

A Poem on Marriage in Hausaland

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In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

May Allah bestow blessings upon the exalted Prophet

Oh Allah, shower Your blessings on Your Prophet,

the Chosen, and members of his household and his companions all together.

Oh you people, I call upon you to come and hear.

The poem that I present has in it a question for you.

“Tell me the truth, what is causing us to suffer?”

I have seen that marriage in our land is troublesome.

Just tell me it results from our denial of the truth;

we all love to pretend!

So just who are those that love telling lies?

They are the parents of the girl [you love]. Oh, people hear this!

As soon as you see a girl that you want to marry,

they say you have to engage in courting¹ and squander your assets.

¹ *Zance*, or courting, in Hausaland entails offering gifts to the bride-to-be. As the author notes, this can become very expensive.

Things that will not be helpful [to you]

are what the parents of the girl will want, I'm telling you!

The gifts required by the tradition of "I have seen, and I want"²

are not useful to us at all.

The father of the girl has no need for these gifts.³

If he needs any of them, let me know!

Likewise, the mother of the girl has no need of them;

There's no one at all who will find any benefit from [these gifts]!

Similarly, the bride is not using them.

The truth is that even if she is using them, it is only a little;

because the moment the gifts are taken to the house, the next day,

she will start distributing all of them—

Money included, even as much as five pounds!

All will be given to beggars, I'm telling you!

² The poet is speaking of the problematic stage in the procedure of traditional marriage in Hausaland. The husband-to-be must follow the tradition called *Kayan na gani ina so* (Hausa: Things [indicating that] I have seen and I am in love). The *Kayan na gani ina so* tradition entails offering a variety of gifts to the woman, including new clothes, costly cosmetics, jewelry, handbags, etc.

³ From lines 9 to 15, the poet notes that neither the father, mother, nor the relatives of the girl will benefit in any way from the gifts offered by the husband-to-be. In the end, she starts complaining to him that she does not even have a soap with which to bathe or wash her clothes.

Bottles of perfume, even as many as a dozen,

she'll give all of them away.

As for toilet soap and powder,

they become mere toys for her, I'm telling you!

Children—even as many as ten—when they enter [the house],

none will leave without something!

This is how [the courting gifts] will be uselessly squandered. Do you hear me?

If they last long with her, give her a week!

Then she will start trouble, saying "I don't have any lotion

I don't even have any toilet soap!"

In fact, if she tells you that in the daytime,

when the night comes, it will be another story altogether!

Alas, courting gifts have become a problem, and that is

the whole reason for the death of marriages (divorce)!