

Contemporary Marriage Processes in Nigeria: Willing Love, Perilous Business, Post-Marriage Problems

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Abstract

From immemorial, marriage has been regarded as the union of a man and a woman to live together for love, procreation and social acceptance (The Bible - Genesis 2:14, Ephesians 5:33, The Quran - 2:187, 30:21). In the African world, especially among Nigerians, this is not different. Contemporary Nigerian marriage ceremonies, the subject of this paper, reflect a link between tradition and modernity. The process demands the new couple have enough finance to marry and to see them through life the many months after the marriage ceremonies. Steps involved in the marriage process are many and daunting. Each involves huge sums of finance: Initial Introduction of the two families; Engagement (Traditional Marriage); Registry (Court Marriage); Church (Christian/White) Marriage; Mosque (Islamic/Nikkah) Marriage; and Reception (for refreshment) amongst others. This paper contends that the financial implications involved are so enormous that young men are dilly-dallying over getting married. This situation is worsened by economic situations in the country. Many eligible and willing men are unemployed despite their academic qualifications. Therefore, many young unmarried females are wasting away. It is averred that most

effects are felt immediately after the marriage ceremony in the lives of the couples. Using the descriptive analysis, this paper examines the issue in view of the socio-economic and marital problems posed by this situation (at the pre and post marriage positions). This paper submits that changes must start to make the Nigerian marriage process and marital life more welcoming, affordable, and attractive to the to-be-wedded and the newly-wedded.

Keywords: marriage, popular culture, contemporary, economy

Introduction

“The best wedding is that upon which the least trouble and expense is bestowed” – Prophet Muhammad. (Mishkat¹)

Across the length and breadth of Nigeria, be it in the cities or rural settlements, among the working class, the middle class or the rich, weddings are not only an essential societal practice, but also an integral part of national identity (Vranjes, 2009). Consequently, it is one factor that is considered in Nigeria when describing who is or is not a responsible member of the society (Djauro, 2011, p.23). Marriage is an important institution in the society and it is expected of both sexes to be responsible members of the institution. Societies create, perpetuate and protect the marriage institution because it provides ‘social goods’; a term for the societal benefits derivable by the whole and the individuals from it (Djauro, 2011).

In the African milieu, among the most important social goods produced by the institution of marriage (of a man and a woman) are children. Marriage was and will always be mainly about children (and what is best for them), because the new generation literally is the future of every society (Zeldin, Christens, and Powers, 2013). Marriage does not only define the social status of people in the society, it also proves

¹ *Mishkat-al-Masabih* (A Niche for Lamps in English): It is a version of Al-Baghawi's *Masabih al-Sunnah* by Muhammed ibn ‘Abdallah Khatib Al-Tabrizi. It contains the sayings of the Prophet Muhammed (The Book of Hadith).

to be a most effective way of transforming a man into a husband/father and a woman into a wife/mother and ensures a child might know and be cared for by his/her biological parents. The parents-children relationship guarantees that children will be provided with the basics of life, nurtured and raised in ways that will make them be responsible members of a society. For most modern people, getting married and having children are principal life events that mark the passage into mature adulthood.

Marriage, a lifelong commitment by two people to each other, is signified by a contract sanctioned by the state and for many people, God (Animasahun & Fatile, 2011). Again, marriage, as an institution, is an avenue of maintaining the life-line of a people. It allows and gives the legal and social backing to individuals to come together, live together and birth the next generation of the group. In this line, social, cultural and religious tenets are passed on from one generation to the other. The individuals so joined and permitted to live as one within the community learn to live together, love their off-springs, themselves and the community.

Problems emanate from how the society and those in and around marriage view the institution. This stems from the moment the to-be couple meet and propose a relationship. Glitches encountered can be social, religious, cultural, individualistic, couple related or even community based. This paper attempts to examine an aspect out of these. It is one usually overlooked and not regarded as a problem but which affects the unions as it encompasses the social, religious, and cultural aspects of the conjugal rite: finances expended on the processes of marriage.

Every culture of the world recognizes a form or two of the institution of marriage. In most cultures, societies and religions, neither man nor woman is considered complete, after reaching physical maturity, without a spouse (Animasahun & Fatile, 2011). Many societies and religions consider marriage a sacred act that originated from God or as the union of souls or spirits within the sacred realm. Jewish beliefs trace the origin of marriage to Adam and Eve and view the union as a part of the fabric of creation (Animasahun & Fatile,

2011). The nuptial blessings emphasize marriage in the scheme of creation and speak connotatively of the state of marriage as paradise regained. As a blessing from God, Jewish marriages not only perpetuate humankind but also enhance and complete the partners' personal growth (Smith, 1981).

