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Article

Joking relationships and humor among the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria in the twenty-first century

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Abstract: I argue that compromises are reached, and interpersonal relationships are negotiated and maintained among the Yorùbá people through joking relationships. I raise questions on how and when joking relationships can lead to interpersonal, interethnic or intra-ethnic conflict, inclusion or exclusion and the socio-cultural and legal consequences that these could generate. I use the hermeneutic and phenomenological methods to determine the impact of joking relationships on the violent crises that have characterized the twenty-first century Nigerian society. I conclude that whereas joking relationships are still socially acceptable Yoruba patterns of behaviour which have served the people well, the freedom that this practice enjoyed in the ancient times may now be coming under social and legal pressure in the socially and religiously sensitive modern Yorùbá and pan-Nigerian societies. However, the vacuum that may be created if joking relationship were to disappear may be filled by socially dysfunctional outcomes including depression and suicide.

Keywords: joking relationship; Yorùbá, southwestern; Nigeria; twenty-first century; social behaviour

1. Introduction

‘Two guys were discussing of their family experiences.

First Guy (proudly): “My wife’s an angel!”

Second Guy: “You’re lucky, mine’s still alive.”’

A young man died before his appointed time, but the Gateman of Heaven took pity on him and decided to give him his life back so that he could return to Nigeria. The young man burst into tears, pleading that he would rather go to hell than go back home to Nigeria.

‘The newlywed wife said to her husband when he returned from work:

“I have great news for you. Pretty soon, we’re going to be three in this house instead of two.”

Her husband ran to her with a smile on his face and delight in his eyes. He was glowing of happiness when she said: “I’m glad that you feel this way since tomorrow morning, my mother moves in with us (sic).”’

Culled from Laugh Now America online [1].

The three excerpts above, which are forms of jokes, are cited to show that joking relationship is global, and it represents the least scrutinized sphere of the human creation. It is encountered on a daily basis, and majority of people consciously and unconsciously get engaged in this socio-psychological dimension of human experience. For some reason, the topic of joking relationship among the Yoruba has not been given adequate attention in scholarly discourse especially from the African perspective. This paper fills this void. I examine anthropological writings

on joking relationships represented in Radcliffe–Brown and their relevance to the Yorùbá socio-cultural experience. Anthropologists such as Labouret [2], Paulme [3], Peddler [4], Radcliffe Brown [5], Goody [6] have written extensively on the subject. Furthermore, Nigerian scholar, Obadare [7] has an article on ridicule and humour that touches on or could be classified as a form of joking relationship. In spite of these insightful publications on joking relationship, there are yet lots more that could be learnt from joking relationships especially among the Yoruba.

Joking relationship has been identified to be common among local and urbanized societies. In fact, it has been carefully documented that scholars have used more than fifty different phrases and terms to describe various aspects of joking relationships [8]. Apart from Africa, anthropologists have also identified such places as Oceana, Asia and North America where joking relationships are also daily affairs. While it could be said that joking relationships cut across ethnic and cultural boundaries, the reality of cultural relativism cautions that we must avoid hasty generalizations. It is safe for me however to observe that joking relationship has been used in creating humor and amusement among traditional and modern Yorùbá people of southwestern Nigeria for as long as they have lived. Yet, while it has been observed that joking relationship is widespread in Africa (Many writers on joking relationships coincidentally make reference to African experience. In fact, Radcliffe-Brown's article suggests that "…general theoretical discussion of the nature of these relationships may be of interest to readers of Africa" [5]), it is interesting that only an insignificant number of African scholars in disciplines such as folklores, literature, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies have devoted their research to this very important phenomenon of Yorùbá cultural life. Furthermore, those scholars have based their theories on kinship relationship.

Obadare's [7] article shows that (together with ridicule), humor has been used by ordinary people in Nigeria to deconstruct and construct meaning out of a reality that is decidedly surreal. He thinks that ridicule and humor are forms of jokes, and then argues that humor should be incorporated into the civil society discourse, and suggests that doing so will enrich civil society's analysis by focusing on both the constructions of sociality and their associated politics, and the hidden spaces in which most of visible political action originates [7]. Obadare's argument follows directly an earlier work by Apte [9], who wrote a whole book on Humor and Laughter. It is not clear, however, that Obadare and Apte share the same view in their sociological analyses. Research carried out in the Niger shows that "transmitted informally from generation to generation, joking relationships are a tool for reconciliation and peace-building and could promote the cohesion and stability of families, ethnic groups and communities. They foster social equality with regard to both age and hierarchy and promote intergenerational dialogue" [10]. What is clear is that with issues raised in previous research efforts still being interrogated, and new areas ripe for exploration, it is undeniable that there is justification for further research work on joking relationships. My effort here is to fill the void.

In this paper, I restrict myself to a particular ethnic Nigerian society; the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria. This decision is borne out of certain considerations, three of which are more important to this paper. First, as I observed above, joking relationship has not received enough attention from African scholarly perspectives

with regards to the Yorùbá cultural society. Interestingly, Radcliffe-Brown who is credited with popularizing the concept of joking relationship used African societies as his case study but never made reference to the Yorùbá. Second, going by the pervasiveness of the claim in socio-anthropological discourse, it is useful to ask if joking relationship could be an effective means of settling ethnic and religious crisis or violence that still riddles Nigerian society in general and the Yorùbá society in particular (This second reason seems to be more important due to the continuous crisis of rhetoric of ethnic and religious identities). For example, it is claimed that joking relationships could help to diminish conflict where there is social disjunction, thereby helping to maintain social equilibrium [11]. Due to the abuse and misuse of joking relationships, however, we must be alert to the possible socio-cultural and legal issues these could generate in the twenty-first century Nigeria in general and Yorùbá society in particular.

