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CONSENSUS AND CONTENTIONS AROUND “ASO-EBI” USAGE AMONG NIGERIA’S YORUBA PEOPLE

Oluyinka Olutola Olajire
Department of Behavioural Studies
Redeemer's University, Ede
falooreo@run.edu.ng

Abstract

Aso-Ebi, an ancient Yoruba custom has recently come under more systematic and rigorous academic investigation by experts to explain why it is still relevant and used by many different ethnic groups in Nigeria. While many portray the Aso-ebi custom as an enduringly stable tradition, its influence and prominence have surged reverberatingly along the West African coast, particularly at a time when many other African material cultural objects have lost their allure and, as a result, have seen a significant decline in acceptance in the face of the continent's ongoing rampaging modernisation and Westernization. It is against the backdrop of these systematic academic investigations that this study probes further the seemingly endless debate on this distinctive Yoruba material culture known as Aso-ebi. The study tows this part in order to determine the degree of consensus (agreement) and contestations (disagreements) around the discourse on Aso-ebi among selected Yoruba people in the southwestern part of Nigeria. The phenomenological investigation study reveals the various meanings and feelings Yorubas associated with using Aso-ebi. While a sizable portion of respondents asserted that Aso-ebi's benefits outweigh its drawbacks, a good number also pointed out the practice's several other shortcomings.

Keywords - Consensus, Contention, Aso-Ebi, Yoruba, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

From the beginning of recorded history till the dawn of the 21st century, no other primary reason apart from the covering of nakedness had been given in the literature to explain why human beings put on cloth. Although there are myriad reasons why humans design and put on fabric of various types, none is as essential as adorning clothes to conceal, protect and honour human bodies at all times. In addition to covering of human nakedness, cloth has evolved as a response to diverse climatic conditions, historical events, moral laws and the aesthetic responsiveness of people in many parts of the world.

At different times, scholars have adduced several factors and motives that underpin why individuals and groups dress the way they are seen. Authors such as Petersen, Novak and Gleason (1982) outline the intention of cloth-users to show the uniqueness of their heritage as one of the common reasons individuals and groups dress uniquely. Closely related to this are the views of Kaiser (1985) and Eicher and Sumberg (1995), who attributed the importance of clothing to social development, dictates of nature, individual choices, and other socio-cultural and environmental factors. Other scholars such as Showalter (2010), Chattaramn and Lennon (2007), Forehand and Deshpande (2001) affirmed that people with a high ethnic identity tend to dress in a way to reflect the ethnic group they belong.

However, the continuous development in the world civilization has brought in its wakes the production and designing of cloth for potpourri of purposes. From the primacy of covering human nakedness, fabric and leather which are the bases of clothing have been used globally to: depict social identity, showcase culture, and represent social status, rank, religion, and professions. It has been equally used to depict peoples' involvement in different economic activities among many other markers of self or group identification. Over the years, the type and quality of material/fabric used, the style or design to be sown and how the material or fabric is sourced often determine the functionality of the cloth (Gillow & Sentence, 1997). Apart from covering nakedness, individuals and groups select material/fabric for clothing due to social identification, performance and representation.

Revisiting the Discourse on Aso-ebi among Yoruba People

“Aso-ebi”, a Yoruba word loosely translated to mean family uniform or the cloth for kin in the English Language, is unarguably one of the most familiar variants of group uniforms/attires or commemorative cloth that people of Yoruba descent cherish, acquire, and use whenever social events and occasions arise. As a social uniform, Aso-ebi is any selected fabric sewn into garments and worn by a group of people related or connected socially. The Yoruba people's strong belief in and reverence for blood relation and family bonds is physically communicated and represented when Aso-ebi is used. Aso-ebi or uniform fabric is often used primarily to show family pride, shared vision and a sign of togetherness.

Culturally, the Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeria use the cloth to represent varied ideas and notions about their local activities and events as they unfold (Lyndersay, 2011). No wonder,

Aso-ebi commonly worn by the Yorubas is a social uniform tied to important celebrations, activities and festivals where kins and other relatives are expected to be in attendance as an indication that the celebrant has smooth relationships with others; and also, a condition to show that the social event is successful. No doubt, Yorubas place a high premium on familial relationships, togetherness and participation in associational groups' events even to the extent that many spend fortunes on Aso-ebi aside from other physical and financial assistance they render to their kins that organise social events or celebrations.