Christian marriage, also identified with the sacred union of Adam and Eve, is regarded as a vocation. The ceremony joins the bride and the groom into one spirit in union with Christ and God (Animasahun & Fatile, 2011). In Christianity, marriage is also a metaphor for the marriage of the church to Christ. In this sense, the bride and the groom become the "bride" (Ephesians 5:25-27) of Christ and are heirs together of the grace of life through the Spirit of Christ (Eliade, 1993). Allusion is made to some religious and cultural traditions and beliefs while conducting weddings in the Christian community. These include Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, Protestantism as represented in the Anglican Church, Methodist Church, Baptist Church, etc., and Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostal Churches represented by the new generation churches.

Among the Hindus, marriage is a sacred institution where a man and a woman become one in spirit. Hindu marriage is also a social duty, and in the Vedic period it was both a moral and religious obligation. Marriage is the siring of children, especially male children; it is also one way through which a man could repay his debt to his ancestors (Brooke, 1989).

Traditional African / Nigerian Marriage Dogmata

Among Africans and Nigerians, marriage like in other cultures and traditions, is a sacred, life-long, socio-cultural and religious contract. In the past, marriages were (and still are in some places and families) usually arrangements not only mainly between individuals but also between families, communities, and nations for various reasons not connected with economic advantages, power acquisition and retention, improved social status, upgraded family links and least of all, love. Nowadays, marriages are generally undertaken by the interested: one brings in one's intended, gets married to the person and bears the outcome.

Within the traditional African socio-communal life, divorce is an aberration: it is neither encouraged nor accepted except in extreme situations like barrenness, incompatibility, etc. (Arugu, 2014). When one marries, it is said that one becomes married not only to the individual person but to the whole family. Therefore, in case of divorce or marriage problems, the two families become involved. A union without children is seen as incomplete and unfulfilled. The irony in this is that the man is encouraged to remarry while it becomes incumbent on the woman to continue in the marriage or until she is able to give birth. The woman is usually blamed for the couple's childlessness.

Generally, Africans and Nigerians go to churches, mosques and courts to formalise marriage relationships to fulfil religious and legal implications. In their minds, and as a general rule, marriage processes are incomplete without the traditional rites and procedures being performed. This phase, done with a lot of pageantry, fulfils all traditional requirements. This is what really ties the two families. Marriage is, therefore, an important step in the life of an African and a Nigerian.

Consequently, more often than not, a few individuals are denied certain responsibilities, not because they are not qualified or capable of handling such but because they are not considered matured enough: they are not married. For example, in Northern Nigeria, bachelors who are seen to be capable of being married but not yet married are often not allowed to lead people who are married in prayers (Djauro, 2011). This does not mean that God will not accept their prayers, but that they lack the credibility of leading such prayers. Also, in taking decisions in the family, the opinions of married people are more respected than those of the unmarried (Djauro, 2011).

In spite of these advantages and the importance allotted marriage in the society, there is still a high percentage of divorce in the society (Arugu, 2014). The rate at which couples go to courts for divorce has become alarming. One begins to wonder what has gone wrong with this most respected social institution. The pomp and spectacle with which a woman is taken from her matrimonial home to her husband indicates that the union ought to last till death do them part. But within a couple

of years, the happiness goes sour. Reasons for this upsetting phenomenon are not far-fetched.

There had not been much research on the causes of marriage instability in the early years of marriage in modern Nigerian society, but there have been a few on marriage crises and management. Sotonade (1998) and Amao-Kehinde (1998) have worked on marital conflict resolutions and strategy among selected couples in Ijebu-Ode. Ibokete (2000) worked on battering among married women in the Lagos metropolis. Olarinmoye (1991) was concerned with the psychological and social consequences of divorce in Ibadan. However, they all claim that marriage has been beset by many problems that have threatened its usefulness and existence. They attribute the high rate of divorce to inadequate length of courtship before marriage, dissimilarities between spouses in social and economic characteristics such as social class, ethnicity, religion and age. Other causes include sterility, adultery, desertion and excessive cruelty. However, a major cause scholars have not discussed or have ignored is the issue of expenses incurred on marriage ceremonies which have become too expensive and demanding in mode. The pre- and after-effects usually have long-lasting, disturbing and traumatic consequences on marriages and the newly-wedded.

The Nigerian society is generally characterized with arranged marriages, polygamous marriages, bigamy and others. Though different groups, traditions and marriages exist, they have one specific thing in common. This involves the changes occurring in wedding and marriage processes and patterns. These are influenced by Western ideas and allure. While these are happening rapidly, the old traditions are falling away fast. The old traditions are disappearing and people are more likely to follow the Western marriage traditions. There are, therefore, more western oriented weddings which adhere to not only its format but also strive to create new ones. Couples also even add it to the traditional African ones (Aiyetan and Kolapo, 2005).

