Thematic Preoccupations of D. A. Ọbasá and Şóbò Aróbíodù on Religion and Colonialism

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Abstract

The works of D.A. Ọbasá and Şóbò Aróbíodù, the two intelligensias of Yorùbá poetry, have been the focus of earlier scholarly works in Yorùbá, with little attention given to the comparative study of their poetry. Therefore, this essay is a comparative analysis of the two poets' poems with particular reference to issues relating to religion and colonialism. Our findings reveal that Şóbò Aróbíodù usually comments on issues in a direct manner while Ọbasá comments both directly and indirectly on religious and colonial issues. Also, Şóbò Aróbíodù's comments on religion are basically to commend Christianity as introduced in Nigeria by the European missionaries, while Ọbasá's poetry usually satirizes or lampoons Islamic and traditional religions. Generally, Ọbasá's view is mainly on Yorùbá ideology while religion and colonialism are the primary foci of Şóbò Aróbíodù's poetry. Therefore, there is no gainsaying that both poets advocate against religious autocracy. They both believe that colonialism is actually good, but they also argue that it also has a lot of disadvantages, which destroyed Yorùbá cultural heritage. Besides, both poets see colonialism as a movement that brings to the fore African modernization. The essay concludes that Şóbò and Ọbasá are both social poets in the areas of religion and colonialism.

Introduction

Religion and colonialism are the oldest issues but current in the present society. Though Africa has been colonized centuries ago, the effect and impact

of colonialism have formed the discourse of several scholars and literary writers till date. Since the onset of colonialism, Western religion which is one of the many strategies of colonization in Africa has also been highly discussed. Therefore, the aim of this essay is to examine the themes of religion and colonialism in the poetry of Dénrelé Ọbasá and Šóbò` Aróbíodu. Akinyemi (1987, 2017) is one of the scholars who have examined the works of Ọbasá. He examines the cultural perspective of Ọbasá's trilogy and the poet's contributions to Yorùbá literary works. However, he affirms that Ọbasá primarily writes on Yorùbá ideologies. Olabimtan (1975) also has a comprehensive work on the language use of Ọbasá in his trilogy. He critically examines how Ọbasá consciously compile known Yorùbá oral genres together with in-depth meaning to examine critical and philosophical issues in the society. Olatunji (1975) also examines the significance of Šóbò` Aróbíodu's poetic works to the contemporary society. In his work, Olatunji asserts that Šóbò` Aróbíodu was mostly celebrated for his oral *orò* performance than the written poetry. However, he submits that Šóbò` Aróbíodu's choice of language of rendition, which is the Ègbá dialect is unique. Šóbò` Aróbíodu was also believed to have contributed immensely to Yorùbá scholarship through his poetry. Ojo (2016) in her work also examines the theme of satire in the work of Šóbò` Aróbíodu. She affirms that Šóbò` satirizes people, events, and religion in his work.

In the light of the above, it is evident that scholars have examined different aspects of the works of these two poets. Though, Akinyemi (1987), Olatunji (1975), and Ojo (2016) have examined some of the thematic preoccupations of the poets, no one has attempted a comparative study of the poetry of both poets, especially on the theme of religion and colonialism, which is the focus of this paper.

Poetry as a Concept

Poetry can be described as spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings which is rendered or written with short consciously selected words or phrases that best capture the mind of the both the reader/writer and the audience or reader. Poetry can also be referred to as a comparative name given to any form of written or spoken word which is rendered with a melodious sound or chanted. It is also one of the three genres of literature, which is emphatic and prominent in words and metaphoric meanings. Though, it is a short composition but it deepens its meaning in the mind of its reader. In Yorùbá literature and other African literatures, poetry is in two forms; the oral and the written poetry. While written poetry from the point of composition is written, oral poetry is verbal from the point of composition to rendering. However, it should be noted here, that it is possible for oral poetry to be found in

the written form in the present day as a way of preventing such oral poetry from going into extinction. Whereas, this does not remove the orality from such oral poetry that has been transcribed. In essence, this paper shall examine both the written and oral transcribed poetry.

Yorùbá poets have written several poems in relation to all aspects of the society and man's endeavors. Some prominent Yorùbá poets are Šóbò Aróbíodù, Dénrelé Ọbasá, Adébáyò Fálétí, Akínwùmí Ìşòlá, Àtárí Àjànàkú, Dúró Adélékè, Àrìnpé Adéjùmò, Bunmi Olújìnmí, Ọlánrewájú Adepoju, Olatunbosun Ọládàpò, and many others. Litrature poets have over the time focused on current issues in the society. In Africa, scholars have categorized poets into three: poets that existed before the advent of colonialism, this category are referred to as pre-colonial poets. The second are poets that existed during colonial era and who must have been born during the colonial era as well. This set of poets are referred to as colonial era poets. The last are poets who existed after the end of colonialism. This set of poets write on contemporary issues in the society and they are tagged contemporary / post-colonial poets. In this paper, our focus is on the colonial poets, who existed during the colonial era using Dénrelé Ọbasá, whose work was basically written during the onset of colonialism and Šóbò Aróbíodù, whose works also reflect mainly on the colonial era and their administration.

