

Man and land: The marriage between a man, a woman and land among the Beti of Cameroon

Abstract

Marriage is a sacred union between two families brought together by a man and a woman. All societies have a way of regulating marriage and when a man gets married in a family he is referred to as an in-law. Therefore in-law is a relationship which is established through marriage. To the Beti of Cameroon in particular to be considered as an in-law, a man has certain responsibilities to fulfil among which are the provision of an envelope and food to the family of the woman he wants to marry. Once these are done, he becomes an in-law. The purchase of land among most in not all cultures is very important but the peculiarity among the Beti is that when a man buys land in a Beti locality, he is regarded and treated as an in-law. This article seeks to answer one major question: what is the relationship between a woman and land among the Beti of Cameroon? To establish a relationship between these two (a woman and land), the objectives of this article are to; understand how the Beti people perceive a woman and land; the importance they attach to them and their symbolism. Data for this paper was collected using the qualitative method and the analysis and interpretations are based on the theories of symbolic anthropology of Geertz and functionalism of Malinowski and Brown. Major findings reveal that a woman like land serve as riches, means of production, an element which unites families and many more.

Keywords: Beti of Cameroon, in-law, land, man, marriage and woman

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Introduction

This article titled *'man and land: the marriage between a man, a woman and land among the Betis of Cameroon'*, explores the perceptions and importance that the Beti attach to marriage, a man, a woman and land. It also examines the relationship between a woman and land. Marriage is a universal phenomenon but different cultures conduct it differently. Among the Beti like in most parts of Africa, when a man marries a woman, he has to pay bride price and provide food to the family of the woman for the woman to be officially transferred from her own family to that of the man. Henceforth the man is considered and treated as an in-law by the woman's or wife's family. When a man purchases a piece of land in the Beti locality, he has to provide the fee charged for the land including food to the family that is selling the land. These items provided permits the official transfer of the land to the buyer. Henceforth, the buyer of the land is considered and treated as an in-law by the family that sold the land.

The Beti people are a Central African ethnic group primarily found in central Cameroon, in the cultural zone of Cameroon called Fang-Beti. They are also found in Equatorial Guinea and northern Gabon. They are closely related to the Bulu, the Fang and the Ewondo (Yaounde) people, who are all sometimes grouped as Ekang. That is, the Beti consists of the Ewondo (more precisely Kolo), Bane, Fang (more precisely M'fang), and Eton or Iton.

The Beti people migrated south and west from the Sanaga River basin into equatorial forests regions. They are Bantu people who once lived in northern parts of Central Africa, with a complex, undocumented and debated prehistory. They likely moved into equatorial Africa in the 7th or 8th century, then further southwest in central Cameroon between the 17th and 19th centuries, likely after waves of wars and slave raids from the Fulani people. They were also a targeted source for slaves and ivory by the Hausa people.

Their initial migration in the 17th century was from highlands and forested regions east of the Sanaga River towards south and west. They

continued to face jihads and violence from the north by the Fulani people (also called Fulbe or Fula people), abandoned their settlements and migrated further into southern parts of central Cameroon till the 19th century when European traders and colonial forces intervened as they sought trade and markets (en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beti_people).

One of the economic activities of the Beti people is farming. These people especially those living in the country site are actively engaged in farming growing crops (like cassava, maize, yams, cocoa, plantain, banana and many more) and also keeping animals such as pigs and chickens. These crops cultivated are used for both commercial as well as domestic purposes. Every Beti man is expected to own a farm. For this reason, a Beti man is rated on the size of his farm. A man who does not have a farm let alone owning a piece of land is not respected among his peers and the society.

Methods and materials

The methods that the researchers used in the research study was done under the following aspects: study design, selection of research participants, data collection, data collection tools and procedure and data analysis.

Study design

The researchers used the narrative study design. Like Bowling¹ notes narrative design allows the participants of the study to share their knowledge on a particular topic. The study design guides the collection of rich data and the use of methods of analysis that will achieve the research objectives.²

Selection of research participants

We used the snowball sampling method to select participants for the study. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method where new participants are recruited by other participants to take part in a research study. It begins with one or more study participants and then continues on the basis of references from these participants. The

process continues until the researcher reaches the desired sample of a saturation point. The snowball sampling technique was used to ensure that a wide range of the study topic was covered.

Data collection

Data for the study was collected using participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The researchers participated in the buying of land and in a few traditional marriages. As concerns the purchase of land, emphasis was laid on the different rites conducted after a piece of land was bought particularly that performed by the chief or *Nkunkuma* of the locality. During traditional marriages, the researchers observed the varied items brought for the marriage, the rites conducted and how food for the marriage was shared among the family members. In-depth interviews were conducted with married people both male and female and those who have sold and bought land. These were face to face interviews with the use of open-ended unstructured questions. 12 married people were interviewed meanwhile 11 interviews were conducted with 6 sellers and 5 buyers of land in the Beti communities. This technique was employed to understand how the Beti people perceive marriage, a man, woman and land. It was equally used to comprehend the relationship between a woman and land. 7 FGDs were conducted, 4 with married people and 3 with individuals who have sold and bought land. Each FGD was made up of between 7 and 10 participants. The FGDs were meant to examine the perceptions of a woman and land to the Beti. This was in an attempt to establish a relationship between a woman and land.

Data collection tools and procedure

The researchers used the interview guides and focus group discussion guides respectively to collect data for the study. Among the questions that featured on the guides were the perceptions of marriage, man, woman and land; the role of a woman and land in the Beti communities; rites performed during traditional marriages; rites conducted during and after the buying of land; and the relationship between the woman and land among the Beti.

