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Discontinuities, Continuities and Emerging Patterns in Wedding Activities among the Yoruba People of Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

Weddings¹ are definitive social realities in many societies. They are traditional, cultural, economic and legal entities that symbolically punctuate social existences of individuals, families and societies. Given social dynamics of many societies as driven by endogenous and exogenous factors, wedding trajectories are likely to be changing with implications for social relations, cultural existences and development tendencies that must be well understood. This article, therefore, using ethnographic methodology, examines continuities,

¹The word wedding, and not marriage, is adopted in this article because our interest is the ceremony and not the relationship or union which is an outcome of wedding

discontinuities and emerging patterns in weddings in Ibadan, southwestern Nigeria as a window to understanding weddings within a broad anthropological context. Social Action theory and Symbolic Interactionism were adopted while purely qualitative research approach was adopted. Particularly, methods of data collection included extended participant observation and in-depth interviews (IDIs) in 5 local government areas of Ibadan. 10 weddings were observed while 15 IDIs were conducted with purposively selected 2 registry officials, 2 *Alaga iduro/Alaga ijoko* (wedding MCs/coordinators), 2 event planners and 9 wedding participants. Data were thematically analysed and presented as narratives and ethnographic summaries. Findings suggest weddings in the social context experience change resulting from internal re-creations and sociocultural intercourses within innovative dimensions aimed at celebrating marital unions in innovative ways. This paper contributes to data and literature on anthropology of wedding and family in postcolonial Africa and beyond.

Key words: *Discontinuities in Yoruba weddings, Continuities in Yoruba weddings, Emerging patterns in Yoruba weddings, Weddings, Yoruba culture, Ethnography, Social change, Ibadan, Nigeria*

Introduction

Different types of wedding exist in societies. There are low-key, medium-key and elaborate weddings (Akanle, Ademuson, Adegoke, & Oguntinyinbo, 2019; Atolagbe, 2012). Though weddings have become "big business" in many societies including in the United States of America (U.S.A), Japan and Spain for instance (Edwards, 1982), it is important to examine "why". Why is this a widespread phenomenon and how have changes occurred in these weddings? This article adopts an African context of Ibadan, southwestern Nigeria through exploratory and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology. This was to examine continuities, discontinuities and emerging patterns in wedding activities to contribute to knowledge on social change in context through the remit of wedding practices. Elaborate and grand weddings are common largely because they somewhat give positive symbolic social appreciation and command respect.

Generally, regardless of types of wedding, glamour and fanfare are common characteristics of wedding (Ogunjuyigbe & Adeyemi, 2003). In fact, the more glamorous the wedding, the more appreciated and fulfilled the celebrants and their families feel even in harsh economic environments like Nigeria. Weddings thus become not only contexts but also systems through which people enhance and legitimize their status

(Atolagbe, 2012). Outlandish attires known *asaso-ebi* (*same* fabric for kin/family identity), *fila* (caps for males) and *gele* (head-gears for females) of *same* colours and patterns, assorted meals and drinks, and relatively large number of guests in an electrifying musical atmosphere (Tade & Aiyabo, 2014) are common features of African weddings particularly among the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria (Akanle, Ademuson, Adegoke, & Oguntinyinbo, 2019; Akanle & Adesina, 2015; Ogunjuyigbe & Adeyemi, 2003).

It should be noted, however, that we are not drawing an uncritical lineal parallel between state of the economy and wedding in the research setting, the intention is to demonstrate the cultural imperatives and social exigencies embedded in weddings in context of social change. We acknowledge that, historically, social problems have existed with social progress and social activities have not been hampered by state of the economy. Moreover, we do not intend to have a fallacious impression of constructing Africa as a monolithic category of a community of the poor. The study that informed this article was conducted in Ibadan and it is important to interrogate weddings within their more fundamental and existential socio-economic context. This article seeks the understanding of social change in Africa especially in relation to family formations through weddings.

Previous researches on social change have paid attention to the question of characteristics often attributed to traditional system, traditionalism and interfaces with modernity thereby refusing to identify tradition with fixism and uncovering of the dynamic process of the traditional society (Galland & Lemel, 2008; Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Although, we acknowledge that traditionalism and tradition may hinder change and innovation (Mazzocchi, 2006), in this article, we reckon that traditional experiences and realities of societies are not immutable and that such societies are far from being trapped or condemned to the past (Galland & Lemel, 2008; Mazzocchi, 2006; Inglehart & Baker, 2000). It is therefore the navigational process of change that are important and must be understood and this is the focus of this article through which we adopt wedding practices as demonstrative narratives of process of social change (Gurumyen, Akanle, Yikwabs, & Nomishan, 2020). Hence, in this article, we do not consider traditional/ism as merely of the ancient past but resilient norms and values within which people relate and define their actions as important to their social systems and development (Akanle & Ejiade, 2012).

