understand the negative implications of the practice so that steps can be taken to protect girls. To achieve this goal, I employed interviews and observation methods of data collection within the framework of Denzin's (1989; 2001) Interpretive Interactionism to explore the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions from Kano (Fagge and Dala community) and Lagos state (Agege community).

The present study found some similarities in prior studies on the factors that underpin the continuity of girl marriage practices. Identified factors contributing to the continuation of girl marriage practices were: the acceptance of girl marriage as a cultural tradition (James, 2010); generational practice (Brewer, 2005; Robertson, 2002; McLaughlin, 1997; Lewis, 1992; Herlihy, 1985; Power, 1975); inconsistencies in the Nigerian constitution (Braithwaite, 2014; Ukwuoma, 2014); mixed blessings - myth and reality; girls' health; first menstrual cycle: morality and waywardness; a perceived need to prevent promiscuity (Ukwuoma, 2015; Erulka & Bello, 2007; Schuler *et al.*, 2006) and uphold female submission (Ukwuoma, 2015); socio-economic issues (Guragain, *et al.*, 2017; Montazeri *et al.*, 2016; Bakhtibekova, 2014; Nasrin & Rahman, 2012; Archambault, 2011; Sah, 2008; Schuler *et al.*, 2006; Chowdhary & Deeba, 2004; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002; Bart, 1994).

Apart from the belief of ‘angelic blessings’ (mixed blessings; myth and reality); the association of fistulae with ‘fate’ (girls’ health); and the significance of the first menstrual cycle among non-Hindus, many of the factors have been revealed in existing studies. However, these studies have not been undertaken with male policy stakeholders, community leaders and parents from Northern Nigeria. It is also pertinent to note here that this study suggest that those who are well-educated with exposure to Western ideas are also involved in the continuity of girl marriage. This finding is different to findings from other studies. The current study confirms the relevance of the above factors in the motives and intentions of people involved in girl marriage decisions. The perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions, particularly the men, have been limited in literature. However, the present study reveals its importance to the complex discourse of girl marriage.

To that end, in this chapter, Section 8.1 will set out the main findings of the study alongside the main aim that was set out in Chapter 1. Section 8.2 will illustrate the implications of my findings theoretically and practically. Section 8.3 will outline the policy consequences. Section 8.4 critically reflects on the limitations of this study, and Section 8.5 will present the plan for future studies.

8.1. Summary of key findings

- The main aim in embarking on this study was to explore how the people who are involved in girl marriage decision making in Northern Nigeria explain the practice of girl marriage.

While the findings of this study suggest that strong cultural explanations underpin the continuity of girl marriage practices in Northern Nigeria, it also argues that this practice is strengthened by patriarchal power structures and the male exercise of control over the lives of women. This finding is based on the analyses of data provided by people involved in the

practice of girl marriage. Key findings are: the acceptance of girl marriage as a cultural construction; inconsistencies in the Nigerian constitution; mixed blessings - myth and reality; girls' health; first menstrual cycle: morality and waywardness; preventing promiscuity and upholding submission; and socio-economic issues. The next section will present a summary of the first finding.

8.1.1. Generational cultural practice

All the participants of this study considered girl marriage a generational cultural practice but the policy stakeholders and women participants (apart from Halima, the female community leader) emphasised that they do not support its continuation. Nevertheless, while some of the explanations of the people involved in girl marriage decisions can be situated within the definition of culture (see Chapter 3); some of their explanations were also contradictory. The male community leaders and male parents' continuous reference to the 'West, Paedophiles and Saints' suggests that they are conscious of the illegality of girl marriage. However, findings from the women participants (parents) suggest they are either not aware that girl marriage is prohibited (Matendere, 2016; Boyden, *et al.*, 2012 in Nigeria or they have accepted girl marriage as a traditional practice but want it to be practiced differently, i.e., to beware of their marriage plans beforehand.

Further, in their explanations of girl marriage as a cultural practice, the community leaders and male parents positioned young girls as commodities that can be bought and disposed at will. Such description of women implies that girl marriage is culturally used by some men to subjugate women under patriarchal rule (see section 'Preventing promiscuity and upholding submission' below). Nevertheless, girl marriage was also justified based on its acceptance in Nigeria's customary law (see section 'Inconsistencies in the Nigerian constitution' below).

While the present study lends support to studies that have discussed the historical practice of girl marriage in Nigeria as based on socio-cultural norms (James, 2010; Akpan, 2003), the present study further clarifies this understanding.

8.1.2. Inconsistencies in the Nigerian constitution

The second major finding of the study, particularly from the perspectives of the policy stakeholders was the view that inconsistencies in the Nigerian constitution underpin the continuity of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria. I found that while some policy stakeholders are determined to curb girl marriage, the political situation in Nigeria's Northern region has been challenging because of the entrenchment and complexity of gender equity, in highly gender-determined contexts like Northern Nigeria. This is coupled with the inability of the Nigerian government to revisit and amend the inconsistencies in Nigeria's 1999 Marriage Act.

While the inconsistencies in the Nigerian constitution have been well discussed (Braithwaite, 2014; Ukwuoma, 2014), the present study further clarifies that the lack of acceptance of the CRA in the Northern region is also influenced by a misinterpretation of the law. The community leaders and male parents in this study hold the view that the 2003 CRA is an imposition of a Western culture, to which they are not prepared to yield (see practical implication of this finding below). The next section summarises participants' views of their motives and intentions concerning girl marriage decisions.

