**The Iyawo-Ile Phenomenon in Okunland**

**Abstract**

Indigenes of Okunland have rich traditional wedding culture and beliefs. One of the beliefs is that it is the entire extended family, and not just the nuclear family that supports a ‘son’ in marrying a wife or gives out a ‘daughter’ in marriage. Among those that constitute members of the extended family is a group of women popularly referred to in Okunland and even the entire Yorubaland as ‘iyawo ile’ i.e. wives in the family. They are a minority group that has tried to blend into the dominant society by taking on their cultural characteristics and responsibilities. This study focuses on the roles, responsibilities and performances of selected groups of ‘iyawo ile’ as it affects the socio-economic transformation and integration in Okunland. Adopting the quantitative research methodology, the study is carried out through observation of live performances of some groups of ‘iyawo ile’ and oral interviews of selected relevant personalities (including selected couples and ‘iyawo ile’). The study also covers the content, style, themes and literary analysis of native praise and advisory songs of two different groups of ‘iyawo ile’ in Ijumu area of Okunland (what obtains in Ijumu area is general and similar to other areas of Okunland). The paper concludes that the roles played by ‘iyawo ile’ in the society are yet to be significantly recognized and acknowledged.

Keywords: Activities, Customary, Performance, Relevance, Roles, Traditional wedding

**Introduction**

Every community in Okunland tries to link her origin with either Ile Ife or Oyo kingdoms. A plausible reason could be because they speak variants of the Yoruba language. Okunland is located inland on the right bank of River Niger above and below the confluence. Its inhabitants include the Abinu, Ikiri, Ijumu, Owe and Yagba. They are presently found in five Local Government Areas and in Kogi State which include Ijumu, Kabba/bunu, Mopamuro, East Yagba and West Yagba.

Due to the fact that for administrative convenience, they were governed in the northern region by the former colonial masters, they were formerly referred to as Northern Yoruba. Generally though, the people of Okunland refer to themselves as Okun people and the word “Okun” is derived from their common mode of greetings. Their economy is generally agrarian though they engage in trading and are also found in white collar jobs (Lewu 70).

**Women in Relevance to Socio-Economic Transformation and Integration**

The focus here is not on feminism which is “a body of social philosophy that advocates and actively seeks the liberation and humanization of women in society” (Ogundipe 9). As a matter of fact, the women alone cannot bring about socio-economic transformation in any society just as the men alone are no better at doing so. It is about the roles women can perform to bring about changes and development in a society and which had in time past not been given enough consideration let alone their implementation.

When compared to agriculture and crafts, women participation in traditional administration is very low.“……..in areas where women are productive, their labour had been exploited by men…..while women are productively engaged in the socio-economic sphere of the traditional system, the men are busy building up political fortress for themselves……there has always been a systematic plan by men to keep women at the background in the scheme of things” (Olaoye 146).

Women are capable emotional and sensitive leaders of families and they organize children right from birth to adulthood. This in essence means that they have the greatest impact in any community and even the nation as a whole because aside the father and mother, children make up families, families make up a community and communities make up a nation. The importance of women therefore cannot be stretched beyond limits. Okecha (citing Awe 1990) observes the useful roles women play as managers of homes and was quick to assert that peace and stability at homes depend largely on the managerial abilities of the women folk. She stressed further that women, especially mothers, plan, organize, direct, co-ordinate all the resources of the home, both human and material, to the benefit of all the members of the family including their husbands. Effective management of the homes promotes national development, but whenever this is lacking, the contrary is usually the case (Okecha153).

An average Nigerian woman, especially the one from this part of the country (Yorubaland), plays multiple roles as a petty trader, weaver, teacher, farmer, mother, wife, ‘nurse’, ‘doctor’, ‘driver’, tailor, all in all. These are noble roles that should not be taken for granted. Suffice to say, most of what she earns goes into running of the home as supplement to what the husband provides, if he provides any. Some women are the breadwinners of their homes. Furthermore, women in several communities in Nigeria have recently made concerted efforts at moving the economy of their immediate environment forward by forming co-operatives and participating more actively in other income-generating projects like farming and cottage industries.

