The Age of Confusion: A Study of Domestic Enslavement of Women in Nineteenth Century Yorubaland

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Yorubaland was a complex collection of tribes in West Africa whose blurred territory lines, shared trade routes, and overlapping cultural traditions led to years of warfare and subsequent slavery. Explorer Alfred Burdon Ellis described Yorubaland's geography by a "dense and impenetrable forest" characterized by the Niger River and interspersed mountains located near present day Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, and Sierra Leone.[1] This vast expanse of jungle and coastline would become the backdrop for nearly a century intra-ethnic warfare, otherwise known as the "age of confusion."[2] Constant civil warfare from 1820-1900 caused competition between Yoruba nations, resulting in violent slave raids and kidnapping expeditions.[3] While these raids enslaved many women, the continuation of domestic slavery lay in established marriage and patrilineal traditions. Previous scholarship examined the enslavement of women through the separate lenses of kinship, gender, diaspora, and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. However, to gain a better understanding of why the enslavement of women progressed throughout the nineteenth century, this research paper analyzed primary source material through two the converging points—warfare and cultural traditions. This study argues that the collapse of the Oyo Empire severely impacted the domestic enslavement women in Yorubaland due to warfare and slave raids; and yet, the perpetuation of this enslavement throughout the nineteenth century was propelled by the entrenched marriage and patrilineage customs in Yoruba society.

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[1] Alfred Burdon Ellis, *The E'we-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa: Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Languages* (London: Chapman and Hall, limited, 1890), 1. See Figure 1 and 2.

[2] Temilila Alanamu, "Church Missionary Society: Evangelists and Women Labour in Nineteenth Century Abeokuta," *Cambridge University Press* 88, no. 2 (2018): 293. The phrase "Age of Confusion" is mentioned multiple times throughout early works on Yorubaland to describe the chaotic period of warfare after the collapse of the Oyo Empire. The term also appeared in Olantunji Ojo, "Beyond Diversity: Women, Scarification, and Yoruba Identity," *History in Africa* 35 (2008), 373.

[3] These dates were determined by the time period of the Oyo Empire's ultimate decline between 1820-1830, which prompted competition from neighboring tribes, and the date which British military conquest in Nigeria began to impact slave trade—1900. Reference: Toyin Falola, *Africa: Africa History Before 1885: Volume 1* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), 174-176, 428-430.

Sources and Methodology

This study of domestic enslavement builds on the growing scholarship of Yoruba literature detailing slavery, family, kinship, women, and political upheaval during the nineteenth century. Recent scholars in the field focused their studies on political and economic problems in nineteenth-century West Africa, concentrating on diaspora, warfare, and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. For example, Nigerian historian, Toyin Falola, analyzed the breakdown of the Oyo Empire and ensuing wars in his book, *Africa: Africa History Before 1885.* In his chapter centered on the Yoruba people, he argued that the downfall of the Oyo Empire led to significant demographic changes across West Africa, resulting in shifts in political power and subsequent conflicts.[4] Other historians focused on social problems within West African tribes that led to enslavement of women. For instance, in 1994, historian La Ray Denzer studied women's roles in precolonial Yorubaland, deconstructing their positions within marriage, analyzing family traditions, and gauging the influence of the economy on parental responsibilities.[5] Building on this understanding of enslaved women, Olantunju Ojo's 2008 essay examined Yoruba women's identity in the context of diaspora and Christian influence. Her study claimed that external influences deeply impacted women's domestic roles, and thus conscious identity.[6] Historian Paul Lovejoy broke from traditional scholarship by using Slave Voyages data to observe the diaspora of enslaved Yoruba people. By placing this data through the nuanced lenses of gender, location, and cost, he tracked men and women's physical movements from the interior to the coast while observing various social patterns.[7] These scholarly works explored the internal motivators and

[4] Falola, *Africa: Africa History Before 1885,* 176.
[5] La Ray Denzer, "Yoruba Women: A Historiographical Study," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 27, no 1 (1994).
[6] Ojo, "Beyond Diversity," 347-349.
[7] Paul Lovejoy, "The Yoruba Factor in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," in *Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, eds. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

external events that shaped the enslavement of women during the nineteenth century in Yorubaland.