8.1.3. Mixed blessings; Myth and reality

Belief in 'angelic blessings' also recurred throughout the dataset, the present study found that cultural beliefs in 'angelic blessings' underpin some of the motives of girl marriage decisions in Nigeria's Northern region. While very little is known about this in literature, our definition of culture, that of Ward (2004) and North (1990), was used as an analytical lens to

understand participants' accounts. Although a cultural belief in 'angelic blessings' might not make sense to an 'outsider', Max Weber proposed that the culture of a group makes sense of the world for people in a particular group (cited by Inglis, 2005). The present study helps us to understand that the cultural reproduction of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria is also influenced by cultural belief angelic blessings.

Nevertheless, it is pertinent to note that mothers who participated do not share this belief in 'angelic blessing'; they felt the practice of girl marriage is 'bad' rather than 'a blessing'. The next section summarises participants' accounts on health implications of girl marriage.

8.1.4. Girls' health

As highlighted in chapter 1, understanding girl marriage from the perspectives of key decision-makers was also intended to help the Nigerian government, particularly policy stakeholders, to understand the negative implications of this practice so that steps can be taken to protect girls. Therefore, following some of the participants' justifications for girl marriage decisions that obviously benefitted men, participants were asked about one of the health consequences of girl marriage, such as fistulae. I was curious to know if they are aware that girls involved in girl marriage practices have a higher risk of fistulae (Bimbola, 2013; Meyer, *et al.*, 2007). To this question, the present study found that the issue of fistulae in married underage girls was associated with 'fate'.

Participants, particularly the community leaders, rejected assumptions that defined girl marriage negatively and asserted that girls and women who suffer from obstetric fistula are destined to suffer from the condition. The community leaders perceived the discussion on girls' health as a criticism of their cultural practices. Nevertheless, some participants also blamed the inadequacies of the Nigerian government for the high incidence of fistulae in Northern Nigeria. While it is possible that the Nigerian government is not doing enough for

its citizens, the issue of fistulae in Northern Nigeria is alarming (see Chapter 1) and the fact that it is justified based on 'fate' has an implication for the policy stakeholders in Nigeria (see Section 8.2 below).

The present study extends our understanding that the people involved in girl marriage have different cultural explanations for some health consequences of girl marriage. Notably, the association of 'fate' with fistulae in married underage girls explains why girl marriage practices continue in Northern Nigeria despite the growing problem of fistulae in the region.

8.1.5. First menstrual cycle; Morality and waywardness

One of the more significant findings that emerged from the present study is the significance of the first menstrual cycle as a determining factor of age at first marriage. Most of the people involved in girl marriage decisions explained that to attract 'angelic blessings' (see Section 8.1.3), a girl needs to get married after her first menstrual cycle. However, the age at which the first menstrual cycle occurs varies for different girls, influencing their age at first marriage. It can therefore be assumed that, if a girl has her first menstrual cycle at 14 and there is an available suitor, that girl is likely to get married at that age. Equally, if another girl has her menarche at 8, then such a girl is likely to get married at age 8 if a suitor is available.

While menarche as a determining factor of age at first marriage has been discussed (Aryal, 2007 and Nagi, 1993), the present study contradicts these studies' suggestion that the significance of menarche in girl marriage is limited to the uneducated Hindu worshippers. Contrary to these studies (Aryal, 2007 and Nagi, 1993), participants in this study are not Hindu worshipers neither are all of them uneducated. Participants in the present study include Christians and Muslims with majority of them having western education and exposure.

Further, in the community leaders and male parents' accounts of girl marriage, I found that girls' first menstrual cycle was associated with morality and the need to prevent waywardness in young girls. Through these accounts, it was evident that marriage at puberty was in part based on societal expectations for girls in Northern Nigeria. The community expects the girl-child to conform to some expectations of 'decency' by getting married after her first menstrual cycle. The present study raises the possibility that the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria is employed by some people to enable male exercise of control over the lives of women, particularly young girls (see 'Preventing promiscuity and upholding submission' below).

8.1.6. Preventing promiscuity and upholding submission

Another important finding in the present study was a view among some of the community leaders and male parents that girl marriage prevents promiscuity and upholds submission. My finding strengthens past studies (Ukwuoma's 2014; Erulkar & Bello's 2007's study in Nigeria and Schuler, *et al.*'s (2006) study in Bangladesh) which found that girl marriage is underpinned by the need to prevent promiscuity and have a submissive wife. The present study also shows that gendered expectations of appropriate behaviours and attributes in Northern Nigeria influence girl marriage decisions. There was a common perspective amongst all the community leaders and male parents that if a girl is not married after her first menstruation, there are tendencies for her to deviate from societal expectations and her husband's instructions (see Chapter 7). The community leaders and most of the men participants positioned women as subordinates that need to be controlled (see Chapter 7). As demonstrated in chapter 4, Nigeria's Northern region is a highly stratified community and relations of inequality in the Northern region are rooted in traditional class hierarchies and in the wider status-prestige system (Terwase & Ochanja, 2015). The present study confirms that

the structured inequality in Nigeria's Northern region affects the Northern women, particularly in relation to marriage.

8.1.7. Poverty and education

While girl marriage was not specifically described as a mechanism for economic survival, some of the people involved in girl marriage decisions emphasised the need for the payment of 'sadauki' (bride price) which can be in the form of cash, kind deeds or livestock before a girl marriage practice can be completed. The emphasis on the payment of a bride price before marriage can however be related to economic reasons. My finding echoes several studies (Guragain, *et al.*, 2017; Montazeri *et al.*, 2016; Bakhtibekova, 2014; Nasrin & Rahman, 2012; Archambault, 2011; Sah, 2008; Schuler *et al.*, 2006; Chowdhary & Deeba, 2004; Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi, 2002; Bart, 1994) which found that girl marriage practices are influenced by economic reasons.

