



Research Article

Ìyàwó Sàráà and Gbà mí o ràmí: Exhuming the History of Gifted Wife in Marriage and Its Implications in Contemporary Yoruba Society, Nigeria

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Abstract

Marriage is a sacred institution ordained by Olódùmarè, God in Yorùbá belief. In Africa, particularly among the Yorùbá, the circle of life is not complete without marriage. Marriage in Yorùbáland entails some processes and rites among which are Ìfójúsóde - looking out for a suitor, Alárenà - suitor's intermediary, owo idègiri and ijòhìn - money for accepting proposal, owó orí - bride price and so on. However, it is not all forms of marriage in Yorùbá society that are accorded these processes and rites. Among such is Ìyàwó Sàráà (Sadaqh Wife) and Gbà mí o ràmí (Rescued from Shame). Ìyàwó Sàráà is a wife given out in alms (in marriage) among Muslim Yorùbá in western part of Nigeria. While Gbà mí o ràmí is rescued from shame wife given (in marriage) to a traditional healer who is familiar with the history of ailment afflicting such a woman. Previous studies have examined marriage in Yorùbá society from socio-cultural and economic dimensions. However, historical and anthropological approaches to marriage have not enjoyed sufficient historical engagement. To address this gap in historical scholarship therefore, this study investigates the motive, context, and implications of such marriages on the people involved and the general Yorùbá society. Primary data is gathered through oral interviews and telephone calls that was conducted with five Babaláwo - Ifa Priests, five traditional healers, five Muslim clerics, five Ìyàwó sàráà and five Gbà mí o ràmí wives. Archival materials and other relevant secondary data were consulted. Information generated was content-analysed. It is hoped that an investigation into these marriages will extend the frontiers of research in marriage in the Yoruba society and Nigeria in general.

Keywords

Ìyàwó Sàráà, Gbà mí o ràmí, Marriage, Yorùbá Society, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The concept of marriage is universal with little variance from one continent, country and ethnic group. The emergence of marriage provides an insight into the encompassing cultural influence it has had through the ages. The actual word 'marriage' first makes an appearance in the period 1250-1300 AC,

[1] while some see marriage as a serious business, others take it with levity without attaching any importance to it. In Africa, particularly among the Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria, marriage is believed to be a sacred union. It is a thing of joy that every adult looks forward to and it is mandatory. Therefore,

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when a Yorùbá man is prayed for that he shall prosper and be fruitful in life, that prosperity and fruitfulness begins with marriage. [2] Unmarried adult in Yorùbá society therefore is considered or suspected to be impotent or *lákíriboto* - a woman without cervical opening, a woman that cannot be penetrated through sex. Such persons run away from his/her town or village because all eyes shall be on him or her. However, things are changing in the contemporary world. Today, one may decide not to marry, or make a marriage of convenience. This is a marriage without children or with certain number of children. To the Yorùbá, the gain/blessing of marriage which is child bearing is quietly been faced out with foreign cultures that is fast eroding many of Yorùbá rich cultures and traditions.

The cultural practice of the gifted wife - *Ìyàwó Sàráà* (Sadaqh Wife) and *Gbàmi o ràmi* (Rescued from Shame) in Yorùbáland is complex and influenced by various factors. The practice sits at the intersection of kinship, marriage, morality, religion, and gendered power relations. [3] In traditional Yoruba society, *Ìyàwó Sàráà* refers to a woman given out in marriage without the payment of bride price (*owó ori*), often as an act of charity, religious devotion, or social obligation. [4] Such marriages could arise from vows (*Sàráà*), poverty, crisis, infertility in a lineage, or to cement alliances. While outwardly framed as benevolent or spiritually meritorious, the practice carried layered social meanings and consequences. First, the woman's social status was ambiguous. Bride price in Yoruba culture legitimizes marriage, affirms a woman's value, and establishes reciprocal obligations between families. An *Ìyàwó Sàráà* or *Gbàmi o ràmi* lacks this ritual transaction, often occupied a marginal position which is legally married but socially insecure. Her marriage could be perceived as incomplete, making her vulnerable to disrespect, neglect or easy dismissal [5].