In the course of the interviews, the researchers took detail notes in their exercise books. Most of these interviews were conducted in the evenings from 5 pm when the participants had returned home from their job sides. Many of the interviews lasted for about an hour meanwhile the focus group discussions went for about an hour and more.

Data analysis

Data was analysed soon after data collection. Data which was audio-taped using a digital voice recorder was replayed many times and then transcribed verbatim into Microsoft word. The data was read, coded, clustered and then sub-themes and themes were developed.

Presentation of findings and discussion

Among the Beti of Cameroon, the word in-law is used to refer to someone who gets married in a family and also to somebody who buys land from a family. Considering the fact that in-law is a relation by marriage, the researchers sought to examine how the woman and land are related. Before that they carried out a finding on how the Beti people perceive marriage, a man, a woman and land.

Perceptions of marriage, man, woman and land

To understand the relationships which exist between a woman and land, we have to first of all understand how the Beti people perceive marriage, man, woman and land. The perceptions here are examined

together with the functions of each. Here, we made use of the theory of functionalism of anthropologists Radcliff-Brown and Malinowski, which represents two strands in the theory: structural functionalism, which stresses the pre-eminence of society and its structure over the individuals, and how the various elements of the social structure function to maintain social order and equilibrium; and psychological functionalism, which stresses individual needs to be met by society. In this respect, the authors made an attempt to demonstrate the functions of marriage, man, woman and land. The paragraphs which follow, handle the perceptions of these four concepts and their functions.

/Aluk/ Marriage and how the Beti perceive it

Aluk or Marriage is defined as basically a sexual union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are considered the legitimate offspring of both parents. The main purpose of marriage is to create new social relationships, rights and obligations between the spouses and their kin, and to establish the rights and status of children when they are born.³ Mbiti⁴ regards marriage as “a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate”. Going by Mbiti’s definition, among the Beti, in marriage, the couple have to contribute for its success. That is, each member has to perform his or her role well, the man, a provider and protector meanwhile the woman, the administrator, teacher and manager of the household. In the Beti societies, marriage is often more of a relationship between groups than one between individuals. An interlocutor, a Beti man said that:

“Most times, people may think that marriage is the union between a man and a woman. This is not the case with the Betis. For two persons, man and a woman to get married, the two families must accept that their children should be brought together by this union. When the two families agree, they will all pour their blessing on the couple” (18/11/2023).

Another Beti man notes that:

“Marriage is a sacred union between two clans, it is something grandiose. It is a union between two clans because the Beti practise exogamous marriage, meaning that a man must marry out of his clan. Marriage shows success in the family of the woman and responsibility in the family of the man. It is success to the woman’s family because it demonstrates that the family is a good one, that has succeeded to train their daughter well and that the family does not have records of evil, murderers, thieves and more. To the man’s family, it is responsibility because the man and his family must do everything to take proper care of the woman and once married, the woman shall be referred to as ‘our wife’ that means the wife of the family. Responsibility also means that the man shall respect his wife and never be violent to her. There are certain men that once married, they turn their wives into punching balls, and this is not a sign of responsibility” (20/09/2023).

In the Beti societies like in all African societies, a man can only marry when he has fulfilled all the payments and proper rites conducted. For a man to get married therefore, his family has to visit that of the woman he wishes to marry and collect a list of items which are needed for the ceremony. A list here, refers to all the goods which the man and his family has to provide to the family of the woman. As they pay this visit, they carry along some symbolic items like 10 litres of red wine, a goat, and some beer. It is important to mention that the length of the list differs according to families. No matter the family some of the items on the list are, palm wine, red wine, goats, pigs, colanut, fish and much more. When a man collects the list and comes back, it shows that he is actually serious in marrying the woman. If he goes and does not return, it shows that he is irresponsible and does not love the woman. An elderly Beti man said:

“Many people may think that the list that our people (Beti people) give is long. The list which is given is negotiable. When I wanted to marry my wife, I was given a long list of items to provide. I went and came back and told the parents of my, to be wife, that the list was long, I begged them and the list was reduced. Because I came back, they saw that I was serious, I love their daughter and this was a sign that I could take care of her” (15/11/2023).

When a man wants to get married, he has to show prove to the family of the woman that he can take care of their daughter. Bride price is therefore a test which is given to a man to find out whether or not he can take proper care of a woman, that their daughter will be in good hands. Bride price is also a symbolic offering of a gift in order to obtain a woman. Accepting to pay the bride price of a woman is a demonstration of the love that a boy has for a girl (20/09/2023).

Apart from the list, an envelope which represents bride price is given to the family of the woman. Bride price is a sum of money or other valuables paid by the bridegroom or on his behalf to the family of the bride. Bride price is marriage payment made to the bride and/or her group, in terms of money and material gifts by the bride groom. Concerning bride price, an interlocutor said:

“Bride price is a symbolic gift to thank the parents of a woman. The family of the man will ask that of the woman what they want in exchange of their daughter. This exchange is not an exchange in the commercial sense where a man may give an amount of money and collect a good. In this case, the exchange is one of friendship and love. Bride price therefore is a gift which honours the future wife of a man” (19/09/2023).

