



YORUBÁ
CULTURAL
STUDIES

EDITED BY
MOYO OKEDIJI



The University of African Art Press.

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Catalog index:

African art, ethnography, literature, religion, education, philosophy, criticism, culture studies.

The University of African Art Press Electronic Book Media.

Africa eBooks

TUAAPEB.001

Electronic design by Ade Kukoyi

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**(this volume is under construc-
tion)**

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Denver, Co; Ile-Ife.**

universityofafricanart.org

INTRODUCTION

Moyo Okediji

What is Yorùbá: language, people, culture, community, or geographical definition? This question is complex and beyond any easy answer. Manifestations of Yorùbá cultures are found not only in Africa, but in various parts of the world: in the Americas, Caribbean islands, and Europe. This book contributes to the investigation and analysis of these international cultures by compiling scholarly documents that define the physical and spiritual dimensions of Yorùbá studies. Materials are drawn on the visual, verbal, musical, historical, geographical, and philosophical perspectives.

Yorùbá peoples are associated with a love of the arts, urban living, philosophy, penchant for esoteric language and rich theological life. Their visual traditions range from the super-realist art of Ifè portraiture, to the absolutely abstract and almost totally improvisational *àlè* installations. Yorùbá artistries include textiles, painting, sculpture, ceramics and drawing in many mediums.

Yorùbá artists are masters of various literary and musical genres. The range of Yorùbá poetry is wide, including *Iwì*, *Ifá*, *Ìjálá* and *Ofò*. Yorùbá performers use music and drama in their arts, to produce entertaining, didactic and religious materials for their communities.

In this volume, readings from various aspects of Yorùbá scholarship are brought together as an introduction to Yorùbá cultural studies. Essays from leading scholars on different aspects of Yorùbá cultures enable readers to gain a round picture of the intricate character of Yorùbá peoples, the diversity of their cultures, the diffusion of their traditions, and the dynamism of their lives. The opening essay by the great Yorùbá historian Adeagbo Akinjogbin, provides a sketch of the dimension of Yorùbá peoples. In what amounts to an unprecedented and intriguing outlining of the borders and centers of Yorùbá geography, Akinjogbin's map is a remarkable document on the philosophy of inclusiveness and exclusiveness in the study of African traditions.

John Rowland Olufemi Ojo's study of migrations of cultural forms within and outside Yorùbá cultures; Oludare Olajubu's work on Yorùbá poetry; Rowland Abiodun's intersections of oral and visual cultures; Robert Farris Thompson's aesthetics of Yorùbá art; Henry John Drewal's study of body decorations; Oyin Ogunba's interpretation of Yorùbá drama; Oluyemi Omotosho's discussion of Ife art; Wande Abimbola's elaborations on Ifa divination literature; Akin Euba's discussion of the music; Abdias De Nascimento's connections with Brazilian culture; Olasope Oyelaran's contemplations on Yorùbá linguistics; Ulli Beier's documentation of its festivals; Wole Soyinka's analysis of Yorùbá tragedy; Pierre Verge's observations of its pathology; Bolaji Campbell's presentation of its contemporary forms; Michael Harris's insights into its diaspora developments--these are all important milestones in the study of Yorùbá cultures. These studies add to the stupendous contributions of the Johnsons, who wrote *The History of the Yorubas*, and also to the monumental work of Bishop Ajayi Crowther, who translated the Holy Bible to the Yorùbá language in the nineteenth century, thus beginning the development a distinctive Yorùbá orthography. Many of these important voices are included in this volume, which is no more than an introduction to the wealth of Yorùbá cultural studies.

CHAPTER ONE

TOWARDS A POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF YORÙBÁ CIVILIZATION

I. A. Akinjogbin

Most histories of West African peoples are written within the geographical and political limits set by the imperial powers towards the end of the 19th century, even when the topic deals with pre-colonial period. Thus, the average historian who is dealing with a topic affecting a cultural group within Nigeria restricts himself strictly to the area now currently known as Nigeria. So does he when dealing with topics within Ghana, Togo, Sierra Leone, Gambia or any other West African country. Even where the topics being treated concern peoples who cannot be geographically confined within those limits, and even where peoples outside those limits perform particularly important roles in the topics being discussed, strenuous efforts are made to keep within the modern political limits and exclude those outside. A worse form of this practice can indeed be noticed within the colonially delineated countries. The same cultural group divided into different administrative units is treated as constituting different cultural groups.

Thus, a discussion on the Akan, while it may recognize the Akan presence in the eastern part of Ivory Coast, loses no time at all in forgetting those of them there, concentrating only on those in modern Ghana. A discussion of the Fulani jihad almost invariably leaves out the area outside Nigeria which the jihad covered. In the more extreme we find authors trying to distinguish between the Igbo of the Niger and the Igbo west of the Niger. Equally authors are creating an imaginary gulf between the Yorùbá and the Yorùbá of Ilorin.

This attitude of mind can be explained: Firstly, earlier modern African historians during and after the era were probably far too anxious to show (what the Africans knew all along but the Europeans were unwilling to accept) that Africa had a history and they were therefore not by the other niceties. Secondly, when we started to write history, in the post Colonial era, it was certainly more convenient to use European documents and official records and these documents and records were written within the political limits set by the imperial powers, and in the language of the imperial masters. The records were kept largely within archives located in the cities of the metropolitan powers or in the institutions created in the various territories by those powers. Thirdly, most of the historians who started this early phase were themselves brought up within the political confines of the colonially-created countries and also within their academic confines. Thus, it was possible for those scholars not to be completely aware of a part of their own people who lived outside their own "country." Fourthly, with

a few notable exceptions, oral tradition had not yet been accepted by most European historians as constituting valid historical sources, so that any African historian who wanted to be accepted would have to use written documents compiled largely by Europeans in their own language, for their own purposes and deposited in their archives. Except in a static anthropological fashion, these documents did not record pre-colonial oral tradition in a way to indicate dynamic historical growth of Africans. Fifthly, immediately after independence African political leaders decided to maintain the Colonial boundaries as any attempt to unscramble them might create much chaos as to deter meaningful development. In their willingness not to “rock the boat” historians appear to have concentrated on developing national histories.

Although we can see the reasons why our histories have been written the way they have, it is difficult to continue to justify them in terms of our own historical development. Certainly most of the reasons have either disappeared or are no longer valid in the light of the development in historical studies since the 1960s. We no longer need to be pre-occupied with proving that Africans had a history. Anyone who still doubts that is plainly illiterate and can be ignored. Our historical sources have expanded beyond the colonial official records and oral sources are now generally accepted as valid historical sources. Any African historian who ignores this fact robs his own work of luster. African historians need no longer see themselves as appendages of their European counterparts, but as independent units within the international academic community, who should contribute to world historical knowledge from their own world-view of history. Finally, becoming increasingly clear that a greater knowledge of pre-colonial history, across colonial boundaries is likely to make for stability and self-reliance among modern African nations.

From the point of view of academic contribution to historical knowledge, the way African histories have been written, confined within colonial boundaries as they were had many disadvantages. Part of the purpose of writing the history of a people is to give them a sense of their own development in time perspective. If the historian therefore ignores a large junk of that time scale, his purpose may be defeat before he starts. Secondly, in terms of historical explanations of the cause-effect cycle, unless the historian is able to explain precisely why the present boundaries had been created the way they were, which implies a knowledge of the period before the creation, it is not likely that the whole historical development will be meaningful. This is why when we read an otherwise brilliant history of some event of a West African cultural unit, one wonders whether the people about whom the thing are being said, and in whose countries the events took place would recognize their own histories in such books.

From all the foregoing, it is clear that in order to understand our own histories, we must now begin to

look beyond the colonial period and beyond the colonial boundaries, so that we can have a good knowledge of the political geography of West African peoples with a view to understanding present political and economic events. An understanding of this pre-colonial period will also help to explain some of the modern trends and may be helpful in directing future plans. The work calls for a great deal of co-operative effort and a great deal of research which probably have hardly begun. A beginning must however be made.

This paper is therefore an attempt to delimit the geographical limits of the Yorùbá and their related peoples in West Africa, so that we could understand the full historical significance of the colonial period on these peoples.

In doing this, however, there are a large number of serious methodological problems. There is indeed the problem of definition. First, who and who shall we include within the phrase “the Yorùbá and their culturally related peoples” and how do we arrive at our classification? The European model may not be of much help here because citizenship in Europe and America is precisely defined by law. We must find our own definition. In doing so, do we limit ourselves only to those who speak the Yorùbá language and any of its dialects? Do we limit ourselves to those people who claim origin from Ifẹ̀ directly or indirectly? Do we include those people who at one time or the other were either conquered or incorporated into one or the other of the Yorùbá Kingdoms? Or do we look around for peoples who have similar institutions, similar objects of worship, similar concepts of belief and similar customs and include them in this cultural group?

It seems to me that we may have to use a variety of criteria in order to arrive at a near accurate definition of those to be included within the Yorùbá cultural unit. Language obviously is an important consideration. There is no doubt that in any culture or civilization, language is basic, and wherever you find a similar language being spoken, there is no doubt that there must be some historical connection. Therefore, wherever the Yorùbá language or any of its dialects is spoken in West Africa, we must assume that that area at one time or the other formed part of what can be loosely called Yorùbáland. Indeed, in this respect, one would like to suggest that wherever one finds a really heavy dose of vocabulary in a language that one would not otherwise classify as Yorùbá, one’s immediate reaction would be to assume that this has been some historical connection which had resulted into this language infusion, and which therefore, will qualify that area for being included in the Yorùbá area.

Secondly, quite a large area within the Yorùbá cultural group claims to have migrated from Ifẹ̀. Wherever, therefore, one finds this claim, the supposition will be that that area should be included in the Yorùbá cultural continuum. We must however, understand the nature of this claim. Largely, the people who claim

to migrate from Ifẹ̀, particularly in the central Yorùbá homelands, are the immediate ruling groups. In some cases, large numbers of their population may come from the same Ifẹ̀ stock, but more often than not, the ruling group forms the minority at the top, governing a population that may or may not be Yorùbá. Even there where you have such political connection, one's immediate presumption will be that such an area should be included within the Yorùbá civilization area. There is however one condition. The ruling group should have been able in the course of history, to convert the majority of its subjects to Yorùbá culture. Where the group itself has been ascribed into an alien culture, political or economic, then it must be accepted that at some point in history, that territory was no longer part of Yorùbá land.

Where the majority of the people in a territory claim to have migrated from “Ifẹ̀” but that they do not know who Odùduwà was, the point will arise as to how to classify such a group and whether to include such a territory in Yorùbá land. Increasing evidence from ongoing researches is showing that the Odùduwà period in Yorùbá history was preceded by one in which the Yorùbá had a well organized monarchical institution from which the Odùduwà monarchy benefited. From the little that is known the language spoken by these pre-Odùduwà group was not the modern Yorùbá or any of its dialects, but is very much akin to it. From the evidence therefore that such migrants do not speak recognizable Yorùbá, we cannot dismiss their oral tradition as meaningless. Such a group should be included as belonging to Yorùbá cultural group. A much greater linguistic study may show the close affinity. Indeed it is becoming increasingly clear that a large number of the kingdoms which Odùduwà princes are claiming to have ‘founded’ were indeed Yorùbá kingdoms that were existing before, and whose kings were simply superceded. It is probable that quite a few Yorùbá kingdoms were lost to the Odùduwà princes and they never really succeeded in governing all of them. Of those that were lost some have continued to retain the Yorùbá culture. Others have been overcome by other neighboring cultures and have taken on other languages other than Yorùbá. Where such a group have lost their cultural identity, they should be regarded as having been lost to Yorùbá land. Where however they have maintained it, though without Odùduwà kings, they should be included.

Thirdly, where a Yorùbá kingdom has succeeded in incorporating a previously non-Yorùbá group for a sufficiently long period to the extent that such an incorporated group has imbibed the language, the institutions, the religions and the mores of the Yorùbá, it would be legitimate to include such people in the Yorùbá cultural continuum.

Fourthly, precisely because we know that some formerly Yorùbá kingdoms were lost to Odùduwà princes, and that some of those kingdoms may have taken on other languages, it will be legitimate where the

evidences so permit to include them, if we can find similar traits and strong historical links. What seems clear is that we cannot use evidence of a single political authority; we also cannot find a single legal basis.

