

Ijegbe and Luse Performances, and the Dialectics of Collectivized Tragedy and Ideology among the Ilaje

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Abstract

This essay explores the genres of Biripo, the Ilaje oral performance or folk-poetry, Ijegbe and Luse vis-à-vis the notion of collectivised tragedy and ideology among the people. Few forays have been undertaken into Biripo, but no known research has been carried out Ijegbe, Luse and collectivised tragedy and ideology among the people. The essay adopts Richard Schechner's performance theory which sees performance as representation of self and advocates the revolutionary departure from the confinement of theatrical enactments to the theatre. The theory is suitable since the concepts of Ijegbe and Luse are performance-centred. The essay employs oral interviews; secondary materials like textbooks, filmic records of already performed Ijegbe and Luse, journal articles and electronic materials for information garnering.

The essay unfolds the meanings of Ijegbe and Luse as the mother of or home-grown forms of the modern rap art or music. They are the genres of Biripo that are performed as the indigenous form of western dirge or elegy performed for the sole purpose of mourning the loss one's loved ones. The paper also reveals how practice of collective performance of Luse and Ijegbe epitomises the notion of collectivised or shared tragedy and ideology among the people. Also revealed in the essay is the fact that the two genres are potent agencies of transmission and propagation of indigenous knowledge system. The paper, therefore, recommends the perpetuation of the forms for the continuity of the people and their sense being.

Keywords: Ijegbe and Luse, indigenous knowledge system, oral performance, performance theory, collectivised tragedy and ideology.

Introduction

Ilaje people, across the vast ethno-racial borderlines or isoglosses of the world are known for their collective and communal spirits. These spirits are characteristically evident in their quotidian and corporate existence. The collective spirit comes to play in whatever they do and in their relationships with one another over the ages. They fish together, wine and dine together after a great catch, worship with collectivised piety, Malokun, the deity of the sea, fight external aggressors together, conquer together, celebrate triumphs together, rejoice together and also mourn together in times of sorrow. This sense of collectivism informed the evolution of the oral performances of Ijegbe and Luse for the purpose of propagation and transmission of collectivised indigenous knowledge system a sense of sharing in the sorrow of others. Over the years, Ilaje people have been known for coming together to mourn the loss of their loved ones through the instrumentality of Luse and Ijegbe. Like the practice of collectivised dirge performance among the Banyang people of Southern Cameroun, studied by Sarah Agbor (1999), the Ilaje are reputed for using these indigenous poetry as both tools of reunion among the people also for lamenting the death of loved ones, both ones that die untimely and those who die at ripe old age. Apart from coming together to lament the loss which is notionally referred to as collectivised tragedy, Luse and Ijegbe have also been used for the amplification of shared ideology and philosophy among the people. Thus, besides lamentation, informal pedagogy and moralisation are some of the utilitarian significance of Ijegbe and Luse among the people both in the pre-writing era and literate era of the people's existence.

Luse and Ijegbe as Folksongs

Abrams and Harpham (2009) discuss folksong in its broad sense. They expand its span and tentacles to include forms like love songs, Christmas Carols, work songs, sea chanties, religious songs, drinking songs, children game songs and any other type of lyric as well as the narrative song, or traditional ballad (124). This opinion of Abrams and Harpham seems to be guilty of over-generalisation and lumping or cramming of many different and unrelated elements together into folksong, if viewed from the African stance. One must bear it in mind that Africans were not Christians, but were conversant with the worship of the paramount ruler and creator of the universe and the things therein, through lesser deities believed to be the intercessors or intermediaries between them and the paramount ruler. So, the scholars' inclusion of Christmas carols

within the domain of folksong is a bizarre display of religious prejudice. This is because folksongs have not just come to existence during the birth and life of Christ from which we obtained the name Christmas. However, they deserve credit at least for giving us the leeway into the understanding of what folksong is. Their inclusion of religious songs, drinking songs, children game songs and many other types of lyrics sounds confusing. If we must accept others included, how are we to account for “many other types of lyrics?” Lyrics connote something different and more modern. Their inclusion or extension of the meaning to ballad is also worth probing. It must also be mentioned that the categorisation of the duo does not seem to put African folksongs into consideration. If they do, then, their inclusion of Christmas carols under folksongs may not be acceptable from African parlance. The opinion of Okpewho (1992) in defining folksongs by reasoning from etymological standpoint is plausible (5). He earns credit for himself by stating how all the other forms classified as being from folksong family are granted qualification into the family. While the duo of Abrams and Harpham (2009) fail to give us insight into the etymology of the word, Okpewho does. Okpewho seems to see folksong from the same standpoint with Abrams (18).

