# *ALAGA IDURO* AND *ALAGA IJOKOO* NUPTIAL PERFORMANCES: THE MUSIC, THE DRAMA

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**Abstract**

The *Alága ìdúró*and the *Alága ìjókòó* are two important people that conduct contemporary Yorùbá traditional wedding ceremonies, known as engagement.They are indispensible personalities in Yoruba traditional marriage ceremonies; they coordinate the proceedings of engagement ceremonies. Music, dance and dramatic displays are prominent features in their performances. They display various body messages and sing various songs to communicate and also mark the different stages of traditional engagements. The article discusses music and dramatic displays in *alaga iduro* and *alaga ijokoo*Yoruba traditional marriage ceremonies. It examines their various dramatic displays at different stages of engagement ceremonies, their roles in educating couples about rightful behavioural traits in marriage.

## Introduction

*Alaga* (*Iduro* and *Ijokoo*) are masters of Yoruba traditional marriage ceremonies.They are important personalities in that conduct Yoruba traditional marriage ceremonies. The *alaga ijokoo* is the marriage coordinator that represents the bride's family, while the *alaga ijokoo* represents the groom's family.The *alaga iduro* leads the groom's family members to the venue of the engagement ceremony. The *AlagaIduro* and *AlagaIjokoo* engage in musical and dramatic displays to entertain, educate and conduct Yoruba traditional marriage proceedings. Oladipo (2015:239) reveals that the *Alágas* are necessary human resources that add fun to Yorùbá wedding ceremonies; although their "dramas are unscripted," they engage music, dance and drama aimed at

marriage negotiations quite effectively. Dance, music and drama are closely related. Music, like language, has the potential to communicate, although not as direct as spoken words. Music and dance may bring about dramatic expressionto reveal episodes with various storylines and may be included in performances (Nketia 1982:218). Drama is a means of expressing creativity, providing entertainment, education and communication (Ezeajugh and Ibeli, 2012:318).

Music making may be combined with dramatic performance or set of symbolic action done with or without costumes; these are performed where the audience is present to watch them perform. Music during events like these is used to communicate or reveal dramatic actions. Musical performances in the African society provide an opportunity for partaking in community life and as a means of communication (Nketia, 1982:22-29). Nketia noted that:

> *Music may be integrated with events, either to set the mood for the actions or to provide an outlet for expressing the feelings they generate. It may also be used to continue or heighten the dramatic action; hence, it may punctuate statements of prayer, or provide a continuous background of ordered sound. (Nketia, 1982:189).*

**Creative Application of Music and Drama as Instruments of Performance by *Alaga***

Creativity in any work of art is dependent on imagination, originality and exposure. Dramatic creativity in the performances depends on the ability of an *Alága* during engagement ceremony, to be able to combine drama and music effectively. The *Alága* (Yorùbá traditional marriage coodinators) have in their repertoires different songs for different stages of traditional engagement ceremonies. Music and drama performed at different stages depends on the dexterity of the *Alága* `*idúró* and *Alága ìjókòó* performing at the engagement ceremony. Through creativity, each *Alága* tries her best to add glamour to her performance. From the beginning of engagement ceremonies to the

end, dramatic negotiations are employed.The scenes of the dramatic performance of the masters of ceremonies are divided into three: the arrival of the bridegroom's family members, the arrival of the groom and the arrival of the bride.

*Dùndún* ensemble is the most eloquent of the Yorùbá membranophone instruments, which imitates the Ọ̀yó dialect (Oladipo 2014:160, Vidal, 2012:43). Investigations show that membranophone instruments such as *dùndún* and *gángan* are instruments played during engagement ceremonies. These instruments have contributed to effective dramatic dialogue and negotiations between *Alága ìdúró* and *Alága ìjókòó* during engagement ceremonies. The following is also a dramatic negotiation that took place between the *Alága ìjókòó* and the *Alága ìdúró* and groom's family members at the entrance of an engagement venue.