On professional level, a woman can be well educated and skillfully trained at an economic venture such as medicine, law, engineering, secretarial work, manufacturing etc. towards the development and transformation of her country. In addition, a woman can make her civic contribution in taking up government appointment and societal duties in both membership and leadership capacity. Like a man, a woman also has great potentials and capabilities for human and economic development.

From all indications, for accelerated and balanced social and economic transformation of any community, the woman’s roles ought to be taken into consideration.

**Women’s Roles in Okunland**

A group of people that have not been given enough recognition in Okunland are the women. Women constitute a larger percentage of the people in the world and they are an indispensable group in the development of any community and the nation as a whole. Against this backdrop it would be unjust to leave them out of the scheme of things. Observation of what obtains presently indicates that women have limited access to socio-economic rights and privileges and do not enjoy high social status.

Okun women play significant roles in the domestic responsibilities in their various settlements. Such roles include preparation of food, improving the nutritional content of family meals, cleanliness of the surrounding, improving better home care and nursing of children. Aside from these, the women also take up jobs (especially educated ones) or engage in trading in order to generate income for the upkeep of the family and themselves.

In the rural Okun setting, farming is the main occupation but the women are less involved in cutting, hoeing, planting and weeding. They mainly contribute to the last stages of farm work like harvesting, processing for final consumption. Products meant for consumption and sales are carried to the market, villages or towns by women and children (Ogidan: unpublished article)

Over time, there are some Okun women who have developed themselves by acquiring good education that has enabled them to obtain the highest qualification i.e. the Ph.D. and even to be placed in significant positions in the society. However, the percentage of women in this category is still relatively low when compared to their men counterpart.

**The ‘Iyawo Ile’ Institution in Okunland**

This is a group that comprises strictly of women only and they play important roles in traditional wedding ceremonies that cannot be overlooked, hence the purpose of this study to project and make relevant this noble institution that is not given enough attention and recognition. As earlier mentioned that the make up of community is a collection of different families, when it comes to the issue of marriage in Okunland, it is not just the nuclear family that supports a ‘son’ in marrying a wife or gives out a ‘daughter’ in marriage. Members of the entire extended family are also expected to be part of the process. Among those that constitute members of the extended family is a group of women popularly referred to in Okunland and even Yoruba land in general as ‘iyawo ile’. A group of ‘iyawo ile’ refers to a group of women who are wives to different men from the same family and lineage irrespective of the women’s age, race and creed. They are a minority whose roles in the activities involved in a traditional wedding ceremony cannot be over emphasized. Except in ‘Iya Gbedde’ that has variances in little ways, the activities and roles of a group of ‘iyawo ile’ are similar all over Okunland.

For a woman to be fully recognized as ‘iyawo ile’, she must be formally married to her husband i.e. both of them must have gone through all necessary marriage rites. Those who became ‘wives’ as a result of getting pregnant outside wedlock will not be well respected by the family members of her ‘husband’ until they do the right thing by going through the customary process of a traditional wedding. Although such a woman who becomes part of the extended family as a result of getting pregnant outside wedlock is still considered to be an ‘iyawo ile’, she will continue to be taunted until she is formally wedded into the family. It was not a common thing in the olden days to have a situation such as this i.e. premarital sex leading to a child/ children outside wedlock and thereby becoming ‘iyawo ile’ informally. These days, it has become so rampant and those involved seem not to be bothered about it.

All ‘iyawo ile’ of the same family usually come together formally to form a group and they do things in order. The coming together creates a forum to know one another better especially in the order of hierarchy and to also discuss important family issues. They usually hold meetings once a week (preferably Sundays) especially those in the village. Those that reside in towns or cities can do likewise if they so desire, but those in villages adhere religiously to this arrangement.

**Prerequisites to Engaging Iyawo ile Services**

The fact that the intending couple’s mothers are members of a group of ‘iyawo ile’ in their respective families does not mean that they will automatically enjoy the services of other members of the group when the need arises. They (‘iyawo ile’) have to be formally invited if the bride’s or groom’s mother desires their participation, involvement and services, especially for the reason of observing tradition and to also add colour to a traditional wedding ceremony.