The concept of folksong is a product of the folk culture or tradition. The “folk” refers to the rural people or community dwellers who speak their regional dialects and are very much connected with their natural root. Due to the people’s connection and constant touch with their tradition, the people are very much conversant with their folkloric elements and these elements form the liturgy of everyday living. Folksong is an aspect of the folklore. Folklore comprises various practices of the people in their rural sense. That is why Isidore Okpewho (1992) sees folklore as etymologically from “folk” (rural people/dwellers) and “lore” (what people practise). According to him, “lore” encompasses “what the people do” as habits and practices such as mat weaving, fishing, wood carving, dancing, sculpture, pottery, beliefs and taboos, ceremonies, rites etc. The second aspect is “what people say” such as folksongs, poetry, chants, incantation recitals, dirges, bridal songs etc. All these oral forms named under “what people say” by Okpewho above are from the balladic family (5). In the postulations of Akporobaro (2005) and Abrams (1999) ballads are folksongs or orally transmitted poetry often riddled with vivid challenges and they are sometimes sung in forms of chanted folktales (51). Folksongs and ballads are suitable for special occasions like marriage, installation, naming, burial, rites of passage and other customary ceremonies (18). Biripo, being from the generic family of Ballad, is inextricably woven and shaped by various socio-cultural factors in the lives of the folk. Biripo, like other balladic forms vary in length, contents and contexts because it can be composed for different occasions. This is also backed by Kennedy, X.J. et al (13-14). It is

a folksong with poetic features which requires the use of musical accompaniments. During the performance of Biripo the performers often insert some dialogues, interludes or rap as a way of making commentaries on prevailing social issues in the community. The rap offshoot (“Ijegbe” or “Luse” in Biripo) is the mother of the modern-day rap music of the hip-hop music. According to Ehinmore (2016), it is done with a view to passing comments on the prevalent social issues. Ehinmore (2016) during an interview believes that the rural folk who lived in pre-literate or pre-colonial era, could not read or write. So, what they did was to evolve folksong or folk-poetry for the purpose of forming a corpus for documenting and propagating their quotidian experiences. These experiences include facts of history, myths, legend, songs, chants, rap, etc., which are necessary for the perpetuation of the existence of the folk.

Biripo shares these common features with other folkloric forms. He goes further to say that “folksongs” used to be a daily means of passing moral lesson and imparting values on the people and their society whenever they erred and misbehaved or when they have done something laudable before they came in contact with the western culture. Babalola (2004) postulates that “folksongs comprise ideas and values which live at the centre of societal education in African societies and by which indigenous people continue to uphold and respect their customs and their beliefs” (1). From this opinion, one can decipher that folksongs underscore the liturgy and creed of daily living of the folk people. Folksongs are complete corpus in the sense that they form the customary mirrors through which the rural dwellers see themselves. They are like the blood that flows in the veins of the people and cords that “bolt” or bind the people to their root. That is why Kumer (1995) postulates that they have been preserved through primary traditional elements and without interruption notwithstanding the challenges in the social circumstances (209). In the pre-literate Yoruba or Ilaje societies, folksongs (Biripo) formed the pedagogical tools used in informal education. So, in societies where informal education was/is the medium of socialising the people into various strata of the societal or communal echelon, folksongs are tested to be indispensable and exceedingly useful.

Enikuemehin (2013) posits that “folksongs are employed for fostering social consciousness in the society and among the coastal Yorubaland” (2). This opinion is similar to the one put forward by Babalola (2004) above. Ajetunmobi (2013) digs deeper than Enikuemehin (2013) and Babalola (2004) as he delves into the origin and authorship of folksongs. He opines that

folksongs have been around for decades that nobody is entirely sure who their composers were. Thus, these folksongs are passed down usually within a community, and they evolve overtime to address some of the issues of the day; while some are designed to promote national identity and

religious development; others are used to propagate socio-cultural heritage and traditional customs of a people (188).

