
Comparative Analysis of Hausa and Zarma Traditional Marriage Culture

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Abstract

Marriage like in any other tradition plays a vital role among the Hausa and the Zarma communities. Marriage is one of the important agent of socializations and development of every communities and nation at large. The word marriage means a bond or contract that legalizes the union of man and woman as wife and husband. In the two communities under study, marriage is considered as a cultural and religious obligation, as such any man or woman who has no wife or husband is reluctantly accepted as irresponsible member of the society. It is in view of the above, this paper wishes to comparatively study some aspects of marriage culture in the two different communities (Hausa and Zarma). The problem associated to this study is that, most of the younger generations, especially the youth are not aware of the real traditional marriage culture of these two communities, talk less of comparing the two cultures. Thus, the motive behind this study is to expose the younger ones to know some important marriage cultures that are practiced in the two communities. The methodology applied in the study includes use of library and oral interviews. In addition, a "Cultural Comparative Theory" is used in the research, as it gives a comparative guide for analysis on the data collected. Equally the significance is to assist in strengthening and bridging up the good socio-cultural relationship between the two communities. The paper also discussed the differences and similarities on some aspects of traditional marriage cultures of the two communities. At the end of this research, the

paper is able to find and state some substantial differences and similarities in the traditional marriage processes between Hausa and Zarma communities.

Introduction

Marriage institution plays a vital role in almost every society in the world. Like in any other community, Hausa and Zarma communities place the tradition of marriage to be an occasion that calls for joy and merriment; it entails a celebration of life that can be considered as an institution of itself¹. Every parent in the two communities wishes to see their children are married when they are matured. Marriage in both Hausa and Zarma communities means a bond or a contract that legalizes the union of man and woman as husband and wife. Marriage is considered as a cultural and religious obligation among the Hausa and Zarma people. It is in view of the above, the two communities considered any person who is mutual and physically fit for marriage, but reluctantly refused to marry as irresponsible member of the society.

Marriage in the two communities is legalized only when the dowry has been paid by the husband to the wife. Although no fixed amount is specified, it depends on the amount mentioned by the bride's father or guardian (*Waliji/Wali*). In line with the above, this paper wishes to look in to some aspect of traditional marriage culture of the two communities (Hausa and Zarma). Thus, the area under study in this paper will include: A brief historical background

¹ Wasagu F I : Voice from Silence: A Literary Analysis of selected Traditional Hausa women wedding songs from Sokoto. M.A. Thesis Department of Modern European Languages. Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.2007 p 38.

of Hausas and Zarma people, and attempt has been made towards defining a marriage. Others areas of study in this paper includes some aspect of traditional marriage culture before, during and after the marriage. In addition, the paper will make comparative analysis of some aspect of marriage culture of the two different communities, whereby differences and similarities of the cultures will be discussed and finally the conclusion.

Towards Defining Marriage

The concept of marriage has no universal definition. Marriage has different meaning in different cultures and may mean different things to people living at the same time. The definition of marriage depends on the socio-cultural and economic environment of a given society and may change from time to time.²

In Islamic law, marriage is a civil contract legalizing intercourse and the procreation of children. It is an institution that combines both worship (*Ibadat*) and social relations (*Mu'amalat*).³ Others view marriage in different perspective, as Wasagu (2007:39) quoted Alhassan et al (1980:1) saying " Marriage is the coming together of a man and woman in a legitimate way so as to avoid adultery , protect ones image, help one another and above all give a legitimate background to their offspring's. Wasagu, (2007:39).

However, Westermark is of the view that, "There are three essential element in every normal marriage, the gratification of the sexual impulse, the relation between husband and wife and apart from it, the procreation of children."⁴ Other sociologists perceived

² Sa'ad M. F. A comparative study of marriage in two muslim communities . M. A .Thesis Usmanu Danfodiyo University . 1989, page 32.

³ Ra'uf M. A. Islamic view on women and the family. New York. Cambridge Press. 1977 p 19.

⁴ Westermark. The Future of Marriage in Western Civilization, Lahore. Pakistan.

marriage as mutual relationship between one person or persons with another with the zeal of relationship as husband and wife.⁵ In addition, other authors has contributed a lot towards defining marriage, among them are Alhassan (1980) Saulawa, (1986) Sa'ad, (1989) Rambo, (2007) among others.

From the various definitions above, one may conclude to say that a marriage is a concrete and mutual relationship between man and woman control under some stipulated guide lines from the community or religion.