According to en.wikibooks.org., Cultural Anthropology (2013) bride wealth is the transfer of symbolic goods from the husband's family to the bride's family. This form of economic exchange is most often found in agricultural and pastoral patrilineal societies, though it is not limited to those lifestyles. Usually, bride wealth represents some form of compensation to the bride's family from the husband's family, for their loss of her labour and ability to bear them children. This is because when a woman marries, she goes to live, produce children, and work with her husband's family, leaving her own. In many cases, bride wealth also serves to create a positive relationship between the families of the husband and wife. When the wife's family receives the bride wealth, they use the goods they receive for their daughter to find her brother a wife. Some examples of the goods which are exchanged in regards to bride wealth are: animals, such as cattle or goats, in east and South Africa and a bride wealth of cash in the Democratic Republic of Congo. (Page 404).

/Pam/ Man and the perceptions of the Beti people about man

The Britannica Dictionary defines man as an adult male human being; a man or boy shows the qualities (such as strength and courage) that men are traditionally supposed to have. To the Betis, a man is the head or chief of his family. And as head, he has to ensure the protection of his wife and child or children from danger. An interlocutor, a Beti woman said in an interview that:

“One of the main responsibilities of a man is that he is as head of the family unit. The man is expected to serve as the spokesperson for his family and make some of the major decisions on behalf of the family. He decides on the residence of the family, the children bear his name and when a man marries a wife, the latter adopts the husband's family name” (18/11/2013).

A man to the Beti is someone who has a wife and a child or children. Commenting on this, an informant said:

“When a man is not married and does not have children no matter his age, he is not regarded as a ‘real’ man, he is a member of his father's family and cannot take any decision in this family. A man has to be physically strong and hard working as opposed to weak and emotional. A real man is one who protects and defends the integrity of his family. He should be known for defending them strongly and sticking to his opinions no matter what” (15/11/2023).

Among the Beti, the strength of a man is rated from the size of his farmland. It could be a plantain, banana, cassava, maize, yam or even cocoa farm. Most men prefer the cultivation of cocoa because it is a cash crop which produces income for many year since it is a perennial crop. A man does this because he wants to be self-reliant, stand on his own and not need to depend on others for his wellbeing. A man who does not own such a farm is not respected in the society and he is regarded like someone who is not married. An elderly Beti man said:

“A man must be someone who is very strong to fend for as well as protect his family and this can be seen in the type of farm which he owns. If he owns a large farm, it is an indication that he will work hard to maintain the farm, the food from the farm will sustain the family and the money which he will make from the sales of crops will help in the up keep of the family” (17/11/2023).

Having the title of “man” comes with particular responsibilities, and how a man fulfils those responsibilities defines his identity. As a man, he has the duties to protect, guide, treat, educate, provide, as well as procreate. A man's development through the stages of manhood is unquestionably marked by the need to protect himself and those around him. When it comes to protecting something, a man must be both physically and mentally strong. That is, a man has to protect his family from harm. He is the one who stands up and fights for his family if necessary. There will be times when he has to put his family first. As the defender of his family, he has to be courageous, capable of demonstrating fearlessness in the face of danger. It is up to him to ensure that his home is safe from internal and external threats. A man who is fearful stands the chance of exposing his family and such a man is regarded as a woman among the Beti.

The man is always the strong one, who does the heaviest work for his family, he supports the family in financing, building the house or providing settlement. The man provides for the education of his children by sending them to school, paying for their education, buying all their school needs like uniforms, and writing materials. The man buys dresses for the wife as well as the children. He equally has to provide food for the family. He has to work extremely hard to ensure that the wife and children do not go hungry. A man therefore is that individual who takes care, ensures food, financial and physical security of his family. An elderly Beti woman said:

“The responsibilities of a man is reflected in his wife and children. If his wife and children are always shabby, or they behave poorly, this will be attributed to the man. On the contrary, if they look good and behave well as well as succeed in school and in life, it will be said that the man has succeeded” (20/09/2023).

According to Steven (<https://Warofmen.Com/Author/Steven/>), the role of a man in life is to be a provider and protector. A man is the head of the household and is responsible for making sure that his family has what they need to live a comfortable life. A husband and father play an essential role in a family. They are responsible for providing for the family financially and emotionally. Those times when he used to date multiple women are now in the past now that he is a one-woman man. His priorities have changed, and he now has a family to think about. His wife is his best friend and confidante. She is the one person who

knows him better than anyone else. So he needs to be there for her when she needs you.

The man teaches the culture of the society to the children. For instance if the man is a farmer, he takes his child or children to the farm frequently so as to participate in crops cultivation. These children will keep such practice as they grows up. They will spread this practice to the next generation, when they start having family of their own. An informant said:

“The man has to educate the children in his culture. When I was growing up, my father usually gathered us in the evenings and told us stories about the history of his people, taught us some folk stories, riddles and jokes and sometimes some folk songs. This was how I like my siblings learned some aspects of our culture” (17/11/2023).

A man should balance between his family and his job. Sometimes, a man can be very busy looking for finances for the family, thus forgetting his duty as a father, neglecting his responsibility of teaching the children. As a father, a man has the responsibility to teach his children the skills needed to become good and successful people in life. His children are his life. They are innocent and need his guidance to grow into responsible adults. He shows them what it means to be a good husband and father. He also elevates his family on all levels by leading by example in all areas of life. He is someone who puts his family first. His number one priority is making sure that his wife and children are happy and safe. He makes time for his wife and kids. This means being involved in their lives and taking an interest in what is going on with them. It also means being there for them when they need him. Being present, listening to them and offering advice when they are going through tough times. Being present physically and emotionally for his family is one of the most important things he can do as a man.

