

Values of Oral Literature in African Society: A Case of Yorùbá Folksongs and Traditional Festivals

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Abstract: Folksongs and traditional festivals are central to almost every activity of the Yoruba people. The contemporary world is full of pains, worries, sufferings and despair and various anti-social activities, in spite of pompous claims and glaring efforts of science and technology in solving old problems to create many new ones. Hence, every individual needs to relax, amuse, and get his or her mind off the dull struggles, worries and sorrows of life through folksongs and festivals. The Yoruba folksongs and festivals as soul-searchers and soul-menders therefore, serve the aesthetic, therapeutic and communicative purposes as tension relievers as well as elixir through which individuals are firmly reassured that there is still hope for humanity. Folksongs and traditional festivals, as manifestations of oral literary genre, possess the remarkable ability to simultaneously entertain, educate, heal and provide solace in individuals. Through them, virtues of the community are upheld and cultural values are projected. It thus concluded that Yoruba folksongs and festivals are a vital communicative instrument for pleasure and a therapy to heal and soothe individuals. Therefore, it is recommended that the Yoruba people continue to utilize folksongs as a means of entertaining, educating, consoling, and comforting themselves as the need arises. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of preserving and perpetuating traditional festival celebrations in Yoruba society, as they serve as a unifying force among the people and a potent platform for showcasing the rich culture and traditions of the Yoruba people to the wider world. Other African societies should also intensify efforts in employing folksongs and festival performances to project their respective cultural identity to the wider world.

Keywords: Values, Oral Literature, African Society, Yoruba Folksongs, Yoruba Festivals.

INTRODUCTION

The African population, with a specific focus on the Yoruba people, particularly in traditional societies, showcases a profound integration of their culture into every aspect of their lives, prominently evident in their oral literature, including folk songs and festivals. Consequently, societies across the globe possess their distinct cultural traditions, and each has a unique approach to both entertaining and imparting values and virtues to their members, ensuring their seamless assimilation into both local and broader communities. The Yoruba people primarily employ oral literature as a means of entertaining, educating, and communicating among individuals, constituting the essence of pre-literate Yoruba society's cultural fabric. This form of expression includes imaginative verbal creations, narratives, folk beliefs, songs, and customs that have evolved and been transmitted from one generation to the next (Finnegan, 1970). This oral tradition, referred to as oral literature, is universal among all societies (Omobola, 2013).

Within this realm of oral literature, there exist various forms, covering epics, myths, legends, fairy tales, fables, proverbs, songs, riddles, jokes, insults, toasts, nursery rhymes, vendor calls, prayers, games, and festivals, as eloquently categorised by Akporobaro (2012). These forms capture human experiences,

stories, and beliefs, serving as a comprehensive reflection of indigenous cultures (Dasylva, 2017). Similarly, Qm̄ob̄ola (2013) identifies these forms as folktales, legends, myths, customs, belief systems, ritual dances, and festivals, originating from ancient times and persisting in contemporary society.

Akporobaro (2012) provides varied definitions of oral literature, describing it as artistically significant verbal expressions shaped by a group of people and passed down orally from one generation to another. It is a creative medium, featuring folktales, folk songs, myths, and proverbs, crafted within traditional societies and transmitted through spoken words. Overall, oral literature embodies the entirety of expressive verbal forms and beliefs developed in traditional societies for entertainment and societal order, enriching individuals' cognitive capacities and decision-making abilities. Thus, it is inferred that oral literature comprises a collection of creatively and artistically composed verbal expressions shared among specific communities, bridging generations and cultures worldwide.

In particular, Yoruba oral literature serves as a vital conduit for transmitting significant information and cultural activities from one generation to the next. Qm̄olasoye (2012) underscores its integral role in the Yoruba social system, emphasising its

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omnipresence in daily life, activities, festivals, and ceremonies. This genre, exclusively oral in nature, is conveyed through spoken, sung, or chanted forms. Key characteristics of Yoruba oral literature, as identified by Omojasoye, include anonymity of the author, susceptibility to fading from memory, potential monopolisation of references, gender orientation, and multiple modes of expression. Furthermore, Gbenro (2005) and Omojasoye (2012) categorise Yoruba oral literature into three main forms: Poetry (Ewi), Prose (Itàn Qlọrọ-geere), and Drama (Alárinjọ). These include proverbs, folktales, praise songs, panegyric, incantations, Ifá corpus, hunter's chants, nuptial chants, masquerade songs, and dirges within oral poetry; legends and myths within prose; and travelling theater (Alárinjọ) within oral drama.

Music, particularly song, holds a central position in the lives of African communities, notably the Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria, reflecting their way of life and serving as a means of personal expression. The Yoruba are recognised for their cultural traditions, resourcefulness, and expertise in drumming. A significant portion of the Yoruba population possesses talents in poetry, philosophy, history, singing, dancing, and drumming, with notable figures such as Hubert Ogunndé, Oyin Ogunbà, Sobo Aróbíodù, and others. Singing and chanting function as vehicles for conveying Yoruba customs, norms, values, and traditions. Folksongs are representative of traditional songs specific to particular communities or nations, handed down through oral tradition over generations, often existing in multiple versions. These songs typically feature simple, modal melodies and stanzaic narrative verses, characterised by lyrical simplicity and rhythmic compositions. Folksongs mirror the social heritage, environment, joys, sorrows, problems, and concerns of the people residing in a particular region.