As part of popular symbolic Yoruba culture, the main traditional and non-economic functions of Aso-ebi are to show identification, solidarity, social bonding, and social relations among people that wear it when social events are on-going (Ajani, 2012; Familusi, 2010). In the words of Murphy (1986), participation in the ritual of Aso-ebi signifies a symbolic form of solidarity and loyalty to the families that organise social events. In this sense, Aso-ebi in some ways portrays those that wear it as part of the extended kin' of the celebrant, thereby justifying the existing cords of love, social uniformity and togetherness between the celebrant and those celebrating with him.

There is no consensus regarding the origin of this age-long practice (Aso-ebi) among the Yoruba people of Nigeria as exemplified in the literature. However, two major schools of thought provide credence and clues to the emergence of Aso-ebi among the Yorubas. The first school of thought highlighted the adornment of Aso-ebi in Yorubaland as an ancient practice which date is lost to antiquity. According to Bascom (1951) cited in Ajiginni (2019), the use of Aso-ebi or what is generally referred to as commemorative cloth evolved among members of different age grades in Yorubaland as they wear same type of dress to mark fraternal bonds. He further describes how some Yoruba men and women who were members of some social clubs began adopting distinctive clothing to recognise and distinctively delineate members of a group from another.

Similarly, Olukoju (1992) outlined some social events of some members of women organisations in the country that birthed or popularised the use of Aso-ebi among the Yorubas. In his seminal work on Aso-ebi, he unearthed how members of some women organisations began attending ceremonies and anniversaries of their members and relatives in 1952 wearing the same type of fabric to communicate comradeship, friendship, unity and togetherness. The other school of thought, however, describes Aso-ebi practice as fallout of an unparalleled accumulation of material objects associated with post World War 1 economic boom of 1918-1920 (See Ajani, 2012; Olukoju 1992).

As a common age-long tradition of Yorubas, adorning Aso-ebi was initially restricted to family members during social events. Originally, it was purposely used as a commemorative uniform for children of the deceased and other close family members during funeral activities. Over the years, its use has become regular among participants in other social events and celebrations such as weddings, birthdays, church events, house warming, political rallies, etc. As reflected in scholarly discourses, the acceptance and adornment of Aso-ebi in Nigeria is not limited to the Yorubas alone; it has also become a regular feature at different ceremonies and

occasions among other ethnic groups in Nigeria. As highlighted above, the Yorubas in the southwestern part of Nigeria initiated Aso-ebi and the underlying factor was mainly for familial relationships and activities. However, the cultural practice has recently become an observable fact that cuts across close relatives, corporate organisations, cultural associations, private individuals and religious and political groups. In Tade and Aiyabo (2014) words, Aso-ebi has become a symbolic marker of organic solidarity within a larger pool of non-kin.

The wider acceptance of Aso-ebi among many other Nigerian ethnic groupings has made scholars such as Nwafor (2011) refer to this practice as uniquely Nigerian culture. For him and some other scholars with similar thoughts, the preeminence of Aso-ebi among Nigerians has transcended just a solely Yoruba phenomenon. Like Nwafor (2011), Ajani (2012) also highlighted how the growing acceptance of Aso-ebi among non-Yorubas in Nigeria has transformed the practice from a core ethnic dress culture to a growing Nigerian culture within and outside the country. In Ajiginni (2019) words, Aso-ebi has become the strength, beauty and main repositories of Nigeria's history.

Since 1930, Aso-ebi has gradually become a popular part of Nigerian culture due to the increasing number of people and groups wearing it during festivities, traditions, celebrations and many other important religious events. Due to its rising acceptance, wearing Aso-ebi has continued to be a common cultural trend during social gatherings and events. At the same time, greater attention is paid to the quality, size, quantity and colour of fabrics used. Aso-ebi is now widely accepted among many Nigerians, young and old, to the point where it is seen as a marker for disclosing people's identities and the wearers' social position within a group.

