Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.7 No.3 September, 2024; p.g. 287 – 300; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

THE PRESENTATION OF LOVE, WEALTH AND MARRIAGE AS TASTES OF POPULAR CULTURE: A READING OF *THE WEDDING PARTY I*

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ABSTRACT

Popular culture serves as a significant force of socialization in the digital age, providing practical models for societal norms surrounding love, wealth, and marriage. Nollywood, as a dominant medium, reflects and shapes these values within the Nigerian society. The Wedding Party I, a commercially acclaimed new-Nollywood video film, exemplifies how popular culture reflects and influences contemporary Nigerian society. This film critically portrays the extravagant nature of Nigerian weddings, highlighting the relationship between affluence, social status, and romantic ideals. By examining The Wedding Party I through the theoretical lens of popular culture, this study reveals that the film portrays extravagant weddings as spectacles of affluence and social power, underscoring how love and marriage are commodified within a context of class rivalry and societal expectations through wealth. Using the methodology of content analysis, this study highlights the portrayal of familial dynamics, particularly the rivalry between the mothers of the bride and groom, as a microcosm of broader cultural hierarchies. It is found that through its narrative and stylistic elements, The Wedding Party I exposes the commodification of love and the reinforcement of class distinctions, illustrating how wedding celebrations have become spectacles of wealth and social power. The portrayal of rivalries, family dynamics, and societal expectations within the film accentuates the methodological differences in how men and women are positioned and perceived in contemporary Nigerian popular culture.

Keywords: *Nollywood, video film, Wealth, Love, Marriage, popular culture.*

Preamble

In recent years, Nollywood has become a powerful platform for examining societal values, trends, and challenges in Nigeria. The intersection of love, wealth, and marriage in Nigerian society reflects significant cultural and social dynamics, particularly as showcased in the Nigerian film industry, Nollywood. Nollywood, as one of the largest film industries globally, plays a major role in mirroring and shaping societal norms and values (Giwa, 2014).

Okafor observes that the film medium holds a powerful role in representing and transmitting culture, as it captures the unique sensibilities, values, and social myths of a particular group. This cross-cultural exchange not only fosters global understanding but also shapes perspectives and attitudes in a positive way (2020, p. 25). Wealth, or the desire to accumulate and become wealthy, is intrinsic to the composition of the Nigerian society. Love and weddings too, have transformed from simple cultural rites into grand, elaborate, and often expensive affairs (Okafor, 2020). This trend reflects a growing fascination with wealth, luxury, and social status, which Nollywood frequently amplifies through its movies. This fascination is amplified in Nollywood films, which frequently celebrate the glamour and opulence associated with weddings. In this context, films serve not only as entertainment but as social commentaries on contemporary issues surrounding relationships, status, and cultural expectations.

The notion of "taste" as a social construct is well-articulated by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984). Bourdieu posits that taste reflects one's social and economic background, shaping and reinforcing social hierarchies. Cultural consumption, whether in art, fashion, or film, acts as a way to signal class distinctions and legitimate social differences (Bourdieu, 1984, p.5). This perspective is essential for understanding how popular media, such as Nollywood films, encapsulates and promotes particular ideals related to love, wealth, and marriage.

This study, therefore, employs Popular Culture Theory to explore the presentation of love, wealth, and marriage in the Nigerian popular cinema, using *The Wedding Party I* as a case study to illustrate how these themes are depicted and how they resonate within the cultural framework of modern Nigerian society.

Theoretical Framework

This study is undergirded by the ethos of Popular culture theory. John Storey, using the Mass Culture approach defines popular culture as a commodified product manufactured "from above" by self-conscious producers operating within institutional frameworks like television networks, record labels, or film studios (2009, p. 12). Here, Storey's idea of commodification refers to the process of transforming cultural practices, relationships, or objects into goods or services for exchange or profit. Hence, popular culture is depicted as commercialized, appealing to the tastes of the majority, and designed for consumption by passive audiences. This consumerist interpretation views popular culture as both subordinate to elite culture and as a site of power dynamics where dominant social groups exert influence over subordinate ones. This theory suggests that media productions are not mere entertainment but are imbued with meanings that resonate with and influence public perceptions and social norms. In this case, the film serves as a medium through which collective experiences and attitudes toward marriage and social hierarchy are expressed (Storey, 2009, p. 12).