In Yoruba society, folksongs play a crucial role in social control and serve as a means of imparting societal norms and values to the younger generation. This multifaceted genre contributes significantly to regulating, sustaining, and preserving various institutions within Yoruba culture. Whether in private or public gatherings, folksongs are employed to convey personal emotions, communicate societal rules and spread happiness and joy. As a cornerstone of Yoruba culture, folksongs inspire and mobilise individuals to achieve their best, both individually and collectively, across the stages of their lives, as noted by Ogunrinade (2009). Music is an integral component of the Yoruba's lifelong educational system, with the Yoruba using it to shape their lives and speech.

Festivals represent a prominent aspect of African societies, including the Yoruba people in traditional settings. The Yoruba, renowned for their rich cultural heritage, employ festivals as a medium for expressing their cultural identity. These traditional festivals incorporate music, dance, drumming, worship, and literary creativity, constituting socio-cultural exhibitions (Olaolu, 2015). This perspective aligns with Adeola's (2015) description of the Yoruba as a prominent ethnic group celebrated for their colourful festivals, characterised by traditional attire, dances, music, and mythical narratives with ancient origins.

Folk songs and festivals are inherently intertwined, with music typically accompanying festival performances. While some folksongs are associated with specific traditional festivals, such as Èsà Egúngún (masquerade's chant) for masquerade festivals, ijala (hunter's chant) for ogun (god of iron) festivals, and iyere ifá (ifa chant) during Ifa festivals, the versatility of these folksongs allows them to feature in various other traditional celebrations like odún isu (yam festival), ojúde oba (the king's court festival), and Òrànmiyàn festival. Thus, folksongs remain

an integral and inseparable component of the rich tapestry of Yoruba culture, enhancing the experience of traditional festivals and preserving the cultural heritage of the Yoruba people.

The rationale behind the choice of festivals and folk songs is borne out of the fact that the two incorporate some other forms of oral literature. For instance, folktales, folksongs, riddles and jokes, incantations, myths and various forms of oral poetry among others are the ingredients of Yoruba traditional festivals. In a similar vein, aside that folksongs cannot be separated from festivals, traces of other forms of oral literature such as folktales, proverbs, riddles and jokes and a host of others can be seen in folk songs. Through performance of traditional festivals and folksongs, individuals are nurtured to honour cultural values, maintain a balance between material life and spiritual life, go back to the root to learn about their origin and history which is much better than reading textbooks in the school and cultivate in individual the cultural values (i.e. hospitality, truth, respect for old age, covenant keeping, hard work and good character).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general aim of performing oral literature in every African society (Yoruba society inclusive) is to help individuals, specifically the youths (the young ones) to tap from the rich cultural values of this heritage to enrich their knowledge and improve their lives. Therefore, this paper seeks to establish the significance of festivals and folksongs in propagation and promotion of cultural values and transmission of same to individual members of the society in order for them to understand these cultural values and use such values as a road-map as they develop. Also, the paper attempts to examine the values of these two important oral genres in Yoruba culture (i.e. festivals and folksongs). The paper also seeks to establish that the two forms serve as communicative tools through which societal cultural values are transmitted from generation to generation.

This set of cultural values of the Yoruba people is based on their beliefs. Since the two forms are a major component of the Nigerian primary and secondary school curricula, the paper attempts to find out how the two, through their respective performances can serve as educative tools that can shape and reshape individual lives and propel them to protect the society's cultural values and become responsible members of the society. The emergence of technology coupled with the influence of Western culture is dragging and forcing most forms of African oral literature (festivals and folksongs inclusive) into extinction despite the rich cultural values embedded in them. However, if the suggestion made by Dweikat (2016) that information and communication technology should be properly integrated into education (especially at the primary level) is taken, this could help in preserving oral traditions such as folksongs and festivals from extinction. Therefore, the dire need to go back to the root to properly restore, propagate, transmit and communicate Yoruba cultural values to individuals through festival and folksong performances necessitated this study.

Oral Literature as a Communicative Resource

The term communication is a slippery concept that has been defined in a variety of ways. However, it is generally defined as a process of transmitting and receiving verbal and non-verbal messages that produce a response (Abdul-Hamid, 2021). Communication plays a significant role in human relations. Literature, be it oral or written is a communicative resource through which individuals interact with literature genres based on his or her background knowledge. Similarly, literature is a social tool and system within a larger subsuming system of education. In other words, literature is a medium of education. The main purpose of performing oral literature, such as festivals and folksongs is to be able to effectively communicate with it and

send a message through it and transmit cultural values of the society to the audience. In a nut shell, the two are a vehicle used to transmit and propagate society's cultural values.

Yoruba oral literature like all other oral literature of the world enhances communicative competence of both the narrator/performer/chanter and the audience. In the same vein, the basic language skills, especially the oracy (listening and speaking) skills of individual are developed through performance/narration/chanting/singing of various forms of oral literature (i.e. festivals and folk songs). The genres of oral literature enhance the speaking skill of the performer and improve the listening competence of the audience. By inference therefore, every genre of oral literature has a pedagogical function. Teaching methods and techniques such as demonstration, guided discovery, dialogue, story-telling, question and answer, and illustrations are imbedded in oral literature. It is through these various methods/techniques that the Yoruba people tell stories, perform festivals, compose songs and use proverbs and riddles to cultivate their cultural values into the younger generation.

Every oral communication instruction aims at developing listeners' fluency and improves their communicative competence in any given language (Dweikat & Agel, 2013). There are some empirical studies that have established that most forms of oral literature have instructional and communicative values. For instance, Odejebi (2014) studied parents' perception of Yoruba folksongs as a potent source of moral instruction among pre-school children in South-western Nigeria. The scholar reported that Yoruba folksongs are a potent source of moral instruction among pre-primary school pupils in South-western Nigeria. In addition, the author emphasizes that folk songs had a great potential for revitalising moral values among young school children. In a similar development, folk songs is one of the methods or techniques employed in teaching young school children not only language but some other school subjects such as History and Social Studies (Badru, 2021). In consonance with this, Badru and Odutayo (2023) researched on parents' perception of the efficacy of Yoruba folktales in cultivating moral values among the youths. Their finding is parallel to that of Odejebi (2014). The scholars found that employing oral literature especially folktales can improve learners' reading skills and enhance their vocabulary development in addition to introducing them to the cultural values of the society.