However, unlike previous scholarship, my study will analyze two intersecting points of origin for the domestic enslavement of women in Yorubaland to gain a deeper understanding for why the enslavement of women persisted in the nineteenth century. First, the paper examines the collapse of the Oyo Empire, arguing that the subsequent civil warfare between tribes prompted slave raids and kidnapping expeditions which resulted in increased slave-trade at the interior of Yorubaland. While enslavement existed long before the collapse of the Oyo Empire, its breakdown created tension between different regions, as shifts in power caused groups like the Ilorin, Ibadan, Abeokuta, and Ijaye to re-examine demographic alliances, resulting in warfare over trade routes and territory boundaries.[8] These wars impacted the local slave networks, as soldiers sold captives for food, weapons, and personal use.[9] This argument is substantiated by primary sources such as *The E'we-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa*, written by the explorer Alfred Burdon Ellis, who detailed the raids and their impact on the Yoruba people.[10] This section also incorporates the work of Sierra Leone native, Samuel Johnson, who became a priest during the Yoruba wars and wrote *The Yoruba Speaking Peoples.* His book offered intimate details into Yoruba culture, including marriage customs, family traditions, and notes on language.[11] Additionally, historians Toyin Falola, Anne O'Hear, and Paul Lovejoy provided context for the collapse of the Oyo Empire, as they analyzed the process of political breakdown and provided data for the increased amount of women being withheld in the interior.

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[8] Anne O 'Hear, "The Enslavement of Yoruba," in *Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, eds. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 56-60. See figure 2
[9] O' Hear, "The Enslavement of Yoruba," 60.
[10] Ellis, *The E'we-speaking Peoples*, 212.
[11] Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos, Nigeria: C. M. S., 1921) Kindle.

The second portion of this study examines how embedded cultural traditions led to the perpetuation of domestic enslavement for women in Yoruba during years of civil warfare. While the breakdown of the Oyo Empire created an unstable environment which prompted warfare and subsequential slave raids, the perpetuation of enslavement was caused by an entrenched marriage and patrilineage traditions in Yoruba society. To gain insight into these customs, this study will examine primary sources such as missionary journals, traveler diaries, and anthropological notes. Missionary journals offered specific insight into Yoruba kingdoms, as missionaries living among the Yorubas noticed social norms, family traditions, local economy, and political systems. This study draws from various missionary works, including *Seventeen Years in The Yoruba Country*, written by Anna Hinderer. Hinderer followed her husband, Reverend David Hinderer, to Yorubaland in 1852 and recorded their life, mission, and specifically, the day-to-day environment during the wartime.[12] However, while missionaries were physically close to their Yoruba subjects, their journals included a specific biases due to the goal of encouraging audiences to aid in a religious cause. Therefore, to avoid bias, this study will also review a variety of journals and reports with objectives outside the sphere of religion. For example, in *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa*, Captain Hough Clapperton ventured into the northernmost parts of Yorubaland. Clapperton was raw and honest in his assessment of the Yoruba people, including intimate details of his time with different tribes.[13] Furthermore, to gauge the family customs and patrilineage traditions from an alternative perspective, this study includes British anthropological notes from Northern Yoruba territories. These reports offered very detailed summaries on Yoruba marriage customs, coming-of-age traditions, divorce,

[12] Anna Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in The Yoruba Country*, (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1873), 209.
[13] Captain Hough Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa* (London: Thomas Davison, Whitefriars, 1829).

celebrations, and more.[14] By analyzing these sources, this research demonstrates the convergence between the breakdown of Oyo Empire and embedded cultural traditions which impacted the enslavement of women in Yoruba over the course of the nineteenth century.

The historical method employed in this study of enslavement considers the limitations and biased nature of primary sources utilized. There was no written language in Yorubaland, and therefore this study relies entirely on English interpretations for the enslavement of Yoruba women. While missionary journals, anthropological reports, and travel diaries offered a first-person perspectives into the environment surrounding enslaved Yoruba women, they are not written from the perspective of Yoruba women. Further, the majority of primary sources did not provide analysis on domestic enslavement of women, including their treatment in enslavement. Instead, sources observed broad details regarding slave-trade practices, and in some cases, the roles women played in society. To overcome these archival gaps, I will include a variety of sources that observe enslavement from multiple perspectives. By analyzing this topic from diverse viewpoints, this study begins to push past the biases that exist in the archive. This historical method draws inspirations from Marisa J. Fuentes who analyzed the lives of enslaved Caribbean women in her book, *Dispossessed Lives.* Due to the limited recourses on her female subjects, Fuentes "stretch[ed] archival fragments by reading along the bias grain to eke out extinguished and invisible but no less historically important lives."[15] To gauge the impact of slavery on Yoruba women, this analysis will also "read along the bias grain" of primary sources to differentiate between the truths, prejudices, and misunderstandings in source material.[16]