Ajetunmobi's position is wider in scope because it extends to national identity and religious development. On the whole, it sees folksongs as tools for knowledge dissemination, cultural transmission and preservation. Biripo is an offspring of the large generic family of folksongs. In terms of its pedagogical values, folksongs perform the same functions with "written documents" in formal education. Folksongs therefore refer to primordial and unwritten documents of the rural folk.

The Concept of Luse

Luse and Ijegbe are offshoots of Biripo performed occasionally at the funeral rite of elders or important personalities. However, there is the need to distinguish between Luse and Ijegbe since they are believed to be of use at different occasions according to Ehinmore (2008), (2016) and Ayela (2016). To Ehinmore, Luse is the mother of all "rap" music. This, according to him, is because Luse occurs in performance as if modern hip-hop artists are rapping in between songs. He has however not succeeded in giving us proof of the validity of his postulation and how he came about his postulation about whether Biripo is the mother of other rap music. The credit of his theory however lies in the way he is able to link Biripo (an indigenous oral form) with the rap music (an exotic form that is not indigenous to Africa). Emoruwa (2005) describes the Luse as the offshoot of Biripo that emphasises chants that are witty, rhythmic and academically inclined. To Emoruwa, "Luse" is employed for teaching the society moral and facts about the society or community in which they live (10). The strength of Emoruwa's theorisation here is that it gives us the knowledge of how teaching and learning took place in the pre-literate African societies. This position has saved us from the darkness of believing that teaching and learning came with the advent of colonialism. Its watershed is that he did not tell us how Luse is used for academic purposes. He is thus like J.L. Austin (1962) who wrote a book in Semantics on *How To Do Things With Words* but did not succeed in teaching us how to do so. He also fails to say whether there are strata in the use of Biripo for academic purposes, what lies at the bottom and top of the academic echelon. Ayela, E.D. (2016) posits that Luse is not as voluminous as Ijegbe. However, Ehinmore (2016) posits that Luse and Ijegbe belong to the rap pattern and are deployed for passing sagely comments on the prevalent issues in the society. He points out that length or volume cannot be used as yardstick for distinguishing between them. It is however clear from their opinions (Ayela and Ehinmore) that the two are different. Luse (whether short in span or scope) is a form of the rap pattern which

is the interlude between songs and drumming used for passing commentary on issues. It is described by Emoruwa (2005) as “*ofo Ilaje ti agbalagba*” (12) and corroborated by Ehinmore as “*ofo aghan agba or omuro*” both meaning words of the Ilaje elders. Luse “is multi-functional or multipurpose and can be used for commenting on issues or can also be tactfully employed in the settlement of disputes between parties or sharing of the father’s or mother’s inheritance after death (13). He goes further to argue that:

in Yorubaland generally and in Ilaje land in particular, the elders remain the bus-stop before the gods, in fact, their pronouncements are as revered as those of the gods. These pronouncements are kept alive in the minds of the young ones to guide them from time to time in various matters. Such matters may include historical events, ethics and moral issues, land disputes, etc (13).

What is decipherable from this submission is that Luse is one of the tools of the elders for teaching the young ones about the world and universe of the Ilaje. It is deployed for various functions and occasions and it is treasured greatly by the people because of its pedagogical values. The facts in Luse must be relayed with precision and accuracy to make it perform its desired function or have anticipated aesthetic effects. That is why at gatherings of the elders and young ones who are eager to learn from the elders, if Luse is relayed accurately the most senior person in the gathering acknowledges the validity or the accuracy of the story. My hesitation to totally accept this opinion that Biripo is the elders’ verdict is occasioned by the reality that youngsters also practise the art. So, Emoruwa has not told us whether what a youngster says while rendering the art is still the elders’ verdict. The performer tells stories or folktales as complements of songs, asking such question as:

Uku yi pa Moluken
Oran one yi gba Moluken
O don Ilaje, O don Ikale
Omoran yi ba maa, ji wa fo
 (The death that killed Moluken
 The matter of the crocodile that took Moluken
 It pained Ilaje, it pained Ikale
 Let the sage that knows it tell me about it.)