The invitation is usually done in a traditional way. One or two weeks before the traditional wedding day, the mother of the intending bride or groom will send presents (usually delivered in a native bowl) comprising fifty ‘obi abata’, some biscuits or sweets and the sum of one thousand naira to the group of ‘iyawo ile’. This form of invitation is more recognized than a wedding invitation card. The sum of money paid in the olden days was ‘toro’ or ‘sisi’ and thereafter it was increased to two hundred naira. Subsequently, in line with the increase in the economic standard and high cost of average living in the country, it was increased to one thousand naira. Although the intending family could give more than this, giving less will never be acceptable. As a matter of fact, the amount given from one thousand and above will determine the quality of dishes (‘igba’) the group of ‘iyawo ile’ will purchase as gifts to the bride or bridegroom’s wife if it is their son that is involved. If the amount is high, the dishes will equally be of high quality and if it low, so also will the dishes be of low quality. The dishes are usually presented to the bride when she is being taken her husband’s house after the wedding ceremony.

However, it should be noted that not all the money given to them as invitation present would be used in buying dishes. Part of it will be kept in the group’s savings for future use. The group however does not keep its savings in the bank account simply because they see no need for it. Their savings also include contributions from each member of the institution at their weekly meetings. It is mandatory for each of them to contribute any fixed convenient amount. Defaulting will not be tolerated and it was discovered during this research that the group enjoys the cooperation of all members in this regard.

**Pre Traditional Wedding Activities**

After the group of ‘iyawo ile’ have received the invitation, it is mandatory for them to identify with the intending couple’s family and to demonstrate their acceptance of the invitation. This they do by individually collecting an impressive load of firewood and taking them to the intending couple’s family house, about four days before the wedding. It is compulsory for all members of the group (young and old) to carry a load of firewood each. Old ones amongst them who do not have enough strength can assign the duty to their children. Scanty load of firewood will not be accepted and defaulters will be fined.

The firewood carrying ceremony is usually associated with a lot of pomp and pageantry. All ‘iyawo ile’ will dress in ‘aso ebi’ (ceremonial uniform) they had earlier agreed on. There will also be a lot of singing and dancing. In ‘Iya Gbedde’, the traditional musical instrument called ‘opele’ is used as an accompaniment to the native songs rendered repeatedly as the group proceeds to deliver the firewood. Such songs include:

Song 1:

Iya oko gha pewa ade

Awa ko le sai debi ayo

Meaning:

Our sister-in-law (bride) has called upon us and we are here, we cannot ignore a call of joy

Song 2:

Call…Ori lo mo ohun te da le

Response…Ori lo mo ohun te da l’ese…

Meaning:

Man’s destiny will determine what he/she will become in life

On the day the loads of firewood are presented, it is the duty of the bride’s or groom’s mother to cook and hold a feast for all members of the group, numbering up to fifty or more in most cases. Also, she must present gifts to them which they will share among themselves after leaving the bride’s or groom’s house. The gifts usually include a bag of salt, tubers of yam, some dry fish, ‘orunla’ (dry grounded okro) and all soup condiments like dry pepper, iru (locust beans). To all these is also added a reasonable amount of money depending on their number or as demanded by them. Part of the money will be shared among them and the rest goes to their kitty.

A family that is buoyant enough to kill a cow for the wedding gives the neck of the cow to the group of ‘iyawo ile’ to share as custom demands. However, the quantity of items given to the group varies depending on the financial status of the intending couple’s families. Giving them these items aside from being customary is very important so that the group will be at peace with the bride or groom. Being at peace with the couple will attract the group’s genuine prayers and blessing. As a matter of fact, they believe that it is their right to receive all these items and denying them could lead to bitterness and discontentment on their part. To avoid these, the intending couple’s family (especially mothers) will see to the group’s fulfillment and satisfaction. All these items are thereafter cooked and each member of the group brings bowls to receive her share. Even the old ones who could not be present during the activities will have their own share sent to them. However, if the items are not substantial enough to be worthy of cooking, a knife will be used to divide the items into small portions, even to the smallest item like maggi and each person will be given her share. This is done for the purpose of transparency and fairness. By so doing, none of them would feel cheated.

A day or two before the wedding, the group will assemble at the family house of the bride or groom in order to render assistance in carrying out domestic chores like cooking, sweeping, washing of dishes etc. On the groom’s side, it is expected that they clean properly the matrimonial house of the bride.