Modern Nigerian Marriage Processes

In the Nigerian society, marriage ceremonies are perceived as one of the requirements or rites of passage for any adolescent to come of age. So, when a young man meets a young woman of his choice, the

marriage event seals their relationship. However, marriage ceremonies take different steps which can be economically scary. These can include: Initial families' Introduction ('*Mo mi i mo e*²'), Engagement (traditional marriage), Registry (court), Church (white marriage), Mosque (Islamic/Nikkah wedding), and Reception amongst others. Looking at these steps, it is obvious that if the to-be couple is not financially buoyant, it will run into pre and post-marriage problems.

The understated steps have both sociological and economic implications on the pre and post-wedding lives of couples.

1. Initial Introduction

When two opposite sexes meet and plan to be together as husband and wife, it is expected of them to do an initial introduction before they seal the relationship with a marriage. All over the country, this is known in several ways: '*Mo mi i mo e*' (know me and let me know you) is Yoruba, '*Ikutu aka n'ulo*' (Knock on the door) is Igbo and '*Shi ga gida*' (Entering the house) is Hausa. This is supposed to involve the parents of the to-be couple and the immediate family members. Both ends are meeting officially and knowing themselves for the first time. This ought to be easy on the pocket as it involves a minimal number of people from the two families. Expenses on food and drinks are marginal to some extent depending on the number of people invited. Nowadays, the number keeps increasing because each concerned individual in the event would want to invite a friend or two. Basically, it is a programme that should be held within the confines of the house of the woman. This is no longer so as sometimes elaborate arrangements for food and siting are made. For the programme, new clothing could have been bought most especially by the new couple-to-be (who must appear in the same type of clothing). Minimal spending could run up from N50,000 to more than N100,000. This is about \$251 to \$502 (all calculations in this work are done at ongoing naira to dollar exchange rate of N199 to a dollar as of January, 2016). It must be borne in mind that the country is

² *Mo mi i mo e* is a minor introduction in Yoruba land (Southwest, Nigeria) usually done before the wedding.

one where the official minimum wage for workers is N18000 (\$90) per month and therefore N216000 (\$1085) per annum.

2. Engagement (*traditional marriage*)

If and when the couple make up their minds to go on with their relationship, the next stage is the traditional engagement. This happens usually in the evening preceding the religious (church/nikkah³) aspect or in the early morning of the aforesaid religious part. It is a part of the marriage process that shows on the marriage invitation card. The card also comes in different styles, colours, and make. A little bit of finance is spent on it as it portrays, to a great extent, the social and financial standing of the couple. Nowadays and sometimes, to avoid the cost of printing the card, couples resort to typing and photocopying. This would have some prayer points and all the information regarding the marriage programme. The invitees are requested to regard the paper as an invitation (it stands in lieu of the invitation card).

The Engagement (traditional marriage) is an elaborate ceremony that involves every member of the two families. Traditionally, a couple is regarded as married after this ceremony because of the exchange of rings. The programme represents the traditional conjugal service. The engagement ceremony also takes place at the bride's house, and her family is responsible for most of what it entails (with the groom and his family helping financially). Both parties dress in fanciful, expensive but different traditional attires. Each family picks a colour code for its wedding cloth, buying a particular type of clothing unique to it. This would be worn by everyone from that family. For the women, it will consist of the *gele*⁴ (head gear), *iro* (wrapper), *buba* (blouse) and the

³ *Nikkah* or marriage and pairing are of the laws that Allah has passed for His creatures. It is one of the Islamic laws to which Prophet Muhammed encouraged the youth: "Young people! Whoever of you can afford marriage, let him get married, for marriage helps restrain the looks, and preserve their chastity' He who cannot afford it, let him observe fasting, for fasting is a deterrent"

⁴ *gele* (head gear). The *iro* and *buba* (pronounced "ee-roe" and "boo-bah") are the most essential parts of a Yoruba woman's traditional outfit. They are essential because they are the skirt and blouse and are the basis for the outfit. The complete outfit in actual fact consists of five separate parts. The *iro*, *buba*, *gele*, *ipele* and *iborun* which

ipele (a smaller wrapper worn on the larger one). The men will have the *sokoto*⁵ (trousers), *agbada*⁶ (flowing wide sleeved robe) (optional), *buba* (a male shirt) and *fila*⁷ (cap). The totality of these (for the male and the female) is called ‘*aso-ebi*’⁸ (the family joint clothing).

