

Aesthetics of Traditional Marriage as a Hallmark of Yoruba Culture and Identity

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Abstract: This study is a descriptive analysis of aesthetics of traditional marriage as a hallmark of Yorùbá culture and identity. Culture and identity are like the snail and its shell; they are inseparable except by death. The prevalent culture in a particular environment identifies its inhabitants who exhibit the elements of such culture. The act of marriage is a very important element of culture which identifies its people. This work excurses into the Yorùbá traditional marriage, and the basic steps involved which are: searching, match-making, investigation, soliciting, consenting, betrothal, preparation, oracle consultation, marriage day, ritual washing of bride's feet, ritual of virginity and ritual of the bride's tasks. It also identifies some important items used during the marriage proper in blessing the bride and bridegroom which include kolanut, alligator pepper, wine, honey, groundnut cake, salt, palm-oil among others. These steps of marriage, the items that are used in blessing the couple and the way they are manipulated, project the aesthetic values in Yorùbá culture and identity in traditional marriage.

Key Words: Aesthetics, Betrothal, Culture and Identity, Traditional Marriage, Virginity

Introduction

The Yorùbá speaking group forms part of the major ethnic groups in the present day Nigeria. It is a prominent group in South-West Nigeria with Yorùbá language predominantly spoken in ten (10) states of the federation across the legitimate 36 states in the country. These include: Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Kwara, and Lagos states. Also in some parts of Kogi, Edo and Delta states. In other parts of West Africa neighbouring countries, Yorùbá language is equally spoken in Republic of Benin and Togo respectively. Speakers of the language could equally be found in places like Brazil, Cuba, United States of America, Tobago and Trinidad. However, one key feature that synergised these milieus together is culture. The Yorùbá is endowed with diverse culture.

According to Edward Tylor (1871) cited in Thompson et.al (1991), culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, law, art, moral customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. Culture is the total way of life (Ngugi, 1979). It is the totality of what makes up the life and living styles of a group of people living in the same geographical area. Culture can be 'shared' and 'learnt' in a community as it serves as a communal property and gives its people peculiar identity (Adeleke, 2003). Culture could be adjudged from two aspects as the components of culture i.e tangible and intangible. The tangible includes the concrete materials like wood or artefacts, tools, shelter, dress: clothing, make-up, facial marks; food, while the intangible culture comprises of the non-concretes like mythology, literature (both written and oral), 'the inner' culture or 'the spirit' i.e religion, knowledge, philosophy or belief of the people which are values of the society inherent in individual being, (Irele, 1991; Adeleke, 2003; Lawal, 2015).

The term '*aesthetics*,' on the other side of the divide, was derived from the Greek word for perception. It was first used in the 18th century by Alexander Baumgarten, a German philosopher, referring to those principles governing the nature and appreciation of beauty. Aesthetics is therefore, conceived with understanding beauty, particularly as it is manifested in art, and with its evaluation, (Alamu, 2010). Aesthetics has its root in disciplines like sociology, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, arts, theology, architecture, archaeology, and culture among others. This

makes its study and application to be complex, as a result of its almost limitless boundary, coupled with its consideration of attitude, beliefs prejudices and human experiences.

More so, the perception of 'good and beauty', which is the concern of aesthetics, is different from culture to culture. Therefore, cultural aesthetics are the intangible or immaterial, and tangible or material aspects of culture that enhance the content of 'traditional marriage' in focus as the hallmark of Yorùbá culture and identity.

The Concept of Marriage

Several scholars have given different definitions to the term 'marriage' based on their perceptions. According to Girgis et.al (2010) marriage is considered from two views: '*conjugal view*' and '*revisionist view*.' The conjugal view in this regard defines marriage as the union of a man and a woman who makes a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together. The spouse seal (consummate) and renew their union by conjugal acts i.e. acts that constitute the behavioural process of reproduction, thus uniting them as a reproductive unit. The revisionist view defines marriage as the union of two people (whether of the same sex or of opposite sexes) who commit to romantically loving and caring for each other and to sharing the burdens and benefits of domestic life. It is essentially a union of heart and minds, enhanced by whatever forms of sexual intimacy both partners find agreeable.