The person responding may now say

Mo muren Moluken ren ji e deyin wale.

*One yi gba Moluken,
One oluko, eran tititi,
Eyi fi apaadi de eghenloju re,*

(I know how Moluken fared and failed to return home.

The crocodile that took Moluken (the hunter) The crocodile with curve jaws, Mountainous beast that used pieces of broken clay-pot to cover its eyeballs to prevent ants from biting them.)

This is the description of the crocodile that took (swallowed) Moluken alive. The story is longer than that from the beginning, if the person responding is right, the leader replies “*wo fo ire*” meaning “you have spoken well”. Where such is wrong another respondent may interrupt the proceeding by saying “*Aye ma fuge*” and the people will chorus “*Awa ye e*” or “*oro da titon*.” *Ayema fuge*” means the world loves this season (*uge*) of the gathering of the sages “*Awa yee*” means we will survive it or we are alive to witness it. “*Oro da titon*” means the discourse begins again anew or afresh. This shows that the discourse is about to take a new turn and new truth is about to be unravelled. Enikuemehin (2013) is of the position that “Luse” is ever full of the nuances that are witty, proverbial, instructive, historical and rhythmical to make it the elders’ delight” (34). Luse is the “elders’ delight” because it is the opportunity that the elders have to mentor the younger stars on matters affecting the universe or the society of Ilaje. Enikuemehin concludes his argument by postulating that,

apart from the fact that it (Luse) helps to complement the songs, instrumental and vocal sound as well as the gestures required for the music or performance, the Luse is also regarded as academic and interactive session to the Ilajes. Thus, this means that through the Luse (chant) lively discussions on historical, political, moral, cultural and educational policies and practices of Ilaje founding fathers are reminiscent (34).

The fact that Luse is employed in various matters of interest to the elders and the society sets Luse apart from Ijegbe which is mainly staged or performed during funeral rites.

The Concept of Ijegbe

Luse unlike its second pair “Ijegbe” is a long rap of tales about the dead person, usually a beloved of the performers. It is the Ilaje name for the English “dirge”. It is the slow, sonorous, sometimes mournful chant used for spicing up Biripo. Ajimisan, S.O (2011) posits that Ijegbe is likened to the traditional

and socio-cultural belief system, which translates into collectivised ideology of Ilaje people (81). Enikuemehin (2013) believes that,

Ijegbe is customarily sung at the burial occasion of beloved ones. This mournful song or poetry called Ijegbe is popularly sung during the passage rite of traditional obas or reputable personalities especially chiefs and prominent elders in the village. Based on the situation or context that Ijegbe is associated with, it is therefore, referred to by the Ilaje people as “orin aro” in Ilaje dialect (34).

This claim is validated by Egboworomo (104). Ayela E.D. (2016) the oral interview cited earlier in this study is of the position that “Ijegbe” is an occasional oral poetry performed during funeral rites. It is synonymous to “Irogho” which is also performed at the funeral ceremony of elder or prominent personalities. He claims that Luse is shorter in span than “Ijegbe”. He clearly states that;

“Ijegbe” may be sung by two or more people in form of dialogue with the leader starting by asking his back-up performers about a certain sad historical occurrence about which he is about to talk. He may start by asking “what happened at so-and-so time. The question will be in singing mode. The backup performers, in form of call and response will respond. If they get it right, he tells them that they are right in song. If not, he tells them that they are wrong and he proceeds to tell them the story in song

The “Ijegbe”, from the opinion of Ayela is thus, different from Luse in that it (Ijegbe) is restricted to be performed during funeral rites. Ehinmore, O.M (2016) in an oral interview draws the line of demarcation between “Luse” and “Ijegbe”, positing that while Luse is for all occasions, including funeral rites, “Ijegbe” is only to be rendered” at the funeral ceremonies of those who die at very ripe old ages, not those who die premature death or in their prime”. This opinion makes the difference more rigid and gives “Ijegbe” a kind of restriction to death that occurs at old or ripe age. Ijegbe is therefore, the oral poetry of rap family sandwiched between songs or the major performances, which is composed in honour of a dead person. The recitations are like citations of the dead person’s profile while alive and they are not only thought-provoking but also sorrow/grief-instilling in contents and mode of presentation.

