

A TRANSITION TO MODERN CEREMONIES IN KANO: A REVIEW

By

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Abstract

Marriage is one of the oldest traditional and religious practices in Kano in particular and Northern Nigeria in general. Each society has different ways of practicing and conducting marriage rites (wedding ceremonies). Like many other societies, Kano had experienced a gradual transition from traditional to modern wedding practices. This paper aims at discussing the traditional practices that were later replaced with modern ones. It employed both primary and secondary sources, which were thoroughly corroborated. This paper has found that the traditional wedding ceremony in Kano was greatly influenced by several number of historical forces and western values, which were borrowed and integrated with traditional practices particularly in areas like introduction of event centres, makeup, clothing, etc. which replaced the known *alibidi*, *zaman ajo*, *kunshi*, etc.

Key words: tradition, modern, marriage, ceremonies, Hausa

Introduction to Traditional Wedding Activities

Centuries before the orientation of Kano communities into a capitalist society, wedding ceremonies were governed by traditional agricultural practices. Human labour served as an interest of man's love for a girl and gradually it moved to monetary values. For any wedding to take place, there were different stages and formalities to undergo. There are two categories of wedding ceremonies: the seven days' celebrations (for the affluent in the city) which start on Sunday and ends on Saturday and the three days' celebration (less affluent people, i.e. *talakawa*) which starts on Wednesday and ends on Saturday (Naniya, 2019). The seven days' activities include the following activities:

Day 1 Sunday: *gada* or *yawo* (girl's game of clapping and singing), *gudu* (going into hiding) and *kamu* (an event that initiates the bride into the ceremony)

Day 2 Monday: *kudin koko* (some money for breakfast given to the women and bride's friends that accompanied her to her house and spend a night there) *kunshin gidan maza* (henna ceremony), *tukudi* (drink made for a marriage celebration, from millet, spices and

honey or milk).

Day 3 Tuesday: *kunshi* (henna ceremony)

Day 4 Wednesday: *kunshin gidan mata* (henna ceremony)

Day 5 Thursday: *daurin aure* (wedding solemnization) and *wankan amarya* (ritual bathing)

Day 6 Friday: *yini* (traditional ceremony), *ajo* (a ceremonial sitting by the bridegroom where his friends and other relatives will contribute money as support to him)

Day 7 Saturday: *jere* (interior decoration of bride's room), Sunday: *tasanim* (cadging visits to friends by bridegroom after ceremonies and festivities are all over (Maitama:2017).

The difference between the two categories of wedding is that the seven days' wedding activity is mostly celebrated for the well to do families that can afford the expenses of one week while the three days' type is celebrated within a short period because they couldn't afford long days' expenses (Asmau, 2017).

In Kano city, as tradition has it, people portray elements of modesty and decorum to their elders. This shows the esteem and respect the younger ones' have for their elders. In the city and rural areas,

between the 1940s to 1980s. Parents hold on to their good family ties with friends and relatives. i.e. *zumunci* and in this case, to strengthen their relationship, they go extra mile to arrange marriages among their children. For instance, in such situations a family may decide to give a family friend its young daughter's hand in marriage when she reaches marital age with their son, grandson/brother, the latter usually accepts the kind gesture and holds on to the arrangements (Ainau, 2016). In some occasions, the girl never meets the groom-to-be until she is conveyed to his house as his bride. Also, in Kano city, traditionally, a man sees the girl he wants to marry; he makes preliminary gestures to show the girl his interest or his love for her. For girls that hawk, the man stops her and either asks her of what she is selling and the price or he buys all the goods with an amount greater than the initial price known as *juye*. For girls that do not hawk, when a man sees a girl he loves, he sends his parents to seek permission for him to visit the girl. In another place, if a man sees a girl and feels that he wants to get married to her, he requested his friends to assist work on the girl's father's land i.e. to cultivate the father's farmland. This, in essence, shows clearly the interest of the man for his daughter (Mariya, 2017). From the 1980s down to millennium, as a result of western education, technological advancement like social media, prospective couples come together to see how their wedding arrangements should be, then involve their parents. Others meet in hallways, lecture halls, supermarkets, weddings ceremonies or other gathering, etc. (Maitama, 2017).

After the identification of the girl, it is important to note that from 1940s to 1980s, the tradition changes; a girl is accompanied by a little brother or sister to meet with her suitor and discuss. These meetings are referred to as *zance*. *Zance* is sometimes performed on Thursdays or Fridays in the evening because it was a free day whereby girls do not go to Islamic school *makarantar allo* (Robertson, 1986). However, the introduction of mobile phones replaced the landlines that were earlier used in the 1990s, *zance* is now being

performed through the use of mobile phones upon the prospective groom arrival at the girl's residence (Saadatu, 2017).