At the entrance of the venue of the engagement, the *Alága ìjókòó*, as is their usual practice, placed three bowls, told the family members of the groom to drop money into the bowls. The *Alága ìjókòó* was so funny that she made the guests at the engagement to laugh with ease. She said she remembered that when she was in primary school and names of pupils were called out from the class register and when her name was called she would say 'present ma'. She told the family members of the groom to line up and as she called them, they dropped money into the three bowls and answered, "Present Ma", before they were allowed to go in. They had to give amounts of money substantial enough as toll fare. She started by calling the groom's father, who said, "Present Ma" and then dropped money, called the groom's mother, who also said "Present Ma". She went on to call the groom's sisters, brothers, friends, housewives and other well-wishers, who likewise dropped money into the three bowls. The *Alága ìjókòó* gave the orders through singing, while the *dùndún* talking drummer drummed to the rhythm of her song. The drama goes thus.

Song Texts and Translation

Alága ìjókòó: *Bàbáọkọ*

| | |
|---|---|
| Groom's father | Present ma |
| *Alága ìjókòó:* | *Iya ọkọ* |
| Groom's mother | Present ma |
| *Alága Ìjókòó:* | *Ẹgbọ́n ọkọ* |
| Groom's elder brothers and sisters' | Present ma |
| *Alága Ìjókòó:* | *Àbúrò ọkọ* |
| Groom's younger brothers and sisters' | Present ma |

The actions stated above are the dramatic negotiation between the *Alága ìjókòó* and the groom's family members.

**Music and Drama as Means of Entertainment by *Alaga***

African theatre is participatory; everybody present at a socio-cultural occasion plays one role or the other. It is encompassing, the nature of African performance and aesthetics necessitates that everyone present is a player in one way or the other. The audience feels connected with the actions going on and is entertained. This brings about a response from them. The response of the audience could be laughing, dancing and singing (Ekweme 2014:429).

**Educative Drama and Music during Engagement Ceremonies**

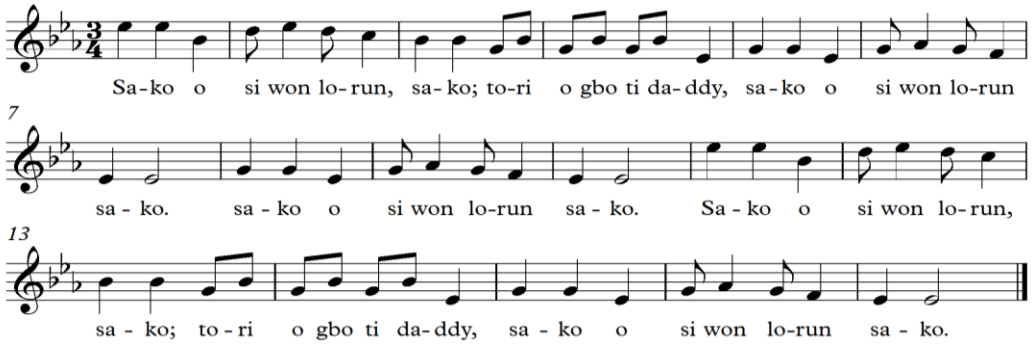
Táíwò (1980) defines education as a continuous process which requires formal and informal means of transfer of knowledge, values and norms of the people in society.Every society has its system of educating and inducting the younger ones into the society, to produce responsible adults. Given this, Fáfúnwá (1974) defines education as "the aggregate of all the process through which a child develops abilities which are of positive value to society" (Fáfúnwá, 1974:3).

Research findings reveal thatcoordinators of engagement ceremonies use music and drama to educate and expose societal values and culture. African theatre summarizes the social lives of a group of people; it encapsulates their lifestyle, economic life, marriage relationship, beliefs and their various activities as regards their moral/social ethos (Ekweme, 2014).

A similar view to Ekweme's assumption on African theatre was discovered.*Alága ìdúró and Alága ìjókòó,* through their dramatic presentations, educates the audience present at engagement ceremonies on acceptable behavioural traits of the couple one to another and Yoruba other values. A practical example was when a bride was told to show off her engagement ring to the audience. The song the *Alága ìjókòó* sang was educative and she adopted the competitive style of negotiation. The *Alága* told the bride to show off her ring to other ladies who were present at the engagement ceremony. This would make girls who were not patient enough for an engagement ceremony to be conducted for them (that is, girls who eloped with men without parental blessings) to be envious of the bride.