Also, we do not equate the traditional with the mythical but modal codes of action that are punctuating and moderating actions and identity safeguards. In Modernisation theory, traditional family types and attendant celebrations gradually transform due to increasing complexities within and without the cultural systems and patterns (Arowolo, 2010). According to Alaba (2004), for example, no sooner had modernity (literacy, profound cultural diffusion, internal multiplications and complexities, capitalism, individualism, and so on) developed in Yoruba society than changes began to accentuate and hitherto rigid cultural systems began to change and these changes are particularly observable in the family. Rather than complete abandonment of traditional family norms and values however, convergence of the traditional and modern family and pre-family celebratory elements are observable. These bring to bear creative innovativeness in family structural systems as observed in intra and inter-familial celebrations of weddings (Fasonranti & Owogbemi, 2010; Cherlin, 2004). The strategic mix and systemic changes in forms and elements throw up important continuities, discontinuities and emerging patterns that need to be understood within social change. This article, by focusing on the Yoruba marriage systems, contributes new data and knowledge, fresh interpretations and literature in terms of dynamics in marriage systems.

Social Change in Weddings: Literature and Theoretical Review

Common accounts of social change in developing societies often trace drivers of change to Western culture and European modes of civilisation that successfully outgrow African cultural heritage (Arowolo, 2010; Cherlin, 2004). Popular and common narratives of change in Africa usually maintain traditional African cultural activities waned in significance and became overshadowed by foreign norms and activities that are seen to be more sophisticated and more modern (Cherlin, 2004). This is the crux of modernization account and this account has thrived in both Global North and Global South since early twentieth century. This account accentuated in the Evolutionary Models of societies as popularised in Rostow's arguments and challenged by the Dependency School. What these schools have in common as much as they may be different is in their *struggles* to explain *change* and developments in developing societies especially of Africa and Latin America. They were/are concerned with how best to explain African cultures and changes as observable in their social institutions and activities.

Common in the modernist traditions are accounts that African cultures only become modern to the extent that they adopt western values and approaches to doing things including in the families. African cultures are thus constructed as too traditional, primordial and irrational and until they are westernised, they cannot be modern or developed. Western culture within modernist accounts is thus regarded as *Category A* civilization while African cultures and activities are seen as primitive, traditional and should be jettisoned for the modern/western/advanced/sophisticated ways of doing things. This orientation was prevalent and still common till date and in some sense has aggravated with *the CNN Effects* driven by globalization and accentuated through cultural homogenization and institutional convergence. According to Arowolo (2010), effects of western civilization and culture on Africa are in several phases and the causes of societal change may be categorised into economic, political and cultural.

These three elements play significant roles in driving and jumpstarting social change and determining course of social life (Al-Khateeb, nd) particularly in the family and its associated activities like weddings. Of importance, however, in contemporary societies are the roles of technology in driving social change and Africa has benefitted, and suffered, from the impacts of technology on social life and social change (Akanle, Adesina, & Akarah, 2016). The roles of technology can be seen in internet, smart phones and social media- Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and so on. Social media has penetrated in significant parts of social life of Africa and it has left indelible marks on social change and cultural processes of institutions (Akanle, Fayehun, & Oyelakin, 2021) including marriages and weddings. This is particularly so in how mates are selected, how weddings are performed/celebrated and how families are formed. Social changes and their drivers have affected wedding performance significantly and they have continually called traditional wedding performance to question. Couples, their kinship and social networks are increasingly becoming more dynamic under the influence of local and external social elements, cultural artifacts, technological values and hybridised customs and activities. Also important is the symbolic meanings change processes give in Africa.

The symbolic meanings determine how changes are perceived, accepted, and related to, including in weddings. These symbolic meanings are serious determinants of adoption of change processes. They also influence how people accommodate and interpret change and associated actions (Mead, 1934). Attached symbolic meanings largely

determine course of actions of people and this is more so in *expensive* weddings as public demonstration of family formations, social class, identity and familial roles and status. In societies where western and foreign values and identities are appreciated, foreign weddings and elements will likely be attractive and incorporated as needed change elements. Class differences and identities notwithstanding, therefore, families and individuals may struggle to make weddings classic through trans-geographic cultural and class infusions.