Toshi (gift from the suitor to the girl he wants to marry), *fitowa* (to seek a girl's hand in marriage or showing interest in marrying a girl), *bincike* (fact finding), *kayan zance* (it's a present of cosmetics, clothes, etc. taken to a girl's house as a gift from the man that wants to marry her) and *sa rana* (fixing engagement date) were among the pre wedding stages. *Toshi* is a tradition usually given during festivities of the season such as *Na ga ni ina so*, *barka da shan ruwa* (given during Ramadan season), *toshin sallah* (clothes, shoes, money) given during the *Eid fitr* and ram during *Eid adha* (Muhd, 2017). The presentation of *Kayan zance* is usually done some weeks to the ceremony. An elderly woman is chosen from the groom's family accompanied by at least two young boys or girls to take the *kayan zance*, in return, a token or gift mostly cash is given by the bride's family as a way of showing appreciation for their kind gesture. Assorted *kayan zancen* comprised of cosmetics inside *kwanon wanka* (wash basin). Gradually, from 2000 the presentation of *kayan zance* switched to *kudin zance* (money given to parents to facilitate the heart to heart talk by the prospective groom to the bride). There is no specifications of the amount of money paid to the prospective bride's family. The capacity depends on the ability of the prospective groom (Zainab, 2017).

Baiko is gathering that involves a form of announcement which is made public to relatives, neighbours, family, friends and others. It is made public that a girl is given to a man (the name of the would be bride and would be groom). Women mostly perform the *baiko*. It is the final formalization that closes opening for any other suitor and no advances should be made by any other man to the would be bride. It is performed in the evening (Asmau, 2017). *Sa rana* is a major step leading to the wedding ceremony. Women make the delivery of *kayan sa rana* and is conducted after the evening prayers (Isha prayers). *Sa rana* has been a long practicing tradition for the people in Kano

city, between the 1940s to 1960s the *sa rana* things were packaged in a big bowl known as *kwalla* and in mid 1980s, a box made from carton called *fantimoti* was introduced by the elites that are privileged to travel abroad (Asmau, 2017). Gradually, the *sa rana* is no longer celebrated as an event on its own but merged with the delivery of *kayan lefe* by men. Others speak and formally make it official over and agree on a specified date for the wedding ceremony (Ado, 2022).

Wedding Activities

Traditional Hausa wedding ceremony in Kano are categorized into two as earlier stated. The categorization is determined more by differences in the status of one's family. For example, well-to-do families and members of the notoriety normally go for the seven-day festivities because they could afford it. Whereas, families from the lower cadre of the society opt for the three-day events which is less expensive, hence the dictum in Hausa “*a kyakyara auren marar gata*” (Rahma, 2015).

Three Phases of Wedding Ceremony

First phase include: *gudu* (going into hiding)/*gada* (girl's game of clapping and singing), *kamu* (initiation of the bride into the ceremony) and *kunshin gidan mata* and *kunshin gidan maza*. The *gada* and *gudu* are mostly celebrated on the Sunday mornings by the bride and her friends. The bride and her friends visit the houses of family and friends of the family and friends with the aim for the bride to say goodbye as she leaves her parents' house to a new matrimonial home. They use broken calabashes *sakaina* to make sounds and sing as they move around. Upon reaching the houses, they pay their respect to their elders and say their farewell on behalf of the bride. This function takes the bride and her friends to the time of *Zuhr* prayers before they return to their homes to take their bath and dress up for the next activity (Hajarah, 2017). They sing songs like:

Soso dan zaria, na muruci kaucin kaba
Ke da samarinki sai akan hanya
Eyeeh ya raye!

Zarian loofah, the shoot of deleb palm;
parasite of dum-palm

You will only meet your suitors on the way
Eyeeh ya raye (Yasir, 2017)

Gudu, literally means going into hiding is practiced in oth urban and rural areas of Kano communities, is performed on Sunday evening. This tradition has been there for long and it is significant, as it provides opportunity for the bride to purchase household items such as kitchen utensils, which have not been bought. For her friends, they collect money from their parents to buy kitchen materials in preparation of their own wedding for those with suitors or to keep in anticipation of getting married in future. The bride and her friends go to nearby markets especially the Kurmi Market and purchase items for decoration like *tasa*, *kasko*, etc. (Hadiza, 2017). However, over the decades, rich parents travel abroad and import goods for the bride to be. Others purchase items from stores within and outside the state to decorate their daughter's home. Also, goods purchased are the type that is reigning in the decade (Sahabi, 2022),