The man is expected to serve as a role model for the younger boys. The advancement of human society is dependent on the passing on of traditions and skills from one generation to the other. Men are expected to teach some of the “manly” things to their sons. This means being someone they can look up to and admire. Young men need guidance and direction in their lives. They need to see that it is possible to be a man and still be a good husband and father. If you want his son to grow up as a man of character, he need to be one himself. For a girl, the father is usually taken as the model for her future life partner.

Women provide that one thing that will make a man fall deeply in love with her and can keep him happy for a lifetime. Good sex is an integral part of a man’s life. It is a way to connect with his partner physically and emotionally. It is also a way to release stress and tension. A good sexual relationship can be the glue that holds a relationship together. Sex in the relationship is equally for procreation. According to the Beti like most African cultures, a man’s value is measured in the number of children he has. If a man does not have a child, if he is not married, he is regarded as an irresponsible man, and a disgrace to his family, a disgrace because the society would say that the family has failed and if the man happens to die, he will neither leave behind someone to remember him nor continue with his name. Because of the importance the Beti people place on procreation, if a family has a brother of about 40 years of age who is not married and does not have a child, an interlocutor said:

“The family of a man could come together and marry a wife for their son because they understand that once a man has a wife and subsequently a child or children, he will be respected, he could be able to speak where others are speaking. He will be considered a successful man. Because of the responsibility he has, he must do

everything to take good care of his family, that is, he has to work very hard to meet their needs” (16/11/2023).

Regarding who a man is, Baloyi⁵ quoting Harrington⁶ notes that in many African societies, boys undergo initiation stages where education about manhood is imparted by elderly men, some of whom are regarded as custodians of culture in society. Both masculinity and manhood are accepted by most African men as part of cultural values which men should have. Therefore, a man who shows his emotions is usually regarded as weak and not part of the larger group of real African men. This adds to the idea that toughness is equated with maleness while emotions and align with femaleness. This becomes a way of seeing aggression in a sense of masculinity traits where other people, particularly women, no longer feel safe.⁶

Barker and Ricardo⁷ give a different angle of what makes an ideal Africa man, apart from the training he receives from the initiation schools, they point out that:

“The chief mandate or social requirement for achieving manhood in Africa – for being a man – is achieving some level of financial independence, employment or income, and subsequently starting a family. In much of Africa – where bride-price is commonplace – marriage and family formation are thus directly tied to having income and/or property.”

Indeed, in a context where a man does not have an income to support his family, his masculinity and manhood are threatened not only in his home but also among his peers in society. Barker and Ricardo⁷ show that masculinity and manhood are injected by many factors that make a man feel strong and in control. In these sociological constructs of masculinity and manhood ideologies, there exists a culture infused into African believers that it is right for men to be aggressive. These are ideologies which have influenced and shaped society for centuries and are still in existence.

/Min’nga/ A woman, how the Beti perceive her

A woman is an adult female human being. A woman is an individual who was assigned female at birth and has maintained that status until today (source). *Min’nga* is the word for a woman. *Min* which means *swallow* and *nga* stands for a *gun*. Therefore *min’nga* literally means that which *swallows* the gun. A woman may be termed that which *swallows* the *gun* because she receives the penis of the man which is regarded as a gun. This gun is symbolic because it is not used to kill but to procreate. The ‘gun’ or penis of a man must be available for a woman to give birth to a child and a woman who is able to procreate is not regarded as a woman and as such will not be respected among her in-laws, peers and society at large.

According to an interlocutor, a woman to the Beti is:

“The companion of a man. A woman accompanies a man to become the head of the family, without a woman and if a woman does give a child or children to a man, that man can never form a family. A woman is also considered to be a female who can already see her menses. When a girl sees her menses, it means that she can bear children, thus she can get married. A girl who sees her menses by the age of 12, is considered early because a girl should see her menses from 15 years. Therefore when a girl can see her menses, she can be prepared by her parents to understand that one day she has to get married and become a woman” (19/11/2023).

Another Beti man said that a woman is:

“Not only our mother, she is a symbol of great riches. The Beti believe that when a man marries a woman, she is expected to give birth

to many children among whom are girl children. These girl children will be given out into marriage and the bride price is a form of riches. The many children also bring fame to the family" (16/11/2023).

An interlocutor noted in a focus group discussion that:

"A woman is that person who is hard working, resistant and caring. The Beti people do not know laziness. A woman works hard especially the rural woman. She accompanies her husband to the farm where most times she works all day long and only returns in the evening. It is very common to find a Beti woman in areas like Nouma, Nkoulnkoumou, Ndzana and many more in the morning carrying a basket containing her machete and hoe on her way to the farm. When she finishes to work on the farm she collects food stuffs such as cassava, yams, cocoyams, or whatever food item available in the farm. When she returns home, she has to ensure that she prepares food for the entire house" (20/09/2023).

Women have diverse roles and (<https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/family/role-of-women-in-the-family-and-society/>) notes that: Women are the pioneers of nation. They are the key to sustainable development and quality of life in the family. The varieties of role the women assume in the family are those of wife, leader, administrator, manager of family income and last but not the least important the mother.

The woman is a wife, that is, a man's partner and comrade. She sacrifices her personal pleasure and ambitions, sets standard of morality, relieves stress and strain, tension of husband, and maintains peace and order in the household. Thereby she creates necessary environment for her male partner to think more about the economic upliftment of family. She is the source of inspiration to the man for high endeavour and worth achievements in life. She stands by him in all the crisis as well as she shares with him all successes and attainments. She is the person to whom he turns for love, sympathy, understanding, comfort and recognition. She is the symbol of purity, faithfulness and submission and devotion to her husband.