Second, power relations within the marital household are usually uneven. This is because, no bride price was paid on *Ìyàwó Sàráà* or *Gbàmi o ràmi*, and as such the husband and his kin might feel less bound by moral and customary obligations. The woman could be overworked in some cases, denied inheritance rights, or treated as inferior to wives whose marriages are fully contracted. In polygynous households, *Ìyàwó Sàráà* or *Gbàmi o ràmi* often ranked lowest, reinforcing hierarchies among wives. [6] Also, kinship ties and lineage claims are always contested. The absence of bride price complicated questions of children's legitimacy, custody, and inheritance. In cases of marital conflict or death, the woman's natal family might have limited leverage to intervene, since the usual ritual and economic ties binding families are weak or absent. Furthermore, the religious and moral interpretations added another layer of complexity. This is because *Ìyàwó Sàráà* or *Gbàmi o ràmi* is associated with sacrifice, piety, and charity especially in Islamic-influenced communities, the woman's suffering could be normalized as virtuous endurance. [7] This framing often silenced her grievances and discouraged resistance. Finally, the practice exposes gendered vulnerability.

While *Ìyàwó Sàráà* marriage was presented as a noble act, the costs are disproportionately borne by women. This reveals how cultural practices that appear altruistic can reproduce inequality, control female sexuality and labour, and limit women's autonomy. In sum, the complexity of *Ìyàwó Sàráà* and *Gbàmi o ràmi* lies in its dual character: a practice rooted in generosity and spirituality, yet one that frequently produced social marginalisation, legal insecurity, and gendered exploitation within Yoruba marriage systems.

Scholarly works on marriage in Yorùbáland reveal complex challenges in Yoruba marriage, highlighting significant social transformations and persistent cultural tensions. Lloyd et al., [8] provides historical context, showing that while Yoruba women have traditionally been economically active and relatively independent, ultimate family decision-making authority typically remained with male figures. Falola, et al., [9] further suggests that colonial influences have dramatically reshaped gender dynamics and religious interpretations of marriage, complicating traditional marital structures. Mann [10] highlights the economic dependence of elite Yoruba women in Christian marriages, while Hussain-Abubakar [11] discusses the challenges in Muslim marriages, including economic predicaments. Lawore [12] explores the transfer of marital rites from the Yoruba homeland to the diaspora, and Alalamu [13] delves into the significance of bride wealth and marital consent in pre-colonial Yorùbáland. Ismail, et al., [14] highlights that Islamic marriage practices are often influenced by local cultural norms, suggesting potential variations in marriage traditions. These studies collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of the gifted wife's role, shaped by economic, religious, and cultural factors. This study therefore examines two types of gifted wives marriage, *Ìyàwó Sàráà* and *Gbàmi o ràmi* marriages and its implications among the Yoruba peoples of Southwestern Nigeria. These types of marriages are underreported in the literature on marriage in Yorùbáland of Southwestern Nigeria.

2. Marriage in the Yorùbá Society

The institution of marriage during the time of the 'gods' in Yorùbáland have no special ways to get married. During this period, the 'gods' usually bring their wives from *Ìkòlè Òrun*-heaven to *Ìkòlè Ayé*-earth, or they saw a goddess or a woman they are attracted to and woo her or possibly they heard about a particular goddess or woman and decided to go and marry her. Such was the case of *Sango* and *Qya* [15]. When all the four hundred and one (401) gods heard about *Iwa* (character), the daughter of *Olúwó* (Oluwo is one of the prominent kings in Yoruba society today in the present Osun State, Nigeria), they all made attempt to marry her because of her beauty but it was only *Òrúnmìlà* that passed the test set out for the gods and *Ìwà* eventually became the wife of *Òrúnmìlà*. The above claim is strengthened by *Òbàrà Mèji* [16] where *Ifá* says;

Èébú ilé àna kò dùn ni
 Òrò ò dùn 'wòfà
 B'órò bá dùn 'wòfà
 Kó lẹ rẹ m'ówó wá.
 Ojú a pón koko bí ojú odíderẹ
 Ló difá f'Ọrunmilá
 Tó ní òun o ó fẹ ọmọ Olúwó Ìṣaájú;
 Gbogbo àwọn ọkànlénirínwó irúnmọlẹ
 Wọn láláwọn yíó fẹ Ìwà
 Tíi ẹ ọmọ Olúwó Ìṣaájú....