Westermarck and Rivers cited in Mondal (2015) define marriage as 'a relationship of one or more men to one' or more women which is recognised by customs or law and involves certain rights and duties both in case of the parties entering the union and case of children born of it', while Rivers is of the opinion that marriage is a union between institution for regulating their sex relationships. However, the factor that emanated from these definitions is 'marriage.'

Therefore, marriage is a term used for social relationships of husband and wife or of plural mates. It is the social joining of male and female matrimony by a qualified person to perform the ceremony (i.e. a priest, judge, minister, justice of peace or other officials that have similar duties). Marriage is also the approved as a social pattern whereby two to more persons establish a family. It involves not only right to conceive and rear children, but with a host of other obligations and privileges. Marriage can also be taken to mean the acceptance of a new status, with a new set of privileges, obligations and recognition of new status by others.

The cultural value of every society determines the forms, functions and methods of marriage in such society because culture varies. What is acceptable in one culture might not be acceptable in another. For instance, some societies allow a male to marry just one wife, while some other societies allow a male to marry more than one wife. In the same vein, some societies will allow a female to have more than one husband, contrary to some societies that will negate such practice for a woman.

Forms of Marriage

As a result of various beliefs and cultural identity, there are diverse views for social recognition and approval of marriages. This craves indulgence for the forms of marriage as stated below:

1. *Monogamy*: This form of marriage states that one person is allowed to marry one person. i.e. a man to a woman.
2. *Polygamy*: This is a form of marriage that allows a person (man or woman) to marry more than one partner at a time. Polygamy is sublet as a form of marriage:
 - i.) *Polygyny*: In this form, a man is permitted to have more than a wife at a time.
 - ii.) *Polyandry*: In this, a woman marries more than a man at a time.

3. *Fraternal Polyandry*: This is a form marriage in which a woman is considered and treated as the wife of all the brothers living in the family equally, the offspring is considered to be the son and daughter of the elder brother.
4. *Non-Fraternal Polyandry*: Marriage in this regard states that a woman is allowed to have more than a man. Non-fraternal polyandry can further be sub divided into the following subs:
 - i.) *Group marriage*: This form of marriage states that the brothers are required to marry with the sisters living together.
 - ii.) *Experimental Marriages*: This is a form of marriage that allows the couple to come together and freely mix and meet in order to understand each other before the marriage proper.
 - iii.) *Inter class marriage*: This dictates that a man marries a woman of the same class (either rich or poor).
 - iv.) *Anuloma*: It is a form of marriage that allows a man of higher class marrying a woman of lower class.
 - v.) *Pratiloma*: This is a form of marriage in which a woman of higher class is married to a man of lower class.
 - vi.) *Sororate marriage*: This states that if a married wife dies, the husband could marry the deceased wife's sister as a wife or if his wife is proven infertile.
 - vii.) *Levirate marriage*: This is the opposite of Sororate form of marriage. It states that when the husband dies, the wife could marry the deceased husband's brother known as 'opo' sùsù' as part of Yoruba culture.

Essential Functions of Marriage

The essential functions of marriage in every society cannot be overemphasised. The functions are taken seriously as part of culture and identity. These include:

- a.) *For social recognition*: As part of the culture and identity, marriage gives social recognition to all sexual relationships which could have social problems. Marriage alone enables the society to accept the relationship of male and female of marriageable age as husband and wife within the society.
- b.) *For procreation of children*: One of the basic objectives of every marriage is to have children, therefore, it is imperative to establish that marriage function as an avenue to have legitimate child(ren). The children born as a result of socially recognised marriage are accepted by the society as the legitimate heirs to the assets and property of the family because they are not born outside the wedlock.
- c.) *For sense of sympathy*: It is a known fact that marriage functions as means of sharing one another's joy, happiness, sorrow and sense of sympathy within the family. This implies that the problem of one person (i.e. husband, wife, child(ren)) becomes the problem of every one.
- d.) *For basic family*: One obvious function of marriage is the basic family. Shortly after marriage, family comes into being. Therefore, the virtues of all the family life in the society begin to emerge and manifest.
- e.) *For stability in relationship*: One key function of marriage is the stability of relationship. This implies that marriage strengthens, synergises and stabilises relationship (after marriage) more among members of the family which include husband, wife, son, daughter, father/mother in-laws, grandparents among others.
- f.) *For perpetuation of lineage*: the desire to perpetuate the family's name comes up after the marriage. At this time the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of the family begin to perpetuate the name of the family and their lineage as the name lingers on continuously.

