

A Cultural Analysis on the Use of Yorùbá Orature in Initiation Rites into Aborigine Ògbóni Fraternity

Alimi-Adeniran, Adebayowa Isiaka

Abstract

The paper is an attempt on cultural analysis on the use of Yorùbá orature in the initiation rites into the Ògbóni cult. Yorùbá orature and Ògbóni cult are regarded as indices of Yorùbá cultural engineering. Arò Ògbóni is an oratural genre specifically rendered in the cult for both secular and sacred functions. Initiation rites known as Orò Ìrìlé is a sacred process carried out for admitting a new member into the cult. Apèèná, the chief priest, officially conducts the rites. Each stage of the initiation rites has a specific arò rendered to align with the particular episode. Sacrifices are offered to particular deities in the orthodox Yorùbá pantheon. Èdan, the cult emblem is venerated at ojú ikú (shrine of immortality) and the new initiate is ritually covenanted with the cult members, the Èdan and the Mother Earth. Cultural elements like kolanuts, bitter kola, alligator pepper, camwood, white chalk e.t.c. are symbolically utilised during the initiation rites. In a nutshell, initiation rites into Ògbóni symbolise physical and spiritual transformations of the member not only within the cult but in the larger community as well.

Keywords: initiation, rites, ògbóni, arò, sacrifices, èdan, Earth.

Introduction

Aborigine Ògbóni Fraternity is one of the cult groups originated, nurtured and developed in Yorùbáland in the Southwestern axis of Nigeria. Though the cult has spread to other parts of the country, other countries in the west African coast and other continents of the world, its Yorùbá origin is not in dispute. As a traditional institution and a survivor of the ancient Yorùbá cultural practice, the cult utilises quite a number of Yorùbá oratural genres in the performance of its secular and sacred activities. Orature, variously known as verbal art, oral literature or oral performance is being utilised in the performance of various functions in the African society. In Yorùbá oryodoxy, oratural genres are rendered either by an individual or in a group for various purposes or reasons. Yorùbá orature and Ògbóni cult are both products of Yorùbá cultural engineering. Their active presence and effective existence from the time imme-

morial attest to their utilitarian relevance otherwise they could have passed into oblivion.

The methodological framework of the work is a combination of both primary and secondary data collection and processing. Primarily, resource persons in Yorùbá oratural genres were interacted with. We conducted oral interviews on the composition and rendition of arò Ògbóni for various functions of either secular or sacred nature. We were involved in restricted observatory participations. We had the opportunity to see and touch some cultural elements like kolanuts, bitter kola, alligator pepper, camwood, granite symbolising Èṣù and other things. We watched video clips on arò Ògbóni and listened to same on audio clips. Secondly, we made use of library and online sources to collect data on Ògbóni cult.

Literature Review

Orature is the oral form of literature. As stated earlier in the introductory section of the study, orature is variously known in the literary parlance as verbal arts (Bascom, 1955) oral performance (Okpewho, 1992) and most recently orature (Pio Zirimu, 2009) Nendwa and Bukenya (1985:1) define oral literature as 'those utterances whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic character of accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression'. Various scholars and writers in Yorùbá studies have worked on oratural genres at various times. Beier and Gbàdàmósí (1959) work on oríkì, odù ifá, òwe, ìjálá, iwí-eégún (èṣà), èkún iyáwó and àlò àpamò. They argue that Yorùbá oratural genres are classified by grouping of people to which the artiste belongs and the technique of recitation employed. They observe that the same material could occur in any of the many poetic forms of Yorùbá oral literature but it is the mode of vocalization rather than the material that prescribes the label for the performance. Babalolá (1967) works on Ìjálá. He describes the form and content of the hunters' genre. Abimbólá (1968) works on Ifá literary corpus. Armstrong Oláyemí and Adú (1969) work on ègè in Ègbáland. Fábùnmi (1972) makes a collection of àyájó ohùn Ifẹ (mythical incantations of Ifẹ) Àjùwòn (1977) works on irèmòjé as funeral poetry for hunters. Olátúnjí (1984) makes a classification of oral Yorùbá poetry into chant mode and feature types. Olátúnjí's work is descriptively analytical. Orímóògùnjé (2004) examines the significance of verbal arts in Yorùbá indigenous health care practices. His focus is on how health related genres are relevant to the community health delivery system. Olúnládé (2005) works on the use of Yorùbá oral literature in Yorùbá