The advantages of Aso-ebi among the Yorubas are numerous and cannot be over-emphasised. The Aso-ebi practice serves various overt and covert purposes in addition to its loyalty, support, unity, and solidarity functions. Nevertheless, there are a lot of drawbacks associated with the practice despite the recent surge in its use. This study was designed to document some possible consensuses and disagreements surrounding Aso-ebi practice among the Yorubas in southwestern part of Nigeria.

2. Research Methods

The research design adopted in this study is explorative while the data collection strategy relies on unstructured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Adopting these methods is necessary because of the preferred choice of the researcher to adopt the phenomenological approach in bringing to the fore, the different meanings that people attach to Aso-ebi use among the Yorubas. The study employed primary and secondary data at the data collection point. The researcher reviewed and consulted books and journals on the phenomenon of Aso-ebi among Yorubas and other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Empirical data were sourced mainly from ethnographic data from the selected respondents in 2022 in Ibadan and Ede in Oyo and Osun states respectively. The researcher purposively selected the respondents for the study from Lagelu Local Government Area (LGA) in Ibadan and Ede South Local Government Area in Ede town. The inclusion/exclusion criteria for the study were the knowledge and use of Aso-ebi and

the fact that the respondents are Yorubas. To this end, the non-Yorubas, other Yorubas that do not know Aso-ebi, and those who had never participated in the practice were excluded from participating in the study. Altogether, 32 in-depth interviews (16 sessions in each LGA) and 4 focus group discussion sessions were conducted without attaching any special interest to the marital statuses, sex and religion of the selected respondents.

The interview sessions among the respondents highlight the meanings people attach to Aso-ebi; the relevance and the pros and cons of Aso-ebi practice among Yoruba people. Before conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussion, the researcher unequivocally intimated the respondents with the following facts: first, the purpose of the interview; second, the use to which information sought would be put; and lastly, assurances of confidentiality. The researcher also shared with the respondents that the study has been approved by relevant officials within his university.

The interview structure was loose and did not follow rigid rules. Probes and prompts were adopted in the course of interviewing in order to allow interviewees and other discussants to express themselves in great details. At the onset of the interview and discussion, the researcher developed rapport with the interviewees by starting with general questions. This was done to ensure that the interviewees and discussants were more comfortable. As interviews and discussions progressed, the researcher and his assistant ensured they verify facts instead of exploring opinions. To this end, questions that required the interviewees and discussants to share their opinions and explore the issues in more depth were asked. At the end of every interview and focus group discussion session, the researcher ensured that information supplied by the interviewees and other discussants were summarised and the respondents were asked to ascertain the correctness of their responses. The respondents were given the researcher's contact information and encouraged to contact him whenever they have other things to add. All interviews and discussions were conducted in English, in person, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data collected and resultant findings from the study were presented as qualitative summaries and narratives. Data collected from the IDIs were transcribed, proof-read, put in themes and content analysed to decipher the underlying thought patterns and processes. Data and findings were presented as qualitative summaries and narratives.

3. Data Presentation, Findings and Discussion

This section showcases how the data, findings, interpretative analyses and discussions made in the study were presented.

Consensus and Discourses on Aso-ebi Phenomenon: The word consensus is ambiguous and could mean different things to different people depending on the context in which it is used. Here, consensus refers to a situation when more than one person or group engages in a discourse to adopt a convergent view. Consensus in the light of this study encapsulates what the respondents jointly highlighted or described as “positives” or benefits associated with Aso-ebi among those that use it. It is all about the understanding, belief, and worldviews of people about

benefits or positives accruing from participating in Aso-ebi practice either as celebrants or people celebrating with them.