Third, with empirical evidence, and contrary to the position of some anthropologists, the paper will show that joking relationship goes beyond purely kinship relationship. I will argue instead that in the Yorùbá socio-cultural setting, joking relationship is a common phenomenon that is practiced everywhere and almost every time among family members and between neighbours and strangers. Contemporary experience has even shown that joking relationship in forms of standup comedy and jests have continued to be part of religious (especially among Christian churches) way of lightening "a dull moment" and making members' to be actively involved in the church ritual practices (Few Nigerian young men and women have identified themselves as Christian standup comedians, and few Pentecostal Christian churches like Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Living Faith Church (aka Winner's Chapel) and a host of others have accepted this practice as one of the means God could use to minister to His people).

Brief historical description of the Yorùbá people

The Yorùbá people are one of the major ethnic groups occupying southwestern Nigeria. Oyin Ògunbà asserts that "the Yorùbá political history is that of history of migrations, conquests, settlements, and significant episodes in the life of communities" [12]. According to the CIA World Factbook, the Yoruba represent about 21% of the total Nigerian population, or over 35 million people [13]. According to William Bascom, "The Yorùbá of West Africa are one of the largest ethnic groups south of the Sahara, and in several ways, one of the most interesting and important peoples of Africa" [14]. While both Ellis and Smith agree with Bascom, Smith adds that the Yorùbá are neighbors of the Bini or Edo of Benin. Bascom further claims that "Yorùbá cities are large, and even the traditional ones are dense." They are one of the largest ethno-linguistic groups on the African continent. They occupy one of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria and they are known not only for farming, weaving, blacksmithing, tying and dyeing, trading, but also they are a well-educated and highly urbanized group of people. According to Salamone [15], "the Yorùbá have long been the most urbanized of all sub-Saharan people (Africa) and among the most urbanized people in the world."

2. Conceptual and theoretical approaches of joking relationship

Joking relationship has been loosely defined as "a relation between two persons in whom one is by custom permitted and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offense" [5]. Elsewhere Radcliffe-Brown says joking relationship is an interaction that mediates and stabilizes social relationships where there is tension, competition, or potential conflict, such as between in-laws and between clans and tribes [5]." According to Goody [6], there are two main varieties of joking relationships namely: symmetrical and asymmetrical. In symmetrical type, each of two persons teases or makes fun of the other. In the asymmetrical type; A jokes at the expense of B and B accepts the teasing good-humoredly and without retaliating; or A teases B as much as he or she pleases and B in return teases A only a little. In different societies, joking relationships may take different approaches. In some societies it may be verbal, in others it may be horse-play and in some others, it might include elements of obscenity, and in others none. In certain cultures like Mali, it is called "Sinankuŋa", among the Yorùbá people; it takes various semantic forms such as Àwàdà, Èfè, Òyàyà, òwékè, Awéèwá or àpárá, which are functional equivalents of the English "humor", "amusement", "joke" and "jest.

Joking relationships were initially conceptualized as a type of alliance [8]. As Jones observes, alliance theory was first developed by Emile Durkheim, but it was his nephew, Marcel Mauss [8] who gave it an expansive treatment. For Mauss, joking relationships have a psychological and material function. In "*Parentés à Plaisanterie"*, he refers to joking relationship as "Joking Kinship" [5]) and argues that exchange is a uniting factor among many types of social activities, including not only joking kinship but also potlatch [16]. Mauss appears to be furthering the Freudian theory of humor (and by extension joke), according to which "the psychic energy is occupied in repressing from consciousness, for example, feelings of aggression towards another person. And through unconscious joke-work, the energy formerly occupied by repression is released, and the aggression becomes expressible, in a now innocuous form, a joke" [17]. One of the earlier writers, Lowie [18], in his ethnographic experience of joking relationships among the Crow and Hidatsa, explains it as "privileged familiarity". This "privileged familiarity" was also developed and pushed further by Radcliffe Brown in one his articles.

Goody [6], however, uses a different name for joking relationship which he labels "privileged aggression". According to Goody, "the element of violence observed in Fiji by Hocart and among BaThonga, as well as by myself suggests that the term 'privileged aggression' is as appropriate a description as Radcliffe-Brown's 'privileged familiarity'". Sheba [19] while citing Zenner [20] notes that information about inter-ethnic images can be derived from proverbs, folktales, jokes etc. Joking relationships found in proverbs have been connected to stereotypes. Incidentally, proverbs are, generally, the means by which the Yorùbá people bring out deeper meaning of "words' intention". It is no wonder that they make proverbs one important part of their day-to-day communication and part of their meaning-making adventure. They claim that "proverb is the horse (vehicle) through which words are conveyed: If a word (its meaning) is lost, proverb is employed in finding it".

3. Functions of joking relationship

Radcliffe Brown [5] views joking as a way of upholding social order and that it is embedded in teleological and psychological explanations. He contends that joking can be used as "the means of establishing and maintaining social equilibrium". To him, joking relationship is a "peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism" in which there is a charade of hostility and rivalry veiling a real friendliness between the two". He explains that "a marriage involves a readjustment of the social structure whereby the woman's relations with her family are greatly modified and she enters into a new and very close relation with her husband" [5]. This kind of relation involves both attachment and separation, both conjunction and disjunction. By this Radcliffe-Brown means that before marriage a man is an outsider to his wife's family just as they are to him. This is a 'disjunction' but it is not destroyed by marriage which leads to 'conjunction'. The social conjunction results from the continuance, though in altered form, of the wife's relation to her family, their continued interest in her and in her children [5].

This is also true of the Yorùbá kinship relationship, but only to a certain degree. It is true in the sense that, in most cases, a woman has no knowledge of whom she is going to marry. Hence, a saying among the people: Olórun nìkan ni ó mo oko Ìyàwó ojú ònà [It is only God that knows who the actual husband of an engaged woman will be]. Since the supposedly "actual husband" is unknowable to human beings, it is only by luck or accident that he could have had a previous close relationship with the family of his wife. What the proverb suggests is the uncertainties that surround engagement or betrothal. Even when both families are involved and grant their consent to the relationship, anything can happen along the way.

