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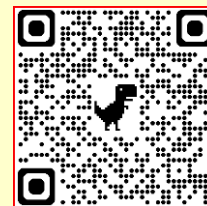
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## Wedding Songs as a Means of Socialization in Selected Hausa Songs

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### ABSTRACT

*The following article analyses four Hausa wedding songs, from two theoretical angles, namely new historicism and feminism. The songs are examined in order to reveal the cultural values that they display, and the impact they might have on the audience that attends the performances during wedding ceremonies. Among the revealed values, there is the notion of the inevitability of marriage for the girl, in a culture that considers marriage as the first and highest aspiration for the girl. Like many African cultures, Hausa culture values highly procreation, and marriage is seen as the right path to it.*

*The article also deals with the socializing role of the songs in the community, as they are significant in the psychological molding of the minds of the audience. Despite this molding, the pieces display resistance to the very values that are celebrated. Thus, one can easily talk about double messages that are encoded in the songs.*

**KEY WORDS:** Hausa culture, wedding songs, socialization, resistance

### Introduction

Before engaging in the analysis of the songs, it is important to present the context in which these songs are produced. In Hausa culture, marriage is commonly viewed as a community sanctioned union between a man and a woman. As such, it is regulated by the socio-cultural assumptions and customs of the community. The wedding songs that are the object of this analysis are sung and/or produced in a social context. They are collected from three women who are from the same area (the Arewa region of Niger Republic), but from two different towns Guéchémé and Matankari. Even though the Hausa community is wide and diverse, the basic cultural values and assumptions about marriage are common among Hausa people in Niger. In fact, they go even beyond this ethnic group, as the same values are also found in some other ethnic groups, despite

ethnic specificities of different groups of the country. In these communities, weddings are not only a family affair, but they are also occasions for social celebrations. The latter are open to the public, whether the wedding happens in a village, a small town, or in the city.

Because of this openness, they play an important socialization role for women, as far as gender values are concerned. Discussing the verbal art of West African women, in her book *Recreating Words, Reshaping Worlds*, Sidikou rightly argues that women's oral art "reveals values that are far more representative of most African women, than are contained in most written texts" (2). This is because, in general the pieces are simply part of the women's sub-folklore or are produced by the women themselves, who represent

the major audience during wedding ceremonies. With this verbal art, women undertake what Ogunyemi refers to as “the transformational role of the griotte as entertainer, teacher, social critic, [and] ideologue” in her book *African Wo/Man Palava* (3).

What Ogunyemi argues applies very well to the context in which the songs are performed. For example, according to Malka Issoufou, one of the interviewees from Guéchéme, in her town, there is a weeklong celebration called the henna ceremony. During this week, the bride spends each day at the house of a different aunt. The aunts are generally her maternal or paternal aunts; they could be her mother’s close friends too. The aunt whose turn it is to welcome the bride in her home for a day, will organize a daylong feast. At these celebrations, many songs are performed. On the D. Day also, songs are produced. During all these feasts, women sing to rejoice, but also to teach lessons to the audience. Generally, the targeted audience is young girls who are taught about bridehood and womanhood through the lyrics.

The songs understudy, are collected from women who know the songs from the folklore. They are anonymous as they are old wedding songs from the community. They can be sung by any woman who knows them. The interviewees who sang during my personal interviews, are not professional singers. The songs have been selected because of their double relevance to denouncing cultural aspects that are unfair to women, and for their empowering aspect. They will be examined from the new historicist angle that stresses that works of art reveal the socio-cultural and ideological realities of the context from which they come. They will also be examined from the branch of feminism that seeks to unveil the cultural practices that are unfair to women, and also celebrate those that empower women within the overall culture, namely womanism. Thus, the pieces will be analyzed from a combination of the above-mentioned theories i.e., from a *new historicist womanist angle*.

### 1. The inevitability of marriage in a girl’s life

As stated above, during the celebration of the marriage, i.e., the henna ceremonies and D. Day celebrations, women sing to rejoice, but also to teach lessons to the audience. Among the key values that are conveyed, there is the acceptance of marriage as one of the major aspirations for the young girl and its inevitability, as in the culture “there is no place” for an unmarried adult woman. Women who are not married undergo a tremendous social pressure to “find” a husband. If at a certain age, a girl is not married, people commonly believe that there must be something wrong with her or her family.

Two songs illustrate the notion of acceptance and inevitability of marriage in a girl’s life, as we can see in this first one sung by Salamatou Moussa from Matankari.