Poetry and Religion

Poetry and religion are two concepts which can be interpreted in two ways; this could be religious poetry and poetry on religion. Religious poetry are poems that are basically used for religious purposes. They are poetry performed at or for a particular religious rite. For instance, *ìyèrè ifá*, is a religious poem performed by those who worship Ọ̀rúnmìlà, the progenitor of Ifá religion. *ìwì egúngún* for those who worship Egúngún (Masquarade), *ìjálá* for those who worship Ọ̀gún (Iron god), among many others. These forms of poetry are mainly used to appraise or complement the many gods in Yorùbá traditional religion. Finnegan (2012) rightly puts the attributes of religious poetry as, "[t]he content may be religious as in verse about mythical actions of gods or directs religious instructions. The poem may be recited by those who are regarded as religious specialists. Thirdly, it may be performed on occasions which are generally agreed to be religious ones" (165-166).

Aside, religious poetry could also mean poetry on religion. This form of poetry is not based on a particular religion as asserted by Finnegan above, neither does it have a specific time or period dedicated to its performance. It also does not require specific experts or specialists in its rendering. These are poems based on religious issues in the society. They are not limited to

appraising deities alone but they can also be used to satirize and rebuke religious practices, or comment and criticize religion and religious activities. Poets who write on religion are commentators who criticize religious activities; their poems are on religion not for religion. They examine both the good and the bad in the targeted religion. In the frame of this paper, the focus is on poetry on religion.

Several Yoruba poets both literate and non-literate have composed poems on religion either traditional religion or on western religion (Christianity and Islam). Both religions have been satirized and appraised. In Yorùbá literature, Qbasá and Aróbíodù are the two prominent Yorùba poets who write on religion during the pre-colonial and colonial era in Nigeria. Their works feature the two religions mentioned above, especially Qbasá has poems based on traditional and Islamic religions while Šóbò has poems based only on Christian religion.

Colonialism and Imperialism

Fulford and Kitson (1998) define colonialism from Marxist perspective as the conquest and direct control of other peoples' land. They also call it a historical phase in the larger process of imperialism or the globalization of capitalist mode of production. It should be noted that, in this definition, colonialism leads to imperialism. Okon (2014) defines colonialism as the imposition of a foreign rule by an external power, which culminates in the control and exploitation of the conquered people. This can happen through political imposition of power, deception, and propaganda. Okon stated further that apart from political subjugation and infantile domination of the subject, economic motivations are often the fundamental reasons for colonial occupation. This occurred in African historical experience. Colonialism in Africa represents the period when Europe conquered and exploited the human and natural resources of the continent through the use of superior military force without taking permission from the people of the land (Okon 2014.193). After the abolition of slave trade, the European countries who participated in the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 partitioned the African communities among themselves without the knowledge of the African people.

According to Shekhar (2012), European colonialism started in the fifteenth century and reached its peak position in the late nineteenth century. At the peak of colonialism, more than three quarters of the earth belonged to these European countries: Britain, France, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Germany. This process of colonization led to the oppression of the indigenous people of colonial territory. Such an example was the apartheid that occurred in South Africa. The people of South Africa according to Skekhar (2012) were

exposed to racial discrimination, oppression, and segregation. They were excluded from citizenship and forced to live on government appropriated lands based on tribe. The Whites who were the colonizers enjoyed superior education, housing, jobs, medical care, and were treated as first class citizens while the indigenous occupants of the land were oppressed.

Imperialism on the other hand was defined by Skekhar as a system in which a country controls other countries. This is a situation when an independent country is under the control of another country even after her independence. An example given by Skekhar is the British colonialism that makes the spread of English language across the globe possible. Also, the diplomacy playing by America to impose English on the world is a modern imperialism. This could also be called English linguistic imperialism. Imperialism covers other aspects of life including religion, socio-cultural activities, sport, politics, education and economy. Fulford and Kitson (1998) observe that it is possible to differentiate between colonialism as a material system of conquest and control, and imperialism as a form of colonialism which is based on hegemony of culture and ideological imperative. When colonialism is a thing of the past, ended in nineteenth-century, imperialism persists in the sense of continuing global ambitions of Western capitalism.

Poets' Views on Africa Colonialism and Imperialism

Because they are products of their society, African poets did not fold their hands and keep silent on the situation of colonialism and political imperialism their lands encountered during and after colonization. According to Olaoluwa (2009), the major thematic preoccupation in the first generation of modern African poetry was the reaction and the discussion against the dominance of colonialism. Many of these poets were elites and they understood the extent of colonial impact on Africa and the forms of imperialism that had gone with it. So, these poets disliked the propagation of the Judeo-Christian civilization which they believed was affecting African people's life style and could displace their communal societies. Among of this set, who wrote mostly in colonial languages, according to Olaoluwa (2009), included Sedar Senghor, Christopher Okigbo and Agostinho Neto. These poets joined the nationalist awareness and independence struggles to call peoples' attention to colonial domination of their land, they condemned the subjugation and discussed the need to revive their culture. Some of them exposed the forms of oppression which African people were subjected to by the European colonists. Example of such oppression was discussed by Osward Mbuyiseni Mtshali (2011) in his poem "Nightfall in Soweto." Mtshali calls himself a victim of oppression when he said,

I am the victim.
 I am slaughtered
 Every night in the streets.
 I am cornered by the fear
 Gnawing at my timid heart;
 In my helplessness I languish.
 Man has ceased to be man
 Man has become beast
 Man has become prey. (Lines 10-18).

