

This is who we are and why!: Ethnography of weddings in Ibadan, Nigeria

Olayinka Akanle^{1,2}, Adefolake Olusola Ademuson², Olufunke Olufunsho Adegoke²,
& Kazeem Olakunle Oguntoyinbo²

¹Research Associate, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities,
University of Johannesburg, South Africa

²Department of Sociology, Faculty of the Social Sciences,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Email: yakanle@yahoo.com

Abstract

Background: Wedding ceremonies celebrate marital unions of two individuals/families in accordance with socially sanctioned arrangements. Among the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria, weddings of various forms exist. Elaborate and relatively grand weddings are common among the Yoruba people but studies are insufficient on these weddings. More attention is thus needed to understand the trajectories and ramifications of these weddings especially within the socio-economic conditions and rapidly changing social environments that have implications for population and development. This article is therefore an attempt to describe contemporary marriage ceremonies among the Yoruba in Ibadan, Southwestern Nigeria and the meanings associated with the ceremonies. The article is a detailed ethnographic narrative of Yoruba marriage processes.

Data Sources and Method: Primary and secondary data were gathered. For the primary data, qualitative research method was used. Data collection methods were participant observations (10 different wedding venues) and 15 in-depth interviews. Interpretive research approach through interviews, observations and pictures were used because of their capacities to extract reliable contextual meanings and implicative elements of social realities. Secondary data were gathered from journal articles, books, newspaper clippings and reliable internet sources. Data analysis was done through content analysis of texts and pictures.

Results: Findings reveal very original and dynamically creative ways of celebrating weddings and significance of such weddings among the Yoruba people with implications for better understanding of Africa's socio-economic and cultural systems, population and development.

Conclusion: Weddings are significant social realities in context. While they precede family formation and traditionally crucial, they are both physical and cultural just as they are systematically symbolic and demonstrative of familial and sociocultural statuses and class in Africa. Weddings in the context are indication and legitimation of identity and existencies and these have strategic implications for social change, cultural systems and population.

Keywords: Ethnography, Wedding ceremonies, Yoruba culture, Ibadan, Social change

Introduction

In many African societies, social transitions are accorded significance with attendant ceremonial necessities to legitimize cultural elements and consolidate social order. The attendant ceremonial necessities are commonly known as rites of passage (Otite, 1991, Otite and Ogionwo 2006). Rites of passage are systematic instruments of maintaining order and protecting social institutions and values for the maintenance of social identities and institutions. They are also sometimes agencies and instruments of social control and (de)legitimation of actions and inactions. Processes and significance of rites of passage are however dynamic and must be

sufficiently understood for sustainable understanding of social systems and human groups especially in Africa. Groups and societies have unique rites of passage- based on age or other factors for instance- and how these rights are marked signifies important, but hitherto, poorly understood elements of people and society particularly in Africa. Recent studies to help in understanding important Africa's unique cultural rites, like weddings, are also few.

Rites of passage often publicly dramatize and validate changes in people's status (Kendall 2008) in families and societies. Generally, rites of passage can be seen as means of moving an individual from one

stage to another and such movements involve change to new attitudes, values, norms and ethos towards new social environments that are usually valued (Ajibade, 2005, Otite and Ogionwo, 2006, Skolnick, 2009). A crucial element of rites of passage is ritual (Kalmijn 2004) and these rituals are often ceremonial for social attractivity and demonstrative significance for institutional perpetuation. Ceremonial forms exist across cultures, societies and civilizations. However, rites of passage vary from societies to societies and so are their processes and significance. Hence, cultural and socio-moral drivers, rationale and justifications of rites of passage differ across societies and should be continually studied and documented given their social dynamics.

Wedding ceremonies are typical of rites of passage in many African societies. Weddings signify rites of passage from childhood/youthhood to adulthood. Weddings are significant because they signify demographic shifts into maturity and socio-cultural shifts and promotions from singlehood/immaturity to marriage/maturity. Weddings are open display of arrival and responsibility that announce the success of the individual and families. They also indicate successful socialization up to that point and prospect of future successes in the socialization process. Weddings are, in Africa, activities beyond the individuals but families and they are agents of both unity and divisions. For social control and social survival, weddings are crucial. Weddings are status issues and they are important, particularly, because they herald family formation and societal and group perpetuity. They are legitimations of family tree perpetuation and societal sustainability.

Family as the bedrock of society and the most fundamental institution, at least in Africa (Otite, 1991), is very important and this is partly why weddings remain important entry point to the very strategic institution of family. As important as weddings are however, there are no written rules in many parts of Africa specifying how elaborate or otherwise weddings should be celebrated. What most societies specify is the importance of weddings and values are instituted to protect the family and encourage weddings. Yet, discussions around degree of elaborateness of weddings are common issues among families of intending couples. In many instances, stress around how and why weddings should be celebrated are common and can even determine the extent of success of the eventual families in terms of families of orientation and procreation. Also, developments before, during and after weddings have implications not only for the couples but the larger families and the societies. As central as weddings are to family consummation and

formation among the Yoruba people, studies are very few on the subject and available ones also dated (Edwards, 1987, Edwards, 1982, Ekundare, 1969). There is thus the need to understand trajectories of weddings in Africa to have enhanced recent knowledge of associated issues and ethnographic studies are relevant in this case. Moreover, while studies exist broadly on families and marriages in societies and Africa (Otite and Ogionwo 2006, Kendall 2008, Skolnick 2009, Akanle, Adesina and Nwaobiala, 2016), current qualitative studies are needed on weddings in contemporary Africa to contribute to understanding of social change and defining characteristics on the continent relative to important institutions and existences. It is against this background that this article contribute recent data and literature on weddings in Africa. This article examines how weddings are celebrated among the Yoruba people in Ibadan to contribute new data and literature. It also documents the significance of weddings in African societies through the case study of Yoruba people in south-western Nigeria as a major traditional yet fast modernizing group in Africa. The Yoruba people are also among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria with elaborate affinity for weddings as a social definition of being.