**Wedding Day Activities**

On the wedding day, the group, dressed in ‘aso ebi’, sings and dances to the bride’s or groom’s house very early in the morning. They sit with the bride’s or groom’s mother in order to be readily available to carry out domestic chores. As they work, they sing along thereby making the atmosphere to be lively. Such songs include:

Song 3: (for the bride):

Iy’oko ti gha mere’le oko o 2x

Ahu lele me hu gege

Iy’oko gha mere’le oko

Meaning: Our sister-in-law is on her way to her husband’s house

Make a joyful noise

Our husband is on her way to her husband’s house

Her Oriki could also be included. For instance, a bride from ‘Omolodu’ clan in Aiyetoro Gbedde could be eulogized thus:

Song 4: Akosun hungi mere’le oko o

Iye ‘molodu mere’le oko

Ahu lele me hu gege

Iy’oko gha mere’le oko

Meaning:

One who uses yam to roast firewood is on her way to her husband’s house

One of our family members is on her way to her husband’s house

Make a joyful noise

Our sister-in-law is on her way to her husband’s house

Song 5: (for the groom):

Baba oko gha me seun da gha orun

O seun o da gha orun

Awo temi se gbalaja

Meaning:

Our brother –in-law has done something that we are pleased with

They continue with their activities until the actual ceremony begins. It is their duty to stay with the bride or her mother until the time comes for them to escort the bride outside to join her husband who is already sitted at the arena where the ceremony is taking place. A veil is usually used to cover her face in order to prevent everyone from seeing her face until her husband or his parents removes the veil and she is led out amidst a lot of singing and dancing. The songs include:

Song 6:

Onitemi mere’le oko oju mi me ro

Oyere yere ye ge

Bayi kase seun gha

Meaning: My dear is going to her husband’s house

I am missing her already

Oyere yere ye ge (has no particular meaning other than adding melody to the song)

This is how we do our thing

Song 7:

Oluwa mi me to’rin

Edera to’rin, to’rin

Iy’oko mi mehi to’rin

Edera to’rin, to’rin

Meaning:

Walk gently my lord

Select your steps carefully

Walk gently my sister- in – law

Select your steps carefully

They also chant:

Iye oko gha me bo o, eme yena

Ohi ee, ohi hun,

Ohi kekere aki ke

Our sister- in- law is coming

Clear the way

Ohi he, ohi hun, ohi kekere akike (has no particular meaning)

Before releasing the bride, leaders of the group will spread small wrappers on the bride’s path or present bowls to receive money from the groom’s family and friends. If the group is not satisfied with the amount of money placed on the wrappers or in the bowls, they would adamantly refuse to release the bride and sing thus:

Song 8:

Omi mokun eyan ni gha ko wa 2x

Opo soro, omi won laduge

Meaning: The water is full, send people to come and convey us

Note: They liken the situation of not releasing the bride because of their dissatisfaction with the amount of money given by the groom’s family, to a helpless situation such as being in an overflowing river where assistance is needed to cross over.

Song 9:

Oko iyawo me gungun komi

Esi, me moghi s’aja re

Oko iyawo me gungun komi

Esi, loki me saja re

Meaning:

The groom gave me bone

Why is that? I am not your dog

The groom gave me bone

Why is that when I am not your dog?

Note: the unacceptable amount of money is likened to being offered a piece of bone by the groom instead of meat.

The group could really go beyond reasonable limit with this aspect of the wedding ceremony especially if the groom’s family is wealthy and they are aware of it. After placing the wrapper on the bride’s path and receiving money, they could go further to place another small wrapper on her chair so as to collect more money from the groom’s family and friends before she would be allowed to sit down. They reason that the groom would be displeased with his bride standing up instead of being comfortably sitted and therefore would be compelled to give out more money. After releasing the bride, the group has no more avenues by which they can enforce the groom, his family and friends to pay more money except when the engagement items are brought in and they are displeased with one or two things.

In the past, it was customary for the group to initially present a fake ‘bride’ i.e. someone different from the real bride in order to deceive the groom. The person could be the bride’s sister or an aged woman from the bride’s family. The presentation would be done one or two time(s) before the real bride is eventually brought forward. The ‘fake’ bride’s head and face is usually covered which makes it easy for the groom to be deceived until he removes the veil. This tradition has however been eroded by modernization and Christianity except in very rare cases.