Below is a dramatic song that also teaches patience to other girls who might have been planning to elope with men and also evokes in them the desire to want to wait for the day of their engagement ceremony. The following educative song, which teaches girls patience, moral values and the belief of Yorùbás in the importance of parental blessings and the submission to one's parents, sang by an *Alága ìjókòó* at an engagement ceremony goes thus:

SAKỌ SÍ WỌN LỌ́RÙN




Song texts and Translation

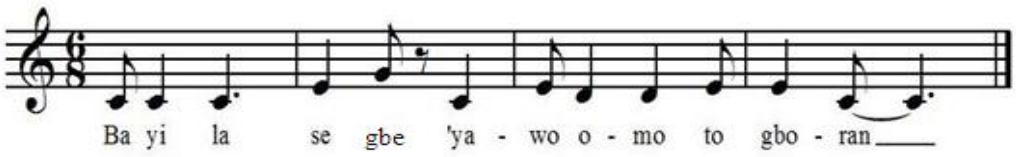
*Sako o sako sí won lórùn sako* (2c) Show off your ring to the disobedient girls (2ce)

*Torí to gbó ti Daddy/ Mummy* because you were obedient and submissive to Daddy/Mummy

*Sako o sako sí won lórùn sako* Show off your ring to the disobedient girls (2ce)

Another educative song recorded is as follows:

BÁYÌÍLA'N SE GBÉ 'YÀWÓ




Song texts and Translation

*Bá yìí là ún se igbèyàwó omo tó gbóràn* This is how we celebrate a submissive and obedient daughter.

**Musical and Dramatic Performance at the Arrival of Groom's Family**

The *Alága ìdúró* leads the groom's family members into the engagement venue with the singing of various songs and choruses. At the entrance, after the groom's family members might have sang and danced satisfactorily, the *Alága ìjókòó* welcomes them on behalf of the bride's family members and this conversation usually takes place:

*Alága ìjókòó*: who are you and why are you here? Where are you from? What have you come here to do?

It is an obvious fact that the above questions are meant to add flavour to the engagement ceremony because months before the occasion the bride and groom's family members have been planning. It is the engagement day, they are dressed in various attires, seated and already awaiting the arrival of the groom's family members. The dramatic nature at this stage of engagement ceremonies is that the *Alága ìjókòó* knows who they are therefore, asking them such questions is dramatic. The *Alága ìdúró* replies, "We are from the

family of Oyeleke of Ibadanland: We have come to take a beautiful rose from your compound; we mean your beautiful daughter. We have come to ask for her hand in marriage".

*Alága ìjókòó:* Thanks for coming; I want to go in to give your message to our Daddy and Mummy. I want to go in to ask them whether you are the visitors we have been expecting. (The *Alága ìjókòó* goes in and kneels before the father and the mother of the bride).

*Alága ìjókòó:* "Mummy and Daddy, there are some visitors outside; they said they are from the family of the Oyeleke of Ibadanland. Are they the visitors we have been expecting? Should I allow them in?

The Bride's parents: They are the people we have been expecting. Please allow them in.

It should be noted that all these conversations are in Yorùbá language. Conversation or negotiations are done both verbally and musically; the researcher discovered that the lyrics of songs are the medium of communication at different stages of musicodynamic negotiations and dialogues.

It is a usual practice at every engagement ceremony, for the *Alága ìjókòó* to place three bowls at the entrance of the engagement venue. These bowls represent wealth *(owó*), children (*ọmọ*) and good health (*àlàáfíà*). The bowls are placed there by the Alága *ìjókòó* for the groom's family members to drop money in before they are allowed to enter the venue of engagement ceremonies. The significance of these bowls is what the *Alága ìjókòó*wishes for the couple in their home. *Alága ìjókòó* allows groom's family members in, only when she must have been satisfied with their singing and the money they have contributed. The groom's family members led by the *Alága ìdúró* kneel before the bride's parents, other family members and friends. The *Alága ìjókòó* negotiates with groom's family members; she commands them to greet in English language and Yorùbá language andbride's

parents' native dialect. The greeting goes thus: 'Good afternoon sir, good afternoon ma, good afternoon friends, good afternoon unborn babies, and good afternoon well-wishers'. *E káàsán sà, ẹ káàsán má, ẹ káàsán ẹ̀yin ọ̀rẹ́, ẹ káàsán oyún inú, ẹ káàsán afẹ́nifẹ́re*". These greetings are part of the dramatic and musical display. It was stated earlier that negotiation is sealed when an agreement is reached between the negotiators. After the greetings, the *Alága ìjókòó* tells the groom's family members to sit down at the reserved seats opposite the bride's family members.