For one thing, either the man or the woman could change their minds. Or either of them may die before wedding day. Yet, however, from the moment a man and woman start a relationship that may eventually lead to marriage, the joking alliance or relationship begins. The only difference is that, in the traditional Yorùbá society, a man could be in social relation with his future wife without his knowing her as such. The nexus of relationship among the people in "Àjobí", "co-sanguinity" and the "Àjogbé," "co-residency," [21] which create social obligations [22] make for this possibility. This system has not changed significantly. Again, it is also possible for a girl to have been given out in marriage as a gesture to seal a friendship that has existed between two friends for a long time. If none of the party involved died, the marriage would eventually be consummated. Hence, a prior relationship has already been put in place. The Radcliffe-Brown's theory of disjunction, therefore, loses its applicability in this kind of setting. However, there are many situations that confirm Radcliffe-Brown's theory.

Whatsoever the mode of a man coming to be known to his wife's family, the joking relationships basically exist as Radcliffe-Brown has aptly pointed out. Thus a woman's younger sisters and brothers, older brothers and sisters naturally enter into joking relationships with her fiancée. Although, in certain cases, because of the culturally diverse nature of the Yorùbá people, there may exist a certain degree of differences. In some of these cases, a man is not permitted to disrespect his wife's older siblings or uncles and aunts, but may likely do so with his wife's younger

siblings, her nephews and nieces. That is why a Yorùbá proverb says: Báàyí ni à sé nse ní ilé wa, Èèwò ni n'íbòmíràn [This is how we do in our family is a taboo in another family]. For example, in a certain Yorùbá family, a man who marries a woman automatically enters into two les, namely: first, as a son-in-law and secondly, by extension, as a son to the family of his wife. So, it is expected that he should be able to see his father or mother in-law at any time he wants just like the experience recorded by Radcliffe Brown [5] in Australia. On any special occasion that brings both the family of the man and the woman in marriage alliance together, a man is permitted to joke freely and "mess" with his wife's siblings (My personal experience, since I have been married shows to me that joking with my in-laws is a natural day-to-day affair. In most cases, my brother-in-law usually starts off the joking relationships).

It is also noted that joking relationship has the capacity of reducing tension and crisis that could lead to violence. Among the Yorùbá people, everybody jokes in one way or the other and joking is a daily affair, yet there are different kinds of individuals who are naturally gifted in casting jokes—clowns, professional jesters, those who mimic, and the parodists. There were and still are Yorùbá palace griots. These various groups of people, with whom the Yorùbá people are blessed, usually instigate and provoke laughter among the people. They joke and jest with relative ease and oftentimes, their jokes and jests know no boundaries. Joking relationships take place at cafeteria, "beer parlour, during games (especially "the Warri Game" [Ayò Olópón]), or soccer games, at funeral times, especially if the deceased is an elderly individual, and during marriages (during engagement in particular) and other types of occasions. Because these kinds of joking relationships exist among the people, it is reasonable to assume that violence would be reduced to its barest minimum.

As noted above, there is another kind of joking relationship that exists between two tribes. This is the case with the Yorùbá ethnic group in their relationship with the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. This is so because of the trade link and cross-cultural diffusion through religion, especially with regards to Islam that connects the two together (Apart from the Northern part of Nigeria which is predominantly Hausa-Fulani ethnic group with strong Islamic religious culture, the Yorùbá people have as many Muslims as they have Christians in their midst). Many Hausa and Fulani live in virtually all Yorùbá cities and villages. A lot of the Yorùbá proverbs engage in stereotyping one another; these proverbs are used to tease intra-ethnically and, more often than not, inter-ethnically especially between the Yorùbá and the Hausa-Fulani.

This point of their long-term traditional inter-ethnic joking relationship may explain why the Yorùbá ethnic group used to be more closely connected to the Hausa-Fulani than the Igbo is to the Hausa-Fulani. Thus, it was rare for both the traditional Yorùbá and Hausa-Fulani to engage in serious inter-ethnic violence. The Civil War case could be shown as a good example here. The civil war was more of a war between two major ethnic groups—the Yorùbá and the Hausa-Fulani against the Igbo group who were planning to secede. My nuance is opened to a debate. This is just a personal observation, which does not adequately represent any general view. See the history of the civil war in Nigeria. Their relationship thrived in friendliness and mutual aid. My position is not to say that the Yoruba-Hausa-Fulani do not have

inter-ethnic clashes. Unfortunately, modern trends have shown that healthy relationship is under political pressure and we have witnessed Yorùbá-Hausa intra-ethnic violence occur in cities such as Ilé-Ifè, Ságámù [23], Ògbómòsó, Lagos [24] and Èkìtì. Recent Yoruba suspicions about Fulani herdsmen kidnapping Yoruba people for ransom especially since Muhammadu Buhari has assumed the position of presidency of Nigeria are especially troubling. The clashes between the Fulani herdsman and the seven Ibarapa towns in Oyo State as well as what led to the activism of Sunday Igboho could also be cited as a case in point [25]. Radcliffe Brown observes that joking relationship between two tribes is apparently rare, and certainly deserves, as Mr. Pedler suggests, to be carefully investigated, but according to him, a similar relationship between clans has been observed in Africa. While this could be true of the clans in the Yorùbá society, it is also true of the relationship of the Yorùbá with the Hausa-Fulani ethnic tribe. According to Radcliffe Brown [5] though, "…both the joking relationship which constitutes an alliance between clans or tribes, and that between relatives by marriage, are modes of organizing a definite and stable system of social behaviour in which conjunction and disjunctive components, as I have called them, are maintained and combined".

