

An Exploration of Tradition and Modernity in Hausa Wedding Songs

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Abstract

This paper explores the evolving themes found in contemporary Hausa wedding songs, highlighting their cultural, social, and religious significance within the Hausa community. Utilizing a combination of free and literal translations, the analysis delves into key themes such as the integration of religious elements, self-praise, modern trends, communal celebration, gender roles, and farewell rituals. The contextual theory is used as its theoretical framework. The findings reveal how these songs serve not only as a reflection of traditional values, but also as a response to contemporary influences shaping marital practices. The emphasis on communal joy underscores the importance of kinship and friendship, while the guidance offered regarding gender roles illustrates enduring expectations within the marriage framework. Additionally, farewell songs capture the emotional complexities associated with leaving one's family, illuminating the bittersweet nature of marital transitions. Overall, this study underscores the dual role of Hausa wedding songs as both cultural artifacts that preserve historical practices and dynamic expressions of identity that celebrate the interplay between tradition and modernity. By examining these musical narratives, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the rich cultural fabric of Hausa society and the symbolic significance of their wedding ceremonies.

Introduction

Hausa wedding songs are traditional songs performed during wedding ceremonies in Hausa culture. They express love, marriage and family values through their lyrics and symbols. These songs are used to celebrate the couple's union, to express the joy and happiness of the occasion, and to offer advice for a successful union. In recent years, there have been a number of new trends in Hausa wedding songs, reflecting the changing social and cultural landscape of Hausa society. The modern trends in Hausa

wedding songs often combine traditional musical elements with contemporary influences to create a vibrant and celebratory atmosphere that resonates more with the younger audiences. Their lyrics also often focus on love, marriage, and the joy of wedding festivities.

There is no doubting the fact that life is dynamic and so are culture and tradition. Over the years, Hausa culture and tradition have witnessed a wide range of changes from the mode of dressing, eating, to the way and manner ceremonies, rituals and festivals are performed. Wedding is one of the most important cultures of Hausa people and one very important feature of Hausa weddings is the songs that accompany them. Traditionally, these songs were heralded by claps and beating of calabashes for music, but those traditional folk songs have gradually been replaced with some other forms of songs and entertainment. The recent trends came with new innovations where musical accessories are different from the traditional ones. Previously also, those wedding songs were monotonous and applicable to all brides. Songs like *Ayye Mama*, *Ayyaraye Daure Jure* and so on, are classic examples of those monotonous wedding songs. Now, apart from the use of modern musical instruments which also gave birth to new dance steps, there is also the personalization of these songs, where you find singers singing for a particular couple, their families and friends.

This shift that saw the gradual phasing out of the traditional folk wedding songs could be said to have started when singers like Barmani Coge, Uwale Mai Amada and a couple of others began singing at wedding ceremonies, closely followed by male singers and dancers like Mande Marafa mai ‘Yantsuntsu, Mai Asharalle, Fati Niger, Sa’adatu Ta’annabi, up to the recent male dominated forum of singers like Ado Gwanja, Nazir SarkinWaka, Nura M. Inuwa, Ali Jita and so many others. This paper focuses on the analysis of wedding songs sung by this new generation of singers and how they tend to incorporate into these songs, some values and traditions that are fast becoming extinct. This new generation of singers usually use technology empowered instruments, such as pianos and computers to produce their music.

One cannot talk about the Hausa people without talking about their culture. The elements of culture and tradition of Hausa people are quite numerous, because they consist of all the things that the Hausa people do and all those things that they have been used to doing because they were inherited from their forefathers. According to Bunza, the Hausa culture began experiencing some changes from when the Hausa man started interacting with non-Hausas or foreigners to Hausaland, as well as people of different religions that differ from the traditional religion of the Hausa man. Due to this, one can look at the Hausa culture through three different

perspectives: pure traditional culture, culture that has been mixed with religion, and culture that has been mixed with modernity.

Hausa culture and tradition go hand in hand with its literature, especially its oral literature, which is naturally where literature started. It is through this literature that one can deduce the actual traditional way of life of the Hausa people and that is why scholars see literature as a picture or mirror through which one can see the culture or way of life of a certain people. Different people have different cultures; that is, the way they live, their social hierarchy, their thinking, as well as their beliefs, and it is only through their various literatures that one can see and differentiate between them.