The activities of the group of ‘iyawo ile’ on the groom’s side are not as elaborate as those of their counter part from the bride’s family. The issue of taxing the bride’s family for whatever reason does not arise. Their major source of gratification is from the groom’s mother who gives out gifts to them in cash and food items. Nevertheless, they still play very important roles such as; sitting with the groom’s mother, assisting in domestic chores and serving food to guests and visitors. Other very important roles they play are escorting the groom to enter the bride’s compound which in most cases is also the venue of the ceremony, with singing and dancing, carrying the engagement items for presentation to the bride’s family and receiving the bride after the whole ceremony. In some cases, the youngest of the wives is mandated to pour water on the new bride’s feet before she (bride) enters her husband’s house for the first time after marriage. This aspect is also fading away as it is deemed unnecessary, archaic and unholy.

While carrying the engagement items to the bride’s family, they sing:

Song 10: Ile oko gha li le owo emo s’egan

Ewo k’amu s’otita ijoko li le oko gha

Meaning: With no gainsaying, our husband’s house is a house of riches

In our husband’s house, the material

that our stool is made of is money

Note (here, the wives creates an impression of the groom’s family stupendous wealth in order to impress the bride’s family)

After bringing in all the engagement items, it is the duty of the group of ‘iyawo ile’ from the bride’s family to inspect them so as to ascertain that all the items demanded are included. If it is discovered that the items are incomplete or any of them is damaged or broken, for instance a broken tuber of yam, there would be a protest. The group would refuse bluntly to accept the items until amendment is made to the error made by the groom’s family. Such amendment entails replacing the damaged item or providing the missing one. Inability to do so would amount to the group estimating the cost of the missing or damaged item and accepting its equivalent in cash. Their reason for being so adamant is that in as much as no part of the bride’s body is missing or damaged i.e. she is not handicapped, therefore the items must be complete just as the bride is complete. There is usually jubilation and rejoicing when eventually all the items are certified to be acceptable.

An important item to the group among the engagement items is the envelope containing the money meant for ‘iyawo ile’ and it is addressed as such. The amount could be two thousand naira or more as demanded by them. The amount is usually determined by the number of wives in the group. At the end of the ceremony, the envelope would be handed over to the leaders of the group and part of it would be shared equally among all of them while the rest would be kept in their savings.

The final and equally important role by the group is performed when it is time for the bride to leave for her husband’s house. While escorting her they sing:

Song 11:

Onihun mo gbahun re, irasese

Mogbahun re ira sese

(Note: ‘ira sese has no significant meaning. It is just an added melody to the song.)

Meaning: The owner has taken what belongs to him

Song 12: Ododo kan……. A gba hun aree

Meaning:

The only ‘flower’ we have has been taken away from us.

(Here, the ‘flower’ represents the bride)

**Post Wedding Activities**

In the past, it was the duty of the group of ‘iyawo ile’ from the groom’s family to bring the bride from her house after the traditional wedding ceremony, to her husband’s house. Nowadays, the common practice is for the couple to go straight to the groom’s house after the wedding reception. Nevertheless, the group from the groom’s family would still be on ground to receive her formally into their fold. As they do this, they sing in appreciation to the bride’s family for releasing their daughter to become part of their own family. The usual song is:

Song 13:

Omo k’ohun gha, eseun 2x

Ahoroho omu, eseun

Awojo wojo awo, eseun

Ilolo inu omo, eseun

Aghunnomo watojo

Ategbon taburo

Meaning:

We have been given a child, thank you

One who is beautifully endowed, thank you

She will live long

She will bear many children for us

Aghun nomo walala

Another very important role the group performs before and during the course of the wedding ceremony is giving out advice to the couple, particularly the bride in form of songs. The songs mainly center round the need for good morals that aid peaceful living with husband’s (wife’s) family, friends, neighbors etc. and guide against broken homes and dispute in marriages. They emphasize on the following for the bride:

* The need to be patient
* Shunning quarrels, fights and bickering
* Ability to command respect
* Upholding dignity and honour
* Embracing the spirit of obedience
* The need to be hospitable, accommodating, loving and caring
* Ability to maintain peace
* Eschewing pride and arrogance etc.