The woman is an administrator and leader of the household. A well-ordered disciplined household is essential to normal family life. The woman in the family assumes this function. She is the chief executive of an enterprise. She assigns duties among family members according to their interest and abilities and provides resources in-term of equipment and materials to accomplish the job.

She plays a key role in the preparation and serving of meals, selection and care of clothing, laundering, furnishing and maintenance of the house. As an administrator, she organises various social functions in the family for social development. She also acts as a director of recreation. She plans various recreational activities to meet the needs of young and old members of the family.

The woman acts as the humble manager of the family income. It is her responsibility to secure maximum return from every pye spent. She always prefers to prepare a surplus budget instead of a deficit budget. She is very calculating loss and gain while spending money. She distributes judiciously the income on different heads such as necessities, comforts and luxuries. The woman in the family also contributes to the family income through her own earning within or outside the home. She has positive contribution to the family income by the work. She herself performs in the home and uses waste products for productive purposes.

The woman is a mother. The whole burden of child bearing and greater part of child rearing task are carried out by the woman in the family. She is primarily responsible for the child's habit of self-control,

orderliness, industriousness, theft or honesty. Her contacts with the child during the most formative period of his development sets up his behaviour pattern. She is thus responsible for the maintenance of utmost discipline in the family.

As a mother she is the family health officer. She is very much concerned about the physical wellbeing of every member of the family, the helpless infant, the sickly child, the adolescent youth, and senescent parent. She organizes the home and its activities in such a way so that each member of the family has proper food, adequate sleep and sufficient recreation. She makes the home a place of quite comfortable and appropriate setting for the children through her talent. Besides, she cultivates taste in interior design and arrangement, so that the home becomes an inviting, restful and cheerful place.

The mother is the central personality of the home and the family circle. All the members turn to her for sympathy, understanding and recognition. The woman devotes her time, labour and thought for the welfare of the members of the family. For the unity of interacting personalities, man provides the temple woman provides the ceremonies and the atmosphere.

She is the first teacher of the child. She transmits social heritage to the child. It is from mother that the child learns the laws of the race, the manner of men, moral code and ideals. The mother, because of her intimate and sustained contact with the child, she is able to discover and nurture child's special traits aptitudes and attitudes which subsequently play a key role in the shaping of his or her personality.

The woman performs the role of wife, partner, organiser, administrator, director, re-creator, disburser, economist, mother, disciplinarian, teacher, health officer, artist and queen in the family at the same time. Apart from it, the woman plays a key role in the socio-economic development of the society.

/Si/ Land and its perception by the Betis

According to Cambridge Dictionary,⁸ Land means the surface of the earth that is not covered by water. Land can include anything that's on the ground, which means that buildings, trees, and water that are a part of land are an asset. The term land encompasses all physical elements, bestowed by nature, to a specific area or piece of property - the environment, fields, forests, minerals, climate, animals, and bodies or sources of water. The basic concept of land is that it is a specific piece of earth, a property with clearly delineated boundaries that has an owner. The concept of land can be viewed in different ways, depending on its context, and the circumstances under which it is being analysed.

Saimum,⁹ notes that in a general sense, land means the solid portion of the earth's surface. The word "land" includes not only the soil, but everything attached to it, whether attached by the course of nature, as trees, herbage, and water, or by the hand of man, as buildings and fences. Land is the solid material of the earth, whatever may be the ingredients of which it is composed, whether soil, rock, or other substance.

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, land in economics is the natural resource used in production. In classical economics, the three factors of production are land, labour, and capital. Land was considered to be the "original and inexhaustible gift of nature." In modern economics, it is broadly defined to include all that nature provides, including minerals, forest products, and water and land resources. While many of these are renewable resources, no one considers them "inexhaustible."

Owning land is important because it is a source of wealth. Land can be harvested and the materials grown on it sold for profit. Factories, warehouses, and buildings can be built on land that will facilitate business. Land can be leased in return for income. Land is also a tangible good that does not depreciate. In addition, land cannot easily be tampered with, in that there is nothing to steal from it. It can be polluted, but that can also be prevented to a degree.

Land according to a Beti man is a treasure that nature has given to each community. With such treasure, a Beti man knows that he has to 'dig' or exploit it to have a treasure. Land therefore symbolises riches. A Beti interlocutor notes that:

"Someone who has landed property is a rich man, because he can open a farm (where he will grow crops or keep animals) on it, he can build a house on it, and he can also carry out other businesses on land. A man who does not have land is regarded as a poor man in the society. If a man does not have land where will he construct his home, when he gets married where will he keep his wife? If it happens that a man marries and does not have a home of his, he can live in his father's compound with the intention that the following year he will do everything possible to construct a house. In order to build a house, he must first of all possess a piece of land if the family does not have land for him to build his house on. Some people prefer to build a home first before getting married and then start a family" (19/09/2023).

Another man of the Beti origin said that:

"Land is an asset acquired by a man or woman through the death of a parent, brother, sister, aunt or uncle (who was unable to have children). In this way, the Beti consider their land to be a source of great wealth. Among the Betis, when someone does not own land, he's considered the poorest of his community, because he is perceived as a beggar for plots of land to cultivate. The management of the land is not determined by the bigger but by the owner. That is, the owner of the land will ask the beggar not to plant perennial crops like plantain, banana or cocoa among others, because these perennial crops will make the beggar not to leave due to the nature of his crops. Again, when a member of the community does not own any land, he or she is perceived as a slave because he or she will always walk behind those who have large plots of land (like an errand boy who is told to do this and that) with the hope of getting a few square meters to build a house or start a small farm" (16/11/2023).

