

INTRODUCTION OF THE COSTUME – GELE

Tying the popular and indispensable gele or headdress can be very tricky or at most quite frustrating. A not so good headdress could make the day's event a miserable one, as you are constantly seen excusing yourself to the ladies room to fix it. As part of your traditional wedding regalia, you cannot afford to make a little mistake in getting the best style of the pack on your wedding day. Your gele should be tied well in advance like a day or two days before the wedding and not on the wedding day. This would help you choose the best fit and style that suits your face the most. If you know you do not have a friend or family member who is superb in tying gele then you can go to your local market like Tediasho or Lagos market to get it done for a little fee. Except of course if your budget includes the paying of a professional then it can be done that same day of the wedding. The headdress should be kept in a place safe from everyone and covered.

Whatever the color, wear it big and wear it proud because your wedding day is the only day you can wow everybody with that headdress!

STAGES / SIGNIFICANCE OF MARRIAGE CEREMONY

In Nigeria, there are 3 types of weddings: Traditional, Church (white) and Court weddings. Of the 3, the first 2 are the most observed types of weddings. Court weddings are usually observed for legal reasons.

In Nigeria, the traditional wedding is the wedding that was celebrated and observed before the arrival of the Europeans. It was and still is observed in the village setting so that all the members of the community can celebrate with the couple and their respective families.

With respect to traditional weddings, there is no dating as is known in the Western cultures. Of course, there might be dating behind the scenes but officially, it is not observed. When a man is interested in a woman, he lets his family know. The family will then carry out an "investigation" of the woman and her family (who the parents are, what they do, are any divorced, etc). Once she passes muster, the next step is for the man's family to observe what is literally translated as, "knocking of the door".

During the "knocking of the door" process, the man's father, family head and/or senior member of the man's family visit the woman's house and let her parents know of their intentions. The woman's parents accept the request and also carry out their own "investigation". They also find out if their daughter is interested in anyone or if someone is courting her for marriage. If their "investigation" of both man and daughter comes up positive, they alert the man's family as to the

availability of their daughter for marriage. The man's family then sets aside a date for the next phase of the process literally translated as, "asking".

In the "asking" phase, again the man's family visit the woman's family only this time, the woman's family is also represented by the senior members on their side. The man's family usually begins by offering some bottles of liquor to "open the mouth" of the soon-to-be father-in-law. The father-in-law then asks why they have come (he already knows but this makes the process fun). The man's family presents their case, eat some food and leave with a wedding list which is a list of gifts expected of the man's family which includes a dowry (bride price). A wedding date is also set at this stage.

On or before the wedding date, the man's family should have fulfilled all the items on the wedding list. Such a list might include items such as clothes, money and drinks among others. Though many have abused this list, it isn't meant to be so much that it places a burden on the man and makes it feeling as though the woman were being sold.

On the actual wedding day, the man arrives at the woman's family compound with his entourage of guests. Before he gets to the actual compound, he is "blocked" by the teenage boys of the village who claim to have protected the woman from the time she was born to the time she was ready for marriage. They usually demand items like money, a soccer ball and drinks. This is all ceremonial and the man's family obliges. In some areas, there is a second road block by the women of the village who claim the same thing as the teenage boys. Again, they are offered gifts and the man's family proceeds to the woman's compound.

ENTERTAINMENT

Upon arrival, the man's family and friends are invited for some food after which they take their seats. Foods and drinks (refreshment) is also presented to the entire audience. Typically at this point, a comedian/ MC keep the crowd alive and well and there are usually some dances by the local girls. As far as the dances are concerned, back in the day, the aim was to showcase the local girls to potential future suitors. Now it is more a form of entertainment especially considering that many a times, such dancers are brought in from elsewhere and have no connection to the woman's family.

THE SEARCH

After refreshments, the woman's family then asks why the man's family is there. The man's family will say something like, "we saw a beautiful cow some time ago here and have come to take her home". The woman's family feigning ignorance will then bring out a cow to which the man's family says they actually meant a lovely lady. Typically, the woman's family will then bring out 2 different women both of which are turned away by the man's family before the actual woman is brought out to cheers and jubilation.

PRESENTATION OF THE BRIDE AND GROOM AND THE COUPLE'S FIRST DANCE

Shortly after the bride is found, she is given a glass of wine to officially introduce everybody to her husband by giving the wine to drink and he will do same signifying that they have accept each other and are aware of the ceremony. She brings out the groom and dance with him while the audience comes out to spray some money on them.

MARRIAGE BLESSING BY PARENTS

After this, the bride takes his husband to his family with a glass of wine for their blessings and prayers and the groom does this too. The both parents accept the wine, drink all of it and offer them their blessings.

GIFTS

Once the "latest couple in town" takes their seats, gifts are presented and the couple then dances together again while the audience friends and families come out to "spray (the equivalent of throwing flowers in the western world)" money on them.

Traditional wedding photos: <http://www.pbase.com/peejays/igbankwu>

Traditional wedding video: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=bIKgZBkVxqE>