Literature review

Wide differences exist in ways and manners weddings are celebrated in societies (Kalmijn, 2004, Leeds, 2002, Becker, 1973). Marking the official commencement of marriage, weddings of various degree of elaboration exist and they may be simple or elaborate depending on the class, perspectives, worldviews, culture and environment of the celebrants (Leeds, 2002) According to Leeds (2002), general underlying elements of a wedding can be tightly-bound, naturally-occurring, publicly celebrated and widely-documented. Socio-cultural context however largely influences how weddings are marked and what they connote (Baron and Byrne, 1987, Kalmijn, 2004). Traditions and customs somewhat determine what weddings mean and how they are celebrated (Skolnick, 2009, Kendall, 2008, Kalmijn, 2004, Gusfield and Michalowicz, 1984). Weddings provide social spaces for demonstrating values, norms, ethos and cultural models of society. Particularly, weddings provide situations in which cultural under-standings of marriage are publicly shown to aggregate values and drive conformity to the system (Dunn, 2004).

Weddings provide and display standards and ideal images of social statuses, relational rhythms, generational verbal and non-verbal instructions and behavioural patterns reinforcements and sanctions. For example, these are sometimes codified in the

forms of explicit verbalizations in wedding vows and speeches (Edwards, 1982, Edwards, 1987). Weddings acts are symbolic, ritualistic and rhythmically patterned for social systems' maintenance. Weddings reveal both cultural understandings and also help the process through which society norms and values are reproduced and perpetuated the societies (Edwards, 1982, Dunn 2004). According to Kalmijn, (2004) weddings are far more than ordinary expressions of joy, satisfaction and happiness demonstrated as they also serve socialization purposes for not only the couples and their families but also the entire society of the old and the young. This is why many yet-to-wed individuals look forward to their wedding days and parents always encourage their children and wards to celebrate weddings.

Weddings thus provide public access to the basic values of society relative to families and responsibilities (Edwards, 1987). Weddings also pronounce, openly, legitimacy of marriages, families and their unborn children. In many societies, the most sustainable approach to establishing and conferring legitimacy on children and spouses is consummation of marriage through weddings. Children born out of wedlock and socio-culturally demonstrative weddings therefore sometime suffer illegitimacy complications. According to Tuzin, (2009), weddings, as marriage rites, commonly rely on civil and religious authority to approve and sanctify unions of men and women and justify parentage of children born of the marriage. In Africa, ceremonies are not just celebrations for fun. They hold critically central places and values in African social systems and they rhythmically punctuate social life. According to Meekers, (1992), unlike wedding ceremonies in Western societies, African marriage/wedding ceremonies are complex and value laden with many embedded meanings commonly brought to fore only within socialized actors' social relations.

For De Coppet, (1992) opines in some nonwestern societies with extensive parental influence on mate selection, wedding preparations are intensive and very ritualistic. Many families in such societies construct weddings as socio-cultural announcements of successes and celebrations of accomplishments. Weddings in such contexts are thus both symbolic and constructive of family relations and existences (see also Meekers, 1992). The Yoruba people are very rich in culture and traditions and celebrating this cultural heritage is a norm among the people (Atolagbe, 2012). Among the Yoruba people, weddings are special practices and are marked in tandem with deep-seated culture and tradition (Alaba 2004, Atolagbe, 2012). Traditionally, there are three major stages observed in celebrating marriage/weddings among the Yoruba people. These

are: early intimation, formal Betrothal (isihun) and the wedding/marriage (igbeyawo) (Atolagbe, 2012).

A vivid account of a typical Yoruba wedding is found in the work of Atolagbe, (2012). According to Atolagbe (2012) participants in a typical Yoruba wedding normally include: the bride and the groom, parents of the bride and parents of the groom, or any close aunt or uncle representing any of the parents who may be deceased, siblings of the bride and groom; grandparents of the bride and groom; relations such as cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces and household members, friends of the bride and groom; colleagues, neighbours and all informed acquaintances, wives married into that family and all in-laws of the family, spokeswoman (or rarely a spokesman) for the bride's family -'Alaga Ijoko' (that is sitting chairman) and spokeswoman (or spokesman) for the groom's family -'Alaga Iduro' (that is, 'standing chairman'), any priest or religious/traditional representative who comes, as one of the categories of participants mentioned earlier and doubles partly as an officiating minister.

Priests are usually not invited in the capacity of officiating minister at such a wedding, but are usually called upon to perform such rites along the line. Dynamics and elements of the wedding however also depend on interests, class/status, dispositions, religion and location of the wedding/celebrants. Materials commonly used in Yoruba weddings (traditional) include (according to Atolagbe, 2012): 'oyin' (honey), 'aadun' (local corn cake), 'obi' (kolanuts), 'orogbo' (bitter kola), 'Ata wewe' (alligator pepper), sugar, salt, the Holy Bible (or the Holy Koran), water, wine (optional for some Christians), assorted drinks, goat(s), or a cow, wedding rings, and the bridal gifts of yams, fruits, drinks, cash, a box or suitcase of wears and so on but is noteworthy that the items are and symbolic (see also Ekundare 1969, Okediji and Okediji, 1970). Given the social change in African societies, there is the tendency for weddings among the Yoruba people to have changed over time and it is important to examine the trajectories of possible changes in wedding in this society.

Methodology

This article is part of a larger study conducted in 2014. The study was qualitative and descriptive. This research approach was adopted given its suitability in unraveling deepseated social relations, social processes and socio-cultural elemental forces of realities of human interactions and existences (Babbie, 1986). The study area was Ibadan. Previous studies did not focus Ibadan and failed to appropriate the rich social elements of Ibadan in the studies of weddings. Of all Yoruba cities, definitive blends of traditional/modern cultural characteristics exist in

Ibadan even when evaluated relative to other Yoruba cities like Abeokuta, Ife, Ado-Ekiti or even Lagos. While Abeokuta, Ife and Ado-Ekiti for example are also Yoruba cities, none of the cities can rival Ibadan in terms of traditional and modern blend as evidenced in the historico-modern and traditional co-existentialities. Hence, while weddings are celebrated across all Yoruba cities, the systematic and purposive choice of Ibadan is in place.