While common modernist accounts of social change are often towards celebratory African cultural displacements by western values, it is very important to examine elements of change in wedding *celebrations* with case study in Africa to see the trajectories of displacements and retentions. This article, therefore, interrogates ramifications of social and cultural angles of weddings in Ibadan, Nigeria as implicit accounts of ramifications of social change. Our primary concern is understanding the meanings that people attach to wedding *celebrations* and elements through symbolism in manners that demonstrate continuities and discontinuities on account of local and global drivers of change. With symbolism, social realities are constructed as social forces that moderate interactions with others through shared symbols. Weddings involve a set of actions that carry meanings and are done to symbolise the marital union of two individuals and families and these actions vary across cultures.

Regardless of the actions taken, these actions are only meaningful in the social and cultural constructions of the weddings. Thus, to understand any phenomenon relating to weddings, one must recognise the influence of social and cultural constructions of weddings. Thus, actions people take in weddings are social actions. Weddings therefore involve actions and behaviours of different people that have meanings bound to the context of the wedding. Thus, all actions taken in a wedding ceremony are meaningful to those partaking in them and also in the context of the wedding. Usually, the goal of marriage is to create a union. The differences in form and conduct are hinged upon the differences in meanings and interpretations of related actions. The spending of huge sum of money, for example, to organise elaborate weddings even in economically poor underdeveloped contexts may not necessarily be without symbolic meanings that are not monetary. It is an action, driven by the action of others and prompted towards the reactions, sanctions and reinforcement of others. As such, spending huge

amount of money on wedding may thus not necessarily be seen as waste until the contextual perspectives of actors and others are aggregated.

Hence, shared symbols form the basis of interactions in the social system and shared meanings of the symbols determine the nature, course and outcomes of wedding practices. In weddings, symbols are myriads and figuratively endless. Symbols include, for example, *aso-ebi*, words, items, songs, time, types, places, foods, representations, cars, number of attendees/crowd, number of days of celebration, ideas and so on (Akanle, Ademuson, Adegoke, & Oguntoyinbo, 2019; Atolagbe, 2012). All these are codified, intrinsic and expressive meanings that moderate the social processes. Roles of the bride and the groom are particularly symbolised at weddings. They are symbolised by the fact that they are treated differently and specially from others in the wedding. They are the centre of attraction and popular affection at least for the day(s). (In) actions and behaviours are also symbolised. For example, in weddings among the Yoruba people, the tradition of prostrating before the bride's family is symbolised as a show of respect by the groom's family. In western contexts, the exchange of rings symbolises a seal of contractual obligations of the spouses. The presentation of "eruyawo" (bridal load) by the groom's family is also a symbol of value and token of recognition of the value of the bride. In ancient weddings among the Yoruba, on the bride's entry into her husband's house after public wedding ceremony, water is poured on the bride's feet. This symbolises peace and tranquility during her stay in the matrimonial home. In contemporary weddings, the (in) actions taken have symbolic meanings just as the nature/type of wedding chosen is full of meanings.

Research Method and Process

This article is based on a larger study conducted in Nigeria. The primary location of the study was Ibadan, in the southwestern Nigeria. Ibadan is a traditional but modernising city and it is among the largest cities in Africa. Historical accounts of Ibadan are very rich and relevant (Akanle, Adesina, & Akarah, 2016). For instance, Ibadan was the administrative centre of the old Western Region beginning from the colonial era. It is also the current capital of Oyo state. Ibadan is among the few cities in Africa with high presence of higher institutions with at least fifteen higher institutions including University of Ibadan- the first university in Nigeria and among the first in Africa. Ibadan is a relatively simple cosmopolitan city with different ethnic groups. The relative and simple

cosmopolitan nature of Ibadan enables moderate cultural hybridity of the city relevant to this article. Effects of many higher institutions also affect the cultural vibrancy, social creativity and foreign values attraction in the city with attendant effects on sociocultural choices as they concern wedding. Generally, Ibadan is a rich mix of modernity and tradition making it very relevant for the current article. The study was conducted in Ibadan metropolis- Ibadan urban. The choice of this setting was based on the comparatively high patronage it enjoys relative to weddings. Three metropolitan local government areas were purposively selected for the study due to the prevalence of wedding activities and sociocultural dynamism of the areas. The selected local government areas were Ibadan North, Ibadan North West and Ibadan South West local governments.

The research design adopted was exploratory. Our study population included active wedding participants with rich knowledge of the events. A total of 10 weddings were purposively selected and attended based on relevance and approval. For instance, there were cases where wedding organisers and couples refused their wedding been studied for the research. In such instances, we simply excluded them. We stopped data collection at 10 weddings due to emergence of patterns and data saturation to avoid redundant data gathering. The methods of data collection were in-depth interviews (IDIs), autoethnography and six months' participant observation. Our participant observation covered all aspects of the weddings beginning from engagements, registry, church and mosque to reception which marked the exit point of wedding ceremony in the context. Inclusion criteria involved consent to study wedding, context of study and relevance. A total of 15 in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted. The IDIs interviewees included 2 court registry officials, 2 event/wedding planners, 2 *Alagaiduro/Alaga ijoko* (engagement coordinators/wedding MCs) and 9 wedding participants who belong to the kinship and social networks of the *couples*. While some interviews were conducted at wedding venues, mostly at engagements and receptions, others gave appointments for interviews at other places like at kin's houses. Bashorun, Onireke, Eleyele, Akobo, Alegongo, Agodi and Agbowo were primary areas of interviewees' recruitment.