When human beings were finally created the tradition continues and later with some modifications in marriage customs.

In pre-colonial Nigeria, there were many types of marriage system in Yorùbá society and there were many stages the couple will pass through before they can finally be proclaim husband and wife. The saying of the Yorùbá that “*Ilé là nwò, ká tó s'ọmọ lórúkọ*” family antecedents influence what names are given to babies” [17] determines a lot of things in Yorùbá marriage in those days. Marriage in Yorùbá society is not an affair between the husband and wife as we have it today. Rather, it is a family business [18]. The first step is to look at the family that a man will marry from. If it is a ‘good’ family, then the stage is set. Marriage could sometimes begin before conception. If a family is good and a man wants to identify with the family, the best thing is for such a man to marry from such a family. Such a man will approach the husband to tell him his intention that if his wife is pregnant and gives birth to a female child, he would like to marry such a girl. It could be an old man that made the approach on behalf of his son. If the husband agrees, then the relationship has started. If the person in question is ‘lucky’, and the woman gives birth to a female child, that child will be betrothed to the man. When the child grows up to marriageable age, every other rite expected of the

Abuse of in-law's house is not painful enough
 Words does not pain a pawn
 If it pains the pawn,
 Let him/her go and bring money
 The eyes is as red as parrot's eyes
 Cast divination for Ọrúnmílá
 That says he wants to marry the daughter of the first Oluwo
 All the 401 divinities
 Said they wanted to marry Iwa
 The daughter of the first Oluwo...

man on the woman will be performed and the woman will become his fully. Another form of marriage is the one betrothed while the child is yet to be born but the pregnancy is already there. It takes the same procedure with the first one discussed above [19].

Yet another type is that a man sees a lady he likes, he would then inform his parents who will investigate into the family of the lady to know the parents, their family lineage, their sickness and the character of the lady. Once the answer to their investigation is positive, the next is to make spiritual enquiry to know whether the two would be compatible and whether the union will be fruitful in all ramifications. If the answer is positive, the next stage is to look for *Alárinà*-intermediary to present the interest of the man to the lady. If the answer is yes, the necessary rite is performed to bring home the lady as full wife. Another type of marriage is the one betrothed by *Ifá* divination. In this kind of marriage, it is *Ifá* that will dictate the choice of a man the lady will marry. This usually comes up when enquiry is made from *Ifá* by the parents of the child; it could be a man or a woman. What is important is for them to harken to the voice of *Ifá* for a peaceful and successful life of the party involved. A good example of this is found in *Ogbe-Di* [20] where *Ifá* says;

Ìrọfá abẹnu gínínní
 Ló difá fún àgàn àìbì
 Èyí tó torí ọmọ difá
 Wọn ní yíó bí ọmọ,
 Eku méjì, ẹja méjì,
 Àgbébọ̀ adìẹ méjì,
 Àtí ẹgbàájì ó lé okòò
 Ifá ní obínrin kan nwá ọmọ
 Yíó sì bí ọmọbínrin kan,
 Dàdà ní ọmọ nàa yíó mǎá jẹ
 A kò sì gbọdọ pa orúkọ rẹ dà
 Babaláwo ní yíó sì ẹ ọkọ rẹ.

Ifa's bell has a pointed mouth
 Was the one who cast divination for a barren woman
 Who divined because she had no children
 They said she would give birth to a child
 Two rats, two fish
 Two hens
 And one shilling, plus twenty cowries was the sacrifice
 Ifa says a woman is searching for a child
 She will give birth to a baby girl
 Her name is going to be Dada
 She must not change her name
 She must marry an Ifa priest.