Forms/Segments of Ijegbe and Luse Performance

The forms or segments in Biripo are two, depending on tempo or beats during the performance. These segments have been identified by Emoruwa

during the performance. These segments have been identified by Emoruwa (2005) and Enikuemehin (2013), Emaye, (2016) and Ehinmore, O.M (2016) in oral interviews identified two segments:

- (i) The Egwo erroneously spelt as “Eghwo” by Emoruwa and Enikuemehin who follows the former’s pattern of wrong Ilaje orthography.
- (ii) Eya wrongly spelt by the trio of Emoruwa, (2005) Enikuemehin (2013) and Ajulekun (2014) as “Egya” which is also an adulteration of Ilaje orthography and spelling.

Egwo Segment

In the view of Ehinmore (2016), the name “egwo” etymologically originates from the Ilaje verb “gwo” which means “to crawl”, “draw like okro” or flow and move like water current or any fluid. In the view of Emoruwa (2005), the “Egwo” segment is

one that is characterised by slow pace and firm-but-steady flow of music both in singing (vocal) and (instrumentations) and in the dance. Literary speaking, “eghwo’ or “egwo” is a term in the Ilaje dialect that means to “draw” or flow; it is used specifically to describe the actions of things, materials, or elements with adhesive qualities and or, with flowing liquid order. For example, when such term as Egwo omi is used, it describes the quality of water as the flowing nature of water or river, or at best implies the kind of sticky and drawing nature of an okra soup (10).

The “egwo segment” is the segment of Biripo named after the drawing nature of okra or fluidity of water or any liquid due to its slow-pace, beats, tempo or rhythm during performance. It is characteristically the starting “note” or point of Biripo performance by both experienced and amateur performers. The slow motion or the tremulous beat is not limited to the songs or the rap or chant, but it extends to the drumming patterns, the movements and general attitude of the people during the starting note of every performance. Everything done in this segment is calm, orderly and shows maturity. Ajulekun (2014) observes that:

the “Egwo” segment allows and facilitates familiarity and general sense of blending the voice with musical instruments. The “egwo” segment is more cherished by the elders and the researchers in Biripo performance gathering

as it enhances graceful gestures. The Biripo dance movement in “egwo” is graceful and fluid-like in quality. It registers a trance-like nature of movement that involves the co-ordination of every part of the body at the same time with utmost level of concentration (33-34).

To Ajulekun, the “egwo” segment is stylistically impressive and psychologically stimulating on the part of the audience. It is much cherished because it gives room for long rap which affords the artist to display his or her creative grasp of the art and language of operation. During this segment, sage-philosophy is neatly packaged and creatively delivered so that the audience or listeners can learn words of the sages or elderly pronouncement as we have in Luse. Ajulekun, in his submission fails to enlighten us on why the beat for the “Egwo” segment must be characteristically slow or tremulous. Ehinmore has however bailed him out by suggesting that the reason for the tremulous beat is for the listeners to be in contemplative or meditative mood so as to be in sober reflection and pick any of the renditions that pertain to their ways of life and adjust. Luse is incessantly employed in this segment since this is the segment that gives Luse/Ijegbe its pedagogical essence. Truth about the existence of the society or the people, the way the society is governed or what is right and wrong in the communal lives of the people are ethically and epistemologically addressed and redressed. Thus, the “egwo” segment is a jumble of ethics, epistemology, theology of the people and their culture and tradition. The elders cherish this segment because it gives them the opportunity to listen to the chronicles of the people’s history being rendered by the artist and the validity of such chronicles. Panegyric “*ekiki*”, proverbs, epigrams (wits), myths, legends and folktales or history of the people are copiously deployed for this purpose of flavouring and the nuances of Biripo are better appreciated in this segment. Ayela, E.D (2016) avers that the “egwo” segment is like the riddle in Yoruba folktale which comes before the main tale. His belief is that

there is what is called riddle (which comes before the tale) and the tale itself is the main form. Biripo begins with “egwo” segment which, like the riddles in folktales, prepares the way for the Eya. Biripo performance graduates from “Egwo” to “Eya”. Sometimes the “egwo” segment is of two kinds (the one accompanied with slow drumming and the one without drumming meant for preparing the audience for the “Eya” which is the main performance. The dance-step in “Egwo” is different from that in “Eya”. The beats or rhythm of the “egwo” segment is tremulous, slow and the voice of the artist is sonorous as well.