Nevertheless, contrary to previous research (Rahman, 2017; Rutto, 2015; Nasrin & Rahman, 2012; Kamal, 2011; Sah, 2008; LeBlanc, 2007; Bates *et al.*, 2007; Manda & Meyer, 2005; Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi, 2002; Singh & Samara, 1996) which suggest that men involved in girl marriage practices tend to be uneducated, poor and naïve, and the girls themselves are often presented as being powerless and voiceless, the current study did not find a significant difference between the uneducated peasants and the educated (with Westernised employment) in their interpretations and practices of girl marriage. Although the majority of participants accepted girl marriage as a cultural construction or generational practice, the majority were well-educated, well exposed to modernity and in professional occupations. Participants of this study include 19 participants with western education and exposure. While I do not suggest that all the people in girl marriage practices are as educated as some of the participants of this study or well-travelled like them, my finding suggests that this is an

addition to knowledge. The next section will present the theoretical and Practical implications of these findings.

8.2. Theoretical and practical implications

Research on the practice of girl marriage has been extensive with studies recommending local strategies that are peculiar to the countries involved (for example Gaffney-Rhy, 2011).

According to this extensive body of research the continued practice of girl marriage is concerning given the harms associated with it, especially for girls and women. While the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions are however relevant for these local strategies, very limited studies have focused on these decision makers within a cultural context. The current study was designed to fill this gap. The findings of this study have implications for theorists and some identified practitioners in this field of study. I will start with the theoretical implications.

Theoretical implications: The overall purpose of the study- to investigate the continuity of girl marriage practises in Northern Nigeria, within a cultural context from the perspectives of the people involved in decision making-has ensured that this study contributes to the on-going discussion in this field of study.

The present study contradicts, confirms and clarifies previous assertions regarding the factors that underpin the continuity of girl marriage (see Chapter 6 and 7). Several scholars suggest girl marriage is influenced by a lack of or limited education. More emphasis is therefore placed on education (Rahman, 2017; Rutto, 2015; Nasrin & Rahman, 2012; Kamal, 2011; Sah, 2008; LeBlanc, 2007; Bates, *et al.*, 2007; Manda & Meyer, 2005; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002; Singh & Samara, 1996) and poverty (Guragain, *et al.*, 2017; Montazeri, *et al.*, 2016; Bakhtibekova, 2014; Nasrin & Rahman, 2012; Archambault, 2011; Sah, 2008; Schuler, *et al.*, 2006; Chowdhary & Deebea, 2004; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002; Bart, 1994). On the contrary,

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my findings indicate that girl marriage is also practised by the economically comfortable and educated people. Although the current study is focused on the motives and intentions of people involved in girl marriage decisions, one unanticipated finding was that some of the people in the practice of girl marriage and decision making are well-educated and economically comfortable. Most of the participants of this study are University graduates in Westernised employment (e.g. human resource officer, accountants, journalist, engineers etc.) and living in urban areas. This finding is contrary to the finding of some theorist (Rahman, 2017; Rutto, 2015; Nasrin & Rahman, 2012; Archambault, 2011; Kamal, 2011; Sah, 2008; LeBlanc, 2007; Bates, *et al.*, 2007; Manda & Meyer, 2005; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2002) who have argued that the practice of girl marriage is often used by peasants and the uneducated as a means of economic survival. Although some farmers were also found to practise girl marriage, they were also able to intellectually argue their views. The present study extends our knowledge that girl marriage practices or the making of girl marriage decisions is not limited to the impoverished, the uneducated or people with limited education.

Further, in recent times, several studies (Rutto, 2015; Archambault, 2011; Camfield & Tafere, 2011; Ahmed, Reavey, & Majumdar, 2009; Majumdar, 2007) have been seen to critique literature (Ukwuoma, 2014; Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013; Allanana, 2013; Sultana, 2010; Erulkar & Bello, 2007) that associate the continuation of girl marriage in developing countries to patriarchal social structures and the subordination of women. These studies (for example: Archambault, 2011; Ahmed, Reavey, & Majumdar, 2009; Majumdar, 2007) claim that locating girl marriage as a problem that violates universal rights strips away the context that renders girl marriage a comprehensible familial and cultural practice. Indeed, caution is needed when dealing with the beliefs and customs different to our own. However, a denial of patriarchal influence in the study of girl marriage, particularly in the context of

Northern Nigeria, will be doing the girls/women involved a great injustice; it will be making reality opaque.

Notably, some of the studies which critique literature that associate the continuation of girl marriage to patriarchal social structures are either not clear on the age at first marriage in their discussion (for example: Reavey, & Majumdar, 2009; Majumdar, 2007), or some of them (for example: Archambault, 2011) justify their theories based on cases of early marriage of girls age 14-21. As highlighted in Chapter 1, the legal marriageable age differs in different countries and age 14-21 is acceptable in some countries but the age at first marriage for girls in some countries, particularly Northern Nigeria, is age 8 (see Section 8.1.5 and Callaghan, *et. al.*, 2015). Arguably, a girl of 8 is likely to be much more limited in autonomy than a girl of 14-21; a girl's age is significant in her ability to challenge a girl marriage decision. More so, the present study found that the people involved in girl marriage decision making are able to use different means, i.e., cultural interpretations, coercive and authoritative power (see Chapters 6 and 7) to enforce some girl marriage decisions.