Solidarity, group feelings and harmonious relationship - In-depth interview and focus group discussion data revealed a lot of benefits inherent in participating in the practice of Aso-ebi among Yoruba people. However, findings revealed that consensus or benefits traceable to Aso-ebi are manifold and vary among the sampled respondents. The commonly mentioned or oft-cited benefit by all respondents is the claim that Aso-ebi expresses unity, sameness, oneness, identification, and solidarity. The fact that people wear Aso-ebi during any social event shows the extent to which people support the celebrant and their willingness to be identified with his/her course of action. The large turnout of people who despite all odds chose to be identified with the celebrant and at the same time, show support and altruistic group feelings towards a member of family or friend on a big occasion or during events speaks volume on the extent of harmonious rapport and positive good feelings existing between the celebrants and his supporters.

A 49 years old interviewee, for example, provided a comprehensive narration that validates findings from other social research that an outstanding benefit of Aso-ebi is that of social support and identification. For him, the mere fact or reason that people simultaneously wear the same attire and attend the same occasion or festival indicates how proud they are to be identified with the celebrant publicly. For the same interviewee, buying a group uniform to celebrate somebody shows that the celebrant cannot be said to be a recluse. According to this source, the celebrant must be a person who supports, cooperates, and cares for others. These are some of the conditions that would make friends, family members and other well-wishers attend the social outing of a celebrant against all odds. The interviewee retorted thus:

Aso-ebi represents one of the many positives in Yoruba culture. The more the number of people that buy Aso-ebi, the higher the level of social support and solidarity that is bestowed on the celebrant. Buying Aso-ebi during the social engagement of a friend or family member depicts that the celebrant is a team player who does not shirk his social responsibilities for others. The more the number of people that put on Aso-ebi during any occasion, the greater the social acceptance of the person and the honour bestow on him or her. Many Yorubas would buy Aso-ebi and celebrate with others irrespective of their financial status. **(IDI/Male/49 years old/2022).**

Another had this to say:

Buying aso-ebi during a social event of any family member, friend or co-worker shows how much we could go to support our people. I make sure I buy Aso-ebi fabric, particularly when I realise I cannot attend the function. For me, buying the material is a sort of support for the celebrant. **(IDI/Female/32 years old/2022).**

Corroborating the stance above, another respondent (IDI) remarked:

One thing that makes our social outing and celebrations unique and colourful is Aso-ebi. It is one of the good things that its absence would always affect the social rating (in terms of solidarity and support a celebrant receives) of any social engagement amongst our people. Putting Aso-ebi on during social events indicates that the celebrant is respected and many people are willing to show him/her solidarity by identifying with him openly. **(IDI session/Female/51 years old/2022).**

An older market woman provided an in-depth explanation on the identification purpose and benefit of Aso-ebi based on her personal experiences during several social outings and events she organised and participated in.

The practice of Aso-ebi is a good one that will continue to be relevant for a long time in our society. One distinctive role of the practice is that where there are many celebrants, it offers individual celebrants and those assisting them the opportunity of identifying the exact individuals that came to celebrate with them through the different fabric they pick as Aso-ebi. For instance, the type of Aso-ebi that my friends, family members and co-workers wore during the burial ceremony of my father assisted my husband to distinguish my visitors from other attendees when it was time for them to be served refreshments. My husband was able to identify my guests and offered food to them due to the type of Aso-ebi they put on that day. **(IDI session/Female/67 years old/2022).**

Creates opportunity to buy more/extra cloth and act as temporary economic leveler -The claim that Aso-ebi often creates a plain level ground for both the rich and the poor because it allows people from different economic strata that share common friends or are family members to use the same Aso-ebi when the need arise. Some of the respondents of IDIs and FGDs conducted for the study believed that the practice has not only made them indirectly acquire more clothes but also provided them the opportunity of being equally robed in the same attire with their rich friends, family members and colleagues during social events. Thus, the opportunity to buy Aso-ebi (particularly the not too expensive ones) elicits a good feeling in those who believe that they do not have suitable attire they can wear to attend a social event and cannot afford to buy any expensive dress at that moment. For people in this category, Aso-ebi offers them an opportunity to wear the same attire with other people who are more financially stable than they were at that point. They further claimed that wearing Aso-ebi during any social event makes them not to feel insecure amidst other attendees due to their low economic status. On a cautionary note, the point above is only relevant in a situation where the celebrant did not pick separate Aso-ebi for both the rich and the poor.