#### Song 1

Aye ye iye raye nanaye  
 Ye iye raye  
 Arme ya ci goma  
 Ya ci talatin  
 Ye iye raye  
 Arme hal dubu dubu  
 Ya canye  
 Ye iye raye  
 Bari kuuka  
 Uwa ki ta baashe ki  
 Ye iye raye  
 Bari kuuka

Uban ki yabaashe ki  
 Ye iye raye

Arme baabu inda  
 Bay kay diya ba  
 Ye iye raye

Hal ya kay Madina  
 Ya kay Maaka  
 Ye iye raye

#### Translation

Aye ye iye raye nanaye  
 Ye iye raye

Marriage has taken ten (girls)  
 It has taken thirty  
 Ye iye eeraye

Marriage has taken  
 Even thousands  
 Ye iye raye

Stop crying  
 It’s your mother who’s given you away  
 Ye iye raye

Stop crying  
 It’s your father who’s given you away  
 Ye iye raye

Marriage has taken girls everywhere  
 Ye iye raye  
 It has taken them to Madina  
 It has taken them to Makka  
 Ye iye raye

In this song marriage is seen as a warrior that can invade all the lands (the girls). The verb *canye*, which literally means to eat, is used in a figurative way to signify to invade as in a context of war. The bride is asked to be aware of the number of girls the warrior has won. If young girls understand the logic of the message conveyed, they will know that they cannot be an exception to the rule of marriage. The bride is also asked not to cry, since her parents are the ones who are giving her to the groom. Traditionally, parents arrange marriages for their children. The relatives of the young man ask for the hand of the bride for their son. If the girl’s parents agree, then the wedding is organized and celebrated. Even if today traditional values have undergone a tremendous change, for young girls, parents and relatives still may play an important role in the choice of their life partners. The girl is expected to accept the decision of her parents; this explains why the singers ask her not to cry because it is her parents who are “giving” her to the man. She should be a good girl who does not question the decision of her parents.

The singers also tell the audience to be aware that marriage can take a girl anywhere in the world; it can take her as far as Saudi Arabia, a reference to the faraway place members of her community go for their pilgrimage. So, if marriage can take one as far as Makka or Madina, it is not as bad as that when the bride has to go to another village, or to countries such as Nigeria, Libya, Ghana, or Cote d’Ivoire, which are the common places many young girls might find themselves after the wedding. They are taught that the bride’s home is wherever her husband is. Therefore, even if it is far from home, she has to follow her husband and she is socialized to accept that as her lot.

## 2. Women's role in the socialization of girls to be submissive

Women play an important role in the socialization of the girls to accept cultural assumptions and realities through the songs. The latter are a subtle and smooth way of molding the personality of the girl who should accept the "right" path to womanhood. Through the songs, the girl is taught about what her gender entails for her community. She learns about femininity and masculinity. In other words, through the songs, she internalizes what Mugambi refers to as "the characteristic performances and attitudes that gendered society attributes to the male" and to the female. (Mugambi, 2003).

In this socialization, the little girl is taught the value of 'the good girl' who listens to her parents. Thus, we hear the singer conveying the message that the bride should not cry because her parents have accepted her suitor: "Stop crying /it's your mother who's given you away/ Stop crying/ it's your father who's given you away". A good girl accepts parents' decisions, as we shall see in the next song.

### Song 2 by Salamatou Moussa

Iye nanaye  
Alwana yayo sako  
Kowa shi wa kaynay miji

Iye naye  
Kanan uba na zamne  
Ni ba ni wa kayna miji

Iye naye  
Iye nanaye  
Alwana sent a message  
Let every girl choose her own husband

Iye naye  
My mother's young brother is alive  
My father's young brother is alive  
I will not choose my own husband  
Iye naye

The main singer says to the audience that they have received a message asking all the girls to choose their own husband. The girls answer that they will not do so, because they have maternal and paternal uncles to handle this matter. This is what is expected from a "good" girl. The above song shows that in Hausa culture, marriage is a family affair. It concerns two families, not two people only. That is the reason why the girls claim that they will not choose their own husbands, as they have uncles and aunts whose role is important in their marriage. Values and family ties are intricately woven, in such a way that it is not easy for the young girl to escape the path that has been set for her. In case a family gets a female rebel, who refuses to listen to the family, – and rebels have always existed in history - the ways that are used to gain her over are manifold. They vary from counseling by some elders, friends, to using the mother child relationship, threat, or even traditional sorcery.

In the first song, the singers tell the audience to be aware that marriage can take a girl all the way to Saudi Arabia. They evoke here the issue of leaving one's family for a new place, the in-laws'. The bride has to prepare herself for her new life in a new environment, with all the consequences that come with it. The next song is an illustration of the consequences of marriage and of leaving one's family for that of the groom.