The finding of the present study is consistent with those of Ukwuoma's (2014) study in south-western Nigeria; Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe's (2013) study in eastern Nigeria; James's (2010) and Erulkar & Bello's (2007) study in North western Nigeria which found that the continuation of girl marriage in Nigeria is strengthened by rooted patriarchy in the system. While it is fair to criticise theories of patriarchy for not having a theory of change, it is not appropriate to suggest that they all think that change does not take place (although some do take this position). The current study confirms that while there have been some changes in the cultural practice of girl marriage in Nigeria (see Chapter 4); the cultural practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria is reproduced across time by some community leaders and parents involved in girl marriage decision making (see Chapter 4, 6 and 7).

Although the community leaders and parents justified girl marriage based on some cultural explanations of “angelic blessings” in relation to the first menstrual cycle, some of their accounts (see Chapter 7) are contradictory. In their narratives, the people involved in girl marriage positioned women/girls as commodities which can be bought by men. Men on the other hand were portrayed as having the right to possess and the right to control the lives of women in the community. In their accounts, the people involved in girl marriage decision making reveal the societal expectations of behaviours which are considered acceptable and appropriate for girls/women in Northern Nigeria. For instance, the community leaders in this study justified girl marriage based on the need to prevent promiscuity and have a submissive wife. The acceptance of girl marriage practices by some community leaders is able to weaken girls’ agency and some local organisations on issues concerning girl marriage.

While I do not intend to present ‘young brides’ as passive victims needing external agencies to rescue them from parochial and oppressive cultural practices, indeed, some of my findings corroborate prior studies (Callaghan, *et al.*, 2015) which found that some girls involved in girl marriage are not completely passive; the attitudes and narrations of the people involved in girl marriage decision making, particularly the community leaders, raises intriguing questions. The capacity to which some women/girls are able to resist girl marriage decisions that could be made by some community leaders in the present study remains unclear.

Moreover, Nigeria’s Constitution (see Chapter 4, 6 and 7) also recognises these gendered beliefs, making the issue of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria very complex one.

Drawing together the findings has demonstrated that several factors underpin the practice of girl marriage in developing countries. While the findings in the present study suggest that strong cultural explanations underpin the continuity of girl marriage practises in Northern Nigeria, it also argues this practice is strengthened by patriarchal power structures and the

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male exercise of control over the lives of women. I am suggesting here that as scholars working to understand early marriage practises in developing countries, we need to consider the individual differences in historical backgrounds, political, legal, socio-economic, education and cultural context – all of which interact in complex ways to influence the age at first marriage in different countries. If girl marriage is continuously oversimplified as an economic or literacy issue, it is likely to sanction cultural violence. One might want to ask why these factors (poverty and illiteracy) are not able to influence the marriageable age for boys in some developing countries. While I do not take lightly the plights of some of the people involved in girl marriage, I argue that prioritising the education of the boy-child over that of the girl-child based on socio-economic issues is in a way authorising gendered identity, and maintaining existing power relations, so that a cultural practice has become socially acceptable.

As girl marriage according to the findings of this study is influenced by strong cultural explanations which are strengthened by patriarchal power structures, preventing girls in Northern Nigeria from getting married before the age of 18 requires bigger changes in the overall situation of Northern Nigeria which might take years or even decades. Nevertheless, the severe consequences (see Chapters 2 and 7) the girls involved in girl marriage might face require certain actions (see practical implications below).

The approach taken in this thesis has differed from that of previous research where women were the main focus. There are very few studies on girl marriage practices with a focus on men's perspectives: this study is one of the first in Nigeria to do so. Nevertheless, the present study also contribute to the discussion on gender issues, particularly the role of gender and potential gender differences. As demonstrated in chapter 7, all men, irrespective of education or class, benefit from the existing power structure and practices. However, this is not just a

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simple issue of men versus women because some women after gaining access to power can also have a similar perspective to some men. This can be seen in Halima (the female community leader)'s defence of girl marriage (see Chapter 7). While all the women participants were not supportive of girl marriage, Halima shared a similar perspective with the men - Halima perceived the present study as meddling into other people's marriage decisions, she was of the view that the upkeep of men and children rather than formal education should be a woman's priority. Although the reasons for Halima's view remain unclear, it could possibly be that she owes her position to the men or that she is aware of a woman's position within the patriarchal family structure and over the years she has become involved in reproducing patriarchal power relations in the community. More research is needed on the views of women in position of power on girl marriage issues. This section has explored the contribution made by the present study; the implications for those implementing Nigeria's 2003 CRA will now be discussed.

Practical Implications: Identified stakeholders include Marriage registrars, Childs' right promotion officers, Law enforcement agents, Legislators and health professionals whose roles include the enforcement of Nigeria's 2003 Child Rights' Act.

The local strategies to reduce the continuity of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria presented here will benefit all stakeholders. On a practical level, these recommendations will help to empower girls, provide interpretations of the CRA to the people involved and encourage the participation of girl marriage decision makers in programmes that promote the prohibition of girl marriage practices.

- The current study emphasises the importance of a re-assessing the 2003 CRA, this is necessary considering its misinterpretation by some participants. The present study

found that some community leaders and parents resist the CRA based on the view that it is an imposition of a Western culture. Therefore, there is a need to organise programmes to ensure the CRA is interpreted in the way the people involved in girl marriage will understand, possibly using the indigenous language in re-presenting the law in the communities involved. This strategy will also clarify any misconception the people involved in girl marriage decisions may have.