In the above poetic lines, the poet points to the kind of oppression mounted upon his people in colonial days of South Africa. He calls himself a victim of oppression by the white colonial masters which he also calls a prey that hunts him around. For his comment on the subjugation exercise targeted against the native black people of South Africa, Dennis Brutus, a renowned South African poet was jailed for eighteen months by the British colonial government (Sustar and Karim 2006). Tembo (2012) also pointed to the fact that many African poems show disapproval of colonial domination and the subsequent dehumanization and enslavement of the colonized subjects. This is to show that African poets comment on the pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial situations of their countries.

Post-Colonialism

According to Abrams (1999), post-colonial study encompasses the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse that are in particular to the former colonies of England, Spain, France, and other European imperial powers. The study is based on the so-called Third World countries which are found in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean Islands, and South America. The theory views through a perspective that shows the extent to which the social and economic life of the above listed continents were represented in the literature and how they were silently underwritten by colonial masters. The movement, according to Abrams, mainly focused on the rejection and objection to the master-narrative traits of Western imperialists. It is also an objection to the act of combining the Western literary discussion with the categories which the subjects (people of colonized countries) consider themselves and see the world around them. A major element in the post-colonial agenda according Abrams is to disestablish Eurocentric customs of literary and artistic values, and to expand the literary standard to include the people of the colonies.

Selden (2005) describes post-colonialism which he also called postcolonial criticism as a further movement which draws on the more radical implications of post structuralism. This is to include the colonial discourse and the real outlook of colonial objects in literary discussion. So, the criticism is a movement against colonial ruling. The struggle found its way into intellectuals and academics as a reaction of a new awareness on the independence of India in 1947. It is a kind of reorientation to the objects of the colonization for total liberation from the Western colonizers. The struggle according to Selden is also to oppose the models of Western thoughts and ideologies which are derived from Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, also from literature of Homer, Dante, Flaubert and T. S. Eliot, that have dominated the world culture. Butt (2013) argues that different perspectives are used by writers using post-colonial criticism as a base of their literary analysis. According to this scholar, many postcolonial critics and writers focus on domination in the contemporary world (after independence) to expose the extent at which colonial cultural activities have penetrated the life of people of colonized nation, post-colonial theory studies all aspects of the colonial objects' lives with further search for elements of neocolonialism within these countries. As a result, topics of post-colonialism cover some aspects such as: politics of anti-colonialism and neo-colonialism, race and ethnicity, gender issues, nationalism, class struggle, political system, religious activities, cultural issues, international diplomacy, language imperialism, sport and tourism, economic rivalry, education, war and other aspects of global world. Ọbasá and Ẹóbò are among the category of poets who write to comment on occurrences and issues in Yorùbá, Nigeria and international world during and after colonialization of Nigeria.

A Brief Insight into Dénrelé Ọbasá and Ẹóbò Aróbíodù

Dénrelé Ọbasá

Akinyemi (1987) did a comprehensive biography on Dénrelé Adetimikan Ọbasá. Hence, it is worthy of note to emphasize a little about his literary antecedent. Ọbasá is the first known Yorùbá literate poet to collect over one hundred of Yorùbá genres from different oral artists. Apart from his collections of oral poetry, he also originally created his own poems. Ọbasá is a prolific poet who uses the known works to create philosophical ideas symbolically in the mind of his readers. He is also a timeless writer. Some of his poems in his trilogy such as "Ilé", "Tanímẹhin I" and "Tanímẹhin II", (Ọbasá, 1934, 1945) among other, reveal how important and relevant it is to have good relationship with other people in the society. Ọbasá is also a philosophical poet. He has a deep insight into the society and the only way he could express it is through

the lines of his poems. He uses all his poems to print a clear picture into the minds of his works' readers and through the use of similar Yorùbá oral genre like proverb, idioms, anecdote and the likes. Besides, he draws out the morals and lessons for his readers. He is not a storyteller like Adébáyò Fálétí, but a descriptive poet who keeps describing metaphorically his philosophically picked ideas until it is well-established. Such an instance could be found in "Ikú", (Ọbasá 1934). Ọbasá as a poet can also be referred to as a social commentator, who does not neglect any aspect of the society. His main focus is on individual make-up and things that make a person a good citizen, *omólúàbí*. This is reflected in the titles of most of his poems such as; "Òmùgò", "Èrè Iṣẹ", "Èlẹnu-méjì", "Àfojúdì", "Ọ̀kànjúà-Olẹ̀", among others. He also gives account of important events during his time, like the history of Tápà and the Yorùbá which he titled "Ìtàn Tápà àti Yorùbá". Aside, there are also comments on religion and colonial issues.

Şóbò Aróbíodù

Just like Akinyemi has a comprehensive biography on Ọbasá, Ọlátúnjì (1982) also has the same on Şóbò Aróbíodù. Hence, only a brief of his literary history shall be examined here. Şóbò Aróbíodù is believed to be an oral poet who spoke on everything and anything ranging from what pertains to his immediate society. His full name is Şóbòwálé Şówándé but got his nickname Aróbíodù, (one whose poetic voice sounds like Odu) from the beat sound of his poem. *Odu*, according to Ọlátúnjì (1982), is a metal made object which produces a sonorous sound used as a mark identifying where and how puppies travel. Because he also chants when walking around, his habits was compared to that of puppy wearing an *odu*, for so doing, he was labeled Aróbíodù. Şóbòwálé Şówándé Aróbíodu discusses his life historical experiences in his poems. He reflects his concerns about things around him. Because he lived during colonial and Christian missionary era, many of his poems have colonial and religious thematic preoccupations. Aróbíodù's poems many times kick against the cultural practices of his community. This is as a result of his consideration that Christianity is godlier than traditional religion such as the *orò* cult. Şóbò Aróbíodu during his childhood stage paid less attention to his primary education. He sneaked out of the school, C.M.S. Training Institute, Ìbàrà, Abẹ̀òkúta, abandoned the school many times to follow *orò* cult practitioners. He learned àrùngbè poem from the process and becomes an àrùngbè oral poet. During his adulthood, he became a Christian and the Christianity became a major thematic preoccupation of his poem. Şóbò Aróbíodu is a social and political commentator who discusses social occurrences of his community. To sum up what Şóbòwálé Şówándé Aróbíodù's poems are Ọlátúnjì (1975) asserts that, "[t]he poems of Şówándé cover a wide range of topics. In