The traditions associated with marriage could be said to have started since when the Hausa man was living his life in accordance with his traditional religion or *Maguzanci*, as asserted by Abdullahi (2008) After the coming of Islam however, according to Ibrahim, these traditions saw some changes where those that did not conform to Islam were discarded, while those that were seen as okay were retained. Such are the ones now referred to as the culture and tradition of the Hausa man. However, after interacting with non-Hausa who come from far and near Hausaland, cultures began to intermix and the Hausa culture saw the infiltration and acceptance of foreign cultures. So many new things were added to the culture and some of the traditional ones which were inherited from the forefathers were discarded. This also resulted in the modernity now being experienced, which is threatening to send the traditional Hausa culture into extinction.

Traditional Hausa folklore includes folksongs, folktales, riddles, myths, legends, proverbs and some forms that are performed during marriage ceremonies, naming and funeral rights, and some other ones that relate to leadership and system of daily living, as previously explained. In the presentation of marriage ceremony, songs are performed which portray the actual way of life of the Hausa people, and it is through these songs that the perception of the Hausa people towards marriage, rights and duties of the spouses, are depicted just like in the songs *Wakar Aure*, *Wakar Jere* and other regular songs like *Ayye Mama* and *Ke kika ce Kina So*, all in Alhassan et al (12-14).

Gusau (2014) is of the view that Hausa culture and tradition paved the way for the emergence of folksongs because it is through the observation of the nature of the happenings, the thinking of the people and the creatures in the environment and the general way of life of the people, that spurred and inspired those people who form songs, especially wedding songs. Scholars however, made the assertion that Hausa oral songs originated from the time Hausa people started hunting on land and in water, up to the time they started farming and other economic activities.

One cannot say precisely when songs started, but it is for sure one of the ways through which a Hausa man portrays his bravery, happiness, enjoyment, as well as his sadness. The Hausa wedding song as a subgenre of folksong is held in high esteem, as it is within the songs that a lot of lessons are taught to the bride and the general society, as it makes more sense than just sitting the bride down and explaining things to her. Songs help in easy comprehension and retention of lessons embedded within them.

Before the emergence of the use of calabashes, songs were heralded by claps, but subsequently, after the calabashes, various types of drums such as *duma* and *kalangu* emerged. Since the Hausa society is also a dynamic one, the traditional mode of songs and musical instruments are gradually being phased out and replaced by other modern instruments such as pianos, drums, guitars and other modern and foreign instruments, so that they can flow into the new trend of songs. It is in line with this observation that we find it necessary to explore these modern trends in the Hausa wedding songs.

Hausa Wedding Songs

Women in Hausaland have different types and forms of songs that they sing or present in their different day-to-day activities and this applies to both young girls and older women. The small girls usually start with songs that are performed during moonlight games or on a particular spot chosen for such games which is referred to as *dandali*; such songs are called *wakokin gada* or *bojo*. Apart from these, there are other different forms of songs that both young girls and women perform in different places or during different occasions like ceremonies, festivals or other traditional events or rituals, or particular events like weddings, religious events, such as *Sallar Takutaha*, while supplicating to God for rains, *Tashe* during Ramadan (the Islamic fasting period); and even while performing their house chores so that they keep entertained or use the songs as a medium through which they send their heartfelt messages of joy or sorrow.

In most cases, women present their songs to entertain or to admonish the bride on the things that relate to a girl's life right from when she is in her father's house, up to the time of marriage, where she is taught how to live peacefully with her husband, his family, her in-laws and other people around her. She is also admonished on how to carry out her chores and other day-to-day activities. Sometimes, it is the stage songs that are converted to wedding songs during wedding ceremonies. There are, however, some songs that are composed specifically for the wedding. For instance, songs that depict a tinge of sadness due to parting with the bride, which otherwise are referred to as farewell songs – songs like *Ayye mama* and others are

good examples.

In those days, these types of song were performed just like the *gada* songs; that is with clapping and dancing. As time went by, things like calabash, mortar and any other item that could be beaten to produce sound, were used for music for more entertainment.