To further contextualize popular culture within Nigerian cinema, scholars like Ibe have argued that "the arrival of film changed aesthetic perception of popular culture and art profoundly" (2019, p. 155). Ibe, Shaka, and Uwah also emphasize that identity formation and social transformation are integral to popular culture, especially among those who align with the tenets of the culture and civilization tradition (2018, p. 197).

According to Haynes and Okome, "Nigerian film and now video production has been absorbed into the realm of popular culture.... Nowhere else in Africa has a domestic market been captured so successfully" (1998, p. 106). The films' symbolic sights and sounds continue to construct and shape the identity of viewers who identify with them, and as argued by Shaka; "will continue to attract youths or poor urban dwellers whose source of entertainment derive from ... [them], and in this sense, popular culture will continue to remain the most vibrant culture of any society" (2002, p. 28).

Synopsis of *The Wedding Party I* (2016)

> *The Wedding Party I*,
> 2016. The ELFIKE Film Collective. Directed by Kemi Adetiba. Script by Tosin Otudeko and Kemi Adetiba. Photographed by Akpe Ododoru. Edited by Andrew Webber. Music composed by Dr. Bayo Adepetun and Michael "Truth" Ogunlade. With Adesua Etomi, Banky Wellington, Richard Mofe Damijo, Sola Sobowale, Iretiola Doyle, Alibaba Akporobome, Sambasa Nzeribe, and Zainab Balogun.

The Wedding Party I (2016) is a new Nollywood romantic comedy film that premiered on 8 September 2016 at the Toronto International Film Festival in Canada and on 26 November 2016 at Eko Hotel and Suites Lagos. It was later released worldwide on 16 December 2016 to become the highest grossing Nigerian film as at 2017 with a box office return of over four-hundred and fifty-two million naira (₦452,000,000). It was produced on a budget of sixty million naira (₦60,000,000) by ELFIKE Film Collective –a partnership of four production companies in Nigeria namely: EbonyLife Films, FilmOne Distribution, Inkblot Productions and Koga Studios.

The Wedding Party I (2016) remains one of Nigeria's most successful films in profitability, initially surpassing Ayo Makun's *A Trip to Jamaica* (Ukwuoma, 2017). However, it was eventually outdone by its sequel, *The Wedding Party II: Destination Dubai* (2017), and several other more recent New-Nollywood releases including Jennifer's *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023). *The Wedding Party I* presents popular aspects of the activities that characterize the usual Nigerian wedding day culminating in marriage. It is set in Lagos, a city ranked in 2018 as the third worst city to live in the world (Nleweoha, 2018). This explains the film's fast motion technique employed by the filmmaker Kemi Adetiba to demonstrate the hustle and bustle of what could be called "Lagos Life."

The Wedding Party I (2016) unfolds from dawn to dusk on the wedding day of Dunni (Adesua Etomi), a 24-year-old art gallery owner, and Dozie (Banky Wellington), an IT entrepreneur. The couple eagerly anticipates their first night together, having chosen chastity. Suspense and surprise arise as Dunni questions Dozie's fidelity, the bridal train engages in matchmaking, a pretentious wedding planner navigates class tensions between the mothers; Mrs. Tinuade Coker (Sola Sobowale) and Lady Obianuju Onwuka (Iretiola Doyle), and gate-crashers, like the pickpocket Lukman (Sambasa Nzeribe), add to the event's glitz and chaos.