his succinct comments on events and developments in his society. He could be seen as a poet displaying his acute consciousness and most delicate sensibility to the conditions of his time” (976).

This implies that Šóbò Aróbíodù like Ọbasá takes close cognisance of his immediate environment. He sees it as an obligation to document and comment on the ongoing issues that affects his community and society at large. However, Šóbò Aróbíodù, unlike Ọbasá do more of narration than description of terms. Šóbò picks an issue and gives a full narration of the incident or event in question, especially how it affects him or his environment. He is also known for giving accounts of incidences especially personal encounter with other people. Šóbò Aróbíodù is a social commentator but he comments more on religion and colonization or civilisation.

Theme of Religion in the Poetry of Dénrelé Ọbasá and Šóbò Aróbíodù

According to Akinyemi (2017), the aim of Denrele Ọbasá is the compilation and documentation of Yorùbá thoughts and wise sayings. However, Ọbasá does not just collect these items but he combines them in a way to teach, enlighten, and comment on the ongoing issues in the society as of his time. On the other hand, Šóbò is like the watch dog for his society. He does not just alert the society on issues or dangers but he makes recommendations and contributions which are solutions to the observed problems. The aim of every poet is not just to compose melodious lines called poems but to use these melodious lines to teach the norms of the society. One of the thematic preoccupations of Ọbasá and Aróbíodù is religion. Both poets discuss issues related to the three religions in their society – African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam.

Ọbasá criticizes religion fanatics, who are hypocritical in all they do, to the extent of “slaughtering” water before they could drink. In his poem titled “Aláṣejù”, Ọbasá, specifically satirizes some Islamic clergies who are known for exaggeration of things, proven to be religious.

Aláwọṣe Ìmàlẹ̀, a b'ori Kẹ̀nẹ̀kẹ̀!
A-ṣe-kó-sú-'ni, Ìmàlẹ̀ Adòdò
O ní 'Bí wọn kò dúńbú omi
Òun kò ní mu!
Bí wọn kò dúńbú ẹja
Òun kò ní jẹ!... (Ọbasá 1927:21).

A converted Muslim with a big deformed head!

One who makes things hard for others, an extremist Muslim
 Who says if water was not slaughtered
 He would not drink!
 If fish was not slaughtered
 He would not eat...

This shows the outrageous length an Islamic religious extremist could go on some of its teaching. It is believed in the Islamic religion that animals that are not properly slaughtered, are forbidden for consumption (*haram*). This belief is established in Quran 108 verse 1-3:

- 1.To thee have we granted the Abundance
- 2.Therefore, to thy Lord turn in Prayer and sacrifice
- 3.For he who hateth thee- He will be cut off (From future hope)

In the second verse of the above Quranic excerpt, Muhammad was asked to make a sacrifice by slaughtering a ram on the day of *Id Adha* popularly called *iléyà* among Yorùbá Muslims. This is a major basis of animal sacrifice in Islam. Therefore, Muslims do not eat animals that are not properly slaughtered with knife. However, Qbasá, in order for him to establish that some people take religion dogmatically beyond letters, he portrays in his poem cited above a man who will not drink water or eat fish if they are not slaughtered. It is possible to identify the elements of extremism in the above ironical and hyperbolic expressions. Firstly, water is inanimate object which does not have blood. It does not have life, and can never be killed or slaughtered. Fish on the other hand is an animate object but which could not also be slaughtered because of the slippery nature of its body. The poet at this point wants to portray how bad the act of extremism is to his readers. So, he chooses to use hyperbolic expressions which he himself is aware could not happen.

The ironic feature of this expression is that some Muslims would always want to follow their religious injunctions without considering if such a rule is practicable in Yorùbá land with different religious beliefs. They just want to follow the rule by all means. This, sometimes, causes harm, destruction, and inconveniences. Because the poet present this case in ironical and hyperbolic manner, which could make a reader have a sense of permutation before decoding the message, that is the reason why we argue that Qbasá's uses indirect approach when commenting on religion.

Qbasá further mentions some other Islamic religious practices which he considers extremely inappropriate. In "Ebi", Qbasá, the poet, while describing pains sustain as a result of hunger says, hunger could make an Islamic clergy eats the foods his Islamic faith considered forbidden,

‘Kòì gbó, kòì gbó’, l’ẹ̀nu onílé
‘Ó gbó’, l’ẹ̀nu àlejò:
Ebi ni í jẹ́ báun!
Ebi kò pà ‘Màle,
Ó l’óun kì í j’àáyá
Ebí pa Súlè, ó j’òbọ̀ (Ọbasá 1927: 72).

