

The Crying has Stopped: Trends in Yoruba Marriage Ceremonies Practice among Ekiti Peoples, Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

Marriage is a sacred and noble institution among the Yoruba people of South Western Nigeria. A notable practice during their traditional marriage ceremonies culture is the “Ekun Iyawo” (crying of the new bride) and that of her family before the bride is married off to the groom’s family. The “Ekun Iyawo” is meant for bride on the eve of the wedding ceremony. This cry is an emotionally inspired cry which has nothing to do with hypocrisy. With the performance of “Ekun Iyawo”, a bride is escorted by family and friends to the doorstep of her husband’s home, her new home. However, there has been noticeable change in this practice in Yorubaland, recently. Brides no longer cry and the whole concept of “Ekun Iyawo” is gradually fading away. Using extensive fieldwork in Ekiti state, this study identified that lack of family bond and westernization/’civilization’ through education, religion and new way of doing things are the major factors responsible for non-crying attitude of today’s brides. While its desirability is important, its continuity seems impossible due to the emergence of new generation of parents and mode of parenting.

Keywords: EkunIyawo (Crying Bride), Change, Yoruba, Marriage Culture

Introduction

Marriage is one of the oldest institutions among the Yorubas in South-western Nigeria; which comprises of Ekiti, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Osun and Lagos states and some parts of Kwara and Kogi where Yorubas are living. Marriage is a contract between spouses that institutes set of rights and obligation between them and among their children and in-laws. It marks the beginning of new era between the new couple.

There are different stages in the marriage culture of the Yorubas, ranging from the proposal stage where the parents of the intending groom make known their intentions or interest. The investigation stage (*iwaadi*), is done particularly by the groom family to seek divination counsel through ifa priest for the horoscope and future of the intending couples. The outcome of this counsel can be positive or negative. This is followed by the proposal stage (*itooro*), intention is shown to marry the bride; it is however now known as introduction. This is followed by engagement stage (*idaana*) and lastly the bride eve (*aisuniyawo/ibaale*). However, during the engagement we have the crying of the bride. The bride will be singing the bridal songs

known as 'ekuniyawo' to receive parental blessings. She also chants her reminiscences of childhood, the experiences of growing up with her peers, the discipline of being a daughter e.t.c. Hence, she chants her grief.

The custom of crying existed a long time ago in South Western part of Nigeria, particularly among the Yoruba tribe. It is a notable fact in Yoruba land that marriage is not only the union of husband and wife but also seen as the union of the two families involved. Though, not so common again, this traditional practice is however still being observed by those who view it as an essential part of the ceremony. This cry is an emotionally inspired cry which has nothing to do with hypocrisy as some men claim or because it is a norm. The bidding farewell advices and invoking prayers usually trigger the flow of tears from the bride's parents' eyes, and spontaneously the bride would be entrenched in tears too. The crying of the new bride is to show that she is depressed leaving her parents' home while she goes to an unfamiliar terrain, bearing in mind that after that day she will be a stranger to the home she grew up. With this marriage ritual ("Ekuniyawo") the bride is escorted by family and friends to the door step of her husband's home.

According to the belief, the bride has to cry, otherwise the bride is seen as having poor upbringing and may be a laughing stock in the society. A similar culture is found in Southwest of China's Sichuan Province, particularly among the Tujia people. Crying of the bride is a mandatory wedding custom whether the bride likes it or not, she has to cry. In some part of China, known as West Sichuan province, this ritual practice is called "sitting in the hall" (in Chinese language 'Zuo Tang') and it usually begins a month before the wedding night. For ten days, each night the bride walks inside the hall cries for about an hour, for another ten days, the mother joins to cry, after the grandmother joins to cry for another ten days. This is followed by the bride female siblings or relations, if any (China daily.com).

However, in Yoruba land this ritual cry is fading gradually or has stopped as bride and probably her parents seem to have "refused to cry" again despite bidding farewell, invoking prayers and emotional advices. Parents and folks are joyous at today traditional wedding, even the bride seems eager to leave her parents. Crying is now seen as a mockery of the joyous marriage ceremony.