**Musical and Dramatic performance at the Arrival of Groom**

The presence of the groom is usually announced with various dramatic presentations. When the *Alága ìjókòó* sees the groom, she goes to him to sing, "You are welcome in the name of the Lord". She then puts out her hand in an attempt to shake the groom, but the groom having been warned by the *Alága ìdúró* that he must not shake the hand of the *Alága ìjókòó*, quickly prostrates. This scene is a demonstration of the Yorùbá culture of respect for in-laws. The *Alága ìjókòó* representing the bride's family must be respected by the groom.The following is a dramatic negotiation that ensued between an *Alága ìjókòó* and the *Alága ìdúró*, bridegroom and the friends of the bridegroom in an engagement ceremony.

The *Alága ìjókòó* instructed the bridegroom and his friends to drop money in the bowls and as they did, they and the *Alága ìdúró* were told to sing: "Daddy, Mummy *Olajumoke la dìbò fún'*. Meaning "Daddy and Mummy we are casting our votes for Olajumoke". The Alaga instructed them to sing it repeatedly severally. As the groom and his friend dropped money, they continued singing with drummers beating the *Ìyá-ìlù dùndún* drum (mother drum of talking drum) to the rhythm (m:d:. m:d:. r:m:r:m:r: d:d:. m:) of the song. The instruction of the *Alága ìjókòó* was a display of dramatic creativity. The money the bridegroom and his friends dropped was significant to casting of votes during an election.

The *Alága ìjókòó* gives the groom and his friends' lots of orders. She tells them to match, chest in, chest out, breath in and breathe out. All these orders are meant to add fun to engagement ceremonies. She showcase various dramatic displays to create fun such as shown in plate 2 where the *Alága ìjókòó* tells the groom and his friends to stretch their hands and match. All these actions are part of the dramatic negotiation.Communication could either be verbal or non-verbal. These dramatic orders are forms of verbal and non-verbal negotiation. The *Alága ìjókòó* negotiates with the bridegroom and his friends and they carry out the orders.



Alágaìjókòó commanding the groom and his friends

The *Alága ìjókòó* tells the groom that he will prostrate to the bride's parents and family members as a sign of courtesy for 103 times, but the groom's family members can bail him out by contributing money substantial enough, instead of prostrating for 103 times so that he will only prostrate three times. The *Alága ìjókòó* sings several songs telling the groom's family to contribute money. The groom and his friends prostrate twice, after which, the *Alága ìjókòó* sings a song commanding the groom's friends to stand up. The dramatic performance at this stage reveals the Yorùbá culture of marriage. The third time the groom prostrates, he prostrates alone. The *Alága ìjókòó*would thenask the groom a very important question '*sé o bẹ̀bẹ̀ fẹ́ẹ́, àbí oó bẹ̀bẹ̀ fẹ́ẹ́'* meaning, did you beg before marrying your bride

or not? The groom will say 'mo *bẹ̀bẹ̀ fẹ́ẹ́'* meaning, 'I begged to marry her' and I begged her parents and her family members before Kemi agreed to marry me.

In the picture below, the *Alága* asked the bridegroom some questions. These were to add glamour. Their conversation was as follows:
*Alága ìjókòó*: *Oko Ìyàwó sé o bẹ̀bẹ̀ fẹ́ Kémi, àbí oó bẹ̀bẹ̀ fẹ́ẹ́*
Meaning: did you plead with Kemi and members of her family to marry her or not?

Bridegroom: *Mo bẹ̀bẹ̀ fẹ́ẹ́*
Meaning: Yes I pleaded.

*Alága ìjókòó*: Is your plea from the depth of your heart or somebody forced you to marry her
Bridegroom: The plea is from the depth of my heart, nobody forced me.

*Alága ìjókòó*: *sé o fi ìdọ́bálẹ̀ fẹ́àbí o òfi ìdọ́bálèfẹ́ẹ́*
Meaning: Did you prostrate and beg her to marry you or not

