

Wives as Sex Gifts? Interrogating Sexuality in the Tiv Matrimonial System

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Abstract

This paper examines sexuality within the Tiv matrimonial system. It is informed by the fact that Tiv men of Central Nigeria are known to have offered their wives to guests as sex gifts for midnight entertainment during the pre-colonial and colonial periods. These claims have gained currency among scholars, celebrities, and non-Tiv speakers in Nigeria. The paper examines gifting and sexuality in the Tiv matrimonial system from a historical perspective. Using both primary and secondary sources of historical data, the paper argues that sex gifting was alien in the Tiv matrimonial system. While men during the pre-colonial period were offered young girls as marital gifts, such opportunities were not accorded to women, as polyandry was and is considered a sinful act in Tivland. It concludes by not only deconstructing this misconception about Tiv men and sexuality but also offers plausible solutions that address stereotypes in Tiv and African historiography.

Key words: Sexuality; Women; Men; Matrimony and Tivland

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INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes and misconceptions continue to be widespread problems worldwide. States, ethnic groups, nations, and

continents have all suffered from stereotypes in one way or another. Africa, for example, is described by some scholars as a dark continent (Bodzrany and Nowakowska, 2020). Despite Afrocentric scholars' efforts to deconstruct this misconception, it gained intellectual currency (Negedu and Ojomah, 2018). Many ethnic groups in Nigeria have experienced prejudice (Bamgbose and Ladele, 2023). In Nigeria, there are heartbreaking reports of Tiv men offering their wives to guests for sexual relations. These sweeping assertions have gained traction among academics, celebrities, and non-Tiv speakers (Odimegwu & Okemgbo, 2010; Arise & Patrick, 2012). Similarly, there are several tales in the media that portray Tiv men as providing women to guests for sex. While giving and sexuality are historic behaviours, researchers have investigated their association (Soble, 2002, Soble, 2019, Jonason, et al 2009, Timiu, 2017). The significance or purpose of sex is often discussed in religious literature (Kissi, 2021). Adewale and Oyekan (2022) contend that God created and gave humans sex in order for them to multiply and populate the earth. Similarly, research from Africa, Asia, and Europe document sexuality and giving (Madlala & Ankomah, 2004; Karras, 2005; Tamale, 2012; Mbaye, 2022). Sex giving has been studied as an economic transaction by academics like Baumeister and Vohs (2004). According to certain works of literature, giving sex as a reward for courage or positive results is acceptable (Kinsella, Ritchie & Igou, 2017). Others offered temporary sex gifts as a source of hope and stability for persons in vulnerable circumstances (Alexander, 2014). The link between intimacy and the economics of sexual labour is examined by Garza (2021) via a detailed examination of a number of ambiguous exchanges, including gifts, favours, services, and both monetary and nonmonetary transactions. In daily life, gifting sex has the power to establish, preserve, and deepen social ties.

Researchers have also recreated how sex gifting affects academics in Nigerian high schools (Okpoko, 2023). The importance of sex giving to power and economic interactions has been shown by studies conducted in the United States of America (Garza, 2022). In Africa, young women were given to courageous warriors for martial sex in order to protect kingdoms' lands from outside invasion and attack (Nnaji & Okoye, 2024). Procreation was the outcome of such handovers. Due to familial ties and incentives for honesty and diligence, young ladies were assigned to men among the Tiv (Asunda, 2023; Abomste, 2024). The desire to have children was the driving force. Therefore, the significance of sex giving has been well shown by empirical data. Sex giving has continued to be a ritual with a purpose, notwithstanding the language of nocturnal pleasure. Unfortunately, those who advocate for Tiv men to use their wives as sex gifts for guests have not uncovered the motivations behind this behaviour. This study aims to answer the following questions: What is sexuality? For the Tiv, what is considered marital sex? Are packages for wives' hospitality in Tivland? The main focus of this study is these analytical questions. The article uses both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Both primary and non-primary sources provided the resources that were used. Data from published works were compared with interviews. A conceptual and theoretical framework, the geographical location of Tivland, sexuality in the pre-colonial Tiv matrimonial system, the role of wives in the Tiv matrimonial system, an introduction that is currently in progress, and, of course, a conclusion are the five (5) sections that make up this paper for the sake of intellectual convenience.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Depending on the individual, sex may imply numerous things. According to the Canadian Institute of Health (2022), sex is a biological characteristic shared by humans and animals. Chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy are among the physical and physiological characteristics that are most closely linked to it. Although it is typically classified as either female or male, there are differences in the biological characteristics that make up sex as well as in the ways in which those characteristics manifest. For example, according to Garza (2021), sex is defined as any act that has the potential to stimulate a person sexually, including kissing, caressing, fingering, and intercourse. According to Ekpo (2019), sexuality, which is derived from the word "sex," is an activity that includes people and is a part of daily life. It describes the core of a person's humanity, including their self-perception, definition of gender, physical attributes, and ability to procreate. An omnibus explanation of sexuality has been

accepted by the African Regional Sexuality Resource Centre due of its significance. In line with this definition: Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender, identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles, and relationships (African Regional Sexuality Resource Centre, 2003, p.5).