We have left till this point, the basic question, “who are the Yorùbá” and whether the name ever covered the whole group. I have discussed in other places the common names that were applied to the majority of the group at certain points in history. The contention in this paper though is that the name itself should not be the starting point. Rather it should be the end product and whichever group satisfies all the conditions enumerated above, or a combination of them complicated as they are, should be included in the phrase “Yorùbá civilization.”

Let us therefore briefly attempt to draw the geographical limits as they would probably be understood around the beginning of the eighteenth century. Some areas present very little problems. The present Òyó, Ogun, Ondo, and Lagos states within Nigeria will be easily accepted. A large part of the present Kwara State, particularly the Offa Igbomina, the Ilorin, the Ekiti, the Owe and the Bunu will also present no problem. Westwards, the ancient kingdoms of Ketu, Sabe and the Ana in the present Republic of Benin, and the Atakpama in the present Republic of Togo, will also present no problem in being accepted as falling within Yorùbá land. All the areas so far described are geographically contiguous one to another. All understand one single Yorùbá language, though they have several dialects of the same language. Their traditions and culture, their political associations with one another in war and peace have been continuous. Their rulers and the generality of their people agree that they belong to the Yorùbá stock.

We may raise a question on the kingdom of Ilorin which became an emirate in the third decade of the nineteenth century. In about 1827, the ruling group changed from Yorùbá to Fulani and the official religion became Islam. After 1827, do we continue to regard that emirate as belonging to Yorùbá land? The answer largely is yes. Yorùbá language continued to be the main language and Yorùbá traditional religions continued side by side with Islam. In the ruling elite, Yorùbá men continued to form the majority. Finally, the monarchy itself which was of Fulani origin, lost all the Fulani attributes except the memory, and in all but name, was acculturated into Yorùbá.

Leaving this central area, we should go first to the eastern peripheries. We will take the kingdom of the Edo (Benin) first. If the question is asked whether the Benin kingdom should be included within Yorùbá land, most Yorùbá, including the present author, will automatically answer in the affirmation, The basis of this answer is very well known: the Benin present monarchy is of Odùduwà origin, and quite a number of the cultural attainments of Benin got its inspiration from Ifẹ̀. For a long time also, the language of economy and of art in the

Benin kingdom was Yorùbá. On a second look however, the case of Benin looks very much like that of Ilorin emirate. Therefore the territory may have to be lured even though we know that a great deal of its achievement came from Yorùbá inspiration.

There is however one consideration that may not make the Benin case on all fours with the Ilorin emirate case. We noticed earlier on that there was a pre-Odùduwà “Yorùbá land,” consisting of very many kingdoms; that when the Odùduwà dynasty took over, it did not succeed in “conquering” all of them, and that the language of the pre-Odùduwà peoples can be regarded as “proto-Yorùbá.” Now if we know more about this “proto-Yorùbá,” and we can show that the Edo language is related to this proto language, then we might be able to include the Edo culture in the pre-Odùduwà Yorùbá culture. There are reports that some form of this “proto-Yorùbá” is spoken during traditional ceremonies among the Onitsha Igbo, and given the Onitsha connection with Benin, there may be some clue here. In the meantime a big question mark should hang over the issue of whether Benin should be included in the Yorùbá civilization area. Here is an area that calls for intensive joint research by the historian and the linguist.

Such an interdisciplinary research activity will also have to be conducted into whether the Igala (or Igara in Yorùbá) and the Igbira should be included within the Yorùbá political group. Unlike the Edo it has not been usual to group these people with the Yorùbá. Small glimpses into their organization and cultural traits however tend to suggest that they should henceforth be regarded as belonging to the same cultural continuum as the Yorùbá. The work is urgent.

The case of the Nupe (or Tapa in Yorùbá) towards the north may be different. While they may belong to a different group, it will appear that the southern half of the territory has over the centuries been thoroughly acculturated by the Yorùbá. More than that political relationship between northern Yorùbá and the Nupe appear to have drawn this southern half more and more under Yorùbá influence. Linguistic researches currently going on are discovering how deep the Yorùbá language has eaten into what was Nupe territory. We may therefore have to include such an area within the Yorùbá civilization area.

Westwards and on the southern coastal area we have a number of language groups which should probably be included in the Yorùbá civilization area, much more regularly than they have hitherto been. These are the Egun (Gun), the Fon (or the Ajase, as they are called in Yorùbá) both in the modern Republic of Benin—the Ewe, in the modern Republics of Togo and Ghana. This of course is making very large but not unreasonable proposition. Starting from the extreme west it is amazing to any casual observer how a large number of “Yorùbá” words can be recognized in Gai Krobo and Adangbe. There is no other way that the present

author can explain this than through close historical contact. We know also that all these groups have traditions of migrating from an area east of where they are presently located. In this connection the Ewes also have a tradition of migrating to their present location from an area lying inside the modern boundaries of Nigeria.

As far as I am aware and I am willing to be corrected no scholar has followed these leads to try to find out the historical and cultural connections of these people with their Yorùbá neighbors. We have been more concerned to treat them as separate peoples who have moved when another group approached. I am suggesting that from these small clues, we should conduct inquiries into the history, the language, the religion, the thought system and the social organization of these people with a view to establishing the relationship.

In this connection the fact that the Ga, the Krobo, the Adangbe, and the Ewe, do not mention Odùduwà in their tradition should not discourage us. As we have noticed above, there appears to have been a pre-Odùduwà territory, which the Odùduwà dynasty incompletely took over. These westerwards group may fall into the parts not completely taken over and who have continued the pre-Odùduwà traditions and have developed their language further from the “proto-Yorùbá” of the pre-Odùduwà period.

The claim of the Fan and Egun being included may be similar to those of the Ga, the Krobo and the Adangbe, but it also has the added point that much nearer to the present, and long after the take over of the Odùduwà dynasty, they have come under the political, economic and cultural influence of the Yorùbá. This contact may have strengthened whatever ancient relationships may have existed.

It should be made clear once again, that what has been said about all these people outside the central Yorùbáland are proposition based on positive but meager evidence, but which call for further intensive investigation by various scholars. Hitherto scholars’ approach has been to look for differences. What is being suggested here is that a much more fruitful approach will be to look for similarities among the people delimited within this West African territory. We may discover that there is a great deal of similarity even in the present languages spoken by the Edo, the Ewe, the Fon, and the Ga. We may discover that modes of worship and concepts of belief are similar barring differences arising from geographical location. Whatever we do, we cannot go on accepting the mental framework imposed by our colonial tradition

It will be noticed that I have not spoken of the Yorùbá in the diaspora. That is because this paper is concerned with the territory which can be regarded as belonging to the Yorùbá cultural group. The relevance of this to the Yorùbá in the diaspora however is clear. If we can establish quite clearly within West Africa the cultural groups that can be broadly called Yorùbá, then the observable cultural traits surviving in the diaspora will be much more completely understood.

The advantages of a renewed study in this direction will be clear immediately to researchers. Certainly the boundaries of our knowledge of West African peoples will be increased. Large number of questions will arise as to how the differences noticeable nowadays between these peoples came about and what really to make of those differences. On the practical side far from this greater understanding causing friction, it should really draw the peoples together through a greater understanding of their past.

CHAPTER TWO
THE DIFFUSION OF SOME YORÙBÁ ARTEFACTS
AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

By
J.R.O. Ojo

In this paper, I want to consider the diffusion of artifacts and social institutions within the Yorùbá cultural matrix, and their adoption by some of her neighbors. I will also discuss some items that have been absorbed by the Yorùbá from her neighbors.

By way of definition, institution in this paper refers to established custom, usage, practice, organization and other elements in the social life of a people. An artifact is a material object that features in the social life of a people. Artifacts are the components of the material culture of a people and the tangible aspects which, in Malinowski's words, complements a less easily categorized body of knowledge, system of morals, spiritual and economic values, social organization and language (1931: 622).

Diffusion is the spread of social institutions and their artifactual components from one group to another. My brand of diffusionism, following Nadel, is of a more geographically restricted scope and greater precision than the hyper-diffusionist German *kulturkreis* in which artifacts and institutions are linked in grand sweeping schemes of universal reconstruction (Nadel 1951: 4; Ojo 1974a: 317).

Historical observation and the geographical plotting of culture traits and complexes establish that all peoples are always borrowing from others (Hoebel 1949: 597). Simply put, culture traits diffuse from one people to another. Of the varieties of diffusion that exist, I shall be concerned only with intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic diffusion. The former, involving the exchange of ideas and traits between people or the same ethnic stock is much more persistent and inevitable than the latter, the diffusion between two different ethnic groups. Intra-ethnic diffusion proceeds more smoothly because of the relation of the new features to pre-existing culture (Goldenweiser 1937: 494). In addition, the new features may fill a pre-existing need, or match the outlook and need of the group to which the features diffused (Nadel 1951: 4).

My discussion will be in three sections. First, I will consider elements of Yorùbá culture which have diffused within the Yorùbá-speaking group; I will then consider Yorùbá elements diffused outside Yorùbáland; finally, I will mention objects which have diffused from other groups to Yorùbáland. As much as possible, I will

outline factors responsible for the diffusion, whether intra- and inter-ethnic.

INTRA-ETHNIC DIFFUSION

The elements I will consider here are Egúngún, ancestral masquerades, which are the most tangible manifestations of ancestor worship; Şàngó, a deified Aláàfin of Òyó who is also associated with thunder and lightning; Òrişà Oko, the deity associated with farming; Òşun, a deity associated with the river of the same name; and Èpa type masquerade headpieces used in masking rituals in North East Yorùbáland, but also found in other parts of Yorùbáland.

Egúngún, of which there are two varieties—one used in ancestor worship, and the other in secular entertainment—is of several types in Yorùbáland. Egúngún is specifically associated with the Òyó Yorùbá, hence the name Egúngún Òyó (Adedeji 1969: 6). According to Ogunba (1967: 26) Egúngún is ubiquitous within the Yorùbá cultural matrix, existing side-by-side with local varieties such as Gèlèdè among the Ègbá Yorùbá; Èpa among the Ìgbómìnà and Northern Èkìtì Yorùbá.

But the *locus classicus* of Egúngún is among the Yorùbá groups living in Òyó, Ìbàdàn and Òşun provinces of Òyó State, in Western Nigeria. The spread of the Egúngún to the last two provinces, as well as Ègbá, Ègbádò, Ìjèbú and the former Ifè town of Apamu, IkÌré, Gbòngán, Ìpétumodù, Modàkeke, and also Òkè-gbo, some northern, Ijesha towns, Ìgbómìnà and northern Èkìtì is due largely to the movements outwards of Òyó Yorùbá elements as a result of pressure from the North, the extent of Òyó and later Ìbàdàn Empiré, peaceful migration and contact between neighboring Yorùbá sub-ethnic groupings (Ojo and Olajubu: forthcoming).

According to oral tradition, Egúngún was introduced to Ìbàdàn through the ‘backyard’ of Òyó (Adedeji 1969: 171; Babalola 1966: 156-7; 1967: 94, 97). Oral tradition is, understandably, silent about the historical circumstances. It is worth remembering that the site of Ìbàdàn was an Ègbá Gbágürá town later peopled by a motley crowd of Ifè, and Òyó Yorùbá elements fleeing from incursions from the north, and the Ègbá and Ìjèbú victors of Òwu war; that the Ègbá and Ìjèbú pulled out and that the Ifè were expelled on account of their leader’s (Máyè) high-handedness so, that eventually the Òyó Yorùbá became dominant (Fadipe 1970: 43-45; Johnson 1921: 224-6, 244; Morgan n.d. 59-60, 68). Egúngún was introduced to Ìbàdàn as part of the culture of the dominant group, in the same way that it spread to areas peopled by predominantly Òyó Yorùbá groups.

The collapse of the Òyó Empiré led to the augmentation of Ìbàdàn, Ijaye, Iwo, Ogbomosho, Modakeke and other towns with Òyó refugees (Akinjogbin 1965: 46; Fadipe 1970: 42). Also, after the expulsion of Ifè from Ìbàdàn camp, the Òyós in Ìbàdàn took the pre-emptive step of sacking Ìpétumodù to where the Ifè in

Apòmù had fled. These two towns with Ìkirè, Akiribótó and Gbòngán were in Ifè territory, with towns such as Ìwó and Èdẹ, they had been playing hosts to ÒyóYorùbá refugees (Akintoye 1966: 38-9; Johnson, 1921: 247; Morgan n.d. 69-70).

All these towns became vassals of Ìbàdàn which at the height of its power, lorded it over people residing in the present Òṣun, Ìgbómìnà, Ìjẹ̀sà, Èkìtì and Àkókó. But the planting of Òyó cultural element such as Egúngún was not so much because of the vassalage, but because of the presence of ÒyóYorùbá elements in large numbers (Akintoye 1970: 36-7).

