MODERNITY AND THE PERSISTENCE OF ENDOGAMOUS MARRIAGE AMONG THE FULBE OF NORTHERN NIGERIA: BETWEEN CULTURAL CONTINUITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Abstract

Research Problem: *Despite changes brought by modernity, including education, urbanisation, technology, and increased contact with other ethnic groups, endogamous marriage remains common among the Fulbe of Northern Nigeria. The link between modernity and the continued practice of endogamy has received limited attention, especially in understanding how Fulbe communities maintain their cultural practices while adapting to social change.*

Methods/Theory: *This study employed a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis of peer-reviewed articles, books, research reports, and official publications. The study was guided by Modernisation Theory, which explains social change in terms of increased social differentiation, mobility, and changes in established patterns of social organisation.*

Results: *The findings showed that education, urbanisation, economic change, technology, and greater individual choice have affected Fulbe marriage and kinship relations. Education and urbanisation have increased social interaction and contact with other ethnic groups, while technology has made communication among Fulbe families easier and exposed individuals to new ideas and social practices. However, kinship, family ties, cultural identity, and community belonging remain important in marriage decisions.*

Conclusion: *Modernity has brought changes to Fulbe marriage practices but has not removed the cultural importance of endogamy. Endogamy remains part of Fulbe social life, even as marriage practices respond to changing social conditions. This suggests that cultural continuity can be maintained alongside social change.*

Key Contribution to Knowledge: *This study provides a systematic examination of the relationship between modernity and Fulbe endogamous marriage practices. It shows that changes in education, urbanisation, technology, economic life, and individual choice have not eliminated endogamy. Instead, endogamy continues while Fulbe communities adjust to changing social conditions.*

Recommendation: *The study recommends involving young people more in marriage decisions, preserving Fulbe cultural knowledge,*

supporting young people as they adapt to social changes, and using technology to strengthen family and kinship ties.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Daudu G.K. (2010), referred 'marriage' as teegal singular and teele plural and the verb form in Fulfulde is ɓaŋa, hoowa and te'a respectively. According to Daudu there are two ways of getting a wife in a Fulbe community especially that of Kaceccere'en in Kaduna state, the first one is by howeego in which boys and girls are pair-up according to the choice of their parent (danyooɓe) and the second one is teegal that the two party (male and female gorko and debbo) that first agree to be husband and wife. The former one is traditional while the second one is a modern way of getting a wife in a Fulɓe community.

In Northern Nigeria, access to formal education has expanded significantly in recent decades, with more women gaining the opportunity to pursue higher education. For example, jigawa State Government has announced free education for women, this move is likely to increase the enrolment of the females in schools. Education and immigration play an important role in the Fulɓe modern ways of socialization process. These have to some extent a kind of influence in their traditional ways of thinking, hence behavioural patterns.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Modernity: It involves the social, economic, and cultural changes that come with contemporary life. In relation to marriage, these changes include education, urbanisation, migration, changes in employment, technology, individual choice, and increased social interaction. These factors can affect how people meet potential partners, make decisions about marriage, and respond to family expectations (Bandyopadhyay & Green, 2021).

In this study, modernity means the changes in society that may affect marriage decisions among the Fulɓe. The concept covers education, urbanisation, technology, economic changes, and individual choice.

Endogamous Marriage: Endogamous marriage, which can be defined as the practice of forming matrimonial alliances exclusively within a designated social, ethnic, religious, or cultural group, has been widely discussed and analyzed in various scholarly discourses (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). This particular marital practice has emerged as a fundamental element of social organization among myriad communities across the globe, serving not only to ensure the persistent continuity of group identity but also to uphold the religious values and social stability that are intrinsic to these communities. Within the context of the Fulɓe community, endogamous marriage transcends mere cultural practice; it represents a crucial foundational pillar that undergirds the maintenance of ethnic and social cohesion, wherein matrimonial unions are frequently intertwined with family alliances, the circulation of wealth, and the safeguarding of both religious and cultural values (Kuper, 2009).

Types of Marriage in Northern Nigeria

Islamic Marriage (Nikah)

Islamic marriage is the dominant form. It requires: Consent of both parties, Guardian (Wali) approval, Payment of Mahr and Witnesses. Polygyny is permitted (up to four wives) under Qur'anic injunctions, provided justice is maintained (Abdullahi, 2018).

Customary Marriage

Customary rites often precede or accompany Islamic marriage. These include: Bride price (Sadaki among Hausa), Family negotiations and Traditional ceremonies. Customary practices reinforce kinship solidarity and lineage alliances (Yusuf, 2016).

Statutory Marriage

Statutory (court) marriage exists but is less common in predominantly Muslim Northern communities due to its monogamous restriction (Ogunleye, 2019).

Bride Price / Sadaki Institution

Bride price—called Sadaki among the Hausa—is central to marriage transactions. It symbolizes respect, legitimacy, and transfer of reproductive rights.