The Yoruba People and their Culture

The Yoruba is generally refers to an ethno- linguistic group that inhabits the whole of South- western part of Nigeria as well as the language use by the group as a means of communication. The Yoruba people can also be found in some other countries of Africa such as the Republic of Benin and Republic of Togo, Ghana, Cote D'Ivoire. Also, a considerable Yoruba population could also be found outside the continent of Africa in countries like Cuba, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago (Lieberman & Awoyale, 2005). The Yoruba people make use of oral literature to cultivate their cultural values into the individuals but this is gradually fading out. The understanding of Yoruba culture begins with a core interest and understanding of the Yoruba Language and its literature. Yoruba culture value like every other African culture value its humanity, though this is being threatening by the invasion of foreign values. The Yoruba society has a cultural value system with shared principle and standard of living which systematically account for the stability of social conduct such as fundamental rights, patriotism, respect for human dignity, respect for parent and constituted authority, among several others. Those values are the criteria which the Yoruba base their

assessment of their daily lives, arranging their priorities and communicate to the wider world (Badru & Ogunniran, 2023).

Culture remains a memory bank of people's experience and history. It embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetics and communicative values, and a set of spiritual mirror through which particular society feels themselves and their place in the global world (Adewale, 2010). Values on the other hand could be regarded as the degree of usefulness of something or quality that something possess which makes it helpful, useful and desirable. Values are a standard, template or an idea which most people have about the worth of good qualities. By implication therefore, values of traditional festivals and folksongs are the worth, in qualitative form that are derivable from the respective performance of these two genres of literature which are useful and helpful to individuals. Values are essential to traditional festivals and folksongs; they both go a long way in building cultural beliefs as well as guiding and shaping the society in other to live a righteous life (Asare-Kumi, 2020). Yoruba cultural values could be seen as a coherent set of attitudes, behaviour and action adopted by the Yoruba people. In other words, Yoruba cultural values are aggregate of a set of Yoruba attitudes, behaviour and action adopted and evolved by Yoruba community as a standard to guide individual behaviours and preferences.

Oral literature is a component of art which the African traditional background was born and grew up with before exposure to modern (written) literature. It is transmitted orally from mouth to mouth and from generation to generation. Existence of story in African societies (Yoruba Society inclusive) is widely known and oral literature as an integral part of the African society. Oral literature usually relates to, and elucidates the various cultural and traditional aspects of the society from which they evolve. Since oral literature portrays the values and tradition of Yoruba society, where both the young and adult learn through the events conveyed, the values of this oral literally genre cannot be underestimated. This implies that, the relevance of oral literature in contemporary Yoruba society cannot be underestimated. The performance of most of the Yoruba oral literature is done by adults. This is because the elderly ones are the custodians of culture and oral literature is regarded as part of Yoruba culture (Lieberman & Awoyale, 2005). Oral literature is culture and no literature in the world can be meaningfully strived outside the facts of the culture which produces it. In other words, it is very difficult to learn a particular oral literature in isolation from the culture of that people, implying that it would be practically impossible to have a proper understanding of a particular oral literature without an insight into its culture. This is because oral literature is a means by which the images of culture are transmitted into the world (Adewale, 2010).

The Concept of Yoruba Folksongs

Folksongs have held a special place in human culture since time immemorial. According to Adegbite (1992), these songs have been a deeply gratifying collective activity for humanity. Adegbite asserts that in traditional Yoruba society, songs serve various purposes, including recreation, entertainment, political expression, social gatherings, funerals, rituals, socio-economic ceremonies, and amusement. Yoruba folksongs are crafted through a harmonious blend of vocals and instruments, designed to please the auditory senses while effectively conveying the experiences and activities of individuals in their environment (Ogunrinade, 2009).

Hamamma, Qabaha and Awwad (2023) opine that folksongs are a significant aspect of oral tradition in the realm of folklore. This sub-set of oral literature, according to the scholars, always reflects socio-cultural, political and historical realities of a given

society. They stressed further that folksong as a genre of oral literature indicates national heritage. This implies that folksong is regarded as a mirror through which national heritage could be seen.

Adesokan (1999) defines Yoruba folksongs as a means of expressing emotions like joy, sorrow, and merriment during significant life events such as birth, marriage, and funerals. They play a crucial role in traditional Yoruba ceremonies. Ogunrinade (2009) further supports this view, emphasising that folksongs mirror human experiences, representing a wide range of emotions such as joy, fear, melancholy, and grief. Yoruba culture boasts folksongs for various situations, including work-related songs, songs addressing societal issues, and those intended for specific gender and age groups, from children to adults. In essence, Yoruba folksongs serve as cultural indicators, revealing the philosophy, beliefs, and way of life of the people, providing insight into their day-to-day existence (Oladipo, 2015). These oral literary forms transmit information, cultural values, and promote virtuous behaviour while discouraging wrongdoing.

Yoruba folksongs have a long history predating colonial rule, but they are not stagnant, as they continue to evolve alongside modern practices. It is important not to define them in opposition to contemporary customs. Yoruba folksongs stand out due to their use of the Yoruba language as a primary means of expression, their connection to deities and rituals, their incorporation of traditional instruments like *bàtá*, *dùndún*, *gáangan*, and *àgídígbo*, and their close ties to Yoruba dance (Omojola, 2016). From these definitions, it can be inferred that Yoruba folksongs are traditional melodies originating within the Yoruba community and passed down orally through generations. Ogunrinade (2014) notes that Yoruba folk songs reflect the Yoruba way of life embody the qualities, characteristics, and values of their culture. These songs accompany every aspect of Yoruba life, from birth to death, and are integral to the community's fabric, transcending various Yoruba locales.