Ìgbómìnà territory classified by Johnson as Yorùbá proper came under the influence of Òyó Empiré which was said to have extended as far as Òtùn, which formed a buffer between her and Benin Empiré. Much later, Ìbàdàn armies foraged through Ìgbómìnà on their way to Òtùn. Ìbàdàn eventually colonized towns in Ìgbómìnà territory, Ìlá, the capital becoming the sanatorium and resting place for the Ìbàdàn in their military campaigns (Johnson 1921: 391,394-5, 403). It is quite possible that like Òyó before her, Ìbàdàn used Egúngún as part of the system of political control. We are told that in the general uprising against Ìbàdàn rule in Ìlá, the Egúngún chief priest was killed,(Akintoye 1970: 78, 80-81; Johnson 1921: 368, 425-6, 428).

During the peace negotiations between the warring factions, controversy arose as to which side should retain such towns as Òtan, Adà, Ìrẹ̀sì, Ìgbájó which, like Ìrágbijí, Ìré, Aágba and Òṣogbo, were Ìjẹ̀sà towns swamped by Òyó immigrants (Akintoye 1966: 60, 139, 253). Some of these towns speak Òyó dialects with local overtones (Òtan), and organize Òyó type festivals (Ìrágbijí) using eastern Yorùbá artifacts. In Ìlá, there are Èpa type festivals; one of the best motifs in Èpa complex is named Òràngún Ìlá in Èkìtì and Ìgbómìnà.

An Aláàfin of Òyó was reputed to have sent an expeditionary force to Ìjẹ̀sà territory, but in spite of Ìbàdàn expeditions ÒyóYorùbá gained little foothold. There is therefore little cultural assimilation, so that the occurrence of Egúngún in northern Ìjẹ̀sà towns such as Ìlára and Ìmẹ̀sí is more likely through the activities of immigrants. This is confirmed in the case of Ìmẹ̀sí (Adedeji 1969: 106, n.42); and said to be the case in Èfòn Alááyè in Èkìtì. It is also said to be the case in Òkè-gbo which Ifè, with the help of Òyó refugees, wrested from Ondo (Akintoye 1966: 230, 281, 1970: 35).

Ègbádo, where Egúngún co-exists with the indigenous Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ masquerade was under the political suzerainty of Òyó. Indeed according to Folayan, the co-ordinating link between the different Ègbádò groups was provided by Òyó's imperial power. The consolidation of Òyó in Ègbádò was helped by the presence of large numbers of Òyó immigrants. Not only were the Aláàfin's messengers stationed in Ègbádò towns, the Oba

of Ìlarõ led other Ègbádò rulers

to Òyó during the annual festivals (Folayan 1967: 28) .

Egúngún cult is very prominent in Abéòkúta where the various Ègbá villages settled for safety. Àgúrá, one of the three groups of Ègbá-occupied an area nearer to Òyó than now, and contained large numbers of Òyó Yorùbá (Biobaku 1957: 3, map 1; Johnson 1921: 4,17). At some point, Abéòkúta accepted Òyó's overlordship; the Aláàfin's political agents instituted Òyó deities such as Sàngó. The 1830 revolt notwithstanding, there is some degree of cultural assimilation resulting in the planting of elements of Òyó culture governmental practices (Biobaku 1957: 8, 14-15).

An Ìbádàn tradition credits Oluyole with the introduction of Egúngún to Ìjèbú. A masquerade annoyed Oluyole so much that he sold him fully clad in Egúngún costume to an Ìjèbú slave dealer. On arrival in Ìjèbú, the Ìbádàn masker taught Ìjèbú people the secrets of the Egúngún cult (Morgan n.d. 86-7). In general, Egúngún is believed to have reached Ìjèbú Yorùbá through the migration of cult members to the area. An Egúngún chant says: "Masquerades were never in Ìjèbú, it was Fagade's father that brought masquerades to Rémọ. Fagade's father is said to have come from Ofa.

Ogunba has concluded that the most convincing evidence of the foreign Origin of Egúngún to Ìjèbúland is that the chants are in Òyó dialect (1967: 192-3; 198). He noted further that Egúngún is not found in Ìjèbú hinterland, but in the outlying areas of Ijebu Igbo and some Rémọ towns. It is absent in Ìjèbú Ode, Imuṣin, Ìjèbú Ifẹ and Ìkòròdú where like Ilé-Ifẹ, masquerades are taboo.² The areas of Ìjèbú where Egúngún is found have been subject to Òyó and Ègbá influence. Rémọ towns took over Egúngún from their Ègbá neighbors while Ìjèbú Igbó received it from their neighbors (1967: 191-2).

In sum, if according to Akinjogbin (1965: 27) the various territories colonized by Òyó (and later Ìbádàn), became part of a single cultural, economic, and political unit with a preponderance of ÒyóYorùbá population, it is axiomatic that Egúngún, one of the pivots of Òyó religious life, should be present in such areas. One should also agree with Akintoye (1966: 39-40; 47, 73, 19) that the preponderance of ÒyóYorùbá in certain areas was a pre-requisite for the planting of Òyó culture.

Where the local populace adopted Egúngún, it is because Egúngún has affinities with local practices or redresses some inadequacy, i.e., that the local types if any, do not represent the ancestors. Everywhere, the underlying factor is the connection of Egúngún with ancestor worship, for wherever the ÒyóYorùbá went, they performed ancestral rituals. And in those places where non-Òyó groups adopted Egúngún, it was assimilated into the ancestral rituals of the local group.

Although it is unlikely that adoption was under pressure exerted by Ọ̀yọ̀Yorùbá overlords (cf. Nadel 1954: 221), it will be apposite here to discuss briefly the political implications of the Egúngún cult in areas subject to Ọ̀yọ̀Yorùbá influence. Morton-Williams noted that Egúngún was introduced to Ègbádò by the Aláàfin's political emissaries and became assimilated into the local ritual and political system (1967: 341). Babayemi wrote that Egúngún was an important agent of Ọ̀yọ̀ administration, developing into a social and political weapon to back up Ọ̀yọ̀ imperialism. Alapinni, the political head of the Egúngún cult in Ọ̀yọ̀ was a member of the Ọ̀yọ̀mesi, the supreme council of state. Alágbàà the ritual head, was concerned with rituals of the cult. Cult members in Ọ̀yọ̀ were sent to assist Alágbàà and members of the cult in provincial towns. Such activities were monitored and reported to the Aláàfin to whom the provincial cutis pay tribute during their own and the festival in Ọ̀yọ̀ (Babayemi n.d..25-26). This arrangement is in a way similar to Nadel's discussion of Nupe State and Community where religious leadership reflects political power, and religious cooperation stands for political union (1935a:273).

A similar situation obtains in the worship of Şàngó. Morton-Williams noted that Şàngó priests inÈgbádò received training in Ọ̀yọ̀ and that the cult breached the religious autonomy of the Ọ̀yọ̀ dependencies (1967: 319). Atanda also wrote that the Ọ̀yọ̀mesi met ostensibly to worship Şàngó, but discussed government business. The chief priest of each religious cult resided in the capital to ensure co-operation between the Aláàfin's administration and chief priests of the cults. This, he went on, was particularly true of Şàngó which was more or less nationwide and was one of the unifying factors of the Empire (Atanda 1973: 17, 20, 25-6; Biobaku 1957: 8).

Ọ̀rişà Oko was also an agent of Ọ̀yọ̀ imperialism (Babayemi n.d.). Although the headquarters of the cult was at Ìràwọ̀, the chief priest was responsible to Laguna, the chief priest of Ọ̀rişà Oko in Ọ̀yọ̀ and a member of the Ọ̀yọ̀mesi. Apeko is the liaison between the palace priest and adherents in the metropolis and the provinces. Initiands to and from Ìràwọ̀ pass through Ọ̀yọ̀ and pay pecuniary tribute to Aláàfin, the chief priest at Ìràwọ̀ also pays tribute to the Aláàfin through Laguna (Babayemi n.d. 27-28).

It is accepted among Ọ̀yọ̀Yorùbá that Ìràwọ̀ is the Origin and home of Ọ̀rişà-Oko. The cult is found as far apart as Abẹ̀òkúta and small villages in Èkìtì. In one of the latter, I was informed that the cult was introduced from Ọ̀yọ̀ area (Ojo, 1972/73: 26). A line in one of the songs in the village refers to Ọ̀rişà Oko as *L'òdẹ I'Éyò*, The hunter of Èyò. I was told that Èyò is the old name for Ọ̀yọ̀. Another line was more specific, referring to Ọ̀rişà Oko as native of Ọ̀yọ̀. We are thus left in no doubt as to the Origin of the cult, although the exact town is not specific, we can infer that it is a Yorùbá proper phenomenon.

The same can be said of Ọṣun cult in Èkìtì where Local streams serve as metonymical representations of river Ọṣun. The cult is prominent in Ọṣogbo, but it is found all along entire water course of the river Ọṣun and in other places such as Abẹ̀òkúta where river Ọṣun does not exist. Towns near Oshogo such as Írágbijí and Ìkìrun organize rituals during which wooden bowls of the type used in Ọṣun rituals are carried to a local stream. In addition, the cults of Erinlẹ̀ and Otin, named after rivers of the same names, are structurally similar to that of Ọṣun. It will be rash to claim that Ọṣun cult diffused from Ọṣogbo to other Yorùbá towns. But it is safe to postulate that local cults of Ọṣun in towns near Ọṣogbo have derived inspiration from Ọṣogbo. Some people however claim that there are centers of Ọṣun worship as important as Osogbo (such as Iponda in Ìjẹ̀sà land), but that Ọṣun Ọṣogbo has received more publicity.

So far, I have been considering elements which seem to be peculiar to the Ọ̀yọ̀Yorùbá groups and which have diffused to other Yorùbá groups. But there are items which Originated in other areas and diffused to Ọ̀yọ̀Yorùbá groups. One of these is Ẹpa type masquerade headpieces which is found mainly among the Èkìtì and Ìgbómìnà, but have been recorded in Írágbijí, Ìlobù, Ọṣogbo and Ifẹ̀ (Ojo 1974b: 178-184).

Beier writing on the Orí Ọ̀kẹ̀ festival mentioned five Ẹpa type masquerade headpieces named Ọṣun, Erinlẹ̀, Odo and Laaromo. I was informed that there used to be more than twenty. One of these, Olugbakun, displaying an equestrian motif is in the University of Ifẹ̀ Antiquities Collection. I have pointed out elsewhere that the names of these headpieces and the context their usage is the result of interaction between Western Yorùbá rituals and the religious ceremonial of eastern Yorùbáland (1974b: 178).

Verger also recorded Ẹpa style carvings in the Ọṣun shrine in Ọṣogbo. The motifs include horse riders and mother with children, two recurrent themes in the Ẹpa masquerade complex of North Central Yorùbáland. Others are named Ọ̀rìṣànlá, Yemòò, Ọ̀rìṣà Oko, Ọ̀sanyìn and Oya. One in particular is named Tẹ̀fòndé, 'that which came from Èfòn', a name which betrays the remote origin of these carvings. Some Ẹpa type headpieces are named Èlẹ̀fòn they are said to have come from Èfòn (Ojo 1974b: 59, 98).

Beier recorded an Ẹpa style carving in Ìlobù where it is used in Otin cult (1957: plate 28). He noted that it was carved to specifications from Ekonde near Ìgbómìnà territory from where the cult was introduced to Ìlobù.

Bascom has outlined the rituals of Èlẹ̀fòn in Ile-Ifẹ̀ where like some Èkìtì towns, he is connected with war (Bascom 1944: 33; Ojo 1974: 183). Chief Ọbaláayè of Iraye, Ile Ifẹ̀, also has a headpiece named Èlẹ̀fòn, shaped like an inverted pot about 20 inches high. It has a scar, like that described by Bascom, said to have been in battle (Bascom 1944: 33; Ojo 1974b: 182-3).

One can conclude in agreement with Brain and Pollock (1971), that people trade in art objects as they would in material wealth of all kinds. Apart from the Epa style carvings described above, carvings are to be found in central Yorùbáland. Further afield, Ìgbómìnà people are said to have exported Epa headpieces from Èfòn Alááyè and Ọ̀tùn I may also mention in passing that in addition to his Èlẹ̀fòn, the Ọ̀balááyè in Ile Ifẹ̀ had two houseposts (now in the University Antiquity Collection) and beaded objects made in Èfòn (Ojo 1974: 183-4).