The exact words of some of the respondents that aligned with submission above are quoted here|:

Recently, I just realised that the number of my native attires have increased considerably due to several Aso-ebi I acquired during social events of friends and family members. I do not think that I would have got all my native attires if I have not been participating in the practice of acquiring Aso-ebi. **(FGD session/Male/2022).**

Another retorted that:

Aso-ebi is one of the reasons I have a lot of traditional or local dresses at home. I buy them whenever my close friends, church members, associates, and family organise any social outing. Another good side of the Aso-ebi is that it does not encourage status symbol among members of different social classes that attend the same occasion. In fact, it would be difficult for people to easily determine your financial status because all guests present put on the same attire **(FGD session/Female/2022).**

Another common benefit of Aso-ebi as indicated by a significant number of the respondents that participated in the study is **mutual helpfulness and obligation**. Most respondents believed that one of the principles guiding the practice of Aso-ebi is reciprocation. By this, they claim that all celebrants that had sometimes enjoyed the luxury of other people supporting them by buying Aso-ebi are obligated to return such gesture when others also have cause to organise social events. In the views of these respondents, people who benefitted from the support of friends and family members and later failed to reciprocate the same gesture by not supporting others to buy Aso-ebi would always be seen as anti-social, uncultured, and uncultured bad individuals. Evidence to support these claims resonate severally from the interview sessions conducted among the respondents.

A key interviewee commented thus:

Buying Aso-ebi and providing other necessary supports to people close to us have a lot of benefits. Like a Yoruba adage that says, "deliver or save me during raining period, I will save you in dry season, " people who support others in buying Aso-bi are not always left out in the cold when it is their turn to celebrate. The fact that you are not found wanting when others were celebrating has made it a matter of compulsion for others to rally round you when it is your turn to organise any social event. **(IDI session/Female/43 years old/2022).**

As seen in all the excerpts above, the generality of the respondents sampled for the study attributed many social benefits to the practice of Aso-ebi among Yoruba people. Undoubtedly, some of these factors could be seen as factors responsible for the continuity and social survival of the practice, even among other ethnic nationalities that have imbibed the culture of Aso-ebi.

So far, the analyses above have addressed and highlighted some of the inherent benefits and social actualities in participating in Aso-ebi use during social gatherings. The concern, however, at this point which the study attempts to address is whether all the positive factors associated with using Aso-ebi as highlighted above outweigh the negative factors associated with peoples' participation in this popular and common social reality among the Yoruba people.

Contestations and Counter-discourses on Aso-ebi Phenomenon

In the section above, it has been established that the practice of Aso-ebi among Yoruba people exudes positivity and sociological relevance as adduced by respondents in the study. As common with all social realities, there are no social acts with benefits that do not have its share of negativity or dysfunctions. On this note, the social phenomenon of Aso-ebi as practiced by Yoruba people is not without its downsides or shortcomings. Indeed, the respondents in the study raised some issues of concern regarding the dimension that the practice of Aso-ebi has assumed among its users in Yorubaland. The researcher investigated what could likely be regarded as negative aspect or dysfunctions of the practice of Aso-ebi among Yoruba people. This, however, is the focus of this section of the study.

Although most interviewees and focus group discussants are passionate believers in Yoruba culture and ardent supporters of the practice of Aso-ebi, they did not hesitate to highlight some of the common negative factors associated with the practice in recent times. While many believed that the negativities associated with the practice of Aso-ebi are not enough to dissuade them from engaging in the practice, few of them emphatically maintained that such dysfunctions linked with Aso-ebi have reduced their enthusiasm regarding participating in the practice. As a whole, various inhibitive factors such as commoditisation of culture/mercantilism, Aso-ebi as harbinger of social stigma and acrimony, purveyor of class segregation, and a material culture that negates a certain pillar of their religion (Islam), among many other factors were all given by the respondents.