## 3. Resistance to and denouncing the established order

Although the acceptance and inevitability of marriage are recurrent

themes in many songs, it is interesting to find out that women's voices are not all the time conservative. Actually, in many conservative songs, there is also a sign of resisting the patriarchal values, as we see in the next song, in which the singer denounces the hard living conditions of the bride in the new family. This in itself can be empowering for the new bride, because it makes room for complaint. It deconstructs the cliché of the suffering silent African woman that is commonly accepted.

### Song 3 by Salamatou Moussa

Aye kondare  
Aye kondare dawa (x2)

Kondare inna kondare baba  
Kondare dawa

Arme ni ce na da takayci  
Kondare dawa

Baka da inna baka da baba  
Kondare dawa

Baka da dankanan aykawa  
Kondare dawa

Dan kanan miji say kiwiya  
Kondare dawa

In ka agaza shi yay yikiwiya  
Kondaredawa

In ka kondahwa kayi lahhi  
Kondaredawa

Say a baka ukku da sanda  
Kondaredawa

**Translation**  
Aye kondarare  
Aye kondaredawa

Kondare mom, kondare dad  
Kondaredawa

Marriage is enraging  
Kondaredawa

One has no mother, one has no father  
Kondaredawa

One doesn't have a little brother to run errands  
Kondaredawa

The young brother of a husband is lazy  
Kondaredawa

If you request his help, he'll refuse  
Kondaredawa

If you touch him slightly on the head, that's a problem  
Kondare dawa

You'll get three whips  
Kondaredawa

Just like Sidikou, Jablow Alta also points out that pieces of oral literature "reveal much of the life of the people" (29). The verbal art under discussion is a perfect illustration of how women reveal much about their lives and their environment in these songs: the notion of bridehood, womanhood, expected relationships between a wife and her husband, and life among in-laws, etc.

For example, in the above song, the speaker reveals in a condensed way, the possible hardship and frustration the bride should expect, once she finds herself in the new family. During all the period of bridehood, she is considered as a stranger, a new comer. In many cases as soon as she arrives, she gains a nickname “amaria” meaning the bride or “the one that marriage has brought.” Bridehood might last as long as when the young woman gets her third child. Some people commonly think it can go beyond that period.

The bride will at times be in rage, because she might find herself in a situation where she will have to take care of all the domestic chores on her own. She might not even have a child to run errands for her, as done in the culture, because the children of the new family may refuse to help her, as the song says. One might read a cultural contradiction here. In fact, the same culture which teaches young people to respect adults, to help them, makes room for a child’s refusal to run errands for the new comer, the bride.

Generally, when young girls get married in rural areas, they find themselves in large families. If the family happens to have more than one married son, then the new bride is lucky, because she will not have the responsibility of making food for a large family by herself. This is a heavy duty in a context where most of the work depends on her physical strength. She has to turn the millet cobs into food after several stages of pounding. And she is expected to finish on time. In fact, it is not uncommon to see older women urge their son to get married quickly. Sometimes, mothers might even take up the responsibility of the father in financing the marriage of a son. If they have enough wealth (sheep, goats, or cows), they provide the son with the money he needs for the wedding. The older women claim that they are tired and they need someone (a bride) to take over the responsibility of making food for the family.

The singer says that marriage is enraging because even when the bride finds herself in a situation where she works alone, when she is late, her husband might not be understanding and he might even beat her. The singer says: If you touch your small brother-in-law /That’s a problem /Kondaredawa/You’ll get three whips. A woman can easily be tagged as “lazy” when she does not accomplish her expected duties on time in spite of the lack of help. The culture is not tolerant of such “laziness”.

The above song also shows that wife beating is acceptable in the culture. Girls are socialized to keep that in their minds. In fact, in many communities of Niger - Hausa culture is not an exception - when wife beating occurs, the common reaction is, to ask why the bride has been beaten. People commonly believe that there are some acceptable reasons for which the woman can be beaten. Among such reasons we can name a few: refusal to have sex with the husband, refusal to follow instructions of the husband, showing repeated “laziness” in accomplishing the duty of feeding people.

Discussing the high prevalence of wife battery and the lack of data on the issue in Africa, December Green states that “this lack of data is due to the fact that in many societies there is a wide spread acceptance of such abuse as natural, normal, or inevitable. Often even the targets accept abuse as natural or traditional” (39). Thus, if it is socially accepted women are more likely to develop coping strategies rather than reporting it. Song 3 could be read as a means to denounce wife beating in the culture. The whole song is a complaint against the hard living conditions of the bride in the new home. The singer denounces how she is treated in the new home. But the other side of the coin is that, it is part of the indoctrination of the girls through psychological conditioning into gender role (Green 14). Girls listening to the song will accept that a bride should expect

to be beaten under certain circumstances. People commonly believe that if a husband feeds and provides clothes for his wife, the latter must be submissive. If she is not, he has the “right” to beat her.