There is usually a Bible or a Quran that the bride is encouraged to pick from amongst the gifts from the groom. Wedding rings are exchanged with the taking of vows. The bride would have her face covered while coming into the ceremony (usually with yet-to-be married dancing friends and drummers). She kneels before her parents and the groom’s parents so that they may pray for her. Then she sits by the groom, and is unveiled. She is unveiled by her man after he and his family must have paid heavily to her and her family while dancing to traditional music. This payment, apart from the major bride price (*owo ori iyawo*⁹) paid to the bride’s family might include the following in the Yoruba land (Southwest Nigeria): *iya gbo*¹⁰, *baba gbo*¹¹, *owo omo ile*¹², *owo obinrin ile*¹³, *owo isuju iyawo*¹⁴, etc.

During the programme, the groom and his family will provide about 21 pieces of yam (number depends on the demands of the bride’s

can be made in a variety of fabrics from affordable *Ankara* print to *Aso-oke* as well as lace for more special occasions.

⁵ *Sokoto* is Yoruba name for male trouser, usually made from cotton, fabric and silk.

⁶ *Agbada* is the Yoruba name for a type of flowing wide sleeved robe, usually decorated with embroidery, which is worn throughout much of Nigeria by (important) men, such as kings and chiefs, and on ceremonial occasions like weddings and funerals.

⁷ *Fila* is a Yoruba name for cap.

⁸ *Aso-ebi* is used to refer to the outfits made from matching fabric and pattern worn by family members (though it now applies to anyone who can afford one or would like to wear one) at a wedding ceremony or social event to denote unity, support, and represent sides of the family. *Aso-ebi* fabrics are typically of *Ankara* or Lace material for the outfit with occasional head gear (*gele* or *fila*) associated with it.

⁹ *Owo ori iyawo* is the major bride price.

¹⁰ *Iya gbo* is part of the dowry paid to the mothers of the bride’s household.

¹¹ *Baba gbo* is part of the dowry paid to the fathers of the bride’s household.

¹² *Owo omo ile* is part of the dowry paid to the children of the bride’s household.

¹³ *Owo obinrin ile* is part of the dowry paid to the women of the bride’s household.

¹⁴ *Owo isuju iyawo* is part of the dowry paid for the bride’s glamor (literarily - money to unveil the bride)

family), a Bible or a Quran, bottles of groundnut oil and palm oil, bunches of plantain, suitcase(s) full of female clothing, crates of soft drinks, assorted wines, different types of fruits, and envelopes with different amount of money in them as presents and gifts to the bride's family. These are signs of love, friendship and a show of the financial capability of the groom's family to take good care of the new wife. On the other hand, the bride's family, as the host, prepares enough food for all (sometimes they are lent a helping hand by the groom's family). Throughout this programme, the groom and his family are expected to expend money on the bride and her family. What follows is eating and drinking borne by the groom and bride, especially the bride's family. This goes into a medium outlay of financial spending. At this stage, the couple might need to expend minimally anything from N100,000 to N500,000 and above (\$502 to \$2511).

After this is the movement to the court, church or mosque either to make the marriage legal under the country's legal system or to get religious blessings for the couple. Hence, there are three options for the couple: traditional, court or the church/mosque. The first can be any two of the events: traditional, court or the church/mosque. The second option is the traditional marriage with the court appearance while the third option is combining the three. Usually, all would want to do the traditional marriage as this is the one that ties the two families in the eyes of everyone. The decision on what to choose or do depends on the couple's circumstances – financial, religious, social, family, etc.

3. Religious Phase

These are the religious aspects meant to fulfil the religious leanings and obligations of the intended. Most times, if not at all times, the marriage takes place in the bride's church or mosque (or religious setting). The ironic thing is that the bride is still either 'convinced' or 'confused' to join the religious leaning of the groom after marriage, especially if both are not from the same religious denomination or the same religion.

i. Church (Christian/White Marriage)

For the church service, the intended are required to be in western styled attire – coat or suit for the groom and a white or coloured wedding gown for the bride. A deviation would be a couple in traditional wear (and this occurs once in a while based on the couple’s philosophical beliefs). There would be an entourage of a bridal train consisting of a best man, a best lady, a little bride, a ring bearer and other innumerable young females and males of the intendeds’ age. While the bride and the groom bear the cost of their own wedding costume, each individual who appears on the wedding entourage is responsible for what he or she wears (though they all would be dressed in the same style and uniform).

One of the two main aspects within the church ceremonies is the handover of the bride to the groom by her father. Usually, the father is dressed in a traditional attire. The other aspect is the official knotting where marital vows and rings are exchanged between the couple. After this, the couple is declared as the newest ‘Mr and Mrs in town’ by the officiating religious officer(s).