Yorùbá Traditional Marriage and Identity

It is apparent from the foregoing assertions that marriage is an integral part of culture. Marriage is one of the oldest institutions that reflect the culture and identity of the Yorùbá milieu. It marks the end and the beginning of eras. End on the parts of the young man and lady leaving their parents and beginning on the other side to take off another journey in life, as the two individuals agreed to live together and their union to create everlasting friendship between the two families. Among the Yorùbá, marriage can be seen from two stand points: Yorùbá traditional marriage (Igbeyáwo' abinibi/aṣijo) and Yorùbá modern or contemporary marriage (Igbeyáwo' aláṣede/Oḍe-oni/igbalode). But for the sake of this study, we shall limit our discussions to the Yorùbá traditional marriage (igbeyáwo' abinibi/aṣijo) as our focus to project the aesthetics of culture and identity.

Yorùbá Traditional Marriage (*I`gbe`ya`wo` Abi`nibi`/A`tijo`* .)

From time immemorial, marriage matters were never left in the hands of prospective couples, rather, they were family affairs. Marriage, especially, traditional marriage is a significant institution to the Yorùbá along with everything that is associated with it. As a result of civilisation, indispensable elements that are attached to its value are beginning to dwindle. This is not far-fetched from the fact that the present generations are not toeing the path of the ancient that could add embellishment to the union between the couples and more importantly, to make the wife valuable before her husband and members of the husband's family for long. Back then, it was so important that every male and female of marriageable age get married or be married. By virtue of Yorùbá culture and identity, the refrain of prayer that '*yoó sẹ̀ ańfańni*' (may it be of good gain), the gain or benefit as the pointer in the refrain of prayer starts with traditional marriage. The aesthetical value is for a male person at marriageable age to get married at the appropriate time as part of Yorùbá culture and identity. But if otherwise, such person will then be under the spotlight of the people as they begin to wag-tongues on him as *apòń* (bachelor or unmarried person) because such act is a product of modern time. Men get married even when they are sexually impotent in order to save either their own faces or the faces of their immediate relatives, as well as to get someone to look after their domestic establishments, Fadipe (1970).

As part of Yorùbá culture and identity, the elders in time past did start the traditional marriage processes of *ańa sişẹ̀* (in-law-ship) before they were opportune to see the female in question. For instance, in time past, if a male resides beside an elder in Yorùbá community, and such elder has up to five wives, there is every tendency that the male that resides close to the elder with five wives could then be paying homage to the elder's place. To an extent that when returning from the farm, he could fetch firewood, probably bring some farm produce to that elder. As he is doing this, he would be making his intention known to the elder that whenever any of the wives gives birth to a female child, she should be considered as his wife. This did not necessarily mean that he has to marry the unborn wife to be, but it could be for his son. However, the response from the elder would be '*ki`Olořun da`eńni`si*' (may God preserve us). If the desire of the intending person to marry the yet to born wife comes to fruition, and the female child is born, then he begins to intensify more efforts on the preparation by taking care of the entire family members and the baby girl till she becomes a full grown woman matured enough for marriage. At the appropriate time for the marriage proper, necessary ingredients or items would be provided and processes of marriage will be in top gear till the traditional marriage is observed. It should be noted here that a female girl who gets married in such manner dares not divorce the husband. If such happens, the parents could place curse on her, Daramola, et.al (1975).

Reasons for Yorùbá Traditional Marriage as Culture and Identity

The Yorùbá attach so much belief to traditional marriage as part of the culture and identity. For that reason they do not trivialise or handle the issue of traditional marriage with levity. Therefore, it becomes necessary that a young marriageable man begins the journey of traditional marriage at his prime stage. The essence of this traditional marriage is for the man to have a helper. Women are known to be helpers to men in such affinity. The women help men in the house, at work, in the family, and every other aspect that men could need help. The men also reciprocate such gesture to

women as confidants. As important as 'ade' (crowns) are to the kings, so also are men as 'ade'ori' (crowns of the heads) to women. Women cherish and respect their husbands a lot. In time past, the women did call their husbands 'Oluwa mi' (my Lord). This gives credence to Yorùbá culture and identity.