Advice for the groom:

* Avoid quarrel and fight with wife
* Have ability to settle disputes amicably
* Restrain from reporting wife to her family members
* Possess and sustain love and care for the wife etc.

Some of the moral songs are:

Song 14:

Oko be ki iwo, were njo

Wo se were o, were njo

Ewa were o, were njo

Ewa were omo, were njo

Meaning:

When your husband calls on you

Hasten to heed his call

Go quickly

You go quickly

Song 15:

Wo ba dele oko re

Momo ya papara

Wo baya papara

Omo aya papara ghi wo o

Meaning:

When you are in your husband’s house

Do not be stubborn and difficult

Otherwise your children will behave likewise to you

Song 16:

Ewi hon oba mi pe mode o

Elenini hoin layin mi o e

Meaning:

Tell my husband that I have come

Detractors, get behind me

Song 17:

Eni to ba gbe, eni t’oba hin

Eni t’oba fo pele gbe rele okore

Abe mongoro l’ogbe soyun

Oforu salo o

Meaning:

Whoever was not properly wedded

Whoever did not have the traditional musical instrument

(opele) played when going to her husband’s house

Definitely got pregnant under the mango tree

And ran away in the middle of the night

(Note: this particular song is an indictment on any spinster who engages in pre- marital sex and gets pregnant outside wedlock. It can be deduced that the society is against such immorality.

Song 18: Gbigbe lagbe

Iyawo gha mewule roju

Gbigbe lagbe ‘yare rele

Meaning: We have performed the wedding rites

Our wife do not be unhappy

Your mother equally went through the same process

**The Economic Relevance of the Institution**

Aside from the money given to the group at various instances cited earlier such as invitation to participate in wedding activities, after delivery of firewood, releasing of bride, envelope among engagement item and voluntary cash gift from the couple’s parent, the group also raises fund through weekly contribution by each member. The money is usually collected during their weekly meetings which in most cases hold on Sundays.

Another means of generating income is through fine. This is applicable to absentees from meetings and anyone who defaults in bringing her load of firewood. Interestingly, it was discovered during the course of this research that the group hardly ever lack fund. Surprisingly too, it was gathered that they do not lodge or save their money in the bank. The usual practice after the end of their activities at a traditional wedding ceremony is to count the money realized then part of it is shared among all the members while the remaining is kept as savings with the group’s treasurer. The sharing of the money is usually done with all sincerity. Everyone gets her own share including old and frail members who can longer participate in any of the activities and are forced to stay behind at home, have their share sent to them.

It is important to add that many of the wives have regular jobs where they earn a living and it is not just that they rely solely on what they get from their activities at a wedding ceremony. Such jobs include teaching, farming, trading, tailoring, hair dressing, weaving etc. This explains how they are able to pay for the group’s ‘aso ebi’, contribute money at meetings and even to pay any fine. Invitation for the group’s involvement at traditional wedding ceremonies does not come on regular basis therefore it is not an occupation but just a pastime they engaged in mainly for sustainability of tradition.

Aside from sharing part of the money realized among members of the group, part of the remaining money that is kept in the group’s savings is used to purchase gifts for the bride’s or groom’s parents. Part of it could also be used to offset loan incurred by any member who could not afford the mandatory load of firewood and had to borrow in order to meet up. The concerned member would be expected to pay back the loan at an agreed time.

Concerning the weekly contributions made at meetings, the usual practice is to share a large portion of the accumulated income among members at the end of the year while the rest is reserved for running expenses.

In addition, a larger percentage of the money saved by the group is given out as petty business loan to any interested member. It is expected that the beneficiary of the loan would trade with it, in as much as the group is in support of the choice of trade. Thereafter, she is expected to pay back the loan at the end of the year with interest. The interest is calculated based on the profit she realizes from the sales. Here, the group functions as a cooperative society even though it is not registered. Part of the proceeds from this type of transaction is shared as usual, while the remaining is saved.