Yoruba folksongs, serving as a potent tool for preserving oral tradition, mark significant stages in human life. They include a variety of forms, including lullabies, children's game songs, nuptial chants, hunter's chants, and more. In Yoruba culture, folksongs motivate communal development projects, wartime efforts, and the gathering of people for important meetings (Ogunrinade, 2014). Each of these activities is accompanied by specific folk songs, contributing to the individual's and society's growth. A Yoruba child is born into a musical environment, learning and growing within a society steeped in music. For example, the hunter's chant, whether performed at a marriage, funeral, housewarming, or naming ceremony, carries therapeutic, communicative, and aesthetic value, incorporating prayers and praises. In a marriage ceremony, it may also involve promises of a bright future, particularly for the bride embarking on a new and unfamiliar journey from her parents' home. Each Yoruba folksong educates, entertains, and lays a solid foundation for a child's language development.

Furthermore, Yoruba folksongs have various forms, such as *èṣà* Egúngún (masquerade's chants) and *ẹkún iyáwó* (nuptial chants). Regarding nuptial chants or nuptial songs, they are oral narratives about the self within Yoruba culture (Alabi, 2005). These songs, exclusive to women preparing for marriage, are sung on the eve of the wedding. The bride takes the central role in this genre, using it to construct and praise herself, her family, and various aspects of her communal life. Weeks before the performance, the bride rehearses her lines with assistance from her parents and neighbors. On the day of the performance, she is accompanied by drummers and unmarried friends as she goes from house to house (Alabi, 2005).

Alabi (2005) describes the nuptial chant as a lament, as the day of the performance is a mixture of sadness and joy for both the bride and her parents. It is a day of reflection for the bride, evaluating her life, achievements, and the uncertainties of her future in her new home. This introspective process often leads to tears for the bride, her parents, and her family. Alabi (2005) notes that the day of the Yoruba nuptial chant performance is marked by both sadness and joy, with sadness prevailing as the bride, who has lived with her parents, especially her mother, since birth, prepares to leave them. The uncertainties surrounding her marital home and her husband's family's behavior intensify the emotions. The nuptial chant primarily includes prayers, with the bride initiating the chant, followed by responses from her mother, father, friends, and family members.

The educational significance of Yoruba nuptial chants, especially for young girls, lies in promoting the value of virginity and its preservation until marriage. These chants emphasise the virtues that will empower the future wife to endure challenges in her new home, ultimately contributing to a better future, as depicted in the chants. The rhythm of these folksongs offers aesthetic value, providing entertainment and pleasure for the audience.

The Concept of Yoruba Traditional Festivals

Many festivals abound in the Yoruba society, because almost every community in the Yorubá nation has one festival or the other. The Yoruba people foster a sense of unity among themselves through festival performance (Ogwezzy-Ndisika & Faustino, 2017). Some of these festivals include *Òsun* in *Osògbò*; *Eyo* in *Lagos (Èkó)*; *Ojúde-Oba* in *Ìjebú-Òde*; *Sàngó* in *Oyo*; *Egúngún* in *Ìbàdàn*; *Àdásóbo* in *Kísí*; *Morèmi* in *Ofá*; and *Oládúnwò* in *Òkè-Ìmesí, Èkitì* State. Some other Yorubá traditional festivals as identified by Ogwezzy-Ndisika and Faustino (2017) include *Udi'Ròkò* in *Adó-Èkitì*, *Olòsunta* in *Ìkéré-Èkitì*, *Semúregede* in *Òde-Èkitì*, *Olófin* in *Ìlawẹ-Èkitì*, *Òkóròbò* in *Ìfáki-Èkitì*, *Olúa* in *Òsi-Èkitì* and *Ògoyé* in *Igbàrà-Odò*. Some of the festivals bear different names in Yoruba towns, but *Ìfá*, *Sàngó*, *Egúngún*, *Qbátalá* and *Ògún* festivals are celebrated in all Yorubá towns. Some of these traditional festivals are discussed below:

A brief discussion of five of the Yoruba traditional festivals are given below. The five festivals include *Òsun*, *Eyo*, *Ojúde-Oba*, *Egúngún* and *Òkóròbo* respectively.

The Osun Festival: is a religious festival in Yorubá land. The festival has become one of the most popular traditional festivals in Nigeria. The festival, which is usually performed in the month of August, is a two-week programme which celebrates the *Òsun* (a river goddess) deity. It is believed that the goddess is capable of dishing out blessings to her worshippers at every celebration (Olaolu, 2015). The *Òsun* has a sacred grove called *Osun Grove* which has been recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a world heritage site (Osadolo, 2016).

The festival was borne out of the yearly sacrifice offered to celebrate *Òsun*, the river goddess, who serves as the protector of the clan, *Osogbo* about seven centuries ago, when the community was founded (Osadolo, 2016). *Òsun*, who is believed to have the spiritual power to solve many problems assured the people of her protection and promised to bless their women with fruits of the womb if they would offer a sacrifice to her annually. According to Osadolo (2016), the contract was sealed and the sacrifices and ceremonies became inevitable. The commencement of the festival (Olaolu, 2015) is marked with the cleansing of *Osogbo* town, followed by the lightning of a 600-year old lamp known as *Iná olójú-merindínlógún* (a 16-point

lamp). Thereafter, the crowns of the past monarchs of Osogbo, the Ataojas, are displayed.