Modern Hausa Wedding Songs

Hausa women wedding songs have witnessed quite a number of changes due to how time is fast changing and progressing, as well as due to mixing up with other people's cultures and traditions. Prior to now, as earlier mentioned, songs were introduced and performed alongside clapping as musical accompaniment. With time, the use of some other items, such as calabashes and the likes to produce music, emerged. This type of music was traditionally done indoors by women who also used sticks to beat the calabashes for better sound. Subsequently, some women decided to use this type of music and singing as a business through which they earn their daily bread. According to Usman in her thesis on Barmani Coge Mai Amada, on how she started singing with calabash music, the singer said she did not inherit the business, and neither did she learn it from someone. She said she was just at a wedding ceremony where she noticed that the women were sitting quietly and looking sort of bored, so, she instantly thought of entertaining them and so asked for a calabash which she started beating and singing at the same time. The women felt happy and entertained and even showered her with gifts. Since then, she started being invited to weddings or naming ceremonies to entertain people. Her husband objected at the initial stage, but since she was always bringing home goodies, he had to let her be. It was later on that she got other women to assist her in beating the calabashes and echoing the chorus. With the advent of modernity, these songs began to change in style, where women were previously at the forefront in that business, men have now gradually taken over. These new sets of singers, that is, the males, now go to studios to record songs, using modern musical instruments and sell them in the form of CDs or Mp3s. Sometimes, people who can afford it even invite them to come and perform live during their weddings. Others would prefer to give the singers a list of names comprising those of the bride, the groom, their parents, friends and relatives, so that they compose and record songs specifically for them. This group of singers shall be the main focus of this paper.

Theoretical Framework

The paper aims at exploring the contexts of modernity and tradition, as embedded in the songs. For this reason, the contextual theory will serve as the theoretical

framework for this research. The contextual theory focuses attention not only on a material of folklore, but also on the event in which a tradition is performed or communicated. The advocates of this theory put a lot of interest in the cultural, sociological, psychological and linguistic environment in which a particular folklore material is produced. The folklore material is thus viewed from its context in language, behaviour, expression, communication and performance.

The oral-formulaic theory of Parry and Lord, for the first time in the long history of folklore scholarship, attached great significance to the context of folklore texts, attention to context as it were, was a byproduct of their main quest: to search for the formulas that singers learn and memorize to continue the tradition of the art of story-telling. Thus, despite the significance this theory attached to the context of epic singing traditions, oral-formulaic theory remains primarily a text-oriented theory. However, one should not lose sight of the emphasis this theory laid on studying context which eventually gained momentum and appeared in the form of a separate and forceful theoretical tool known as the “Contextual Theory”.

Methodology

The data for this paper was collected through Moving Picture Expert Group Layer 3 (MP3s). Free and literal translations would be adopted in translating the original Hausa songs into English. The former allows a translator to use his/her own initiatives to bring out what may be regarded as the actual message from the source language, while the latter allows a translator to substitute a word or sentence from the receptor language. The verses of the songs selected are composed by a number of singers; namely, Ali Jita, Nura M.Inuwa, Ado Gwanja and Umar M. Shareef. The titles of the songs are: *Ga Amarya* (Here is the bride termed as Jita) by Ali Jita, *Ina Amarya* (Where is the Bride termed as Inuwa) by Nura M Inuwa, *Sabuwar Amarya* (New Bride termed as Gwanja) by Ado Gwanja, and *Babbar Rana* (The Great Day termed as Shareef) by Umar M Shareef.

Analysis

In this section, the verses from the various songs that talk about the same themes are presented in their original Hausa version alongside the English translation and discussed together.

1. Religion

Na sa Ubangijina mai duniya
I pray to Allah, Lord of the worlds
Sarkin da shi ke mini lafiya

The King who keeps me healthy
Ya ba ni baiwa ga ta kun jiya
He bestowed me with this gift
Gare shi sai dai inyi godiya
My gratitude goes only to Him
Alhamdulillah Sarki daya
All praise be to Allah, the only Lord
Roƙo nake ka daɗan juriya
I pray to Allah to give me more strength
Waka ta auren so zan biya
I intend to compose a song for love marriage
Sunnar Ma'aiki mai juriya
The Sunnah of the resilient Messenger
Manzonmu shi yayi gwagwarmaya
Our Prophet who struggled to see
Muke ta numfashi duniya
That we survived on this earth
A yau waɗanda su suke kwaikwaya
And today, he's being emulated
Miji da mata sun zama ɗaya
The husband and wife have become one
(Shareef)

Abunda Rabbana ya hukunta
As ordained by our Lord the most high
Da namiji shi zai auri mata
Man it is that marries the woman
Sunna ku je ku raya
Go on and uplift the sunnah
(Inuwa)

The religion and culture of the Hausa people are intertwined. Islam encourages people to always remember and mention Allah in all their dealings. This is also a common practice with the Hausa written songs, which gave roots to the modern oral songs, where songs begin with a doxology. Nowadays, these modern songs are usually written before they are sung. The mention of “sunnah” reflects the cultural and religious context of Hausa weddings, where Islamic traditions and values play a significant role. Sunnah is the way of life of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, (peace

and blessings of Allah be upon him). The mention of Sunnah, therefore, indicates that the union follows Islamic tradition and also highlights the religious significance of the occasion. The verses underscore the significance of upholding cultural practices and principles in the marital relationship.