Love, Wealth and Marriage as "Tastes" of Popular Culture in *The Wedding Party I*

The film is neatly divided into several sequences, which can be categorized into eleven (11) distinct plot segments between the opening credit and the end credits. Below is the overall *Wedding Party 1* plot segmentation:

Credits

1. **Dawn**
   a) Finishing touches at the reception venue
   b) Lukman the street tout picks up wedding invitation
2. **The bride and groom dress up**
   a) The home of the Cokers: Dunni dresses up
   b) Crosscut to the home of the Onwukas as Dozie and his men prepare
3. **Rivalry for social supremacy between the mothers**
   a) Mrs Tinuade disenchanted at a magazine publication of the wedding
   b) Lady Obianuju lambasts Dunni and her family
4. **Reception venue**
   a) Wonu makes her final roll-call
   b) Mrs Tinuade replaces Dunni's caterer with Iya Michael
5. **The home of the Onwukas**
   a) Rosie comes to deliver the wedding rings and goes to seduce Dozie
   b) Chief Felix prevents her from sleeping with Dozie
6. **Departure and arrival at the church**
   a) Dunni's wedding dress tears into two
   b) Obianuju and the pastor impatient at the bride's delayed arrival
   c) All eyes on Obianuju as the final bands of marriage is announced
7. **En route from church to reception venue**
   a) Pandemonium at the reception venue as pickpocket steals phones
   b) The exotic motorcade of the couple glides by
   c) Dunni discovers a lady's used thong inside Dozie's suit
8. **Arrival at the reception**
   a) Mrs Tinuade and Lady Obianuju clash
   b) The families dance in one after another
   c) Lukman tiptoes into the store room of the wedding presents
9. **The wedding party begins**
   a) Dozie abandons his bride in search of his mother
   b) Rosie's crew invade Dunni on the dance floor
   d) Pastor Leke takes a hilarious opening prayer
   e) Chief Felix's infamous girlfriend appears
10. **Sola plays a wrong appreciation video**
    a) Dunni runs away from the venue
    b) The families are held hostage by Lukman
    c) The families reunite
11. **The denouement**
    a) Dozie finds Dunni
    b) Chief Felix enthrones his son Nonso to man his company
    c) A happy ending for all parties who engage in a unity dance

End credits

As the opening credits roll, a fast-paced soundtrack establishes the film's tempo, reflecting the hustle and bustle of life in Lagos. A bird's-eye view shot of the metropolitan city transitions into the diegetic sound of a motorbike, followed by a drone. As the bike manoeuvres through the streets, we learn that the delivery man is in a hurry to dispatch the final set of invitation cards for the wedding of Dunni and Dozie, scheduled for the same day. A crosscut reveals the film's title card (**Plate 1**), followed by the location of the wedding reception. We see the wedding planner, Wonu (played by Zainab Balogun), making final touches in a desperate attempt to ensure the event's success. The opening sequence ends with the motif of a street urchin (Lukman) who picks up an invitation card that falls off the delivery man. As we shall see, his character is a representation of the popular Omo-ni-le (area boy) in Lagos who wakes up every day looking for events to gate-crash and burgle.



Plate 1: Opening credit sequence reveals the title card of *The Wedding Party.*

In the second sequence, an extreme close-up captures Dunni's ring finger as she prepares for her wedding. The unfolding events convey the common anxiety that accompanies the morning of most wedding days. Dunni continuously calls her friends on the bridal train, highlighting their physical distance. Meanwhile, the father of the bride, Engineer Bamidele Coker (played by Ali Baba Akpobome), is shown in a frenzy over the disorganization of the event preparations. A POV shot of Dunni looking down to welcome her friends as she screams "everything is going to be perfect" (**Plate 2** & **Plate 3**) is followed with a non-diegetic outdoor insert and an alternating shot revealing Dozie and the groom's men getting dressed. Shortly, Dozie's older brother Nonso (Enyinna Nwigwe) enters from screen right to meet the rest of the groom's men who muse over their last night bachelors' eve experiences at Oxygen night club. While they re-enact their various roles at the party, Sola (Ikechukwu Onunaku) the overzealous friend of Dozie displays a flash-drive which he claims contains the footage of what transpired at the bachelors' eve. As the men try to get the storage device off Sola's

"wrong hands", the scene returns to the bride's family house as her mother Tinuade Coker and her "asoe-ebi" friends sing and dance round the sitting room.