This study focuses on the Ekiti peoples of Ekiti State. Ekiti state is wholly situated in the tropics. The State is found in the East of Osun state, South of Kogi and Kwara states, and surrounded by Ondo state in the South and in the East. According to 2006 population commission the population of Ekiti is at 2,384,212. Ekiti is a sub-group of Yoruba with slight different in local dialect in different communities. Ekiti people are culturally the same and they speak a minority/regional dialect of Yoruba language identified as Ekiti dialect. It has three senatorial districts; Ekiti Central senatorial district (comprising of Ado, Efon, Ekiti West, Ijero and irepodun/ifelodun local government areas), Ekiti North senatorial district (Ido-Osi, Ikole, Ilejemeje, Moba and Oye local government) and Ekiti South senatorial district, (comprising of Ekiti East, Ekiti South West, Emure, Gbonyin, Ikere and Ise-Orun local government areas),

all totalling 16 local government areas. This study takes a critical and systematic look at cultural practice of marriage ceremony in Ekiti State. In other words, it seeks to answer questions such as: To what extent is the marriage ritual (crying bride) still practised? Do Yoruba people still desire its continuity? If yes, is it possible? If no, why? What factors account for the decline in the crying rituals? And what role does family economic status play? The study focuses on Ekiti state for a variety of reasons, among which is the proximity to the researcher and cultural homogeneity of Ekiti people.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are;

- i. to investigate the extent to which marriage crying ritual is being preserved in Yoruba land.
- ii. to examine the desirability of the crying ritual by Yoruba communities dwellers.
- iii. to determine the factors responsible for the change in this marriage culture in Yoruba land.
- iv. to determine the effects of this change on people and Yoruba culture.

Between Traditional Yoruba and Western Marriage Ceremonies

The significance of Yoruba traditional marriage is gradually becoming a thing of the past and this has become a concern in research. Aderinmoye (2016) emphasized the far reaching effect of social change on Western Nigeria traditional life. His research is premised on unraveling what marriage values of the Yoruba were and how these values have been affected over time. While he used qualitative method of research (simple percentage and systemic coding method), the study identified that civilization, education, the mixture of culture and language, leading to urbanization, inter-marriage and electronic media are responsible for changes in Yoruba traditional marriage, which reflect in loose family standard, marriage instability, weak patriarchy system and loss of values and customs among the Yorubas. In ascertaining the strains in Yoruba marriage culture Fasoranti and Owagbemi (2012) conducted a research to investigate the changes in Yoruba traditional family values, using Akoko communities as case study. The household sample used was drawn from five clustered within Akoko South West local government of Ondo state. It was identified that the main strains to Yoruba marriage traditional culture are the lost or reduction in extended family tie, the clamour for women empowerment, which has led to dual occupational system between couple, as well as the pervasive flair for religious or court marriages which relegates the importance of traditional marriage. Moreover, in 2014 a study was conducted in Ogun state to discover the negative impact of western culture on Yoruba marriage institution among the people in Igbesa community. The study reveals that although conflicts exist between western marriage culture and the indigenous traditional marriage, but the western culture does not negatively affect the traditional marriage culture (Dada, 2014). While Odejebi (2013) also investigate the influence of socio-economic change on various steps involved in Yoruba traditional marriage norm which also includes

“Ekun Iyawo” and identified that socioeconomic change has been playing a prominent in the changing Yoruba traditional marriage culture.

Methodology

The study area for this study is Ekiti state. Since, Ekiti state is sub-divided into three senatorial districts; Ekiti South, Ekiti North and Ekiti Central. This study selected two local government areas from each of the three senatorial districts, making 6 local governments that were used out of the 16 local government areas. The sample technique used is purposive random sampling of adults above the age of 50 years. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaire from 60 adults (30 males and 30 females) of different households in selected local government areas. The selected local areas are Ado, Ijero, Ikole, Moba, Gbonyin and Ise - Orun local government areas.

Results and Discussion

Here, we provide and discuss the results of the field work on the change in Yoruba marriage crying ritual, its desirability and the influence of family socio-economic status on the Yoruba marriage culture.

The research objectives were achieved with the use of simple percentage. One on one interview was also used to know the views of our aged parents on the change in this marriage culture.

Objective one of this study talks about the preservation of crying rituals among Yoruba people.

Table 1: Preservation of Bride Crying Ritual in Yoruba Traditional Marriage Culture

	Yes	No	Total
<i>Has the crying stopped</i>	52	8	60
<i>Total %</i>	86.7%	13.3%	100%

Source: Author's (2020)

The result from table 1 shows that out of 60 respondents, 86.7 percentage of the respondents concluded that the crying has stopped. While 13.3 percent still believe that some part of the state still practice the ritual.