Similarly, men and women venture into traditional marriage as part of Yorùbá culture and identity in order to have 'arolé' (children/survivors). It is believed that 'omó ni èyè igbéyàwò' (child/ren is/are the beauty of marriage). In time past, any marriage without child (ren) is like a snake that crawled on a rock without a path. When the couples eventually get married, it is the prayer of everyone that they give birth quickly. The virtue of Yorùbá culture and identity then reflects in the refrain of prayer here that 'eyìn iyàwò ko ní mo eni'ó' (may it not be long before the bride puts to bed).

Besides, the Yorùbá believe so much that traditional marriage that produces child (ren) is accepted in the sight of the Supreme Being. It is a thing of joy to both families (husband and wife) when the bride conceived that very month of their traditional marriage. On the contrary, it is a sad thing for a woman not to conceive much less of giving birth after their traditional marriage. It poses challenges on the families. The families begin to proffer solutions to such problems, especially the bride's family. The Yorùbá believe that 'okuhrin ki ÿya aghàn' (men do not become barren). The fact remains that if a woman is barren, a man could marry wives, thereby practising polygamy or any other forms of aforementioned marriage as part of Yorùbá culture and identity.

Also, traditional marriage does create cordial relationships and co-existence between the two families as part of Yorùbá culture and identity. In time past, the Yorùbá believe that traditional marriage is not for the couples alone, rather, for both families. It is the institution that unites them. Therefore, before there could be traditional marriage between the couples, the two families would have to give endorsement and authorisation. The authorisation and endorsement could be more effective if the steps that are involved in Yorùbá traditional marriage as part of culture and identity are duly followed to the letter.

Basic Steps involved in Yorùbá Traditional Marriage as Culture and Identity

In time past, several basic steps were required to be involved before marriage could be consummated. These steps were valid and observed in Yorùbá traditional marriage because of their cultural relevance and identity. These are discussed in the following trajectory:

Searching (I`foju`so`de)

This is the first basic step in traditional marriage that reflects the Yorùbá culture and identity. In time past, *ifojusođe* (the search for spouse) in this regard begins with the man when he is of marriageable age. At this point the potential groom begins to visit the places of female dominated centres like village square, night market in the community, the local streams (i.e. where laundry is done mostly by maidens) among others. It could also be through friends who have female siblings or through potential groom's sister. More importantly, the parents did search by looking out for a well cultured and behaved girl who possesses marriageable attributes. The essence is the fact that the parents know good home that is worthy to be married from aside from beauty. Besides to create good relationship with the family of the female child, this step is so important in a way that if a man makes any mistake in choosing wrongly, he may not get it right forever.

Match-maker (Alá`rina`)

The roles of match-maker in traditional Yorùbá marriage cannot be overlooked. S/he plays prominent roles in the entire process of the marriage exercise. When the male child of marriageable age finds his choice, he dares not accost her, rather, he gets someone who knows the maiden so well and whom the maiden respects to serve as an intermediary between them. Such person is known as *Alárinà* (match-maker). *Alárinà* (match maker) is the courier who carries messages from the groom to the bride. S/he equally settles any form of misunderstanding that could come up between them. *Alárinà* (match-maker) will devise a means of conveying the

message of the intending groom and tactically relays the message to the maiden. Such message cannot be put directly to her so as not to aggravate the anger in her. *Alárinà* will market the groom in a way that the maiden will be convinced to concur to his intention. S/he will place the credentials of attitude and attributes possessed by the husband to be. It is the duty of *Alárinà* to begin fixing meetings for both of them. When they get to know each other so well, the match-maker stays off. The Yorùbá culture and identity affirms this in the saying that '*bi'aya ba' moju' oko, tań, Alárinà a' yẹba'*' (when a wife gets to know the husband fully, the match-maker steps aside).