4. Humor and its connection to joking relationship

The observation of the interconnection of humor and joking relationship has been carefully made by Apte in his research work on Humor and Laughter. His work shows how humor often provokes laughter and hence, humor includes the behavioural responses of smiling or laughter [9]. He agrees with anthropologists and sociologists who express the view that humor is useful for analyzing and understanding socio-cultural systems. He quotes Berger [26], who claims that "because humor is intimately connected to culture-codes, it is useful in providing insights into a society's values". Apte also cites anthropologist Hall [27] who contends that "people laugh and tell jokes, and if you can learn the humor of a people and really control it, you know that you are also in control of nearly everything else" (See Apte, Humor and Laughter, 17, here also Apte is quoting Hall (1959/1968:56) to strengthen his argument about the connection of humor to jokes or joking relationship). One could easily see how Hall connects laughter with jokes and later makes the two look as if they carried the same meaning as humor. As a matter of fact, Apte devotes the whole of chapter one of his book to examining the phenomenon of joking relationship and its applicability to cross-cultural analysis.

Apte begins chapter two of his book by making this interesting remark: "Perhaps no other humor-related phenomenon within the framework of social organization has been as extensively studied by anthropologists as the "joking relationship," which is one of the major manifestations of kinships". I earlier raised an objection against anthropologists' and sociologists' reductionism about the one-sided argument that joking relationship is only kinship-based. A careful cross-cultural examination, which is often advocated in ethnography, will show that such a one-sided way of thinking is no longer acceptable. In many African cultures, joking relationship is one of the common features of how people organize their lives; it is not just a manifestation of kinship relations.

5. Some examples of joking relationships among the Yoruba

Current literature on joking relationships in Africa is long on analysis but short on examples. This is not surprising. Earlier sociologists and anthropologists failed to either pay attention to practical lived experience of the people they studied or, due to language barriers, show little interest in this pattern of activities and lived experience that real people engage in to organize their worlds. Those scholars focus on theories rather than practice.

In this section, I make up for this gap in knowledge with some examples of joking relationships used as practical strategy on daily basis among the Yorùbá people and in their relations to other ethnic groups. Stereotypes used in proverbs [19], ritual of lampooning and ritual of obscenities characterize most of the jokes that Yorùbá people engage themselves with. What I try to do here is to present examples of the jokes with an attempt at a hermeneutical account of the jokes. But in doing this, I do not want to be swept off feet by my own interpretive bias. So, I will only examine the way Yorùbá people socially and religiously use everyday strategies, tactics and routines of 'playful' and 'magical' action to manipulate words, gestures, emotions, bodies, objects and images in an effort not only to control and comprehend their relationship with the world but also to change the way the world appears to them (I got this inspiration from my Harvard Professor Michael Jackson in one of the classes I took with him when studying for my Master of Theological Studies (MTS) at Harvard Divinity School between 2006 and 2008), particularly in times of transition, change or crisis.

6. Social forms of joking relationships

Peering through some proverbs used in stereotyping (a form of joking relationships) other ethnic groups especially Hausa-Fulani people, one cannot but be struck with the ways the Yorùbá create joking atmosphere, which may carry social and or legal implications. Here are three Yoruba jokes about the Hausa (All jokes and joking proverbs are italicized to differentiate them from their interpretations and reflections).

1) Wón ní kí Haúsá ó tàkìtì, ó ní ilè le, ta ní so pé kí ó ta àtayè télè! They tell a Hausa man to somersault, he says the ground is hard; who cares if he doesn't survive the somersault.

2) Kàkà ká dòbálè fún Gàmbàrí, bí a kú ó yá. It is better to die than to prostrate for a Gambari (another name used for Hausa in Yorùbá land). Sheba claims that Gambari is a derogatory term for Hausa. To bow or prostrate is a mark of honour for an elderly or people of high-ranking position. Here, Yoruba will consider it demeaning to prostrate for Gambari (Hausa).

3) Àpónlé ni málà; Haúsá ni Haúsá n jé. Mala is an honorific appellation; let us call a Hausa by his name (Mala is an abbreviation for Malam, the title of a Muslim Cleric). Since Malams are treated with respect due to their clerical positions and social statuses among the people, the Yorùbá people do not see the reason all Hausa should be treated as such. But this proverb is still in want of more research to really ascertain whether or not Mala and Mallam truly mean the same thing.

The above proverbs on the face value are hilarious and funny; people use them

for social excitement and good feeling; but beneath the surface, they have ethical implications. In the modern society characterized by political conflict and mutual suspicion, they could also generate ethnic tension and legal challenges. For many people see such proverbs as expressions of ethnic or national superiority and prejudice, and subtle ways of discriminating against others.

The first two of the three proverbs above appear to denigrate the Hausa ethnic group and to devalue their humanity. Sheba interpreted the first proverb to mean "a disregard for the safety of this group of people". And in the second proverb, the Hausa are regarded by the Yorùbá as an inferior group. The third proverb is however different. It is used in situations where the speaker just wants to deemphasize title and honor. It happens that Mala is commonly used as an honorific title for many Hausa and Fulani people because many of them are experts in the Islamic religion as teachers of the Holy Koran. If many Yoruba people are also experts in Ifa religion so that they are referred to as Babaláwo, a similar joking proverb could be applied.

For example: Àpónlé ni Babaláwo, Yoruba ni Yoruba je (That is Babaláwo is an honorific title, let us call a Yoruba by his name). This notwithstanding, it is not indisputable that some users of the proverb have a disrespectful attitude to the Hausa ethnic group based on their interaction with the itinerant Hausa who trade in kolanuts and dry fish in Yorubaland and sometimes engage in begging for charity around Yoruba towns. But that disrespectful attitude to an entire people based on interaction with a few of them is misplaced. Among the Hausa people, we have shakers and makers of Nigeria today. We have business giants who represent Africa well in the world of industry and business. Therefore, any ethnic stereotypes are certainly misplaced, even if they are interpreted as coping mechanism among the Yorùbá to channel pent-up tension and feel happy.