- The suggestion that girls involved in girl marriage practises are at a higher risk of vaginal fistula was disputed by the community leaders in this study. The issue of fistulae in married underage girls was justified based on 'fate'. Therefore, there is a need to organise health educational programmes which will create awareness and address the issue of fistulae in Northern Nigeria.
- One of the findings of the present study is that most of the decision makers have an inappropriate perception of women/girls, participants portrayed women as a commodity that they can buy and have the power to own. Such representation of women can limit girls' agency. In view of this, empowerment programmes that will promote self-confidence, courage, self-reliance, career ambition and self-image in young girls should be organised and maintained in primary and secondary schools, religious houses, and community halls.
- Establish and promote local women's organisations in primary and secondary schools where young girls who are resisting girl marriage practices can find support. This promotion should also be targeted to young girls who are already married but want to leave abusive marriages because the present study shows that some girls are not able to leave abusive marriages because they are unable to afford a refund of their bride price.

- Finally, organise cultural empowerment programmes that will enable empowerment in cultural aspects like freedom for girls to choose their partners and freedom to be involved in their marriage plans.

This section has addressed the practical implications of the research for researchers and stakeholders. The next section illustrates the consequences of the inconsistencies in Nigeria's constitution.

8.3. Policy consequences

The problem of how to enforce the laws prohibiting girl-marriage in Northern Nigeria is often treated in terms of police decisions to arrest or apprehend offenders of girl-marriage. My finding however shows that the power to successfully make arrest or to enforce the CRA depends much more on the legality of the CRA. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, the inability to successfully apprehend offenders of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria is mainly due to the inconsistencies in Nigeria's constitution. These inconsistencies in Nigeria's constitution have some consequences:

- The legality of girl marriage in Nigeria: Nigeria operates a tripartite legal system with civil, Islamic and customary law operating simultaneously. In relation to marriage the federal government has no control over customary and Islamic marriages but only marriages conducted in a civil manner. This implies that according to Part 1 Section 61 of the 1999 Constitution, when a person marries a child under Islamic or customary law in Northern Nigeria and is consequently in contravention of the 2003 CRA, such a person cannot be penalised because the federal government would be interfering with a customary or Islamic marriage and would be in violation of Part 1 Section 61 of the 1999 Constitution. Therefore, in relation to girl marriage practises, Part 1 Section 61 of the 1999 Constitution renders the CRA null and void, as the 1999

Constitution serves as the supreme law of the land in Nigeria, overriding all other legislation. For example, some of the findings of this study show how Part 1 Section 61 of the 1999 Constitution is being used as a constitutional backing for girl marriage practice.

- Hinders progress towards gender equality in Nigeria: The acknowledgement of a tripartite legal system to which some of the laws encourage the perpetration of girl marriage practices questions the conformity of the Nigerian government in the protection of the girl-child.
- Inconsistent policies create inconsistent actions by policy stakeholders: The findings of this present study suggest that some while some policy stakeholders are determined in their duties to curb girl marriage in Nigeria's Northern region, the inconsistencies in the constitution has been a mitigating factor. Poor policy management can result in conflicting copies of a policy or leave officers referring to an outdated version. Further, inconsistent policies also make it hard for officers to understand and meet expectations. The resulting inconsistent actions can erode community trust, which puts the officers, agency, and community at risk.

This section has illustrated the consequences of the inconsistencies in Nigeria's constitution.

The limitations of the current study will now be discussed.

8.4. Limitations of the study

The present study was a relatively short term one which was obstructed in one of the research communities and relied much more on findings from one community. Its findings cannot, therefore, be assumed to be generalisable and further research needs to be done if many issues are to be clarified.

- **Sample size:** One of the limitations of this study is its reliance on a relatively small sample of policy stakeholders and people who are involved in girl marriage decisions. It would require researchers to conduct a more extensive study of this area to capture all the complexities involved in the practices of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria. However, one of the strengths of the present study lies in its detailed qualitative analyses of the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions.
- **Attrition:** Another limitation of this study is in relation to the sample recruited and later attrition. The difficulty of recruiting participants in their communities and the withdrawal of some participants, particularly, community leaders and parents, makes it difficult to generalise the findings of the study. This is particularly so because of the sensitivity of the research topic and the fact that girl marriage is prohibited in Nigeria. It was therefore difficult to convince some men that I was not a spy in their communities. Most of them withdrew from the study without cogent reasons. I was limited to only two participants in the third community (Agege in Lagos). Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how such attrition can be avoided for a sample of this kind. This attrition however does limit the conclusion, it is possible to draw on the basis of the data from this study

It could also be argued that the study was too short term to have been able to seriously address the research aim. It should be noted that I have over 16 years personal and professional experiences working as a local community officer in the Northern part of Nigeria. I have had the opportunity to observe different traditional practises in these communities, particularly girl marriage practices. There are, however, few studies which attempt to research the continuity of girl marriage practices within a cultural

context from the perspectives of the policy-stakeholders, community leaders and parents in their communities. The study makes an important contribution to understanding the motives and intentions of the men involved in girl marriage decisions. It is, perhaps, more accurate to view the findings of this study as mainly the perspectives of the participants in this study than as a generalisable conclusion.

- **The methodological validity of reliance on participants' accounts:** A further potential limitation of this study is that it relies mainly on the reports of men to understand the motives and intentions of girl marriage decisions. While the reason for the focus on men is because this study had not been undertaken with the male community leaders and parents involved in girl marriage practices from Northern Nigeria. It probably would have been more comprehensive if the voice of more women was included. Nevertheless, this study aimed to take seriously the motives and intentions of the men involved in girl marriage decisions as presented in their accounts rather than dismissing them as simply being inaccurate. There is yet to be other ways of obtaining people's perceptions of their lived experiences.