Ibadan is located in south-western Nigeria. Ibadan is cosmopolitan but predominantly occupied by the Yoruba people. Ibadan was the centre of administration of the old Western Region since during the British colonial rule. Ibadan is said to be the largest town in tropical Africa and was one of the new nineteenth-century Yoruba city states founded as a consequence of the political crises, wars and migrations of the century (Falola, 1985, Falola, 1991). Ibadan is a city with a rich blend of modernity and tradition making it very suitable for this study. It is the capital of Oyo state- one of the thirty-six states of Nigeria. Ibadan is commonly regarded as being among the largest original and surviving indigenous cities in Africa. Ibadan is rich in culture and tradition but with its fair share of social change. It is also commonly known for its large presence of higher institutions including University of Ibadan, Lead City University, The Polytechnic Ibadan and School of Nursing, Eleyele. Ibadan is a veritable ground to examine changes in socio-cultural practices. Ibadan metropolis contains the urban areas in Ibadan and the study was carried out in the urban contexts.

The population of study was purposively drawn from different parts of Ibadan. The population comprised participants at wedding ceremonies. Relevant research issues were observed at selected wedding ceremonies. The in-depth interviewees were main actors at the selected wedding ceremonies. They were participating individuals in wedding ceremonies. Efforts were made to as much as possible include participants with social aptitude of and affinity with the issues at the wedding ceremonies. Even though it may be argued that the wedding venues are not too suitable for study, we were able to detach ourselves and interviewees from the events in focused manners since research was

our objective and we were able to conduct interviews away from the venue to avoid distraction. Hence, we were able to control and manage the contexts in manners that we were able to collect empirical data even with the background celebrations. For the observation however, the day of the wedding was a huge opportunity to observe needed issues.

We did not interview the couples and the parents as they were too busy to be interviewed but they were observed and we got information on related issues concerning by proxy through kin. We did not include traditional rulers, the presumed custodians of tradition because our interest was particularistic to the wedding at hands not direct distant traditions. We were also of the opinion that the kin and people we interviewed were able to provide needed data beyond even what traditional rulers can provide. 10 different wedding ceremonies were observed across Ibadan metropolis. Inclusion of these weddings was to allow us to sufficiently capture the wedding socio-cultural and existential landscapes of the study area. We decided to stop at 10 wedding ceremonies due to data saturation and since we have covered the nuances in the weddings. Recruitment of participants and weddings was purposive based on relevance and approval of celebrating families.

At least one wedding ceremony was studied in every of the urban Ibadan. The rural areas were not included in the study because they may not provide sufficient dynamics of interest. Interviews and observation were largely based on the availability of the wedding and the willingness of the wedding organizers to allow their weddings to be studied. 15 in-depth interviews were conducted to add interactive and conversational dimensions to the observed weddings. The 15 interviewees were decidedly diverse in composition. Interviewees included: 2 registry officials, 2 event planners, 2 alaga iduro/ijoko (traditional/modern Masters of Ceremony/Coordinators) and 9 guests at weddings. Some of the interviews were conducted at wedding venues while some interviewees gave appointments for interviews at other places they preferred. Below is our data collection matrix:

Observations	No	Locations
Court wedding	5	Onireke, Agodi, Gate, Iwo Road
Engagement/traditional wedding	5	Bashorun, Agbowo, alegongo, akobo, ring road
IDIs	No	Locations
Registry Official	2	Onireke, Agodi
Events Planner	2	Oshuntokun, Bashorun
Alagalduro/Ijoko (Wedding MCs/Coordinators)	2	Agbowo
Wedding Guests	9	Sango, Eleyele, Samonda, Gate, Alegongo, Akobo,

Source: Authours' Fieldwork: 2014

In order to optimize the reliability and validity of data collected, consistent data analysis was adopted. Qualitative data analysis was therefore done. This was to bring out the life and meaning of data gathered. Pictures, actions and voices of research participants and contexts were comprehensively captured for analysis and all these were qualitatively analyzed. The in-depth interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Content analysis of pictures and gathered voices was done and presented in this article as textual narratives, ethnographic summaries and images. Ethical considerations were factored into the study throughout. Ethical issues of anonymity, non-maleficence, confidentiality and non-inducement were respected throughout the fieldwork. All our interviewees allowed interviews freely and approvals were collected before weddings were observed.

Findings

This section deals with data analysis and presentation of findings from the fieldwork according to the objectives of the study. The focus of this section is therefore on forms/how weddings are celebrated and significance of the weddings among the Yoruba people in Ibadan.

The hows of weddings: textual and pictorial analysis

Meanings of weddings are attributed to differing perspectives and viewpoints of participants based on the degrees of success of their socialization process within the cultural systems. There is no rigid worldviews among participants. Weddings are largely seen as rituals for uniting two individuals and families who decide to form a relationship/family. Weddings among the people are also not just social activities but socio-religious obligations. Based on findings from this study, most people take weddings very seriously. And, such people engage in spiritual and religious consultations before celebrating their weddings. The intending couples or/and their parents and/or other kin usually consult spiritual leaders and/or entities to protect the day and future of the weddings. Often, many intending couples and their kin consult spiritual entities for soothsaying and prophesy about the wedding. Weddings are therefore usually public accreditation of spitiually sanctioned consultations. This is more so as divorces are not socially approved in the social systems (Ekundare, 1969). Weddings are somewhat, processes of fulfilling divine guidance in family formations and they are demonstration of faith.

Weddings are entries to new roles in family relations this is in alignment with the fact that weddings are meant to publicly dramatize and validate changes in a person's status (Kendall 2008). While the new weds are celebrating their marital union, their family members are also celebrating their transition into inlawhood. This also lends support to Otite (1991) who stated that the primacy in weddings is to create new social ties, or families (spouses and in-laws) that provide a setting for important sexual, economic, and educational activities (see also Johnson, 1960). Weddings are also media of publicly displaying a marriage for approval and this is reiterated by (Baron and Byrne, 1987, Kalmijn, 2004) who stated that weddings are publicly celebrated event. And the degree of celebrations demonstrate sense of fulfillment, class and important values within specific cultural systems. Most of our interviewees opined that their celebration of weddings are a means of tanksgiving to God for sparing the lives celebrants and those of people present. This is why prayers and songs of thanksgiving are regular features on the agenda of all the weddings we studied.