Data gathered were content analysed and presented as ethnographic summaries and interpretive narrative (interpretative phenomenological analysis [IPA]). Throughout the study, close attention was paid to ethical issues and respected the principles of anonymity, confidentiality, freedom from harm, informed consent, beneficence, non-maleficence and right of withdrawal.

Data Analysis and Results

This section presents the data gathered from the fieldwork as analysed. In writing this section, we decided to keep our analysis as direct and as simple as possible so as not to confound the original worldviews of the study participants since originality of data is as important as the originality of analysis. This is very important as it is common for researchers to sometimes over narrate and over interpret data to the extent that researchers' opinions, and not the subjects', become the findings and focus of study².

Continuities and Discontinuities in Weddings

This section presents findings on subsisting and discontinued *performances* in weddings in the context of study. The essence of this section is not to give boring historical details of traditional Yoruba wedding *performances* but to provide ethnographic dynamics of weddings over time among the people. This section is however presented in a way that connects periods and activities performed in the weddings over time to make them accessible to global audience. From the findings, it was observed that while some activities are still enduring, some others have changed. Research participants revealed that so much of wedding related cultural activities native to Yoruba people have faded and are no longer parts of the wedding. Other cultural activities have been enduring and some others though still in existence, have been modified. It was found that contemporary weddings among the Yoruba people have reduced the influence of family members in marriage to mere formalistic approvals of selected mates/future spouses. A new category of mate selection now prevalent and dominant among the people is that in which individuals concerned personally choose their own mates which is customarily against earlier activities of betrothal and arranged marriage. A major discontinuity is the choice of venues used for wedding ceremonies. The engagement ceremonies used to take place at the bride's father's house or family house but due to factors such as urbanisation, event

²We adopted the current method of data presentation in this section for clarity, simplicity and robustness. It is also to give seamless understanding of research issues. The adopted analytical approach also allows original demonstration of cases of co-existence of old and new weddings in manners that clearly show practical hybridity which is one of our major contributions to knowledge in data and analytical frameworks on the issues.

centers/neutral locations/buildings, halls and open fields are commonly used for engagement ceremonies especially among the rich and the upper middle class. Some persons however still use their homes.

While some people still use their homes and other small places, the venues are sometimes big to cater to large number of guests both the invited and the gatecrashers/uninvited. The venues are also often lavishly decorated as demonstrative element of kin/familial affluence. Another aspect of discontinuity is observed in the prayers for the bride and groom. Items such as kola nuts (*obi*), alligator pepper (*ata're*), bitter kola (*orogbo*), honey (*oyin*) and other traditional totems were being used at weddings by older family members to pray for the couple in the observed weddings but other actors like *Alaga iduro* (MC) and even planners are now playing key roles. Those who traditionally used to perform the function were mere audience at contemporary engagement ceremonies. In many weddings, Holy Bible and Holy Qur'an are used as additions in blessing/praying for the couples. A major continuity with discontinued elements is the *eru-iyawo* which refers to sets of items grooms' families bring to engagement venues as part of requirements to get the bride's hand in marriage. Mix of the following items were observed to be commonly included in the *eru-iyawo*-- sugarcane, tubers of yam (numbers and sizes depend on status of families in marriage), engagement ring, wrist watch, pairs of shoes and bags, fruits, aso-oke, bag of salt, unsewn cloth materials, one big suitcase, honey, engagement Bible or Quran, crates of soft drinks, bottles of wine, bag of rice, keg of palm oil, and keg of groundnut oil.

Bride price is another continuity that carries discontinued elements. The bride price is now usually returned to grooms' families immediately it is paid to brides' families. Returning of bride price symbolically communicates to the groom and his family the bride is not being sold like an item to the grooms' family. This is to protect the bride from abuse as some families/grooms may consider the bride a purchased item to be used/abused like every other item if exorbitant bride price is collected and not returned. In times past, bride prices were usually given to the wife or collected by her family members who would then share them in the family as agreed. This practice has however changed significantly in contemporary time and terms. Returning of bride price means a lot in current practice as brides' parents place more emphasis on caring for the bride/daughters rather than placing price tags that can be symbolically misinterpreted by the groom and the family thereby leading to the abuse of the bride/s in the marriage later on. It should however be noted that

this symbolic gesture of returning bride price “owo-ori” does not suggest brides were abused in the past because of the payment of bride price and that they are no longer abused today because of the return of bride price. It simply suggests more attraction to bridal care rather than financial gains.