Brief Historical Background of Hausa People

Hausa is the name by which the people of the Hausa ethnic group call themselves and are understood as such by other people. Though, of course different people had different local names for them. Hausa is also the name of the language of the people, and in their literature they have no other word for their country but Hausa land (*ƙasar Hausa*) the land of the Hausa people or language.⁶The Hausa people are mostly found in Northern Nigeria, they are equally found in Diasporas such as in Niger, Benin, Northern Ghana, Cameroon and Sudan just to mention the few.

Hausa land extends from latitude 10° south to 20° north and from longitude 10° west to 40° east.⁷ The land has high temperature; it also has cold, dry and dusty wind from Saharan desert known as Hamadan period, and a worm and humid air, bringing air from the

1984 p 30.

⁵ Burgess et al. *The Family*. 2nd Ed. New York, American Book Co. 1953 p 16.

⁶ Adamu ,M. *The Hausa Factor in west African History*. Zaria. Ahmadu Bello University Press. 1978 p 1

⁷ Wasagu F I : *Voice from Silence: A Literary Analysis of selected Traditional Hausa women weeding songs from Sokoto*. M .A. Thesis Department of Modern European Languages. Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.2007 p

southern Atlantic Ocean. In terms of vegetation it is like that of Savannah Sudan and Sahel savannah. Their main occupation includes farming and rearing of animal and trading as well as extracting minerals. They also have central political system headed by the *Sarki*.⁸

Brief Historical Background of Zarma People

Zarma people has the estimated population of about 34590,000, and are mostly found in Niger with the population of 3,300,000, and 113,000 lives in Nigeria, 1100 lives in Burkina Faso and 69000 lives in Ghana, 38000 lives in Benin. Their related ethnic group includes Songhai; others are Nilo-Saharan groups, *Fula*, Hausa and *Mande*. The Zarma language is one of the Songhai language families. The Zarma people share common language and culture with Songhai's, it is because of this good relationship, the Zarma people are sometime referred to as "Zarma-Songhai or Djerma-Songhai". They constitute a smaller ethnic groups who were either indigenous of Songhai Empire and later assimilated into Zarma people or else of Zarma origin who differentiated themselves in the pre-colonial times (through dialect, political structure or religion)

The *Zarma* people therefore are said to might have migrated from Fula region around Lac Debo, Mali from Songhai Empire and settle in *Anzourou* and *Zarmeganda* in the 16th century. Zarmakoy Aboubacar founded the Dosso state from his own *Taguru* clan around 1750's. It remained a small collection of villages in the *Dallon Basso* valley until 1820s when they led much of the resistance to the Sokoto caliphate. While Dosso fell under the control of the Amir of Gando (A sub division Sokoto) between 1849-1856. By 1856-65 they were converted to Islam during Zarmakoy Kossoru.

⁸ Sarki: The head or leader

The language of Zarma is dialect of the Nilo-Saharan language family. Traditionally, the people of Zarma and Songhai view themselves as one family. It is estimated that over 90% of Zarma are Muslim, therefore adhere to the teaching of Islam in their daily activities.

Some Aspect of Traditional Marriage Culture of the Hausa People

There are so many cultures that are practiced before the Hausa traditional marriage takes place. Here, the paper will look in to some aspect of traditional marriage culture of the Hausa people from the courtship to the wedding day and after the marriage.

Courtship Among the Hausa People

In traditional Hausa society, the parent has the responsibility of selecting husband for their children (Both males and females), and the choice of their parent is the final stand of confirming husband and wives for them. That is to say, in traditional Hausa society, the girls has no right to select husband for themselves. Although, after embracing the religion of Islam by Hausas, things has changed gradually where girls may be allowed to make their own choice with regard to whom they wishes to marry.

Hausa people provide an avenue were boys and girls meet to discuss as courtship. This avenue include market place or during night child play or in any other ceremony like sallah and wedding, and naming ceremonies. After the boy saw the girl he love to marry, he will then sent his friends to discuss the matter with her directly or her friends, or to inform his parent about the issue.

After they reached concusses or agreed to marry each other, he then presents a gift to the girl which will be conveyed by the parent of the boy or his guardian to the girl's guardian. The gift is

called 'I see, I love' which is called '*Na gani ina so*'. If the gift is accepted, the girl's parent will give the boy permission to visit the girl and discuss the matter thoroughly. Traditionally, the boy will be visiting the girl weekly especially on the village market day accompanied by his friends and the girl too with her friends or sister.⁹ This is done to avoid any misconduct at the time of their discussions, in the day time or at night.