The cultural way we express our physical pleasures is known as sexuality. Though other processes and activities surround it, it has a lot to do with sex. As a result, Ekpo (2019) connected gender and sexuality and illustrated how it is difficult to discuss one without the other. The social status of being either male or female is often referred to as gender, and sexuality is a significant byproduct of this dichotomy. Therefore, sexuality is historically perceived, expressed, experienced, or suppressed in the interaction of this duality in human life (Ekpo, 2019). Because sexuality is so pervasive, it has shaped families, communities, and even the country over the ages. In terms of family and national population politics, sexuality is significant (Soble, 2002). Economic strategies have been adapted to the effects of sexuality. In Nigeria, prostitution, urban decadence, unemployment, demography, and the spread of STDs all pose problems for human sexuality. According to Timiu (2017), it encompasses more than just disease, immorality, and reproduction. According to Odimegwu and Okemgbo (2010) and Arise and Patrick (2012), the Tiv marital system explains sexuality in terms of presents (women) that Tiv men give to guests as sex packages. These researchers' conceptualisation of sexuality in the Tiv marital system is distorted when seen in the context of sex giving and its intended use. For example, sexual gifts involve a mix of interest and disinterest, but they also generate social bonds, debts, and a sense of duty (Stan, 2012; Pipyrrou, 2014). Cooperation (Polese, 2014), competitiveness, and altruistic or hostile connections are often the outcomes of the new relationship formed by sex giving, and these interactions help to shape the personalities of the individuals involved (Scheper-Hughes, 2007). Accordingly, sexuality is defined in this paper as a long-term, socially acceptable mating arrangement that usually entails partners' cooperation in terms of economics, social interactions, and reproduction. The theory of social perception serves as the foundation for this paper's theoretical framework. Solomon Asche created the hypothesis in 1946 (McLeod, 2023). Its ideology is based on how individuals see and draw conclusions about other people as independent individuals. Parkinson (2019) talks on the theory's use in identifying and analysing social signals to develop beliefs about norms, relationships, and social roles. This domain also includes social, which is defined as one's comprehension of social roles, norms, and

schemas about social interactions and circumstances. The four main components of social perception are observation, attribution, integration, and confirmation. Observation is the raw data of social perception, which is a conglomeration of three sources: people, situations, and behaviour. These sources provide evidence to support a person's opinion or inference about other people. Attribution is another important concept to understand when talking about social perception (Parkinson, 2019). The representation of a person's personality as the cause or origin of their behaviour during a situation or event is known as attribution. In order to understand the impacts of situational or personal attributions, social perceivers need to integrate all available information into a unified perception. In order to confirm these impressions, people try to understand, find, and create information in the form of various biases.

As a result, the theory provides a strong foundation for understanding how people negotiate and understand the complexities of the social environment. It emphasises how important cognitive processes, cultural norms, and individual prejudices are in determining how people perceive and evaluate other people. A thorough comprehension of these processes is important for social psychologists as well as for people who want to improve their interactions and relationships with others. Essentially, the theory of social perception provides a useful framework for analysing the mental processes, prejudices, and social factors that contribute to the myth that Tiv men offer their wives to guests. This understanding is crucial to dispelling and correcting such myths and advancing a more accurate and culturally aware understanding of Tiv's sexual culture.

TIVLAND: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Located in the Benue lowlands of East Central Nigeria, Tivland has an estimated 29,300 square kilometres of land and is situated between latitudes 60 35 and 80 10 N and longitudes 80 04 and 100 E (Tyubeen 2006). According to the 2006 census, the region's estimated total population is 2,920,481 and is divided across 14 Local Governments. Makurdi, Gboko, Katsina-Ala, Zaki-Biam, Vandeikya, Adikpo, and Aliade are the principal towns in Tivland. The Bekkawra and Abi ethnic groups in Obudu Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross Rivers State and the Republic of Cameroon border the region on the south, while Nasarawa State borders it on the north. The Chamba and Junkun in Taraba State border the region on the east. The region is bordered to the west by the Igala ethnic group of Kogi State and the Idoma of Benue State (Tyubeen 2006). The Tiv people of central Nigeria make up the majority of the region, which is drained by two sets of rivers: the Katsina-Ala, Guma, Nagi, Gwer, and Mu of the Benue Basin and the Konshisha,

