



An ethical response to matchmaking and dating in the Yoruba traditional society and the digital world

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is a socially recognized union, sanctioned by legal or religious authorities, with specific rights and responsibilities between spouses. As a universal institution, marriage exists in all cultures with variations that reflect the values, beliefs, and social structures of each society. Marriage fulfills several critical functions: it provides a socially accepted framework for the formation of families, regulates sexual relations, facilitates the upbringing of children and the alliance of families. Consequently, marriage remains central to family formation. Existing scholarship on marriage among the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria has predominantly explored its social, psychological, and legal dimensions with little attention paid to the ethical considerations surrounding matchmaking and courtship practices in both traditional and contemporary societies. The purpose of this paper, therefore, was to explore the ethical issues relating to matchmaking and dating in both the traditional Yoruba society and the contemporary digital world. The research adopted a qualitative method to gather information on practices related to matchmaking, courtship, and marriage among the traditional Yoruba people of the Southwestern part of Nigeria, as well as the transformations these practices have undergone in the contemporary era. Our findings revealed that despite the influx of foreign culture, the Yoruba traditional practices of matchmaking and dating are still relevant, practised, and respected by the people, as it promotes peaceful coexistence and family stability. The paper recommends a reintroduction of the traditional pre-marital practices across cultures to complement the modern system for a stable family structure and for a better society.

Keywords: Ethical response, Matchmaking, Dating, Yoruba traditional Society, Digital World.

INTRODUCTION

Every nation of the world grapples with one societal problem or another.¹ In Africa, particularly in Nigeria, marriage, once a cherished and highly respected institution, has faced significant challenges in modern times, especially with the rise of social media.² The family is widely regarded as the

¹ M.E. Nwokedi and E.C. Ngwu, "The Challenges of Nationhood and State-Building in Nigeria's 'Fourth' Republic," *AfriHeritage Research Working Paper Series*, 2018.

² R.E.E. Nwobodo, "The Role of Marriage and Family in the Contemporary Society," *Aquino Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2022): 167–80.

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fundamental unit of society, typically formed through the union of a man and a woman who have legally or culturally agreed to live together.³

One of the primary reasons traditional marriages endured longer in Yoruba society than they do today is that marriage was not viewed as a union between two individuals alone, but rather as an alliance between two families. Both the bride's and groom's families played active roles, ensuring that all necessary steps, spiritual, cultural, and social, were taken to safeguard the marriage and prevent public disgrace.⁴ Although it would be inaccurate to suggest that marriages in the past were entirely free of challenges, the extended families were deeply invested in preserving the union.⁵ Their commitment was often driven by a desire to protect the integrity and reputation of the family name, which the Yoruba people cherished. As such, every effort was made to sustain the marital bond, not just for the couple's sake, but for the honour of both families involved.⁶

In essence, without the coming together of two individuals as husband and wife, the institution of the family cannot exist.⁷ Consequently, it can be asserted that without marriage, there can be no family, and without families, the very fabric of society would be nonexistent.⁸ Therefore, whatever occurs within the family unit inevitably has either a detrimental or beneficial impact on society at large. This underscores why, in traditional Yoruba society, elders made concerted efforts to preserve the integrity of the family structure, ensuring that familial bonds remained unbroken regardless of the circumstances.

The gap this study aims to address lies in identifying the missing link between the traditional processes and procedures that preceded marriage in the past and the prevailing marital experiences in contemporary society. In traditional Yoruba communities of Southwestern Nigeria, marriage was regarded as a sacred and socially significant institution, sustained by well-defined pre-marital customs, rituals, and values. However, with the advent of modernization, civilization, and increased cultural contact, these traditional systems have undergone considerable transformation.

The main objective of this study, therefore, is to examine how the pre-marital traditional processes and procedures among the Yoruba people can be meaningfully incorporated into the modern marriage system. This integration aims to revitalize and sustain the institution of marriage, which has been adversely affected by the forces of modernization, globalization, and cultural change. There is no doubt that social media, an outgrowth of modernization and technological advancement, has significantly reshaped perceptions and practices surrounding marriage. An institution once held in high esteem within Yoruba society now faces challenges such as declining moral values, reduced communal involvement, and weakened cultural identity.

METHODOLOGY

To address the concerns raised, this research adopted a qualitative approach. Data was gathered through a review of relevant books, scholarly materials, and cultural documents, as well as through interviews with custodians of indigenous knowledge. These methods provided a comprehensive understanding of how traditional Yoruba marriage practices can inform and strengthen the contemporary institution of marriage.⁹

³ O.O. Omotayo, "Traditional Marriage in Yoruba Culture: An Exploration of Male Dominance," *Lakhomi Journal : Scientific Journal of Culture* 4, no. 3 (2023): 111–20.

⁴ A.S. Olamide, "Ethno-Sociological Inquisition of Marriage in Nigeria: The Christian Perspective," *Uyo Journal of Religious and Cultural Studies (UJORCS)* 9, no. 1 (2024): 8.

⁵ George Kocholickal, "Family in Africa—Opportunities and Challenges," *Roczniki Teologiczne* 61, no. 10 (2014): 151–65.

⁶ S.O. Abul, "The Family as Basis of Social Order: Insights from the Yoruba Traditional Culture," *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 23, no. 7 (2014): 79–89.