Land has varied uses. Different types of land could be used for different purposes. How land is used can change as human habits, population change, and people move. Generally speaking, there are six main types of land use or categories for which humans use land. These include agriculture, residents, commerce, recreation, industry and transportation. Most Beti and non-Beti people in the suburbs and in the villages are engaged in agriculture. They use the land they possess to grow crops and keep animals such as pigs, goats and chickens. As concerns the farming of crops, the most cultivated crops include cassava, yams, maize, plantains, bananas and cocoa. There are people who own hectares upon hectares of cocoa and cassava farms. Other people are specialised in animal husbandry, keeping larger numbers of chickens and pigs. These animals are purposely for commercialisation. The farms be they crops cultivation or animals keeping generate huge income for their owners.

Some of the people use their land to build residents. These residents may compress the house of the land owner. Once he has his residence constructed, he no longer pays rents for a house. An interlocutor in an interview said:

"Ever since I build my house, I do not have anything to worry about especially when I have to pay rents at the end of each month. A

man who lives on rents and cannot afford his rents on time runs the risk of being thrown out of the house at any time. Where I was living before building my residence, I did not have enough space, but I have built my house to my taste and I have enough space for my children to play" (19/11/2023).

Other people choose to construct apartments where they put on rents. These apartments could be rented by people for their offices, as well as for residences. Some of the apartments could be hired by people to start snacks, beer parlours, barbers' salons, restaurants and many other businesses. Therefore such houses or apartments constructed on land generates much money for their owners and will do so for a very long time.

There are yet other people who use their land to build a clinics and hospital, a school, shops and supermarkets. Land used for the construction of a school must be large enough to contain classrooms and play grounds for the learners. Such school may range from day care to high school.

Land could also be rented out to people to open farms and do other businesses. Land is usually rented out to farmers to cultivate seasonal as well as perennial crops. Some people may rent to grow maize, cassava, yams among others. Payment on land for the growing of the above mention crops is done yearly, before the cultivation is done. To start a farm like that of a cocoa plantation, the land owner may come into an agreement with the farmer either to pay the rents in cash of in 'two party'. Two party is a type of arrangement where the farmer divides the proceeds from the cocoa farm between the land owner and himself.

The relationship between a woman and land

This portion of the article is interpreted using Geertz theory of symbolic anthropology. Geertz championed symbolic anthropology in the 1930s and 1940s. This theory focuses on the symbolic rather than material aspect of culture. It is the study of culture through the interpretation of the meaning of symbols, values and beliefs in society. Among the Beti of Cameroon, when a man marries a woman in a family, he is called and treated as an in-law. This is same with someone who buys land in these communities. There is therefore a relationship between a woman and land. Some of them include that fact that; a woman like land serve for production, a man is considered a man when he marries a woman and owns landed property, a man who marries a woman or buys a piece of land must take care of them, a woman like land unit families, they create a new social relationship between families, food is provided after the payment of bride price and money for the land respectively.

A woman as well as land serve for production. One of the most important roles of the woman is procreation. When a Beti man like all other African gets married, him and his family awards the 'cry' or birth of a baby. This shows that a child is very important in African societies in general and among the Betis in particular. The birth is not only a source of joy for the family and society but also an additional member of the family and society. Commenting on child birth in African societies, Mbiti,⁴ notes that:

"Children are the buds of society, and every birth is the arrival of 'spring' when life shoots out and the community thrives. The birth of a child is, therefore, the concern not only of the persons but of many relatives including the living and the departed" (p. 110).

A woman serve for the production or reproduction of new members of the society. According to the Encyclopaedia of Anthropology, human reproduction refers to "the process by which new social

members are produced specifically, the physiological process of conception, pregnancy, birth, and child raising. From a larger prospective, reproduction is what makes a whole society continue to thrive without becoming extinct (http://de.wikibooks.org/wiki/Benutzer:Dirk_Huenniger/wb2pdf). (p. 376)

Due to the importance of a child, among the Beti, everyone is expected to get married and have a child or children. A woman who gets married and does not have a child will not find favour from her in-laws in the marriage. She will sometime be treated as an object which does not have any 'use' because she is unable to fulfil her fundamental role of production. Because of her failure to produce, the mother of the man may force him to get married to another woman. Because she like the other members of the family fear that their brother and son should not die without having someone to remember him as Mbiti (1969) notes:

"If you do not get married and have children, who will pour out libation to you when you die? This is a serious philosophical concern among traditional African people. Unfortunate, therefore, is the man or woman who has nobody to 'remember' him (her), after physical death. To lack someone close who keeps the departed in their personal immortality is the worse misfortune and punishment that any person could suffer. To die without getting married and without children is to be completely cut off from the human society, to become disconnected, to become an outcast and so lose all links with mankind. Everybody, therefore, must get married and bear children that is the greatest hope and expectation of the individual for himself and of the community for the individual" (p. 134).

Land also serve for production but not like the woman. When a man buys a piece of land and build his house on it, this house generates income for him because the amount of money which he or she would have been spending on rents could be saved. Some people buy land to build houses for different businesses. Some may choose to build a schools, others hospitals, and yet others supermarkets. These are all businesses which do not only serve to generate much money for their owners but provide social services to the society.