Commoditization of Culture and Economic Exploitation-a significant number of respondents in the study consented to the claim that the main motive some people make the purchase of Aso-ebi mandatory for family members, friends, associate and guests during their social occasions or events transcends the identification purpose it meant to serve. In some cases, what informed the call for participation in Aso-ebi is often the excess money that celebrants add to the real cost of the material/fabric chosen as Aso-ebi for the social event. Many see this act as a way through which some celebrants surreptitiously rip-off those who chose to attend their social events. Some respondents claimed that love-showing, which should be a vital cardinal point of participating in Aso-ebi is often sacrificed on the altar of mercantilism. A step they all claim could have serious repercussion and damaging consequences on the social relations between the celebrant and his well-wishers.

A respondent avers that:

Some people now hide under the guise of Aso-ebi to make unnecessary financial gain/profit from the sale of clothing materials to their circle of friends, family members and others guests. More often, many inflate the price of the material intending to fleece those who care to buy from them.

This act of swindling your guests indirectly is not part of Yoruba culture and should be stopped.

Another responded this way:

I do not think there is another motive why some celebrants encourage people close to them to buy Aso-ebi apart from money-making. I came to this conclusion because of serious efforts most celebrants put up to ensure that people buy Aso-ebi directly from them. For instance, my landlord once compelled me to buy Aso-ebi from him even though he knew I did not have enough funds to pay my house rent then. He was so desperate that I had no choice but to buy from him.

The study has also established that the intention of some celebrants to make extra financial gain/profit from Aso-ebi sale has necessitated the subtle compulsion they sometimes employ to ensure that many of their friends, family members, colleagues and associates source the material from them. A married female interviewee described the extent to which some celebrants can go to ensure they get more people to buy Aso-ebi from them.

People can go to any length to ensure you participate in Aso-ebi practice. A friend once told me that our friendship's strength would be determined by whether I buy her Aso-ebi or not. Not minding my financial state at that point, she listed several reasons I had to buy the material to show that I was one of her friends.

A 31 year old man who is an artisan (FGD session) also explained how it was needless for some celebrants to tow the path of coercion and threat mainly because they want to sell their so-called merchandise or Aso-ebi. He claimed that an attempt to compel people to buy Aso-ebi negates the principle of unsolicited love and affection which he claimed should naturally flow from true friendship.

Why should somebody that regards me as his friend force me to buy Aso-ebi from him or her? If he is my friend, he should understand my reluctance and feel unbothered because of our love and affection. In fact, as a good friend, he could decide to give it to me free of charge for friendship sake.

Anti-religious stance of Aso-ebi: although all the respondents believed that the practice of Aso-ebi is one of the celebrated and popular cultural items among Yoruba people, some unequivocally voiced out how the practice has not been totally in sync with some of the tenets of their religion. Particularly the respondents that claimed to be adherents of Islamic religion; they stressed how their religion forbids participation in Aso-ebi particularly during burial ceremony. For many, Islam does not encourage Muslims to participate in group uniform whenever adherents are burying their dead people or engaging in any burial rite. Few Christian respondents also indicate their disapproval of participation in the practice of Aso-ebi in line with the injunctions of the Bible. Some copiously quoted the portion of their holy book that says, 'believers should not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. They interpreted some of Yoruba people's cultural practices, including the use of Aso-ebi as anti-religious and ungodly activities.

Islam is my religion and it frowns at the use of Aso-ebi. We are not permitted to buy or encourage people to buy or use whenever there is any social event or outing. The celebrants (husbands and wives, family members) are not forbidden to buy and wear the same type of attire during social event or celebration. Such a step does not violate Islamic religion. However, this should not be extended to other well-wishers that attend the occasion to celebrate with us.

The stance above is corroborated by some respondents that are Christians who interpreted the practice to be common among the people they referred to as heathen or unbelievers. They reiterated how the Bible has discouraged believers from living like the unbelievers.

The Bible has not put us in the dark regarding the form and dimension our social events should take. There are many reference points in the holy book regarding the extent of our involvement in social activities during social events and celebrations. Why the Bible promotes celebrating with those celebrating, it also promotes and preaches moderation. Christianity does not encourage the practice of Aso-ebi the way people have interpreted it to mean in recent times. Nowadays, many people go out of their way financially just to be part of Aso-ebi practice (**IDI session/Male/34 years old/2022**).