⁷ O. Ajibade, *Finding Female Voice: A Sociological Appraisal of Yoruba Nuptial Poetry* (Germany: Deutsche National-bibliographies, 2009).

⁸ Ron J., Hammond, Paul Cheney, and Raewyn Pearsey, *Sociology of the Family* (RJ Hammond and P. Cheney, 2010), 8.

⁹ O. Ehoru and O. D. Badey, "New Media and Marital Instability: Exploring the Implications of Social Media on New Marriages," *International Journal of Innovative Development and Policy Studies* 9, no. 3 (2021): 116–26.

DISCUSSION

Matchmaking in Yoruba Society: A Cultural and Social Institution

Matchmaking is the process of pairing individuals or entities, such as people, businesses, or competitors in games, based on specific criteria to foster mutually beneficial relationships or interactions. In the context of human relationships, this can involve identifying compatible romantic partners or forming alliances that align with shared values and goals.¹⁰ Among the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria, matchmaking is a deeply rooted cultural practice traditionally facilitated by families, elders, or professional matchmakers. These intermediaries initiate and manage introductions and potential unions between partners, underscoring the collective nature of decision-making in Yoruba society.¹¹

One notable form of matchmaking in Yoruba culture is the arrangement made between two close friends to marry off their children, a practice known as *À fì omọ dà ọrẹ*, which translates to "Let the children marry so that the friendship can endure."¹² This practice reflects the community-oriented ethos of Yoruba society, where marriage is not solely a personal affair but also a means of reinforcing social ties.¹³

In situations where a young man of marriageable age lacks the confidence or social leverage to approach a potential partner directly, his family often takes the initiative.¹⁴ Typically, he confides in his parents, who then conduct background investigations and take formal steps to begin the matchmaking process.¹⁵ This parental involvement does not necessarily stem from perceptions of immaturity, but rather from cultural norms that expect timely and honorable actions to prevent social embarrassment or delay. Therefore, the matchmaking among Yoruba functions as both a cultural tradition and a mechanism for social continuity, highlighting the roles of family, community, and tradition in the formation of marital unions.¹⁶

Matchmaking Strategies among the Yoruba Traditional Society

Matchmaking among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria is a long-standing tradition deeply embedded in their cultural heritage.¹⁷ The Yoruba place a high value on preserving customs, especially in matters as significant as marriage.¹⁸ Consequently, families involved in matchmaking adopt deliberate and cautious steps to foster cordial relationships before formal discussions of marriage commence.¹⁹ This emphasis on inter-family harmony reflects the communal nature of Yoruba society, where marriage is not simply a union between two individuals, but rather a bond between two extended families.²⁰

¹⁰ Eli J., Finkel et al., "Online Dating: A Critical Analysis from the Perspective of Psychological Science," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 31, no. 1 (2012): 3–66.

¹¹ A.T. Ojuri and O. Akande, "Understanding the Why and How of Left-behind Spouses of International Migrants in Nigeria," *African Journal for the Psychological Study of Social Issues* 28, no. 1 (2025): 85–103.

¹² O.O. Oladipo and O. John, "Analysing Traditional Yoruba Family through Family Communication Pattern Theory (FCPT)," *Arts and Social Science Research* 13, no. 2 (2023): 163–74.

¹³ O.A. Oyeshile, "Social and Political Framework of Traditional Yoruba Society: Some Philosophical Implications for Contemporary Society," *DIVYADAANN Journal of Philosophy and Education* 19, no. 3 (2008): 367–87.

¹⁴ Carol R. Ember, Benjamin Gonzalez, and Daniel McCloskey, "Marriage and Family," *Explaining Human Culture*, 2021.

¹⁵ Ajibade, *Finding Female Voice: A Sociological Appraisal of Yoruba Nuptial Poetry*.

¹⁶ A.O. Wulemat, "Who Needs Your Opinion? Changing Values Traditional Marriage among the Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria," *Global Journal of Applied Management and Social Sciences. (GOJAMSS)* 11 (2016): 85–96.

¹⁷ E.F. Kayode and B.A.T. Beatrice, "Cultural Interaction and Yoruba Traditional Episteme," *Aquino Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (2002): 67–74.

¹⁸ O.O. Familusi, "African Culture and the Status of Women: The Yoruba Example," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 5, no. 1 (2012): 299–313.

¹⁹ S.K. Sharma, "Impact of Live-in Relationships and Marriage and Family Institutions: A Societal Perspective," *International Journal of Law Management and Humanities* 7, no. 2 (2024): 3392–3406.

²⁰ O.C. Omobola, "Influence of Socio-Economic Change on Marriage Norms in the Yoruba Society in Southwest Nigeria," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies. MCSER Publishing* 2, no. 3 (2013): 139–46.