The subject of eru-iyawo is further captured through the worldviews of our interviewees. According to an interviewee, items in eru-iyawo may vary depending on a number of factors including class, religion and influence of the kin and social networks of the celebrants. According to an interviewee, common items in eru-iyawo may include:

Tubers of yam (isu), pieces of dried fish (Eja osan), baskets of fruit, honey, crates of canned or bottled soft drinks, crates of malt soft drinks, cartons of bottled water, bottles of non-alcoholic wine, cartons of fruit juice, bag of salt, bag of rice, umbrella, keg of groundnut oil, big suitcase containing clothes, shoes and hand bags including aso-oke fabric, sets of lace with gele and 2 sets of ankara, wrist watch, earrings and chains, biscuits and sweets, engagement rings for bride and groom, Bible(for Christians), Quran, praying mat, praying kettle, rosary, white hijab, veil and tasbir (for Muslims).

Figures 1-3:Eru-iyawo



Fig. 1: Neat presentation and packaging of eru-iyawo

Source: *Fieldwork*



Fig. 2: Eruiyawo- Tubers of yam and keg palm oil

Source: *Fieldwork*



Fig. 3: Eruiyawo neatly wrapped

Source: *Fieldwork*

Figures 1-3 show some eru-iyawos presented at engagement ceremonies. As we observed at the engagements, due to this trend of packaging the eru-iyawo, it is hard to decipher the actual items contained therein. However, in figure 2 tubers of yam and a keg of palm oil are seen and in figure 3, briefcase and some food items are well packaged in ribbons and exotic wrapping papers. Common items in eru-iyawo exist as driven by tradition and modernity as already explained above.

A 45-year-old female Alaga-iduro/Alaga-ijoko further observed in Agbowo:

In the olden days, before one can marry a girl, you cannot just meet someone beside the road and start marrying each other. If a man sees a woman he wants to marry, he will tell his own family members and they will go to the house of the girl to ask for her hand in marriage. The bride price they pay for the wife in Yoruba land, they usually give it back to the family of the husband. But in the olden days, whatever the husband's family brought, they will not return it. In the olden days, they will veil about three women before bringing out the original wife. In the olden days, they used to pour water on the feet or on the head of the wife before entering into the husband's house. Today, after the reception that is the end. Before too, the family house of the bride is used for the engagement. Today, fields or hall are used. Some traditional things are not usually included in the eruiyawo (bridal load) today. Those things include the things used to make prayers for the couple like, kola nut, bitter kola, dry fish, schnapps drink and others. There are some new things like bags of rice and beans, Bible, Quran

ring and it is the family of the bride that will request from the grooms' family what they want.

Another 45 years old married civil servant vividly described wedding experiences of the past emphasising the discontinuity of many vital elements:

Let me tell you one thing, when we are talking about the earth it is not certain. It is dynamic in nature. Likewise, we human beings, there are some things that change due to economic reasons. You will see the way they celebrate wedding in the olden days is quite different from the way it is being done today. Firstly, the parents of the wife will collect the bride price but nowadays, something like that is not occurring again. Secondly, when the wife is going to her husband's house, we witnessed it. We would be singing in the night and we would follow the wife to her husband's family house and members of the husband's family will be singing in response as well. You know the kind of things, in return, they would release the wife, and the family of the wife will follow the wife to her husband's house, those people will sing and will follow her in the night with lantern and songs when they reach the place, those people will, give them money, they will entertain them.

In terms of dressing and food preparation, a female interviewee noted the continuities and discontinuities evident between the old and new forms of weddings among the Yoruba people.

Well, I feel that so many things are no longer practiced. And some of these things are the traditional parts of it. When we were studying Yoruba in secondary school, they used to tell us about *Ekunijawo* (bride's chant) and it's like a song to release the wife to the husband. But since I have been going to weddings, I have not really seen it. Again, I think before it is *Oleku*³ (very traditional style attires) they used to wear for traditional wedding but now it no longer *Oleku*⁴. Then again there used to

³The interviewee used *Oleku* here to refer to contemporary Yoruba traditional wears as against the usual use of *Oleku* as a slang or an expression of surprise. The interviewee used *Oleku* in reference to dress during the interview.