Further, a reliance on accounts does not necessitate that those accounts be taken at face value as if they constituted the whole and only story. Therefore, observational notes were also used to critically analyse participants' account of girl marriage decisions. The combination of the observational notes, men and few women's account in this study can be argued to provide rich data, particularly since accounts were not treated as the simple 'truth' but were accepted as social constructions that provided insights into lived experiences. As with some interpretive studies, findings from the

present study are considered to be transferable. In presenting examples of decision makers' accounts, the current study lays its interpretations open to scrutiny and hence alternative interpretation.

8.5. Plan for future studies.

In some ways this study has raised more questions than it has answered. Despite the extensive studies conducted on the issue of girl marriage practises in developing countries, there is a need for more information from the perspectives of those involved. For example, few studies have focused on the life course perspective of the girls who have been involved in girl marriage practices without relating it to their health conditions. Considering the welfare of girls who have been involved in girl marriage without limiting discussion to health matters would also aid understanding of girl marriage.

The findings of the present study suggest an important area for further research. There is a need for studies to focus on life after early marriage for some girls particularly those who want to leave the marriage but are unable to leave due to reasons such as an inability to refund the bride price. In the course of the current study, it was identified that while the girls involved in girl marriage are portrayed in many previous studies as being trapped in abusive marriages and are unable to leave, some of these girls are actually able to leave, as described by some participants in this study. However, some were unable to leave because their families are unable to refund the bride price. Particularly, if such marriage was based on financial reasons, this is an important issue for future research. Why are they being requested to refund their bride price before they can leave the marriage? What are the motives and intentions that underpin the refund of a bride price as the only criteria that can allow a girl to dissolve a girl marriage? Considering that men are allowed to dissolve these marriages at

will, particularly if the girl suffers some health conditions such as fistula after the marriage. More research is required to answer all these questions.

Further, more research is needed on the ways in which patriarchal power structures perpetuate the practice of girl marriage. As seen in this study, some of the community leaders are involved in girl marriage practises and considering the role they play in the communities, they are able to limit the capacity of girls' agencies in resisting girl marriage. Although several studies have found that some girls are able to resist girl marriage without the assistance of external agencies, the finding of this study shows a limited capacity in the context of Northern Nigeria. For instance, some parents and community leaders are able to diffuse oppositions in several ways: gendered roles, the representation of marriage as a priority to the girl-child, representation of cultural beliefs about the first menstrual cycle etc. More research is needed in the way these factors are used to perpetuate girl marriage.

Conclusion

The factors underpinning the continuity of girl marriage practises, within a cultural context, from the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions has been explored. This has addressed a gap in literature on providing the perspectives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions within a cultural context.

This study revealed similarities with previous work on the determinants of age at first marriage in developing countries such as inconsistencies in the Nigerian constitution, socio-economic issues with particular emphasis on poverty, religion and cultural norms. However, whilst socio-economic issues with particular emphasis on poverty and education were suggested by prior studies, education was found to have only a limited impact in the context of Nigeria's Northern region. Reason being that Nigeria's policy on education makes access to education free and fair but some of the people involved in girl marriage have refused to

benefit from this programme. There was evidence of gendered identities in the discourse of the people involved in girl marriage decisions, patriarchy seems to be the bane of women's existence in the Northern region and a deconstruction of this monopoly will enhance women's rights and empowerment. The present study found that girl marriage in Northern Nigeria is not limited to the uneducated men or men with low level of education as portrayed by prior studies. Some of the people involved in girl marriage decisions, at least based on the sample of this study, are men with 'western education' and 'exposure'.

Although it was found that some cultural explanations such as, mythical 'angelic blessings' and the significance of first menstrual cycle, underpin the continuity of girl marriage from the perspectives of the decision makers in this study, this thesis argues that girl marriage in Northern Nigeria is much more strengthened by power and exercising control. This study found that the intentions and motives of the people involved in girl marriage decisions were self-serving rather than serving the interest of the girls involved.

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Appendix 1: Topic guide for interviews with participants

Topic guide for interviews with Policy stake holders:

- What do you think about the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria?
- What do you think are the factors that have led to girl marriage? (family factors, social, economic, education, cultural and/or contextual factors such as displacement and risks associated natural disasters and internal armed conflict)
- What are the implications of girl- marriage to (1) the girl, (2) the family and (3) the community?
- Do you think people in these communities are aware of the constitutional laws about marriage?
- Are there procedures in place for checking age during registration of marriages?
(Question 4 is for the marriage registrars only)

Topic guide for interviews with Community leaders and Parents :

- How does marriage work in your community?
- How can you explain the practice of girl marriage?
- How did you meet your husband/wife?
- What are the implications of girl marriage to - (1) the girl, (2) the family and (3) the community?
- Are there any issues with girl marriage?
- What are the laws on marriage in this community?

Appendix 2: Participants' information and consent letters

Understanding the Practice of Girl marriage in Northern Nigeria from the perspectives of key decision makers

This project is an attempt to understand the practices of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria. As part of the research I will be interviewing key policy stakeholders, community leaders and parents that are involved in girl marriage decisions or witnessed girl marriage in an effort to better understand factors that underpin its perpetuation, as there has been few academic research looking at the factors underpinning the perpetuation of the practices of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria.

My emphasis is to understand the underlying factors which facilitate the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria. It is expected that, this knowledge will assist in shedding more light into this practice and enhance the understanding of marriage in the community. If you would be interested in taking part in this interview, please let me know. You are under no obligation to take part in any aspects of this study if you do not wish to.

Why should I take part?