Investigation (*I`wa`di`i`*)

When a male child of marriageable age finds his favourite or makes his choice, it is expected of him to inform the parents after he must have confirmed his interest in the lady. The parents of the male child then begin their own investigation. The essence of the investigation was to have an in-depth understanding of the family and the kind of family their son intends to marry from; whether the family has a lineage illness or they have been involved in any form of crime that could bring any form of shame to them or tarnish their image. In the same way, the maiden's family will investigate the man's family. In time past, as part of Yorùbá culture and identity, the investigation did go beyond physical. They did consult *Ifá* oracle to ascertain the degree of *omolúàbí* (appropriateness of the behavioural pattern) of the families involved because Yorùbá believe so much in whatever the *Ifá* says (Dasylva, 2016). The divination will counsel them either to marry or not. If the *Ifá* clears the way saying '*Ifá fo're*' (*Ifá* has spoken well) for them, they will proceed with the traditional marriage proper. But if otherwise without solution of sacrifice or atonement, they would have to discontinue their preparations and the young man and the lady will be advised to go their separate ways. If they forcefully observe the traditional marriage, the consequences await them in their journey in life sooner or later.

Family Supplication or Soliciting (*Ìtoro*)

After the completion of the investigation, next is *Ìtoro* (family supplication or soliciting). *Ìtoro* is highly important as part of Yorùbá culture and identity. Despite the fact that both families were aware of the relationship scenario between the children, it was expected of them to pretend as if they were not aware. It was also expected of them to come in soliciting for the lady's hand in marriage. In line with Yorùbá cultural identity, it was not from the biological father of the lady that they will solicit for the lady. The biological parents of the lady may not have the final say over the supplication. Rather, the head of the extended family. Therefore, the father to the lady would consult the head of the extended family the moment he received message from the boy's father through the emissaries regarding their visit. Back then, the supplication or soliciting used to be early in the morning. The visiting family did go to their in-law's place with some significant items like kolanut, palm wine, and gin drink. The head of the extended family in the lady's family will invite the lady out and begin to ask her questions if really she intended to be married to the young man. Same way the young man will be questioned to know his intention for the lady. If both certified that really they were serious about getting married to each other, the head of the lady's family will pray and bless them fervently.

Consents (*I` s, i` hu` n/I` jo` .he. n/I` jo. ` hu` n*)

It was at the venue of the event of the family's supplication or soliciting that the consents would be given as '*isihuń/ijoheń/ijohuń*' (consents). This reflected the aesthetical value of culture and identity of the Yorùbá. Consents in this regard could be in two folds. The consents by the lady and consents by the parents. At this juncture, the *Alárinà* (match-maker) did organise the meeting of the lady and the young man with the support of the parents. It was at that meeting that the young man will make it known proper by saying *mo fe'fe'e* (I want to marry you). The lady may be reluctant to respond at first, eventually she did respond saying *mo gba* (accepted). That is *isihuń/ijoheń/ijohuń* (opening of voice and acceptance). Then *Alárinà* (match-maker) did ask for the amount to be paid by the man as the consent fee. Back then, the amount of money paid was '*oke kan tabi oke meji*' (one or two bags of cowries as the legal tender then). The consents by the parents (*baba' gbo, iya' gba*) did reflect the agreement or acceptance between the two families. It implies that both of them are in support of their children marrying each other.

Betrothal (*I`da`na*)

The celebration of the *Ìtoro* (supplication or soliciting) and *isihun/ijohen/ijohun* (consents) marked the formal betrothal (*Ìdána*) of the young man and the lady. The Yorùbá believe that without these rituals the lady was not considered engaged to the young man, and there would not be any claim of damages laid open to him in case of her adultery with someone else. It became more pronounced when betrothal (*Ìdána*) was done in elaborate form. The fixed day for the *Ìdána* (betrothal) used to be Ojo Àje (Monday), Ojo Ojoḡo (Thursday), Ojo Abaámefa (Saturday), and Ojo Aíku (Sunday). It is not in Yorùbá culture and identity to observe *Ìdána* (betrothal) on days like Ojo Ojo'Ruũ (Wednesday) or Ojo Èti (Friday), Mustapha et.al (2004:93).

