



Fig.011 Illustration showing a native woman with her child on her arms preparing food in front of the hut. Unlike a modern woman confined in the household, native women are out and about gathering food in the forest and leaving their smaller children with the elders. If their husband is not of their liking, they are free to return to their parents.

Personal Freedom Among the Natives of Higher Africa

Native lovers can keep a date "in the cover of night" in a special hut which is "an assignation place for the young bloods of the camp". As they grow older "women-folk marry into a different family group" but they always retain "access to their parent group" and they will "always get protection and aid from it" in case for example of a divorce. There are certain women known as sisters "who never leave" the parent group and since all women are of great value for procuring "all the fruit and vegetable food to the camp", a parent group "will permit the marriage of one of its girls into a strange group, only on condition that the latter can supply a girl" in exchange. It should not be inferred here that natives "barter their marriageable girls". On the contrary every girl follows "her own natural inclinations" and "select the boy of her heart from the family group decided upon". Also "sometimes happens that a couple become so devoted to one another that they will not be parted even if the youth cannot provide a girl in exchange". Some other time "there are cases of elopement when the young man is too poor to give compensation for his bride". Even in this circumstance "the decision rests with" the woman (Schebesta 1933). Until she marries "she can sleep with anybody she likes (Duffy 1984).