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[14] British Library, "Yoruba Tribe Anthropological Notes," Nigeria: Northern Nigeria: Precolonial Documents Preservation Scheme, 1931.
[15] Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 7.
[16] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 1-12.

The Collapse of the Oyo Empire

The collapse of the Oyo Empire and the ensuing civil warfare throughout Yorubaland acted as the inception point for the domestic enslavement of women during the early nineteenth century. While outside economic factors, such as the Transatlantic Slave Trade, also created motivations for local slavery, the internal breakdown of government created tensions between tribes, incited an environment where men were more likely to capture and sell women into domestic slavery. The Oyo Empire was the largest Yoruba settlement and acted as a powerful government until its slow breakdown between 1890-1930.[17] The Oyo initially gained power from their physical location, positioned in the most northern point of Yorubaland, near the Niger river and several trade routes.[18] This location allowed the Oyo to control north-south trade, becoming the economic power-house of Yorubaland. But the Oyo's true strength was in their military conquest, as they expanded their kingdom to include surrounding territories. It is unclear why the empire collapsed, but theories range from and internal break-down of the state to a weakening of their strong military.[19] According to historian Toyin Falola, external factors also caused the empire to decline, as the British abolished the slave trade in 1807, which disrupted trade routes, forcing the Oyo to move their main economic outlet from Port Novo to Badagry and Lagos.[20] Without the Oyo to control trade and oversee territories, the Yoruba kingdoms were flung into a eighty-year period of conflict known as the "age of confusion."[21] Between 1820-1900, tribes battled over territorial boundaries, trade routes, and political power. The resulting warfare and

[17] Falola, *Africa: Africa History Before,* 174. See also Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, Chapter 3, The Rebellion of the Oyo Chiefs and Chapter 4, The Rising of Ojo Agunbambaru. Kindle.
[18] See figure 2.
[19] Falola, *Africa: Africa History Before,* 174.
[20] Falola, *Africa: Africa History Before,* 175.
[21] Falola, *Africa: Africa History Before,* 170.

raids generated a new market for local slave trade, impacting the sale of captives across Yorubaland.

The Oyo Empire was a significant slave-supplier for the surrounding territories of Yorubaland. However, as historian Ann O'Hare explained in her analysis of the enslavement of Yoruba, the immediate collapse of the Oyo caused a gap in the slave market, inciting competition between tribes.[22] Therefore, during the empire's decline in the early nineteenth century, rising tribes like the Ilorin and Ibadan competed to become the primary slave supplier in those regions.[23] Travelers living in Yorubaland during these years documented their observations of the resulting slave trade. Captain Hugh Clapperton observed the nature of slavery in the 1920s, stating, "The slaves sold to the sea coast are generally those taken in war or refractory an intractable domestic slaves."[24] And in a conversation with a sultan, Clapperton remarked, "The slave trade was the ruin of Africa; that Yourriba [Yoruba] presented nothing but ruined towns and deserted villages, and all caused by the slave trade."[25] However, as O'Hear noted, not all enslaved people were sold at the coast, as warfare and raids in Egba, Nupe, and Ekiti territories incited slave trade within the interior of Yoruba. Competitive soldiers in these regions captured people to sell for food, weapons, prisoners of war, and in some cases, seized women to be enslaved as agricultural workers and wives.[26] Missionary Samuel Johnson emphasized this type of transaction in his journal, *The History of the Yorubas*, stating, "After the possession of a rifle became a general thing, every war chief trying to get a few for himself. For this purpose many

[22] O'Hear, "Enslavement of the Yoruba," 56-58.
[23] O'Hear, "Enslavement of the Yoruba," 58-59.
[24] Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, 95.
[25] Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, 102. Interestingly, Clapperton made these observations shortly after the fall of the Oyo Empire; and while the ensuing civil wars had not yet taken hold of the country, according to Clapperton, villages were in already in ruin.
[26] O' Hear, "The Enslavement of Yoruba," 60.

had to sell their slaves and slave wives."[27] The treatment of enslaved people as commodification existed before the collapse of the Oyo Empire; however, the outbreak of war increased the need for funds, transforming the enslaved person's economic significance.