Income generated by the group is also expended individually. Each member uses out of whatever share comes to her to supplement her regular income and whatever comes(if it does) from her husband as housekeeping allowance, for taking care of the family and herself. Top on the list of her priority in most cases are the children and this is crucial because no doubt, a child well taken care of will most likely turn out to be a productive person in the society.

Furthermore, an individual can also use her own share of the proceeds to contribute to community development such as building of a town hall.

**Political Involvement**

Members of the group usually participate actively in any political obligation in their community as the need arises provided they are duly recognized and informed. In most cases they respond positively to any political party/figure that seeks their involvement and support especially in the areas of campaigning and voting.

**The Social Relevance of the Institution**

The social relevance of the institution can be portrayed through the following themes:

**Unity:** The coming together of this group of women and their collective performances show not only that they are organized, they are also united.

**Peace:** The group takes it upon itself to settle any dispute between/ among two or more members. Their advice to the bride on the need for a peaceful co-existence with family members, friends, in-laws, neighbors also indicate the need for peace in our society.

**Solidarity:** This is clearly demonstrated among members of the group and with the couple’s family members. The group agrees together on any decision/ action taken. For instance when they agree to wear a particular ceremonial uniform (aso ebi), no member violates the instruction. In the same vein, collecting money from the groom’s family requires a solidarity effort from the group of ‘iyawo ile’ from the bride’s family. Other members of the group are usually in support of one or two members assigned to speak on their behalf.

**Fairness:** This is demonstrated through the group’s method of sharing things given to them. Food items and money given to them are shared equally without any form of insincerity. Old ones and even widows still receive their share.

**Hard work:** Aside from the domestic chores they engage in, carrying an impressive load of firewood from the place of gathering or purchase all the way to the bride’s house requires a lot of hard work.

**Industry:** Many of the women are quite industrious as they engage in one business or the other in order to make ends meet.

**Love:** Taking it upon themselves to buy gifts for the couple, presentation of loads of firewood, helping with cooking and other domestic chores etc. are all show of love and care for the couple and their families.

**Dignity and Pride:** The group of ‘Iyawo Ile’ from the bride’s family’s act of rejecting any substandard amount given to them by the groom’s family implies that they have a sense of dignity and pride. This stance will erode the thoughts of ‘a beggar has no choice’ from the mind of the groom’s family in whom the group has high expectations of gratification.

**Challenges**

**Eroding culture:** The interests to engage the activities of the group is waning gradually among the new generation couples and in some cases even their parents, mostly because of religious beliefs and modernization. It is common these days for the bride or the groom to have preference for their friend’s services instead of a group of’ Iyawo Ile’. The fear expressed by a few members of the group interviewed is that the culture could go into extinction if it is not preserved.

**Non-participation of Urban women:** many ‘okun’ wives who reside in urban areas do not identify with the group. They do not attend meetings even when they visit their native land, neither do they make any contributions, nor purchase ‘aso ebi’ etc. Such women are not likely to enjoy the services of the group whenever the need arises.

**Financial Handicap:** Some members of the group especially those with no regular source of income, cannot meet up with contributions and other financial commitments to the group. This invariably results in shortage of fund for the group.

**No or Partial Education:** Many of these women are not educated at all while some are only partially educated. This short coming could retard their contributions to the socio- economic development of their community.

**Other Challenges**

* Low level of skills acquisition- proper acquisition of skills can enhance their income.
* Lack of adequate knowledge on business management- Improper management of business can lead to loss of income and resources.
* Ignorance and inadequate knowledge of record keeping and banking, otherwise the savings kept at home could have been kept in a bank.
* Inadequate knowledge of investment – The group’s savings could also be invested so that it could generate more income.

**Conclusion**

The roles and performances of a group of ‘iyawo ile’ in Okunland go beyond just adding colour to a traditional wedding ceremony. The group in its own subtle way contributes to the socio-economic development of their community. These contributions which range from their activities at the small nucleus family level to the larger community, no doubt have brought delight to many homes and community.

The messages embedded in their songs and activities are directed at achieving among other things, peaceful co-existence, morality, sense of responsibility, hard work, mutual respect, love, good neighborliness, promotion of development through industry, elimination of conflict and violence, dignity and fair partnership. These values are very relevant and essential to be imbibed by any community that desires genuine socio-economic development therefore; they need to be given more recognition, support and encouragement.

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