2. Self-praise

Kin ji jita na kada a babbar harka

Listen to the guitar being played at the grand wedding

Kin ji ganga tamu munyi mai albarka

Listen to the beats of our blessed drums

Ni kidana bai rufe ma kowa kofa

My music is for all generations

(Jita)

Ya amarya shigo shigo da kawayenki

O dear bride, come in along with your friends

Ku taho ku iske Gwanja mawakinki

Come in and meet Gwanja, your singer

(Gwanja)

Da tamburana na buga ina kidi

Ni Shareef Umar mai wakar gidan kidi

(Shareef)

Har nayi abunda zai sa ki burga

I'll make you stand out

Bikinki duk gari sai ya dauka

Your wedding will be the talk of town

Da an ganan a ce ba ki tamka

When they see me they'll know that you're special

Ni ne nazo da kaina

I came to the wedding in person

(Inuwa)

Another traditional aspect taken up by modern songs is the act of self-praise and mentioning of the singer's name within the songs. This is also as a result of following the culture of writing the lyrics first before singing. However, the traditional act of mentioning names at the beginning or end of a song that was done as a result of

following the Islamic or Arabian way of writing written songs, is not the sole reason for doing so now. These singers usually do it for the sake of informing and inviting them for further references. It serves as a sort of advertisement. Sometimes, they even read out their phone numbers in case anyone wants to contact them. This act of mentioning names is evident in the verses above.

3. Modern trends
Yau ga amarya nan ga angonta
The bride is here, so is the groom
Yasa hannunsa ne ya rike ta
Coming in hand in hand
(Inuwa)

Ga amarya ku ganta gimbiya mai kunya
Here comes the bride, beautiful and bashful
To ku duba, ga ta nan da angon nata
Here she comes, along with her groom
(Jita)

Ya amarya shigo da kawayenki
O bride, come along with your friends
(Gwanja)

Traditionally, the events that surround wedding ceremonies do not entail any event where both the bride and the groom come out amidst the gathering of people to dance or just stand for people to stare at them and admire them. This is a modern trend where events such as *Kamu*, Luncheon, Dinner, are featured along the long lists of events slated for the ceremony. During such events, the bride and the groom usually come in after almost all the guests have been seated, in what they term as the grand entrance of the couple. This is very much different from what is known traditionally. The Hausa bride is supposed to exude modesty, bashfulness, and be self-effacing, contrary to what is seen today where brides come out with tight-fitting dresses and see-through veils that do not cover anything. The groom would hitherto be angry and show his jealousy if anyone complimented the beauty of his bride; but nowadays, it is the opposite.

4. Communal Celebration

Dangi da kawaye, abokai

O relatives and friends

Ku zo muyi murna

All come let's celebrate (Shareef)

Murna da karuwa in ta samu

As we rejoice and celebrate

Farin ciki ku zo ku taya mu

Come you all and felicitate with us

(Inuwa)

Duk sanadinki an tara al'umma

All have gathered solely for you

To shiga taron gida ya kankama

The celebration is at its peak, come and join

(Gwanja)

To yara-yara, manya-manyai sai kun taka

Old and young, all come and dance

Mai kudade yau a hannu sai ya jefa

Those with money must spray it today

(Jita)

Hausa people value the ties of kinship, friendship and neighbourliness very much. Whenever there is a celebration of any kind, relatives and friends come together to show their joy and happiness with the celebrants. The verses emphasize the communal aspect of weddings. The participation of "old and young" and the call for everyone to dance, highlight the importance of shared joy and unity. The act of spraying money, a common practice at Nigerian weddings, further emphasizes the communal wealth and generosity. The core is the joy and excitement surrounding a wedding.