In *Ìrètẹ̀ Méjì*, [21] *Ifá* also has this to say on the issue;

Aláásàrèé Aláásàrèé

(name of an Ifa priest)

Alààsàrèé Alààsàrèé
 Alààsàrèé Alààsàrèé
 Àwọn ni wọn sawo títi
 Wọn gb'apá erinlá
 Wọn dèyìnkùlé àpón
 Wọn pòyì bírì bírì bírì
 A dífà f'Ólókun...
 Alààsàrèé
 Alààsàrèé Alààsàrèé
 Alààsàrèé Alààsàrèé
 Àwọn ni wọn sawo títi
 Wọn gb'apá erinlá
 Wọn dèyìnkùlé àpón
 Wọn pòyì bírì bírì bírì
 A dífà fún Iyewájóbi

(name of an Ifa priest)
 (name of an Ifa priest)
 They were the ones that embark on Ifa expedition for so long
 They received the hand of a bull
 They got to the backyard of a bachelor
 They made a cylindrical turn round
 Cast divination for Olokun...
 Alààsàrèé (name of an Ifa priest)
 (name of an Ifa priest)
 (name of an Ifa priest)
 They were the ones that divined for so long
 They collected the hand of a bull
 They got to the backyard of a bachelor
 They made a cylindrical turn round
 Cast divination for Iyewájóbi...

Níjọ tí nsunkún póun ò níbùdó... On the day she was crying for lack of settlement.

A lady was told to offer two sheep as sacrifice. One of the

sheep was given to her to be taking around and was instructed that wherever a ram copulates with the sheep that is where she is going to marry.

Àdà ẹni sóko Ada eni soko
 A dífà fún Ọgò
 Èyí tí ẹ'pmọ Ọba l'Ọyọ ajòrí

Name of a priest
 Cast divination for Ogo
 Who is the child of a king in Oyo Ajori

Níjọ tí nsunkún póun ò lóbinrin... On the day he was crying for a wife...

A male was asked to buy a ram and be taking it to everywhere he goes. Any town the ram copulates with a sheep that is where he would get a wife. Eventually, the two met in a town and they became husband and wife, Mating.

Another form of marriage in Yorùbá society is *Ìfọmọ dórẹ*—giving out a child as a result of friendship. A man can give out his daughter to a friend as wife or to the son of a friend to solidify their friendship. Such was the case of *Onibadan* and *Ọpó* as explained by *Ifa* in *Ọsẹ Méjì* [22]. There *Ifa* says;

Ọnà dá, Obìnrin hòdì kúé kúé
 A dífà fun Inaki
 N'ijo ti nsawo re'le Elédùmarè...
 ...Ike n'ikee sóko. Ike n'ike soko
 Moba ni moba toro Moba ni moba toro
 Lánùújù ni baba eku
 Lánùúkù ni baba ẹja
 Lánùújù ni baba eye
 Lánùúkù ni baba ẹran
 Lánùújù ni baba eniyan
 Ta a ba wolu
 Ile Oluwo eni la a lo
 Odo Ojugbona la a re
 Ai-d'odo-Ojugbona
 Ko je ki nraye d'odo Oluwo
 A dífà f'Ópòó

The road is deserted woman scratch her buttock
 Cast divination for Inaki
 On the day he was going to Eledumare's house
 (Name of a priest)
 (name of a priest)
 Lánùújù is the father of rat
 Lánùúkù is the father of fish
 Lanuaju is the father of bird
 Lánùúkù is the father of goat
 Lanuaju is the father of human being
 If we enter a town
 It is the house of ones Oluwo that we go to
 It is the place of Ojugbona that we go
 Because I did not go to Ojugbona
 Prevented me from Going to Oluwo
 Cast divination for Opo

N'ijo ti nlo la ara Ibadan lagan On the day he was going to liberate Ibadan people from bareness.

When Òpó got to Ibadan, he divined for them and they offered sacrifice. There after they began to have children. The then *Onibadan* was so happy that when his wife delivered, she gave birth to a baby girl and he promised to give the child to Òpó when she grew up, a promise he fulfilled. Therefore, it is not a strange thing to give ones daughter to a friend as wife in those days. During old Oyo Empire, for example, *Alaafin Abiodun*, to have a peaceful reign from the almighty *Basorun Gaa* (the Prime Minister or Head of the Oyo Mesi (the council of seven king makers) in old Oyo Empire who was so powerful then and to resolve a long conflict between the king and *Iba*, he promised to give *Agbonyin*, his only daughter to Basorun Gaa as wife [23]. This is a clear indication that a child can also be given in marriage to settle conflicts. Finally, there is *Iyawo Gbami o rami* that can literarily be called gifted wife. Who is a gifted wife? How does a woman become a gifted wife, what are the circumstances that could lead to such a marriage are what this study try to examine and document?

