**THE DOWRY OR THE TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE IN IVORY COAST**

The dowry or traditional marriage consists of the contribution of a set of goods given in kind or in money by the fiancé and his family to the parents of the bride and to the bride herself to express the tribute that the fiancé’s family pays to his fiancée’s family and to his wife and also for having legitimate children. The dowry is therefore a symbol of alliance and union between the two families. In Cote d'Ivoire, the dowry is a condition of the legitimacy of any union because it is an obligation for the fiancé to acquire this customary obligation since the girl is considered a source of human wealth by her fecundity and by her work (labor at home) before concluding the marriage. Therefore, it is important to understand the ceremony of the dowry, the physical presentation of the fiancés, and the celebration after handing over and accepting the dowry.

 In order for the dowry to take place, beforehand the fiancé and his parent must present themselves to his fiancée’s relative by doing what is commonly called the "kokoko" which means the presentation to the family of the future bride. During this presentation, liquor drinks and wine are offered to the bride's relative. Subsequently after an uncertain number of days, now follows the dowry ceremony itself. This day is a great day of joy, celebration and unity. The dowry is done in the intimacy of both families. The ceremony is held in the fiancée’s parents’ house. Two tarpaulins and chairs are erected standing in front of each other. One tarpaulin is allocated to the parents of the fiancé and his guests, and then the second opposite one is for the family of the fiancée. In between are the gifts brought by the fiancé and his family; these gifts represent the dowry. The dowry varies according to the custom of the bride. But in general, the components are a gift of liquor drinks, gin and whisky, or wine. There are also animal gifts, such as pork, beef, sheep or goat, plus groceries food products like plantain, yams, cassava, salt, etc. In addition, valuable fabrics call “Kita and wax” made from rare and expensive fabrics are offered to the father and the mother of the bride. Finally, after all these gifts and presents, a symbolic sum of money is also demanded of the fiancé. Once all the gifts are displayed in the public square, in front of the different parents, the parents of the bride must decide whether to give their daughter's hand to the applicant. During the ceremony, the bride is hidden inside her parents’ house, and she won’t come out until her parents have accepted the dowry and granted her hand to her fiancé. In the worst case, she will be kept inside of the house and her fiancé and his parents will be sent back home. Sometimes, some parents refuse to grant their daughter's hand simply because the dowry was insignificant, but this case is very rare. With the grant having been accepted, the parents publicly declare that they grant the hand of their daughter to the bride, and now she is free and able to come out. This seals the marriage, and festivities can now begin.

When the bride finally leaves the house, she first goes to her parents, who bless her with prayers and words of benedictions and protection. Then her father leads her to her husband. When leaving the house, our bride is richly dressed in traditional dress from her native region. It can be the Kita loincloth, which is made in golden colors and is adorned with gold jewels at the neck, hip and ankles. The sandals that she wears are equally matched to her outfit. Her hair is hand braided in a traditional way mixed with gold yarn and gold balls. It is in this outfit that she will hug her husband and walk to greet her parents-in-laws. She will then sit with her husband. The parents of her husband will make a thank-you speech in the place of the bride’s parents for accepting the dowry and for agreeing to have their daughter unite with their son. After the speech, the brides return together inside the house to change their clothes and wear uniforms or similar clothes, also rich as the one the bride had previously worn to mark their union and complicity. The clothes are formal and adorned with gold; it is a great day for the future brides, so they are dressed in the outfit of king and queen. After this, the party can begin.

Then all the parents and the bride celebrate the wedding; the parents of the bride offer a very delicious feast consisting of plantain called foutou, accompanied by the salty soup made from palm seed, fish and beef, plus some white rice with clear soup made from eggplant, chicken tomato and lamb. In addition, they can feast on attieke, which is made based on cassava semolina accompanied by fried fish. During this meal, everyone feels a moment of relief, and good fraternal exchanges on place. After eating well, the assembly sketch dance steps to the sound of the “tam-tam,” which is a musical instrument made based on wood and cow skin; the sound is accompanied by clapping hands to give an interesting rhythm. The couple moves to the middle of the dance floor to dance in a majestic way; those present pour banknotes on them to show their affection. Once the party is over, the bride can finally reach her home on the same day if her husband wants this. Aunts, sisters, and cousins may accompany them with songs of joy to their new home. After that, the bride will face the reality of marriage and married life alone.

 To conclude, the traditional marriage or dowry is a kind of guarantee for the future bride and an honor for her parents. But this form of marriage does not guarantee that the girl will remain married for the rest of her life because this marriage, as opposed to legal civil marriage, can be broken at any time without guarantees or protection. In general, after sealing, the traditional, legal marriage is essential and advisable to provides guarantees and protections in case of divorce or death of one of the spouses.