Churches usually do not demand charges for church weddings. In lieu of this, during the programme there are different types of thanksgivings, and donations towards specific church projects, those requested by the church of the two families, etc. Envelopes can even be distributed during the service to attendees to make personal donations or pledges to the church (either in cash or kind). The couple might be spending N60,000 – N150,000 (\$301 – \$753 approx.)

After the service, there are photo-shoots by photographers consisting of those employed by the intended, each family, other family members and other interested individuals and groups. Of course, it goes without saying that the photographers would have been paid part payments of their fees before attending the ceremony. One must not forget to say that there would also be a video recording of the various processes of the wedding. The video-man will also need to be paid. His work fee ranges from N30, 000 to more than N150, 000 (\$150 to \$753). His work will cumulate in the production of an edited compact/digital video disc of the programme. In most marriage programmes nowadays, there are as many video-men as there are interested parties who want recordings

of the events for themselves. But it is incumbent on the couple to have their own ‘official’ and designated video-man.

ii. Mosque (Nikkah/Islamic Marriage)

For the Nikkah marriage, which is Islamic, there are about one or two ways of doing it based on tradition and region in Nigeria. In the South (west) of Nigeria, the bride is allowed on the marriage ground while in the North, this is not so. On a general basis, Nikkah (marriage) is seen as an act of worship (*ibadah*¹⁵) and is mostly done in mosques (though in keeping with modern development, it is done outside the mosques now). At the Nikkah, the following formalities are carried out: the consent of the couple to wed is sought; the presentation of the *Mahr*¹⁶ (which is the marriage gift) to the bride; the approval of the bride’s guardian, the *Wali*¹⁷ is gained; and the presence of the two witnesses to the marriage is acknowledged and accepted. This programme is officiated by the Imam, Alfa or someone designated to oversee it.

This social-cultural engagement is also a religious injunction, contract and covenant known as the *mithaqun ghalithun*¹⁸. Along the line, the *Mahr*, which is the marriage gift, is extended to the bride by the groom with a good and clean heart (Quran 4:4). This can come in various forms: property, movable objects, cash (no specific amount), etc. This varies from place to place and from family to family. Generally, it can involve cartons of biscuits, and sweets, wraps of kola nuts, packets of chewing gums, tubers of yam, bottles of different types of perfumes, different types of fruits, envelopes with money for the bride and the officiating personnel and other people involved in the marriage programme, etc. In this contract (*Aqd-Nikah*), a side of the

¹⁵ In Islam, *ibadah* is the obedience, submission, and devotion to Allah (God) along with the ultimate love for Him. Muslims believe that *ibadah* is the reason for the existence of all humanity.

¹⁶ *Mahr* is a mandatory payment, in the form of money or possessions paid or promised to paid by the groom, or by the groom's father to the bride at the time of marriage: “And give the women (on marriage) their *mahr* as a (nikkah) free gift” (Quran 4:4).

¹⁷ Custodian, Protector, Helper.

¹⁸ The Quran specifically refers to marriage as *mithaqun ghalithun*: a strong covenant.

marriage entourage expresses *ijab*¹⁹ (the willingness to enter into the marriage) while the other side expresses *qubul*²⁰ (the acceptance of the responsibility for the marriage). These are done in front of everyone during the programme. The marriage becomes legally binding after it is appended to by the bride and the groom, their two respective witnesses and its announcement to the audience. The audience is treated to a Nikkah sermon (*khutba-tun-nikah*²¹) by the officiating personnel. The marriage ends with a prayer (Dua²²) for everyone present. This is followed by the reception (Walima) where everyone is treated to refreshments.

In all these, money spent might not be easily calculated. The new couple would be decked in new clothing (from head to toes). The families can also be in new clothing (this is dependent on the part of the country but the mania is catching on with the *aso-ebi* system which originated and operates in the Southwest of the country). The gifting has gone beyond the ordinary as most grooms and their families go out of their ways to provide things that will endear them to the brides' families. Again, the couple is expected to provide the video or camera personnel. This comes at a cost. They would also have done a photo-shoot at a good cost. There is the reception which will gulp a high amount of money. The couple is expected to bear this, though once in a while one finds a couple helped by parents and family friends. Money expended here might be from N100, 000 to more than N500, 000 (\$502 to \$2511)

4. Registry (Court Wedding)

¹⁹ The willingness to enter into the marriage.

²⁰ The acceptance of the responsibility for the marriage.

²¹ In Islamic societies, customarily, a state appointed Muslim judge (*Qadi*) officiates the nikkah ceremony and keeps the record of the marriage contract. However, any trustworthy practicing Muslim can conduct the nikkah ceremony as Islam does not advocate priesthood. The documents of marriage contract/certificate are filed with the mosque (*masjid*) and local government for record purposes.