During the last gasp of the Oyo Empire, during the competitive scramble for land, sources revealed more women were being held back at the interior for local slave trade. This enslavement originated with the civil warfare playing out at the interior, between the Ilorin, Ibidan, Ekitis, Ado, and more. While women and children were typically transported to the coast for sale, it is likely that a combination of factors, including slave raids, cultural pressures, in addition to the British suppression of trade at the coast, slowly increased women's value at the interior. While women were sold as agricultural laborers and used as debt pawns, northern tribes, like the Illorin sold women for marriage. For example, in Robert Campbell's 1861 *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland* he remarked that "a less troublesome way of procuring a wife, with many, is to resort to the slave-marts of Ilorin at once, money in hand, and make their choice."[28] In this succinct analysis, Campbell summarized the cultural and political motivations driving for enslavement present in Yoruba society. Historian Paul Lovejoy's research supported the theory that more women were being held back for internal slave trade during the nineteenth century. By analyzing David Eltis' data on the Yoruba diaspora, Lovejoy surmised, "The proportion of adult females declined from 30 percent in the last part of the eighteenth century to 21 percent after British abolition, while the proportion of children increased from 22.4 percent to 34 percent. The proportion of adult males remained largely the same."[29] This did not suggest that female slavery

[27] Johnson, *The History of the Yoruba*, loc. 8809/11898 Kindle.
[28] Robert Campbell. *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland: An Account of a Journey Among the Egbas and Yorubas of Central Africa in 1859-60* (Published by Thomas Hamilton. New York, Philadelphia, 1861), 58.
[29] Lovejoy, "The Yoruba Factor," 47.

decreased as the century progressed, but less women were leaving West Africa—potentially due to warfare and cultural reasons.

As the century progressed, the British began to notice the increased amount of slave trade in the West African area, and according Falola, the Church Missionary Society established a permanent presence at Port Lagos in 1851.[30] While these missionaries observed day-to-day life in the tribes, they also took note of the violent slave raids plaguing Yorubaland. For example, missionary David Hinderer remarked on the end of the Ibadan wars in 1855, stating, "The Ibadan war has at last terminated, and the warriors have come home with great riches, with hosts of slaves…Though not many are sold down to the coast except to Port Novo by way of Abeokuta, yet is the price high."[31] According to Anne O'Hear, this success was a result of slave-raiding period where the Ibadan fought for control over territories and retained enslaved captors in the process.[32] Anna Hinderer and her missionary husband were stationed in Abeokuta during Ibadan conflicts with the Ijaye, and noted the violence that resulted from those raids. In 1872, Hinderer remarked, "Occasionally there were severe engagements of war," more frequently they watched the enemy "plunder property and kidnapping people."[33] She further emphasized that it was "a war without many battles" but rather "a state of hostility, treachery, lying in wait for stragglers, and capturing prisoners for slaves."[34] While these primary sources offered important insight into the violent nature of slave trade during Yoruba's civil wars, they do not specifically mention women. Many missionaries and travelers observed their surroundings, but did not draw broader cultural connections. While some noticed the sale of women as wives, they were not aware that

[30] Falola, *Africa: Africa History Before*, 176.
[31] O 'Hear, "The Enslavement of Yoruba," 59.
[32] O 'Hear, "The Enslavement of Yoruba," 58-59.
[33] Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, 216.
[34] Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, 216.

the internal slave trade was a more noxious problem for women than men, as highlighted by Paul Lovejoy's data analysis. In hindsight, by examining Yoruba wars during the nineteenth century in conjunction with their marriage and patrilineage traditions, it is clear that the slave trade severely impacted the women throughout Yorubaland.