Similarly, Osádòlò (2016) observes that the Òşun festival commences with a sequence of rituals, namely Ìwopópó, Iná Olójú-mérindínlógún, Ìbòrí-adé, and the Arugbá rituals. The first ritual, Ìwopópó, serves to purify Òşogbo city from malevolent forces, preceding the official start of the festival. Subsequently, the Iná Olójú-mérindínlógún ritual involves lighting a 16-point lamp, believed to be 600 years old, three days after the initial purification rite. The third ritual, Ìbòrí-adé, entails the gathering of the crowns of past monarchs (Ataojas) for blessings, overseen by the incumbent Àtaója of Òşogboland, the Arugbá, the Yèyé Òşun, and a committee of priestesses. During this phase, a votary virgin carries a calabash containing sacrificial materials on her head, leading a procession to the Òşun River. The townspeople view her as the goddess's representative, transferring their troubles onto her while offering prayers (Oşadòlò, 2016).

In addition to these traditional rites, the festival boasts an array of side attractions and activities, enhancing the overall experience for visitors and tourists, particularly first-time attendees. These include trade fairs, games, and various events designed to infuse excitement into the two-week celebration. Consequently, numerous activities are organised around the festival, attracting tourists and visitors who come to witness, engage, and partake in the festivities. From this, it can be inferred that the Òşun festival transcends mere rituals of appeasement and celebration dedicated to the river goddess (Olaolu, 2015; Oşadòlò, 2016).

The Èyò Festival: The festival known as Adamu Òrişà, or Èyò festival, holds significant cultural importance in Lagos, particularly on Lagos Island, also known as Èkó (Hinterland of Lagos) (Olaolu, 2015; Aromashodu, 2017). It is considered the core of the local tradition. This festival, highly esteemed by Lagosians, involves various groups referred to as Iga. The Èyò masquerade performance is typically conducted to honour the memory of a deceased Oba (king), Chief, or prominent individual who made substantial contributions to the development of Lagos (Aromashodu, 2017).

Despite its significance, the Èyò festival does not occur annually. In the past, there were instances when the festival did not take place for twenty-one consecutive years. Conversely, in 1903, 1906, and 1909, the festival was celebrated three, four, and five times, respectively (Aromashodu, 2017).

The Èyò masquerade stands apart from other masquerades in Yoruba culture. While many masquerades wear attire of diverse colors and brandish whips, the Èyò masquerade dons flowing white poplin garments, traditionally known as àròpalè, along with a decorated hat called Àpé/Aga. Additionally, the Èyò masquerade carries a staff known as Òpá Èyò, which is employed to transmit the blessings of the Adamu Òrişà play by touching individuals. It is evident that this masquerade possesses distinctive features and exudes captivating beauty (Aromashodu, 2017).

The Ojúde-Òba Festival: In Ìjèbú land, there exists a longstanding tradition known as the Ojúde-Òba festival, which traces its origins back to the year 1892. During this significant period, Oba (King) Adesunmbo Tunwase, who held the esteemed position of Awujale, the Paramount Ruler of Ijebu-Ode, entered into a treaty of association with the British Queen. As part of this agreement, King Adesunmbo Tunwase allocated a parcel of land for the establishment of the Central Mosque for the Muslim community. Simultaneously, he also consented to the British missionaries' request to propagate Christianity within

Ijebuland and allocated the land upon which the first Church in Ijebu land was constructed.

The Ojúde-Òba festival, which translates to 'Festival in the King's Court,' was initiated by the Muslim community as an expression of gratitude and reverence towards the reigning monarch for his benevolent actions and support. (<http://hotels.ng/guides/carnival/ojude-oba-festival>).

The Ojúde-Òba festival, renowned for its rich historical tradition of uniting all the sons and daughters of Ìjèbúland once a year, typically commences on the third day of the Eid-el Kabir festival. This grand celebration casts a radiant glow over Ijebu-Ode, the capital of Ijebu land, and has evolved into a unifying force for both the local and diasporic Ijebu community. Participants, organized into age grades known as Règbérégbé, revel in the festivities with traditional attire, intricate hairstyles, the delightful cuisine of Ìfókòrè, and captivating performances of rare cultural dances and impressive horsemanship (Olaolu, 2015).

The Ojúde-Òba festival boasts several prominent features, including the following: families assemble in vibrant attire, congregating before the Oba to receive royal blessings; many families, particularly those with a warrior heritage, parade on beautifully adorned horses, showcasing their equestrian skills to captivate onlookers; diverse musical and dance performances by the various règbérégbé groups before the Oba; intermittent gun salutes when a warrior family and their entourage dance within the court; an array of fanfare events throughout the festival grounds; and the presentation of cash prizes and other accolades to the best-dressed règbérégbé and horse-riding family, respectively (Olaolu, 2015). (<http://hotels.ng/guides/carnivals/ojude-oba-festivals>).

Egúngún Festival: Egúngún (Masquerade) festival stands as one of the most celebrated indigenous festivals within the Yorúbá territory of South-western Nigeria, particularly in Ìbàdàn, renowned for its powerful historical figures such as Iba Olúyòlè, Balógun Ìbíkúnlé, Lágelú, and Ìyálóde Èfúsetán Aniwúra (Òjédòkun & Òtòí, 2020). This annual festival plays a pivotal role in venerating the spirits of the ancestors among the Yorúbá people (Òjédòkun & Òtòí, 2020). Egúngún holds a significant place in Yorúbá tradition, signifying the origin of remembrance for the departed (Adéoyè, 1985). Typically, it is a collective endeavor, organised by its faithful and observed between the months of May and July, with June being the dominant month for festivities across the South-western Region of Nigeria, as reported by Òkèowó (2020).