Plate 2: Dunni looks down to welcome her friends (objective narration).



Plate 3: A shot from Dunni's point of view follows (perceptual subjectivity).

In segment 3, the women flip through a popular entertainment magazine featuring the wedding (Plate 4). Tinuade is visibly upset when she realizes her name is missing in the publication, assuming her rival Obianuju deliberately erased her name. She claims her family is funding the entire wedding, amplifying the tension. Singing along to a well-known Yoruba juju song, they are interrupted by the bride's father, Engineer Bamidele, who arrives with drinks to announce that more dignitaries have confirmed their attendance, adding to the event's already high stakes.



Plate 4: Mrs. Tinuade's facial expression framed as the name of her social rival Lady Obianuju is mentioned.

The significance of this sequence lies in Tinuade's focus on asserting her social status. She insists her family is as influential as the groom's, signaling a readiness for rivalry with Obianuju. This tension mirrors common dynamics in Nigerian weddings, where parents often

fund the event and exert control, making the couple feel like mere actors in a larger family drama. Wealthy parents use such occasions not only to dictate wedding proceedings but also to display their wealth and social class. Here, the mothers turn their children's wedding into a battleground for social supremacy.

The evidence of this rivalry is fully displayed in the next scene as the soundtrack of a piano establishes the opulent surroundings of the Onwukas. Obianuju the mother of the handsome groom is pictured in a close-up with her friends and her husband Chief Felix Onwuka (Richard Mofe Damijo) having a continental outdoor breakfast. She picks up a copy of same magazine featuring her son's wedding and begins to lambast the choice of Dunni and her family as in-laws. To her, she has seen her son flirt around with numerous girls from wealthier families, and therefore cannot come to terms with what she describes as "*a native house girl from Ekiti State*" (alluding to Dunni). Through variable framing, her husband Felix is peeved about her utterances to the point of losing his appetite and walking away. A corresponding shot exposes Felix answering his phone and whispering "*I told you not to call me today*." As we shall see, this call is from his infamous girlfriend who always follows him everywhere he goes.

As Wonu, the wedding planner, conducts her final roll call in segment 4, Iya Michael, a low-tier caterer, arrives with her team. Wonu confronts her, but Iya Michael confidently begins setting up. The scene shifts to the Cokers, where a close-up captures Dunni's frustration with her mother for replacing her chosen caterer with Iya Michael. Emphasizing the everyday reality of parental control, Dunni's friend reminds her, "This is Nigeria; it's their wedding." Although embarrassed by her mother's interference, Dunni chooses to focus on her mother's good intentions.



Plate 5: A high-angle shot of Dozie's erstwhile girlfriend Rosie welcomed by Chief Felix Onwuka.

Segment 5 returns to the house of the Onwukas as we see Rosie, Dozie's ex-girlfriend arrive with the wedding rings (**Plate 5**). The rings got into her hands after her cousin Kelvin who was Dozie's supposed best-man had a motorbike accident and so cannot make it to the wedding anymore. Obianuju sends Rosie to Dozie's room to the amazement of her husband Felix. Rosie goes inside Dozie's room to seduce him but the act is nipped in the bud by Felix who opens the door. The significance of this scene lies in the question of why Obianuju allows

Rosie to go so close and intimate to her son Dozie on his wedding day. As the filmmaker's technique reveals, Obianuju is now used to the flirtatious life of her husband Felix and therefore sees nothing wrong in her son imbibing this immorality. Thus, she indirectly instructs Rosie to go intimate with Dozie on his wedding day without an iota of compunction about infidelity.