Pre-Introduction Investigations

Among the Yoruba, marriage is considered a serious and sensitive institution.²¹ It is seen not just as the union of two individuals but as the fusion of two lineages.²² Because of the far-reaching implications of marriage, the Yoruba perceive it as a lifelong commitment, often described metaphorically as a “journey of no return.” A common prayer offered to the bride reinforces this belief: that nothing on earth should compel her to return to her father’s house. A failed marriage, particularly one in which a woman returns permanently to her family home, is referred to as “*ó dá ilé mó sù*”, a culturally loaded expression indicating a shameful and undesirable outcome.²³

Once a prospective groom expresses interest in a young woman, the responsibility of ensuring the suitability of the match shifts to both families, especially the groom’s. In particular, the groom’s mother plays a pivotal role in initiating discreet but thorough inquiries into the background of the potential bride and her family.²⁴ At this stage, the Aláríná, the go-between or intermediary is engaged to facilitate the matchmaking process.

Role of the Aláríná (Intermediary)

The Aláríná is a trusted figure appointed by the groom’s family. This individual must be someone of impeccable character and proven integrity, given the delicate and sensitive nature of the task.^{25,26} His role includes collecting credible information about the prospective bride’s family, character, health history, and moral standing. Although the Aláríná plays a central role, the families, particularly the groom’s, often conduct parallel private investigations, including consultations with traditional oracles, to validate the intermediary’s findings.²⁷

A Yoruba proverb reflects the cautious approach taken during this phase:

“*Bí a se gbón nilé oko, là a gbón nilé iyàwó*”

(As we are wise in the house of the groom, so we are in the house of the bride).

This implies that just as the groom’s family is careful when choosing a bride, the bride’s family must also be discerning to avoid being deceived by appearances or the actions of the intermediary.

These thorough background checks stem from a deep-rooted cultural wisdom expressed in another Yoruba saying:

“*Ómòkòmò séfẹ́, sùgbón ànàkàná ni kòsẹ́ ní.*”

(One can marry a troublesome child, but it is worse to have a bad in-law).

This highlights the belief that the real danger in a marital relationship often lies not only in the character of the spouse but in the conduct of their extended family.²⁸

Ethical Concerns in Yoruba Traditional Marriage Investigations

As soon as the *Alarina* (go-between or matchmaker) discovers any disqualifying information about the bride, the marriage process is immediately terminated²⁹. However, if the investigation yields favorable outcomes, the marriage proceeds. An ethical issue that arises in this practice is the gender imbalance in scrutiny: Only the prospective bride and her family are thoroughly investigated, while the groom is

²¹ O.A.Omotayo. 2023. Traditional Marriage in Yoruba Culture: An Exploration of Male Dominance. *Lakhomi Journal: Scientific Journal of Culture*. Vol 4 No.3. pp. 111-120.

²² F. D., Kirab et al., “Unveiling Cultural Threads: An Exploration of Maguindanao Marriage Practices in the Face of Contemporary Adaptations,” *International Journal of Research* 9, no. S3 (2025): 41–48.

²³ N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970).

²⁴ I.O. Omodunni, “The Crying Has Stopped: Trends in Yoruba Marriage Ceremonies Practice among Ekiti People, Southwest Nigeria,” *AGIDIGBO.ABUAD Journal of the Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2022): 14–20.

²⁵ M.O.Mahmud 2021. A Study of the Yoruba Traditional Marriages as a rite of Passage. *International Journal of African Society, Cultures and Traditions*. Vol.10, No.1.pp 40-52. ISSN: 2056-5771

²⁶ M.O. Mahmud, “ A Study of the Yoruba Traditional Marriages as a Rite of Passage,” *International Journal of African Society, Cultures and Traditions* 10, no. 1 (2021): 40–52.

²⁷ O. Ariwoola, *The African Wife* (London: Kenion Press Limited, 1965).

²⁸ K.C.Oladokun and K.A.Olatunji. 2022. Influence of Parents on the choice of Marriage Partners among the Yoruba in Atiba Local Government Area of Oyo State. *African Scholar Journal of Arts and Sociological Research (JASR-6)*.Vol.24 No.6.pp.221-234. ISSN: 2910-2080.

²⁹ O.A.Omotayo. 2023. Traditional Marriage in Yoruba Culture: An Exploration of Male Dominance. *Lakhomi Journal: Scientific Journal of Culture*. Vol 4 No.3. pp. 111-120.

generally exempt from such evaluation³⁰. These investigations often encompass the health and moral standing of the bride's lineage. The aim is to ensure that the women in her family are of good character and enjoy a positive social reputation. Particular attention is given to hereditary health conditions such as epilepsy, tuberculosis, leprosy, mental disorders, or barrenness, as well as a history of chronic indebtedness. Families are strongly opposed to marrying into lineages associated with disgrace or illegitimacy. The underlying belief is that a woman in such a family could introduce disorder and tarnish the reputation of her husband's household. It is also considered taboo for a person to marry within close family lines, such as a son marrying his mother or siblings. Such unions are strictly forbidden and violate the cultural and moral codes of the Yoruba people.³¹

Beyond physical and social investigations, spiritual compatibility is also taken seriously. Elders or spiritual leaders are consulted to determine whether the couple is spiritually aligned and destined to enjoy a harmonious union. This aspect of the investigation is rooted in the belief that marriage transcends the physical and must be sanctioned by spiritual forces to succeed.³²