3. Iyawo Saràa- Gifted Wife Among the Muslim Community in Yorubaland

Iyawo Saràa is an Arabic word coined from Arabic term *Sadaqah* wife – translation: a woman (or as it is in most cases, a young girl) given out in alms in marriage. Usually, the wife to be will not know that she would be given out as a *saraa* (gift) to the husband and the family. Oral interviews confirm that such wife are probably stubborn, sick with an incurable disease that is going back and forth or a *lakiriboto* (a woman without virginal opening). Parents were usually afraid that if they allow the girl to continue that way and to forestall such an 'evil' life befalling their child, they give her to a much older man, who already had several wives or a *Babalawo* who is taking care of her ailment as wife since it is the believe of the Yoruba that *Ológún ló le ṣ'ọkọ àbíkú* (it is only an experienced herbalist that can marry a born to die child).

Among the Muslims, it is believed that the most honourable wedding or marriage is the one with little dowry paid on a woman. The payment of this dowry is demanded by the woman based on the capacity of the man she intends to marry and it depends on what the woman desired [24]. *Iyawo Saràa* - gifted wife among the Yoruba Muslim is a wedding out of wedlock of which little or nothing is paid as dowry. Sometimes it has to do with *Ìfọmọ dọrẹ*- giving out a child as a result of friendship among the Alfas - Muslim clerics. It is not too different from one of the traditional Yoruba system of marriage narrated above. However, we don't know who is copying who between the two traditions. In Akinloye's [25] view on *Iyawo Saràa*, he affirmed that it was Prophet Mohammed that first told one of his followers as cited in hadith narrated by Sahl bin Sad As-Sa'idi that:

A woman came to Allah's Apostle and said, "O Allah's

Apostle! I have come to give you myself in marriage (without Mahr)." Allah's Apostle looked at her. He looked at her carefully and fixed his glance on her and then lowered his head. When the lady saw that he did not say anything, she sat down. A man from his companions got up and said, "O Allah's Apostle! If you are not in need of her, then marry her to me." The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Have you got anything to offer?" The man said, "No, by Allah, O Allah's Apostle!" The Prophet (PBUH) said (to him), "Go to your family and see if you have something." The man went and returned, saying, "No, by Allah, I have not found anything." Allah's Apostle said, "(Go again) and look for something, even if it is an iron ring." He went again and returned, saying, "No, by Allah, O Allah's Apostle! I could not find even an iron ring, but this is my Izar (waist sheet)." He had no rida. He added, "I give half of it to her."

4. Gbami o rami - Rescue Me from Shame Among the Yoruba Society

Iyawo gbami o rami is a kind of marriage that is instituted to save a person or family from shame or disgrace. From time immemorial, the Yorubas have discovered that to be healthy is to live a life without sickness physically, spiritually and psychologically. Without life, there is no man and since illness is an indication that the means of existence is being threatened, man must then find means to take care of it as viewed by Dopamu [26] who explains that the Yorubas look with disdain at anything that threatens their health. As a result, they try to combat it at all levels. In the process of combating it, if it defied orthodox medicines, then they will be advised to make use of alternative ways which is traditional approach. Pain is closely associated with ill-health that one may not be able to bear for a long time that may prompt some people to try suicide rather than continue to bear the pain. Both illness and pain could definitely lead to untimely death of which suicide is one of the untimely death that is very common in this contemporary time. Although it is not sickness alone that lead to suicide, factors like economic hardship, social status, political and many more could be the reason. However, a close look at those aforementioned sicknesses in their own right. Both sickness, pain, untimely death is all source of disgrace to individual, groups, families and sometime to the entire community. Therefore, in a situation that someone is sick and in serious pain, if such a sickness can be managed or cared for by a *Babalawo* or herbalist, rather than allow such a lady to remain in pain, commit suicide or continue to disgrace the family, the family may advise or sometimes beg the *Babalawo* or the *Onisegun*-herbalist to marry her since he knows the history of the sickness and how to care of it when the sickness rears its ugly head again. If he agrees to their term, then he has saved them from shame. Occasionally, the suggestion may come from the *Babalawo* or the *Onisegun*-herbalist and the family will joyfully accept rather than loose her to death untimely without a child or children.