The sequence (6) moves to the bride's home as a medium close-up frames her dad Engineer Bamidele getting anxious at their delayed departure to the church wedding. A comic scene ensues when the bride makes her first appearance to her parents. Her father becomes extremely excited, while her mother asks to take a picture with her. As they hurriedly pose for photos, the wedding dress tears, leaving the family in a state of confusion amid a flurry of amusing suggestions. The scene cuts to a long shot of the church building where the wedding is holding. As the shot reframes, we see Obianuju expressing her dismay at the bride's late arrival and the church pastor cautioning the groom on the effects of further delays. According to him, a similar case occurred previously where the bride marched in after the groom had taken the vows. These words invite Sola who jestingly queries the pastor "*who then did the groom kiss*?" Finally, the bride is walked in by her father as the programme begins. The entire scene pleases every attendee except Lady Obianuju Onwuka the mother of the groom, who rather appears to be irritated with every passing event. This is highlighted as all eyes turn to her when the pastor announces the bands of marriage and requests for reasons why the wedding should not continue. She is also caught outside shaming her daughter-in-law when Dunni tries to peck her in the full view of every guest including her husband, Felix.

Segment 7 begins at the reception venue where Wonu is becoming increasingly busy by controlling the crowd and instructing the security men not to permit anybody without invitation card. Lukman who picked up an invite in the opening sequence is seen well dressed in Yoruba "agbada" outfit and stealing phones from unsuspecting guests on the queue. As pandemonium sets in, few guests enter into the reception hall without invitation while others begin to notice that their phones are no more in their pockets.



Plate 6: The bridal exotic motorcade glides by.

The sequence cuts to a high-angle extreme long shot which reveals the newly wedded couple's exotic motorcade gliding by (**Plate 6**). A jump cut reframes the personalities in these cars, one after another, starting with the best-man and the chief-bridesmaid who seem not to be getting

along with each other quite well. Engineer and Mrs Bamidele Coker are seen next arguing over the local stew in the boot while the Onwukas are seriously concluding a business deal. This once again accentuates an important element of popular culture as these characters are portrayed in ethnic stereotypes. For Tinuade to have smuggled a pot of stew into the car simply resonates existing popular notions about the Yoruba, occasions and foods. It is a quotidian assumption that the average Yoruba will do anything possible to have surplus foods in their occasions and events, while a typical "Igbo man" will always convert every opportunity to business meetings.

Popular Nigeria video stereotyping as constructed in social discourses are reproduced as ethnic stereotypes in Nollywood films. Such stereotypes as the Hausa *Aboki* (friend), *the Igbo man* (a money conscious man from Eastern Nigeria), *Alhaji* (a wealthy Hausa man), *Yoruba man, Agbero* (tout), *Okon* and *Ekaete* (male and female house helps respectively), *militant* (an average Niger-Delta youth), et cetera are identities which are attributed by fluid reliance on popular perceptions about ethnic, socio-economic, religious and political affiliations of their meanings.

Stereotypical ethnic framing in Nollywood films is borrowed from older popular art forms in Nigeria such as the Yoruba travelling theatre, Onitsha pamphlets and television soaps and dramas like *The New Masquerade*. In this popular TV soap opera, the three dominant characters are stereotyped along ethnic boundaries. The richest character Jegede Sokoya is from Yoruba, the wise patriarchal figure Chief Zebrudaiah is from Igbo, while the wretched of the earth as portrayed in Gringory (a bastardized variant of Gregory) is from Efik descent of Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom states (Ajibade, 2012).

As the scene progresses, we see Dunni and Dozie on the back seat kissing while the ever-intrusive Harrison drives. Their intimacy is abruptly interrupted when Dunni discovers a female thong inside Dozie's suit. bringing the car to a sudden halt and separating them from the wedding convoy. Alarmed by the delay, Dunni's mother, Tinuade, anxiously wonders where they are. Through ensuing conversation, it is revealed that Dunni, who has kept her virginity, fears marrying someone with a potentially unfaithful past. Dozie, realizing her concern, reassures her of his commitment and loyalty, and, reassured by his words, Dunni chooses to trust him as they resume their journey to the reception.