INTER-ETHNIC DIFFUSION

I will start this section with Egúngún which has not only diffused within Yorùbáland, but beyond. I will then consider the diffusion of Ifá as a system of divination, and two objects associated with Ifá, but one at least of which seems to have diffused independent of the Ifá complex.

EGÚNGÚN

The word occurs among the Nupe as Gugu, Egwu among the Igala, Egugu and Egwugwu among western Ibo. Among the Igbira (Moronfolu 1971: 94), it is known as Ekwu, probably a derivation of the Yorùbá word *ẹ̀kú*, the ancestral masquerade costume.

It is often claimed that Egúngún secrets were revealed to the Yorùbá by the Nupe in the 16th century and that the first priests came from Nupeland (Johnson 1921: 160). Adedeji noted that Egúngún is a word of Yorùbá Origin denoting ancestral spirit, but that during the reign of Ofinran. (c.1544) descendants of Ọ̀ba and others from Nupeland brought Egúngún and joined remnants of Ọ̀yọ́ refugees from Bariba country (1967: viii; 6). But Adedeji has also pointed out that some towns of the old Ọ̀yọ́ Empire which feature in praise poems and Egúngún chants are located on the frontiers with Nupeland and Borgu (Bariba) (1967: 116). It has therefore been suggested that the references to Tapa (Nupe) in Egúngún chants might be a reflection of the nostalgia generated by the Ọ̀yọ́ Yorùbá memory of their former homeland where they must have moved more freely with the Nupe (Ojo & Olajubu: forthcoming).

Now the Nupe regard masquerade as foreign referring to the 'gugu' dance of the Yorùbás. According to Nadel, although the Nupe sacrifice to the ancestors, they do not have an ancestral cult of which Egúngún is a part on the same scale as the Yorùbá. They do not constantly worry about placating spirits of the ancestors (1954: 277). Mask dances with face masks are found around Mokwa, an area which Nadel described as the

gateway for cultural influences from the Yorùbá (Ọ̀yọ́) and Yagba, a Yorùbá sub-ethnic group (1942: 12, 16, 56).

He contrasted Nupe usages with other customs and forms of behavior such as “worship of human figures and idols” and the use of face-like masks which the neighboring Yorùbá use in their ritual dances. Yorùbá religious practices, he went on, can be found in those places west and south of the Niger where Yorùbá and Nupe villages are interspersed, and in certain cases together as twin village. In addition, since about 1860 onwards, colonies of Yorùbás have settled in Nupe villages, where though Nupelized in language and mode of life still publicly perform Egúngún, gugu to the Nupe, which he described as a funeral rite and an annual ritual safeguarding fertility and well-being (1954: 208).

Another masked ritual *elo*, with no meaning in Nupe, resembles the Egúngún in costume and dance gestures. The masks were carved in Shonga, a mixed Nupe Yorùbá village. As recently as the mid-sixties *elo* masquerades were recorded together with Egúngún in Mokwa, the latter using carved headpieces similar to those from Abéòkúta and Ègbádò. (Nadel 1954: 214; Stevens 1973: 40-43).

Father Arinze, in a discussion of the ancestors and human soul among the Ibo, describes Ibo masquerading as one of the manifestations of the belief that the soul never dies. Ibo “practice of masquerading is Nmuo or Egugwu”. The same practice, he added, is found among the Yorùbá who call it Egúngún from where he says the Ibo word Egwugwu or Egugu might have derived (1970:18). But unfortunately Father Arinze did not specify in which part of Iboland Mmuo is referred to as Egwugwu.

Seton (1929-30: 46) believes that Egu among the Igala came from Iboland. From all available evidence, this is in fact not so. As I will show in the case of *Ifá* (Igala) and *Afa* (Nsukka Ibo), it could have been the other way round.

Boston in a detailed monograph on Igala political organization (1968) mentioned several types of Egwu. One of these, *Egwu Afla* is one of the three pivots of the clan ancestral cult. The other two are the ancestral shrines and *okwute* (1968: 131, 159). Egwu Ata, the royal masquerade represents the king’s ancestor during the annual festivals, and is one of the most important aspects of the palace division of the ancestral cult (1968: 172).

In general, for the Igala, Egwu is a national festival, being an occasion for ancestral rituals to be performed throughout the kingdom; it is also a ritual for the clan ancestors (1968: 218). Perhaps, here much more than the Yorùbá, we see an intimate connection between masquerades and ancestor worship.

Okwute among the Igala are ancestral cult objects. There are nine representing the ruling dynasty, and representing the royal ancestors as a group. They are brass bound wooden staffs wrapped in red cloth (*ododo*) and stored in the ancestral the palace. Offerings are made to them during the Egwu festival (Boston 1968:

167, 196-7; Seton 1929-30: 155). Boston further notes that Egwu ceremony and the King's accession rituals are similar in respect of offerings made to the *okwute* staffs (1968: 2907). At the death of a new king and the accession of another, a new staff is made, and the oldest one discarded.

As described among the Ìjẹ̀bù Yorùbá by Ogunba, *okute* is like a robust walking stick carved at one end in the form of the face of a past king. There are eighteen in Idowa; those at Ìjẹ̀bù are lost. Carved in hard wood, Ogunba sees similarities in the Ìjẹ̀bù staff and those Benin which are carved with the same of wood but are longer, about six feet high. I have been informed that there are *okute* among Òkítìpupa Yorùbá where according to a Western Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, an annual *okute* ceremony is held.

Before discussing Ifá divination among the Igala from where there is abundant evidence that it diffused to northern Iboland as Afa, I want to point out the meager evidence of Yorùbá connections with Igala. A northern Ibo informant told Shelton that Igala hunted with Yorùbá hunters from whom the former learn more ogwugwu medicine in addition to what they already know (1971: 22).

According to one source, a Yorùbá king traveled to Raba and requested the king of Nupeland to show him a suitable place to settle. He was taken down the river Niger to Idah where the aboriginal Akpoto (Okpoto) allowed him to settle (Boston 1964:17). Another source claimed that the first Ata of Igala was a hunter who came from a place near Ado which some think is Benin. But if as Armstrong rightly pointed out, Igala is more closely related to the Yorùbá than Edo, I am therefore suggesting that Ado Èkìtì be considered. According to another tradition collected by Seton, the Igala were driven across the Niger from Yorùbá country by a king of Benin (Armstrong 1955: 80). I need only mention in support of this tradition that Benin armies ravaged through Èkìtì at the height of its power. But as Armstrong concluded, the connections of Igala with the Yorùbá is far from being explored (1955: 81).

Turning to more concrete evidence, the Yorùbá speaking group extend as far the west bank of the Niger around Lokoja. This has been indicated by Ojo (1966) who wrote that the population of Kabba district contains more than ninety percent of Yorùbá ethnic stock. Igala was an administrative division of Kabba province; it is therefore safe to suggest that cultural influences have flowed between the two groups on either side the Niger.

The Kabba groups, Aworo, Bunu, and Ijumu, Owe (Kabba) and Yagba all speak related dialects of the Yorùbá language. Their greeting, "*okun*," which Krapf-Askari thinks is Nupe in Origin is actually a standard greeting among the Èkìtì Yorùbá. The social structure is considerably akin to that of Èkìtì (Krapf-Askari 1964-65: i; 1966: 4). From her evidence, we gather that Kabba claim to have migrated from Ifẹ̀. They worship a category of spirits known as *ẹ̀bọ̀ra*, a word also variously used among the Èkìtì, Ìjẹ̀sà and Ifẹ̀. Other features

of Kabba religion is the presence of Ifá diviners who are freely consulted, the worship of Ogun by hunters and blacksmiths, and the Egúngún cult (1964-65: 9-10; 1966: 3-4).

Whatever the reason for classifying Kabba with Igala in the same administrative division, there must have been peaceful relations between them, resulting in cultural contacts such that significant items of social institutions like Ifá and Egúngún are present among both groups.

Ifá among the Igala crops up frequently in Boston's *Igala Kingdom*. Seton before him described the paraphernalia of Igala Ifá as consisting of four strings on each of which are four seeds separated by seven or eight cowries and backbone joints of fish. This is different from the Yorùbá opele, and there is no mention of palm kernels and other items associated with Yorùbá Ifá divination. But the name, and more important, the purpose among both Yorùbá and Igala people is the same.

Ifá features in Igala legends of origin. It is consulted in all serious misfortunes, before any major decision of state is put into effect in any crisis affecting the king such as succession to kingship and finding out whether witchcraft by his wives caused the king's death (Boston, 1968: 24, 35, 107, 225, 238). Ifá may also attribute misfortune to ritual pollution of the land, in which case, offerings would then be made at the national land shrine. Household shrines can also be set up in response to a direction from Ifá (1968: 158, 221).

Shelton has described Afa divination paraphernalia among the Nsukka Ibo. Like Igala paraphernalia, there are four strings of four seed pods (1965: 1443). He did not know the Origin; neither did his Ibo informants who said they were introduced by ancestors at an indeterminable time in the past. Indeed for Shelton, "apparently ethnologists in general" do not know the origin of Afa among the northern Ibo.

In his 1971 monograph on the Igala-Igbo borderland (Nsukka village region) he quoted Talbot that the method of divination in Nsukka "may have derived from Yorùbá Ifá". Shelton failed to trace Ifá, to Igala even though he was aware that the Igbo speak of domination of the northern Nsukka Ibo villages by the Igala, a domination that resulted in the substitution of Igbo shrine priests by Igala Attama and the addition of Igala lineages of diviners (1971 xi-xii).

The attama is often the diviner and makes offerings to the *alusi*. The Igala settlers monopolized divination and were the only mediators between the Igbo and the powerful, often hostile and imponderable *alusi* spirits (1971: 151, 240). *Alusi* are the numberless intermediary spirits between the Igbo and their High God, *Chukwu* (Shelton 1965: 1441, Arinze 1970: 12-13). To exist peacefully with the violent, capricious and hostile *alusi*, the village needs the diviner who can read and interpret the will of supernatural entities. He is consulted to find out which unforeseen force may be the cause for matters which cannot be logically handled.

Afa, as divination is called in northern Nsukka region, is a significant element in their lives, enabling them to satisfy their need to understand that which would otherwise remain unknown and therefore uncontrollable (Shelton 1971: 200-203). The supplicant does not understand the language of Afa; the diviner translates the 'words' into advice for the supplicant and not into Igbo language. It is instructive to read of the 'words' which come out when Afa is cast: *Ọbara ohu,, ohu abara, ohu ogute, ose ogute, okara eturukpa, eturukpa eka, eka Ọbara and eturukpa Ọbara* (Shelton 1965: 1449, 1450~ 1453).

Unfortunately, there is no information about the names of verses of Ifá among the Igala from where it now seems obvious, Ifá came to Nsukka region. But anyone conversant with Yorùbá Ifá divination will see the connection between these words and *Odù* verses of Yorùbá Ifá. It seems that this method of divination was accepted in Nsukka area because it fulfils a need, the need to communicate and placate unpredictable spirits, *alusi*.

Eba is one of the two methods of divination among the Nupe, the other being *hati* of Mohammedan origin (Nadel 1954: 8). *Eba* consists in throwing strings of shells and resembles the Igala and northern Ibo method, and the Yorùbá use of òpèlè chain. Among the Nupe, the divining apparatus of *eba* and the interpretation is uniform, unlike the method. The apparatus consists of eight strings each strung with four perforated hollow half shells placed equidistantly along the string. There is also a set of marked slabs-like dominoes, which serve as key to the throws of the divining chains. The technique and the interpretation are described in detail by Nadel (1954: 39ff).

As is the case with Egúngún, the existing evidence does not support the theory that Ifá came to Yorùbáland from Nupeland. There is apparent contradiction in Johnson's account of its introduction to Yorùbáland. We are told that it was introduced by a Nupeman at about the time of the Mohammedan invasions. The diviner was expelled by the Nupe, who then traveled through Benin, Owo and Ado Èkìtì before finally settling in Ile-Ifè where he met Oduduwa. Yet Ifá was introduced into Yorùbáland in historical times, the time of the jihad in the North (Johnson 1921:32-33)

Cylindrical bark boxes are the most sacred utensils of Ifá in Yorùbáland. In Ilé-Ifè, the carrier of this box, *àpèrè*, leads the procession in the final rites of the annual festival. Each box consists of two discs of wood joined by closely fitting bark cylinders so that the cover completely encloses the box. They are very difficult to open, and are not meant to be opened, not even by the owner. The boxes contain sacred objects and are owned by higher grades of Ifá priest-hood. I have seen it used as a ritual seat by a masquerade who also used an Ifá staff as a ritual walking stick in Èkìtì. Bradbury noticed one on a Benin object associated with the cult of the hand. There, they are used as containers for carrying valuables, offerings and valuable gifts. They are also used as thrones over a

wide area formerly subject to Benin influence (1961:132). They have been recorded among the Igala and across the border in the Nsukka region.