Kamu (initiation of the bride into the ceremony) is performed in the evenings on Sunday mostly and it is an indoor activity traditionally. It is an important custom and tradition which initiates the bride into the ceremony. The new bride is locked in a room with her friends until a ransom in kind or money is paid to the bride's friends before they open the door for the elders to rub henna on her palms, the bride continues to cry and wail. Others combined two different methods on the bride, the rubbing of henna and spraying of milk. For families that use milk in most cases are not Hausa but Fulani by tribe. The application of henna on the bride gradually disappeared and replaced with the spraying of perfume instead. Such event was performed by an elderly member of the family in most cases the grandmother of the bride (Yaya, 2017). A song is sang when performing the *kamu*:

Ta zama ta zama
Ni dai, ni dai, ni dai
Ni dai babu ruwa
Babu ruwan innata
Babu ruwan goggona (Hadiza:2017)

She's become, she's become..
And I and I and I...
It's not my concern
It's not the concern of my mother
It's not the concern of my aunty (Yasir, 2017)

However, the emergence of event centres is one of the reasons of the collapse of a known tradition i.e. *kamu* that was earlier celebrated indoors to an outdoor activity. Also, the celebrations like singing, is wiped away and replaced with DJ, MCs and so on. In essence the beauty of the culture is no more there (Baraatu, 2022).

From Monday to Wednesday, the *kunshin gidan mata* and *kunshin gidan maza* (a henna ceremony) are the activities. *Kayan kunshin* has been a tradition of Hausa people most especially during wedding ceremonies. The first day of *kunshi* ceremony is for the bride's family while the second day is the groom's family members who come to the function with gifts for the bride's family (Zainab, 2017). A powdered henna leaf is mixed and rub on the bride signifying that the wedding ceremony has started. She rubs the henna on the bride's hands and legs and it also shows that the bride is committed also known as *saka amarya a lalle*. The friends of the bride don't allow the rubbed henna on their bride friend as they remove it immediately because they don't want it to give color to the bride's hands. Others say the friends remove the henna without a genuine reason other than it is not part of their friend's cosmetic (Rahma, 2015). Gradually over the decade, this part of the tradition became out fashioned and therefore new beautiful henna designs copied from Indian films, intermarriages with outside people like Sudanese, introduced new styles/designs of henna. Bride and her friends now visit shops where henna are designed or organise henna party whereby henna designers are invited to make different designs on guests' hands and legs (Daliya, 2022).

Alibidi (feast prepared by the bride's friends to the groom and his friends) is another event that has been part of tradition in which the bride shows her cooking skills to her groom and to show him she is up to task

that, the bride knows the kind of food the groom likes and considering this, she cooks his favourite meal. The groom provides the funds for his bride while his friends provide for their suitors. The friends of the bride seize the opportunity to also prepare a delicious meal for their suitors. From the 1980s, *alibidi* was no more practiced (Delu, 2017). However, as a result of the world becoming global village, luncheon party, cocktail party, bridal shower, henna party replaced the *alibidi* whereby, food are now ordered from outside and delivered to the venue. Quite a number of brides are accompanied to their matrimonial homes with either chef/cooks that will assist in the cooking. Others pay for online classes or register for cooking classes to learn prior to the wedding (Hanan, 2022).

Wankan amarya (ritual bath of the bride), *Daurin aure* (wedding solemnization), *kayan lefe* (clothes given to bride by bridegroom in contracting a marriage) and bathing the bride are also another old tradition of the Hausa society. *Wanka* is done mostly on Thursdays where the bride is brought outside and asked to sit on a mortar at the house of the woman responsible of bathing the bride i.e. *mawankiya's* house. She is surrounded by the friends and relatives and songs are sang while she is bathed. Her hair is loosed and washed with herbals. The bath isn't the normal day to day bathing but an important aspect in which the bride is cleansed with the use of traditional stuffs like henna (Rahma, 2016).

The groom's family come along with a basket, which is called *lefe*. It consist of different kinds of clothing materials, i.e. textile materials. Between 1940 and 1950 (Robertson, 1986) the tradition was that it used to be presented by men on the day of wedding contract i.e. Thursday morning. This is also important as it shows the groom the beginning of taking responsibilities of taking care of his bride.

The wedding solemnization is a process that comprises of an agreement between a man and a woman to become husband and wife. There are other conditions that validates the wedding ceremony such as

Waliyy (a guardian), two trustworthy witnesses and payment of dowry (Kabiru, 2018). Up to date, wedding solemnization is still the same, the only difference is the amount of dowry paid. Gradually, the presentation of *lefe* became an activity on its own. Some still maintain the presentation on the wedding solemnization while others present it before the wedding starts. The wedding solemnization also shifted to Fridays after Jumaah prayers, others schedule it during the weekends to enable the attendance of guests (Kabiru, 2018).