Plate 7: Mrs Tinuade Coker's brooding action on the couple's whereabouts translated in English subtitle.

At the reception venue (segment 8), Mrs. Tinuade is shown on the ground, lamenting that the couple may have been kidnapped (**Plate 7**). Her rival, Lady Obianuju, quips that it is actually her son who has been "kidnapped" by Tinuade's daughter. As their bickering escalates, the couple's car finally appears, entering from screen right, which immediately eases the tension. Both mothers rush to opposite car doors, eager for an explanation, but receive none. The scene jumps to the entrance to the reception hall where the rival mothers clash once more on who makes the first and grand entry. In the end, the Onwukas dance in first before the Cokers. Kemi Adetiba the filmmaker, douses the comic tension in this sequence by alternating these dances with the shot of Lukman the pickpocket successfully tiptoeing into the store room of the wedding presents.

The significance of this sequence lies in the class perception and battle for supremacy between the rival mothers; Mrs Tinuade Coker and Lady Obianuju Onwuka. Although the essence is for humorous effects, the rivalry represents a vital popular element of the environment in which the film draws its inspiration and meaning. In Nigeria, it is commonplace finding mother-in-laws loathe their daughter-in-laws for whatever reasons. In the film's motivation, Lady Obianuju is against her son marrying Dunni on the grounds that her parents are not well-heeled enough to become her in-laws. Thus, when Mrs Tinuade remarks; "*who is paying for the wedding?"* (in the scene where the wedding planner gets confused on who dances in first), Lady Obianuju responds: "*you are the one who wanted to marry into money, not so?"*

As we shall see Lady Obianuju's discontent extends beyond Dunni as her son's chosen wife. In the film's perspective, a content wife signifies a harmonious social presence, while an unhappy one results in social embarrassment. This latter situation is evident with Dozie's frustrated mother, who endures her husband's ongoing infidelity, quietly accepting his behaviour without objection. This explains why Dunni tells Dozie *"I am not going to act like your mother and pretend to be blind"* when she finds a girl's used undies on his wedding jacket. Also, the latent effect of a divided family manifests in the opposing moral standards of the two lovers, Dunni and Dozie. As a product of a peaceful home, Dunni is reared in good moral values up to the height of being a virgin bride, while Dozie holds the cynical mind-set that it is impossible for a man to remain faithful to his wife. In spite of this parallelism, it is true love for each other that bonds them together.

Dozie's ex-girlfriend Rosie unashamedly comes to the wedding reception gorgeously dressed and escorted by three fellow damsels in segment 9. As Sola refers to her as a loser, the shot crosscuts to the wedding planner walking up to the Cokers now seated to alert them that the cake designer is withholding the wedding cake. Engineer Bamidele follows her outside to meet with the cake designer and settle all outstanding issues. The remainder of the plot is rendered through formal crosscutting technique to present simultaneous stories with intriguing outcomes. The couple's dance scene utilizes elements of popular songs and dance; Dozie suddenly exits the dance floor to unsuccessfully invite his mother over; Rosie's crew invade Dunni on the dance floor, spraying her with money; Felix the father of the groom shields Dunni from the trespassers; and the wedding guests choose between Obianuju's continental delicacy and Tinuade's local appeal.



Plate 8: A master long shot of Efik dancers when invaded by Dunni's white friend Deardre Winston.