The betrothal (*Ìdána*) ceremony enabled the young man to become the potential *oḡo* (husband), while the lady became *iyàwo* (bride). From that moment, the relatives of the husband also called their relative's fiancée *iyàwó*, Fadipe (1970:73). As a matter of significance and relevance of Yorùbá culture and identity for the betrothal (*Ìdána*) proper, the family of the young man was expected to grace the ceremony with items like *oroḡbo*, *iyó*, *oyin*, *aàduñ*, *eja*, *ìreke*, among others. The relevance of these is further discussed below. Also to be accompanied with the itinerant musicians and drummers to add embellishment to the programme. Back then, when the two families were seated, the young man's family will submit the items they brought for betrothal (*Ìdána*). It should be noted here that *Ìdána* (betrothal) exercise depends on the norms of every other parts of the Yorùbá nation. But there are some items that are general. Some could add variety of cloth to theirs, while some could include tubers of yam to their items. It could also be roasted fish and money. In time past the amount of money included used to be *oḡe meḡa*, *meḡin tabi ma'ruñ-un* (three, four or five bags of cowries).

Preparation (*I`pale`mo`*)

Immediately after betrothal (*Ìdána*), next is *ìpalẹmó* (preparation). The *ìpalẹmó* (preparation) is in lieu of the marriage proper. The two families will be engaged in readiness for the bigger ceremony of traditional marriage as part of Yorùbá culture and identity. The date fixed for the traditional marriage will be communicated to members of the two families. It could be fixed for festive season of a particular worship that will attract everyone being present. The bride's family would not allow the bride to be far from them to avoid any form of danger that could befall her. The mother to the bride will be inducting her daughter; so also, the father to the groom will be educating his son with *ẹko`iwa`omoluabi`* (act of good characters). Such informal training prepared them for the marriage proper. The Yorùbá traditional marriage will be incomplete without the bridal chant (*ẹkuñ iyàwó*). As part of Yorùbá culture and identity, the bride was expected to learn *ẹkuñ iyàwó* (bridal chant) as part the preparations. The essence of *ẹkuñ iyàwó* (bridal chant) was to appreciate her parents for rearing her to the adulthood and to bid the family members a farewell.

Oracle Consultations (*Ifá Iyàwó*)

On the exact day for the traditional marriage proper, early in the morning, the bride's father will consult *Ifá* oracle regarding things to be done to enable the bride experience peace in her husband's home. Such was known as *Ifá iyàwó* (Oracle consultations). This did reflect the Yorùbá culture and identity. If it involved sacrifice or atonement, it would be done. They would have to appease Eṣu Oḡara. The essence was to make the place bearable for the bride.

Marriage Day (*O`jo`I`gbe`ya`wo`*)

On the actual day of the marriage, the kinsfolk, friends and well-wishers used to be present at the bride's father's house as part of Yorùbá culture and identity. Relatives on both sides of paternal and maternal lines would start to bring presents. The marriage marked the conclusion of contract to 'give' the bride to the young man by the parents. Back then, they would be felicitating at the ceremony till the evening time when the bride would be ready to leave for the bridegroom's place. The first point of her duty used to be her father's place to receive blessing from him. In the presence of relatives from both families, she did go on her knees with high degree of obedience to

her husband. The father prayed and blessed her. Some parts of the blessing included longevity for her and her husband, fruitfulness and many more. The bride was always shedding tears, as she approached her mother to bid her good-bye and for the mother's blessing too. In most cases the mother could not control her emotions as she equally broke down in tears. At night, the parents did call on the wives who were married to the sons in the bride's family and young men of about four of the extended family, bride's *egbe* (associates), party brides and the bridesmaid who were usually a niece or first cousin of the bride, to escort the bride to the groom's house and to specifically hand her over to the head of the groom's family.

Ritual of Washing of the Wife's Feet (*Wi'we, e, se, `Ìyàwó*)

The drumming and singing of merriment songs did alert the bridegroom's family of the arrival of the groom in order to stand by at the entrance to wash the feet of the bride by the wives of some members of the extended family in the bridegroom's house. The Yorùbá believed that such practice was for the wife to enter into the new family with purified body, goodness and fortunes. Having washed the body or the legs, one of the old brides did lift on to the shoulder of the new bride and eventually carried her into the house. It is this lifting and carrying of the bride that has given name to the event *i-gbe-yaìwo* (lifting or carrying of wife) (Mustapha, et al 2004, p.96).