⁴It is important to give the proper context of *Oleku* as mentioned by this interviewee. *Oleku* as a concept and celebration/entertainment/fashion movement is a recent invention of traditional culture captured from the adaptation of Professor Akinwumi Ishola's novel *O le ku* (can be literally translated *This is serious*) to a movie by Tunde Kelani (Mainframe). In contemporary times *Oleku* refers to Yoruba traditional wears/attires of the late 1960s and 1970s- like *Iro* (wrapper) and *Buba* (blouse) and *Esiki/Aghada* (small/big wide male wear). The blouse, for instance, had short sleeves and the wrapper was tied short, reaching above the knees. *O le ku* movie somewhat

be *Alárinà* (the Go-in-between) that will make the wife and husband meet themselves. Then before, it is the *Iyáwo-ile* (the wives married before the current bride) people that use to do the cooking of the food. Now it is the caterer/event planner that collects money to cook for the wedding. It is just time. As time goes on some things just go with time.

Another discontinuity is present in wedding date selection. In the traditional times, the dates were fixed by the family-- parents and extended family. In the contemporary times however, the children are involved in wedding date selection and sometimes even have more influence on the date of wedding. Government registries are also involved in wedding organisation nowadays. According to a government registry official who has tremendous experience in conducting weddings:

One major thing I know has changed is that before, it was only the traditional wedding alone that used to be done. But today there are different combinations of wedding. Some people do traditional and court, some people do court alone, some people just go to church so the idea of doing engagement alone is dead.

The data above demonstrate opinions of people/interviewees about continuities and discontinuities in Yoruba *cultural activities* they observe in developments of continuous evolution of Yoruba traditional weddings. A new introduction to weddings is the *Alaga-iduro/ijoko* (wedding MC)⁵. They professionally and humorously moderate events at the weddings paying close attention to tradition and modernity in manners that expectedly add glamour and organisation to the weddings. They coordinate events from beginning to the end with recourse to directives from key family members (especially from bride's families). While coordinating events however, *Alaga-iduro* and *Alagajoko* (MCs) also look for opportunities to maximise their economic gains by systematically collecting monies from the *couples* especially groom and his kinship and social networks. It was observed that *Alaga iduro* uses different strategies to get money from grooms' families at different times during engagement ceremonies. These monies are different from her appearance charges/fees. The amount she is able to collect depends on the status of the families involved, the length of time allotted to her and

revolutionized a return of *Oleku* fashion into Yoruba culture and has since become a point of reference in contemporary fashions/celebrations that attempt to resonate a hybridity of the *new* and the *old*.

⁵Even though it may be argued that wedding MCs are not entirely new additions to weddings in Africa as supported by archival data, the *modus operandi* of current *alagaiduro* are new and their charges are departures from identical activities of the past.

the willingness of celebrating families to part with money and yield to her antics. The reason for introduction of Alaga-duro into *engagement* ceremonies among the Yoruba is to add fun and glamour to the events and the caliber of the Alaga-iduro also determines the social rating of the weddings whether interesting, classy or boring and ordinary.

Emerging Patterns in Weddings

Emerging patterns consist of new features not inherent in weddings activities among the Yoruba but are gradually carving a niche of relevance for themselves in weddings activities. We found major emergent trends in aspects of weddings' ceremonies. Professional decorations of the wedding venues are trends subscribed to and gradually gaining prominence. This is professionally known among event planners as the ambience. That is creating ambience of choice for the wedding. Rather than just leave the wedding venue bare, decorations and props are set up to enhance the beauty and class of the venue of the event/celebration. For the engagement ceremony, most observed weddings were designed with traditional mats and cane chairs and calabashes, for instance, in attempt to recreate cultural and traditional atmospheres. The wedding venues are also embellished with lights. Another emergent pattern discovered is the use of colour schemes in weddings ceremonies. Colour schemes refer to the use of particular colours as dominant colours in weddings ceremonies. In fact, colour codes are indicated on Wedding Invitation Card as institutionalised wedding elements. Starting from the decoration of the venue, to the table clothes spread, the dresses of the couple, the bridal train, the groom's men and even to the *asoebi* chosen, it is common for attendees to follow same colour codes. The choice of colour codes is at the discretion of the couple, their friends and sometimes the event planners.

The use of cakes in weddings has been around for a while now and has been used in other ceremonies like birthdays and anniversaries. However, an emerging pattern in cakes' utilisation at weddings is the styling and aesthetic dynamics that is being applied to making of wedding cakes. Cakes in weddings are no longer merely square or conical, rather, from observed weddings, cakes are now made to represent different items and objects from everyday life like pillows, bags, briefcases, towers and others. The styles sometimes depict couple's interests, dreams, aspirations and values. Meanings are also ascribed to colours and materials used for cakes depending largely on the interests and wishes of

the couples and their kinship and social networks. At other times however, they are for pure aesthetics and special effects for glamour. Another emerging pattern gradually becoming a norm is the seeking the services of musical groups that are paid to perform and entertain the guests while the ceremony is underway. Although this was also part of traditional wedding ceremonies when the services of traditional drummers' services were being employed with fees charged, the services of the professional musicians are now more common and becoming very expensive.