According to Callaway (1987), Sadaki payments vary by class, education, and urbanization levels. Wealthier families often demand higher payments, reflecting social stratification.

Adamu (2014) argues that commercialization of bride price has contributed to delayed marriages among low-income men, sometimes encouraging informal unions.

Polygyny in Northern Nigeria

Polygyny remains prevalent due to religious legitimacy and socio-economic utility.

Functions of Polygyny

Expands lineage size, provides agricultural/domestic labor, enhances male prestige and addresses infertility. Smith (2020) notes that elite Hausa-Fulani men historically maintained large households as symbols of power. However, modern studies reveal tensions such as: Co-wife rivalry, resource competition and emotional stress among women (Adamu, 2014).

Purdah (Seclusion) and Gender Roles

One distinctive feature of marriage in Northern Nigeria is purdah the seclusion of married women. Callaway (1987) explains that purdah regulates women's mobility, economic activity, and social interaction. While it symbolizes honor and religious devotion, critics argue it reinforces patriarchy and economic dependency. Nevertheless, women in purdah often engage in home-based trade and informal economic production (Yusuf, 2016).

Early and Child Marriage

Northern Nigeria records some of the highest early marriage rates in Africa. UNICEF (2022) reports that many girls marry before age 18, driven by: Poverty, religious beliefs, protection of family honor and limited female education. Walker (2012) argues that early marriage perpetuates gender inequality, health risks, and educational discontinuity. Yet, some local scholars frame it as moral protection within Islamic cultural logic (Abdullahi, 2018).

Cultural Continuity: Cultural Continuity involves the preservation and passing on of values, practices, norms, beliefs, and social identity from one generation to another. Among the Fulɓe, it can be seen in the continued importance attached to shared identity, kinship, family expectations, and marriage within the community (Sarkin Fulani, 2024a). Cultural continuity in this study does not mean that Fulbe marriage practices have remained unchanged. It refers to the retention of important cultural elements as marriage and kinship relations respond to changing social conditions.

Social Change: Social Change involves changes in social relationships, institutions, values, behaviour, and ways of organising

society. In this study, it includes greater access to education, urbanisation, migration, changes in occupations, technological development, economic changes, and increased contact with people from other ethnic communities (Sarkin Fulani, 2024b). These changes provide the wider setting for examining how Fulɓe marriage practices are maintained, changed, and negotiated. Social change is therefore considered alongside cultural continuity in understanding the current pattern of Fulɓe marriage.

Theoretical Framework: Modernisation Theory

This study is based on Modernisation Theory. The theory explains social change in terms of changes in social institutions, values, economic activities, technology, and ways of organising society. Talcott Parsons and Walt W. Rostow are among the major classical contributors to the theory (Parsons, 1951; Rostow, 1960). More recent work has also looked at the relationship between Modernisation, changes in social structures, and social mobility (Maas & van Leeuwen, 2023).

3.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of Fulbe Kinship and Marriage Practices in Northern Nigeria

Fulbe marriage is closely connected to kinship, family relations, and cultural identity. Changes in education, urbanisation, economic activities, and individual choice have affected these relationships. Traditionally, Fulbe kinship placed strong emphasis on extended family ties, patrilineal relationships, and the authority of elders. These arrangements have become less rigid, with individuals having more room to take part in family decisions.

Marriage decisions have also changed. Young people now have more opportunity to take part in choosing a marriage partner, while the direct involvement of extended family members may not be as strong as it was in the past. This has created more opportunities for relationships outside the Fulbe community. Even so, family expectations, kinship ties, cultural identity, and community belonging still influence marriage choices.

These changes can therefore be seen as adjustments in marriage and kinship practices rather than a complete break from the past. Individual choice has become more important, but marriage is still closely connected to family and community relationships.

Education and Urbanisation among the Fulbe

Education and urbanisation have increased social interaction among the Fulbe and changed the conditions under which marriage decisions are made. Education exposes people to new ideas and wider social networks, while living in towns and cities brings individuals into contact with people from different ethnic groups. These changes provide more opportunities for relationships outside the immediate community.

The Fulbe experience, however, is more complex. Education and wider social contact may increase the number of possible marriage partners, but family expectations and cultural preferences still matter. Living in an urban area may bring people into regular contact with other ethnic groups without necessarily changing their preferred marriage partner.

Education and urbanisation therefore affect the opportunities and conditions surrounding marriage, but they do not determine the outcome on their own. Their effects depend partly on the social and cultural setting in which marriage decisions are made.

Technology and Fulbe Family Relations

Technology has also changed Fulɓe family and community relations. Digital communication has improved contact among

Fulɓe communities and increased access to information, education, and economic opportunities. At the same time, it has affected family interaction and some aspects of traditional values and identity.