Here are two jokes about the Fúlàní:

- Fúlàní se bí olókùnrùn wojà, tinú alábahun n be níbè. [Fúlàní limps into the market like a sick person what the tortoise intends to do is within him].
- Ohun tó jo ohun la fí n wé ohun, èso ìyeyè jo igi imú Fúlàní. [What looks alike are comparable, the fruit of the hog plum (Spondias lutae) resembles the nose of a Fúlàní].

The first proverb suggests that the Fúlàní are pretenders. Sheba says that as cow sellers, after selling their cows in Yorùbá land, they go about begging for alms as if they are poor. This proverb uses this practice of a few to characterize an entire group of people. The second proverb uses human anatomy to ethnically profile. However, while the second proverb appears to reflect an observation about physical features of a people, which can be replicated for any other ethnic group with its unique physical feature; the first proverb is not completely true. Many Fúlàní are very rich and wealthy and should be distinguished from migrant Fúlàní who serve as and are employed by Yorùbá people as herders. As I observed above, in contemporary Nigeria, many Fúlàní are employers of labour, and what is more, the current Nigerian president is a Fúlàní man. Sociologists, Haralambos and Holborn [28] argue that:

Stereotypes are oversimplified or untrue generalizations about social groups. For example, short people might be stereotyped as being unusually aggressive, and women as being weak and passive. When stereotypes imply negative or positive

evaluations of social groups, they become a form of prejudice, and when they are acted on they become discrimination.

As sociologists aver, many of our rigid classifications often overlook alternative ways by which we could hermeneutically deal with those classifications. Thus, Camosy [29] observes that "our sinful natures appear to crave the sort of sensationalized 'us vs. them' narrative".

Note, however, that joking or stereotyped rhetorics are used among and by the Yoruba against other Yorùbá sub-groups as well. Therefore, it should not be thought that the Yoruba are intentionally biased against other non-Yoruba ethnic groups. For example, not a few proverbs are in continued use among the Yorùbá, and such proverbs are extremely demeaning to sub-Yoruba ethnic groups which could potentially lead to internal crisis if not violence. However, there is a general understanding among the people, concerning the largely innocuous character of such joking proverbs. The following are three of such proverbs that target Oyo Yoruba people:

1) Èèdè ni Òyó n toro, kójú tó mó won a ti gbalé lówó eni [The Òyó only begs for (the use of the) passage or lobby but before dawn they would have taken over the whole house from the owner.) (Sheba interprets Èèdè to mean veranda, which seems unlikely. In old-fashioned architectural houses, rooms were usually adjacent to each other, the space-in-between or the interstitial space will be equivalent to the living room of the modern architectural mansions. It is even logical to call it a passage that allows for different occupants of such house to move in and out. Veranda will actually mean iwájú ilé, that is, a roofed platform along the outside of a house, level with the ground floor. See https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=veranda+meaning),

2) Ká sòrò, ká má ba béè ló bará Òyó jé. [Speaking the contrary is the embarrassing habit of Òyó people].

3) Òyó dòbálè, inú rè lósòó. [The Òyó man prostrates while the inside squats].

As Sheba notes, the three proverbs depict Òyó Yorùbá people as extortionists and this attitude aided their expansion within the Yorùbá land. They also appear to be cunning and deceptive in their behaviour. The three proverbs share the same meaning, a perceived duplicitousness of Oyo people. However, Sheba's depiction of Oyo people as extortionist and expansionist on account of these proverbs may be challenged. First, expansionism is not necessarily a logical outcome of an extortionist predisposition.

Many expansionists are not accused of being extortionists, expansionism through war and conquest being the commonest example. On the other hand, being extortionist by nature or disposition doesn't make anyone human group an expansionist. Furthermore, with respect to the second proverb, there is reason to believe that all human beings are potentially if not inherently cunning and deceptive. Recall here Thomas Hobbes' [30] depiction of life in the state of nature; that is, a state of human interaction absents of any political authority. Therefore, it is not a trait unique to any one group. As a matter of fact, all the three proverbs could also be prospectively used to stereotype any of the Yorùbá dialectal groups depending on the contexts in which they are used. Life experience has shown that many Ìjèbú, Ìjèsà, Èkìtì and Ondó people could be as cunning and deceptive as the Òyó people are

claimed to be.

7. Joking religiously

Yorùbá people enjoy jokes and stereotypes about religious groups with a sense of impunity. Here are a few examples of jokes about Muslims:

1) Lèmómù tí ó so wípé Ìyàn yóò mú, omo rè kò ní je wàláà. [The Imam who says that there will be famine, his son or daughter will not eat Arabic slate]. This is used when the people are being threatened by the preaching of the Imam who is predicting woes and calamities including predicting famine. After all, famine doesn't spare anyone, including the Imam's family. Everyone will be impacted. Note, however, while this proverb uses the Muslim Imam's harsh prediction as an instrument, what it really does is to highlight a fact of life. No one is immune from a generalized calamity even if any one person anticipates it or warns of its coming. This proverb is similar to another: *Òrun n ya bò, kìí se erù enìkan*.—[The observation that the falling of the sky is imminent should not be construed as the burden of any single person].

2) Lèmómù j'óná O nbèèrè irùgbòn, kí ni ó kó ma j'óná? [The Imam was burnt and you are asking for his beard, what would have burned first?] This proverb is used when a calamity strikes and some people are concerned about trivial issues. Of course, it is an awkward imagination to think that a man who was burnt would have his beard still left intact. Again, while the proverbs uses a feature such as growing long beards which is somehow unique to Muslims in Yoruba land, it makes a more general point about life and lived experiences.