newspaper from 1859 to 1960. He analytically examines the use of *oríkì* (panegyric genre), *orin* (songs), *itàn* (stories), *àlọ̀ àpamọ̀* (riddles) and *òwe* (proverbs) as serially published in editions of *Akéde Èkó*, *Èkó Àkété* and *Elétí Ofẹ̀*. The gaps that are yet to be filled by the earlier scholars and writers that we intend to fill with this paper is cultural analysis on the use of *arò Ògbóni* in the initiation rites into the *Ògbóni* cult. Yorùbá oratural genres are the socio-cultural framework of references which which ensconces succinct general truth of moral reflections of codes and rules of conduct and also excellent sources of data that assert events or situations.

Ajìkòbì (2007:111) affirms that:

Verbal art is the authentic voice of both the past and the present that encompasses proverbs, songs, cliches, sayings, conundrums, maxims, pithy sentences, anecdotes, idioms, dicta, saws, aphorisms, poetry, historical lays e.tc. they are like sharp nails which force truth upon memory.

Ajìkòbì presents a general idea on orature but the present work behoves us to percolate down from generality to particularity hence we have a perusal at *Ọládẹmọ* (2009:16) :

Yorùbá oral literature genres include *òwe* (proverbs), *ẹsẹ ifá* (oracular verses), *ewí* (a broad term that include varieties of genres and recitations), *itàn* (stories), *orin* (songs), *oríkì* (praise poetry) *iyèrè ifá* (sing-song of ifá oracular verses) *ìjálá* (hunters' poetry), *ìrèmòjé* (hunters' dirge) *ràrà* (general dirges), *orin obitun* (maiden chants) and *ẹkún iyàwó* (brides song)

While Ajìkòbì makes a generalisation on his discussion of orature, *Ọládẹmọ* is particular on Yorùbá oratural genres. It is however surprising that none of the duo mentions *ofọ̀* (incantation) *àlọ̀ onítàn* (folktales) *àlọ̀ àpamọ̀* (riddles) and *orin ìrẹmọ* (lullaby) a genre popularly functional in motherhood and child-care for the purpose of nurturing socialisation. We notice that none of the writers has exhausted the list of Yorùbá oratural genres.

The nature of the work is folkloric since Yorùbá is primarily an oral society where orality predated literacy. Folklore thrives on oral traditions. Oratural genres and *Ògbóni* cult are elements of Yorùbá cultural engineering which are rooted in sociological experience and cosmological beliefs. *Ògbóni* in the belief and practice of Yorùbá traditional setting is essential to the society on the altar of services and sacrifices. The cult renders secular and sacred services to

the society. With reference to Marxist theory on society: the Ògbóni traditionally plays statutory roles in structure and infrastructure aspects of the society. The economy of the traditional society as the basic structure of any viable and vibrant society is controlled by the Ògbóni. Other aspects of the society that rest on economy, which is the base, and are regarded as infrastructures are either facilitated, monitored or supervised by the cult.

The infrastructural aspects of the society in accordance with marxist theory include commerce, governance, politics, justice dispensation, maintenance of peace and order, conflict management, security, defence, religion, technology (development and advancement) health and disease control diplomacy and inter-community relationship. All the aforementioned are statutory roles of Ògbóni in any given traditional society in the ancient times though the present realities have drastically reduced the influence of the cult and its grip on the society being relaxed the cult is still relevant in the Yorùbá society either openly or covertly.

Theoretical Framework

Considering the nature of Ògbóni, its social relevance and the onerous tasks assigned it by the system within the precincts of sociology and anthropology its members are supposed to be extra-ordinary par excellence in terms of virtues in order to meet up with the challenging demands of its membership of the cult. At this juncture, it behoves an intending member of Ògbóni to be drilled and grilled during the process of initiation suffice to prepare the novice for the tasks ahead.