Based on findings from our observation, different wedding styles punctuate formalization of family consumations in the social space/Ibadan. There are existential stylistic cultural blends of religious, civil and traditional weddings in the context. Civil weddings are done in marriage registries and they have foundational basis in western marriage cultures. The religious weddings include Islamic (Nikkai) and Chrinstian weddings –commonly called Church/White wedding because they are celebrated in church using white wedding gowns/robes. Religious weddings are done according to the provisions of Islamic and Christian religions. It is noteworthy that however, that even in the face of the foreign wedding forms- civil and religious-traditional elements remain key in wedding celebrations. Traditional weddings include what is commonly known in the context as introduction and engagements. During the introduction and engagements, families of intending couples visit their extended families and traditional rites are performed. The important thing to note here is that there is systemic order in the weddings. While everyone intends to have religious weddings- Nikkai and white weddings- and many people love civil/legal marriage, these are usually after the traditional wedding. The traditional weddings come first and are usually of less publicity compared to the civil and religious. While the religious and civil are common, they only

traditionally become sanctioned and legitimate if they are done together or after traditional rites/weddings. It is during the traditional weddings that families, extended meet and perform important traditional rites and actions. It is also during traditional weddings that extended families get to meet, express supports and approvals and familiarize. The religious and civil are therefore somewhat amplifications of the traditional. The traditional somewhat legitimizes the religious and the civil. The civil and the religious however have important significance. While the religious give spiritual elements into the weddings, the civil/registry/court weddings give legal backings to the weddings. The civil is particularly important where couples want to have legal backing for the union. For many women, this gives them protection against men's infidelity, flimsy divorces and increases their confidence as legal wives. From our findings and observations, more women advocate for legal marriages/weddings than men given the patriarchal nature of African societies that gives less empowered position to the female gender. Depending on class of the families in question, it is common to have the three types of weddings at the same time. In other words, people can have traditional wedding, religious wedding and civil wedding all in one. This is to see the wedding as complete but this style tend to be more expensive but many families struggle to do these to satisfy familial and public expectations and boost kin profile. The order of the celebrations are however in various forms. While many people celebrate all the types of weddings the same day-usually Saturdays- to save cost and logistics, some split the types over two days- usually Fridays and Saturdays- to save stress and increase glamour and ovation. The common patterns of celebrations are:

1. **Same day (Saturday for all):**

Traditional wedding/engagement (early morning 7AM in brides family house) --- *Civil/legal/registry wedding* (usually at 10am/11am at the Local Government Headquarters) --- *Religious wedding* (Nikkai/church) (usually in church/mosque/bride's family house around 12pm/1pm) --- *Reception* (around 2pm/3pm).

2. **Over 2 days (Friday and Saturday for all):**

Traditional wedding/engagement (Friday anytime of day and usually extended/prolonged in bride's family house) --- *Civil/legal/registry wedding* (Saturday usually 10am at the Local Government Headquarters) --- *Religious wedding* (Nikkai/church) (usually in church/mosque/bride's family house around 11am/12pm) --- *Reception* (around 1pm).

For the not so rich families, also depending on religiosity and educational level of the intending couples and their families, people may opt for less

mix of the types of weddings. This lead us to the following patterns of weddings:

Usually same day

3. *Traditional wedding/engagement* (usually morning in brides family house) --- *Civil/legal/registry wedding* (usually at the Local Government Headquarters) --- *Reception* (usually at noon).

4. *Traditional wedding/engagement* (usually morning in brides family house) --- *Religious wedding* (Nikkai/church) (usually in church/mosque/bride's family house) --- *Reception* (usually at noon).

5. *Traditional wedding/engagement* (usually morning in brides family house) --- *Reception* (usually at noon).

Source: Autours' fieldwork, 2014

The above patterns are not sacrosanct and may be varied. They however give a general indication of the wedding organizations based on our fieldwork. As can be observed in the above patterns/categorizations, traditional weddings are largely the most common and fundamental among the people in the context. The different weddings have different processes and ideals. The civil/court weddings are usually brief and relatively formal unlike the traditional and religious weddings which are usually elaborate and can go on for hours. As already indicated above, financial ability, family approval, kinship system, culture and maturity of the intending couples are important in the choice of types and processes of the weddings. An interviewee provided a perspective to the forms of weddings practiced among the contemporary Yoruba:

We have traditional marriage, that one is not legal. It occurs between two families. The family of the husband goes and visits the Family of the wife that we need so so so person from your family. They will reach an agreement, and they will know each other, and they will tell them their rules and regulations in that family, this and sop is what we want to collect before we can release our family member. But that one is not legalized. It does not entail rings and it gives room for that husband to marry another person, but when we are talking about the customary abii court marriage, that one is a legal it is backed with legality that whenever you do that kind of marriage you cannot have another wife or another husband. Are you getting me? Another type of wedding is church wedding. U see, when we are talking about church marriage, the court will order the church to do the marriage, you see, the court will send the applicant, the person that want to engage

to court that go and give them this form and they will pasted that for good 21 days. After 21 days, if there is no objection, the court will now order the church to do the wedding for the couple, when we talk about muslim type, it is in form of traditional one, because you know, muslims believe in many wives, but court did not believe in many wives, while church also did not believe in many wives, traditional and Muslim type of marriage they are in the same group while church and court are in the same group. Court wedding is very important, if somebody pass through that kind of marriage, and, one do something contrary to the rules and regulations, that person will be seriously punished under the law, it has a legal backing (IDI/Male/Civilservant/Married/45/Agodi/15-1/2014)

A male Event Planner also observed:

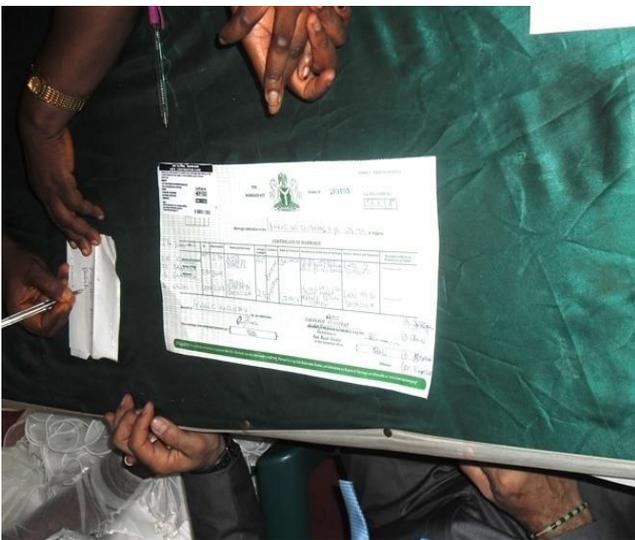
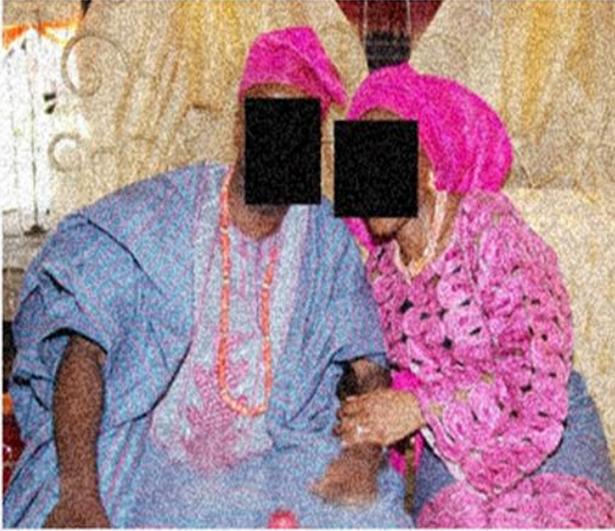
Usually, in planning weddings, the wedding is a complete ceremony that involves many ceremonies. We cannot remove the court from the church or

mosque or traditional. In fact reception, bachelor's eve and honeymoon are part of wedding just that we focus on the part that has feferity (glamorous celebrations) and dancing and eating. So I won't say there is a difference in wedding just that all that will happen is a choice of the family and couple. Wedding is everything done to join the husband and the wife together. What now matters is the choice the people make. Court is there, engagement mosque or church is there. But the goal everything is to join the couple together. (IDI/male/33/single/event planner/osuntokun/8-3-2014)

These responses reveal the basic understandings of weddings, their forms and the relevance of typologies.

Weddings in Ibadan Metropolis (Case studies/Pictorial Analysis- Sources: Authours' Fieldwork). Images 1-4 clockwise (image 4 is from Nairaland.com . Accessed 17-12-14).





The pictures above show varied forms of weddings present in contemporary Ibadan and generally contemporary Yoruba culture. The differences can be seen, somewhat, also in the attire used by the bride and groom particularly. Beyond this, numerous differences exist through the conduct of rites and meanings of the rites. Despite these differences, different types of weddings coexist within the same cultural framework. The images present different types of wedding: court, church/nikkai and traditional. From our observation, the weddings combined many different types. The court wedding, as presented in the first picture, is usually done in marriage registry. The image 1 shows the couple standing next to each other on the right whilst the registry official standing before them conducts the ceremony. The court wedding is basically a ceremony of the law. The whole essence is for the couple to register and be recognized as married before the law.

Image 2 is from a church wedding. The couples are kneeling before the pastors of the church that

serve as conductors of the wedding. The officiating ministers of the church are praying for the couple. Their dressing is similar to that of the registry marriage. The bride is dressed in a white wedding gown and the groom, in three piece suit. The church wedding takes its descriptive epithet 'church' from the fact that it is carried out in the church and is infused with a lot of Christian tenets. Church weddings are characterized by teachings on the essence and importance of marriage and the delight of God at the new couple. In regard, church weddings, fit seamlessly in the space of the court wedding, as the usual registry vows are taken and a marriage certificate is issued. Image 3 is from a traditional wedding ceremony. Unlike in court and church marriages, the traditional wedding is founded on the cultural tenets of the Yoruba people. Evidently, the attire is purely Yoruba attire, hewn from identical, exotic aso-oke and traditional ileke (beads) (see Akanle Olutayo, Akanle and Fadina, 2011, Olutayo and Akanle, 2009).

This traditional wedding is also referred to as *engagement* as mentioned above. Through this traditional wedding, the traditional customs and wedding practices are exhibited. The rites of the traditional wedding are reinvented from the elementary traditional practices of the Yoruba. The importance of this is in the sanctioning and approval of the marital union by the family members of the couple and the society. It is also a method and process of socialization of the new couples and the larger society. It is therefore not surprising that it is this form of wedding that most people prefer though in line with other more modern forms as necessitated hybridity in wedding celebrations and family consummation. Image 4 is from a Muslim or Islamic wedding. The religion of Islam is well established among Yoruba people of Ibadan. The religion of Islam has its own rites of marriage and these are exhibited in Islamic weddings. Just as Christians sanctify their marital union before God, Muslims also do the same.

The picture shows the couple in Islamic attire while Islamic clerics sit behind. The particular cleric standing is coordinating the ceremony. The ceremony revolves around Islamic prayers and wedding rites. In some Islamic weddings, marriage certificates are issued just as church certificates are issued in church weddings. It is important to note however that it is the marriage certificate issued in civil/court marriages that are often legally recognized. How couples and families cope with wedding recognition legally is to combine other types of wedding with the court one thereby having more than one wedding certificate. See figure 5 for the image of a Court wedding certificate. These varied forms of wedding ceremony co-exist in the lives of the Yoruba people and have been ingrained in the overall cultural framework to the end that despite some of them not being native to Yoruba culture, they have found acceptance and popularity till date. They are propagated alongside traditional wedding which overtime has also been modified in response to many emerging socio-cultural developments.

Significance of celebrating weddings

Celebration of weddings demonstrates its important place in the lives of those celebrating it. A wedding is meant to allow individuals transit seamlessly into new social positions of husband and wife (Kalmijn 2004). In line with this we found that through weddings, people get public conferment of status, class and identities. In fact, it is against the above finding one can find the essential justification of why Yoruba people celebrate weddings in various styles but the more glamorous and grand the more the class announcements and the more respect the families and new couples command at the venue and beyond.

Weddings are public announcements of true social essence of class and culture among the people. Our interviewees gave varied reasons as the significance of weddings. They gave many reasons that make weddings significant in the social system.