²² The officiator concludes the ceremony with prayer (*Dua*) for the bride, groom, their respective families, the local Muslim community, and the Muslim community at large (*Ummah*)

This is the legal part of the wedding programme recognised by the courts of law of the land. Most couples do this to ‘legalise’ their marriages. If it comes to the situation, they then have the option to seek for official legal redress and divorce. It might be adjudged the simplest, cheapest and fastest of all the parts of the three-day marriage itinerary. Usually, the couple would have gone earlier to the Local Government Council Office where they would have been registered with their photographs pasted for public information. This is to inform to all and sundry about the intended marriage and for anyone with any opposing view to go to the Registry and log it in.

This programme is usually less than one hour and can hold in the morning, especially before the church or Islamic marriage. The couple appears in another attire different from the ones used for the other parts of the marriage. Here, the attire can either be English or traditional depending on the choice of the couple. A few couples no longer do the church/Islamic. So, after the Registry ceremony, they move straight to the Reception ground.

The major items on the agenda at the Registry, especially after the laws governing marriage must have been read to the couple, are the swearing to the marriage oaths on either the Bible or the Quran (depending on the religion of the couple), the signing of the marriage certificate and the exchange of rings. These become the legal knots tying the couple while the rings become the physical manifestation which they carry about on their fingers.

Here, too, photos and video are taken. The Registry would have been paid for its official job, space and time. Again, sometimes, there is a slight supply of merriment of food, drinks and music that accompany this part of the wedding programme. Money expended here is usually low in the range of N20,000 to N80,000 (\$100 to \$401).

5. Wedding Reception

This event occurs immediately after the registry, church or mosque wedding depending on whichever the couple had agreed to do away with or perform. It is always the last part of the programme. The reception is for the invitees to enjoy themselves with food and drinks.

This event often proves to be the most elaborate of the whole process. So much expense is involved. These include reception venue, decoration of the venue, disc jockey or music band(s) and a Master of Ceremony (MC) which must be provided no matter their cost and the number of invited guests. On the other hand, the cost on things such as food, drinks, and catering can vary depending on the number of invited and uninvited (but present) guests.

In this new era of marriage ceremony monetisation, marriage ceremonies have been elevated to another level, with different players and situations involved. The ‘wedding uniform’ traditionally and nationally referred to as *Aso ebi*, and a part of the tradition of the Yoruba people of the Southwestern part of the country, will be in use by both families. This has become a ceremony culture and has gone on from being a Yoruba people denominated feature to a national phenomenon. There are different types of *Aso ebi* with the rich tending to go for highly costly textile materials such as *Aso oke* or *George* while other folks prefer batik popularly referred to as *Ankara*. The choice of *Aso ebi* is a way of making money by a few people within the families as they become emergency ‘suppliers’ with operational ‘benefits’. The *Aso ebi* becomes a form of ‘pass’ for the occasion and those who buy it are often rewarded with ‘gifts’ for ‘identifying’ with the celebrants. Such gifts vary from cheap plastic plates, mugs, to expensive items such as microwaves, choice cutlery sets, etc. that would have been bought by either the couple or the emergency ‘suppliers’. It is to assuage the *Aso ebi* buyers on the price charged for the cloth (which is usually not market-friendly). The couple do not partake of this *Aso ebi* as they would have gone for something costlier and different from what all would wear.

The choice of venue also matters. Wedding venues are extremely costly. Venues are charged on an average N200, 000 to over N1,000,000 (\$1004 to \$5023) for events such as weddings and other ceremonies in cosmopolitan areas across the country. The cost in small towns is also equally on the high side. The wedding venues take on characters of their own for each occasion through decorations done by officially designated interior decorators that are also paid (differentiated from the fees paid for the marriage venue building). So, it is required of

the celebrants to adorn chairs, tables, and the walls (the whole hall) with tapestries and other forms of beautifications. However, this does not come cheap as it goes from a modest N40,000 (\$200) to above N500,000 (\$502) depending on the spending power of the celebrants.

In the morning of the marriage programme, a beautician is invited by the bridegroom. The job of this professional is to perform facial and physical make-ups for the bridegroom and her whole entourage consisting of all the females (including the Little Bride). This professional is supposed to make all the females appear more beautiful than they really are. The job does not come easy or cheap as it costs anything from N30,000 (\$150) to N100,000 (\$502).

A wedding is not complete without photo shoots. In the days gone by, the ‘ordinary’ and economical photographer comes around and takes his shots on the special days. After the events, he comes back with an album of pictures and everybody is happy. These days the photographer is more of a theatre director, an image enabler of sorts. The couple is faced with the task of making the right choice. Such choice leads to sourcing and getting locations for shoots and decision on ‘costumes’ or ‘dress code’. Shoots have the tendency of covering days, if the photographer is quite sensitive about his craft and which most are. At the end of the sessions (including the wedding), the photographer presents a photo book, which could cost between N100,000 (\$502) to N300,000 (\$1507). The photographer makes it clear that with such attention and effort, his fee is quite reasonable.