Proper Introduction

Following the completion of preliminary background checks to ascertain the compatibility of the prospective bride and groom, a step considered indispensable in Yoruba custom, the families proceed to the next phase of the marriage process. These investigations typically encompass spiritual, physical, and social dimensions, ensuring that there are no underlying issues between the individuals or their respective families.³³ Among the Yoruba, it is considered unwise and wasteful to initiate formal marriage discussions without first confirming this foundational compatibility. Once compatibility is established and the relationship is deemed favorable, the groom's family initiates formal contact by paying an introductory visit to the bride's family. This visit, although not highly ceremonial, is culturally significant and adheres to well-established norms of etiquette and respect. The delegation is usually made up of a few trusted relatives and close friends of the groom.³⁴

The eldest member of the groom's delegation customarily serves as the spokesperson. Though the bride's family may already be aware of the groom's interest—perhaps through informal hints or interactions—it is culturally appropriate for them to receive the visitors as if hearing of the interest for the first time. In keeping with tradition, the groom does not speak during this encounter and plays no active role in the proceedings. The meeting begins with formal introductions and greetings.³⁵ Each member of the groom's party is introduced, along with their relationship with the groom. The spokesperson then states the purpose of their visit respectfully and metaphorically, as is customary. A typical expression might be:

"Omo wa Aderinoye ri ododo kan to rewa ninu ile yi, lawa toro lowo yin. A se tan lati toju ododo aa, ti ko fi ni ku, mo wa lowo, ti o dagba, ti o dogbo ni odede wa, lase Edumare.

This translates to:

"Our son Aderinoye has seen a beautiful flower in your household, and we have come to seek your permission to pluck this flower. We are prepared to nurture this flower so that it never withers, but flourishes and grows old with dignity in our home, by the grace of *Edumare (God)*."³⁶

This poetic exchange symbolizes the deep respect and value placed on the bride, underscoring themes of care, commitment, and divine blessing. It sets the tone for the subsequent stages of the traditional marriage rites. At this point, the eldest member of the bride's family responds formally to the

³⁰ S. Chaudhari. 2024. The Psychological impact on women during matchmaking process in arranged Marriage. *Rasarshi Janak University Research Journal*. Vol.2, No1 &2. pp.1-2.

³¹ O.D. Eburn, "Reflection on African Traditional Marriage System," *Journal of Social Sciences and Public Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2014): 94–104.

³² F.D. Fincham and S.R.H. Beach, "Spiritual Behaviour and Relationship Satisfaction: A Critical Analysis of the Role of Prayer," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 27, no. 1 (2008): 362–88.

³³ Omotayo, "Traditional Marriage in Yoruba Culture: An Exploration of Male Dominance."

³⁴ Ajibade, *Finding Female Voice: A Sociological Appraisal of Yoruba Nuptial Poetry*.

³⁵ Eburn, "Reflection on African Traditional Marriage System."

³⁶ Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*.

groom's proposal.³⁷ He acknowledges the visitors, introduces members of his own family, and poses important questions that reflect their protective concerns and expectations. In Yoruba, he might ask: “*Şe òdodo na wú yín? Şe e kì yòò fì ọmọ wa şe ilòkùlò? E ò ní na ọmọ wa o?*”—translated as, “Are your intentions genuine? Will you not mistreat our daughter? Please, do not beat our daughter.” These questions, though symbolic, are deeply sincere, expressing the family's desire to ensure the well-being of their daughter.³⁸ In response, the groom's family affirms their good intentions in unison, reassuring the bride's family of their commitment to her happiness and welfare. Following this emotional and symbolic exchange, a prayer session is held, typically led by a respected elder from either family. The prayers are directed to Olódùmarè (God), invoking blessings for the couple, harmony between both families, and a joyful, enduring union. The meeting often concludes with the sharing of refreshments provided by the bride's family, symbolizing warmth, hospitality, and communal joy. Depending on the family's financial strength, the groom's family may assist by contributing items such as bush meat and palm wine to entertain the guests.³⁹

These pre-introduction and introduction ceremonies represent an integral part of Yoruba cultural heritage. They are time-honored traditions that not only strengthen the marital bond but also lay a solid foundation for mutual respect and family unity. Preserving these practices is essential, as they help foster lasting marriages and prevent situations where women are treated as disposable or undervalued.⁴⁰

The Engagement Ceremony (*Ìdáná*)

The next stage after the introduction in Yoruba traditional marriage is known as *Ìdáná* (Engagement). This phase can take place at any agreed time after the introduction ceremony. Opinions vary on the appropriate length of time between the introduction and the engagement.

While some suggest a waiting period of about six months, others advocate for a full year.⁴¹ However, the most crucial consideration is that the duration be mutually agreed upon by both families involved. In some instances, couples who had brief courtships went on to build successful marriages, whereas there are also cases where prolonged engagements were disrupted by unforeseen events. Thus, the consent and alignment of both families are more important than the length of time.⁴² Like the introduction, the engagement involves the gathering of family members, friends, and well-wishers, primarily from the groom's side. However, unlike the introduction, the engagement is often more elaborate and financially demanding. On the day of the engagement, the bride's family hosts the groom's entourage, and their arrival is typically marked by drumming, singing, and dancing.⁴³ Although formal introductions may not be repeated, since that was done during the earlier ceremony, new attendees who missed the initial meeting may be introduced briefly. Prayers are offered, and pleasantries exchanged before the formal presentation of gifts begins.