Weddings bring two adults and their families together in a somewhat social contract of obligations, rights, privileges and duties. Also, the procreation of legitimate children is somewhat hinged upon marriage celebrated through wedding. Weddings are significant to celebrate the joyous and grateful nature of people to the people, families, societies and mercies of God for making the wedding possible. Weddings are also important in that it shows the importance Yoruba people attach to legitimate, socially sanctioned sexual and other relationships. Weddings thus are moral antecedents to approved sexual intercourse among adults especially in societies that frown at premarital and non-marital sexual relations. Weddings serve as means of sending a message to the general public that the wedded individuals are no longer in the singles/unmarried circle and that the bride/groom is no longer available for marriage to other persons.

Weddings are significantly celebrated in relatively elaborate manners to show the value and importance accorded to marriage and family formation and by consequence, biological and social procreation. Celebrating weddings to a large extent is an extension and expression of the families' statuses in society. Weddings are status statements in Ibadan and many parts of Africa. Families express their achievements, wealth, influence, affluence and social standings before the general public through children's/kin's/selves' weddings. Once a wedding is very elaborate, common questions people ask are: omo ta lon se nkan? (the child of who is celebrating?), ebi ta lon se nkan? (the family of who is celebrating?) and so on. The number of cars packed, the nature/types of cars packed, locations of weddings and the event centers used are all indicators of class, glamour and status of the celebrants and their families because they symbolically demonstrate affluence and class. It is not uncommon for people to get loans and secure credits to live up to public perception and expectations of their class through weddings elaborateness.

Generally, the level of sophistication of a wedding is an indicator of the level of wealth a family has and people struggle to create befitting or/and desired class identities through weddings. It is common to hear of a *ki se igbeyawo lemeji ohun to ba gba laafun* (we do not celebrate wedding twice therefore we shall do whatever it costs us to make it befitting/grand). Socially, elaborate expenses incurred during weddings are not seen/interpreted as wasted.

They are often seen as obligations of those who have the means to show the world their worth and those of their families by throwing elaborate weddings. Over time, even years beyond the day(s) of the weddings, references are made in discussions to how enjoyable/befitting/interesting and/or disappointing a person's/family's wedding is. Celebrating weddings that are below public expectation can therefore be social stains on family reputations. How one celebrates a wedding is thus a status symbol and much preparations and socio-economic investments are therefore put into weddings in the society.

Elaborate weddings have their place in motivating individuals to be interested in getting married rather than having children out of wedlock which is often considered inimical to social health. The level of focus, attention, accolades, gifts, well wishes and celebration newlyweds get during wedding ceremonies are sources of inspiration and encouragements to other individuals who are yet to marry. Thus, celebrating weddings contribute to social health and are means of social control in many African societies. The cost of having a socially respected wedding is also a motivation for individuals to work hard and strive to achieve economic success. Also, we found that the elaborate nature of weddings is what takes it beyond the level of ordinariness. The social and economic costs of weddings also serve as means of protecting marriages and demotivations for divorce. This is in the sense that when couples consider the amount of energy, funfare and money spent on their marriages they tend to have reasons to remain committed to the marriage. There is therefore some positive relationships among nature (socio-economic) costs of weddings, sense of commitment to the marriage and values couples attach to families. Weddings are also significant tools and avenues for scattered family members to come together especially in contemporary times when extended family members live far apart in different towns, cities and countries.

According to Social Action theory, actions are meaningful to those who take them and it is from the perspective of actors that actions can be best understood. This accounts for why we adopted interpretive approach in this study to understand weddings in the context. Ordinarily, spending huge amount of money amidst widespread poverty can be seen as irrational and wasteful. We however found re-interpretation and rationalization of economic spendings in socio-cultural terms as means of class announcements and status identity consolidation, codification, commodification and establishment which celebrating couples and families prioritize beyond economics of wealth creation and management. Celebrating weddings in styles are

therefore rational actions to the actors beyond economic terms. Even when individuals and families borrow to celebrate weddings it could be to live up to the expectations of their society and symbolic identifications. This is moreso when aso-ebi (family celebration attire) is commonly involved in such weddings. This is particularly so in accordance with symbolic interaction theory. According to one of our interviewees who captured modal views:

I will not say that there are no benefits in celebrating big weddings. There are benefits. The benefit there is that, there are some ladies that are not ready to settle down and boys too. People like that, when they go to beautiful weddings, they would have a change of heart and desire to one day get married. Females will also desire to keep themselves sexually till they get married. Moreso, boys will be inspired to work hard and attain success when they see how the hard work of those getting married reflects in the big wedding they do. A husband when considering the amount invested in the marriage will not maltreat his wife. It will be a thing of shame for the public to hear that a wedding done in such fanfare has collapsed. They will try to protect their home to the core. For the wife, it is a thing of prestige that she was celebrated so much, it is also a thing of honour for her in her husband's house.(IDI/female/45/alagaiduro/ijoko/agbowo/2014)

A forty five year old male interviewee observed weddings as necessary celebrations to show the joy that comes with the successful training of a female child particularly. With weddings, thanks and adulation are given to God:

Socially, that wedding it is very very important, you see we are social rational beings, for a lady that pass through that kind of stages and she hold on till somebody talks to her that he wants to marry her, it calls for celebration, and that kind of celebration brings out all those things and the family of that lady they will be happy that they thank God that their daughter that wants to belong to someone, you see, it calls for celebration, that is the reason why you will see after the court that they will go to events centre they will provide food for those people that invited them, and that is it. You know, during that time, the traditional will emerge, a situation whereby the parent of the husband will bring all the required items that this is what is what you said you want to take before you can release your daughter, and during that time, they will do the celebration, people will dance, it is also a means of giving thanks to God. It is because they thank God that ermmm their daughter did not remain in their house. And as i told you, we human

beings we regard ourselves as social beings, socially, we have to do something like that to show that we socially conscious of ourselves and happenings in our environment. (IDI/Male/Civil servant/Married/45/Agodi/2014)

According to another interviewee:

You see, wedding is a necessary and important in any life, that is why you see that it is not only Yoruba people that do it, all over the world, it is done, that is to show how important it is to human beings in general. In a wedding, people are happy that their person is taking another step in life. So wedding is to show the world that ha, we are happy o that god has preserve our life till this period that we can see this day of joy. (Female , 38, wedding guest, IDI, Ibadan, 2014)

A male events planner observed:

Well, the significance of weddings is much, very very much. We can start that it is a method of starting a family and uniting people and families in marriage. It is allows for people to have sexual relationship that is allowed and the child from such sexual intercourse is accepted. Because we see that girls that get pregnant without due marriage are not appreciated but married women that get pregnant are seen as responsible. Wedding also is important because it brings family members together. I remember the last wedding I went to, I met a childhood friend I have not seen for more than twenty years. So family people from every where some people travel from abroad to come for wedding in Nigeria. Is because wedding is important we even see people who fight with their friends because they didn't come for their wedding. (IDI/male/33/event planner/osuntokun/2014).