It is not yet ripe, it is yet not ripe, could only be heard from landlord
 But the visitor would said it is ripe:
 That is hunger!
 When a Muslim is not hungry
 He says he doesn’t eat monkey
 When Sule (a Muslim) is hungry, he consumes the monkey!

The last three lines in the above excerpt is a proverb. It stated that if a Muslim has not been tormented by hunger, he/she says eating monkey meat is unlawful but when he is well tormented, he violates the law and feeds on the same monkey. This proverb is a satirical proverb which lampoons the act of Islamic religious extremism which makes some food that are lawful in Yorùbá socio-cultural setting unlawful. Hence, in line 25 of the poem “Ebi”, the poet opines that a person who is seriously hungry cannot remember religious taboo, *ẹ̀ni ebi ní pa kì í k’èèwọ̀*, this means, a person who is hungry does not follow taboo. His comment is also made indirectly. We should take note that the expression used to satirize religious acts above is a proverb. Proverb expresses issues in ironical/indirect manner and should always be interpreted as such; or else its intended meaning will be lost.

Ọbasá is also found of playing on Arabic words which is mostly related to the Islamic religion. For instance, in “Ìyàn Ẹ̀lẹ̀fẹ̀”, (Ọbasá 1971:79-80), the poet reflects how some people use religion to deceive others in order to satisfy their needs. Ọbasá in the poem narrates the conversation between Oníṣu (the owner of the yam) who also called Onílé (the landlord) in line 25 and Aláròó, who want to share in the yam Oníṣu is preparing to cook and eat but which Oníṣu does not want. When Aláròó observes that his justifications to convince Oníṣu might not succeed, which could automatically deny him the opportunity of eating from the yam, he says *salaam* (Islamic way of greeting), Oníṣu considers a trick, he quickly rejects the temptation.

Aláròó ni “Salam àlékù!”
Onílé ni “Salam àlékù kan kò sí
Bí ik’a jolóunjẹ k’ó jẹun!”

È fẹ̀ d'ẹ̀ fẹ̀ iyàn:(Ọbasá 1927:79-80).

Aláròó says “Peace be upon you!”
Onílẹ̀ says your greeting is not accepted
Unless you let me enjoy my food
The gist has turned to a gist of famine

Salamat is highly respected among the Muslims. They regard it as an ordained way of greeting by Allah. There is a lot of religious beliefs attached to it. According to Stacey (2016), any Muslim who does not respond to it when it is said onto him or her is considered a sinner. Muslims believe that God shows mercy and blessing upon those who greet one another in this manner. This is established in Quran 6:54 where God explains the reward attached to the saying *salaam* to Prophet Muhammad,

When those who believe in Our Ayat (Proofs, evidence, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) come to you, say “Assalam Alaikun”, your Lord has prescribed Mercy for Himself, so that if any of you does evil in ignorance, and thereafter repents and does righteous good deeds, then surely, He is Oft forgiving, Most Merciful.

Because of this theological belief, Muslims considered *salaam* as having more reward than any cultural forms of greeting. They believe there is God’s mercy and blessing in it. Aláròó is aware of this; he knows that Onílẹ̀ also does. He is sure of the fact that Onílẹ̀ will reply him and he would welcome him or her to his or her home. Surprisingly, Onílẹ̀ voids the temptation and Aláròó could not meet the expectation. The poet in this context systematically and indirectly reveals the habit of some people who use religious beliefs to commit a lot of atrocities. They take advantage of other peoples’ region to dupe, deceive, and cheat them.

Ọbasá also believe that even the religion clergies are deceitful. In his poem titled “Ìtànjẹ”, (Ọbasá 1971:35) reveals that religion clergies manipulate people with their religious titles and positions.

Irọ́ n' purọ́ fún rọ́
Şigìdì kò lẹ́nu
Ó lóhun ó fọhùn
Irọ́ n' purọ́ fún rọ́
Irọ́ ni Babaláwo n' pa
Nwọ́n kò gbọ́ fá
Irọ́ n' ịsẹgùn n' pa

Nwọn kò lóògùn
Àwọn Egúngún
Nwọn kò r'égúngún
Àwọn Abòrìṣa
Nwọn kò r'órìṣà
Olórùngbé kò jẹ́wọ́
A-tan-ni-jẹ bí i Olóorun... (Ọbasá 1927:35).

The liars are lying to one another
 Figurine does not have mouth
 Says it wants to talk
 The liars are lying to one another
 An Ifá priest is just lying
 They are not versed in Ifá corpus
 The herbalists are lying
 They are versed in magical power
 The masquerades
 They do not see the spirit
 The idol worshippers
 They do not see the deities
 Those who pretend to be dozing do not confess
 Nobody decieves more than them

In the last line above, the poet concludes that the set of the people mentioned in the preceeding lines of the poetry are all deceitful. The first four lines are proverbial expressions, they introduce Ọbasá's comment in the excerpt. From line five to twelve of the excerpt, Ọbasá comments directly by mentioning the names of traditional religious priests he considers as liars in the poem. The last two lines which are embellished with proverbs sum up the deceitful habits of the mentioned people in an ironic manner. So, Ọbasá uses both direct and indirect style to comment on religion in the above excerpt.