A central figure in the Yoruba engagement is the *Alàrinà* (intermediary), who must ensure the successful completion of his or her assignment. It is the duty of the *Alàrinà* to help the couple understand each other and foster a bond of friendship before stepping aside. This is echoed in the Yoruba proverb: “*Tí ọ̀rọ̀ ọ̀kọ̀ àtí aya bá wọ̀ tan, alárinà a yèbá,*” meaning “once the husband and wife have understood each other, the intermediary steps aside.” The presentation of gifts by the groom's family is a significant

³⁷ A.O. Awokeseinro, “Performance and Aesthetics in Contemporary Yoruba Traditional Marriage Ceremony,” *Humanus Discourse* 1, no. 4 (2021): 1–19.

³⁸ It is quite interesting to note that in some neo-pentecostal churches, the pastor of the Bride asks similar questions from the groom during courtship to evaluate the intentionality of the would be husband; B O Igboin and B A Adedibu, “Christian Ethics and Sustainable Church Growth in Nigeria,” *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 5 (2020): 90–103.

³⁹ K.C. Oladokun and K.A. Olatunji, “Influence of Parents on the Choice of Marriage Partners among the Yoruba in Atiba Local Government Area of Oyo State,” *African Scholar Journal of Arts and Sociological Research (JASR-6)* 24, no.6(2022): 221–34.

⁴⁰ T.O. Shalom, “Sociocultural Context of Yoruba Traditional Marriage Songs,” *NIU Journal of Humanities* 9, no. 3 (2024).

⁴¹ M. Egbosiuba, “Yoruba Traditional Marriage,” *All things Nigeria*, 2012, <https://www.allthingsnigeria.com/2012/yoruba-traditional-marriage/>.

⁴² Fincham and Beach, “Spiritual Behaviour and Relationship Satisfaction: A Critical Analysis of the Role of Prayer.”

⁴³ Ariwoola, *The African Wife*.3-5.

part of the ceremony and often the lengthiest. These items are symbolic and are used for prayers invoking blessings on the couple.⁴⁴ For instance:

Salt, honey, sugar, and ààdùn (a sweet snack made from maize) symbolize sweetness and joy, wishing the couple a life devoid of sorrow.

Kòlànút and bitter kola signify good health and vitality.

A she-goat (èwúrẹ́) symbolizes fertility, expressing the hope that the bride will bear children without difficulty.

Although the specific items may vary in different Yoruba communities, the main message remains consistent: The groom's family expresses their readiness to care for the bride, demonstrating both goodwill and commitment.⁴⁵

While some critics argue that these elaborate gift presentations may carry undertones of domination or material display, others view them as sincere gestures meant to reassure the bride's family of her welfare and to further cement the alliance between the two families.

The Bride Price in Yoruba Culture

The bride price, also known as dowry or bride wealth, is a traditional payment or gift presented by the groom's family to the bride's family in exchange for her hand in marriage. While the purpose of this practice varies across cultures, it is generally regarded as a symbol of respect and a token of appreciation. Among the Yoruba people, this sentiment is captured in the saying: "*Eni fún wá ní odidi ọmọ, ó parí òore,*" meaning, "Someone who has given us a whole human being has performed the ultimate act of kindness." This underscores the cultural view of the bride price as a form of compensation and deep gratitude.⁴⁶ Due to the communal nature of Yoruba society, the decision regarding the bride price is not made solely by the bride's parents. Instead, it involves consultations across various segments of the extended family. The amount to be paid is often determined by the customs of the specific Yoruba subgroup and the financial capability of the groom's family. If the bride's family considers the proposed amount inadequate or inappropriate, they may reject it.⁴⁷

However, in contemporary times, there has been a noticeable shift. In many cases, bride prices are outrightly declined by the bride's family. The rationale behind this modern stance is that their daughter is *not for sale*. Rather, the focus has shifted to ensuring that the groom and his family are willing and able to care for the bride properly. The financial and material aspects of the dowry traditionally rest solely on the groom's family. Yoruba customs also emphasize parental responsibility.⁴⁸ Parents are expected to adequately provide for their children before they marry. Post-marriage, however, the duty of caring for aging parents falls on the children, as reflected in the proverb: "*Bí òkété bá dàgbà, òmù ọmọ rẹ ló máa ń mu*" (When the bush rat grows old, it suckles on the breast of its young).⁴⁹ The timing of the bride price payment varies in Yoruba communities. In some, it is paid on the day of the engagement ceremony (*Idáná*), while in others, it is settled before the formal wedding rites.

Matchmaking and Dating in Contemporary Society

It is a statement of fact that modernity, civilization, and the influence of foreign religions have significantly altered many traditional marriage practices that were once highly respected and cherished by our forebears. The institution of marriage today is undergoing rapid transformation in response to

⁴⁴ A. Atolagbe, "Semiotics and Language Interlarding in Yoruba Traditional Wedding Bilingual Discourse," *Journal of English and Literature* 3, no. 7 (2012): 158–65.

⁴⁵ A.I. Zainab, "10 Items That Must Be Included in Yoruba Traditional Weddings," 2025, <https://tribuneonline.com/10-items-that-must-be-included-in-yoruba-traditional-weddings/>.