Technology has made it easier for families to remain in contact even when they live far apart. Young people can also access ideas and social networks outside their communities while still keeping in touch with parents, relatives, and other members of the community.

These changes have implications for marriage. Technology provides new ways of communicating, sharing information, and discussing marriage matters. It may widen social networks without necessarily reducing family involvement in marriage decisions. The available evidence does not show that technology directly reduces endogamy. Its more evident effect is on communication and the way family and social relationships are maintained.

Persistence of Endogamous Marriage

Marriage within the Fulbe community remains important despite changes in education, urbanisation, technology, economic activities, and individual choice. This does not mean that Fulbe marriage practices have stayed exactly the same. Rather, some established preferences have continued even as social conditions have changed.

Kinship, family relationships, cultural identity, and community belonging remain important in the choice of a marriage partner. Marriage within the community may continue to be valued because it helps maintain family connections, shared cultural practices, and a sense of belonging.

Endogamy, however, should not be explained by culture alone. Education, place of residence, economic circumstances, individual choice, and technology also affect the conditions in which marriage decisions are made. Individuals may now have greater involvement in choosing a partner while still considering family approval, cultural compatibility, and community expectations.

Cultural Continuity and Social Change

Change and continuity have taken place together in Fulbe marriage practices. Education and urbanisation have widened social interaction, technology has changed communication, economic changes have affected family organisation, and individuals have become more involved in marriage decisions. At the same time, kinship, family ties, cultural identity, and community belonging remain important.

The Fulbe experience therefore does not fit a simple division between tradition and modernity. Marriage practices have changed, but important cultural elements have remained. Social change has affected how these practices are expressed and negotiated rather than completely replacing them.

Greater access to education, mobility, and information may give young people more room to express their preferences, but family involvement has not necessarily disappeared. Marriage decisions may instead involve more negotiation between individual preferences and family expectations.

Cultural continuity should therefore not be seen simply as resistance to change. Some practices may be adjusted to fit new circumstances while still retaining their cultural meaning. Fulbe marriage shows how social change can take place without completely abandoning established cultural practices.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study examined modernity and the continued practice of endogamous marriage among the Fulbe of Northern Nigeria. The study found that education, urbanisation, technology, economic changes, and greater individual involvement have affected marriage and kinship relations. However, these changes have not removed the importance of family ties, kinship, cultural identity, and community belonging in marriage.

Endogamous marriage among the Fulbe has changed as society has changed, but it has not disappeared. Education and urbanisation have increased social interaction and created new opportunities for individuals, while technology has changed the way people communicate and maintain family relationships. At the same time, family expectations and cultural values still influence marriage choices. Modernity and cultural continuity have therefore existed side by side.

The findings also question a simple linear view of Modernisation Theory. Modernisation has changed the circumstances in which Fulbe marriage takes place, but it has not completely replaced established cultural practices. Endogamy remains important to Fulbe identity and social relationships, even though the way it is maintained and negotiated has changed.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

Families should allow young people to have a greater say in choosing their marriage partners, while still consulting parents and other family members.

Families, community leaders, and relevant institutions should encourage young Fulɓe to pursue education, employment, and other opportunities. At the same time, young people should be encouraged to maintain their connections with their families and communities.

Families, community leaders, and cultural organisations should encourage younger Fulɓe to learn the Fulɓe language, values, kinship practices, and other aspects of their cultural heritage.

Families and community organisations should make better use of social media and other digital platforms to keep relatives connected and to pass cultural knowledge and traditions to younger generations.

Fulɓe families and community leaders should allow marriage and cultural practices to adjust to changes brought by education, urbanisation, technology, and individual choice. Cultural continuity and social change should not be treated as completely separate or opposing processes.

Government agencies and organisations involved in education, youth development, and social programmes in Northern Nigeria should consider the importance of family, kinship, cultural identity, and community structures when developing programmes for Fulɓe communities. Such programmes should create opportunities for young people while also taking account of the social and cultural environment in which family and marriage decisions are made.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should include fieldwork in Fulbe communities to find out how individuals and families make decisions about marriage. Interviews and observation could help to explain the roles played by young people, parents, elders, and other members of the community.

Further studies could compare endogamy among different Fulbe groups, especially nomadic and settled communities as well as urban and rural populations. Such comparisons could help explain how education, urbanisation, technology, and economic conditions affect marriage practices in different settings.

Quantitative studies could also be carried out to measure changes in endogamous marriage over time and identify the factors that have the strongest relationship with marriage choices. This would provide numerical evidence that could complement the qualitative findings of the present study.

Comparative research involving other ethnic groups in Nigeria would also be useful. Such research could examine Fulbe endogamy alongside wider patterns of ethnic identity, cultural continuity, and marriage choice. It could also show whether the coexistence of modernity and endogamy found among the Fulbe is common among other Nigerian communities.

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