The present work is both culture-related and oratural-based hence the analysis will be carried out within the theoretical framework of cultural semiotics and sociology of literature. Though a subtle reference was earlier made to marxist theory it is on logical to apply cultural semiotics with an emphasis on pragmatics and sociology of literature with a particular focus on the 'mirror image approach'. The two sets of theories have been considered to be viable interpretative and analytical paradigms. Semiotics is the study or science of signs, meaning-making, sign processes, indication, designation, likeness, analogy, metaphor, symbolism, signification and communication. Another term used for the study of signs or science of signs is semiology. While semiotics is associated with C.S. Pierce, semiology is pioneered by the swiss linguist Ferdinand De Sussure. Semiology is a specific study of structure and meaning of language. Semiotics may be divided into three branches such as semantics, syntactics and pragmatics. Semantics us the relationship between

signs and to which they refer, their signified denotation or meaning. Syntactics is the relation among or between signs in formal structures. While pragmatics is the relation between signs and sign-using agents or interpreters we have indicated earlier that this work will be analysed using the pragmatics aspect of semiotics within the Yorùbá cultural framework with a particular emphasis on Ògbóni as a sub-culture.

On the other hand, the term sociology of literature was coined by the French historian Hyppolyte Taine (1828-1893) in *History of English Literature* (1863) He analysed that a work of art is determined by three factors viz: the author's race, geographical and social 'milieu' and historical 'moment'. In his own views on sociology of literature Ògúnṣínà (2006:5) says 'As the name suggests, sociology of literature is a fusion of two distinct disciplines : sociology and literature. In her own contribution, Oḷádẹmọ (2009:18) explains that the sociology of literature is a theoretical approach in which a work of art is analysed and interpreted from the standpoint of the social structure of the society that produced it. The 'mirror image approach' that will be used for analysing this work views literature or orature as a direct reflection of various facets of social structure. Initiation rites is a process in Ògbóni which is a facet of social structure right from the ancient time in Yorùbáland. Initiation rites as the starting point in the process of being a member in the cult is a stage and the 'neophyte' is exposed to series of novel experiences that will definitely influence his mindset and shape his or her life as different from what it was in the past. The influence the initiation impacts on his mindset as well as the 'new life' the experience of the initiation rites has garbed on him or her will be reflected in his or relationship with fellow cult members and other members of the larger society as well.

Various oratural genres rendered during each stage of the initiation rites will definitely have impacts on him or her.

Initiation Rites into Aborigine Ògbóni Fraternity

A non-member who intends joining Ògbóni will make his intention known by getting linked up to an official designated as the recruitment officer. A preliminary investigations on the intending 'sheep' (àgùntàn) would be carried out about his family history, character and behavioural pattern. In the olden days descendants of slaves, rogues and prisoners were not eligible for initiation into the Ògbóni in the olden days but every facet of the society has been proliferated and standard being compromised nowadays. After satisfac-

tory results of the investigations and prescribed fees paid and ritual materials made available the initiation day will be fixed.

Initiation rites are carried out on *ojó ọ̀sẹ̀* or *itàdógùn* of the particular *il-édi* (temple) Initiation rites is called *Orò Ìrílé*. There are two modes of *ọ̀sẹ̀* or *itàdógùn* *Ògbóni* : ‘*ẹ̀mọ́*’ and ‘*àfẹ̀*’ These names of rats. *Ẹ̀mọ́* is a brown rat while *àfẹ̀* is a white-bellied rat. The two are symbolic in *Ògbóni*. Though brown in colour *ẹ̀mọ́* signifies daylight and *àfẹ̀* symbolises night or darkness. Those *iledis* where *ọ̀sẹ̀* is held during the day are identified as *ẹ̀mọ́* (daylight) while those that hold their *ọ̀sẹ̀* at night are regarded as *àfẹ̀* (night) They are so regarded because of the time each of the rats comes out. *Ẹ̀mọ́* though brown in colour comes out during the day and *àfẹ̀* with its white belly is a nocturnal rat. What an irony! This leads to the composition of an *arò*:

Ẹ̀mọ́ ló lọ̀sán
Ọ̀mọ́ Kúáyé
Mo ọ̀sẹ̀ báfẹ̀ ló lòru
Àtòru àtọ̀sán lọ̀mọ́ ilẹ̀ ní rin o!