Marriage Wealth (*Dukiyar Aure*)

Eventually a bond of love and agreement with good understanding will be established between the couples. The boy parent will sent marriage wealth (*Dukiyar aure*) to the girl's family house which was formally some farm product, but now money. This money will then be shared among the girl relatives in other to inform them that, the girl got a suitor, and also to make them start preparing their contribution for the success of the wedding when it is time.

Group/Physical Work (*Aikin Gaya*)

In addition to the above, in some areas of Hausa land, after courtship has developed, the boy and his friends will be asked to go for '*aikin ganya*' where from time to time the boy will be going to his in-law farm to assist them in farming activities or sometimes domestic work which includes building a traditional house or hut and likewise. Hausa people attached a great importance to this group/physical work. By tradition it is done to test the ability of the boy endurance.

⁹ Rambo, R. A. (2007) Nazari a kan wasu kebabun al'adun auren Hausawa da na Dakarkari. Sashen Harsunan Nijeriya Jami'ar Usmanu Danfodiyo Sokoto. Kundin Digiri na Biyu. 2007 p 69.

Betrothal Ceremony (*Baiko*)

Another important traditional culture exercised before marriage in Hausa culture is betrothal ceremony. Here, people will be invited to gather at the girl house where the girl's father's relatives or waliyi open the proceeding with the following announcement:

"I Umar hereby give my daughter Hauwa'u to Usman, son of Alhaji Tukur for marriage upon the payment of a dowry of thirty five thousand naira only (For example)".

After the announcement of the girl's father's relative (Waliyyi), the boy's father's relative or representative will made an acceptance announcement as follows:

"I Shukkau, solemnly accept what Malam Umar said on behalf of my son Usman"

After the announcement of the above persons, the Imam will then lead prayers and the crowds disperse. After this betrothal, traditionally no any other person is permitted to come and propose the girl for marriage again. The betrothal gives room for the commencement of the courtship.

Presenting Gift to the Girl (*Kayan Toshi*)

After the betrothal, next is the suitor's visit to the girl, while visiting her, he usually presents to her some gifts from time to time more

especially during Ramadan fasting or *sallah* festival. These gifts may include wrappers, cosmetics, blouses, jewelries, bags, and so on. In Hausa tradition, these gifts signify the economic standard of the suitor, and served as a means to measure the capability of the suitor to handle the girl after marriage.

Fixing the Wedding Date (*Kayan Sa Ruwa/Lalle*)

Again, another important tradition that took place before the day of weeding ceremony is fixing date for the marriage ceremony. Here, some items are sent to the girl's house for the aim of fixing the date for the wedding ceremony to take place. This marks the approach of the time for the wedding. The items may include all other items in 'I see, I like' (*Kayan Na gani ina so*) but, must include henna (*Lalle*). Other items include food grains, dates, cooking oil, plates, spoons, bronze plate (*Tasa*), mat, kola nuts and so on.

Other Hausa Traditional Cultures on Marriage Ceremony Day

On the weeding day, so many cultural activities took place which includes the weeding prayers led by the Chief Imam after marriage sermon and announcement of some conditions to take care by the groom (*Ango*). These consist of bride and groom guardians, dowry, witnesses and offer and acceptance (*Siga*). The marriage is pronounced by the Imam and praise singers will announce in lauder voice. The dowry mentioned may be paid instantly or later. In addition, in some areas of Hausa land, they require the groom to pay

some money for malam's (*Kudin malamai*), cousin's and grandparent gift (*Kudin kakanni da na Taubasai*) among others.

It should be noted that, in those days, marriage contract is done before the actual day of wedding ceremony, but now it is done on marriage day. During marriage ceremony many cultural activities took place among which includes soaking of henna (*Jikon Lalle*), bride bath with henna (*Wankan Amarya*) which others calls *cudanya*. Others include *shan hakin maye*, *lugude*, and *kidin kwarya* among others. These are some of the cultural activities that take place during the Hausa traditional wedding ceremony.