⁴⁶ H.U. Idris and T. Margaret, "The Impact of Bride Price Payment on Women's Autonomy in Marital Relationship in Ankpa, Kogi State, Nigeria," *Nexus International University (NIU) Journal of Social Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2023): 215–29.

⁴⁷ A. Ainamon, "Exploring the Issue of Marriage Rites in Selected African Novels," *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)* 10, no. 2 (2022): 1–19.

⁴⁸ S.O. Ademiluka, "Bride Price and Christian Marriage in Nigeria," *HTS: Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 1–10.

⁴⁹ C. Mills, "Duties to Aging Parents," *Developmental Psychology*, 2003, 145–66.

broader social changes.⁵⁰ **Social change** refers to the alteration of social structures in various aspects of life, and marriage is no exception. Unlike in the past, the methods and procedures involved in pre-marital and marital ceremonies have changed considerably. Traditional Yoruba values surrounding marriage have been widely abandoned, even among the most religious and elderly members of society.⁵¹ It is important to emphasize that Europeans did not teach Africans how to eat, drink, sleep, make friends, or conduct marriage.⁵² The Yoruba people had a well-established and deeply rooted marital structure with clearly defined stages and protocols that made marriage socially acceptable and culturally significant.⁵³

As the structure of marriage evolves, so too does the structure of the family.⁵⁴ In earlier times, the family system was communal, built on the philosophy of "live and let live," where a child was raised by the entire community.⁵⁵ In fact, it was often difficult to identify the biological mother of a child due to the collective responsibility in upbringing. Today, the concept of family has shifted to a nuclear model, typically consisting of a father, mother, and their children. The extended family structure is gradually disappearing. Additionally, many alien practices have crept into pre-marital tradition.⁵⁶ The items required for traditional introduction and engagement ceremonies are no longer consistent with the old customs. The longstanding practice of bride price collection has become less fashionable, and parents now play minimal roles in selecting spouses for their children. Instead, the decision largely rests with the individuals involved.⁵⁷

Pre-marriage counseling sessions, often organized by religious groups, have replaced the traditional family-led investigations into the character and background of prospective partners.⁵⁸ Marriage is now predominantly viewed as a private union between a man and a woman, with little community involvement.⁵⁹ A notable trend is the hiring of "stand-in" parents when the biological parents disapprove of a marriage choice, an indication of the extent to which traditional norms have eroded. Another disturbing trend among young people today is that many marriages are no longer rooted in genuine love and understanding. This has led to alarming incidents where couples resort to violence, and in some tragic cases, even kill each other over issues that could have been amicably resolved.

Changing Trends in Contemporary Marriages

In the past, marriage was built on the strong foundations of love, responsibility, and mutual commitment. These values contributed to the low divorce rate, since marriage was preceded by rigorous traditional processes that emphasized compatibility and family involvement.⁶⁰ However, contemporary society has witnessed significant changes in the institution of marriage, resulting in practices that deviate from the norms of the past.⁶¹ One emerging trend is **marriage by contract**. In this arrangement, a man and a woman agree to marry under specific terms and conditions, which may include financial agreements, the purpose of the marriage, and a predetermined duration. Once the agreed-upon terms are fulfilled or the stipulated time expires, the marriage is dissolved. This contractual approach to marriage undermines

⁵⁰ B.O. Igboin, "Colonialism and African Cultural Values," *African Journal of History and Culture* 3, no. 6 (2011): 96–103.

⁵¹ M.O. Esiri, "Social Change and Marriage Structure in Nigeria," *International Journal of Management, IT and Social Sciences* 8, no. 3 (2021): 228–35.

⁵² E. Morris, "Early Missionaries' Interaction with the African Worldviews and Culture," *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)* 4, no. 3 (2018): 54–66.

⁵³ Tolulope Grace Banjo, "Cultural Norms and the Expression of Affection in Nigerian Yoruba Families" (The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, 2024).

⁵⁴ Juna Muça et al., "The Evolution of Family and Its Impact on the Increase of Marriage Age: Analysis of Needs for Psychosocial Services," *International Journal of Science and Research Archive*, 2024.

⁵⁵ S. Brint, "A Critique and Reconstruction of the Community Concept," *American Sociological Association*, 2021, 18–29.

⁵⁶ H. Bhasin, "Change in Family Structure in the Modern Times," *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* 3, no. 4 (2016): 124–37.

⁵⁷ F. Falana, "Bride Price Syndrome and Dominance in Marriage: An Expository Analysis," *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)* 6, no. 8 (2019): 132–39.

⁵⁸ R. F. Stahmann, "Premarital Counselling: A Focus for Family Therapy," *Journal of Family Therapy* 22, no. 1 (2002): 104–16.

⁵⁹ Ime N. George, David E. Ukpong, and Eme E. Imah, "Cultural Diversity of Marriage Sustainability in Nigeria: Strengths and Challenges," *Sociology and Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (2014): 7–14.

⁶⁰ Scot M. Allgood et al., "Marital Commitment and Religiosity in a Religiously Homogenous Population," *Marriage & Family Review* 45, no. 1 (2008): 52–67.