Simply translated as:

The brown rat rules the day
The children of Kúáyé
The white-bellied rat rules the night
The snake rules both during day and night.

The analysis is that orthodoxically, Yorùbá are ecologically knowledgeable suffice to identify animals that come out during daytime as different from those that come out at night. Furthermore, they can also identify the animals that comes out at anytime. Meanwhile in *Ògbóni*, the ‘*ẹ̀mọ́*’ and ‘*àfẹ̀*’ are used as elevated metaphors to signify day and night specifically and further utilise them as nomenclatures for classifications of *ọ̀sẹ̀* (times of periodic meeting) The imagery of snake that can come out at anytime signifies the initiates or members of *Ògbóni* who has liberty to walk at anytime of the day or night, an unfettered freedom so to say.

The first rite to be performed during the initiation of a new member is the killing of a red-feathered cock in propitiation of *Èṣù* (neither the biblical devil nor the koranic satan), the diety of *Oríta*, denotatively a place where paths (or road) cross but connates confusion. *Èṣù* in Yorùbá thoughts and beliefs is either a law enforcer or a ‘special relations officer’ (*Ìdòwú*: 1969) In *Ògbóni* *Èṣù* is held in a very high regard and often propitiated to cuddle his favour and to

ward off his wrath. The significance of carrying out a propitiation of Èṣù during initiation into membership is to keep off from the back of the new member. An arò is rendered at the shrine of Èṣù during the rites:

Èṣù gbéwájú
Kóo màmà gbéyìn o
Èṣù gbéwájú o
Kóo màmà gbéyìn o
Iwájú awo l'Èṣu wà o.

Simply translated as:

Èṣù stay in the front
Do not stay at the back
Èṣù stay in the front
Do not stay at the back
Èṣù is in the front of the initiate

In Yorùbá orthodoxy, cosmologically Èṣù is believed to be a trickster, a trickster can go to any length to confuse or misguide or mislead his victim. Esoterically, Èṣù is believed to be of both positive and negative energies. He is both benevolent and malevolent in his attributes. Whereas there is the belief that he supports and favours a client of a diviner who adheres to injunctions of the oracle and promptly offer the prescribed sacrifice in the same vein Èṣù punishes the recalcitrant and the foolhardy.

During the initiation rites when Èṣù is being propitiated by the Àpèṣà, the Chief Priest of the ilèdì who intercedes on behalf of the person going through initiation that Èṣù should lead him or her by staying in the front and should not plot his or her downfall by staying at his or her back. The belief is that since the Èṣù has been propitiated, presumably a euphemism for being bribed, he would be benevolent to the cause of the person being initiated. At this juncture one could hazard a guess that Àpèṣà did not wholeheartedly trust Èṣù that he passionately pleaded with him not to stay at the back of the new member as he could harm him or her from the rear. One thinks this portends mistrust. Yorùbá orthodoxically do not worship Èṣù rather they massage his ego. There is a saying among the Yorùbá 'È ló pá Èṣù' Èṣù is not neither respected nor venerated but he is dreaded and avoided. Unlike Ògún and Òṣun whose priests and priestesses blackmail and intimidated in order to curry their blessings and favours. It is not uncommon for an òjálá chanter when singing the praises of Ògún to say:

Ògún bóò gbè mí
Ojúti loò mò
Ògún bóò gbè mí
Ojúti loò ni

Translated as :

*Ògún if you support me not
You are shameless!
Ògún if you favour me not
It is shameful of you!*

In the case of Ọṣun here goes a song:

Asúrétete kóògùn máa jẹ o!
Ọṣun Ọṣogbo bóò gbè mí o gbé o!

Translated as :

*The medication should be fastly effective!
Ọṣun Ọṣogbo if you favour me not you are doomed!*

The two deities in reference were being subjected to blackmail and intimidation by those singing their praises!