Aso-ebi as a purveyor of acrimony and disharmony between relatives and friends-
Another common theme that emerged from this study is the claim from the respondents that the inability of some celebrants to manage or properly handle series of frictions and disharmony associated with the sale of Aso-ebi. A sub-section of the respondents in the in-depth interview sessions aptly described a few cases where celebrants later picked up quarrels with some of their friends that did not attend their social events mainly because they lacked the wherewithal to purchase the recommended Aso-ebi. According to them, most of the affected celebrants misinterpreted the decisions of their friends for not buying Aso-ebi and consequently not attending their social function as an act of betrayal and wickedness. In other instances, friends and well-wishers thought the worth of the gifts they received was not equivalent to the cost they spent purchasing Aso-ebi. Many of these mistrusts later degenerated to the level that friends became upset with their celebrant friends and later picked up fights with them

A 27 year woman remarked like this:

Participating in Aso-ebi has a lot of negative implications, particularly when dealing with people who are not matured mentally. Sometimes ago, a friend later cut ties with me and discontinued our friendship because I did not attend her mother's burial outing. Unknown to her, I did not attend the programme because I did not have enough money to buy the material she recommended at that time. All explanations that I made to pacify her fell on deaf ears.

For a 35 year old man:

I had on some occasions quarreled with my wife on why she should drop her plans of spending part of the meager family money in the house to buy Aso-ebi from one of her numerous friends. Indeed, there was a time we almost engaged in scuffle because she insisted that I should find money by all means to enable her conclude her plan of buying Aso-ebi. I even heard of cases of husband and wife that fought because both could not agree on whether to buy it or not.

Class segregation and unequal treatment of guests: The study has also identified class segregation and unequal treatment of guests as another drawback commonly exhibited in social events where Aso-ebi was used. Some respondents have observed that celebrants often use preferential treatment in attending to the needs of their guests who belong to different socio-economic groups in the society during social events. A segment of respondents maintained they have witnessed several occasions where celebrants mete unequal treatments on their guests concerning the quality and quantity of refreshments (foods and drinks) and other gift items they served during their social outings. According to many, such situation occurs more when and where the celebrant has picked two or more types of Aso-ebi to ensure that the needs of the poor and rich are catered for. On such occasions, the celebrant ensures he picks expensive Aso-ebi material for the affluent guests and the not too expensive for those who could not afford the expensive one. Most respondents' conclusion is that most celebrants treat those that bought the expensive material better than those that only afforded the cheap one. The reason for this is not unconnected with the fact that celebrants make more financial gains from those who bought the expensive material than those who bought the cheap one. As a whole, guests' social/financial status is another important parameter that determines the quality and quantity of treatment or attention that guests receive from the celebrants as activities during social events unfold.

A respondent remarked:

I was once a victim of preferential treatment during the occasion of the wedding ceremony of a colleague of mine in my place of work. The celebrant did not pay much attention to some of us that did not buy her Aso-ebi and those that bought Ankara material. From the beginning of the programme to the end, her utmost attention was devoted to those that bought the expensive lace material as Aso-ebi. They were served better than others in terms of the quality of food and drinks provided. They equally received more expensive gifts from the celebrants at the end of the social event.

Another interviewee also expressed his observation:

Aso-ebi plays a huge role in how a guest is treated in social events and occasions in our society. Wearing Aso-ebi during any social gathering is a key that unlocks warmth reception and good feelings from celebrants. Most times, Aso-ebi determines what you get and how you are treated in any occasion in this age and time.

Borrowing money and spending unbudgeted funds – in line with the findings from this study, another drawback that characterised Aso-ebi and which have made many to question its relevance in the society is the fact that some people borrow to buy Aso-ebi or uniform cloth in order to make their friend who is the celebrant happy. In the same vein, it has also been revealed that some people even go out of their way to source for loan or spend beyond their budget to purchase Aso-ebi. According to the study, many of the people that fall into this category do so because they do not want to be seen as uncooperative and unsupportive by the celebrant friends. In fact, the study shows that some people even go to the extent of postponing other personal pressing needs just because they are in dire need for money to buy Aso-ebi. By this, many have indirectly mortgaged their children's future due to their failure to prioritise their spending.