3) Ebi kò pa ìmàle (mùsùlùmí), ó ní òhun kìí je àáyá, ebi pa Súlè ó je òbo. [A Muslim is not hungry, he claims that monkey meat is his taboo, but when Suleiman (a Muslim) was stricken by hunger pang, he ate a gorilla meat]. Muslims neither eat monkey nor gorilla. This is another proverb that uses a Muslim's belief to highlight a general moral problem of hypocrisy.

Jokes about Christians include:

1) Réfénì n sanra, sùgbón omo ìjo nrù. [The Reverend gets fatter while the members of his congregation are getting lean]. In pre-modern Yorùbá society, the priests were well catered for. The first fruits of the farm products belonged to the priests. Nay, in the era of Pentecostal Christianity, priests and ministers of God in many of these Pentecostal churches get bountiful gifts from members. As a matter of fact, many Pentecostal pastors collect certain offerings from their members, which is novel to Christianity itself called "Prophetic Seeds".

2) Ìyàwó Réfénì tí ó n kiri búrédì ní ojó Sunday, yóó so oko rè l'énu ni. [The wife of a Reverend who advertises the sale of bread on Sunday mornings is an embarrassment to her husband]. A Reverend's wife is not expected to sell bread when Sunday service is going on).

The first joking proverb is still in use because of the prevalent abuse of some Christian priests demanding different kinds of gifts of money, foods and other material goods from their members. While many of these members are themselves lacking the good things of life, they see their priests living larger than life. In many Pentecostal churches, members may be in deep suffering while their pastors live in

opulence and boastful display of wealth. On the other hand, while it appears funny, the second proverb is a depiction of the dilemma faced by many pastors and their families in African indigenous churches where they lack support and must make ends meet. The wife has no choice other than to engage in quick early Sunday morning sales of bread to raise money for both church offering and house keep.

8. Joking at workplace

Joking relationship takes place at kiosks, motor parks, restaurants, market places and various shops where different kinds of trades take place. Few examples show this very clearly.

Worldwide, public passenger vehicles ply different inter- or intra-city routes. In Nigeria, public passenger vehicles, especially buses, have drivers and conductors, a practice not common in developed countries. The function of bus conductors is to invite or canvass for passengers to patronize their buses. One day, a coaster passenger bus drove passengers from Lagos to Ìbàdàn and stopped at the designated bus stop at Iwo Road in Ìbàdàn, where passengers converge to board passenger vehicles. The driver of the coaster bus needed passengers for his return trip to Lagos and so, his bus conductor called out, soliciting for passengers traveling to Lagos.

Meanwhile, one of the intra-city Ìbàdàn buses' conductors was also soliciting for passengers to board his bus for the inner city routes which he plies, shouting out the stops on his route. It goes like this:

The Ibadan conductor shouting his bus route: Ìdí Arere (Arere is one of the big trees and a community where the tree is located was named after the tree), Ìdí Osè (Ose is another big tree and a community named after it is a bus stop), Ìdí Ayùnré (Ayunre is another big tree and a community named after the tree is a bus stop) and so on.

Now, Ìdí could mean "at the spot" of Arere, Osè, and Ayùnré. It could also mean the lower position of a thing such as the bottom of a pot. But Idi also has an anatomical meaning referencing the butt of human and non-human animals.

On his part, the Lagos bus conductor found a good outlet for dispelling stress and creating fun out of an ordinary situation. He turned Idi from the bus stop context which the Ibadan bus conductor had assigned it, to Ìdí as human backside or butt. Out of the blues, he shouted, "we also have Ìdí Àràbà in Lagos," touching his buttock. Note that Àràbà is a much bigger tree than the ones already mentioned above. Thus, the Lagos bus conductor was trying to prove to the Ibadan bus conductor that much bigger buttocks were in Lagos than in Ìbàdàn, Therefore, the Ìbàdàn bus conductor should not think it was only in Ìbàdàn that people could see Ìdí (buttocks). The joke was not lost on passengers around who complimented him with a big applause, all relieving their stress as they waited for their various trips.

9. Play and humor in traditional Yorùbá marriage as joking relationship

Joking relationships in form of ritual of license during marriage rites among indigenous or ancient Yorùbá used to be a common feature of traditional wedding rituals (it still happens in some places with moderations). In such rituals, brides,

especially, were the objects of jokes, teases, jests, humors and laughter. In this traditional Yorùbá setting, friends of the bride would have rehearsed different kind of jokes and humorous songs to use when a new bride was to be escorted to her intended husband's house and either sex or a collection of men and women engage in formal joking activities during the ceremony.

When a new bride is ready for her husband's house on their wedding night; the friends and the younger sisters and cousins of the new bride are by custom expected to escort the newly wedded woman to her husband's family house. As soon as they get close to the husband's family house, they start with different kinds of songs with implicit and explicit sexual coloration. Here are some examples:

- K'òlókó ní'lè yí ni, t'ó òbò nse bí àlúkú àlàpà? [Does it mean that there are no men with penises in this place? In a sea of vaginas that are running around?] This song goes with great hilarity and loud clapping) [31].
- Alábàké ti inú ijù tí óti lo kó igi fún iná dídá w'álé, jé kí òbòo rè fè sílè fún ìbálòpò. [Alábàké has just returned from the forest, fetching firewood for cooking. Let her vagina be wide open for sexual intercourse].
- Olókó s'òbò l'álejò. [Men with penises come and give hospitality to women with vaginas].

The above are examples of bridal songs also known as Ekún Ìyàwó, typical in traditional wedding ceremonies. They are funny and almost always with sexual language. While we may today find them offensive or demeaning, traditionally they are believed to serve some useful purposes especially for the new bride. We may identify three such purposes. First, the newly wedded woman is young and inexperienced. She does not know what she is going to face in her new home far away from her family. Such a lack of understanding creates anxiety. A recent case reported from Northern Nigeria brings this out clearly. An 18-year old woman stabbed her new husband to death because he approached her for sex. Her excuse was that she did not know that sex was part of marriage and she feared that the man—her husband—was trying to hurt her when she was approached for sex. These songs introduce the newly wed to her new life and lighten her up while it tempers her fear which she laughs off in the company of her friends.