In essence, Egúngún (Masquerade) serves as a powerful symbol of the Yorúbá belief in the existence of departed souls, still actively connected with the living. It embodies the Yorúbá belief in the afterlife (Adéoyè, 1985). Furthermore, the Egúngún mask represents ancestral spirits, and any glimpse of the person beneath the mask is considered taboo (Okeowo, 2020). Egúngún is believed to bestow good fortune, fertility, and purification upon the land, and during times of conflict, it is believed to bless, protect, and lead communities (Aremu, Banjo & Olanipekun, 2012). Moreover, Egúngún collectively safeguards communities against malevolent spirits, epidemics, famine, infertility, chronic illnesses, poverty, witchcraft, and evildoers (Aremu, Banjo & Olanipekun, 2012).

Ìbàdàn, the largest city in Western Nigeria, is especially synonymous with masquerade festivals, surpassing all other Yorúbá communities. Historically, Ìbàdàn, known for its formidable warriors, employed masquerades during conflicts, notably during the Yoruba civil wars from 1793 to 1893 (Okeowo, 2020). Prominent among these masquerades are Alápáńsánpá, Olólólù, Afidíléjéjé, and Atipákò. Alápáńsánpá, also called

Egúgún Ògúndèjì, holds a distinguished position among Ìbàdàn's Egúgún masquerades and exclusively performs in June each year (Okeowo, 2020).

Traditionally, Alápánsánpá visits the palace of the Olubadan (The Paramount Ruler), where he administers three ceremonial whips to the monarch, who reciprocates with blessings and gifts. It is believed that failure to visit the palace disrupts peace and prosperity in the land, signifying a disharmony between Alápánsánpá and the ruling monarch. This belief is encapsulated in the popular chant, "Bi Alápánsánpá ò délé Olúbàdàn, Ìbàdàn ò fararọ" (If Alápánsánpá does not visit the Olubadan palace, there will be no peace in the city). During Egúgún ceremonies, devotees chant *Iwì* or *Èṣà* (Masquerade Chant), while offerings like *kolanut*, bitter-kola, palm oil, salt, ram, cornmeal, pork, he-goat, cock, pounded yam, and bean cake are presented as sacrifices (Adéoyè, 1985).

Adéoyè (1985) extensively classifies eight (8) types of Egúgún within Yorùbá society, including Egúgún Èlérù, Egúgún Alátẹ (Tòhòlò), Egúgún Ọlópón, Egúgún Jàhùkù (Ọlórẹ), Egúgún Láyẹwù (Jẹhjú), Egúgún Kúndúke, Egúgún Alágbe (Oníjọ), and Egúgún Pidánpidán. Additionally, Adéoyè (1985) identifies Apónrán, Gángan, Bátá, Àdàmọ, and Àgèrẹ as the various types of drums employed during Egúgún (Masquerade) festivals.

The Òkóròbò Festival: most indigenous Yorùbá festivals are closely tied to specific deities, unique to each community, and typically observed annually between April and September. One such festival is Òkóròbò, a significant celebration in Ìfàkì-Èkitì, Èkitì State, located in the South-western region of Nigeria (Adétúnmbí, 2006). This festival holds a prominent place in the region, particularly within Èkitì State. Adétúnmbí (2006) distinguishes between two variants of Òkóròbò: Òkóròbò Ìwòrẹ and Òkóròbò Egun. The former is more widely recognized globally, while the latter is known for its captivating performances, as participants dance to the vibrant traditional music while retreating to the grove. Unlike many other traditional Yoruba festivals, Òkóròbò doesn't involve rituals or idol sacrifices, which may explain its appeal to people of diverse backgrounds and races. The festival centers on singing and dancing, although it also features a unique tradition where physically and mentally fit individuals voluntarily strike each other's legs with long palm fronds, known as "uro" in Ìfàkì-Èkitì. This practice is viewed as both exercise and a longstanding tradition associated with celebrating the annual festival.

Approximately seven days before the festival, women customarily sing praises to herald the upcoming event and offer elegies in memory of those who once celebrated with them but have since passed away. The festival is typically held the day after the local market day, allowing Òkóròbò adherents to purchase necessary items on the market day preceding the celebration. Additionally, two days before the festival, parents often take their children to a special farm called "Okò Òkóròbò" (The Òkóròbò Farm) for a festive gathering. Children in the farm commemorate a mock Òkóròbò festival on this day, creating cherished memories (Adetunmbi, 2006).

Yam plays a significant role in the festival, with generous farmers sharing part of their yam harvest with friends and family. The festival's official meat is *Èran Èlédẹ* (Pork), which is slaughtered in large quantities for the feast and distributed to interested individuals. The less fortunate also have an abundance of food during this special festive period. The Òkóròbò, referred to as *Aja* in the Ìfàkì dialect, is paraded on the day of the celebration, marking the peak of the festivities. This procession, consisting of two long columns adorned with palm fronds, is carried on the head and supported by two strong ropes.

Each column, as described by Adetunmbi (2006), measures between ten and twelve feet in height and is carried from the Òkóròbò grove to the town.

The festival features two types of folk song: one without drum accompaniment for the physical aspects of the ceremony and the other accompanied by *kekedu* drums, *aran*, and buffalo horns. The lengthy procession and the Òkóròbò's two-kilometer journey along the main street of the *Iwore* quarters are the highlights of the celebration, offering a climax of joy and excitement. During this phase, the intensity of flogging among the youth escalates as they precede the procession until Òkóròbò reaches its resting point. The festival typically concludes before 7:30 PM on the same day (Adetunmbi, 2006).