Some Aspects of Hausa Cultures after Marriage

As earlier mentioned, that some activities took place before the marriage ceremony, so also others are taking place after the ceremony. Some of the activities which took place after the marriage ceremony include the following:

Conveyance of the Bride to the Groom's Home (Daukar Amarya/Kai Amarya)

After the wedding ceremony, the next important aspect of Hausa culture that takes place is conveyance of the bride (*Daukar Amarya/Kai Amarya*) to the groom's house. Traditionally after the sun rest, some women mostly relatives and neighbors will take the bride to the groom's house. While going, other women and girls will be singing, clapping and joking from the bride house to the groom's house. Later on, false bride (*Amaryar Karya*) will be taken by groom

friends as if she is the original bride.

Virginity of the Bride (*Kai Bante*)

In Hausa communities' bride virginity is regarded to be very important culture. White mat or white bed sheet will be used on consummation bed. If the bride was found virgin, it shows that her parent gave her good family training, and she will be given a special gift from her family as a sign of gratitude. This could be in form of money, kola nut, wrapper (*Atamfa*) among others.

Talking Fee (*Sayen Baki*)

This is usually done when the bride and her friends left in the new bride room. The groom will be accompanied by his friends, and they will be cracking jokes between the friends of the celebrants. Finally the groom's friends will give some amount of money to bride friends to be taking to the bride's house. If the talking fee is not given to the bride, she will not talk to the groom, and equally she will not talk to anyone in the house until she is given the talking fee.

Decoration of Bride's Room (*Jere/Wahi*)

This is another important aspect of Hausa people marriage culture. It is a furnishing or decoration of the bride's room. It is done according to the financial standard of the bride's parents. Most importantly, the bride will be taken to her room with necessary home work materials

which includes foodstuff and room materials like bed and its component. Local painting of the room (*Wahi*) is also among the room decoration. The decoration depends upon the capability of the bride's parents.

Some Aspects of Marriage Culture of Zarma People

From the brief historical background discussed in this paper, it could be understood that Zarma people shared some cultures in common with the Hausa people. Some aspect of marriage culture of Zarma people are discussed below as follows:

Courtship among the Zarma people

The traditions of Zarma custom mandate the parent to select husband for their daughters. In normal Zarma tradition neither the boy nor the girl has right to select husband or wife for themselves, but their parent initiates whom they will marry. At the time of selecting suitor for the young, the parents look for honest and disciplined house for their children to marry from. They do not allow their children to marry from irresponsible house, and they give marriage to responsible persons only.

Although, some time suitors may meet at market place or on ceremonial places like *sallah* and naming ceremony where suitors met and fall in love with each other. At this point, they have no right to accept each other without their parent's approval.

Special Gift

After the boy and the girl agreed with each other with parent approval, the next cultural obligation as for the Zarma tradition is the special gift offered to the girl's parent from the parent or guardian like the Hausas. If the gift is accepted, then the boy is given a clue to continue the courtship with the girl. However, if the gift is not rejected, it means gesture is not honored and there by decline.

Marriage Wealth

Marriage wealth plays a very important role in Zarma traditional marriage culture. By tradition in the olden days, Zarma people imposed some amount of money estimated to four hundred naira only. The reason for giving the money is to show that, there will be no separation in marriage unless in the case of death. Equally some agricultural products are accepted as a marriage wealth in Zarma community like the Hausas, The marriage wealth is distributed to the members of family, informing them that, their daughter has got a suitor, and to make them get ready for their contribution on the weeding day.

Physical Work

Physical work known as *Gayya* in Hausa is another cultural aspect of marriage tradition in Zarma communities. During the courtship, before the actual weeding day, the boy may be ask to go to his in-law's farm to assist him in farming activities or a domestic work. This is done to test the endurance capacity of the boy.

Conveyance of the Bride to Groom's House (*Daukar Amarya/Kai Amarya*)

In tradition, when the bride will be taking to the groom's house, it is usually by inviting her relatives particularly the older ones. These women will take the bride using either horse or camel to the groom's house, and it is done a day or some days after the wedding. The bride will remain in the house for seven days with her friends. After the first week, she will then come back to her parent and spent another week before she finally moves to her room.

Virginity

The relationship between boys and girls are strictly control by the elders of Zarma people. To this, they take serious precautions on preventing their younger ones on committing adultery. As such, when the bride is taken to her room, and found to be virgin, the groom family prepared some special gift for her in appreciation to her virginity. If the groom is found not virgin by her husband there is every possibility for the marriage to get separated.

Similarities of Some Aspects of Traditional Marriage Culture between Hausa and Zarma People

The two communities of Hausa and Zarma have numerous cultural similarities which include the following:

The two communities regard the selection of the spouse as a family duty. Parents are responsible for choosing partner for their children. In both communities they consider the historical background of the spouse houses, which mean they don't go in to the broken home. After the selection of the spouse, in both communities ceremony are done to mark the engagement, which is usually done before the presence of some invited family and friends. But before the engagement both the Hausa and Zarma people practice what is called courtship.