Second, the songs are integral parts of the traditional Yorùbá marriage rites of passage in which sex and sexuality are joked about and are freely discussed. As Olupona and Ajibade [31] observe, "those songs are rendered to provoke laughter in the midst of the tears that accompany the maiden's performance". And according to Evans-Pritchard [32], "It is not uncommon for those who live amongst primitive peoples to come across `obscenity' in speech and action. This `obscenity' is often not an expression by an individual uttered under great stress and condemned as bad taste, but is an expression by a group of persons and is permitted and even prescribed by society".

Third, as mentioned above, the songs are means of preparing both husband and wife for sexual intercourse which is expected to consummate the night of wedding. Traditionally, men and women betrothed to each other are not expected to be sexually intimate before their wedding. The songs are meant to get them in the mood for sexual activity or get them initiated into sexual activity on their wedding night.

10. Comedy: Socially acceptable form of public joking relationship

Comedy is as old as the dawn of human consciousness and it is practiced in virtually all known cultures of the world. Due to its social relevance and its continued use as a source of amusement among the Yorùbá and its close connection to jokes and joking relationship, a brief treatment of it is necessary in this paper. Comedy involves a comedian who is skillful in entertaining people. He or she seeks to "entertain an audience through jokes (emphasis mine) or amusing situations, or acting foolish (as in slapstick) or employing prop comedy [33]. It is explained further as "a literary genre and a type of dramatic work that is amusing and satirical in its tone, mostly having a cheerful ending. The motif of this dramatic work is triumph over unpleasant circumstance by creating comic effects, resulting in a happy or successful conclusion".

A comedian who addresses an audience directly is called a stand-up comedian [32]. Comedy is performed in every place and within dramatic or theatric plays. In recent times in Nigeria, many standup comedians have been discovered, who perform once or twice a week for audiences who pay entrance fees in Lagos, Abuja, Ibadan and other major cities. Popular standup comedians include the late Gbenga Adeboye, AY, Basketmouth, Kenny Black (whose original name is Òtòlórìn Kehinde Peter), Alibaba Akpobome, I Go Die, Helen Paul, Chioma Omeruah, Maraji and a host of others. Interestingly, sex gender does not have any major influence on the Nigerian comedy as both female and male Nollywood actors and actresses dominate the comedy scene. The Yorùbá have an appropriate appellation for them: A d'èrín pa Òsónú [Skillful in getting sadists to laugh].

It has been observed that "comedy tends to bring humor and induce laughter in plays, films, and theaters." The primary function of comedy is to amuse and entertain the audience, while it also portrays social institutions and persons as corrupt, and ridicules them through satirizing, parodying, and poking fun at their vices. True to this description, Nigerian comedians are skillful in mimicking high profile people, including politicians, such as president, governors, ministers, senators and representatives. They have jokes about kings and religious leaders as well. What is more, many of these comedians even use the occasion of their casting jokes to reveal some vices of the leaders as those leaders are seated in the audience and participate in the laughter as if they were not being affected by the jokes. Such a practice has been noticed in American culture since 1960s as well; where black comedians have consistently practiced social satire to poke fun at the expense of whites [5]. We may raise the question: "why has there not been any serious litigation against those comedians?" The answer lies is the fact that everyone knows that these are matters for fun and no seriousness is attached to whatever comes out of the mouth of a comedian in action. Indeed, these comedians always also make fun and cast jokes about their own persons, origin and cultural backgrounds in such a derogatory manner that it becomes difficult for anybody to raise an eyebrow against their being made objects of jokes, humors, jests and laughter.

Òtòlórìn Kéhìndé Peter, alias Kenny Blaq, for example, casts jokes about his background, his name and his town in all his comedies both in Nigeria and overseas. In most of his comedies, he is fond of poking fun at the presidents of Nigeria, past

and present. The current president Muhammed Buhari is not an exception. Kenny Blaq told his listening audience how President Buhari invited him through a phone call to serve as the Master of Ceremony (MC) for his daughter's wedding (One can easily watch any of his comedies on YouTube). The joke goes like this:

- President Buhari called on phone: Hello is that Kenny Blaq?
- Kenny Blaq replied on phone: Yes, Your Excellency!
- President Buhari: You are shouting!
- Kenny Blaq: I am sorry sir, Your Excellency
- President Buhari: How much do you charge for your service?
- Kenny Blaq: What kind of service, dear Excellency?
- President Buhari: For wedding
- Kenny Blaq: I charge thirty billion (he said this because it was the President of Nigeria)
- President Buhari: What, how much is the whole country (Nigeria) worth? Do not worry, we will use Dino Melaye (Dino Melaye was a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, a virulent critic of the President and is also well known as a humorist and joker in the Senate chamber).

11. Jokes and humor on the church's pulpit

Few Yorùbá pastors joke and create humors before their congregations with the aim of driving home their sermons or making them to be alert. For example, an invited pastor who sensed that the members of the congregation needed to be alert to follow his sermon cast a joke. He told the members of the congregation how he was stopped by a team of police officers when he was coming from a church vigil at 3.00 a.m. in Lagos. The dialogue between the pastor and the Nigerian police officer goes like this:

- Police officer: Mr. Man, where are you coming from at this time of the day?
- Pastor: From our church vigil?
- Police officer: Okay, where are your particulars (the policemen meant vehicle's papers)?
- Pastor: Reached into the safe of the car; Here are they sir?
- Police officer: After searching closely for a while, they discovered that the papers were up-to-date. But they went further to ask the Pastor: why are you driving alone at this hour of the day?
- Pastor: I am not alone; riding with me in this car are: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and the innumerable company of angels.
- Police officer: (Became annoyed and shouted): You have violated the driving rule; you carry overload!!!