Land is very important to the people because it serves as a means of livelihood. A lot of people civil servants and non-civil servants alike own large farms on which the cultivate crops. These crops especially maize is sold to companies which produce breweries, cassava sold to producers of garri and cocoa sold in kilograms to cocoa cooperatives. Cocoa cooperatives are associations which collect cocoa beans from the farmers. The crops cultivated bring in a lot of income to the owners.

A man is considered a man among the Beti when he is married and when he owns landed property. Marrying a woman means that a young man has grown enough and is ready to start his own family. The people think that responsibility begins when a man is married. And when a man is married, he has the duty to take care of his wife by making her comfortable; providing her with her basic necessities, providing money for the up keep of the house and more. As he takes care of his wife, he also comes to the aid of some of the relatives of his wife. His doors have to be open to the brothers, sisters, uncles and the aunts of his wife as well. Failure to respect his in-laws, he will be regarded as a bad son in-law. An elderly Beti man said:

"A man according to the Betis is someone who is married and has children. A man no mater his age, if he does not have a wife and not married, he can never earn any respect in his family and society. If a man is not married, he is considered as a member of his father's family since he does not yet have his own family. On the contrary,

if someone is married and has children, he becomes the head of his family" (10/11/2023).

Marriage is very important because it demonstrates the capacity of a man to raise money (bride price) and food required to married a wife. Someone who is able to provide the bride price and food to marry a woman is prove of love and that he could take good care of the wife and children. Marriage is the beginning of the family because when a child is born in the family, it is one of the greatest blessings. This explains why the birth of a child is usually welcome with a lot of merry making.

When the marriage rites are conducted, the father or the head of the woman's family gives palm wine in a cup to 'show' or hand to her would be husband in public. In the Cameroon Grassfields, the cup used in this rite is either the horn of the cow for a simple family head and a sculpted buffalo horn in case where the family head is a notable. when the husband is identified, the head of the family therefore offers some words of blessings and prayers in which he thanks the ancestors and gods for the occasion, ask for prosperity, love among the couple, protection, guidance and above all that the union be blessed with many children. The ancestors are implicated in these rites because the Beti people like most Africans belief that they (ancestors) are always there watching and taking care of the living. They must therefore be informed and called upon to take control of everything.

As concerns land ownership, a true Beti man is one who has a piece of land, a piece of land which will serve to grow crops as well as build the family home. If a man gets married and does not have land to build his house, he will either live in the family home or rents a house. If he is married and continues to live in his father's compound with his wife, he will not have respect especially if the compound is small to accommodate everyone in the family. He or his wife may have problems with his brothers or sisters.

A man who marries a woman or buys a piece of land must take care of them. When a man is married to a woman, he has a responsibility to protect his family. Educate the family, and provide for the needs of the family. The wife on her part is the husband's companion, she has to accompany her husband in all the projects which he has to carry. If the man is engaged in the construction of a house for instance, his wife has to support him in this venture. The wife also has to accompany her husband in educating the children. As she caters for the children, she reports everything that happens to a child or children to her husband. If a child is ill for instance, she tells her husband who will either take the sick child to the hospital or buy medications for him or her. Because the wife is his companion, her husband has the obligation to watch over her. But if her husband fails to watch over her, she may be deceived by someone else who shows concern for her by treating her nicely.

He makes time for his wife and kids as discussed earlier. This means that he has to be involved in their lives and taking an interest in what is going on with them. It also means being there for them when they need him. Being present, listening to them and offering advice when they are going through tough times. Being present physically and emotionally for his family is one of the most important things he can do as a man. When he does all these, he will earn a lot of love and respect from his wife and children and this will make his family stronger. By so doing, no one can come between them (husband and wife).

Just like a women who has to be taken care of in marriage, when a man buys a piece of land, he has the obligation to watch over the land by may be farming it (planting both seasonal and perennial crops) if

he does not have enough financial resources to build a house or carry out some other project on it. Often times, sellers of land will tell their buyers when all payments and rituals have been done on a piece of land that: “from now hence this land is yours, you have to take care of it, protect it. I am no longer there so if something happens to it do not ask me because I am not the one to watch over it” (14/11/2023). This means that if a buys land and does not take of it, another individual may snatch it. The researchers have heard of many cases where the land of some individuals have been snatched by others or the seller of the land on the pretext that there was no one occupying it.

A Woman like Land Units Families. When a man takes as wife or marries a Beti woman, he is called an in-law or more precisely son in-law. An in-law is someone who is a relative because of marriage. When a man marries a Beti woman, he symbolically becomes a part of the woman’s family. This means that any ceremony in his wife’s family be it happy or sad, he has to take active part in it. Among the Grassfields of Cameroon, when the father or mother of an in-law dies, the in-law or in-laws (if there are many men who are married to that family) he or they have the responsibility to provide the coffin in which the corpse has to be put. He or each of the in-laws has to have his own ‘die house’ that is, a house to receive visitors in the ceremony.

Like a woman, when a man be he an indigene or not buys land from a Beti man, the buyer of the land is considered and called an in-law. He or she performs all the different rites like someone who is married in a family. A buyer of a piece of land is regarded and treated as a member of that family. Being a member means that the in-law contributes in all events but he cannot take any major decision so far as the family’s affairs are concerned.