The next stage after propitiating the Èṣù is the veneration of Ọgún. A tortoise head will be held and the neck is continuously rubbed against the sharp edge of its upper shell until its jugular vein is cut and blood comes out and spread on the shrine of Ọgún. The Apèènà will then chat arò:

Alábahun láyé o
Kí ṣubú irákòrò o
Alábahun láyé
Kí ṣubú irákòrò o
Oò màrà ní ṣubú dàá nù o!

The arò is a supplication seeking success and breakthrough for the person being initiated metaphorically likens him or her to tortoise who never falls while crawling. The essence of venerating Ọgún during the initiation rites is to charge Ọgún to facilitate his or her earthly victory and breakthrough. In Yorùbá cosmology, it is believed that Ọgún is the deity controlling the making and using of iron or black metal all tools made of iron are associated with his technological acumen. All trades and crafts having to do with iron are credited to his skills. Ọgún is the deity of hunting and war. There is even a myth that it was Ọgún who used his metallic cutlass to clear the path for the league of

deities on their earth-bound journey from their erstwhile abode in the celestial territory during the primordial time. The Apèèná would invoke the spirit of Ògún to perform same feat for the person being initiated so that all blockages in the path of his or her success will be cleared and will also overcome his or her open and surreptitious detractors.

On leaving the shrine of Ògún, the Apèèná will blindfold the new initiate with a white cloth and leads him to ojú-ikú (shrine of mortality) this is where Èdan, the cult emblem, is domiciled. The new initiate would not physically see the Èdan as he or she would remain blindfolded throughout the eating of the sacred meal. The rite would be accompanied with arò, this particular arò would be chorused by the congregation as follows:

Apèèná :	Ìyàwó n jogbó
Congregation:	Àjégbó àjéyè
Apèèná:	Ìyàwó n la apa
Congregation:	Àlágbo àláyè
Àpèèná:	Ìyàwó n jẹ ọbẹ
Congregation:	Àjẹtọ àjẹyè

We notice that the new initiate is being referred to as 'ìyàwó' a bride this denotes a new entrant into the circle of the initiates but connotes a transformed person since the person was initially regarded as 'àgùntàn' (sheep) metaphorically depicting him or her as the ignorant.

When the new initiate was being fed with the 'sacred meal' the Àpèèná was mentioning the components of the 'meal' one by one through the rendition of arò typically composed for the purpose. The Apèèná said 'ìyàwó jogbo, ... 'jogbó' is a contracted form of the verb phrase 'jẹ ogbó' the full structure of the clause is ìyàwó jẹ ogbó. It means the 'bride' eats longevity. But in the real sense there is no food item called 'ogbó' It is rather a prayer or supplication that the new member will live long. It is coded. What is called 'ogbó' in the arò is called orógbó in Yorùbá orthodoxy. Orógbó is a fruit it is known as bitter kola in English Language. In Yorùbá an aged person is called arúgbó. The syllable -gbo- as appears in orógbó and arúgbó is a verb 'gbó' it means either to ripe, to be old or aged. Though orogbo is an edible fruit it is not considered as one of the stable food items in Yorùbá orthodoxy. One cannot rule out the fact that certain individuals consume it by chewing it as a stimulant. It is also used in medicinal preparation either singularly or in combination with other items. Culturally it could also be an item combined with others in traditional naming and wedding ceremonies and in cases of hospitality, homage and

as diplomatic gifts. The congregation in responding to the refrain 'iyawó n je ogbó' chorused : Àjẹgbó àjẹyè it is a supplication meaning that the new member would live and achieve old age.

The second refrain by Apèènà was 'iyawó n la apa' and the congregation gave its chorus as 'Àlágbo àláyè. The 'apa' as used in the context is not a lexical item known or neither understood by the generality of the speakers of Yorùbá language. Apa is a shortened form of apalà which is obì in Yorùbá orthodoxy and kolanut in English. It is an edible fruit and just like bitter kola it is not part of the stable foods. But unlike bitter kola many more people chew it as a stimulant. It is also used for social, medicinal and spiritual purposes just like the bitter kola. Kola nut exists in variety of forms. There is the reddish called obì ipa and the whitish called obì ifin. Apart from colour there are different lobes of kolanuts. The lobes range from two to seven. An oddity is noticed in the sentence uttered by Apèènà thus:

Ìyàwó n lá apa. The oddity noticed is the verb 'lá' to lick. In natural science we have learnt that a matter exists in three states of solid, liquid and gaseous. Kolanuts are solid fruits in nature. It retained its solid nature as it was being fed to the new member during the initiation rites. It was neither ground into powdery form nor be dissolved in a liquid hence it could not have been licked. We affirm that the verb 'lá' (to lick) as used in the context was coded. In orthodox Yorùbá kolanuts can only be chewed in its natural form not licked.