The Values of Yoruba Folksongs

Yoruba oral literature, particularly folksongs, is renowned for its inherent formal and functional beauty, as noted by Lawal (2010). Lawal further posits that the artist, within this context, assumes the role of a priest who transcends mundane concerns, embracing the religion of beauty. Among the multifaceted functions fulfilled by Yoruba folksongs and various literary forms worldwide, aesthetics reign supreme, constituting an indispensable core. Hence, any creative work or piece of literature that prioritises secondary functions at the expense of its intrinsic aesthetic dimension cannot be considered high-quality literature according to Lawal (2010).

In the quest for relaxation and diversion from life's burdens, every individual seeks solace. Oral literature, with its well-composed, melodious, and rhythmic songs, offers an avenue to soothe the mind and rejuvenate the spirit. Yoruba oral literature, particularly folksongs, is especially adept at achieving this through elements of suspense, thus casting the artist in the role of an entertainer. The captivating nature of Yoruba oral literature is achieved through dramatic situations, intricate plots, vivid imagery, performance elements, narrative techniques, and musical accompaniments. Moreover, the moral conflicts depicted in most folksongs, coupled with the language and presentation style, contribute to their intrinsic beauty. Even themes of darkness and malevolence can serve as a basis for narrative enjoyment and audience engagement. These elements collectively serve an educational purpose, particularly for the younger generation, as corroborated by Igba, Chukwuoko & Idike (2016).

Yoruba folksongs possess a rich vein of healing and soothing properties. In today's world, marked by mounting social, security, political, and economic challenges, as underscored by Lawal (2010), suffering and despair prevail. Poverty, disease, warfare, and various forms of criminality, such as insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and bombings, appear to be on the rise, despite the advancements of science and technology. Yoruba folk songs serve as a balm for the soul, offering therapeutic relief from tension and despair. They reassure us that, despite the prevailing chaos and suffering, there is still hope for humanity. Many forms of Yoruba oral literature, especially folk songs, contribute to this therapeutic function. For instance, lullabies lull infants to sleep, while panegyrics uplift and delight children.

Additionally, Yoruba folk songs provide an avenue for children to release stress, express and resolve repressed negative emotions such as anger, hatred, and jealousy. Chanting, singing, or narrating a horror story within this context helps individuals, including children, confront and overcome their fears, a process referred to as catharsis or emotional purging. Consequently, engaging with Yoruba folk songs aids in the resolution of negative emotions as opined by Oduolowu and Akintemi (2014) and Ogunrinade (2014).

Furthermore, Yoruba folksongs, particularly children's songs, impart important moral lessons, emphasizing the importance of obeying and respecting elders, especially parents. Many Yoruba children's songs promote moral uprightness and discourage social vices such as gossiping and stealing, which tarnish one's reputation. These songs also instill knowledge of Yoruba social and cultural values, including virtues like honesty, kindness, hard work, good faith, obedience, and endurance. In this manner, Yoruba lullabies contribute significantly to children's overall well-being, ensuring they remain in good spirits.

The Values of Yoruba Traditional Festivals

Yoruba festivals offer a myriad of valuable aspects, as highlighted by Olaolu (2015), Oşadlo (2016), and Aromashodu (2017). These cultural celebrations provide a platform for individuals to showcase their innate talents and serve as a forum for communal prayers, aiming for peace and prosperity within the community. Additionally, Yoruba festivals act as significant tourist attractions, offering a window into the worldviews and traditions of the Yoruba people drawing attendees from both near and far. Furthermore, these festivals serve as instruments of social cohesion and mobilisation, contributing to the development of the villages, towns, or cities where they occur. They compel individuals to actively engage in communal activities, reinforcing shared values, bonds, taboos, and guiding behavioral norms for cultural preservation.

Moreover, Yoruba traditional festival performances provide a unique opportunity to appreciate various Yoruba art forms, including beaded crowns, gèlédé masks, armllets, and depictions of Yoruba òrìṣà (deities) and legendary figures such as Šàngó (the god of thunder), Ógún (the god of iron), Òrànmiyán (a Yoruba legend), and Mòrèmi (a Yoruba legend). As traditional attire is predominantly worn during these festivities, attendees can gain insight into the traditional Yoruba dress code, which modestly covers sensitive body parts. The celebration also involves the performance of traditional music and chants, offering audience an opportunity to witness these forms of artistic expression and interact with the performers, gaining firsthand experience. Furthermore, attendees can learn about the interconnectedness of nature and culture through festivals, and these events play a significant role in the development and preservation of the Yoruba language.

Literature plays a crucial role in language development, as noted by Lawal (2010), by presenting morals, patterns, usages, and images in vivid, meaningful, and memorable contexts. Yoruba oral literature, in particular, enhances the communicative competence of both narrators/performers and their audiences. It plays a pivotal role in developing fundamental language skills, especially oracy (listening and speaking) skills, through the performance and narration of various forms of Yoruba oral literature. This enhances the speaking skills of the narrator and improves the listening competence of the audience. Furthermore, all literature, including Yoruba oral literature, promotes psychomotor development by involving dramatic skills such as dancing, singing, acting, miming, and oral poetic performances (Lawal, 2010). These activities promote physical fitness and agility as participants engage in running, jumping, and various body movements during their participation in various forms of Yoruba traditional festivals.

In specific terms, the following are the values of performing traditional festivals and folk songs in traditional Yoruba society which the modern society can learn from and emulate to build a just and egalitarian society.