This box is associated with Ifá in Yorùbáland, but not in the other places where they have been recorded. It is quite possible that they did not originate in Yorùbáland, but were adopted as part of the utensils of Ifá divination because the manufacture ensures that the nature of the contents will be kept secret.

Ifá and Òsanyìn staffs occur in varying forms and are found in Dahomey, among the Yorùbá groups and in Benin. Slightly similar iron staffs are found in Iboland (Nzimiro 1964:30), whilst the Igala examples are identical with the Benin ones (Boston 1964:20), cf. Ojo 1972).

Westermann has drawn attention to the “ceremonial implements in the form of richly ornamented staffs found among Ewe, Yorùbá and neighboring people, also among Benin...often adorned with figures of the chameleon.” I have no information about the Ewe staffs, but according to Mercier, the Dahomean staffs consist of four kinds. One of these is used in the cult of Ifá divination. It is called *asen acrelele* and similar to staffs used in Ifá divination among the Yorùbá (1952:13-14)

Yorùbá Ifá staffs are variously known as *òrèrè*, *òsun babaláwo* or *òpá òsòòrò*. They vary in the height of three to four and a half feet, and are surmounted by one, but sometimes up to three birds. On the stem are two sets of four small iron rattles which jingle when the staff is struck on the ground. The bird is *Èyè Òsanyìn*, but the staff is not Òpá Òsanyìn, although they may be so called especially in Èkìtì. Among the central Yoruba, Òpá Òsanyìn consists of a central shaft surmounted by a bird below which are arranged with sixteen other birds on a ring attached to the central stem. They are seldom more than two feet high.

The Èkìtì variants of the long staff have, in addition to the birds and bells, representations of the chameleon like those described by Westermann. The Èkìtì staffs seem to have combined western Yorùbá motifs with themes from Benin *osu-ematon* staffs which also have representations of the chameleon. The Èkìtì staffs are called *Òrèrè* and are used in various religious ceremonies apart from Ifá and Òsanyìn. (Ojo 1972/3:31-32, 45)

The staffs in Benin have been described as very important *osu*. Like the Èkìtì staffs, they are ornamented with two chameleons, one above and one below the sets of bells (*aja*); but unlike them, other objects surround the birds. These are knife, hoe, axe, machet, ceremonial sword and sacrificial knife (Denet 1906:192-95; Von Luschan 1919: Tafel 108-109).

Osu, according to Melzian, is the power active in leaves and herbs used in medicines and charms. But according to Bradbury's impeccable ethnography, Osun is the god of medicine whose devotees are professional

doctors. Osun's assistance must be sought to ensure effective use of all medicine. (1957: 53-54) In addition, the iron staffs embody the power of the god of medicine, *osu*. The purpose then seems to be the same as that of Yorùbá *Ọ̀sanyìn* in staffs.

There is no confusion in the Èkìtì usage of Ifá type staffs as *Ọ̀sanyìn* staffs. The Ifá priest may refer his client to an *Ọ̀sanyìn* priest; on the other hand, some Ifá priests combine the duties of the herbalist with divination. The *Ọ̀sanyìn* bird on Ifá staffs is supposed to carry the influence of *Ọ̀sanyìn* to whatever the Ifá priest does. *Ọ̀sanyìn* is also said by some to be the constant companion of Ifá.

I suppose that the Dahomean models owe something to Yorùbá examples, and that the Èkìtì staffs combine Yorùbá and Benin motifs as the area was for a long time subject to Benin influence. 5

I will like to close this section with a note on items which from linguistic evidence, seem to have been adopted by the Yorùbá's western neighbors in the Republic of Benin (Dahomey.)

Fa in Dahomean cosmology is the unity and speech of Mawu the creator, who with Lisa, gave birth to all matters affecting human destiny. The sixteen combinations or lines made by the diviner are Du, each having an involved mythology, and each myth representing the experience of the human race (Argyle 1966:193; Herskovits 1932:290.)

The will of Mawu can only be made known to man through the agency of Legba, the youngest son of Mawu who brought Fa to the world. Legba must be fed before Fa and seems to be playing the same role as Yorùbá *Èṣù* (*Èlégba*) in relation to Ifá. Mawu's decision as to the individual's destiny is contained in Fa; the execution of Mawu's command must be carried by Legba to the Deity that will execute Mawu's wish. (Herskovits 1932:29)

In the cult of Fa is *gbadu*, described as a calabash containing four smaller calabashes and certain animal and vegetable matters (Argyle 1966: 194) Regarded with awe, it is of foreign Origin, but has adapted itself to the indigenous religious system. Argyle's description fits the Yorùbá example except that the outer container is not a calabash, but a cylindrical bark box.

DIFFUSION INTO YORÙBÁ LAND

Of the artifacts of social institutions which, from internal and external evidence, diffused into Yorùbáland, I will mention only two-*omo*, bronze bells, and Nupe *ndako gboya* masquerades.

Omo bronze bells are either square in section, splaying outwards from top to mouth or round in section or dome shaped. These bells are found on ancestral shrines in Benin City, and along the coastal region from the

Delta to Mahin in Òkìtìpupa, as far inland as Ìjèbù-ode, further north among the Ìgbómìnà and Èkìtì. They are also hung on state drums among the Nupe.

The bells in Delta are found in association with objects with Benin charter of origin. The bells in Ìjèbù have forehead markings as on certain Ògbóni objects, and objects from Benin. As in Benin, the Ìjèbù bells are associated with the ancestors, as are bells in Ìlá which are used during annual ancestral masquerade festivals. In Èkìtì, they are used in the Èpa masquerade complex.⁶ In all three Yorùbá communities, they are known as *Òmò*.

What are the reasons for the wide ranging occurrence of these bells? Benin influence is said to have extended beyond Lagos and there are traditions of contact with Ìjèbù. The Benin were very active militarily in northeast Yorùbáland and maintained a base in Obo, a center of bronze casting. Tsoede with whom the Nupe bells are associated (Nadel 1942:74) is said to have come up with the River Niger from Idah which came under Benin's artistic influence.

Finally, we come to Nupe *ndako gboya* masquerades which the Yorùbá refer to as *ìgunnu*, and the rituals in which they appear as Ìgunnukó. The costume of the masquerade is a huge cylinder of cloth about fifteen feet high hanging down from circular rings fixed on a wooden pole. The man inside, representing 'spirit' or ancestor *gboya*, stands inside the mask carrying the pole in his hand. With this, he controls the height of the masquerade (Nadel 1935b: 435; 1954:190). In Nupeland, *ndako gboya* masquerades appear during the annual rites of *gunnu*, the most important religious ritual of the Nupe who regard *gunnu* as the *kuti* (ritual) of God. The *gunnu* in part, marks the Nupe youths transition to manhood.

The appearance of the masquerades in Nupeland has been merged with the main ritual of *gunnu*. They appear during the vigil; the esoteric phases of the ritual, to frighten novices, warn youths to obey their elders; and in the public exoteric phase, to frighten all women and discourage potential witches and weaken by their presence the evil powers of witchcraft (Nadel 1935b: 437; 1942: 25; 1954: 189). In general, *ndako gboya* masquerades appear either during the annual celebration of *gunnu*, or because the community feels itself threatened by witches (1954: 195).

Nadel pointed out that strangers often confuse *gunnu* and the masquerades which appear during the rituals. The Yorùbá for example, refer to *ndako gboya* masquerades as *ìgunnu* (1954:189.) Now, in places such as Abèòkúta where there is a strong belief in the evil powers of witchcraft, performances are organized to drive away the birds, a euphemism for witches. According to Ogunlusi, these masquerades are said to have been introduced to the southwestern corner of Nigeria by descendants of Nupe slaves. (1971: 60-61)

Nadel affirmed that the performance is the only aspect of Nupe culture retained by Nupe emigrants to Yorùbáland. The headship of the Nupe community in Lagos was combined with the priesthood of *gunnu*, the only traditional cult they have retained, reminding them of their ethnic identity. The *gunnu* in Lagos is a combination of three rites - the *gunnu* itself, the *ndako gboya* and the ritual of the chain of Tsoede, the legendary founder and culture hero of the Nupe people (1954: 228-229).

Nadel went on to say that the Nupe owners of the ceremonies are expected to perform them for the well being of the whole community including their Yorùbá hosts who may also request a special performance if some calamities like witchcraft threaten the community. And as I have mentioned earlier on, the performance of *ndako gboya* masquerades have been adopted by the Yorùbá and the performances fitted into the annual calendar of rituals in the adopting communities. It was readily accepted because it formed an additional armory against the malevolent propensities of witches.

In passing, I must mention that apart from Ogunlusi's article (1971), and a WNBS recording from Baashi where some cult members claim Nupe ancestry, research need to be done into this phenomenon especially in places where there are well organized cults and annual performances are staged. One can then see in what ways it differs from Nupe practice and how well it has been integrated into Yorùbá religious system, and what elements if any, it has absorbed from Yorùbáland.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I cannot claim to have outlined all items of Yorùbá culture which have diffused over Yorùbáland and beyond. Neither have I mentioned all those which the Yorùbás adopted from neighboring groups. The places of origin of some of the items discussed are debatable. My sketchy conclusion will of necessity draw on Nadel's elucidation of motives which underlie adoptions and rejections of alien observances especially when the response from the adopting community is voluntary (1954: 221-223; 226-227)

While it is certain that two ethnic groups may exchange items of culture in border areas, this is not axiomatic. Identical items of culture can be found on both sides of the border. The problem becomes more complex when an item from a neighboring group is found in the metropolis of the adopting culture, forms part and parcel of their cosmology and permeates the religious system. This is as true of isolated practices, items of believe and whole systems like divination or ancestor worship.

It could also be postulated that where whole complexes are similar in two differing ethnic stocks, the two groups have a common origin in the remote past. Whether single traits or entire complexes are adopted, it may be

that the adoption answers needs in which the adopting culture is deficient. More important, the items may be in tune with the existing cosmos in the accepting culture. If this is so, there may be no need to modify the content and purpose, let alone the form. The homogeneity of a complex of traits such as ancestor worship is assured when groups, such as the Ọ̀yó Yorùbá, move and maintain themselves as a compact group in their new settlements.

Nadel's remarks apply to religion, but I do not think his remarks are out of place because the items discussed in this paper touch on religion. The characteristic of traditional religion is such that it can be regarded as an ethnic affair, conceived inseparable from a particular group. We therefore speak of Yorùbá, Nupe or Edo religion. As I have demonstrated in this paper, items of belief and single observance or cult objects can be borrowed, but not the religion as a whole. The items that are more likely to be borrowed are those which can fit or be fitted into the existing system, and fulfil needs not already met by the existing system. The borrowed items may also reinforce what is already present.

NOTES

1. See also Ojo 1974b: 46-59.
2. I am reliably informed that the Modakeke masquerades risk their costumes being ripped off should they accidentally stray into Ifẹ̀. Although Ifẹ̀ has her own brand of masquerades, masquerades are not allowed within and around the palace.
3. For details, see Pierre Verger, **Dieux d'Afrique**, p.186 and **Notes sur le Culte de Ọ̀rìsà et Vodoum**, pp. 407-8. Information on some north eastern Yorùbá masquerade ceremonies can be found in Ojo 1974b: 60-140.
4. For references on bark boxes see Ojo 1974b: 328.
5. For references on Benin influence in Èkìtì, see Ojo 1974a: 333 and 1974b: 175.
6. For references on **Omo**, bronze bells, see Ojo 1974a: 330-331; 1974: 174-5.
7. On form, and especially content, see Ojo 1974b: 196-216.