One of the aims of this project is to make academics, stakeholders and the general public to understand the factors underpinning the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria and how it is practiced. By taking part, you are able to anonymously inform people of your practices, which may help to dispel some of the misunderstandings surrounding the practice.

What you will be expected to do

You will be asked to take part in an interview in which you will be invited to share your experiences or understanding of girl marriage in general and, specifically, your experiences as a one (if this is the case). All interviews will be audio recorded with your permission and will take place in a mutually agreed upon, private, comfortable and safe place, to be arranged prior to the interview. You will not be asked to discuss anything you do not wish to due to either personal preference or the values of your tradition. You will be given a copy of the transcript of your interview and a summary of the themes derived from the interviews, on which you will have the opportunity to comment. Whilst there is no specific time limit on the duration of the interviews they are expected to last roughly one hour. If you would like to see the list of questions to be asked, before the interview, please contact the researcher.

Participation is voluntary

Participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the interview at any time without having to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the study after the interview is completed, you have one month from the date of your interview to do so, again without having to give a reason. If you do choose to withdraw after the interview has taken place, your information and interview data will be destroyed.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

In accordance to the Data Protection Act 1998, your questionnaires will be anonymised, using a participant code, so as to protect your identity. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or password protected computer to which only the researcher have access. Where quotes are used within the study, all identifying details will be removed or anonymised.

Quotes may also be used at academic conferences and/or published in academic journals. There is also a possibility that study findings may be the subject of university or community talks/lectures and may also be reported in newspapers, magazines or online. Any quotes used will also be anonymised to protect your identity. If you do not wish for your quotes to be used in this manner, please indicate on the consent form. Once transcripts have been produced, the audio recordings will be destroyed, the transcripts will be stored for an indefinite amount of time. Although we ask you to sign a consent form, this will be kept separate from the rest of your data. If you wish to receive a copy of your transcript or to withdraw your data, you only need to contact me to let me know and mention what your pseudonym is.

Contact Information

If you wish additional information about this research project please contact me:

Tolulope.Eboka@northampton.ac.uk (01604) 892964 or +2348033551833

If you wish to know more about the project as a whole or my registration at Northampton University please contact one of my supervisors:

Dr Suzanne McDonald Walker:

Suzanne.McDonald-Walker@northampton.ac.uk

(01604) 892139

Prof Judith Sixsmith:

Judith.Sixsmith@northampton.ac.uk

(01604) 893698

Dr Faith Tucker:

Faith.Tucker@northampton.ac.uk

(01604) 892580

Consent Form:

Understanding the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria

Please Tick

						Y	N	
I understand that I must be 18 or over to take part and confirm that I am							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand the nature of the study and how my data will be used							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I may withdraw my data up to one month after the date of my interview							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given a copy of this description for my own records							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to quotes from my interview being used in academic conferences and journals							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to my interview being audio recorded							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signed-----

Date-----

Name-----

Age-----

Gender F/M/Other (Please circle as appropriate)

Pseudonym-----

(Researcher use only) Participant code-----

If you would like a copy of the transcript of the interview, please leave your email address
below.....

You are under no obligation to take part in any aspects of this study if you do not wish

Appendix 3: Sample of conducted interview with policy stakeholders

INT: What do you think about the practice of girl marriage in Northern Nigeria?

Policy stakeholder: Oh! That is their practice (referring to the Northern Nigerians), Although it is illegal in Nigeria, it is acceptable in the Northern region. As marriage registrars (referring to herself and her colleagues), we do our part in discouraging it but it is difficult because that is the way it (referring to girl marriage practices) has always been in that region. Even in the whole of Nigeria, but most regions no longer practise that.

I mean you can see the problems these girls go through, as soon as they get pregnant most of them can no longer go to school; they end up as beggars on the road. The health concern is even worse; some of these girls die during childbirth, stillbirths, VVF different complications. You just wonder why they continue in this senseless practice.

INT: What are the factors that have led to girl marriage?

Policy stakeholder: It is difficult to say the exact cause, you see hmmm... (Paused, to wear her glasses), some say it is religion, but that is difficult to accept because we have different people from different religions in its practice. Others say it is illiteracy. Girl marriage practice is not limited to a class of people. I am a marriage registrar, and in my 19 years of practice, I have seen different class of people in this practice. You will notice this when you get to the community. Although, some rich men exploit some low-class families, they entice them with a high bride price and the families who are in financial need often fall into such enticement and would rather give their daughters' hand in marriage to the richer suitor. It is sad.

INT: Why is it difficult to convince the rich and educated people who are in the practice of girl marriage?

Policy stakeholder: This is because; they claim to know better than us. I think it is more of a traditional thing, there are cases of child marriage in every community. It is practice by community leaders and followers, so if you ask me, it is their culture and tradition, they will be in a better position to tell you why they have continued in this practice.

INT: What are the implications of girl- marriage?

Policy stakeholder: More of negative implications than positive, these are the reasons I have given you earlier, for the girl- it is a complete loss of identity and self, for the family – some of them claim to gain financially if their daughter is married to a rich man but not all the girls are lucky to marry a rich man. For the community – I still do not know.

INT: To what extent do you think girl marriage is a response to teenage sexuality?

Policy stakeholder: Maybe it is to an extent but, that is not a good approach to it, I mean ermm..., marrying her off at that age is doing more harm than good.

INT: Do you think people in your community are aware of the constitutional laws about marriage?

Policy stakeholder: What constitutional law? Most of them get married under the Islamic or customary type of marriage. They do not come here (referring to the government marriage registries) to tie the knot. They know it is not accepted but then they are also aware that they can practice it under the Islamic or customary type of marriage.

INT: Are there procedures in place for checking age during registration of marriages?