Table 2: Desirability and Possibility of Bride Crying Ritual in Yoruba Traditional Marriage Culture

	Desirability		Possibility	
	Obs.	%	Obs.	%
Yes	47	78.3	10	16.7
No	13	21.7	50	83.3
Total	60	100	60	100

Source: Author's (2020)

It is observed from table 2, that most of the respondents still desire the continuity of the crying bride culture, with 78.3 percent level of desirability. While 21.7 percent do not see the need for the bride to cry during her wedding. However, 83.3 percent of the respondents do not believe in its reoccurrence and continuity, and 16.7 percent feel that Yoruba people can still practice the marriage culture.

Among the factors that play a prominent role in the changing trend in Yoruba marriage culture are westernization/civilization, socio-economic status, technology, urbanization and lack of family bond.

Table 3: Factors Responsible for the Change in Marriage Crying Ritual

	Agree	Disagree	Total	% Agree	% Disagree	Total
<i>Westernization/ Civilization</i>	46	14	60	76.7	23.3	100
<i>Socio-Economic Reasons</i>	10	50	60	16.7	83.3	100
<i>Technology</i>	32	28	60	53.3	46.7	100
<i>Urbanization</i>	40	20	60	66.7	33.3	100
<i>Lack of Family Bond</i>	49	11	60	81.7	18.3	100

Source: Author's (2020)

As shown in table 3, lack of family bond is seen as a major factor responsible for the change in Yoruba marriage culture (crying ritual of bride). 81.7 percent of respondents supported this. This is followed by the effect of westernization/civilization; through education and religion activities, with 76.7 percent of respondent in support. Also, the influence of communication and technological devices. But socio-economic reasons has little or no contribution to the stalled in bride marriage ritual.

Findings from Personal Interview

From the interview conducted on few of the respondents, it was identified that lack of family tie/bond is the major reason behind the declining crying ritual of Yoruba traditional marriage. According to the interviewees, civilization through education; where children at an early age of 6 years or at most 10 years have left their parents to stay in school as a boarder, have made the children to be independent of their parents unlike the days of old where children stay with their parents while they all work/feed on family farmland. Consequently, this results to lack of home training, peer influence, poor socialization process and cohabitation before marriage.

Match-making or betrothed husband in the days of old (where parents choose groom for their daughter) have also been mentioned as part of the reasons why bride cries, because she does not know the groom or what to expect in the new home. Meanwhile, the present generation of bride chooses who to marry. Thus, the intending couples have become familiar to themselves as against when the parents dictate who to marry.

Furthermore, as thought by people, men are not many in the days of old as they are now. Girl child would have reached or past her prime age before she could find a male suitor. Her parents become happy at the sight of a proposed spouse and at the traditional wedding, hence no sympathy from either of them. Also, the need to lessen the financial burden of the family leads to joyful departure of female child and parents – transition from women traditional role of care giving to full economic involvement leads to the encouragement of boarding facilities in school.

Communication and technological advancement is now seen as a bridge between the bride and her family. Since phone call can be made as many times as possible and the presence of several social media chat (Facebook, Whats up, Telegram, Twitter e.t.c) have bridged communication gap.

Moreover, children of today are looking for freedom and most have tasted the forbidden fruits at early age (before marriage). Hence, they are always eager to leave their parents' home without thinking twice. In addition, moral decadence and possibility of divorce make children to see marriage as a trivial issue, thus no need to cry, since they can quit at will.

The effects of this change in Yoruba crying ritual to a non sympathetic or emotional moods as we have today made Yoruba traditional wedding watery, unimportant and has relegated the essence of parents involvement in choosing spouses for their sons or daughters. Consequently, there is increase in divorce rate, cohabitation is rampant and virginity is seen as outdated.

Conclusion

The study hence concluded that Yoruba traditional wedding of a crying bride has faded away. Lack of family bond/tie as a result of parents' inability to give their children time and attention makes these children not to cry during their wedding, because there is no attachment and children find solace outside their parents' home. This is also linked to westernization/civilization

through early education of children and availability of boarding facilities that make children to be independent at an early age. Although, Yoruba people still desire the practice of bride crying ritual but this might be impossible as new generations of elders who do not believe in this culture emerges. Moreover, change is a permanent thing.

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