CHAPTER THREE
THE YORÙBÁ ORAL ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK

By
Oludare Olajubu

INTRODUCTION

Oral artists have remained since the dawn of scholarship rather controversial and ambiguous characters in literary circles. Aristotle, writing in his *Poetics* in the fourth century B. C., found it difficult to find a name for his art. He said:

The form of art that uses language alone whether in prose or verse and verse, either in a mixture of meters or in one particular kind, has up to the present been without a name. For we have no common name that we can apply to the prose mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus and the Socratic dialogues or to the composition employing iambic trimeters or elegiac couplets or any other meters of these type. 1

And Oyin Ògúnba, writing as late as 1972, said:

We have also been interested in studying the artists in each of these literary (oral) forms. A number of questions naturally arise here. In the case of traditional African drama for example, can we properly talk of a *dramatis personae*? If this is so, how are the performers selected? What is their training? What is their frame of mind or attitude to their performance? Is there professionalism in ritual drama or what kind of professionalism is there in ritual drama or any other African drama? For one ought to distinguish between professional performers and professional standards of performance. In poetry and prose the questions are: How is the material that is recited or narrated mastered? What scope is there for the artist to display individual skill? How does he interpret his function in relation to the community?... We have also been interested in the position of the artist in traditional African society. Is he an outcast or a strange man, or a rugged individual? Or is he venerated admired, integral to the community? Does his opinion carry any weight? 2

The two excerpts above raise many vexing questions about the real identity of oral artists, their training, their worth, and role in the society. Attempts have been made to answer some of these questions in books, journals and dissertations by many scholars of African Oral Literature, notably among who are Morris, Schapera, BabaIola, Finnegan, AbimboIa, Isola and others. 3 But by the nature of the work of each scholar, it has not been possible for any single scholar to present complete pictures of oral artists in a way to clear the ambiguity

associated with them both by the scholar and the society. What we intend to do in this paper, therefore, is to identify oral artists, discuss their selection, training and operation in the society. We shall also try to examine the place, role and worth of oral artists in the society to which they belong. Finally we shall take a brief look at their work and how they go about it. In this study we shall restrict ourselves to oral artists in the Yorùbá context with the hope that our findings and conclusions will be applicable to other oral artists in other societies.

ORAL ARTISTS

Oral artists can be defined as persons “who by conscious art or mere habit imitate and represent various objects through the medium of the voice. The imitation is produced by rhythm, language, or harmony, either singly or combined.”⁴ What the sculptor does with his chisel, what the painter accomplishes with his brush and paints, oral artists achieve with words - that is, the production of true and beautiful works of art that would please all men at all times, that would stand up to repeated examination and remain worthy of perpetual admiration. The material they use is language. Through their sound command of language, they are able to form grand conceptions that would stimulate powerful and inspired emotions. These they achieve by the proper formation of figures of thought and of speech through the creation of noble fiction by clever choice of words. The total effect of all these is beauty, sublimity and grandeur of language. Apart from masterly use of language, Yorùbá oral artists also use tune and rhythm to produce harmony.

With the above in mind, Yorùbá oral artists include oral poets, singers, dramatists, storytellers, public orators, priests and diviners, and all those who perform by words of mouth in the presence of an audience or without such an audience. They include those who sing or chant at work to reduce the tedium of work, those who intune the advertisement of their merchandise and those who have to chant incantations privately to themselves to ensure the efficacy of a drug or as a form of prayer, and, indeed all enunciators of all genres of Yorùbá verbal art. Under this wide umbrella, we have not only all exponents and chanters of the various genres of Yorùbá “traditional” poetry, tellers of folktales, and myths, mothers who chant lullabies and rhymes and those who perform at traditional festivals, but also modern folk dramatists, *Akéwì* (modern poets) and modern music makers. Of all these, only the following categories of artists, namely, oral poets, singers, music makers and dramatists, regard themselves as oral artists *Òṣèré*. The Yorùbá word for verbal art is *and* the word for oral artists is *awon* *Òṣèré* or *awon eléré* (both meaning performers.) The term *eré* also refers to all performances of oral and dramatic arts. If Ifá priests go to town to perform their poetry backed with the rhythm of *agogo Ifá* (Ifá gongs), people would say: *Àwọn onifá n ṣeré* (Ifá priests are performing.) The terms *eré* (performance)

and *eléré* (performer) for Yorùbá verbal arts and Yorùbá verbal artists respectively indicate that the Yorùbá see verbal art as a performance, a sort of action or drama to be acted or imitated, thereby forging an identity between Yorùbá verbal art and Yorùbá drama. This is as it should be because, according to Finnegan (1976), oral literature the world over is performance-based. It depends essentially on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion and who gives it life and existence by transmitting it through continued performance.

Oral poets and singers, apart from being regarded as *eléré* (performers) are also regarded as *olórin* (singers), and they see themselves as such. There is no problem in calling a singer an *olórin*; but, what about an oral poet? The answer lays in the fact that Yorùbá poetry is produced by chanting or by intuning the words. Melody of voice is of great essence; this being so there is also a close affinity between Yorùbá poetry and song.

As regards other categories of oral artists, namely, storytellers, public orators, priests, and diviners and others, though, we recognize their performance as aspects of Yorùbá verbal art, neither they themselves nor the public see them as artists. Suffice it is to say, however, that all Yorùbá oral artists have certain things in common: they all formulate and create in words on specific occasions, and they all perform their art in the presence of specific audiences.

It is fashionable to regard oral artists as mere transmitters of old traditional recitations. There is only one thing that is old and traditional in Yorùbá verbal art and that is its oralness. It is the oralness that imposes on it a specific mode of expression and transmission, that of dramatic performance. Yorùbá oral art, though rooted in tradition of oralness, is a dynamic art: it blends old themes and sayings with modern thoughts and usages. Today, Yorùbá verbal art is being used to convey twentieth century thoughts and concepts. Thus, for example, *ewì* (modern poetry) and incantations find uses in commercial advertisements and in propaganda of all kinds. Though using an old traditional medium to perform and express their art, oral artists are concerned mainly with their audiences, their societies and their messages, all of which are dynamic. The dynamic nature of Yorùbá verbal art has made possible within living memory, the introduction of new genres of Yorùbá verbal art and consequently new breeds of Yorùbá oral artists.

These new genres include *àpàlà*, *sákàrà*, *dadakúàdà*, *wéré*, and *wákà* all of which are adaptations of old verbal art forms with heavy dance-music accompaniments but with the vocal aspects predominating. Each of these is limited to local or religious communities. *Àpàlà* and *Sákàrà* belong to Òyó, Ègbá and Ìjèbú Yorùbá while *dadakúàdà* belong exclusively to Ìlòrín in Kwara State of Nigeria. *Wákà* and *Wéré* develop from occasional Muslim songs sung during Muslim festivals, and both have music accompaniments. *Wákà* is

restricted to women while *Weré* is for men. The content and context of both forms are the same. The differences lie in the rhythm of the drum, music and the chanters. All these new forms are organized on orchestral and mostly professional basis.

Derivable from the above is the fact that the term 'traditional' is becoming inadequate and consequently obsolete in describing Yorùbá verbal art because it fails to account for the dynamic nature of the content, form and scope of the art.

THE MAKING OF ORAL ARTISTS

Here we intend to direct our attention to two main points; namely, the selection and training of Yorùbá oral artists. Among the Yorùbá, verbal art is a specialist art and artists are special members of the society. One valid statement about Yorùbá oral artists is that, they are born rather than made. This statement, however, has some limitations and that we shall come back to later. In traditional Yorùbá society, art, occupation and religion are practiced along family lines. The child follows the trades, occupation and religion of his forefathers, or those of his maternal relations. It is only in exceptional cases occasioned by misfortune that an individual takes to the trades and religions of other lineages other than his own. In such a society, the religion and art of a child like his name are prescribed before or at birth. For instance, a man would be a hunter not just because loves hunting, but also because he descends from a generation of hunters!

The genre of verbal art which one would practice or take to is also dictated by the religion, trade or occupation into which one is born. In traditional Yorùbá society every religious sect and trade guild has its own music, its own poetry, and song which are performed during the festivals of the religious sect or guild. For instance, hunters and all workers who use iron tools are of necessity devotees of Ògún, the god of iron and their verbal art is *Ìjálá*, the poetry of Ògún. *Èsà* also known as *iwì* is the poetry of Egúngún masqueraders and consequently the preserves of members of Egúngún cult, while *Şàngó-pípè* the chant, specially reserved for invoking and singing the praises of Şàngó, the god of thunder, is taught only to the *adóşù*- a person, male or female, set aside at birth for the worship of Şàngó, the Yorùbá god of thunder.

It is in bad taste for a man born into a hunter's family to take to the art of *Èsà* chanting. Such a man is never accorded the respect and credit due to him among the practitioners of the art. He is continually referred to disparagingly as an *isáwò* (an interloper) and an *aláwòşe* (a mere impostor). Chanting of *Odu Ifá* and *iyèrè Ifá* are strictly restricted to herbalists and devotees of the Ifá Oracle. While *Odu Ifá* is for divination, *iyèrè Ifá* is for entertainment of Ifá priests and their happy clients.

There are exceptions to this rule. The first exception concerns verbal arts which do not belong to specific

cults, guilds, or religious sects. Such verbal arts can be performed by anybody at given social occasions to entertain himself and his audience. Examples of such verbal arts are folktales, *olele*, the oral poetry of the Ìjẹ̀sà and Ifẹ̀ people, and to some extent *rara*, a genre of Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá verbal art. One does not need to be born into any specific family to be able to practice any of the verbal arts under this group. The second exception concerns new forms or genres of Yorùbá verbal art, among which are *wéré*, *dadakiàdà*, *àpàlà*, *wákà* and *sákàrà*. All these forms develop in the last fifty years or so and are all accompanied with specific musical tunes. Artists who practice any of these new forms do not need to be born into any specific family, since the verbal arts themselves are not strictly bound to any religion, trade or occupation. One must add, however, that *wákà* and *wéré* develop from lyrics sung during Moslem festivals.

Another aspect of the fact that oral artists are born and not made is that, to be a successful Yorùbá oral artist one has to be endowed with certain natural talents. For *Èsà* Egúngún, the chanter should be gifted with a sweet voice and he should have a long repertoire of praise poems of principal lineages in Yorùbáland.⁶ for *Ìjálá*, “it is only those who have a natural flair for *Ìjálá*-chanting who successfully go through the apprenticeship.”⁷ And for *Şàngó-pípè* “a good memory and mellifluous voice are basic requirements.⁸ All scholars of Yorùbá verbal art agree that to be a successful oral artist, a good singing voice, good memory, quick wit, a good ear and eye to note subtle developments, happenings and gossips in the society, a fine sense of humor, a high sense of critical judgment of events and issues of public and private interests and a fine command of the Yorùbá language are basic requirements. Apart from the above, artists should have deep interest and natural flair for the art of their choice.

Irrespective of qualifications imposed by birth, religion or trade, all Yorùbá oral artists must possess the second group of natural gifts to be successful. Yorùbá verbal art depends very largely on performance and good performance is judged solely by the quality of the voice of the artist, his control of language, the correctness of the content of his chants and the length of his repertoire. Therefore, selection for pupilage of all aspects of Yorùbá verbal art is not done by man. It is not based on the will or orders of parents and superiors but on nature, or if one may say, “divine will” who would endow the would-be artist with requisite natural talents, and cause him to be born into the right family.

The above qualifications though of paramount importance, do not all that make a Yorùbá oral artist. All scholars of Yorùbá verbal art agree that to be a successful Yorùbá oral artist one needs to be rigorously trained.

Training for each verbal art follows a systematic and prescribed sequence. Training, in most cases starts in early childhood. For instance, in *Şàngó-pípè*, the *adóşù* is identified as early as the age of eight.⁹ While for *Ifá* divinatory poems, training starts at the age of ten¹⁰, for *Ìjálá*, pupilage starts from as early as the age of

six to early adolescence. 11 There are however, people who start their own training when they have attained adulthood and have got their own families. For *Èsà Egúngún*, children are born into the art and grow up in it, developing their interests and talents as they grow up. It is only newly married wives who go in for training shortly after their marriage to members of the Egúngún cult.

In few cases, especially in the area of poetry, the pupil has to live with his master. But in a majority of cases the pupil does not need to live with his master. All he needs to do is to remember to keep dates with him at social and religious gatherings wherever the master performs. In the case of *Èsà Egúngún*, the pupil is invariably a member of his master's family, usually the son or nephew. He naturally lives within the family; hence he is with his master at all times. In the cases of Ifá divinatory poems and *Şàngó-pípè*, too, the novice has to live with his master. This is so because, in the case of *Şàngó-pípè* for instance, oral artistic training goes on side by side with the religious, and professional training all combined in one course.