A 45 year old man had this to say:

People now attach too much importance to buying Aso-ebi in recent times. As a proprietor of a primary school, I have seen cases where pupils were sent home from school because their parents could not pay their school fees. We later discovered that some of the affected parents had used the money meant for the school fees of their wards to acquire Aso-ebi. Issues like this have become a recurring decimal among a category of parents in my school. This is a big problem that is currently affecting the chances of our pupils to have uninterrupted schooling.

Another 41 year old woman opined thus:

The pressure to buy Aso-ebi for my aging parents that are no longer working but are expected to attend all social gatherings within the extended family members has severally made me spend more than I budgeted for on numerous occasions. This is in addition to the money I spent buying the same type of Aso-ebi for me and other immediate family members whenever such social event/occasion occurs. This, no doubt, has made sticking to my budget a difficult thing to achieve for me almost every year.

27 year old woman aptly described Aso-ebi scenario like this:

The meanings that people attach to the Aso-ebi phenomenon recently are gradually turning the social practice into heavyburdens and weights in our society. There was a time that I did not have enough money in my bank account and I was compelled to buy Aso-ebi for my son during his graduation ceremony in a private primary school. I had to borrow from a friend to buy the material. I did this so he would not be the odd among other students in his class. Eventually, I was forced to spend more than I had in my bank account because of Aso-ebi which was made compulsory in his school.

An uneconomical venture –Another downside of Aso-ebi as revealed in this study is the claim that persistent and unregulated participation in acquiring Aso-ebi leads to waste of funds. Particularly at a time in Yorubaland when celebrants unapologetically mandate colleagues, kith and kin to support them buy Aso-ebi whenever they have to organise any social event. The study showed that Aso-ebi is no longer reserved for important or special social events among Yorubas unlike decades ago. People now expect their friends, associate and family members to buy Aso-ebi whenever they have any social event. The respondents maintained that such constant calls have made many friends and family members result to a cycle of never-ending purchases of Aso-ebi when other profitable ventures await their attention. Some others claimed that regular participation in purchasing Aso-ebi is sometimes not economical and a waste due to the amount of money spent on such fabric and gifts presented to the celebrant/s.

A 32 year old interviewee had this to say:

Buying Aso-ebi could result to money wasting depending on how often one participate in the practice. In the past, I wasted a lot of money on Aso-ebi just because I wanted to satisfy everybody. I later realised I do not need to always buy whenever the need arises. At the moment, I have a lot of different fabrics at home that I have not used more than once, and many others have not been sown. There were some that I bought and did not sew because I later realised that the materials/fabrics were of low quality.

Another interviewee corroborated the stance above:

For me I see buying Aso-ebi as double jeopardy. I reach this conclusion because guests you are expected to give gifts to the celebrant/s in addition with the money spent on Aso-ebi. The amusing aspect of the practice is that most of the gifts that celebrants distribute to well-wishers and guests are not always useful. Imagine somebody presenting me plastic bowls, trash cans and plates as souvenirs.

All the responses above have to a greater extent shown that Aso-ebi is like a coin that has two sides. As a popular Yoruba cultural item, the same way the practice has spurred togetherness over the year, it also can bring friction into social relationships of people who engage in the practice.

Conclusion

As indicated above, this study has brought wide arrays of views of selected Yoruba people about family uniform, popularly known as Aso-ebi. Various divergent opinions of respondents in the study indicate potpourri of consensus and contestations associated with the practice of Aso-ebi among Yoruba people in southwestern Nigeria. Like all social behavior and activities, Aso-ebi practice among Yoruba is depicted as a popular material culture with a catalogue of strengths and weaknesses. Respondents have provided chequered narratives about this cherished practice among the Yoruba people based on individual experiences and other related information gathered from friends, colleagues and family members. Contrary to many common views and narrations in the literature that almost portray Aso-ebi as a practice that

mainly exudes togetherness and sense of solidarity among its practitioners, this study has shown that the practice could equally be a divisive element depending on many other intervening variables.

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