The period of this courtship is not stipulated by any of the community. In terms of marriage wealth, both communities shared the same procedures. Equally, both communities work out the details of the marriage and dowry to be paid and have no fixed amount of dowry, but depend on the agreement reached by the two parties concerned. Gift are usually allowed, and these gift include fiats gift (*kayan jin kira*), Ramadan gift (*Kayan Azumi*), Sallah gift (*Kayan Sallah*), wedding trousseau (*Lehe*), Plaiting gift (*kayan kitso*) and sprinkling the bride (*Kayan sa amarya ruwa*) among others. Sa'ad, (1989:195)

In both communities, the duty of ensuring the bride got enough room furniture and other working materials is on the sight of the bride family. Although, each community to bear in mind that the furniture depends on the financial status of the family.

In the issue of foodstuff gift (*Gara/Kai gara*), in both Hausa and Zarma communities the practice is the same. The son-in-law in both communities make used of *gara* to settle dept, since some money is sent to the groom.

One other area of marriage culture similarity between the two communities is on the formal contraction of the marriage. In both communities marriage take place in a ceremonial form. It takes place in the presence of members of the family, relatives and friends. The bride is usually given by the parents or guardian in the presence of witnesses. The responsibility of organizing the wedding is shouldered on the two parties involved. In addition, in Hausa culture the bride usually visits her friends and relatives to say goodbye to them, likewise the Zarma people. Moreover, both communities have what we called the guider (*Arwanka in Hausa*). *Arwanka* is responsible for the preparation of the bride and serve as advisor to the bride. She educates the bride on sex education and other domestic duties as well as taking care of her husband. Sa'ad. (1989:195)

Apart from the above, other important culture practiced in both communities is the test and proud of the bride virginity. "The virginity of the bride is traditionally considered as a great importance. Both the communities usually place a white bed-sheet on the consummation bed which to be soiled to prove the brides virginity. Sa'ad (1989:200). When the bride is met virgin, the family in both communities prepared some special gift (*Kyautuka*) for her. Above all, both the communities practiced almost the same type of marriage which includes child marriage (*Auren kuruciya*), forced marriage (*Auren dole*), love marriage (*Auren kauna*, relation marriage (*Auren zumunta*) and polygamy marriage (*Auren mace fiye da daya*) among others.

Differences of Some Aspects of Traditional Marriage Culture between Hausas and Zarma People

With regards to the differences that exist between the traditional marriage culture of the two communities (Hausa and Zarma), not much differences are discovered. However out of the few ones discovered in case of this study includes the following:

The first culture that differentiates the two communities is on how bride is conveyed to her room. In Hausa, the bride is taken on the first day of her weeding, while in Zarma communities it was done a day after the wedding day, though the conveyance is reciprocal and depends on the readiness of the bride parents. Equally the bride in Zarma used to run away to her relatives homes, and she will not come back until after her wedding, but in Hausa this is not the case. In the olden days, the Zarma people do not sent wedding trousseau (*Lehe*) while Hausas do so. Although at present some Zarma people sent their wedding trousseau earlier than the weeding day.

Finally, we may conclude by saying that, the traditional marriage culture of Hausa and Zarma people are almost the same, though there are some areas where they differed from each other. This may not be unconnected with the fact that they shared common socio-cultural ways of life to each other, despite the fact that they speak different languages.

Conclusion

Marriage is one of the means by which one's relations are widened and develop affinities between different groups of various societies like family culture and nationality. The culture of marriage initiates the new generation to the culture and tradition, and improves further

civilizations. It is the bridge that linked the past with the present and also the future. It is also the basic entity of the society which integrates its members and makes them to play their ideological and cultural role as ongoing process.

In this study, the paper find out that traditional marriage cultures helps in shaping the life style of their people. And if they should be allowed to be destroyed, the future of the community's civilization will be threatened. In addition, the paper is able to find out that the two communities (Hausa and Zarma) shared many traditional marriage cultures which are common during their marriage ceremony. The study also finds out that, there are some areas where their traditional marriage cultures differed. It is equally observed that, because of these marriage culture similarities, it make the life of the Hausa and Zarma people unique and united so much so that, one can only differentiate the Hausas and Zarma people by their language.

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