This segment is unique in its rendition and vocalisation and contents and the diction are carefully and specially selected. The “Egwo” segment, according to Ehinmore, O.M. (2016) cited above, “engages the inner sense of the audience”. He claims that “during the rendition of the “egwo” segment, the performers or the artists are seen as assuming the status of elders or sages. The segment gives the artists the room for speaking the fundamental truth about the people and the society”. On the whole, the “egwo” segment is characterised by fluidity of vocalisation and instrumentation. This fluidity thus produces slur in the singing and drumming to reflect the name “egwo”. Perhaps, the slow motion of a snake on a smooth sandy soil may help the understanding of this concept. The tone of the “egwo” segment is contemplative as we have in Luse and “Ijegbe” or Iyeja which is the special funeral rite of a king. The performers and the audience are therefore in preparatory mood during the singing of “egwo Biripo”.

The Eya Segment

The “eya” segment in Biripo performance is characterised by fastness, heightened tempo, rapidity of the flow or occurrence of words in rap interlude and swiftness of the dance steps. This is because the body of both the performers and the audience are already stimulated by the preceding “egwo” segment. The “Eya” segment is the main performance while the “egwo” is the forerunner that prepares the way for it. Ayela, E.D (2016) in an oral interview lends us credence when he opines that

during the “Eya”, the beat gradually wakes trenchant and the tempo increases as the performance continues. The “Eya” is the peak of the performance and it graduates from the “Egwo” sometimes, to graduate from “Egwo” to “Eya” may need to stop the drumming totally in preparation for the “Eya”. At other time, the drumming may not be stopped outright, but the drummers play on diminuendo before changing into trenchant “Eya” beat.

In the “Eya” segment, everything is speedy, the spirit is high, as the tempo of the performance climaxes, the stimulation heightens as well and the speed of speech delivery of the performer while chanting or rendering Luse or Ijegbe becomes speedy as well. The rapping artist is believed to be engrossed by the spirit of Ogbaranikose, the Ilaje god believed to be in charge of exceptional creativity and the act of speaking the truth without fear or favour. It is therefore believed that whatever pronouncement he or she makes is the verdict of “Ogbaranikose”, the deity in charge of the art he or she chooses to practise.

This deity is comparatively the equivalent or the Ilaje counterpart of the Greek Bacchus, the god in charge of music or creativity. Ehinmore (2016) takes Ayela's view further and he submits that:

the “eya is synonymous to “ariya”. The dance steps become acrobatically swift and the rate at which words flow from the artist or lead-performer is highly mesmeric and captivating. The artist is believed to have ascended the highest creative mountain of the deity of creativity and the dancers as well are believed to be operating on the top echelon of the realm where the gods operate.

This is true of Eya-Biripo as it is believed that the stimulation garnered from “Egwo” serves as the chain for ascending on to the top echelon of the realm where the gods operate. This is because the Ilaje believe that to be exceptionally creative in Biripo the “Egwo” might have connected you to the creative fountain of the realm above. The dancers' acrobatic dexterity is also stimulated so that they can jump ten mountains in one swift moment. Thus, the slow movement of the water-current in “Egwo-Biripo” metamorphoses into the tempestuous rolling or buffeting of the sea waves which buffet the bank indiscriminately. That is why, during “Eya” elders will say that “Malokun mi yi igbi” – The sea is rocking in waves and they often sing songs like “*aimugwe mama yaagan o, agan ma mi ja aimugwe ma ma yu agan oo*”. The meaning of this is “unskilful swimmer, do not dive into the lagoon/because the lagoon is tempestuous”. This is sung as warning to inexperienced or novice Biripo performers should be warned because the wavelength at which the experienced performers operate is high. It is also a way of one artist throwing barbers or jibes at another artist not to meddle on the glee-ground where experienced people are operating.