But this issue of providing for the woman in most Nigerien cultures is arguable. When one listens to what men and sometimes even some women say about this issue, one gets the impression that women do not contribute economically in the household and that they are fully taken care of by their husband. This is an illustration of the power of culture and socialization. Culture and socialization can make one consciously or unconsciously refuse to acknowledge what is real and concrete. The reality is that, given the prevailing poverty of the country, most women cannot afford being taken care of by husbands. In the cities, most of them engage in small trades, and in the rural areas they engage in small animal husbandry and farming, and they contribute to feeding the family. But despite this, people love to think of men as the only breadwinners, preferring not to acknowledge the reality of the relative economic independence of the woman. The culture produces the discourse of *man the provider* which is in contradiction with the reality women live, i.e., the fact that they are producers of family income through their activities.

The last song is the most subversive because it is a rebellion against marriage. In the song, the girls wish the death of the woman who is responsible for giving the henna bath to the bride, before she is taken to her husband. It is not an ordinary bath as it is meant for protection too.

#### Song 4 sung by Malka Issoufou

Arwanka mai dankoko  
Allah kashe ki watan bwakoy  
In kun ji kuuka rwahi  
Dan kar kuce mutua ne  
Kuma kar ku ce yaki ne  
Arwanka ta  
Muka wa bizo  
Iyenaye

Bath giver, owner of the bath cup  
May Allah kill you in the seventh month  
If you hear cries from the bush  
Do not think it is death  
Do not think it is war  
We are burying the bath giver

The singer wishes the death of the woman who gives the traditional bath to the bride. The bath giver is referred to as the woman with the small calabash or cup (she uses to pour the henna water on the bride). One wonders why the death should occur in month 7 of the year. A possible interpretation might be because of the significance of this number in Islam. Even if pre-Islamic traditions are still present in Hausaland, Islamic traditions are also highly present in this environment. The number seven is significant in Islam: - “There are 7 verses in the first sura (chapter) of the Qur’an.- During the Hajj, pilgrims walk 7 times around the Kaaba –walk 7 times between Safa and Mawra - throw 7 stones at the Devil (Ally, Shabir. “The Miracle of Number 7 in the Quran.” [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).) Also, people commonly think 7 is the number for the union between a man and a woman, 4 representing the woman and 3 the man. In some Hausa communities people continue to celebrate weddings for 7 days. As we are in the context of wedding, the number 7 is thus appropriate. The bath giver dying on that month can also reflect the significance of the event for these girls. They understand that marriage is a turning point in their lives and it means a reduction of their freedom and their entrance into the hard life of womanhood

with all its responsibilities.

The singer calls upon Allah to kill the bath giver on the seventh month of the year. When she dies all the girls would bury her in the bush. They would not be mourning and they tell the community that even if they hear some people cry, it is neither a war nor a death that occurred. They would just be burying Arwanka. The song is subversive in that it is a way of denouncing what marriage is about in the community. It conveys to the audience that marriage is not about permanent happiness. This is why in the songs, the singers raise issues such as the difficulties of life after the wedding. The audience and the girl getting married need to be aware of that. Some of the songs are meant to make the bride cry, because she is getting in a new life which is basically about hardship. Thus, it is understandable for the girls to wish the death of the bath giver. They are aware of the reduction of their freedom, the difficult chores and life among in-laws.

## Conclusion

We have seen how women's voices in wedding songs are a means of "disclosure" i.e. instruments "of bringing in the open many hidden aspects of experience which are "the secrets referents in any conversation, any judgment passed, any alliance made" (Davies, ix). The pieces reveal many patriarchal aspects of the culture in which women are active participants, being products of the same culture. But although the songs foster some patriarchal views, they also reveal a subversive dimension of the social order. Wedding songs are produced not just for the sake of celebration and entertainment. They play an important role in the socialization of the guests and the on-lookers. They are an important locus for gender de/construction and negotiation.

Through these oral performances by women, we have demonstrated that in Hausa culture, women are aware of the patriarchal aspect of their culture, and they do raise their voice against it. They do not need to be educated in formal schools to do so, as people commonly like to think. The women who produce their own songs to socialize and/or subvert cultural values are far from what Oreyonke calls "feminist victimology" commonly used to discuss the lives of African women (169). The songs show that women are full agent of their own lives on which they reflect in their songs. This type of women's verbal art has always existed even before the advent of colonialism. It can be subversive as well as conservative.

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