With careful attention, one could see the creative ingenuity of the pastor. Normally, no Nigerian police officer would charge a driver for carrying overload cargo just because the driver announced that he was accompanied by celestial beings that included God, Jesus, Holy Spirit and the angels. The pastor skillfully moved from the joke, which he turned into prayer, telling the congregation that for their attendance in church that day, they would carry overload of blessings back to their various homes "in Jesus' name". The congregation got the joke as they shouted a

loud "Amen" and began to laugh and clap. The pastor has succeeded in creating a listening audience or congregation for his message.

From the foregoing, it is clear that joking relationship pervades the social, political, religious, and family atmosphere of the Yorùbá, and there is no limit at which people could joke. The actors and actresses on Nollywood video films, African Magic and others joke freely, tease one another, poke fun at one another and create humor and laughter for the listening and watching audience.

12. Social and legal implications

The legal hazard of joking relationship in Nigeria remains unclear. At what point there is risk of litigation is up in the air especially because there has not been any attempt to sue a comedian based on his or her joking performance. What is clear is that the circle of social acceptable joke is quite broad and stand-up comedians have been casting jokes on anything and everything with no serious legal implication since the return of democratic rule in the country. We know, however, that jokes and comedy were no-go areas during military rule. As Ayakoroma the critic notes, "During military rule, you couldn't go and start cracking jokes about the head of state. That night, they would have come for you. So we can say that civilian rule opened the way for people to make jokes about our leaders without fear of being arrested.

We know, for instance, that as military Head of State between 1976 and 1979, General Olúsegún Obásanjó dealt severely with all his critics such as Fela Aníkúlápó Kútì by burning down his Kàlàkútà Republic which also led to the death of Fela's 77 years old mother" [33]. In the present democratic dispensation, however, comedians poke funs and crack jokes about political elites with impunity. Ironically, the same dictatorial Obásanjó later contributed to its (joking) public acceptance as the civilian head of state, to the extent that he (Mr. Obásanjó) championed the cause of comedians and recommended for performances such stars as Mr. Akporobomerere, who roasted him regularly [33].

Comedians have patriotic reasons to roast political leaders and activists. Thus, popular Nigerian comedian Mr. Okpocha, 37 commented, "I can stay away from religious jokes, but I'm not going to stay away from political jokes. It's something that affects the common man and nobody is speaking on their behalf. Inasmuch as I definitely have to limit myself so that I can live longer, I can't see a truth and not say it" [33]. Obádáre argues that "As part of 'emergent' civil society's mean of subverting, engaging and deconstructing the state, humor (or joking) can be important in exercising agency even as it is being denied, attaining a form of political participation amid alienation, and, crucially, challenging, contesting, negating, and 'playing with' official meaning".

This is not to deny that the challenges are still there. As it has been rightly observed, "working in such public spheres, the comedians are challenging deeply rooted social and political mores. Socially, Nigeria remains an extremely hierarchical country where powerful individuals are treated with fawning respect. For the second time since military rule ended in 1999, Nigeria finds itself governed by a former general, President Muhammadu Buhari, evidence of the military's lingering

influence" [34].

13. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the concept and practice of joking relationships among the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria. I have attempted to show the relevance of Radcliffe-Brown's theory to this practice among the people with a modification that moves beyond simple theoretical model to the discussion of its practice among the Yorùbá people. I have also shown the weakness of the earlier anthropologists especially with reference to kinship and marriage alliance theory proposed by Radcliffe-Brown et. al. My suggestion is that this theory can be further opened up for critical debate and analysis and can be pushed further especially because of its limitations in this era of globalization, westernization, and cross-cultural diffusion with regards to Islam and Christianity, which has led the indigenous people to abandon many of the norms and customs through which they maintain cohesiveness and unity.

Christian Fundamentalists and Muslims in Yorubaland, in particular, have made the matter worse, because of their teachings that sobriety and seriousness at all times is an indication of pietism, from which it follows that such religious groups might take offense at jokes, jest or humor that target their doctrines and practices. The Danish Cartoon crisis of 2005 and 2006 that spiked off religious violence is a good example of what extremist religious groups could determine as an offense against their belief system [35]. Not only that, the consanguinal relationships that used to exist between Muslims and Christians in traditional Yorùbá society has been compromised and weakened so much that there is an element of suspicion in interpersonal relationships. Worse still, is the complicated relationship that exists between Yorùbá people and other ethnic groups in contemporary Nigeria. It may now be very difficult for the Yorùbá to poke funs that stereotype Hausa-Fulani in the present volatile and polarized politico-religious atmosphere that Nigeria is.

Furthermore, as human beings move away from the hold of tradition and become more and more conscious of their self-esteem and self-worth, joking relationship might lose its value in the future. It is not now uncommon to see up-and-coming Yorùbá men and women take offense against joke and jest directed at them as an assault on their dignity. With individuals becoming sensitive to jokes and jests, we can be sure of the multiplier effect of such sensitivity in the political arena. Thus, comedy jokes and jests must be handled properly so they do not unwittingly incite violence against political or religious authority or other social institutions.

These caveats notwithstanding, however, we must underscore the fact that Yorùbá communities have been well-served by their cultural investment in joking relationship over the decades and centuries. It is the reason for the vivaciousness of Yorubaland. It is what people notice and why they remark that the Yorùbá are a happy people. One of the distinctive aspects of Yorùbá social life is their social parties popularly referred to as Owàmbè parties. These include naming ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, house warming ceremonies, birthday ceremonies, and funeral ceremonies, featuring elaborate food service, drumming and dancing. But one of the most enduring aspects of those ceremonies is the jokes and funs that fill the time that

people spend together during which they completely forget about any of their problems. Depression and suicide are few and far among the Yorùbá partly because they organize their social life such that they place a high premium on joking relationship and humor.

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