The highlight of this sequence lies in pastor Leke's four minutes opening prayer that exasperates Obianuju the more, and Sola's costly mistake of surprising screen characters and the audience by playing a shocking video. Just before Sola plays the wrong video of the bachelors' eve at Oxygen night club, Felix's infamous girlfriend whom he nicknames "Small Chops" appears at the occasion and attempts to walk straight to the table of the Onwukas. This act of public insolence forces Nonso (Dozie's older brother) to order her out. From a theoretical standpoint, this mistake unveils a different facet of the commodified nature of popular culture as depicted in the film: the interplay between private indiscretions and their public exposure for entertainment value. Afterwards, a group of Efik dancers enter to perform the popular ekong-bi dance of Cross Rivers which Mrs Tinuade dedicates to the Onwukas (**Plate 8**). However, Lady Obianuju is quick to point out that the Igbo tribe is not the same as Efik. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the executive producers of this film are Efik, and this better explains why an Efik dance has a place in the film.



Plate 9: Surprise and suspense as Dunni, the bride, runs away from the wedding party.

In the climax of the plot (segment 10), Dunni flees the wedding reception after Dozie's footage is shown with ladies frolicking around him at the bachelors' eve (**Plate 9**). Also, Dozie, Nonso,

Engineer and Mrs Bamidele Coker, and Chief and Lady Felix Onwuka are all surrendered at gun point in the store room by Lukman the pickpocket. The significance of this scene is that it serves as a point of convergence for true communication and reconciliation among the families. Engineer Bamidele confesses to his wife that their finances are drained after covering wedding costs. Lady Onwuka reveals the painful truth about Chief Felix's infidelity with much younger women, while Lukman, the jobless thief, shares his frustration at being forced into crime despite graduating with top honours. As tensions peak, Nonso disarms Lukman, and Dozie sets off to find his bride. In a surprising shift, Lady Obianuju expresses acceptance of Dunni as her daughter-in-law before they part.

Sola in a bid to remedy his wrongs offers to drive Dozie to find his heartthrob (segment 11). As they reconcile with Dunni at her favourite place of solitude, Dozie for the umpteenth time poetically reaffirms his love to Dunni and vows never to cheat on her. Dunni (in tears) forgives Sola for trying to ruin her wedding day and follows them back to the wedding party. When they return back to the deserted party, it becomes more like a family reunion. Chief Felix's final speech accentuates the film's ideology that happy social relation is the product of a happy family (**Plate 10**). The plot ends on Wonu drinking from a leftover bottle after the unity dance by all major characters.

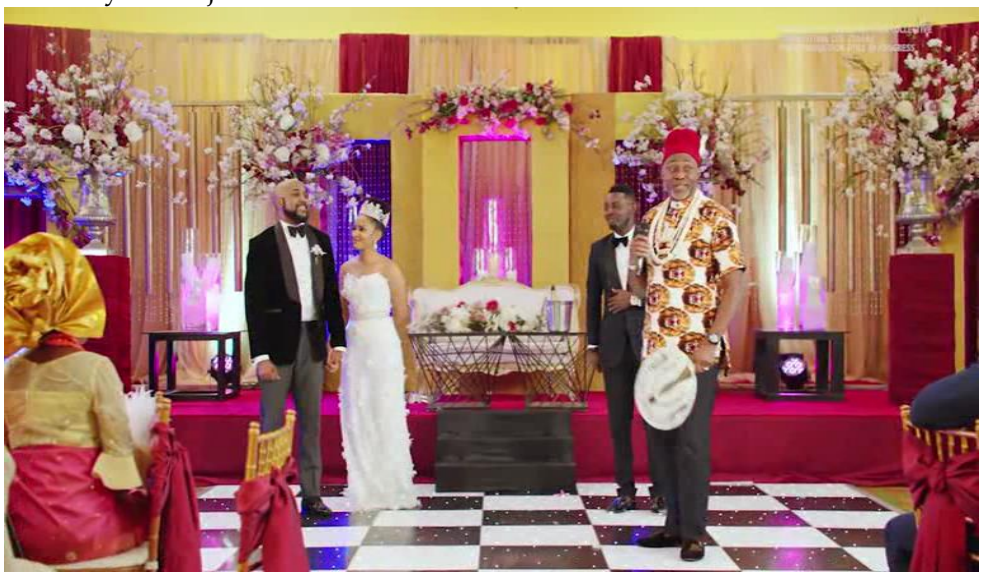


Plate 10: Widescreen displays newly wedded Dunni and Dozie, MC and Chief Felix Onwuka making his handover speech.