The type of marriage that can be regarded as *Iyawo Saraa* in Yoruba context is related to the hunters who usually encounter strange women (spirits that transformed to human beings) that may eventually become their wives. In a situation like that, there may not be anybody to pay the dowry to, even if the hunter wishes to pay. Although, the saying in Yoruba that *Eni f'ẹmọ n'ijù yíó ẹ̀bọ̀ra* - He who marries in the forest will have spirits as in-law does not indicate that the husband will pay any dowry. Such was the case of *Olowo-aye* and *Ajediran* in Fagunwa's *Igbo Olódumàrè* [27], *Irinkerindo* and *Ifepataki* in *Irinkerindo Ninu Igbo Elegbeje* [28]. My hunter friend once told me that he encountered an incident where a bull transform into a beautiful woman of which he brought home and was his wife for some time before they got separated [29]. *Babaláwo* and herbalists who usually go into the forest to collect herbs on regular basis also do encounter such spirits that usually become their wives.

5. Gifted Wife Dynamics in Marriage in Yoruba Society

Marriage dynamics, according to British literature refers to the intricate social, emotional and behavioural interactions between spouses that shape their relationship [30]. Nothing is made to last forever. Therefore, there is a big shift in the concept of gifted marriage in this contemporary time. Today, there is a paradigm shift from the rigid, duty-based traditional structures to more flexible, egalitarian, and emotionally driven partnerships. Driven by economic shifts, increased individual autonomy, and changing social norms, modern marriage is increasingly seen as a personal choice rather than a necessity. The major factor that determines gifted wife in Yoruba society in the past was hopeless sicknesses. However, with modern hospitals, qualified doctors and nurses, better medical facilities, most hopeless situations that people found themselves in the past are almost forgone issues. Even spiritual matters that could usher in desperate conditions are now been handled by Pentecostal pastors through miracles and deliverance.

Also, a shift in marriage system from parents determining who a girl/child marries has greatly affected gifted wife. Today, with the influence of foreign culture and ways of life, there are a lot of ladies with good health conditions that prefer to remain single for life. While some prefer to have a child or two out of wedlock and without any marriage commitments so that they are independent, without subjecting themselves to any man's authority.

Some career ladies preferred to glue to their jobs pursuing financial freedom that will give them desired comfort in life. Rather than settle for less, they preferred a life of affluence to marriage. Some, it is their social status and beauty that determines issues. Instead of putting themselves under the bondage of marriage that will restrict their movements, they will rather remain single. Even among those who preferred to be married, with the influence of foreign culture, there is a move towards

shared responsibilities in some areas of the marriage. Today, rather than for a man to be the sole bread winner of the family and the woman the homemaker (full house wife) type, they both bring something to the table. Women are now increasingly participating in the workforce that allows for more balance in fulfilling their duties not only as full house wives alone but as partners in progress [31]. Thus, this has eased the burden of men shouldering all the responsibilities in the family alone. Therefore, the decision making on finances, household chores and children training are made together and shared.

Religion also plays a big role in shaping gifted wife in this contemporary time. With the emergence of foreign religions, most especially, Christianity that practice celibacy life, a lot of ladies are nuns today who dedicated their lives to the service of Jesus Christ with no consideration for marriage and raising of children. In traditional religion of the Yoruba, in the past, majority of *Ifá* priests were men. Today, there are *Ìyánifá*-women *Ifá* priestesses who are diviners. It is a job that requires many years of training, devotion and semi-independent life. As *iyánifá*, such a person can no longer be a gifted wife to any man like *Apètèbí* the wife of a *Babaláwo* whose husband *Ifá* is a shield for her because *Ìyánifá*, as a trained *Ifá* priestess is more or less like a man [32]. Culture is dynamic, with the presence of foreign culture with their own forms of civilisations; a lot of cultural influences have taken place to the level of eroding almost all the existing cultures, not only in Yoruba society alone but the whole of Africa with just fragment of existing remaining.