1. They help to honour cultural values and immunise on healthy culture penetration from outside;

2. They help people to maintain balance between material life and spiritual life, especially with the stress of modern life, where people are seemingly programmed to leave and work.
3. Both are an environment for the Yoruba people to go back to their route to learn about their origin through words of mouth, performance and their experiences in the festivals and songs.
4. They both present a premise for people to learn about their history, which is much better than reading textbooks at school.
5. Both are tools used to regulate inter personal relationship and to perpetuate the entire Yoruba community and have certain standards or norms to be observed.
6. They are tools used to prevent members of the Yoruba community from becoming rebellious and thereby endanger the welfare of the society.
7. Festival performance and folk songs promote Yoruba cultural values such as hospitality, truth, respect for old age, covenant keeping, hard work and good character that guide the behaviour of individuals in the society.
8. These two genres of oral literature promote cultural education in which children as well as young individuals are educated according to the native custom, practices, beliefs, and general life pattern of the Yoruba society.
9. Both cultivate in the children and young adults of the society the right type of values as they learn to identify, understand and appreciate cultures, norms and values of the Yoruba society.

CONCLUSIONS

Yoruba folksongs and traditional festivals, as manifestations of oral literature, possess a remarkable ability to simultaneously entertain, educate, heal, and provide solace to individuals. In many instances, they can be viewed as therapeutic mechanisms capable of alleviating one's concerns and addressing mental distress. These two categories of oral literature serve as invaluable instruments for documenting every facet of Yoruba life. While the primary purpose of any form of oral literature is to entertain, they also serve additional roles such as imparting knowledge, facilitating communication, offering comfort, and promoting healing.

This study draws the conclusion that Yoruba society revolves around the rich tapestry of folksongs, with these melodies accompanying every significant life event among the Yoruba people, from birth to naming ceremonies, marriages, deaths, housewarmings, coronations, and beyond. Furthermore, traditional festivals are identified as paramount features of Yoruba culture. These festivals hold enduring significance in Yoruba society and can be either widespread across the entire Yoruba territory or specific to certain localities. Regardless of their scope, the core objective of festival performances is to preserve and propagate the cultural heritage and traditions of the Yoruba people, along with promoting the values and virtues of their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is noteworthy that folksongs play an integral role as complementary elements during traditional festival performances. Therefore, it is recommended that the Yoruba people continue to utilise folk songs as a means of entertaining, educating, consoling, and comforting themselves as the need arises. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of preserving and perpetuating traditional festival celebrations in Yoruba society, as they serve as a unifying force among the

people and a potent platform for showcasing the rich culture and traditions of the Yoruba people to the wider world.

Disclosure Statements

This manuscript is not extracted from any thesis either Masters or PhD.

- **Authors Contributions:** *Surajudeen Adewale Badru:* introduction, the aims and objectives of the study, the review on Oral Literature as a communicative resource as well as the review on Yoruba people and their Culture. Conclusions, Recommendations and the Abstract (Summary) respectively. *Victoria Oludunni Ogunniran:* carried out a review on The Concept of Yoruba Folksongs and the Values of Yoruba Folksongs. *Saudat Adebisi Hamzat:* carried out a review on The Concept of Yoruba Traditional Festivals and The Values of Yoruba Traditional Festivals respectively.
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DRAFT



قيم الأدب الشفهي في المجتمع الأفريقي: حالة من أغاني اليوروبا الشعبية والمهرجانات التقليدية

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الملخص: تعتبر الأغاني الشعبية والمهرجانات التقليدية عنصراً أساسياً في كل نشاط يقوم به شعب اليوروبا تقريباً. إن العالم المعاصر مليء بالآلام والهموم والمعاناة واليأس ومختلف الأنشطة المعادية للمجتمع، على الرغم من الادعاءات المتغترسة والجهود الصارخة التي يبذلها العلم والتكنولوجيا في حل المشاكل القديمة لخلق العديد من المشاكل الجديدة. ومن ثم، يحتاج كل فرد إلى الاسترخاء والتسلية وصرف ذهنه عن صراعات الحياة المملة وهمومها وأحزانها من خلال الأغاني الشعبية والمهرجانات. وبالتالي فإن الأغاني والمهرجانات الشعبية اليوروبا، باعتبارها باحثين عن الروح ومصالحين للروح، تخدم الأغراض الجمالية والعلاجية والتواصلية كمخففات للتوتر بالإضافة إلى إكسبير يطمئن الأفراد من خلاله بقوة إلى أنه لا يزال هناك أمل للبشرية. تمتلك الأغاني الشعبية والمهرجانات التقليدية، باعتبارها مظاهر للنوع الأدبي الشفهي، قدرة رائعة على الترفيه والتثقيف والشفاء وتوفير العزاء للأفراد في نفس الوقت. ومن خلالهم، يتم دعم فضائل المجتمع وإبراز القيم الثقافية. وهكذا خلص إلى أن الأغاني الشعبية والمهرجانات اليوروبية هي أداة تواصل حيوية للمتعة وعلاج لشفاء الأفراد وتهديتهم. لذلك، يوصى بأن يستمر شعب اليوروبا في استخدام الأغاني الشعبية كوسيلة للترفيه والتثقيف والتعزية والراحة عند الحاجة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية الحفاظ على احتفالات المهرجانات التقليدية وإدامتها في مجتمع اليوروبا، لأنها بمثابة قوة موحدة بين الناس ومنصة فعالة لعرض الثقافة والتقاليد الغنية لشعب اليوروبا إلى العالم الأوسع. وينبغي للمجتمعات الأفريقية الأخرى أيضاً أن تكثف جهودها في توظيف الأغاني الشعبية وعروض المهرجانات لإبراز هويتها الثقافية للعالم الأوسع.

الكلمات الدالة: القيم، الأدب الشفهي، المجتمع الأفريقي، الأغاني الشعبية اليوروبا، مهرجانات يوروبا.

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