⁶¹ K.A. Eghafona, "The Changing Phases of African Marriage NS Family: Perspectives in Nigeria in the African Context," *The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, 2021.

the lifelong commitment that traditionally characterized marital unions. Increasingly, some men of marriageable age are no longer interested in long-term relationships. Instead, they engage in relationships solely for childbearing. After the woman has a child or two, she is often dismissed.⁶² This phenomenon has given rise to the widespread use of the terms “baby mama” and “baby daddy”, reflecting a lack of intention for enduring marital commitment.⁶³

Another notable development is proxy marriage, which has become more common due to the growing number of people emigrating abroad—a trend popularly known as the *Japa syndrome*⁶⁴—as well as the demands of military or diplomatic service. In such cases, either the bride or groom is absent, and a family member stands in for them during the ceremony. While this practice varies across cultures, the physical absence of one partner raises questions about the sincerity and authenticity of the union.⁶⁵ In some cases, the representative may even be a younger sibling, and photographs of the absent partner are placed on a chair as a symbolic presence. In one instance, attendees at the ceremony were seen praying for a photograph of the groom. This stands in sharp contrast to traditional practices, where both partners were expected to be physically present. A further innovation is online marriage, particularly popular among youths. Here, the entire marriage ceremony, or parts of it, is conducted virtually. The couple may exchange vows and participate in the ceremony via video conferencing or live streaming. In some cases, the families meet for the first time online, exchanging greetings and pleasantries in a digital space. This practice diminishes the bond between the families, which was once forged through physical gatherings, shared meals, and face-to-face interactions. These evolving trends reflect broader social changes and highlight the tension between traditional values and modern realities⁶⁶ Although technology and globalization offer convenience and flexibility, they also challenge the depth of interpersonal connection and communal support that once defined marriage.

Ethics and Human Action in Contemporary Society

Ethics is fundamentally concerned with human actions, how they can be judged as either good or bad, right or wrong, commendable or condemnable. Although scholars have defined the term ethics in various ways, its core focus remains the critical evaluation of human behaviour.⁶⁷ Every society operates with a set of moral standards by which individuals' actions are assessed. When a person acts in accordance with these standards, their behaviour is considered commendable and often held up as an example for others.⁶⁸ On the contrary, any deviation from these accepted norms is usually condemned as unethical or immoral. Importantly, human actions are not physically visible or written on one's face; instead, they are revealed through everyday conduct and decision-making.⁶⁹ Within the institution of marriage, for instance, there are clearly defined moral expectations and societal standards that individuals are expected to uphold. Ethics plays a significant role in evaluating such actions, particularly voluntary ones, those we choose to perform or refrain from. Unfortunately, in recent times, the influence of civilization, modernization, and foreign religions has significantly disrupted many of these well-established traditions. These once-respected values have, regrettably, been sacrificed on the altar of modernity.

⁶² K. Chavda and V. Nisarga, “Single Parenting on Child’s Development,” *Journal of India Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 19, no. 1 (2023): 7–14.

⁶³ O. Alabi and O. Olonade, “Complexities, Dynamism, and Changes in the Nigerian Contemporary Family Structure,” 2022.

⁶⁴ This has contributed significantly in the changing faces of the religious landscape particularly African Christianity in Western Europe and North America For further reading; Babatunde Adedibu, “Migration, Identity, and Marginalization: The Case of Britain’s Black Majority Churches,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 2, no. 1 (2014): 110–17; B.A Adedibu, “The Urban Explosion of Black Majority Churches: Their Origin, Growth, Distinctives and Contribution to British Christianity” (North West University, South Africa, 2011).

⁶⁵ O.E. Aderonke and O.C. Abiri, “‘Japa’ Syndrome: Causes, Effects and Solution for National Development,” *International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability* 11, no. 5 (2023): 87–95.

⁶⁶ J. Guo, “Relationship Between the Internet and Marital Decision. Advances in Social Sciences, Education and Humanities Research,” in *Proceedings of the 2020 3rd International Conference on Humanities, Education and Social Sciences. (ICHESS 2020) Vol. 496*, 2020, 261–74.

⁶⁷ J.I. Omoregbe, *Ethics: A Systematic and Historical Study* (Ikeja: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Limited, 1993).

⁶⁸ J. Wang, “Why Do People Have Different Moral Standards? The Influencing Factors of Moral Standards,” *8th International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences Research (ICHSSR)* 664 (2022): 2716–19.

⁶⁹ A.E. Tenbrunsel and K.S. Crowe, “Ethical Decision Making: Where We’ve Been and Where We Are Going,” *The Academy of Management Annals* 2, no. 1 (2008): 545–607.

In recent times, several unethical practices have crept into the institution of marriage and the family setting, practices that were once considered strange and unacceptable in traditional society. In the past, individuals who engaged in immoral behaviours were often named and shamed, serving as a deterrent to others.⁷⁰ However, many of these behaviours have become widespread and normalised today. Among the most rampant are infidelity and lack of trust. It is now increasingly common for married individuals to engage in extramarital affairs without remorse. The rise of social media and constant online interactions has further compounded the problem, leading to trust issues, particularly among young couples. Another critical challenge that affects the stability of modern marriages is the breakdown of effective communication, a virtue that was highly valued in the past. Traditionally, prospective brides were thoroughly prepared by their parents on how to maintain cordial relationships with in-laws, friends, and the extended family.⁷¹ As a result, they were better equipped to manage interpersonal relationships and communicate effectively within the marriage. This important aspect is now largely neglected.