The Continuation for Domestic Enslavement: Marriage and Patrilineage Traditions

This study finds that although warfare acted as an inception point for the increased internal slavery throughout Yorubaland—marriage and patrilineage traditions provided the motivation for the continued enslavement of women throughout the nineteenth century. In Yorubaland, the marriage institution signified more than a financial partnership or love bond, as it assumed in Western cultures. A marriage ensured patrilineal power, family lineage, and a method for political alliances. Due to Yoruba's heavy emphasis on marriage, the tradition played an integral role in children's "coming of age."[35] Families often made marriage arrangements for their unborn children, and young girls then spent their youth preparing for the role of wife, mother, and mistress of the house. For example, missionary Samuel Johnson observed, "It is generally the duty of the female members of the family to look out for a wife for their male relative. Girls are generally marked out from childhood as intended for a particular young man, with or without her knowledge. "[36] British anthropological notes further explained, "A young man having chosen his bride will approach his father and ask for assistance."[37] The minor discrepancies between these sources, regarding who selected the bride, is likely due to the slight cultural differences throughout the kingdoms. Johnson summarized customs from the Bight of Benin to the Niger, while the British anthropological notes analyzed the Kaduna region of

[35] British Library, "Anthropological Notes," 15-20.
[36] Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas,* loc. 2474/11898 Kindle. See also, Ellis, *The E'we-speaking Peoples,* 201.
[37] British Library, "Anthropological Notes," 45.

Yorubaland. Regardless, both sources—even with an outsider's perspective—emphasized the significance of the marriage in Yoruba. Through the detailed customs, marriage was engrained within society from childhood until to death. According to historian Olantunju Ojo's, the marriage institution had the potential to elevate a man's social status, make political alliances, and fulfill patrilineal traditions.[38] And yet, these customs did not benefit women, as enslaved women had no autonomy over decisions within domestic enslavement.

The Yoruba marriage tradition was first and foremost an expensive affair, placing a substantial financial responsibility on men. Marriage traditions required men to pay a dowry fee to the family, in exchange for the labor they were losing in their daughter.[39] According to Major Claud MacDonald's account of marriage in his expedition journal, "A man wishing to take to himself a wife, proceeds to the father of his desired bride, to whom he pays goods to the value of about twenty-five shillings" in addition to hosting a feast for the bride's parents.[40] Furthermore, British anthropological notes suggested boys often began the process to pay for the dowry when they separated from their families and established their own farms.[41] Historian Olantunju Ojo elaborated on these financial struggles in her 2008 study of Yoruba women, *Beyond Diversity,* which claimed that in "female-deficient areas" the cost to marry was often more than men could afford, and led to men pawning themselves into a temporary servitude to pay dowry fees.[42] Ojo also noted that the cost of marrying depended on the economic makeup of the region, as there were often more enslaved wives and polyamorous relationships in wealthier districts like Ibadan,

[38] Ojo, "Beyond Diversity," 349-356.
[39] Ellis, Alfred Burdon *The Yoruba Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (Westminster: Nicholas and Sons, 1903), 182.
[40] A. F. Mockler Ferryman and C. R. Day, *Up the Niger: Narrative of Major Clause MacDonald's Mission to the Niger and Benue Rivers, West Africa* (London: George Philip & Son, 1892), 38.
[41] British Library, "Anthropological Notes," 17-18.
[42] Ojo, "Beyond Diversity," 360.

Oyo, Abeokuta, Ijebu, and Ondo.[43] But beyond the dowry fee, men often were required to pay for elaborate wedding ceremonies. Peter Marris observed in his study *Family and Social Change in an African City,* that the cost of the wedding ceremony was almost double that of the dowry.[44] The economic framework of Yoruba society hinged on a man's ability to provide a house, secure a wife, and establish his lineage. This was an immense financial responsibility under normal circumstances. However, during wartime, financial burdens may have limited a man's ability to pay a dowry, prompting him to look towards less traditional channels for a wife.

The patrilineage custom was an additional aspect of the Yoruba society complicated by the civil wars. Sources revealed that a vast majority of Yorubaland practiced patrilineal traditions—meaning the family power passed through the men within the household.[45] Therefore, the goal of marriage was to produce male heirs that would continue the inheritance line of men. Scholar William Schwab analyzed the inheritance traditions in his article, "Kinship and Lineage among the Yoruba." He emphasized that while lineage could be outwardly recognized through facial markings, oral stories, and chants, lineage was clearly expressed through examples of inheritance.[46] For example, explorer Ellis Arthur Burdon explained in 1903, "When a man dies his sons divide all his property between them. The daughters have no inheritance in their father's house, but they divide between them the property of their mother."[47] In Johnson's reference to inheritance, he mirrored this analysis with one exception: "If his