The consensus of opinion among scholars of Yorùbá verbal art is that the pupil learns by imitation during public performances. He is never formally lectured or tutored on any aspect of the art. Most pupils start their training by chanting the refrain to the songs that form a part of the poetry or the folktale. Later they try to imitate the words of the chants of their masters both during performance and privately on their own when they are alone at work. . The following account of the training of an *Ìjálá* artist represents the general pattern of the training of all Yorùbá oral artists:

The first stage of pupilage is a period of merely listening to the *Ìjálá* chants performed by the teacher in his own house as well as at every social gathering where he entertains people with *Ìjálá*. The second stage is the imitation of the teacher word by word as he chants *Ìjálá*. Subsequently, when he is at a social gathering such as the *asomogbè* (supporter) or *elégbè* (chorus singer) to his master, the pupil is able to repeat the words of his master's chant almost simultaneously. When there are two or more pupils an *Ìjálá* performance then resembles choral chanting. The third stage is when the master orders his pupil to give solo performances of *Ìjálá* chants at social gatherings at which the master singer is himself present. This is obviously a sort of promotion, for the pupil ceases to provide merely an accompaniment to his master's chanting voice. 12

During any public performance the pupil takes his turn when all his seniors in the art have had theirs. By this, he is able to listen to other people's chants and learns from them. The present writer has observed a training session of some *Èsà Egúngún* pupils in 1967 where prompting was employed.13 One of the pupils started to salute one

Sólómóṣùṣì (Solomon); she apparently did not know all the *oríkì* and *orílẹ̀* (personal and lineage praise names) of his subject. Her father who was also her teacher on the occasion and who was sitting behind her came to her aid by supplying leading phrases and words loud enough for the pupil to hear but not loud enough to constitute a hindrance to the show. The ensuing product is as follows:

Dúóríkẹ̀: *Ng ó bó ọ délé ọ̀rẹ̀ẹ̀ rẹ*
(Pupil) *Nílẹ ọmọ píntín ajá*
Ọmọ tỌjé ò̀npetu
Tò̀npetu lẹ̀jẹ́ ọmọ arótíwẹ̀bí ọ̀jò
Sólómóṣùṣì ọ̀.

Abéégúndé: *Àjàó*
(Father &
Teacher)

Dúóríkẹ̀: *Àjàó ọmọ píntín ajá*
Bilé lo bá wà o wòde
Èhìnkùlẹ lo bá wà o wòdẹ̀dẹ̀

Abéégúndé: *Baba Mọ̀rìnlọ́lá*
Ọmọ píntín ajá o, Sólómóṣùṣì ọ̀.
Àjàó baba Mọ̀rìnlọ́lá o.
Àjàó bilé lo bá wà o wòde
Èhìnkùlẹ lo bá wà o wòdẹ̀dẹ̀.

Abéégúndé
Simultaneously
With Dúóríkẹ̀: *Èmi Adéorìkẹ̀ẹ̀*

Dúóríkẹ̀: *Ọmọ píntín ajá*
Èmi à̀sàkún Dúóríkẹ̀ẹ̀
Mo gbéhìn rẹ̀ pẹ̀ ọ̀ní. 14

Translation:

Dúóríkẹ̀: I will follow you to the house of your friend
(pupil) In the household of the offspring of the *Ọjé Ọ̀npetu*;
Ọ̀npetu of Ọje, offspring of one who bathes in a shower of liquor like showers of rain
Solomon!

Abéégúndé: *Àjàó*
(Father &
Teacher)

Dúóríkẹ̀: Àjàó, offspring of the dog,
If you are inside the house, peep outside
If you are behind the house peep at the fore-court

Abéégúndé: Father of Mọ̀rìnlọ́lá

Oh, you offspring of dog, Solomon
Àjàó, father of Mòrìnlólá
If you are at the backyard, peep to the fore-court.

Abéégúndé
Simultaneously
with Dúóríkèé: I Adéoríkèé.

Dúóríkèé: Offspring of the dog
I Àṣàkún Dúóríkèé
I am singing your praise in your absence

It is apparent from the above that the chanter did not know the other name of Sólómóòni, his subject (Àjàó), and the name of his child (Mòrìnlólá), both of which weré supplied in undertones by her father and teacher. The father also taught the pupils a stylistic device whereby the chanter drew attention to herself or himself as the person singing the praise of Sólómóòni. As the performance went on, the father/leader kept on guiding the younger chanters. At a stage he asked each of the pupil-chanters to chant her own praise. When it came to the turn of Olapetan Alari, she was harping on her own names alone; her father had to tell her that she had to add bits of her father's praise names all along. The prompting came in this way:

Alari: *Bèè mò mí ẹ̀ kò gbóhùn mi ni?*
(pupil) *Èmi Ìbírónké Adétúntàn Alárápé*
Bé ẹ̀ merin
È ò gbóhùn erin?
Bé ẹ̀ mọ̀sà,
È ò jiyò lẹ̀bẹ̀ o?

Abéégúndé: *Forúkọ baba rẹ̀ kún un*
(Father & *O tó máa bá a lọ.*
Teacher)

Alari: *Ikú Elẹ̀rìn ọ̀mọ̀ wáyé o wá mọ̀ni*
Tògègè rẹ̀dí ẹ̀kú baba Olápétán.

Translation:

Alari: If you know me not, don't you hear my voice
(Pupil) I Ìbírónké Adétúntàn Alárápé
If you know not the Elephant,
Have you not heard the voice of the elephant.
If you know not the lagoon,
Don't you eat salt in your stew?

Abéégúndé: Add your father's name to it

(Father & Teacher) Before you go along.

Alari: Death of Èlérin, offspring of the one who comes into the world to know many people.

(Pupil) One who staggers to reach for his costume, Olápétán's father.

The length of apprenticeship varies from one form of verbal art to another. In Èsà and Ìjálá, the training lasts until the pupil attains the age of about twenty, when he should have built up enough courage, competence and skill to be able to face an audience. It is certain, however, that the pupil is not adjudged master until he has achieved competence.

Except in the case of Ifá divinatory poems where the pupil has to present himself for initiation, a sort of passing out test at the end of his pupilage, no formal passing out ceremony is conducted for trainees. The pupil having developed a sense of self-reliance through series of successful performances independent of his master simply decides to operate on his own. He is however obliged to pay acknowledgement and glowing tributes to his master and all other past masters of the verbal art at the beginning of each and all his subsequent public performances.

The most important aspect of the training of Yorùbá oral artists is the acquisition of the content of the poems, stories and speeches. This the artists do through memorization. They have to commit to memory all the praise poems of all the lineages, kings, chiefs and important members of the community in which they want to practice. They also have to memorize all the clichés employed for structural and aesthetic purposes. For in Yorùbá verbal art, there are set phrases and utterances used for specific aspects and situations of the performance. For instance, there are sets of verbal formulae to open or start a performance, another set to invite the chorus singers to chant the refrain, another for calling a temporary halt to singing and drum music, another to indicate a change of subject matter or digression and yet another set of phrases to bring a performance to a close. All these, the oral artists have to commit to memory.

Apart from the above, the oral artists have to learn prayers, incantations, classic stories and myths about lineages, popular Yorùbá proverbs and wise sayings. There are other things they have to learn by imitating their masters in the art. These include modulation of the voice, gestures and manipulation of the eyes and the face for expression. The list of what the oral artist has to learn looks so formidable that one wonders how he is able to learn and remember them. Many oral artists claim they are assisted and aided by medicinal charms known as *isòyè*.¹⁶ The *isòyè* consists of various kinds: incantations (*ofò*), powdery medicament (*àgúnmú*) mixed

with food, and other types of powdery forms injected into the blood stream by means of incisions (*gbéré*.) The Yorùbá believe in the efficacy of these charms. But perhaps the most important things that help the artist to learn the content of their verbal art forms and to remember them automatically without shuntering are the mode of learning, that is, by practice, and continuous repetition, and the structure of the verbal art forms.

As we have indicated earlier the pupils start training as early as the age of six. They live with their masters and they continue learning till the age of twenty or so. During this period, There are usually a very large number of performances in which the pupils participate. The numberless repetitions of the subject matters of the verbal art forms allow the words to get fixed in the minds of the pupils; which reminds us of the words of Alexander Pope:

Through practice comes my art not by chance,
as they move easiest who have learned to dance.

The structure of the content of the verbal art forms also allows for easy learning and quick remembering. The content of the praise poems for Yorùbá lineages (*orilè*) are stereotypes. They are expected to be recited without any amendations or omissions. So also are the praise poems (*oriki*) of various individuals. There are also stereotype praise poems for practically all things in the Yorùbá world: from animals, birds and plants to things like fire, hunger and the wind.¹⁷ Apart from these there are also set phrases to describe human beings in their various physical make up, their dispositions and their various levels of material well-being. For instance there are stereotype praises to describe a tall person, a short person, a fat person, a king and a rich person, etc. ¹⁸ Above all, Yorùbá oral artists in traditional Yorùbá society operate in a limited or rather closed community. That is, each artist operates within his own immediate environment. This enables them to know practically every member of their community intimately. Praise

Poems of persons and lineages are usually based on the intimate knowledge of the people. For instance, in such poems one comes across phrases like: “Son of.....,” “Father of,” “Offspring of.....,” “One who.....”

As a result of the structure of the content, its stereotype and prescribed nature, the artists are left with the manipulation of the stereotype phrases and statements, just as one operates a substitution table! There is however the very important factors of constant practice and natural gift of good memory.

In the case of story telling and oratory, though the young learn through observation and imitation, there is no formal training as it is in the case of the poetic forms. This may be due to the fact that only the poetic arts are institutionalized and organized formally. Folktale narration is a parlor business, while public oration comes up rather incidentally at public gatherings. It is the artists of the poetic forms that expect and receive practical

reward in the forms of money, clothing and food in appreciation of their performances. No artist gets paid for telling a folktale, however well he may tell it. All he receives is admiration of members of his audience.

ORAL ARTISTS AND THE SOCIETY

Yorùbá oral artists are regarded in the society as social entertainers. Their attendance at social gatherings are very much welcome. They are either invited or they attend on their own uninvited. In most cases they are not particularly distinct from other persons. In such cases they are just members of the religious sect, guild or cult and the performance of art is regarded as their own contribution to the success of the festival when there is occasion for one. Though a good performance is highly appreciated by the society and richly rewarded, such rewards are usually treated as the common property of the group, and not the personal property of the star artists. From this, one can conclude that Yorùbá oral artists are not professionals. But if a group happens to have a good band of artists, the band can be specially invited by other groups to perform for them during their own festivals. For instance, if the hunters guild in town A has a fine bunch of Ìjálá-chanters, the group of chanters through the guild in town A can be invited to perform by the hunters guild in town B, or town C during the latter's own Ògún festival for a fee. If the group from town A gets very popular, and gets invited by many more groups, to the extent that members of the group get engaged in performances most days of the week, such a group gradually acquires a professional status, in which case the group would stop operating under the umbrella of the hunters' guild by which it was nurtured.

Except in such circumstances as described above, Yorùbá oral artists are non-professionals. They live primarily on the proceeds of their profession as farmers, weavers, herbalists and hunters. They never keep long enough on their verbal arts to be able to live on earnings from them. Whenever a Yorùbá oral artist tries to extort gifts from his audience by direct soliciting, he is regarded as a beggar - an *alágbe* as is the case with most itinerant *ràrà* chanters, most of whom go to social gatherings uninvited, declaiming wild and vague praises of people they know very little about. Some powerful Ọbas (kings), chiefs and rich nobles keep permanent praise singers whose duty it is to sing their praises all the day long. The Aláàfin of Ọyó, the Olúbàdàn of Ìbàdàn and the Tìmì of Èdẹ, all in Ọyó State of Nigeria are examples of people who keep permanent praise singers and drummers. Such artists attached to the courts of Ọbas and nobles live on the gifts they attract from the many visitors to their patrons and on whatever their patrons can provide.

In Egúngún cult, there is a group of performers called *Alàrinjò*, a sort of travelling theatre. Members

of this group go from place to place staging shows.¹⁹ Such shows consist of dancing to *Bàtá* drum music, acrobatic displays, display of costume, and chanting of *Èsà*, the poetry of Egúngún. Though the group is usually very well organized, its members are not professionals; the group goes on its performance tour when there is less to do on the farm and whenever its members can spare time off their regular job. On arrival in a village or town the leaders of the group would pay a courtesy call on the *Ọba*, they would also seek his permission to stage a performance. This request may be turned down if any unhappy situation exists in the town. The *Ọba* is however obliged to offer them a customary gift and to provide them with boarding and lodging facilities for the duration of their stay.