Ọbasá further reveals the wickedness in traditional religion, this occurs when performing rituals. He beleives that traditional religions are devilish in thier practice. When they are planing evil, they exempt their own children but use other peoples' children as elements of sacrifice. He says in his poem titled "Ètẹ",

Ẹ pète pèrò
Ẹ gbé kinni yíi ka ni lóri
Ẹ wá takété sí ni?
Ọmọ ọlọmọ nù jẹ Eégún dé...

Ó ri mùú –mú-ù
O kò tẹ́ n'í fá
O r'ẹ̀sẹ̀ aṣiwèrè
O kò bù u ẹ̀òògùn
Ọlọgbón kò jẹ́ fí tirẹ̀ sílẹ̀. (Ọbasá 1927:41).

Your planned
 And put me into trouble
 And you distance yourself
 Someone else's child is made to be the masquerade...
 You see an unintelligent person
 You did not take advantage of that
 You see a mad man's footprint
 You did not use it to make a spell
 No wise person would ever release his own

The first four lines above reflect how traditional religious clergies take advantage of other people to do ritual practices which could physically and spiritually affect the object of the incident, the non-initiate and the helpless people of the society. This comment is also presented indirectly because the excerpt is a string of proverbs.

In the same vein, in *Şóbò* Arobiodu's poem titled "*Sí Şòpònná ọdún 1883*", he exposes some of the atrocities committed by the traditional religion followers, especially how they use humans for sacrifice:

Àánúú Jéésù kò máa jẹ́ k'íkú p'ọmọ Ìmàrò
Şòpànná i bá kàn máa k'ẹ̀gbààgbèje
Nin'ọmọ abòrìṣà
Ìgbóo bá kan ọwọ́ ti Jéésù
A t'abẹ̀ rẹ̀ b'akò. (Líjàdù 1902: 5-6).

It was Jesus' mercy that repels death on the people
 Şòpànná would have killed thousands of people
 Among the idol worshippers
 But when he gets to Jesus' people
 He quits

The *Şòpànná* practitioners were believed to be infecting people with small-pox around 1883 in Abéòkúta, Nigeria. This religious people pretended and lied that it was the grievance of the deity *Şòpànná* (The god of small pox) that causes the epidemic. So, they would admit anybody infected by the disease,

task them a huge amount of money and collect costly items like food and cloth from them before giving them the medication to cure the disease. This is exactly what the poet is pointing to. He considers this to be wickedness, exploitation, ungodliness, and abuse to humanity. Against the use of religion to deceive and cheat, the poet believes that with the arrival of Christianity, this act of exploitation was checkmated with what he considers the power of Jesus Christ, who saves his people from the trauma. Unlike Ọbasá, Ẹ́óbò Aróbíódù comments on religious immoralities directly by mentioning the name of the people involved. He mentions the atrocity they committed and exposes how the power of Jesus Christ overrides them. Ẹ́óbò Aróbíódù here considers Christianity as better than Ẹ̀pànná (a Traditional Religion). With this, we can refer to Ẹ́óbò Aróbíódù as an advocate of Christian religion.

Ẹ́óbò Aróbíódù disapproves and warns against arrogance. This is reflected in his poem, “Sì Àwọn Agbéraga Nínú Ọmọ Ìmàrò”. The poet observes that many of the Christian youths during colonial period of his time in Abẹ̀òkúta were elite; as a result, they show off their outfits when attending church programs.

*Èdùmàrè kọ̀sẹ̀ ìgbéraga, àfi ìwà ìrẹ̀lẹ̀:-
 Àlùfáà Aké wọ ẹ̀ṣọ̀ṣì ó papá mọ́ra, ó rìn l'ìrẹ̀lẹ̀:
 Ọmọ́dẹ̀ Ìmàrò wọ ẹ̀ṣọ̀ṣì ó tapá kaka,
 Dede wọn rée n di kọ̀là bí ẹnì d'ìgi,
 Nwọn a rí wònrìnwòn!
 Bí kẹ̀fẹ̀rí bá n wọlé Ọ̀gbóni lọ tẹ̀rùtẹ̀rù,
 Ìwọ olígàgbọ́, Jẹ́sù rée o n tọ rée n tapá kaka i ?
 Ó kò bẹ̀rù ì? (Líjàdù 1906:57).*

God detests arrogance but loves humility
 The Bishop of Aké enters the church with humbleness
 The Ẹ̀gbá elite youth group enter with arrogance
 They abnormally put on neckties
 And walk arrogantly!
 If nonbelievers could enter their temple with humility
 You Christians, why are you walking toward Jesus with arrogance?
 Are you not afraid?

The poet in the above citation is not happy with the act of arrogance in the house of God. He challenges the elite, whom he called Ìmàrò for their arrogance even in the Church. Church, according to Christian belief, is the house of God, a place where Christians worship their Lord, a place of honor. The Bishop of Aké is aware of this, so he humbly enters the Church. The youths