It was observed also that gradually, an industry of wedding service providers is emerging. This industry is serving the needs required in weddings. With the continued existence of weddings, photographers, decorators, caterers, musicians, rental services, event planners, Alagaiduro and other types of conventional MCs, like celebrities, comedians and radio/television/social media personalities are carving niches and making a living for themselves during the wedding ceremony reflecting increased commoditisation and commercialisation of wedding activities even in tough economic situations. A married female caterer, who frequently cater at weddings, explains at Bashorun:

All these decorations and cakes *kosinighayen*⁶. You just organise your chairs and that is all. When it is just traditional marriage, there was nothing like cakes. We now have it that wedding receptions are more elaborate. Some people still have other things after reception party. You now see them (couples) changing clothes, some people can change clothes up to two- or three-times during engagements. I have seen one on TV that by the time they changed into new attire, it was Indian apparel. Yoruba people then started dancing to Indian songs. People are just coming up with different ideas. All these new ideas being introduced into weddings, from my own perspective, they are gradually making our traditional values, the core values, the reason why we do these things to fade off, to be eroded. The engagement ceremony is more of entertainment now. Ideally, engagement should be the traditional formalisation of the union where the cultural values are really expressed. Now you find that there are spokespeople (alagaiduro and alagaijoko). Alagaiduro represents the groom's family and alagaijoko represents the bride's family.

⁶Were not available in the past/olden days.

A26 years old interviewee with the opinion that the emerging patterns and trends make traditional culture richer explains:

We don't have a choice about the emerging patterns. As the world is moving, we are moving with the world. But something good is that our culture is mixing and it is not dying totally. These new ways of doing things just help us to make our culture richer and more interesting.

An Event Planner at Oshuntokun Avenue shows emerging patterns to include video coverage of events and the thematic organisation of receptions:

There are lots of new ideas. As a planner, people come to me and they say they want their wedding settings to be like a palace, to be like an Indian setting, they make lots of requests. But what we do for them is to try to create a whole world for them in their weddings and make sure their desires are consistent across the whole weddings from foods to decorations to cakes and all.

It was found that some of the new patterns and trends are aimed at enhancing wedding activities. Though they are being integrated and being seen as part of the overall wedding process, they are yet to attain full symbolic statuses among the Yoruba people. We found that the increased exposure of people through education, social media, radio, television and newspaper and interaction/travels to other parts of the world have infused innovative dimensions to ceremonies of their country of origin. These include exposure to various types of mass communication – television, video programmes, and satellite dishes (Al-Khateeb, nd). Mechanisms of mass communication through which people of contemporary times get informed play key roles in exposing them to new weddings. Social media which is birthed from information and communication technology and globalisation has become a tool of influence in the creation, popularisation and sustenance of new trends in weddings. We found that people upon getting married share their wedding pictures on social media like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and Tik Tok, among others. Some even create special dedicated websites for their event through which events' information and images are shared/publicised. Sometimes, live streaming of wedding events is organised for maximum coverage and admiration of significant and non-significant others. From these social media spaces, individuals have access to the pictures and learn new trends even though

they were not present at the weddings. According to a 36 years old interviewee:

The world is changing, and as the world is becoming more global, new ideas will keep coming. Five years from now, all these ones of today will become obsolete as new things will come up again. The world is changing, people are moving, and so as they are moving, they see one thing there and bring it. People don't really like doing things the way it has always been done. The way things are now, with all the exposure, more people are learning now and everybody can read and have access to internet, therefore, people come up with 'oh, this one has done this, I want to do something different'.

According to a registry official:

Nowadays, young people are exposed to a lot of things, they read different things, they are taught different things in school and their level of thinking and operation is higher than the older generation. So the energy and vigour of youth are always making them want to try new things and also, they like showing that they are young and they easily call old activities 'old-school'. So doing things anew makes them bring up all sorts of things. Sometimes I wonder where they get the ideas from.

Another interviewee (guest at wedding) opines increasing commercialisation and commoditisation of events, weddings, as money making ventures drive the emerging patterns as service providers/event planners aggressively innovate and bring new ideas to impress their customers and to also compete with other service providers/competitors. According to a guest at a wedding:

One thing I see as a reason for all these changes is that they are inspired by money that all these party planners and bridal stores want to make. Since they know that people like trying new things a lot, they make a lot of different products and ideas that people will pay for to make their weddings wonderful. Because, I know that photographers charge as much as one million Naira (USD \$650.77⁷) just to snap pictures in (one day) wedding alone, and all these decorators can charge up to two million naira⁸ just for decoration (about USD\$1,302).