Policy stakeholders: Yes, if they come here, we check using their birth certificates but if not, there is nothing we can do.

INT: Why do you not report to the law enforcement agent?

Policy stakeholders: Which law enforcement agent? It is their tradition; you cannot report anyone for practicing their tradition.

INT: What if that culture/tradition has a negative effect?

Policy stakeholders: They will tell you to report to the traditional or community leaders and these people are all in this practice. They jealously guide all their traditional practices.

Sincerely, it is a difficult one. When you get to the community, you will understand better.

INT: How important do you think school education is for girls?

Policy stakeholders: Very important, it is very important.

INT: Okay, thank you very much.

Appendix 4: Sample of conducted interview with community leaders

INT: Thank you very much for accepting to partake in this interview.

Community leader: That is okay

INT: How does marriage work in your community?

Community Leader: This type of traditional marriage is our culture; this is how we met our forefathers practicing it. It is not new and there is nothing wrong with it. You see, the way Allah created women; we are like a property to our family. When a girl grows to maturity and Allah blesses her with a suitor, the suitor is expected to give a dowry in exchange of the girl. That is the tradition. More so, Nigeria's customary law acknowledges this tradition.

INT: How did you meet your husband?

Community leader: I did not meet my husband, I was married to him (she smiles)

INT: Can you tell me a little bit more about how you were married to him?

Community leader: There is no need for that!

INT: How old were you at the time?

Community leader: I was 11 years old!

INT: What are the implications of girl marriage?

Community leader: There are no implications. Marriage of girls after their first menstrual cycle is a blessing to everyone. You see, girls' education should not be limited to the classroom; girls can learn any vocational trade such as hair dressing, fashion designing, tie

and dye, weaving and any other type of vocation when they are married. After all, this was how our mothers grew up. I only had a primary education certificate when I got married. After which I learned fashion designing, so classroom education is not the only way of teaching girls.

INT: Can you please elaborate more on how marriage after the first menstrual cycle is a blessing to the girl?

Community leader: Why do you ask?

INT: I was just wondering considering the issue of fistulae.

Community leader: These diseases and infections are everywhere. Take a look at me; I married at the age of 11, I am now 44 years old and I have not contracted any of these conditions. I am healthy, happy and successful. I have travelled to different countries and I have seen people with these problems in places where girls are not married as early as we do here. If only our government can respond to the medical needs of the people, there will be no problem. Let us stop putting the blame on our marriage traditions. Our fathers practised it and they did not have any of these conditions. What will be, will be, at least I can authoritatively tell you because I got married at 11 years old.

INT: What are the laws on marriage in this community?

Community leader: There are no laws, but the practise is: when a girl clocks the age of 10 or 11, the parents starts to search for a suitor for her. That is if she the girl does not already have one. Not all girls are lucky enough to have a suitor after their first menstrual cycle. Some girls that get married at age 14 or 15 in Kano must have seen their menstrual cycle

within that age. However, several other reasons like waywardness or too much education can delay from getting married at the normal time (Pauses to have a drink).

It is much more difficult to train girls than boys. A girl can easily be influenced by negative peers, we need to watch them so they do not get pregnant and bring shame to the family name (pauses the interview questions to explain that she is no longer able to continue because she has a programme to attend)

My dear (she was referring to me), why don't you go and find something better to do with your time, you know (she smiles), like taking care of your husband and children if you have any.

INT: Thank you very much for your time, I would have loved some more clarifications on this blessing you mentioned a while ago. When would you be available, so I can come around again?

Community leader: No dear, I will be travelling to India next week.

INT: Okay then, once again, thank you for your time.

Appendix 5: Sample of conducted interview with parents

INT: Thank you very much for accepting to partake in this interview.

Parent: How many questions do you have?

INT: There are 5 questions; it all depends on how much information you are willing to share.

INT: How does marriage work in your community?

Parent: Marriage is a cultural thing and anything cultural will have beliefs and processes guiding it, we have our procedure on how we get married and these procedures are followed. The fact that girls are married at puberty in this region does not mean we pick them up from the streets. We follow due traditional processes of consultations and payments before the marriage is consummated. The white people (referring to the British colonial masters) brought the issue of law into marriage when Nigeria was colonised. It does not make sense, for example – if somebody wanted to marry you now, will he ask you of your age? No! Love knows no age. There should be no law relating marriage with age because marriage is love. But if you go the orthodox (referring to the Constitutional law) way, they will ask of your age and you will be told the dos and don'ts of a constitutional marriage. What (referring to the CRA) they are asking of us is not part of our culture” (Mustapha, an Accountant and parent).

INT: How did you meet your wives?

Parent: How does that matter to you?

INT: How old were your wives when you married her?

Parent: They were all between ages 9-15.

INT: How old were you at the time?

Parent: (refused to answer)

INT: What are the implications of girl marriage?

Parent: Nigeria, as a country has several traditional marriage practises and they are all accepted in the customary law. We definitely would have stopped our own (refers to girl marriage) if there was a problem with it; marriage after a girl starts to be matured (referring to menstrual cycle) has a reward.

INT: What are the laws on marriage in this community?

Parent: There are no laws. “If the marriage is not consummated after the first menses (refers to first menstrual cycle), the girl is likely to become wayward and you cannot control her.

INT: Can you please explain what you mean by ‘you cannot control her’

Parent: No, you see I am a very busy person!

INT: Okay, I have one more question for you. Can you please explain what you mean by marriage after a girl starts to be matured has a reward?

Parent: Okay, that is it now. I need to attend to some other issues.

INT: Thank you for your time. Bye.