Western education also has its role to play in shaping gifted wife marriage these days. In the past, the training of children began in the womb to when the child is born. After a child is born, the training continues till adulthood. Even at adulthood, a child is not left alone. He/she receives more training from the elders till he/she dies. This is the reason why the Yoruba would say, *Ọmọ kii dàgbà lójú òbí ẹ̀* - a child is never old in the eyes of his/her parents. This form of education was regarded as informal education. (We should note here that *Òbí*-parents include all the elders around in the community and not only the biological parents alone. That was when Africans still value extended family system of living as explained by Olaleye [33]. With the emergence of western education known as formal, it changes a lot of things. It empowered women to be more active in all aspect of human live, not only in the family circle alone but in the entire world. Today, there are women lawyers, engineers, pilots, doctors and so on even in some professions reserved exclusively for men.

6. The Implications of Gifted Wives in Yorùbá Society

From the parent's angle, they are happy for it that at least, the girl is somewhere as a wife thus, removed the shame and stigma from the family. However, the fate of *Iyawo Saraa* is a terrible one. This is due to the fact that she has not been mar-

ried off ‘properly’ in the traditional manner of the Yoruba society. As a result, she had no respect to an extent from her ‘husband’ or the members of his family. Therefore, her position in the household is usually that of a sex slave and a drudge. Examining the situation from this position, *Iyawo Saraa* usually lives her entire life in marriage unhappy as she is not fulfilling whatsoever. The implication is so bad that her children also get stigmatised as a result of the kind of marriage that brought their mother into the family.

In Yoruba society, bride price (*owó orí / iyàwó owó*) is not merely a financial transaction; it is a symbolic and legal instrument that validates marriage, confers legitimacy, and regulates rights and obligations between families. Therefore, a wife gave out in marriage without bride price often experience diverse and layered challenges.

First, such a wife may suffer questioned legitimacy and status. Bride price publicly acknowledges the transfer of marital rights from the woman’s lineage to her husband’s family. Without it, her marriage may be regarded as incomplete or informal, making her position insecure within her husband’s household. She may be addressed with less respect by in-laws or co-wives and excluded from important family decisions.

Second, she faces vulnerability in cases of marital conflict or divorce. In Yoruba customary practice, bride price establishes claims over children. Where it is unpaid, disputes may arise over child custody, and the woman’s children may be labeled as belonging ambiguously to either lineage. This weakens her bargaining power and emotional security.

Third, the wife may experience psychological and social stigma. Community members may interpret the absence of bride price as evidence of desperation, moral failing, or lack of family support. This stigma can affect her self-esteem and her ability to command respect in social spaces such as women’s associations, age grades, or market groups.

Fourth, there are ritual and spiritual implications. Marriage rites in Yoruba society are interconnected; bride price often precedes or accompanies other rituals that secure ancestral approval. Without these rites, the woman may be perceived as lacking full spiritual protection, especially during childbirth or crises, increasing her marginalisation.

Finally, her experience is shaped by gender and power relations. While modern realities—love marriages, economic hardship, or religious influence—may explain the absence of bride price, traditional norms still prioritize male authority and lineage control. The wife must constantly negotiate her identity, loyalty, and security within this framework. In sum, a wife married without bride price in Yoruba society confronts social insecurity, legal ambiguity, and symbolic marginalisation, revealing how deeply marriage practices are tied to gender, lineage, and power.

7. Conclusion

With the influence of modernity, western education, social life, modern hospitals and embracement of foreign culture, a

lot of changes have been recorded in marriage system not only in Africa or Yoruba society alone but the entire globe. Thus, the issue of gifted wife is almost a forgone issue. Most of the youths do not even know anything about the concept of gifted wife in Yoruba society these days. The paper will be credited for bringing past events to the present for the contemporary youths to know about their past so as to appreciate the present, particularly in marriage system with no values and dignity.

Author Contributions

Samuel Kayode Olaleye: Conceptualization, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Project administration, Formal Analysis, Supervision, Writing – original draft

Titilope Olusegun Olalere: Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Project administration, Formal analysis, Validation, Writing – review & editing

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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