Marriage also demands a high sense of responsibility, especially from the groom, who is expected to be financially dependable.⁷² Sadly, this expectation is often unmet in today's society. Cases abound where wives build houses or make significant financial decisions without their husbands' knowledge, and vice versa. Such secrecy and lack of transparency have led to the collapse of many marriages. Moreover, the emotional disconnect between couples has become more pronounced in this digital age.⁷³ Many married individuals now maintain relationships with so-called "side-chicks" or lovers outside the marriage, depriving their spouses of the emotional attachment and commitment that marriage requires.⁷⁴ In earlier times, wives were known for their emotional resilience and loyalty, remaining committed to their families even in difficult times.⁷⁵ They understood the value of staying united for the sake of their children. However, today it is not uncommon for either spouse to abandon their family in pursuit of greener pastures abroad, often leading to long-term separation and eventual breakdown of the marriage.⁷⁶

Furthermore, the traditional role of family members in providing guidance and premarital counseling has significantly reduced. Many modern couples enter marriage without any form of structured guidance or mentorship, contributing to the growing number of single parents and broken homes. The pervasive influence of social media exposes couples to unethical content, including online infidelity, pornography, and cyberbullying, which further undermines the sanctity of the marriage institution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this paper underscore the urgent need to re-evaluate modern marital practices. A more stable and enduring marriage institution is attainable if all relevant stakeholders, prospective couples, families, religious institutions, and policymakers commit to restoring core values and embracing responsible, community-oriented approaches to marriage.

Parents, in a matter of necessity, should begin to inculcate traditional values such as honesty, endurance, perseverance, and hard work into the lives of the younger generation. These virtues are essential in shaping responsible and culturally grounded individuals who will thrive in society as they grow older.

⁷⁰ Onuche, J., "Marriage and Changing Moral Values in Contemporary Nigeria," *Journal of Sociology and Social Work* 2, no. 1 (2014): 145–55.

⁷¹ A. Nyarks and M.M. Hope, "Impact of Effective Communication in Marriage," *International Journal of Research in Education, Science and Technology* 4, no. 2 (2023): 33–40.

⁷² P.A. Ali, "Spousal Role Expectations and Marital Conflict: Perspectives of Men and Women," *National Centre for Biotechnology Information*, 2020, 1–14.

⁷³ O. Jabali, B. Hammra, and F. Mahamid, "Modern Relationships and Social Media: Exploring the Digital Dynamics of Husband-Wife Interaction," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 1, no. 11 (2024): 1–10.

⁷⁴ A.A. Ubong, "Conceptualizing Sidechickism as a Threat to Marital Security among CISGender Married Women in Nigeria," *Onioj: AJU Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 1 (2024): 114–35.

⁷⁵ F. Walsh, "The Concept of Family Resilience: Crisis and Challenges," *Special Section*, 1996, 261–68.

⁷⁶ Ojuri and Akande, "Understanding the Why and How of Left-behind Spouses of International Migrants in Nigeria."

In addition, the school curriculum should include subjects that promote the cultural heritage of each ethnic group in Nigeria. This will help the youth appreciate their roots and make conscious efforts to preserve and protect their culture positively to the wider world.

The government can also play a significant role in this direction by organizing cultural competitions at the secondary and tertiary education levels. These events, which should reward outstanding performances with prizes and recognition, would serve as motivation for students to take pride in their heritage. Rather than expending resources on events that glorify immorality or promote indecency, such as shows that expose the nudity of young people, emphasis should be placed on initiatives that foster cultural awareness and moral uprightness.

Moreover, various organizations, including NGOs, can collaborate with the government to support these efforts. The enormous funds often allocated to entertainment programs like *Big Brother Naija* could be redirected towards youth programs that promote cultural education and values.

Specifically, Yoruba traditional values and cultural expressions should be constantly portrayed in movies, cinema, and on social media platforms. These visual representations will leave a lasting impression on young minds, often more effectively than textbooks. When young people see their history, language, and customs positively reflected in the media, it reinforces their identity and encourages them to maintain their cultural legacy.

CONCLUSION

This paper has critically examined the evolving nature of the marriage institution, contrasting its traditional sanctity with contemporary practices. Historically, marriage was revered and guided by foundational values such as honesty, responsibility, trust, love, and hard work. It was widely held that individuals who were unprepared for the demands of marriage should refrain from entering into it, lest they bring dishonour upon themselves and their families. The active involvement of parents and extended family members at all stages of the marital process served not only as a support system, but also as a means of safeguarding family honour and social values. Consequently, thorough and cautious procedures were observed to prevent any form of misconduct or embarrassment. On the contrary, the contemporary marital landscape reveals a departure from these time-honoured values. Increasingly, people seek marriage without parental involvement or spiritual counsel. The rise of online dating, marriage by proxy, and the phenomenon of hiring surrogate parents for wedding ceremonies are symptomatic of a broader shift towards individualism and superficiality in marital arrangements. These trends have, in many instances, contributed to the growing prevalence of divorce, separation, domestic violence, and, in extreme cases, fatalities. Based on these findings, recommendations have been made, which, if adopted, would enhance the sanctity of marriages and maintain traditional values for the sake of posterity.

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