Ijegbe and Luse as Oral Performances: Through the Lens of Schechner's Performance Theory

Performance is a unique feature that gives every indigenous art forms or aesthetic object life through the conviviality or warmth generated by the vivacious interactions of the artist with the audience. Okpewho sees performance is an art form created in the warm presence of an audience as against the cold privacy of the written work. From this opinion, it is evidently revelatory that the audience are indispensable parts of the performance as they are made to perform some aesthetic functions in the performance either by deliberate orchestrations of the performer or by unintentional impulses from the audience themselves. “Performances differ one from the other, depending on such

factors as age and energy of the performer, the nature of the occasion (death or merriment), type of setting (cult enclave or open square), whether or not any musical accompaniments are used especially by the performer, and whether it is a solo or a group act” (42). Some performances require the use musical instruments or percussions.

Performances come with some degree of appeal not only in the spoken, chanted or sung words of the performer or the oral artist but also in the manner of articulating those words. This accounts for Okpewho’s assertion that songs, chants, recitations and renditions are complex forms of performance (43). J.P. Clark (1963, 1966 & 1977), Scheub, Bascom, Finnegan and Herskovits have carried out various performances and several performance-based researches. Finnegan advocates performance-centred approach to the study of oral literature. She, during her examination of the Akan Dirges of Ghana posits that performance lies not just in the spoken or chanted text alone. She adds that:

...the printed words alone represent only a shadow of the full actualisation of the poem as an aesthetics for poet and audience. For, quite apart from the separate question of the overtones and symbolic association of words and phrases, the actual enactment of the poem also involves the emotional situation of a funeral, the singer’s beauty of voice, her sobs, facial expression, vocal expressiveness and moments (all indicating the sincerity of her grief), and, not least, the musical setting of the poem (3).

From Finnegan’s position above, performance is the nucleus of oral literature which guarantees its survival and aesthetic beauty and nuances. Without performance, the spoken words reduce in local colour and meaning-making. Okoh (2008) sees performance as “that material that boasts no independent existence outside an enactment or an occasion (87). Performance refers to the conscious enactment that gives or breathes life into a text or oral material. Suffice it therefore, to say that an oral text remains lifeless or inconsiderable until it is vocalised or amplified by “word of the mouth”, which is a cardinal hallmark of operation in Oral Literature or folklore. This vocalisation or amplification of the text through the mouth is what is known as performance in clearer terms.

Okoh further submits that performance is indispensable in oral literature. The orality in the literature lies in performance. One of the major attributes of performance is its allowance or permissibility of tinkering, flexibility, improvisation and adaptability which bring to bear the, the competence or versatility of the performer or the griot. Performance extends to other extra-literary devices such as facial expressions, costuming, bodily carriage, gait or mien, histrionics, verbal pyrotechnics, ideophones, purposeful, calculated shifts in

narrative tempo, the employment of mime, song and dance (88). Luse and Ijegbe, which are genres of Biripo, like other forms of oral literature are performance-driven. Schechner (1988) argues that “the crucial and distinctive turning point in the line of development is the participatory nature of performance in ritual to the spectatorial aspect of theatre” (3). Schechner’s (1977) theory is defined as a ritual where liminal space is created for transformation to happen. Accordingly, the author sees performance as an art activity involving time, the site of the performance, the performing body/ies, and interaction with audience because of the broad definition, performance include all art activities that concern these elements. This participatory nature applies incontrovertibly to Ijegbe and Luse performance of the Ilaje people not because of their awareness of Schechner’s theory but because that is the way nature designed it.

Luse, Ijegbe and the Notion of Collectivised Tragedy and Ideology

Ideology is a set of beliefs, held by a particular group or some set of people that influences their way of seeing and perceiving things or behaviour. It is also a systematic body or compendium of concepts about human life, culture and the world around and beyond them. Tragedy, in this context, means a very sad event or situation involving loss of lives especially those of one’s loved ones. As the people come together to rejoice and celebrate a fortune, they also come together to lament like modern wailers among the Jamaicans, Akan or Ewe people of Ghana and the Banyang people of Southern Cameroun in the work of Sarah Agbor referred to above. This is akin, in many respect, to the practice of communalism in the collective life of the Apostles as documented in the book of Acts of Apostles 2:47 in which the Apostles “had everything in common”, including their feelings of joy and grief. This collective spirit or style of existence of sharing in both a person’s joy and grief is one of the long-standing attributes of the Ilaje wherever they find themselves around the globe. Their style existence and survival, according to Ajimisan (2022), is likened to that of the red mangrove tree (Igi Egba) that characteristically spreads its tentacles or adventurous roots to cover its saline aquatic habitat.