The next stage after the sacred meal is entering into covenant with the cult emblem variously known as Ìyá, Ajíbólá or Èdan. The Apèènà as usual would administer the covenant between 'iyawó' and 'Ìyá'. As the oath taking was going on before the 'òpón èpè' The congregation in the main hall of ilèdì would be chanting arò thus:

O gbórí ilè o jekú
O gbórí ilè o jeja
O gbórí ilè o jogbó
O gbórí ilè o jàpalà
O gbórí ilè o jobè
Bo bá gborí ilè to bá dà wa o
Àdàbí dọwọ ilè á mú ọ

Translated as:

You stand on the earth and eat rat
You stand on the earth and eat fish
You stand on the earth and eat bitter kola
You stand on the earth and eat kolanut
You stand on earth and eat to eat alligator pepper

If you stand on earth and betray us
Nemesis of the earth will definitely catch up with you.

A discerning mind will notice that in the preceding stages before the oath-taking (covenant taking) supplications or prayers were made for the new member but a curse was eventually put on his head in case he betrayed them after he had wined and dined. The them refers to the trio of all members of Ògbóni of the particular ilédì, the Ìyá or Èdan which is the cult emblem and the mother earth (Ilẹ̀). The members of Aborigine Ògbóni Fraternity are generally believed to be avowed worshippers of the mother earth. After the oath-taking the Apèèná would ask the new member to categorically state his or her intention for joining the cult this done, he would further instruct him or her to offer prayers for himself.

The next stage in the initiation rites is cult marks. Cult marks involves making three vertical and deep cuts on the left wrist of the new member. The marks are the membership identification signs. The marks denote bonafide and accredited membership of Ògbóni and connote a blood covenant involving the Ògbóni, the Ìyá or Èdan and the Mother Earth. The marks depict unity of purpose, uniformity of creed and universality of brotherhood to the service of Olódùmarè under the aegis of the Mother Earth. The marks are a signification underlying trinity. The Apèèná would be chanting a particular arò meant for the purpose thus:

A kìí kẹfun ká rojú
A kìí kosùn ká gbàrùwẹ
A kìí sògbóni láikọla

Translated as:

It is forbidden to adorn the face with chalk and still frown
It is odd to adorn the face with calm wood still mourn
It is a taboo to be initiated into Ògbóni and not accordingly given the cult marks .

The third refrain of the arò as used by the Apèèná and as accordingly chanted by the congregation was:

Ìyàwó n jẹ ọbẹ
Àjẹgbó àjẹyè

What is being referred to as 'ọbẹ' during the initiation rites was what the orthodox Yorùbá calls 'ataare' i.e alligator pepper in English. Ọbẹ as known in Yorùbá culture could be stew or soup in English. In Yorùbá orthodoxy ọbẹ is

a combination of ingredients (with or without meat and or fish) cooked or heated at a specific boiling point and served as food. In Yorùbá culture soup or stew is not a complete meal it is rather a complement, it could be eaten with solid food like 'iyán' (pounded yam) or othres or with grains like rice (though rice was not an indigenous food item but it had since been integrated through the process of acculturation) At this juncture, we observe that arò Ògbóni as an oratural genre in Yourùbá literary parlance makes use of Yorùbá language in a special or coded manner while using cultural elements in a peculiar way. The diction of arò is very high and the metaphors are elevated and behoves extra knowledge to understand the meanings. The mode of communication is highly signified and coded. Culturally, Yorùbá orthodoxy do not eat bitter kola, kolanuts and alligator pepper as either staple food (oúnjẹ àjeyó) or snacks (ipápánu) It is the principle of cultural relativity that applies within a macro-culture (orthodox Yorùbá) and micro culture (Ògbóni cult) Ògbóni as a sub-culture adopts certain cultural elements, language inclusive, from Yorùbá as the main culture and adapts them to suit its own doctrinal whims and caprices.