5. Advice on gender roles

Tilas amarya sai kin biyayya

O bride, you must be subservient

(Inuwa)

Za tayi wa Ango biyayya
 She'll be subservient to the groom
Waje na girki bata da sanya
 She'll not delay in cooking meals
 (Shareef)

Eh, ni dai nasiha zan ba ki
 Yes, I have come to advice you
Ko in miki shawara daukar daki
 Or to admonish you will be better
 (Gwanja)

Wedding ceremonies are usually avenues where pieces of advice are given by almost everyone. The singers are not left out. The advice givers usually try to point out specific gender roles and offer examples where such roles are practiced. The verses above offer practical advice to the bride on how to navigate her marriage successfully. They offer specific advice, particularly for the bride, on the need for being obedient, as well as a good cook, as a typical Hausa wife is expected to be. The emphasis is on respect and obedience, which contribute to maintaining social order. Sometimes, even the groom is not left out in this line of advice. He is also advised on how to live with his new wife, how to take care of her and a host of other things. They are both advised on moral behaviour, how to settle their scores, as well as how not to involve other people in their private life. They are generally advised on how to live a successful married life. Examples of verses that advise the groom are:

Ya rike ta, kai miji kula da amarya
 The husband it is, who takes care of the bride
Gode Allah, ango sai ka dinga sana'a
 Get a job and always thank God
 (Jita)

Here, the groom is reminded of his responsibility as the husband to wholly take care of his wife, hence the need for him to have a job or a business so as to have the financial means to take up that responsibility.

6. Farewell

Yau Amarya, za ki kwana babban daki

Today you are going to sleep in the big room
Sallama dai za kiyi wa dangin naki
Say goodbye to your relatives
Sallama dai za kiyi wa Mama taki
Say goodbye to your mother
Kun yi bai-bai addu 'a ake yi don ki
You're leaving today, everyone is praying for you
Daina kuka, ke amarya ba a raki
Stop crying o' Bride, be brave
(Jita)

Bankwana muke miki, more zamanki lafiya banda zama a firgici
Today we say farewell, enjoy your marriage and live in peace
Ke da iyayenki, ke da kawayenki, da mawaƙinki, kuyi bankwana
Bid farewell to your parents, your friends, and your singer
(Gwanja)

Wedding ceremony in a Hausa society reaches its peak on the day the bride is to be taken to her groom's house. It is on this day that the bride cries her eyes out, because of the pains of leaving her family behind. She also cries because of the sad goodbyes that are happily sung on that day. Traditionally, the songs are sung as the bride's entourage leaves the bride's father's house up to the time they reach the groom's house. These songs are known as farewell songs in Hausa land. They are labeled so, because the theme of farewell predominates in these songs. Nowadays, farewell only comes up as a theme in the songs which are also sung at various events lined up for the wedding, not necessarily on the day the bride is to be conveyed to her new home. In conclusion, this analysis illustrates the rich complexity of themes found within contemporary Hausa wedding songs, demonstrating their significant cultural, religious and social implications. The use of both free and literal translations facilitates a deeper understanding of the nuances embedded within the original Hausa verses, allowing us to appreciate the intricate relationship between language and meaning.

The exploration of themes such as religion, self-praise, modern trends, communal celebration, gender roles and farewell, showcases the multifaceted nature of Hausa weddings. These songs not only serve as a reflection of the traditional values and beliefs inherent in the Hausa culture, but also highlight the shifts brought about by modern influences. The intertwining of religion and culture, particularly the emphasis on Islamic traditions, highlights the profound impact of spirituality in the

lives of the Hausa people.

Moreover, the evolving practices surrounding weddings—such as the grand entrance of the bride and groom—illustrate a dynamic cultural landscape that balances respect for tradition with contemporary expressions of identity. The emphasis on communal celebration illuminates the collective joy that accompanies such significant life events, reinforcing the importance of kinship, friendship and neighborliness in Hausa society.

Furthermore, the advice on gender roles and the expectations placed on brides and grooms reflect the enduring norms that dictate marital relationships, emphasizing the roles of respect, obedience and care that both partners are encouraged to uphold. Lastly, the poignant farewell songs highlight the emotional weight of marriage transitions, capturing the bittersweet essence of leaving one's family to start anew.

As we delve into the lyrics and meanings, it becomes clear that these songs are not merely entertainment; they are vital cultural artifacts that preserve historical practices, convey moral teachings, and foster communal bonds. The evolution of these musical expressions signals the continual interplay between tradition and modernity, making them a compelling subject for further study in the realms of anthropology, linguistics and cultural studies. Through this paper, we gain a greater insight into how the Hausa wedding songs encapsulate the essence of their society, celebrating both the continuity and transformation of their cultural heritage.

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