Interviewees were asked about why weddings were celebrated despite poor social and economic conditions. Interviewees blamed the prevalence of poverty as major reason for the misinterpretation of celebrating weddings as unnecessary and wasteful.

According to an interviewee:

You see what I will tell you about that one; it is poverty that cause that kind of thought that celebrating elaborately and heavily is wasting money. Had it been if you finish your service, immediately you get a job, and your wife also secure a job, there would be enough money, your parents will spend you too will spend, your wife will spend, everything will not depend on your parents or you only, but when we are talking in terms of our national problems,

social amenities, these services belong to the government, it is not we that are supposed to provide that one, but due to the reason why the present situation of our country, our economy, has made us to start thinking that we have to rationalize everything that we should not spend extravagantly. For somebody who is well brought up, you see, that kind of person will wait until the man comes to as for her hand in marriage and do the right things but for somebody that because you see, what is happening now, firstly, poverty caused it, when you find people that cannot be able to provide anything definitely, they will just, start living with each other, when they have money, they will now come, after two or three issues, are you getting me? But at the same time, you see that due to what I can describe as social ills, also cause it (IDI/Male/Civil servant/45/Agodi)

Another interviewee gave a more critical perspective. He opined on how elaborate weddings are not equal to a successful marriage. In her opinion, spending much may not guarantee a successful marriage:

Personally, spending so much on weddings which is a day affair or maximum a two day affair, it is what you feel you can afford that you should do. You don't need to do an elaborate party, if it is something that you have done before, you know that there is nothing new in having an elaborate wedding, by the time you now start, one week down the line, e ma, ma gba ara yin leshe loju. Wipe shebi iwo naa ripe gbo gbo owo lati fi she iyawo tan, to me , spending so much and being extravagant about weddings ceremonies is nothing, (IDI/female/36/caterer/bashorun/2014)

In contrast, another interviewee observed the centrality and the necessity of spending money no matter how small on weddings. For her, like many others, it is a necessity to spend money specially on weddings:

Everything in this life, it is money you will use to do it now. So, if you want to do wedding, you must spend money. You will sha buy clothes and you will provide food for your people that come to your wedding. And you know that since the people coming are much, the money for food alone is big and there are still other things that they will do like decoration,. So there is no way you will not spend money ooo. The kind of money you now spend depend on your taste and the kind of money you have. In some wedding, you cannot count the number of different food you will eat, ofada, amala, semo, iyan, and all these things cost money. And you cannot now invite people to your wedding and they begin to go back

home hungry. You must take care of them. And you know that when people want to do wedding, they will do court, church and traditional and at each place they will spend money. It is even hard to count the amount of money people spend on wedding. But I know weddings that millions of naira was used. They bought new avanza (car) for the husband and wife and the wedding was very big, I just opened my mouth that day when I was thinking about how much they spend.

(IDI/female/26/single/Alegongo/2014).

Discussion

Weddings involve a set of actions that carry meanings and are done to symbolize the marital union of two individuals. These actions vary across cultures. Regardless of the actions taken, actions are only meaningful in the social and cultural context of the wedding. Thus, to understand any phenomenon relating to weddings, one must hold prime, the influence of the social and cultural constructions about weddings (Ekundare, 1969). Thus, the actions individuals take in the course of wedding and sealing marital knots are social actions. The decision to get married, the planning, the family involvement, date selection, the forms of wedding whether traditional, court or religious and other actions are not in social vacuum. These acts are initiated by the consciousness of other social actors and these actions in the long run get reciprocated with other actions. By Weberian definition, all actions that take into account actions of others as well as being directed in the course of other peoples actions are social action. As such, all social actions are laced with meanings to those carrying them out. It is thus wrong to assume the meanings of actions of people without taking into account the meanings social actors themselves ascribe to their actions.

Weddings therefore involve actions and behaviours from different categories of people that have meanings bound to the context of the wedding ceremonies. All actions taken in wedding ceremonies are meaningful to those partaking in them and also in the context of the weddings. In this regard according to Weberian traditions classificatory schemes, weddings fit into the category of traditional actions. And accordingly, traditional actions are carried out due to tradition, because they are always carried out in particular manners for certain reasons and situations. Weddings in line with this are carried out based on preexistent codes, norms and values. Individuals only act out what has been laid down for them. For example, payment of bride price in most weddings is a traditional action, prostration for brides' parents among others are actions based on tradition. The goal of all weddings is to create a

marital union and the differences in forms and conducts are hinged on the differences in meanings and interpretations of such actions. The spending of huge sum of money to throw elaborate weddings is not without meaning. It is an action driven by the actions/expectations of others and prompted towards the reactions/expected reactions of others. As such spending money on wedding is not necessarily seen as wastage until the thoughts and perspectives of those spending the money and the significant others are brought into consideration.

Beyond the carrying out of social actions in weddings, it is worthy of note that the actions taken up are attributed symbolic meanings and interactions in weddings is based on these symbolic meanings. Weddings are interactive events and events beyond the weddings. The processes that lead to the weddings and the processes afterwards are interactive through which people engage themselves in continuous manners over. While interacting, symbols form the basis of interaction. In weddings, symbols are endless. Symbols include all elements, words, items and ideas that are laden with codified and intrinsic and extrinsic meanings (Danesi, 2004). Basically in weddings, the roles of the brides and the grooms are symbolized. They are symbolized by the fact that they are treated differently from other people in the weddings.