Culturally, faces of devotees of Òrìṣà-oko and Ọbàtálá paint their faces with 'ẹfun' (white chalk) in devotion to their deities. The faces being adorned with white chalk looks radiant and peaceful. A radiant and peaceful face should not be frowned. Likewise osùn is one of cosmetics used as a form of make-up by the females in the ancient Yorùbá fashion style. It is wrong for somebody who uses osùn to look mornful rather she would look comely and inviting.

'Ẹfun' and 'osùn' are elements of Yorùbá culture and are used for various domestic purposes. They have medicinal and religious values and are so utilised. In the arò rendered by the Apèèná in which 'ẹfun' and 'osùn' were mentioned the Ògbóni cult marks were emphatically stated to be compulsory for any initiated memmber to validate membership of the fraternity. The Apèèná said:

A kí ẹfun ka rojú
A kí kosùn ká gbàrùwẹ
A kí sògbóni láìkọla

All the three lines of the arò expressed what is regarded as 'èèwọ' (taboo) in sociological and cosmological nuances of Yorùbá.

The three bold vertical marks incised on the left wrist of a new member are coded as a signification to brand the bearer as an initiate of Ògbóni cult, it is a communication revealing the identity of the member to the beholders. At this juncture, it should be noted that incising and cutting of marks on the skin are

examples of traditional surgery in Yorùbá culture. Facial and bodily marks and totems to differentiate tribal and lineage types (or for beautification) circumcision of male and female genitals (though recent realities in modern health care delivery system frown at female circumcision) piercing of ears and nose are all examples of traditional surgery.

'Èwò' is a product of Yorùbá cultural engineering. Olúnládé (1999:34) writes:

A lè ki èwò gégé bí ohun tí 'a kí í ʃe' tàbí ohun tí 'a gbòdò ʃe' ní ìbámu pèlú àṣe àti ìṣe àwùjọ kan.'

Translated as :

We can define èwò (taboo) bracket mine, as what we are forbidden to do or what we must do in accordance with the authorisation and practices of a society.

From Olúnládé's submission èwò is all about the practices that are either permitted or not permitted in a given society. Èwò as a product of Yorùbá cultural engineering had been enshrined in the charter of oral traditions of the society from the ancient times with a view to entrenching discipline in the society to ensure personal wellness and equanimity as well as societal wellbeing and tranquility. The concept of èwò got diffused into the circle of Ògbóni as a sub-culture from the main Yorùbá culture.

Orí bíbọ is an index of Yorùbá cosmological belief and practice. The physical head which is the zenith of animals' physique (human being inclusive) is ultimately essential to life to the extent that its detachment terminates the life of the bearer. Bearing the importance of the physical head in mind Yorùbá use it as a signification of an extremely important though invisible head. The assumed invisible head is the spiritual one believed to be superior to and more active than the physical head. The spiritual head in Yorùbá cosmology is the generator, originator and determiner(god) of man's destiny taking destiny as the totality of man's terrestrial existence. It is this spiritual head that Yorùbá venerate in the concept of 'Orí bíbọ' The 'orí' is regarded as guardian angel of man. It is observed that the concept of 'orí bíbọ' was neither a creation nor an initiative of the Ògbóni cult as a sub-culture but was adopted from the mainstream Yorùbá culture. One needs to clarify that the Reformed Ògbóni Fraternity, another sect of Ògbóni, did not adopt the concept of 'orí bíbọ'.

Having foregrounded the essence of 'orí bíbọ' in Yorùbá cosmology there

is the need to analyse 'orí bíḃ' within the context of the rendered 'arò' in its support.

It should be noted that despite the fact that the three vertical marks are deliberately inflicted 'injuries' or 'wounds' they would be dressed and the bearer instructed to avoid the following for the next seven days:

- coital engagement
- contact with water
- physical combat.