are ignorant of this, but they feel too big to respect the ethics. As a member of the church, who, as a nature of his profession and a social-cultural critic, could not fold his hands and allow the youths in the church to get rotten, he quickly challenges them in the last two lines of the excerpt that if the Ògbóni cultists could show humility when entering their temple, while would Christian (the believers) not do the same in the Church. Sóbò Arobiodu, at this point, could be seen as a religious poet and as well as a promoter of Christianity. His poems promote Christian religious practices over indigenous religious practices such as the Ògbóni cult. According to Àyántáyò (2018), every religion of the world teach humility. This is contrary to many people's belief that only Islam and Christianity teach moral values. Also, calling the Ògbóni group *kèfèrí* (non-believers) is derogatory. The word *kèfèrí* is from the Arabic language (*Kafri*). The word was borrowed into Yorùbá language by early Islamic preachers. Since all religions of the world have the attribute of monotheism and cultism in common, Àyántáyò (2018) argues that like the Christians and the Muslims, the African Traditional religious group, i.e. the Ògbóni members also have religious creeds. Their creeds might not necessarily be the same with those of the Christianity and other religions of the world. As a point of observation, Qbasá's comment on religion is not as direct and uninterrupted as that of Arobiodu. There are similarities and differences in the way both poets comment on religion. Qbasá satirizes Islamic extremism and immoral behaviors in traditional religion. Sóbò Aróbíodù's concerns is the promotion of his belief in the *orò* and other traditional religion's cults of the Ègbá people and his new belief, Christianity. Both poets envisage religious normality and proper conduct.

Theme of Colonialism in the Poetry of Dénrelé Qbasá and Sóbò Aróbíodù

Several poets in Africa have different views about African colonialism. Some poets believe that western colonialism is the reason for the various forms of ills in the contemporary society. There are others who believe that colonialism is a blessing to Africa. Whereas, few scholars believe that colonialism has both its gain and loss to Africa. Dénrelé Qbasá and Sóbò Aróbíodù are among African poets who succumb to this view. These poets believe that colonialism has actually opened the eyes of the Yoruba people to a good number of things present in their society before colonization but were not properly utilized. They also believe that colonialism has helped to check the abuse of power by some autocratic political leaders. For instance, Qbasá believes that the era of colonialism put an end to tribal and intra ethnic wars and dispute in Yorùbá land. He also reveals in his poems that colonialism checkmated the

excessive power of some Yoruba kings and chiefs. Hence, he says in his poem titled “Ìgbà Oibó” that,

*Ayé d'áyé òyìnbó
Ìgbà òyìnbó dùn l'ádùnjù
Kò s'ógun mò
Kò s'otẹ̀ mò
A kò múni l'óko mò
A kò múni l'ódò mò
Tani n lẹ̀ ní'bẹ̀un kò sí mò
Gbogbo wa d'omọ ọba! (Obasá 1945: 41-42).*

The power of land is now in the hand of the white (Europeans)
The era is good
There is no more war
No more menace
No more abduction at farm road
No more abduction at river road
No more why are you walking over there
We all become equal

Obasá clearly reveals here that the colonial era was peaceful compared to the precolonial era. The crime rates reduced, no more abduction, kidnapping, civil war, subjugation, and the sense of inequality is no more. In the same poem, he goes further to highlight other advantages of the colonial era and the civilization that science and technology brought to Yorubaland. Hence he says;

*Gbogbo ayé ti lu j'ára wọn
A n re Mọkà, à gb'ọ̀nà Èkó
A n're 'Lú Ọba
A gb'na Kàdúná
Ọkọ̀ kò gbojú omi mò
Ó n rìn ilẹ̀ jilẹ̀
Ọ̀nà ilẹ̀ jilẹ̀ kò yá mò
Ojú afẹ́fẹ́ ni wọn tún n bá lẹ! (Obasá 1945: 41-42).*

The world is connected
We are going to Mecca, we took Lagos road
We travel abroad,
We travel to Kaduna

Traveling by water is no more relevant
 We travel by road
 Traveling by road is no longer relevant
 Many people now travel by air

Here, Obasa makes reference to technology as one of the inventions of the Whitemen (Europeans) in Africa. How they have used their inniatives to create and recreate roads and other faster means of transportations like ship and aircraft which are better than the traditional means of transportation. Also, Šóbò Arobiodu initially commends the colonization of his nation by the British government. He sees colonialism as a way out to many problems occurring in his land and always defends the government. This is reflected in a good number of his poems. Olatunji, (1982: 45) discusses Šóbò's view on the resolution of civil war, slave trade, conflicts of different types and interethnic misunderstanding present in Yorùbá land before colonization.

*Ìgbè Òyìnbó kò dè jẹ kòmódé Ègbá jagun,
 Ó mà dùn jù.
 Oṭẹ̀ ibá jẹ̀ fí bayi parun adùn pọ̀ jù
 È jẹ̀ ká dúpẹ̀ lẹ̀wọ̀ Òyìnbó funfun
 Àwọ̀n rée kò dè jẹ kòmódé Ègbá jagun àtọ̀tẹ̀* (Olatunji 1982: 45).

Colonization frees Ègbá youths from going to war
 It is more pleasant
 Conspiracy could have ended this way it could have been better
 Let's be thankful to the Whiteman
 They were the one that saved the young people of Ègbá from experiencing
 the pains
 of war

The poet in the above poetic lines praises the colonial government which stopped wars in Yorùbá land. It is not only in Yorùbá land that the British government stopped interethnic and intraethnic rivalries, they did so elsewhere, mostly, in all former British Colonies. In the excerpt, Šóbò Arobiodu could be seen as the lover of the colonization and the promoter of British colonial administration.

Šóbò Arobiodu on the other hand condemns some things he considers the disadvantages of colonization. Example of this is in the poem below where Šóbò Arobiodu points out some of his dissatisfaction about the administration of the British colonial government.