Marriage as well as land purchase create a new social relationship between both families. This means that because of any of the above acts (buying of land or marrying of a woman), the family of the man who buys land and that of the seller, the family of the bride and that of the groom always come to each other’s aid when need arises. An interlocutor, a Beti man said in an interview that:

“I have given out my daughters’ hands in marriage to three men. The families of these men who are married to my daughters are already part of my family, we have become one large family. This is in the sense that when I have any celebration in my compound, I inform each of these families. Each will honour my invitation by giving me gifts. And if any of these families married to my daughters equally have an occasion, I am inform and I in turn offer that family a gift” (20/11/2023).

Another elderly man of the Eton origin said:

“I own a large piece of land which was given to me by my father. I have sold a portion of it. My family and I consider and treat the buyer of the land as an in-law. Whenever I have a ceremony I inform him and whenever he has one, he also informs me. In every occasion, we offer gift either in kind or cash to one another” (10/10/2023).

This gifts exchange mirrors Mauss gift and counter gift. Mauss (1923) comments that because gifts are inalienable they must be returned: the act of giving creates a gift-debt that has to be repaid. He argues that gifts are never “free.” Rather, he noted that human history is full of examples that gifts give rise to reciprocal exchange. To him, gift entails three obligations: to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. Each gift is “part of a system of reciprocity in which the honour of giver and recipient are engaged and failing to return means losing the competition for honour.”

Food is provided after the payment of bride price and money for the land respectively. When a man gets married in a family, he is given

a list of items which he and his kins have to provide to the family of ‘their’ wife to be. Their is used here to make allusion to the woman. Once married, she becomes the wife of the entire family. The list varies from one family to another, some families are less expensive meanwhile others are really expensive and others are moderate. According to an informant:

“The food is divided into two food for the men and that for the women. Generally, the men may ask for the goat and women the pig. In some families, the men may ask for two goats and the women also ask for two pigs. It equally depends on the amount you can raise. Six cartons of red wine; three for the women and three for the men, a bottle of whisky, crates of beer and palm wine (in good quantity). Two cartons of fish, some bags of rice and a bag of salt” (15/11/2023).

Food is provided by the buyer of a piece of land to the seller as mentioned above. In the days of old, food given after the buying of land was much but not as much as that offered during traditional marriage. Today many people and families that sell land prefer the buyer gives food in cash. This money which is usually in an envelope is shared to all the members of the seller family if the land sold belonged to the entire family. But if the land is individual land, the seller receives his money. An interlocutor said:

“When a piece of land has already been purchased, the buyer must make provisions to give the seller of the land something to eat and drink. The seller establishes a list of the items that the buyer of the land has to provide. These items may include a pig, twenty liters of palm wine, a carton of fish and many more depending on the seller of the land. The seller on his part informs the head of the family as well as invites the whole community, that is, his ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ from the village, to share the food. He calls the people of his village (brothers and sisters) because they live in the same community and their communal live warrants them to be one another’s keeper. What concerns one family is the concern the entire community. Their invitation is a prove of love and the peaceful coexistence which occurs among them. This food offered after a piece of land has been bought is regarded as a bride price because the Beti people consider land as a woman for many reasons. Upon completion of the food rite, the family of the buyer becomes a part of the family of the land seller” (17/11/2023).

Another informant said that:

“Buying of land is like bride price. When a man buys land from someone else, he gives the seller food. These gifts offered represent love, when someone buys land and still provides food to the seller’s family (which is like what obtains in marriage) is not wastage. It is a symbol of love. Even if the family of the seller or the seller asks for food, it is a demonstration of love, if he does not love the buyer, he will not ask for food from him or her” (19/09/2023).

In the case of land, when someone buys land, the chief known in Beti as *Nkunkuma* of the locality is informed from him to know that, that specific portion of land in his chiefdom has been sold to someone who will from thence be a member of his chiefdom. This said *Nkunkuma* in the presence of his notables signs a document (known as abandon of customary rites) to symbolise transfer of the land from the seller to the buyer. These traditional dignitaries act as witnesses to the act, and that everything is conducted as tradition demands. As he signs the document, the buyer of the land provides some drinks usually red wine which is shared to all present at the scene. As the wine is drunk, the *Nkunkuma* offers prayers in which he invites the gods and calls on them to recognise the buyer of the land as a new member of the chiefdom, he equally prays and blesses the land, that whatever project

which has to be carried out on the land, should be productive. If the buyer of the land has to open a farm, may the farm give high yields? In the case where a man buys land and this ritual is not performed, he is not covered by the *Nkunkuma* nor the ancestors and gods.^{10–13}

Conclusion

Marriage in most if not all African societies is a union between two families, made possible by a man and a woman. When a man marries a woman he is regarded and treated as an in-law by the wife's family. When a man equally buys land in the Beti locality, he is considered and treated as an in-law. The woman as well as land are very important not only to the Betis but to all Africans. The two serve as a symbol of unity. Once a man marries a woman, the family of the man and that of the woman become united and any event be it happy or sad which concerns one concerns the other. This is the same when a man buys land. When a man purchases land from a family, him or his family unites with that of the seller such that they always commune with each other every time any of the two families have a ceremony. The woman as well as land serve as great riches to the Beti people. When a woman gets married she is expected to give birth to children among which would be girls. Such girl children would be given out to marriage and this (bride price) will bring in so much riches to the family. The children themselves are riches because a true Beti is respected and rated according to the number of children he has. Land on its part will generate a lot of income to its owner if well exploited. The woman and land serve for production. A woman once married has to procreate, bring forth offsprings who will give the family honour as well as continue with the family name. Land is a factor of production, the materials grown on it sold for profit or the businesses invested on, will bring in income to its owner.

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