Ambir, and Aya of the Cross River Basin (Utov 2000). They speak a similar language called Tiv and make up the main ethnic group in Benue State (Torkula, 2001). The cultural legacy of the Tiv is extensive. The Tiv are renowned for their distinctive social structure, language, art, traditions, and rituals (Wegh, 2003). Their history, values, beliefs, and way of life—all of which have been handed down through the generations—are reflected in their culture. A major part of the Tiv people's culture is farming, and they are mostly farmers. In addition to being necessary for survival, the crops they grow—yam, millet, sorghum, cassava, and maize—have great cultural and symbolic significance. The patrilineal kinship patterns that underpin Tiv culture link power, succession, and inheritance via the male line (Ihuah, 2021; Okpeh and Ugbegili, 2013). Since people often live together in compounds or homesteads, extended families are an important part of Tiv society. In the family and community, the oldest man, referred to as the Orya, is respected and has power. Even though Christianity has become more popular recently, the Tiv traditional religion still plays a big part in their cultural customs. The cosmos and all living things are said to have been created by the ultimate god Aondo, according to Tiv belief. Along with many rites and rituals connected to birth, marriage, death, and other important life events, ancestor worship and divination are also essential elements of Tiv spirituality. Regarding the origins of the Tiv people, there are a lot of different stories. While there are differing opinions regarding the Tiv's origin, Torkula (2006, p.1) points out that: "The version that commands popularity and currency is that which traces their origin to the Bantu people who once inhabited the Central African continent, in the Shaba area of the present Democratic Republic of Congo." Empirical linguistic evidence is the reason for this version's popularity and currency. For example, Abraham (1934) listed 67 Tiv words and compared them to Bantu Nyaza words, which revealed remarkable phonetic and semantic similarities. Abraham (1934, p.5) deduced that the Tiv were "real Bantu" and that they originated in the Congo as a result. The name Tsenõngu, which is Tiv and the name of a town with 300,000 residents in the current Democratic Republic of the Congo, is another piece of linguistic evidence (Tsenongu, 2011). The Tiv migrated from the Congo, as evidenced by such linguistic evidence. From there, they travelled through a number of locations, including Swen, before relocating to their current home in the Benue Valley.

SEXUALITY IN THE TIV MATRIMONIAL SYSTEM

Interrogating sexuality may be challenging. According to Bajpai & Mishra (2019), this challenge is rooted in the weight of morality. In spite of this, Ekpo (2019) contends

that many Nigerian civilisations had previously created culturally acceptable conceptions of sexuality that were either healthy or sick, moral or immoral, abominable or not abominable, or suitable or improper. Sexuality was relegated to the domain of marriage in the majority of pre-colonial nations. Sexuality was to be experienced and addressed exclusively in the context of marriage. Outside of this, having sex and talking about sexual issues was frowned upon. Sexual conversations and interactions were limited to marriage among the Tiv people of central Nigeria. According to Akiga (2003), a young man had to demonstrate that he possessed all the traits associated with men in order to appeal to the other sex (to be marriageable) and have sex. These included diligence, courage, health, agility, integrity, and a strong family history. On the other hand, the young lady was supposed to be hard-working, conscientious, a good chef, well-behaved, have a round figure that suggested she might have children, and have a decent family. Marriage was classified as a means of obtaining sexual relations. According to Akiga (2003, p.5), the Yamshe, or exchange system of marriage, was the most notable aspect of the pre-colonial Tiv marriage institution. It was founded on the idea of trade by batter, with the fundamental justification being the need to get a woman of similar value in exchange for your daughter. According to Fyanka (2018), a man marries by trading a female relative for a wife from another clan, family, or lineage. This procedure was the only way to ensure marital sex. Social cohesiveness and marital stability were maintained by this system. According to Asunda (2024), this method has been shown to be helpful in preventing women from being mistreated in their married families because of fear of the daughter or sister being reassessed. Since the stability of the marriages was essential to the harmony and unity of the two families involved, the women's choice was respected. As a result, the new wife was awarded the same rights and benefits as the replacement of the sister or daughter that was handed away in return. The exchange wife's family could have to find a new one if she turned out to be infertile or unfaithful. In Tivland, exchange marriages were thus seen as a kind of clan and family unity. It was expected of the women who were married in this way to copulate with their husbands right away in order to have children. Because sex enables him to view his face—a Tiv metaphor for children—it was the man's responsibility to fulfil his marital obligations.