The Use of Narrative and Stylistic Elements in *The Wedding Party I*

Several stylistic elements add up to produce humour in *The Wedding Party I*. These are mostly through the movement and performance of special characters like Wonu, Harrison, and Ayanmale. Wonu, the wedding planner, exaggerates her social status to secure high-profile events, speaking feigned English and acting posh. However, her true status is humorously exposed when she kneels before Iya Michael, pleading in Yoruba for more local food to serve additional one hundred guests, much to Iya Michael's incredulity. In the last sequence, she throws up her wig to reveal her low haircut that is usually found on proud African damsels.

Harrison on his part creates humour and helps deflate tension in the film. He prescribes that his tailor who made his "Guchee" (a bastardized form of the international fashion brand

Gucci) suit be invited to amend Dunni's classy wedding dress in the scene the train got split into two. Also, he lends his voice to support Dozie's assurance of fidelity in the scene Dunni halts the transit to the wedding party. Finally, Ayanmale is the wedding guest from Ekiti who first attempted to gate-crash the wedding with his entire family. His very timid character helps build ludicrous atmosphere in the film. He hides the continental dish under the table décor because he needed to place order for Iya Michael's local food.

Specific settings and sounds play distinct narrative roles. The Cokers' home is introduced with a noisy, modest interior, contrasting sharply with the Onwukas' luxurious, serene environment accompanied by a piano melody. The Onwukas' home gains further significance with Rosie's arrival, framed in the middle of the marbled interior (Plate 5) as Chief Felix greets her near the grand piano. The same narrative motivation marks the film's use of costume and props. The display of exotic cars and costume as well as the film's quality picture adds colour to the film's diegesis.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, social events such as weddings are arguably glamorous parties and carnival sites where popular culture finds material expression. The popular Yoruba phrase "owambe" describes a cultural practice that brings together people from diverse strata of the society. The jamboree usually includes the likes of the character of Harrison (Kunle Idowu) in *The Wedding Party I* (2016), whose folly becomes ludicrous the more he tries to blend in. As already remarked, weddings have become the platforms for display of wealth, social power and resentment from diverse forms of envy. Many guests attend weddings in Nigeria for different reasons, ranging from assessment of the bride and groom, hunger for the popular *jollof rice*, *ofada rice* wrapped in leaf, *amala* and *ewedu* (italicized words are popular foods in Yoruba), and what have you?

Similarly, some who take front rows at the buffet stands attend the weddings even without personal relationships with the families or knowledge of names of the bride and groom. Such people in Yoruba (the locale of *The Wedding Party I*) are called *mogbo-moya*; which translates to mean "I over-heard, so I came in." *The Wedding Party I* is a romantic comedy that summarizes the off-stage activities that characterize vast majority of wedding ceremonies in Nigeria. Ideologically, family is placed above everything else in the social relation, and this is the hallmark of the Nigerian cultural heritage. The rivalries displayed by the two female parents of the bride and groom are part and parcel of the hilarious dramas at most Nigerian wedding parties. This *comedy* of romance uses several stylistic elements to produce its humour. These are fast-motion technique to depict the bustle of Lagos life. Variable framing, bird-view shots, staging and performance of comic characters, and specific settings and sounds also highlight distinct narrative functions.

Hence, the Popular Culture Theory aptly describes how *The Wedding Party I* functions as a commodified product of Nigerian cinema, created within institutional frameworks to appeal to a wide audience. The film's depiction of extravagant weddings, commodified love, and class-based familial rivalries exemplifies how popular culture is designed not only for passive consumption but also as a tool for disseminating and reinforcing social norms and values.

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