Beyond this, actions and behaviours are symbolized. The tradition of prostrating for the brides family, for example, is symbolized as a show of respect by the groom's family. In western contexts, the exchange of rings symbolizes a seal of contractual obligations of the bride to the groom and vice versa. The presentation of eru-iyawo (bridal load) by the groom's family is also a symbol of value and a token of recognition of the value of the bride/daughter. In traditional weddings among the Yoruba people, on the brides entry into her husband house, she is showered with water (see also Ogundoro, 2007, Ogunjuyigbe and Adeyemi, 2003, Okediji and Okediji, 1970, Olusanya, 1970). This symbolizes peace and tranquility during her stay in the (matrimonial) house. In contemporary weddings, the actions taken are given symbolic meanings (Gusfield and Michalowicz, 1984). Actions and items are only relevant and meaningful when they are analysed in the context of the symbolic interpretations and actions. Weddings and its constituent acts and elements are only relevant when the meanings constructed around them are evaluated.

Conclusion

Weddings are precursors to family formation and in Africa, families form the legitimate context of sex, outcomes of which are often procreations.

Procreations drive population depending on related dynamics. Understanding weddings- their nature, drivers and significance- can thus help in understanding population dynamics in Africa. The article is a necessary narrative around Yoruba wedding processes in Ibadan, as a window to understanding weddings, families and population dynamics in Africa. Ibadan thus only provide great case study for understanding weddings, families and population processes and dynamics in Africa. This article provides new data and literature as new contribution to knowledge and relevance to understanding African weddings, family consummations and population drives.

References

- Ajibade, G. O. (2005), "Is there no man with penis in this land? Eroticism and performance in Yoruba nuptial songs", in *African Study Monographs*, 26(2): 99-113.
- Olutayo, A.O. Akanle, O. and Fadina, O.A. (2011). *Aso-Oke (Hand Woven Textiles) of Southwestern Nigeria: A Compact Examination of a Resilient Artifact*. *American Journal of Sociological Research*. 1. (1). Pp. 9-17.
- Olutayo, A.O and Akanle O. (2009). *Aso-Oke (Yoruba's hand woven textiles) usage among the youths in Lagos, Southwestern Nigeria*. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*. 1.3. Pp. 062-069. July.
- Akanle, O., Adesina, J.O. and Nwaobiala, U.R. (2016). *Turbulent but I must endure in silence: Female breadwinners and survival in Southwestern Nigeria*. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. Doi: 10.1177/0021909616658913. First published on July 26, 2016.
- Alaba, A. (2004), "Understanding Sexuality in the Yoruba Culture", *Understanding Human Sexuality Seminar Series, Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre*, Vol. 1
- Appadurai, A. (1997). *Discussion-Fieldwork in the era of globalization*,
- Atolagbe, A. (2012), *Semiotics and language interlarding in Yoruba traditional wedding bilingual discourse*. *Journal of English and Literature*, 3 (7): 158-165.
- Babbie, E. (1986), *Observing Ourselves*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Baron R. A., & Byrne D. (1987). *Social psychology: Understanding human interaction*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon
- Becker, G. S. (1973), *A Theory of Marriage*. *Journal of Political Economy*" 81(4): 813-846.
- Danesi, M. (2004), *Message, signs and Meaning: A Basic Textbook in Semiotics and Communications Theory*. Canada: Canadian Scholars Press Inc.
- De Coppet, D. (1992), *Understanding Rituals*. London: Routledge.
- Dunn, C.D. (2004). "Cultural Models and Metaphors for Marriage: An Analysis of Discourse at Japanese Wedding Receptions", in *Ethos*, 32(3): 348-373.
- Edwards, W. (1982), "Something Borrowed: Wedding Cakes as Symbols in Modern Japan" in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 9, No. 4.
- Edwards, W. (1987), "The Commercialized Wedding as Ritual: A Window on Social Values", in *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1.
- Ekundare, R.O. (1969). *Marriage and Divorce under Yoruba customary Law*. De-Ife: University of Ife Press.
- Falola T. (1991), "Kemi Morgan and the Second Reconstruction of Ibadan History: History in Africa, Vol. 18.
- Falola, T. (1985), "From Hospitality to Hostility: Ibadan and Strangers 1830-1904. *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 26, No. 1
- Gusfield, J. R. and Michalowicz, J. (1984), *Secular Symbolism: Studies of Ritual, Ceremony, and the Symbolic Order in Modern Life*. *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 10 Pp. 417-435
- Johnson S. (1960), *The History Of The Yorubas, From The Earliest Times To The Beginning Of The British Protectorate* Edited By Dr. O. Johnson, Lagos C.M.S. (Nigeria) Bookshops.
- Kalmijn, M. (2004), *Marriage Rituals as Reinforcers of Role Transitions: An Analysis of Weddings in the Netherland Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 2004, 66: 582-594.
- Kendall, D. (2008), *Sociology in our Times (Seventh edition)*. The University of Chicago Press Chicago and London
- Leeds, H. (2002). *Wedding as Text: Communicating Cultural Identities through Ritual*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Meekers, D. (1992), *The Process of Marriage in African Societies: A Multiple Indicator*. *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1.
- Ogundoro, D. (2007), *Marriage culture in Yorubaland, Nigeria, Africa*. Helium inc.
- Ogunjuyigbe, P.O. and Adeyemi, E. O. (2003), "Mate Selection and Marital Fertility: The Case of the Yorubas in the Rural Areas. *Anthropologist*, 5 (1): 9-15.
- Okediji, F.O. and Okediji, F.O. (Eds.) (1970), *The Sociology of the Yoruba, Ibadan* : Ibadan University Press.
- Olusanya, P.O. (1970) *Social Change and Marital Stability Among The Yorubas of Western Nigeria, Ibadan* : Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Ibadan.

- Otite O. 1991, Marriage and Family Systems In Nigeria. International Journal of Sociology of The Family, Vol. 21, No. 2.
- Otite, O. and Ogionwo W. (2006) An Introduction to Sociological Studies, Second Edition, Ibadan: Hienemann books.
- Skolnick, A. (2009), Marriage. Microsoft Encarta, Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.
- Tuzin, D. F. (2009), Rites of Passage. Microsoft Encarta, Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.