The British instituted the Kem Kwase (bride price) system in 1927, which made marital sex feasible after the Yamshe (exchange marriage) was abolished (Wayas & David-Wayas, 2020). Despite being outlawed, Fyanka (2018) observes that traces of the tradition persisted in Tiv society. Even after their daughter had produced fruit, families that gave their daughters away in bride price marriages continued to expect a female in exchange

(Isheikyo) later on (Torkula, 2004). This new tendency was influenced by the desire to protect their daughter's safety and dignity. Ishekryo means "eyes behind your head" connoting security. The evolution of Tiv marital systems was characterised by a unique blend of elements from the old marriage system, including this one, which somehow made its way into the new idea of bride price. Young men of marriageable age were required to pay the bride price, or Kem Kwase, prior to copulation under this system. The usual bride price was set at £4 or £5 by the colonial authority. In 2020, Wayas and David-Wayas This would soon alter since the new monetary standard established by the colonial authority could not be compared to the value that the Tiv people placed on the female child.

According to Fynka (2018), the bride price was set at between £10 and £25, but it was extended indefinitely "in kind." According to Paul and Laura Bohanan (1939), it was often increased to as much as £30 among clerks and unmarried females. The value of virginity was great. The experience of marriage sex with a virgin was enjoyable. The husband would, however, perforate a piece of white fabric and give it to the parents as a signal indicating that the lady had previously been deflowered before to marriage if it was found during their first sexual encounter. She and her family would always be humiliated by this. In Tiv territory, this custom was typical and oddly anticipated whenever a female was married for the first time (Asen & Tsav, 2017). On the other hand, because the husband's virginity was not looked into, it was not a matter worth worrying about. It was illegal for women to have extramarital relationships after marriage. The sole possession of her body belonged to her husband, who was entitled to utilise it whenever and whenever he pleased. According to Asen and Tsav (2017), this involves having sex with her whenever he wants to rather than when she wants to. In contrast to the sexual practices of Kunyaza/Kachabali in Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya, which aimed to induce female ejaculation and several orgasms in women during sexual interactions (Tara, 2021), female orgasm was not given much importance in Tivland. Making decisions regarding sexual and reproductive issues was regarded as the sole prerogative of the man in the marriage. According to Orisaremi and Alubo (2012), a woman was not supposed to reject her husband's advances or negotiate sex with him. In addition, males have demanded marital privileges that infringe upon their spouses' basic rights. For example, the Igbo of southeast Nigeria prohibit openly discussing sexual desire and bodily parts in any conversation. For female teenagers, the societal pressure to be quiet about sex is greater, and discussing or having sex publicly is seen as a sign of waywardness (Izugbara, 2008). In Nigeria, there are undoubtedly prevailing cultural views about sexual orientation. For instance,

heterosexuality is taken for granted as being natural and normal, and anybody who deviates from this “normalcy” is seen as abnormal.

Consensual kidnapping was practiced by young males who were unable to afford marriage and sexual activities. (Torkula, 2004) suggest that voluntary kidnapping or elopement was a result of the end of exchange marriage. The girl agreed to be abducted if she was prepared to put everything on the line to marry her love. In Tiv’s social and cultural framework, the marketplace served as a gathering spot, and bathing ponds and streams were also major features. Because the affair had to be kept secret, the couples avoided getting together at one other’s houses. Since parents and guardians let their children to spend a lot of time away from home until the market closed at night, the day of elopement was customarily set for the village market day. Therefore, elopement was a licence for intercourse between spouses. With the backdrop of the aforementioned borders, a man and his wife have sex in a culturally sanctioned way. Any departure from the standard of practice resulted in the wrath of society and the gods. The married couple experienced sexuality in private. Most of it was done at night. According to Gbaka (2024), the guy lowered the table light to the lowest possible level before to copulation. The age difference between brides and grooms was another noteworthy feature. Sex was appreciated and based on the values of friendship and respect, and the groom was always older. Men were given more sexual freedom than women, according to Wegh (2003), even though Tiv marriage sex was based on the values of respect. The Tiv Society, for example, let men to exploit young women to state their sexual cravings. However, if their husbands did not provide them with sexual satisfaction, women were prohibited from engaging in extramarital sex. The Tiv marriage customs permitted widows to inherit from their spouses. Wife inheritance was regarded as a method of ensuring the sexual and bodily demands. In Tivland, polyandry was and is regarded as a sin.