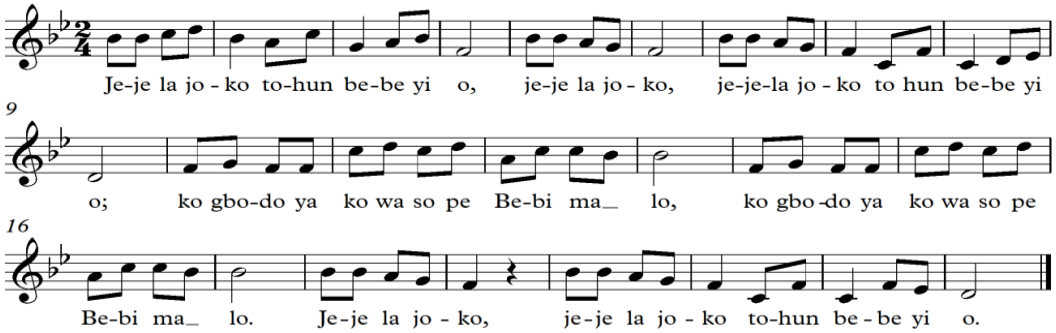
Bridegroom: *mo fi ìdọ́bálẹ̀ fẹ́ẹ́*
Meaning: I prostrated and begged her to marry me



The Alága ìjókòó is seen in the above picture asking the bridegroom "did you plead with the bride and her family members before you got married to Kemi or not?

The *Alàga ìjókòó* then sings the following song of negotiation and entertainment:

JÉJÉ LA JÓKÒÓ




Song Texts and Translation

*Ję́jé la jókòó tí ò ńbèbè yí ò* from your free will, you have come to ask for our daughter'shand in marriage

*Kò gbọdọ́ yá* In future

*Ko wá so pé bèbí máa lọ* you must not say, baby, I do not want you again

*Ję́jé la jókòó tí ò ńbèbè yí ò* from your free will, you have come to ask for our daughter's hand in marriage

The family members would then pray for the groom. The *Alága ìjókòó* sings a song to instruct the groom to stand up and sit on the laps of the bride's parents. The groom is later instructed to go to his parents to prostrate before them as a sign of appreciation for taking care of him.

**Musical and Dramatic Performance at the Arrival of the Bride**

The bride is brought in by her friends. The *Alága ìjókòó* and *Alága ìdúró* sing various songs to welcome the bride; she kneels before her parents to pray for her. The researcher observed that the *Alága*

*ìjókòó* sings and dramatises at this stage and then tells the bride to sit on her parents' laps.

The proposal is given to the bride's mother and the acceptance to the groom's mother. They both go to present the letters to their respective husbands and one of the bride's younger sisters reads the letter of proposal. These actions are part of the nuptial negotiation. During one of the engagement ceremonies attended, the *Alága ìjókòó* told the guests at the engagement to contribute money to buy a pair of glasses for the girl that was to read the proposal.

Another dramatic way of negotiation the researcher observed is the *Alága ìjókòó* telling the groom's mother to strap the bride on her back with a wrapper and the bride's mother to strap the groom on her back. The *Alága ìjókòó* then sings songs that portray that the women had just given birth to babies. The *Alága ìjókòó* thengreets both mothers on the birth of their new babies.

The bride is told to kneel before the bridegroom, the bridegroom prays for her and gives her money and according to the *Alága ìjókòó*, the money is meant for cooking. The groom carries his wife and places her on his parents' laps. In Yorùbáland, the husband is the crown and headof the wife according to Mustapha (2009). This belief of the Yorùbá is revealed when the bride is told to kneel before her husband for prayers.

The bride and groom's family sit facing each other. The side of the groom, although in the same venue is regarded as the groom's family house, while the side of the bride is regarded as the bride's family house. All these are elements of theatre, although everybody present is a participant while the *Alága ìjókòó* and *Alága ìdúró* are the principal actors. According to Fadipe (2012), in the past, housewives from the wife's family escort the bride into the groom's house and one of the housewives from the groom's family receives the bride and carries the bride into the groom's room after satisfactory displays of singing

and dancing by the groom's housewives. During engagement ceremonies, the *Alága ìjókòó* instructs the groom to carry his bride and place her on his parents' laps. The different stages of the Yoruba traditional engagements are marked with various dramatic displays.

**Conclusion**

Alaga iduro and alaga ijokoo are very important personalities in the performance of Yoruba contemporary marriage ceremonies. To set the mood for engagement ceremonies, masters of ceremonies engage various songs and gesticulations in nuptial negotiations. Their roles in exposing Yoruba cultural values cannot be underestimated. Through music and dramatic performances, they entertain, educate and sustain Yoruba culture. Songs used by Alaga iduro and alaga ijokoo expose the Yorùbá culture and norms and have helped in conforming to societal beliefs.

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