The Apèèná will then round off the initiation rites by doing 'ìkàrò' for him. Ìkàrò is formal pronouncement of rules and regulations. What follows is rendition of an arò emphasising the essence of 'orí bíḃ'. Orí bíḃ denotes 'head worship' but connotes veneration of one's guidance angel or overself or creator (ẹlédàá). The arò goes as follows:

Bí a bá ṣawo ká bọrí o
Bí a bá bọrí tan ẹran orò ló kù o
Ká má dàgbà Òṣùgbó abẹrùlórùn o!

The whole house would thunderously chorus the arò.

The arò outlines levels of rite to be performed in the status development of members. The initiation makes one to become an 'awo' (the initiate) The next level of rite performance is 'orí bíḃ' as revealed in the 'arò' 'Bí á bá ṣawo kábọrí'

After 'orí bíḃ' comes the offering of the sacrificial beast in order to avoid being a senior initiate bearing cumulative liabilities. The implication of this warning is that it is compulsory for an initiate to offer a sacrificial beast: it is required not optional. It is observed that it is an established practice in Yorùbá culture to kill beasts for both secular and sacred purposes. The Ògbóni had equally adopted the practice from the mainstream Yorùbá.

In conclusion, an attempt has been made on a cultural analysis on the use of Yorùbá orature in the initiation rites into Aborigine Ògbóni fraternity. Arò Ògbóni has been identified as the specific oratural genre used for communication during initiation rites into the cult. Signification and codification are common features in the rendition of arò Ògbóni. One can say without any fear of contradiction that arò stands as the lingua franca among the initiates especially when they are in Ilédì. Cultural elements are codified in arò. Cultural elements that are used as symbols during initiation rites into the Ògbóni cult are not always interpreted in the same way they are interpreted in Yorùbá

orthodoxy. It is obvious that certain cultural practices are adopted from the mainstream Yorùbá into Ògbóni subculture but some are sometimes adapted to align with the nuances of the culture. Signification and codification seem to be a game of secrecy in Ògbóni cult. For example the brown rat 'eku ẹmọ' signifies the daylight while the white-chest rat 'eku àfẹ' signifies the night. Hence in Ògbóni, 'ẹmọ' and 'àfẹ' are codifications for day and night respectively. Another example of codification is ọmọṣẹ, which literally means the child of the mother earth but the ordinary referent is snake. A snake belongs to the class of reptiles or scalled crawlers, it has the freedom to move about at anytime of the day, it damns the consequence of its audacity or daring tendency. In the real sense, it is a member of Ògbóni cult that is being referred to ọmọṣẹ because Ilẹ, the Mother Earth is the arch-deity being worshipped in the cult. The statement 'àtòru àtòsán ọmọṣẹ ní rìn' asserts their aplomb as members of the Ògbóni cult. It should be noted that Yorùbá culture frowns at deliberate nocturnal movements, except for hunters and augurers. The proverb 'ìjàkùmọ kíl rìn de ọsán ẹni a bíire kíl rìnru' simply translated as the jackal does not sojourn during the day while a noble man detests nocturnal movements. Yorùbá orthodoxy call kolanut 'obì' bitter kola 'orógbó and alligator pepper 'ataare' but they are being codified by the Ògbóni as 'àpalà', 'ogbó' and 'òbẹ' respectively. Offering of sacrifices, veneration and propitiation of deities, oaths and covenants taking are sacred practices in Yorùbá cosmological beliefs, same are adopted and adapted by the Ògbóni cult as evident in its initiation rites. We learnt that the new initiate must abide by certain rules and regulations of the cult which breakage elicits dire sanctions.

At this juncture, it is significant to note that initiation into Ògbóni is a sacred process and each stage of the process has a particular arò rendered for a purpose. Members of Ògbóni maintain that the initiation rites constitute an all-round transformation for the initiate. The larger society should accord members of Ògbóni their due respect in as much the latter do not infringe on their rights. Respect is reciprocal, it is for the good of the society if friendly relationship is maintained and sustained. Other aspects of the cult we are suggesting for cultural analysis include 'orí bíbọ, ẹran orò and orò ìpínsẹ.

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