*Èyin Kíryó Èkó, ẹ̀ kò gbọ̀rò mí ná?
Iwun ojú ènià dúdú ń rí lí sáà yí ju togun Ìdàhòmi?
Dede ènià dúdú ń dájó tọ Sọ́jà líbí ńwọ̀n ńjagun,
A kò kúkú mọ́ 'wọ̀' lẹ́ ipi nwọ̀n ti ẹ̀ bẹ̀rẹ́ ọ̀tẹ̀. (Olatunji, 1982:49).*

You, the Creole, are you listening to me?
Is what the black people experience during colonisation
is not worse than the havoc
of Idahomi war?
All the black people financially contributed to the
maintenance of soldiers at the
battle field,
Whereas we are ignorant what causes the war.

According to Olatunji (1982), Sóbò Arobiodu makes this comment during World War I. During this time, all the British Colonies financially contributed to the maintenance of the British soldiers at the battlefield. The poet compares the period of colonization to the traditional era of governance in Yorùbá land and submits that even with technological advancement, the instruments of life conveniency, and the law of equality which colonization has brought to his land, his experience of Dahomian tribulation is preferable. He argues that the period of colonialism is more turbulent than the precolonial days. It could be said that Sóbò Arobiodu praises the colonial government at its beginning when many people do not understand what colonialism entails. Nevertheless, when the system was put into practice, he realized along the line that colonial masters are worse than the traditional warlords.

However, Obasá does not just appraise the influence of the Whiteman through colonialism alone, but he reveals some of the effect of this era on the Yorùbá society and Africa at large. He believes that the civilization introduced by the colonial era has deprived the Yorùbá society of its cultural values such as respects for elders and communal life style the Africans are known for. According to Obasá in the poem “Ìgbà Òìbó”, the civilization has brought disunity to the society, starting from the home to the larger community. Hence, he says:

*Ìgbà d'ìgbà òyìnbó
Aya kò gbọ́ t'òkọ
Omọ kò gbọ́ ti Baba
Ìyàwó kò gba t'iyàlé
Ìwọ̀ fà kọ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ sisé
Ayé yadà (Obasá 1945: 42).*

It is now the time of the Whiteman
 Wife does not listen to the husband
 Child no longer listen to the father
 Junior wife no longer listen to senior wife
 Slave no longer work again
 Life is not in order

The above excerpt shows that people now think that colonization has brought civilization. So, the world is free. The colonial government has given equal right and privilege to all. Wives and children, see themselves as equal with their husbands and fathers respectively. This act kicks against the Yorùbá cultural value of *omólúàbí* (a virtuous person). It is a concept that allows a child to respect his/her parents and elders. It also enables slaves to serve their masters. Qbasá goes further to state that colonial masters through civilization promoted divorce in African marriages. Divorce is a very rare thing in Africa, which is greatly discouraged. However, Qbasá believes that through civilization some women have embraced divorce and have seen it as a leverage to commit adultery and promiscuous act. Such women divorce their husband to marry other men they may be in love with. Hence, he says:

*Ò n rìn fanda
 O l' amúni kò sí
 B'ókọ bá fẹ́
 K' ó kálọ sí Bẹrẹ
 Bẹrẹ l'ò tí i dé
 Níbi tí wọn gbé n k'ókọ. (Qbasá 1945: 41).*

She is walking freely
 She said there is no one to arrest her
 If the husband wants
 He should go to Bẹrẹ
 Is because he has not gotten to Bẹrẹ
 Where they divorce their partner.

It should be noted that the culture of divorce is not alien to Yorùbá socio-cultural setting. But the practice is ultimately minimized as a result of social belief that most women who divorce their husbands do so as a result of their promiscuous attitude. When the Britian establishes her colony in the Yorùbáland, women were permitted to request for divorce if they wanted one. Customary court was established and divorce was legalized for every married

person irrespective of gender or religion. This is exactly what the woman in the poetic lines above tells her husbands to do. *Bẹrẹ* mentioned in the excerpt is the headquarters of the old Ìbàdàn municipal government during British colonization, it is where the customary court was located. For a wife to have the freedom of telling her husband to go and order for divorce according to Ọbasá, is among the relegation of conjugal respect wives owe their husbands in Yorùbá land.

Conclusion

There are similarities and differences in the way both Obasa and Arobiodu comment on religion in their poetry. Ọbasá satirizes the Islamic extremism and immoralities in traditional religion. On the other hand, Šóbò Aróbíodù's religious concern is on his old belief, *orò* (and other traditional religious cults of Ègbá people) and his new belief, Christianity. Both poets envisage religious normality and proper conduct. They both believe that people should stop hiding under religion to commit inappropriate acts as it is seen in Šóbò's poem titled "Sí Šòpònná 1883" and Ọbasá's poem titled "Ìtànjẹ". The poets also believe that colonialism is not a total mishap to African society. Ọbasá and Arobiodu at the initial stage of their poems on colonialism appraise the colonial era. They try to bring out all the positive contributions of colonialism to the society. They both see various ways that the colonial era has helped to develop their society. Each of these poets made reference to their society to see how the colonial era has particularly helped in the area of science and technology, putting an end to the autocratic power of the traditional rulers, and the unhealthy rivalry among tribes. However, at the latter end, they criticize the colonial era for the evils introduced to their society through civilization. Therefore, it will not be an overstatement to say that Ọbasá and Šóbò Aróbíodù are Yorùbá society watchdogs, who have not just warned the society but have also proffered solutions to basic issues on religion and colonialism.

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