In addition, the bridegroom's family did provide vulnerable calabash (*igba'gbigbe*) for the wife to step on and break into pieces. Back then, the splinter of the calabash signified the number of children that the bride will bear. However, the arrival of the bride used to be before the head of the extended family of the bridegroom and members. Then the bridegroom should not be found at home by virtue of Yorùbá culture and identity. The bride knelt in silence before the head of the extended family of the bridegroom, and the leader of the four young men group assigned to escort them, step forward and delivered the compliments from the bride's father and his heartfelt prayer (Fadipe, 1970, p.82). All these reflected the Yorùbá cultural identity. It was important for those that escorted the bride to stay behind to witness whether the bride will pass the test of virginity to her husband or not.

Ritual of Virginity (*Oro`I`ba`le`*)

The ritual of virginity (*oro ìbaìe*) used to be an imperative aspect in Yorùbá traditional marriage. It was the chief event of the 'bridal night' where the bride did prove her esteem of being found *virgo intacta*, Fadipe (1970:83). The meeting between husband and wife did come up three days after the traditional marriage. But in some division of Yorùbá nation, it did come up that very night. In the inner room where the defloration was to take place, a piece of white sheet used to be laid before the bride could sleep on it. Then, two women usually slept outside the door of the bride's room where they would be straining their ears to catch any exclamation of pains coming from the bride in the course of defloration. A bride found *virgo intacta* (i.e her virginity still intact) used to be the cause of rejoicing by the husband, herself, the relatives of both families, especially the bride's parents. It implied that they had been training her on how to keep herself pure. The white sheet laid smeared with blood used to be sent in covered up calabash to the parents of the bride that night or the following morning. Such used to be accompanied with *owo* (some money), *emu* (a full gourd of palm wine), *efun* (white chalk), *isqána'odidi* (a full box of matches), Daramola & Jeje (1975:41).

The merriment continues in the bridegroom's house and in the bride's father's house too. The Yorùbá norms allowed the bride to spend the day in her father's house. But if found *non virgo intacta* (i.e. she had lost her virginity before marriage), the women outside and their *egbe* (associates) would take to their heels and look for their safety because the bridegroom could vent anger violently on them as a result of disappointment, especially over a woman he loved greatly. The bridegroom would send an indigenous semiotics (*aroko*) messages to the bride's father as a way of reporting the shame and insult brought upon their family through the daughter. The items are *akeñ` gbe`emu aàbo* (half a gourd of palm wine), *eèdu* (black charcoal), *isqána`aikuñ* (half a box of matches). The fact that the bride was found unchaste on the bridal night did not out rightly mean that the husband would put her away. Rather, such a woman did suffer considerable loss of

face from her husband's kindred. Equally, she did miss the great deal of presents that a bride normally looked forward to receiving from dignitaries and members of her husband's allied. These explain the degree of Yorùbá culture and identity.

Ritual of the Bride's Tasks (*Oro`is.e`Ìyàwó*)

The first set of tasks for the bride did come up on the fifth, seventh or eighth days after traditional marriage. These depended on the divisions within Yorùbá nation. The bride's first task at this point was to sweep in the open. In doing this, *àwọ̀n ọ̀rẹ̀ ìyàwó* (comrades or associates) who had been with her for about three days assisted her before they could take their leave. In some cases, *àwọ̀n ìyàwó ile* (wives of the extended family), led by the *ìyàále* (most senior wife) entrusted with the bride's caring, joined her in showing her the houses of the family's allied. They did sweep the whole compound and the verandas running round the compounds. The essence of the task was to collect gratitude from the occupants of the rooms alongside of the verandas. It must be mentioned that, the act of giving and receiving presents or gifts is the hallmark of the Yorùbá culture and identity. The younger ones give the older ones; the inferiors give the superiors as they reciprocate such act.