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[43] Ojo, "Beyond Diversity," 356.
[44] Peter Marris, *Family and Social Change in an African City: A Study of Rehousing in Lagos* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1961-1962), 45-46. Marris notes in his footnotes that it was almost impossible to understand the average cost of dowry fees across Nigeria, as there is not enough data. He did give a sample of 28 pounds in Abeokuta, and in Lagos, 20 pounds. While this sample is interesting, it doesn't take into account family wealth, geographical economics, or inflation.
[45] William B. Schwab, "Kinship and Lineage Among the Yoruba," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 25, no. 4 (1955): 354-356.
[46] Schwab, "Kinship and Lineage," 354-356.
[47] Ellis, *Yoruba Speaking Peoples,* 177.

children are females, they will pass on to the male relatives, unless the daughters are capable of seeing the farm kept for their own benefit." While Johnson observed circumstances where married women exercised inheritance rights, only in rare situations when there were no surviving male benefactors would a woman inherit his property or belongings.[48] Schwab further summarized that land was the primary economic resource in Yoruba and that the patrilineage tradition determined land be passed from father to son.[49] During the nineteenth century, this foundational belief in land as inheritance acted as a subconscious motivator for tribes warring over territory lines. Land equated to power, and therefore, kingdoms that controlled tribes and trade routes not only gained land for themselves, but for future generations. Therefore, central patrilineal traditions placed enormous pressures on men to secure wives, whether through enslavement or traditional channels.

Throughout Yorubaland, successful marriages would not only benefit a man economically, but they could also enhance his political and social status in the tribe. Therefore, polygamy was a universal method to conveniently assemble a large harem of wives to elevate a man's social standing. During the nineteenth century, polygamy increased due to a combination of factors relating to the Yoruba civil wars. First, slave raids and slave marts made it easier to acquire wives in mass quantities without undergoing the traditional customs of marriage. However, it is also likely that tribes in competition for territory control wanted to show off their power, and the most attention-grabbing method was a large amass of enslaved women. For example, Ojo described, "During carnivals, when Yoruba chiefs marched with their followers, the community was less interested in the seniority of chiefs than in the size of their

[48] Marris, *Family and Social Change*, 15-21.
[49] Schwab, "Kinship and Lineage," 357.

contingents."[50] While polygamy was more common with the upper class of Yorubaland, missionary Daniel Bowen analyzed the Kroo people of Guinea in his journal, *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labors.* Bowen noted that, "Polygamy is universal in Africa," continuing, "Kings, nobles and rich men have large numbers of wives, and even the common people sometimes have two or three."[51] Bowen's analysis suggested that polygamous marriages extended throughout the whole of Yoruba society, explaining that the tradition was "interwoven as it is with the whole fabric of society."[52] Expanding on the social justification for the polygamy, Robert Campbell observed in his book a *Pilgrimage to My Motherland*, that Yoruba kingdoms embraced multiple marriages because they advanced a man's level of respect among peers.[53] Marriage was an important social marker for men and the number of wives equated to political power, which is why royalty would sometimes have hundreds of women in their harems.[54] By incorporating more wives into their households—whether through traditional marriage or through enslavement—men furthered their lineage through male heirs, increasing their influence in society.[55] The outside influences of warfare paired with the internal social pressures, likely increased the polygamy custom over the nineteenth century, and the subsequent enslavement of women.

The archive remains largely silent towards Yoruba women's opinions towards their own domestic enslavement, and yet missionaries and travelers observed various differences between free and enslaved women. During the nineteenth century, women were frequently captured during war raids, their status as a free women quickly transformed due to wartime violence. For

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[50] Ojo, "Beyond Diversity," 356.
[51] Thomas Jefferson Bowen, *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labors in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa, from 1849 to 1856* (Nigeria: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857), 304.
[52] Bowen, *Central Africa*, 342.
[53] Campbell, *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland*, 57-58.
[54] Denzer, "Youruba Women," 5. Also see, Campbell, *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland*, 93-94.
[55] Ellis, *The Yoruba Speaking Peoples*, 174-181.