The caterers’ role in making the wedding plan a reality cannot be ignored. They ensure that the couple’s day is fulfilled by taking care of the guests’ appetite. Catering is usually a bench mark for measuring a couple’s financial capacity or that of the celebrants’ families. So, it is not out of place to have a big budget for catering activities. This will include the buying of one or two big rams known as *agbo* or *rago*²³ or a big *malu*²⁴. This will be complemented with the buying of cartons of fish and turkey, bags of rice, kegs of edible oil, various condiments for

²³ Rams

²⁴ a hunch backed cow

stew and soups and other traditional foodstuffs such as yam flour (assorted), garri²⁵ (cassava flakes for *eba*), semolina/semovita, tubers of yam (meant for pounded yam – *iyán*²⁶), etc. With these assorted foods, the followings are produced: *moinmoin*²⁷, *jollof rice*, white rice, fried rice, *eba*, *amala*, *iyán* with stews and soups like *omi obe*²⁸, *efo-riro*, *ewedu*²⁹, etc. Protein plays an important role in eating: so assorted fish products such as catfish (for pepper soup) and stock fish popularly referred to as *panla* or *oporoko*³⁰ are accorded due priority.

Making food available on a wedding day is important but ensuring that the food is served with little or no wastage and that everyone is equally taken care of becomes more important. These are the added responsibilities of the chief caterer who oversees a sizeable catering crew with the duty of serving food, drinks and other related activities. There is a new invention to catering, the evolution of the ‘small chops’ – what Europeans and North Americans refer to as desserts. No wedding is given its seal of approval, at least by the guests, without the provision of the ‘small chops’. The cost of catering is better left to one’s imagination – giving a figure is simply impractical with the number of guests that can go up to a thousand. The financial figure might run between N150,000 (\$753) to N600,000 (\$3014) and above.

²⁵ Also known as *gari*, *garry*, *gali*, or tapioca) is a popular West African food made from cassava tubers. The spelling *garri* is mainly used in Cameroon, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Benin, Togo and *gari* in Ghana

²⁶ *Iyan* is made from pounding yam repeatedly with a club like cooking utensil called Pestle inside a bucket like cooking utensil (*Odo*). In Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Cross River and some other states, pounded yam is a choice food when having a traditional event like marriage, naming, chieftaincy title awards, coronation of a new King and buffets.

²⁷ *Moin Moin* also (*Moi Moi*) is a Nigerian steamed bean pudding made from a mixture of washed and peeled black-eyed peas (beans), onions and fresh ground peppers (usually a combination of bell peppers and chili or scotch bonnet). It is commonly seen accompanying *Jollof Rice*, *Fried Rice*, *Fried Plantain*, *Custard*, *Akamu* (*Pap*, *Ogi*) etc. It can even be eaten alone as a snack with a chilled soft drink to wash it down - See more at: <http://www.allnigerianrecipes.com/beans/moi-moi-moin-moin.html#sthash.79AtOkEd.dpuf>

²⁸ *Omi obe* is a cooked combination of tomato and pepper stew.

²⁹ *efo-riro* and *ewedu* are indigenous Yoruba vegetable soups. They can be taken with *iyán*, *amala* and *eba*.

³⁰ *Panla* (Yoruba) and *Oporoko* (Igbo) are stock fish.

Along with all of these, the couple and the marriage process are expected to have in place and at nearly all the events, a DeeJay (DJ), a Master of Ceremony (MC), or a musical band(s). They are to make the different events' places lively not only with music but also with interaction with the invitees and making them comfortable. Some couples go for the DJ alone to cut costs that run between N20,000 (\$100) to N100,000 (\$502) and might even reach N600,000 (\$3014) if a full musical band is invited.

Implications

Wedding ceremonies in Nigeria have become very big events with deep economic implications. They have evolved into expensive projects, no matter how modest the average couples intend them to be. We cannot take away the fact that this new trend has helped in driving and expanding the economy over the past twenty years. Many businesses have grown and thrived on the back-drop of the contemporary 'naija'³¹ wedding. The occasions are usually much more than events for Nigerians; they become displays of the individuals', couples', families' and society's economic wellbeing. However, this also has adverse effects on the couples after the weddings. These effects are not farfetched and they include broken homes, divorce, lack of trust, sexual immorality, marriage instability, financial limitations, quarrelsomeness, etc.