Secondly, the bride was to formally fetch water. Fetching water in this regard was for the members of the husband's family and the important allied in the family. She used to be accompanied by *ọ̀mọ̀ ìyàwó* (bridesmaid) or the *ìyàále kekere* (the latest comers among senior wives who were in the household before her). In the process of fetching water with pitcher of water on her head, relatives who were required vouchsafe her blessing and offerings.

Relevance of Major Items in Yorùbá Traditional Marriage as Culture and Identity

Some important items were used during Yorùbá traditional marriage. These items were so important with high degree of relevance. At the occasion, when the two families congregated for the marriage proper, they did use the items for prayer and blessing the bride and the groom. The items for prayer include *orògbo* (bitter-nut), *obi`aba`ta* (kolanut), *ataare* (alligator pepper), *ogi skeet* (local wine), *Oyin* (honey), *a`du`n* (groundnut cake), *Iyo`* (salt), *Epo-pupa* (palm-oil), *isu* (yam) among others. The elders have ways of using each of the items for prayers. These are elucidated in the following trajectory:

Bitter-cola (*Oro`gbo`*)

The use of *orògbo* (bitter-cola) and its relevance as part of Yorùbá culture and identity is not of small measure. Forty-two (42) pieces of *orògbo* (bitter-cola) are expected to be submitted as part of the items for Yorùbá traditional marriage. Its relevance represented the old age, troubled-free world and prosperity. In time past, the elders did take some bite of *orògbo* (bitter-cola) to pray for the couples to live long in good health and see generations of their children.

Honey (*Oyin*)

Oyin (honey) is an essential item in Yorùbá traditional marriage. A bottle of *oyin* (honey) is expected to be brought for traditional marriage by the bridegroom. Its symbolic value is that the couples will be as sweet as honey. The elders then did taste the honey and pray for the couples that may *Olo`du`mare* add sweetness to their lives and be blessed with children.

Kola-nut (*Obi`-a`ba`ta`*)

About forty-two to hundred pieces of *obi`* (kola-nut) is expected to be submitted for the Yorùbá traditional marriage. It has some spiritual and social values as part of Yorùbá culture and identity. In Yorùbá society, *obi`aba`ta`* (bitter-kola) has become a relevant item. For Yorùbá traditional marriage, the elder(s) did take some bite of *obi`* to pay for fertility, fruit of the womb and protection from evil.

Alligator Pepper (*Ataare*)

Ataare (Alligator pepper) comes in a pod of multiple seeds. It symbolised blessing. It was so

relevant that the elder(s) did take some seeds of *ataare*, chewed it and pray for the couples to be healthy, have abundant and prosperous children in their homes.

Ground-nut Cake (*A`a`du`n*)

A`a`du`n is a locally made cake from ground-nut. It was relevant in Yorùbá traditional marriage that the elder(s) did taste it and prayed with it for sweetness, blessing and prosperous future for the couples and their children in their endeavours.

Salt (*Iyo``*)

Iyo (salt) forms part of the necessary items for Yorùbá traditional marriage. It has its symbolical value, 'life'. It is used as a preservative and sweetener. In time past, the elders did use salt to pray and blessed the couples for joy and troubled-free life which reflected Yorùbá culture and identity.

Gin/Wine (*O`ti`*)

Gin is in liquid form. It represents water which is life. The elders did take some quantity, then pray and blessed the couples that no one will ever dislike, hate or speak evil about water, may they not experience any form of hatred and dislike.

In time past, all these items were used in Yorùbá traditional marriage. Every item picked for prayers back then was also given to the couples to taste and to drink. The Yorùbá believed that doing so did enable every refrain of prayer pronounced to be answered. These projected the aesthetical value in Yorùbá culture and identity.

Conclusion

In this study, we have been able to examine Yorùbá traditional marriage as a major hallmark of culture and identity. We were able to look at the culture and its beauty in marriage, especially traditional marriage (*Igbeyawo abinibi/ atijo*), with various forms of marriage, its functions, reasons for Yorùbá traditional marriage, and relevant items that could enhance the comprehension of the study. More so, the study looked at the basic steps that were involved in time past regarding Yorùbá traditional marriage to project the aesthetical value inherent as culture and identity.

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