⁷At about 1,535.88 naira to 1 USD\$ as at 02 April, 2025

⁸Values adjusted to reflect the current pricing and exchange rate realities

So, to make sure their customers get satisfaction, they bring different ideas and to also compete with other people.

From the findings, it can be seen that despite being key actors at the weddings and doing things in new ways, it takes conscious efforts, calculated attempts to incorporate new ideas and patterns at weddings. Drivers and emerging patterns are also internal and external and they are very dynamic and multifactorial in manifestation and consequences.

Discussion of Findings⁹

As an enduring activity, weddings among the Yoruba people have encountered some changes (Atolagbe, 2012). Though many traditional wedding *activities* are still being practiced, a lot of their features are changing. These changes become more appreciable and obvious when weddings of nowadays are compared to weddings in the past. In the traditional Yoruba society, most marriages were arranged by the parents on both sides. Ogunjuyigbe and Adeyemi (2003) noted the importance of the family in the selection of marriage partners. However, this article shows that couples and their kinship networks are determinants of mate selection. This is however not to suggest that parents do not play key roles in the approval of suitors as parents still give, at least, approvals and the right of approval is still with parents. The contents of *eru-Iyawo* have also changed showing a continued practice with changed/changing elements.

Traditionally, the contents of the *eru-iyawo* were used to offer prayers by the elders in the family of the couples. But these days, the contents are made up of modern things like umbrellas and malts. Even though the symbols of *eru-iyawo* may have changed, it is still practiced and it is very symbolic with deep contextual meanings even in changing times. The payment of bride price also follows this pattern with the returning of the bride price to the husband's family. Weddings in general, especially in Nigeria and among the middle and upper classes particularly, have created commercial corridors which have made rooms/opportunities for event planners, makeup artists, *alagaiduro*, location designers, photographers, caterers, event centres and so on.

⁹This section articulates findings based on data but in line with literature and theory. Even though we could not interview the couples directly, on the day of wedding due to busyness, family members and other key actors interviewed and studied gave indicative and implicative data that are relevant in our discussion and conclusion.

Event centres, halls and garden owners, for instance, now make a fortune from renting out their places for receptions unlike the olden days when the houses of the parents were used.

The factors responsible for the emerging patterns in wedding ceremonies have been hinged on various elements that perpetuate change in society. Largely and generally, emerging patterns are attributed to *modernisation* and westernisation and as found here, through local and foreign forces, leading to creative and innovative cultural hybridity in wedding settings. Being educated and westernised meant the adoption of ideas and values from the developed countries (Fasonranti & Owogbemi, 2010).

Conclusion

This article contributes to understanding of social developments in the context of change. Through the research that informed this article, we build on existing knowledge and contribute something new through integration of what is known and new original data from the field in context of wedding in a developing country. Through this article, new data and analysis contribute new knowledge important for behavioural change and formulation of policies, practices and programmes in remit of social development. Weddings continue to endure through times as functional aspect of culture and social existence. This endurance is however not without change. In this article, we examined weddings in Ibadan metropolis, southwest Nigeria. Our findings show that dynamic, creative and innovative weddings take place in Ibadan and the changes driving the nature and developments in weddings are motivated by internal and external factors. While the weddings retain some of their unique cultural elements, new elements are constantly introduced due to socio-cultural, modern and economic subjects related with kin, their social networks, globalisation and service providers. Everyone and everything in the wedding space compete to drive change through continuity, discontinuity and hybridity as emerging patterns. This portrays uniquely dynamic and evolving original patterns as measure of cultural and critical/sensitive progress in times. Despite many social and economic problems in Nigeria, spending huge amount of money on weddings is common and often not necessarily seen as wastage. Rather, such spending is seen as a once in a lifetime obligation that must be satisfied/celebrated as big as circumstances can permit.

Weddings demonstrate and represent cultural values and ideals that people feel they must celebrate as measures of success and culture. This is why *the businesses/enterprises associated to wedding* are booming in Ibadan and Nigeria. A very important contribution of this article is in the need to understand social change in Nigeria using wedding ceremonies as window. This is to aid understanding of the dynamics in weddings in Africa as not outright jettisoning of traditional ways of life on the continent but systematic infusion of different cultural elements. This is in manners that show and drive hybridity, new forms and originality for social progress and systemic preservation in the face of necessary changes. This, we have done through ethnographic/qualitative study of wedding activities in Ibadan, Nigeria.

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