example, Robert Campbell remarked on the status of a free wife, "Wives procured according to the first of these methods [paying a dowry] although not regarded as slaves, are practically as much so as the other, for like them, at death of their lord they become nominally the wives of his eldest son."[56] Privileges increased with status, as Clapperton noted a widow in Wawa who was not only wealthy, but perhaps the "richest person in Wawa" owning a thousand slaves.[57] And, according to an 1973 Anthropological study on Yoruba women's work, free women had minor privileges in life, such as running trade ventures and working in the market.[58] While the processes of enslavement removed these rights, primary sources such as Samuel Crowther and Samuel Johnson believed that women still retained certain privileges in domestic enslavement. Crowther claimed the domestic enslaved person could sell their wares in the market for personal gain, in addition to the allowance personal free time.[59] And Johnson strongly emphasized that "any slave-woman taken as a wife becomes ipso facto a free woman."[60] However, these sources overlooked that an enslaved woman was the property of her enslaver, as Barber M.A.S. emphasized in *Village Life in the Yoruba Country,* stating that an enslaved woman's children were not her own "but the property of her owner."[61] A patriarchal system enabled men to exert a clear amount of dominance over his enslaved wife, as he could sell her, give her as a gift, or even offer her up as a human sacrifice.[62] During the nineteenth century in Yorubaland, women faced a

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[56] Campbell, *Pilgrimage to My Motherland*, 59.
[57] Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, 81. It is likely Clapperton gathered these facts via rumor, and so they are probably exaggerated.
[58]Niara Sudarkasa, *Anthropological Papers: Where Women Work A Study of Yoruba Women in the Market Place and Home* (Ann Arbor: Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, 1973), 39-47.
[59] J. Frederick Schön, W. Russell Bascom, and Samuel Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther: Who, Accompanied the Expedition Up The Niger, in 1841, in Behalf of The Church Missionary Society* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1842), 187-188.
[60] Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, loc. 5962/11898 Kindle.
[61] M. A. S. Barber, *Village Life in the Yoruba Country; from the Journals and Letters of a Catechist there & Describing the Rise of a Christian Church in an African Village* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1857), xvii.
[62] Ojo, "Beyond Diversity," 360; Example of sacrifice: Francis Shields, "Palm Oil & Power: Women in an Era of Economic and Social Transition in 19th Century Yorubaland (South-Western Nigeria)," (Serling: Scotland, University of Sterling, 1997), 192.

lack of overall access to personal rights, and the ongoing warfare significantly diminished a woman's self-autonomy by subjecting them to enslavement.

Conclusion:

This study contends that the downfall of the Oyo Empire significantly affected the enslavement of women within the Yorubaland, primarily due to warfare and slave raids. However, the persistence of this enslavement during the nineteenth century was driven by deeply rooted customs related to marriage and patrilineage within Yoruba society. By analyzing the intersections between warfare and cultural traditions, it is evident that the Yoruba society treated women as a commodity during the nineteenth century. While the commodification of women existed before the collapse of the Oyo Empire, nineteenth century civil warfare created an environment where men captured and sold women for domestic purposes. Traditional analysis of Yoruba women observed essential factors such as gender roles, identity, diaspora, and marriage. However, placing the enslavement of women within the context of Yoruba civil wars unveils the external motivators for the system, such as the breakdown of the Oyo Empire, tribe competition, and slave raids. And yet, the enslavement of women in Yorubaland cannot be understood without the analysis of entrenched cultural traditions, such as marriage, patrilineal beliefs, and polygamy. Marriage was the cornerstone of Yoruba society, as men could gain social and political hierarchy from unions. However, warfare during the nineteenth century shifted significance away from traditions and towards the simple acquisition of a wife through slavery. By examining two converging points of origin for the increased enslavement of women in Yorubaland—warfare and cultural traditions, this research analysis gained a deeper understanding of why this enslavement persisted in the nineteenth century.

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Appendix

Figure 1



Yorubaland is traditionally located in the southwest region of present-day Nigeria. However, additional tribes that fit into the cultural and linguistic definition of "Yoruba" may stretch into modern Benin, Togo, Ghana, even reaching far down into Guinea.

Figure 2



The boundaries of Yorubaland are classically defined by a blurry red border which have been determined by linguistic and cultural trends. However, tribes outside the boundaries, such as the Ewe People and the Kroo people of Guinea, also share a similar umbrella language and family traditions, and are therefore used in this study.