Over the past two decades the combination of the above marriage ceremony processes has given birth to the emergence of a reasonably sized economy which has had positive effects on the national economy. The wedding ceremony is the end result of a number of economic activities, without which the event may not turn out as anticipated. Wedding, in contemporary Nigeria, is big business aided by the traditional concept of its importance. In the past, medium or large scale marriage ceremonies, excluding the attendance of the registry, used to

³¹ *naija* is the pidgin and populist translation and way of referring to or calling Nigeria.

be the preserve of the middle class and the affluent. They usually took place then in church, mosque or town halls with modest emphasis on funfair, extraneous additions and financial outlays. There was a level of conservatism to the way weddings were approached. But now with the present level of celebration, there are implications for the society and those involved or planning to be involved.

One of the earliest effects that the newly-wedded would face is lack of finance to run the home. In a few times, the couple would have gone for a loan to prosecute the marriage process. Repayment for this would usually start the month after the marriage and can last for six months or a few years. Throughout this period, the couple must learn and practice financial home management to a great extent. If this is not well done and managed with a lot of understanding and patience, marriage problems can occur.

During this period also, the couple is expected to be blessed with a child. In the African world, a marriage without child(ren) is not a fulfilled and complete one. Some families would even insist that the bride gets pregnant before the marriage (not minding the religious injunction that having sex before marriage is considered fornication and the child of such a relationship can be considered illegitimate if things do not work out as planned). What is discovered nowadays and which is un-African is couples delaying the procreation process for a year or two. This is usually to the chagrin of everyone – especially the mothers-in-law who would want to see and ‘carry’ their grandchildren. The couple, who must have taken this decision, would continuously be pressurised, advised, cajoled and enticed by all with different discussions, debates and arguments so that they could change their minds. The couple’s decision would usually be based on finance because ‘baby-making business’ in Nigeria and Africa, especially from the middle-class to the upper class, is expensive and time-consuming. (In this modern way of life, capitalism and unemployment also become factors that can force many Nigerians and Africans to make this hard choice. Many couples would have incurred unimaginable costs during the wedding process that any attempt to make a child immediately after their wedding will further plunge them into economic crises). They must work to offset expenses incurred during the marriage process.

Due to the prevailing poor economic situation in Nigeria, it is discovered that unemployment plays another pivotal role in marriage processes and the after-effects. Intended couples sometimes wait for a long time so that both would be gainfully employed before marrying. If this is not possible and one of them gets employed, a few couples would go ahead with the marriage process. This means that one of the two would bear most of the expenses for the marriage. This is usually financially and emotionally tasking on the one doing the spending. The outcome of this can easily be felt early in their married life. The moment there is a problem, the 'spender' would either consciously or unconsciously always make reference to what (s)he did: meaning that the marriage rests on him or her. Marriage rift causing conflicts can ensue, especially if the financier is the woman and the unemployed is the man.

Conclusion

Expenses incurred on marriage process within the Nigerian environments are on the high side and they continue to climb. Most couples, who go through the process, do so not from the ease of their pockets. They only want to satisfy their immediate families and the public. Some do it to tell the world that they can measure up with others so that they are not underrated, jettisoned or deprived of their rights in the society.

It has rippling effects on the early years of marriage. What occurs can include lack of trust, conflicts without resolutions, lack of funds, and financial imbalance in the new family with repayments of excruciating and long-drawn out loan, postponed child-bearing process, incompatibility and divorce, amongst others. Any of these or more can occur as long as the financial base of the marriage is not well rooted and well managed. Finance controls a greater part of married life and it can destroy or uphold a marriage depending on its presence or absence.

This study avers that couples must look before leaping. They must be well prepared not only for the marriage process but also for the married life. No matter what is spent during the process, some funds must be kept aside for the later.

As much as possible, couples should not be enticed by families and friends to overspend. They must have a marriage budget that fits and suits their pocket, for the present and the near future. This they must stick to. They must not spend to meet up with any Jones. They must remember it is their lives and the consequences are theirs to carry.

Couples should encourage separate and joint meetings between their families before, during and after the marriage process. This will engender love, understanding, trust and good planning and budgeting. From here, spending can be streamlined. This will reduce pressure on all, especially the couples.

Families should also be considerate in their demands on the new couples. Usually, the couples are young and would still be finding their footings. Therefore, they should be encouraged not to spend more than necessary and have something preserved in their coffers for the immediate dry days that would come after the marriage celebrations. The families can always come to their financial aids by underwriting some of the expenses.

Finally, the couple must stand and speak as one. They must be seen and heard as having one voice. It means that in nearly all issues they must have their own joint opinions. These must be put across to others sensibly, patiently and with a lot of understanding towards convincing their families who might have other opinions.

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