Kamun Ango (initiation of the groom into the ceremony), *yini* (A traditional sitting), *jere* (arrangement of the bride's furniture in her matrimonial home), *budar kai/sayen baki* (removing the veil from the bride), *Zaman ajo* (a ceremonial sitting by the bridegroom where his friends and relatives will contribute money as support to him), *hawan angonci* (horse riding by the bridegroom and his friends) and *tasani* (thanks giving visit) are all activities that are part of the traditional wedding ceremony. *Kamun angu* is another tradition that is performed by the family of the groom. This *kamun angu* is different from that of *kamun amarya* because the groom's event is celebrated outside the home (Gambo, 2017). Few families still celebrate the *kamun angu*. *Yini* is a traditional gathering of women in the new home of the bride for merry. The groom's family and the bride's family come together and celebrate by eating, rejoice and entertain themselves (Hauwa, 2016). Nowadays, *yini* is no longer celebrated in the bride's matrimonial home. Some celebrate the event at their residence, others take it out to halls, marquees, etc. This is mainly because of the number of guests invited with an invitation card that gives pass to the guests unlike before when everyone was invited (Hajiya, 2017).

Ajo was started around 1947 and was introduced by Maitama Sule after finishing his middle school at Zaria. The first *ajo* in Kano was that of Alhaji Shehu Mai Mota. This is significant in order to portray their love for the groom whereby, the groom's and bride's family come together and bid on the money given to the groom. *Ajo* however, is now

celebrated mostly within the Emirate, few that are not royalties celebrate the event up to date (Yusuf, 2017). *Jere* is performed on Saturdays a day after the traditional sitting. It is an event that provides opportunity for family and friends to visit the house of the bride and assist in the decorations of items like: *farantai*, *kumbo languna*. It is on this day that the mother of the bride brings out the prestige of her daughter by bringing the equipment she has been saving for years. Later *kumbo*, *kwalla* were used for decoration, much later, *nasu bakin leshi* (kind of ceramic bowls, crystals etc. (Hadiza, 2017). Nowadays, set of chair, vase, television, etc are used in decorating the bride's home. *Sayen baki* is also a tradition where friends of the bridegroom meet with the bride two days after she was conveyed to the matrimonial home. The groom's friends present gift of cosmetics to the bride. The friends of the groom also extend their appreciation to the bride and then pray for the couple's happiness as they are now newly wed (Yusuf, 2017). The tradition of *sayen baki* is still practice by a number of people in the society. *Hawan angwonci* is when the groom celebrates his wedding by riding a horse in the city. It is performed on Saturday evenings and it started from time immemorial that was initially restricted to the sons from the royalty in the 1940s. As time passed by, elites also adopted the horse riding during their weddings (Uba, 2017).

Last but not the least is *tasani*. An activity performed upon completing all the wedding activities. It is a thanks giving visit to the bride's family members that actively participated in the wedding (Ibrahim, 2017). *Tasani* is still practiced till today.

Three days wedding ceremony

For the less privileged girl, the aforementioned activities lasted for three days. The royalties describe this type of wedding as a *kyakyara auren talakawa* and in the city, a *kyakyara auren madanbawa* (wedding of the ulamas). This calibre of people cannot afford seven day celebrations because of the expenses involved. The celebrations are the same with the seven days

wedding except for the three *kunshi*, in this type of *kunshi* only one *kunshi* is performed. Other activities like *zaman ajo*, *hawan angwonci*, etc., were not performed because the bride's parents cannot afford the expenses (Rabi: 2017).

The introduction of event centres such as The Afficent, Meena event centre and FABS assisted in shifting wedding activities from houses and homes to outdoors. Also, the emergence of makeup industries and their frequent television shows did not only promoted business entrepreneurs but have a huge impacts on the beauty industry. Also, tailoring, photography, reception and entertainment play a vital role in promoting western borrowed ideas in traditional

wedding ceremonies in Kano. The major differences between modern and traditional wedding ceremony are; the traditional was based on our norm and custom since our forefathers, while the modern wedding ceremony borrowed other people's cultures more particularly western world. The reasons for doing that was the international relationship or contact through economic activities, which makes it easier to borrow some innovation into their wedding system. Another important aspect of cultural change associated to wedding ceremony is social media influence such as Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok etc where weddings from different parts of the world are shared.

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