INTERROGATING WIVES AS GIFT (SEX) PACKAGES TO VISITORS

Analyses of evolutionary trends unique to sexuality in the Tiv matrimonial system have come up with statements that Tiv men, as part of their hospitality package, offered their wives to visitors. These assertions are difficult to substantiate, given the extant literature on Tiv history. Relatedly, anthropologists have never alluded to such a practice, even in a very remote manner. Initial investigations into Tiv studies indicate that: “wives are the personal property of a man while he is alive and the members of the village have not the right of promiscuous intercourse with one another’s wives (Abraham (1933, p.88)”. This claim was supported by

Paul Bohanna (1939) and Makar (1994), who debated the value Tiv men put on their wives. According to a focus group discussion conducted in 2024, spouses were seen as *Kyav*, or property. With confidence, a male will call his wife *Kyav ya*, which translates to “my property.” He treated her materially and psychologically as his own possession. In addition, these were cultural customs that prevented adultery. For example, if a woman had an affair, she may be subject to *idyugh deistic* visitation, which could lead to infertility in the family (Torkula, 2004). According to warnings rooted in traditional Tiv practices documented by Akiga (1994, p.67), “...sleep with no man’s wife.” You become a man’s flesh debtor if you cheat on him with his wife”. No adult Tiv man would let his wife be the property of another, as women (wives) were the property of their husbands. On behalf of their husbands, they received visitors. According to Fyanka (2018), in pre-colonial Tiv society, a foreign visitor to a village was customarily brought to the *Orya’s* (Head of the compound) compound, where the visitor would be housed and entertained. He would naturally ask the youngest wife to bring food, bath water, and wrapping for the guest, since most seniors had a large complex with several women. The foreigner or stranger may be killed if he was discovered having an affair with his host’s wife. Foreign visitors in pre-colonial times may have experienced Tiv hospitality in this manner and believed that receiving one of your hosts’ wives as part of the hospitality package was standard practice. They may have also heard stories of a guest who got away with adultery. It is important to interrogate the centrality of younger wives to Tiv men. They were regarded as commodities of sex vibrancy and life sustenance. Their spouse kept a careful eye on them as they completed the chore of giving the foreigner food, water to bathe in, and wrappers (Focus Group Discussion, 2024). They often slept in their younger wives’ huts, according to the marital record of polygamous Tiv males. The reason for this was because younger spouses were seen as affectionate and acted as a kind of stress relief for males. They received all the necessary marital care and protection as a result. They never permitted outsiders to carry out their marital responsibilities on their behalf, even if their spouses were unable to meet their sexual requirements. Wives’ bodies were constantly monitored to prevent other males from using or even touching them. Sexually contented ladies didn’t hide anything. As a result, traditional males who had developed great magical abilities made sure that no strangers touched their wives. According to Tiv tradition, this way of thinking was intended to protect men’s supernatural abilities, particularly those of the leader of the *Orya* family. Allowing women to engage in extramarital sex had far-reaching effects. Men’s spiritual equilibrium was upset when women had sex with

strangers. Therefore, married women were led by their husbands out of jealousy. The goal was to keep certain undesirable individuals out of the marriage market so that their culturally inappropriate characteristics wouldn't proliferate across the society.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS ERASING THIS MISCONCEPTION AND THE WAY FORWARD AGAINST STEREOTYPES

The long-standing myth that Tiv men give their women to tourists for sex has negatively impacted the Tiv people's reputation and their relationships with the outside world. This review explores the psychological and historical elements that might have contributed to the development of this stereotype as well as the critical role that education and cultural awareness play in eradicating it. These fallacies have been sustained in large part by historical narratives and oral traditions from non-Tiv speakers. These stories often result from an outsider's incomplete understanding of the complexities of Tiv traditional customs. These stories, which have been passed down through the years, have the power to influence how the Tiv males are seen by others as individuals who supported emotional abuse of women. False assumptions of Tiv martial cultural practices have been produced by literary and media misrepresentations. Giving married women for canal purposes never equated to the Tiv hospitality of letting their wives prepare food and wrappers for visitors. Therefore, by investigating the nature of sexuality in the Tiv marital system from a historical standpoint, this research has dismantled this myth. In the future, combating misconceptions and prejudices about the Tiv people—or any group—will need a variety of tactics based on the dissemination of truthful cultural knowledge. Additionally, it promotes laws that will safeguard Nigerian ethnic groups' customs and fight hate speech, discrimination, and misleading information about them on a local, national, and worldwide scale. In addition to urging community efforts like campaigns and seminars aimed at dispelling myths and preconceptions about Tiv's sexuality and culture, the publication promotes appropriate online conduct.

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