In general it is very difficult to make a living out of the proceeds of some of the Yorùbá verbal art forms, especially those performed for a day or at most seven days in a whole year and as parts of annual festivals. Examples of such festivals are: *Òkè* in *Ìbàdàn*, *Agẹmọ* in *Ìjẹbú*, *Orókè* of *Ìgbájo* and *Òtan Ilé* and *Ege* of *Èsà Òkè*. Though the artists attract a great deal of customary and incidental gifts, such gifts are never large enough for the artists to live on for a whole year. Some verbal art forms like incantations, on-the-work poems and songs and children songs and rhymes do not attract any material remuneration.

In traditional set up, Yorùbá oral artists occupy a unique position in the society. They serve as the moral police of the people. They are therefore free from arrests and punishment for offences committed during the course of their performances. They are at liberty to say whatever they please in favor of or against anybody in the community, *Ọba*, chiefs, and nobles inclusive: “*Ọba ò í mólùkọrin*” (singers are immune against arrests by kings). They are also free from molestation during wars and public disorders. As counterparts of members of the press in modern society, they enjoy all the privileges claimed by its members. Some of them, for example, the *Adóşù Şàngó*, *Egúngún* masquerades, hunters-chanters of *Ìjálá*, and priests of the various deities, are greatly revered as the representatives of gods on earth. Prayers from them are regarded as divine blessings. They attract gifts of money and materials, mostly drinks and food, and great respect from members of the society not only in appreciation of the beauty of their performances but also as a sign of the regard people has for them.

There has, however, been a gradual change from the situation described above in recent years. This change is as a result of a number of things. There has arisen among the generality of the Yorùbá community greater demand for amusement and entertainment. Secondly, the governments of Nigeria have since 1970 or so taken keener interest in Nigerian culture. Performances are organized at local, national and international levels. As a result of these developments many oral artists are called upon to perform not just one season in a year, but for upwards of three days in the week. This has led to the establishment of new verbal art forms on

professional basis, and systematic professionalism on the part of the proponents of the old verbal art forms. Alabi Ogundepo is a case in point. He is an *Ìjálá* artist now turned professional. So also has Foyeke Ayoka, daughter of the famous *Alárìnjó* masquerader, Ajangila, who for some years now has been operating as a professional *Èsà* chanter. Examples of new verbal art forms that are organized on professional lines are: *Àpàlà*, *sákàrà*, *dadakúàdà* or *pánkeke*, *wéré*, *wákà*, and to some extent, *jùjú*, all of which are verbal art forms with musical accompaniments. *Jùjú*, Yorùbá version of highlife music is organized on orchestral basis and makes use of European musical instrument combined with local ones. Each orchestral is made up of lead vocalist who also plays a guitar, a group of chorus singers cum drummers. One may wonder why we classify these new forms as verbal art. The reason is that the new forms are appreciated and patronized not merely because of their music but largely because of their poetry.

Today professional oral artistry is a very lucrative trade among the Yorùbá. The art is gradually being divested of its institutionalism. It is losing its classic nature and taking on the gab of “pop” art, with the amusement and entertainment aspects overshadowing the instructive and educative aspects.

YORÙBÁ ORAL ARTIST AT WORK

A written work of art lives and is transmitted through the pages of books long after the death of the original writers and composers. But, performance is the essence of Yorùbá verbal art and indeed of all verbal art forms. To some extent, this is true of the written forms too. Example is the present-day *Akéwì* (poet) who composes his poems in writing for actual performance on the radio or to a particular audience. Though such poets are allowed to read straight from the scripts, the audience would however prefer and commend a poet who recites his poetry from memory.

Judging from the description of the content of Yorùbá verbal art forms as stereotype, and of mode of learning as being by memorization, one might be tempted to conclude that there is nothing in the performance of Yorùbá verbal art forms other than mere recitation of antiquated clichés and formulae. If this were so, then proponents of such art forms could not be truly regarded as artists. This is far from being correct.

The circumstances governing the performance of Yorùbá verbal art forms make it possible for the proponents while making use of the stereotype phrases and verbal formulae to demonstrate a high degree of oral artistry. In other words, the Yorùbá oral artist is not mere repeater of tradition or a mere performer reproducing by note what someone else has composed.

The performance of Yorùbá verbal art is governed by the following elements: the situation or the context, the audience, the language and the structure or form of the verbal art. Added to all these is the personality of the oral artist himself. Every form of Yorùbá verbal art is performed at a given and specific situation, for example, a funeral ceremony, a marriage rite, an initiation ceremony or a festival in honor of an òrìṣà, etc. The variation in the nature of situations has its effect on performance of a verbal art form. To illustrate what we are trying to say, let us take a “bridal night.” In a community, scores of girls are given out in marriage every year. Each girl has her own parents, relations, religious learning, a personality of her own, etc. The time of each bridal night also varies; harvest time, .raining season, time of famine or war, after or before a major festival, etc. All these determine the nature, the language, the composition and mood of the performance.

Another element controlling the performance of Yorùbá verbal art forms is the audience. The nature and composition of the audience depends largely on the type of verbal art to be performed and the situation of performance. The type of audience to be expected at the annual festival of an Oro (the bullroarer god) cult, taking place in a grove or the special cult house at the middle of the night would be different from the one to be expected at a public performance of an Egúngún masquerader, and both would be different from the one to be expected at a story telling session.

The audience is perhaps the most important element controlling the performance of a Yorùbá verbal art form. Every performance is for and about the audience. The main objectives of the artist are to entertain, amuse, and impress the audience so as to earn praise, admiration and material gifts. The artist is ever receptive to the reactions of the audience who is the critic, judge and evaluator of his art. In the poetic forms, an essential element of the content is the chanting of praise poems about and verbal salutes to members of the audience, starting from the leading members to the least. In the verbal art forms associated with cults and gods, the audience is intimately involved in performance. The audience chants refrains to songs, and sometimes joins the leader in chorus chanting. In such situations, the audience identifies with the performer. In storytelling, the audience is expected to sing refrains to the songs and pass comments on the content of the stories being told.

The third element in the performance is the language. Yorùbá language with its tonal nature, its richness in proverbs and idioms gives the oral artist an unfettered freedom in the composition and performance of his art, thus making it possible for different story tellers to tell the same story each in his own unique way. While each artist keeps to the standard themes and content of the specific art form, he is able to create new versions by his able manipulation of the elements of the Yorùbá language.

The fourth element in the performance of Yorùbá verbal art is the structure of each verbal art form.

Every genre of Yorùbá oral literature has a specific form or structure in which it must be composed and performed. For instance, *Èsà* or *iwì Egúngún* has the following form. Every performance begins with *ibà*, verbal salutes to and acknowledgement of persons, gods and powers that rule the Yorùbá world, among whom are leading *òrìṣà* (Deities), *Ọba* (king), chiefs, priests, medicine men, past masters in the art, and of course mother-witch known as *ḷyà mi òṣòròngà*. Next to the *ibà* is the main body of the chant which consists of verbal salutes and praises to members of the audience and their lineages. These salutes known as *oríkì* and *orilẹ̀* also include stories about individual lineages. Also included in the main body of the chants are comments on current events and the society, prayers, jokes and incantations. Every chant ends with specific closing chants and songs. Another example is story-telling, *àlọ́*. Every *àlọ́* begins, progresses and ends in a prescribed manner.¹⁹

The final element in the performance of Yorùbá verbal art is the artist himself. He is a man who has gained a mastery of his art through imitation, training and practice. He is endowed with a sweet voice, a swift tongue and an efficient control of the Yorùbá language. He stands face to face with a particular situation and a given audience both of which continually influence every aspect of his performance and both of which he in turn manipulates to suit his art. It is in the midst of all these that the oral artist composes and performs his art. The variability of the elements governing the performance is the great factor that enables him to produce new and unique verbal art forms at each performance. It is this factor that makes it impossible for an oral artist to produce a repeat performance of an earlier work. Each performance yields a new work of art. His creativity and originality are demonstrated by the way he chooses and manipulates the stereotype content forms - the verbal formulae for prayers, and acknowledgements and the several clichés of Yorùbá literature to convey the salutes, praises and comments he has for the audience and for the occasion.

Each artist is free to rearrange, and manipulate the content of the subject matter of his genre of oral literature to the full benefit of himself, his art and his audience. But he must never distort or amend the basic facts contained in the content. He is free to interpolate or inject into the stereotype content his own free composition of comments on current affairs, jokes and gossips aimed at educating and amusing members of his audience.

His skill, for which he gets credit and on which his reputation depends is measured not only by the correctness of the rendering of the stereotype content forms, but largely by the appropriateness with which he employs the various verbal formulae and clichés, the proverbs and wise sayings and the commentaries. He is also judged by the degree of his competence in the use of the language and his virtuosity with the voice melody. All the fore-mentioned are the things that differentiate one oral artist from the other. According to a common

saying among *Egúngún aláré* (The dancer/singer masquerades):

Kò síbí tá ì í gbé dáná alé

Obè ni ó dùn ju'ra wọn ló

(There is no house where supper is not prepared but one stew would taste better than the other)

Perhaps, the literary artist that comes closest to the Yorùbá oral artist is the football match commentator. The Yorùbá oral artist adds to the performance of his art certain things which are impossible for the written words to convey. These things include:

Overtones and symbolic associations of words and phrases; beauty of voice, expressiveness of tone, gesture, facial expression, dramatic use of pauses and rhythms, the interplay of passion, dignity or humor, receptivity to the reactions of the audience. 21

The inability of the printed words to incorporate all these makes the printed versions of Yorùbá oral literature mere shadows of the full actualization as an aesthetic experience for the artist and the audience. Viewed from the above context, the Yorùbá oral artist is not only a composer, and a verbal performer but also a dramatist. It would require the full combination of phonograph and cinematograph to reproduce each genre of Yorùbá oral literature as it is performed by the different artists. 22

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing, we have tried to describe the role of Yorùbá oral artists as livewires of the Yorùbá oral literature. We have described how much the verbal art forms depend on the performers (the artists) for actualization and transmission. We have also seen the role of each of the essential elements of the performance of the verbal arts, namely; the audience, the context or situation and the language. What all these mean in essence is that, for anybody to understand Yorùbá oral literature, it is not just enough to rely on the printed words, one must also hear and see the performer with the audience in the actual situation.

This realization has far reaching implications for the methodology of teaching Yorùbá oral literature in colleges and universities. Yorùbá oral literature lives through performance and to have any meaning to the student, it should be presented to him in performance, which is via phonographs and cinematograph. It is only through these media that the student would be able to see the facial expressions, body movements and gestures of the performer which supply ideas, experiences and meanings which are not and cannot be represented on the printed page. Experience has shown that many students of Yorùbá oral literature even at the undergraduate level have problems with reading aspects of Yorùbá literature intelligibly.

The popularity of modern Yorùbá poetry, *ewì*, today is due largely to the opportunity afforded the public to listen to actual performances of the poems on the radio and from phonographs. At 6.15 am and 6.15 pm, the Broadcasting Corporation of Òyó State, Nigeria, broadcast live performances of such poems. Other radio stations in the Yorùbá speaking areas of Nigeria also broadcast regular performances of same. Many of the *ewì* (modern poetry) have been waxed on gramophone discs and, recorded on cassette tapes and they sell like hot cakes. Nowadays, it is the fashion in Yorùbá speaking parts of Nigeria to have an *Akéwì* in attendance at social gatherings. Although, we have no statistics to back up our claim, we can safely say that the phonograph recordings of the *ewì* enjoy far greater patronage than the printed (book) forms.

Many centers of African literatures in Nigeria have taken steps in the right directions by setting up language laboratories where students learn through the use of recorded tapes and discs. The ultimate has even been reached by the Institute of African Studies, University of Ìbàdàn by its publication in print, in records and in films, various aspects of Nigerian poetry, drama and rituals. We are not unmindful of the high cost of producing the phonographs and the cinematographs and the limited financial resources at the disposal of the various departments of African Literatures. There is a solution to these problems. The Institute of African Studies, University of Ìbàdàn, the Federal Ministry of Information and the Radio and Television Houses who have many of these films and recordings are ready to give them out on loan on request. There are even facilities for making copies of the recorded tapes for a small fee at the Institute of African studies, University of Ìbàdàn. Teachers of Yorùbá oral literature should avail themselves of the opportunities to make use of these audio-visual aids to enliven the teaching of Yorùbá oral Literature, a subject which many students consider dead and archaic.

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