Earlier, Ajimisan (2016) has argued that Biripo performance is characterised by collectivism. Therefore, Ijegbe and Luse, being genres of Biripo, retain the feature of collectivism for which their mother-form, Biripo is known. This collectivised performance and participation subsists not only the composition of the troupe of performers but also in the spirit and intention behind the performance, which is the insatiable propensity to convoke in honour of the departed loved ones for last respect. In most cases, gathering together for Ijegbe

or Luse performance is a nocturnal affair as people will have to go about their daily activities in daytime. This practice has been sustained over several centuries of their existence before contact with Christianisation, Europeanisation or Westernisation and the practice assumes operational or functional similitude with the Christian wake. In some other instances, where the deceased is not too old and still has younger wife(ves) or children who are still too young to fend for themselves, the people use the opportunity of the performance to raise funds which they will use in supporting the widow(s) and their children. This is a clear exemplification of the shared philosophy and ideology of the people that “*one se oju ne, ji e e se eyin ne, ei s’eniyan*” meaning one who acts well in our presence but acts contrary when we are no more or absent is not a good breed or person of good character.

Central to the collectivised tragedy, philosophy and ideology in Ijegbe/Luse performance is the firm belief of the people that one shares grief with one with whom one earlier or always shares joy and other good things. The people see bond or familial affinity between them as that which exists between the eyes and the nose, hence, the long-standing maxim among them which says “*aju e le ka hon, ji imo ka gho*” which means the eyes cannot be shedding tears and the nose will be watching without sobbing. The practical implication and presupposition of this maxim is the belief of the people that your neighbour cannot mourning and you will be watching or feeling unconcerned. Thus, when people are rejoicing, you rejoice with them as a way reminding your “*orugbo*” (71) (the personality soul/ personal deity) or Obarisa (king of all deities) as the people also refer to God, according Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) and Ajimisan (2021) to quicken arrival of your season of celebration. When people are also mourning, you mourn with them as a way of epitomising the belief of the people that you share with your neighbour, what s/he has at hand. Sequel to this shared ideology, the people are known for their ancestral habit of living together in harmony both at home and in diaspora and helping one another to secure opportunities. When they meet each other outside their home-soil, they see each other as brothers and sisters, even though they are not related from home or do not know each other from Adam.

This collectivised living and ways of seeing things and living life has made them the envy of other sub-groups in Yoruba land and all over the world. For instance, when an Ilaje man prepares better meal, he invites his neighbours far and near to share from what he has at hand to share. The neighbours do same when they too have good meals especially of big fish. They come together to share meals prepared with the heads of big fish like whales, turtles, sharks, dolphins, alligators or big crocodiles all from the same plate and in most cases, drink from the same cup or calabashes. This communal living is not limited to peace-time alone but also extends to war times and periods of

mourning or grief. When a woman's husband dies, all her friends and neighbours rally round her to offer consolation and support that will help her to get over the pains and grief without delay. They leave their houses to stay with her for some days and visit randomly for some days to either support her morally, psychologically and financially, if they can afford. They help to shave her head and pubes during the mourning rite and help her to cast off the mourning clothes when the mourning rite is over.

Conclusion

The joint practice of collectivised performance of Ijegbe and Luse among the Ilaje of Ondo State has engendered collectivised tragedy and ideology. Collectivised ideology and tragedy is a product of the people's long-standing tradition based on the communal style of living which makes the people believe that a person exists not only for himself but for others around him/her. In this paper, efforts have been made to contextualise the performance of Ijegbe and Luse within the functional praxis with a view to revealing how they have not only functioned for entertainment alone but also for social mobilisation, cultural socialisation and informal pedagogy.

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