



**Traditional Songs as
'Language' of Information
and Morality in Yorùbá
Religious Beliefs and Culture:
Context and Significance**

Delivered by

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INTRODUCTION

For the Yorùbá people, as in most cultures, particularly within the African context, renditions of songs constitute a very significant part of their fundamental religious and cultural experiences. Consequently, songs as a set of words arranged into 'music' can be regarded as the 'language' of contents and expressions indicating the holistic Yorùbá religious and cultural world views, be they philosophical, theological, political, moral or social.

As world view indicators, it can be argued that the traditional songs provide the most effective paradigms as both sources of knowledge and expressions of moral dictates, precepts and expectations. These paradigms could be said to be designed to be relevant and significant not only for the new and younger members of the society being tutored on different aspects of the people's religion and culture but also for the adults in the context of expected knowledgeable, responsible and morally upright members of the community.

The Yorùbá people form one of the largest African ethnic groups found in the South-Western part of Nigeria, which is comprised of these states: Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti and Lagos. They are also found in parts of the North-Central states of Kwara and Kogi. They can also be found in some parts of the Republic of Benin and Togo. The Yorùbá people have many dialects, but the same cultural heritage and ideological beliefs serve as a basis of their religious beliefs and practices.

My objective in this discourse is, therefore, to explore the context and significance of traditional songs as multi-dimensional 'language' of functional expressions of fundamentals of Yorùbá Indigenous Religion and culture. However, two functional expressions are focused upon here. First, these songs are considered sources of credible and time-tested sustainable knowledge on the Yorùbá belief system. It is important to note that

within any religious system, the beliefs and practices represent the paradigms that are unique and central to the identity and sensibilities of the people with the beliefs and practices. Such songs, to my mind, are a way of preserving the past and sustaining the present for the benefit of the future. The second is the dynamics of the songs as bastions of individual and corporate moral barometers of character training for young children and compliance by the adults. In achieving this stated objective, the following outline is used.

1. Theoretical Framework

- i. Definitions and Paradigms of Tradition
- ii. Songs: Traditional Songs – Nature, characteristics and modes of songs generally and in the context of the Yorùbá traditional prism.
- iii. Language—In what connotation is the concept and pragmatic use of language employed here?

2. Functional Dimensions

- i. Samples of Traditional Songs as ‘Language’ of Informative Knowledge of Fundamentals of Yorùbá Indigenous Religious Beliefs and Practices—Context and Significance.
- ii. Samples Traditional Songs as Expressions of Moral Dictates and Public Shaming of Immoral Behaviors—Individual, Family and Community—Context and Significance.
- iii. Contextualization and Relevance in 21st-Century Moral Dictates—The Journey from Public Shaming to Public Cheering Syndrome in Moral Aberrations.
- iv. Summary and Final Reflections.

Theoretical Framework

As background information, while the meaning of some keywords in this paper, such as “indigenous”, can be regarded as straightforward and therefore needing no extensive definitions, the same cannot be said of “tradition” and “sustainability.” Some

detailed explanations in the form of definitions are essential to locate our discussion of their connectivity in a perspective which clearly indicates the paradox of traditional values and the concept of sustainability.

Definitions and Paradigms of Tradition(s)

Definitions of the word “tradition” have been offered from different viewpoints and to capture different experiences. This is vividly reflected in the diverse but largely complementary definitions of “tradition” by various dictionaries. Three definitions are provided here.

- a. The handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, instruction, etcetera from generation to generation especially by words of mouth or by practice (Unabridged Dictionary, Vol. 1).
- b. A mode of thoughts in behavior followed by a people continuously from generation to generation; a custom or usage (American Heritage Dictionary, Vol. 1).
- c. An inheritance pattern of thoughts or action... a specific practice of long standing (Harper, 2001).

A synthesis of these definitions gives us deep insight into what “tradition” means, particularly within the context of human activities in maintaining the past for the use of the present and the future. What is of utmost importance in the sampled definitions is the sense of dynamism brought into the concept of tradition. Tradition is not viewed as a dead or an archaic element, but a form of living transformation identifiable with the people who practice it. It is a form of human construct and configuration, altered through time to create meaning for people and their world (Kidula, 1999). From this perspective, a holistic, though not an exclusive, definition of tradition as given by Savage suffices for us here. It states:

Tradition is a dialect between the reality of culture and the forming of its identity... the primary

phenomenon in which sediment positions and cultural values also hold the promise of continuing memory and relevance of a way of life... (Savage, 1994).

When the conception of tradition is viewed within the context of the indigenous African paradigm, what emerges is the notion of tradition as a pragmatic agency and strategy of cultural values and identities which are inherent in inhabitants of Africa. They depict how societal or communal agencies and strategies become trajectories of tradition when engaged within the context of sustainability. This of course depends essentially on the definition and paradigm of sustainability embraced.

My submission here is that the above narrative on tradition clearly underlines the pragmatic and functional values of songs emerging from the heritage of a people—in this case the Yorùbá people—not only as epistemological but also as instructional and behavioral tools for the development and sustenance of the people's socio-religious and moral values.

“Songs”

In the context of this discourse, songs belong to a subcategory of oral Yorùbá poetry that is distinguished by its highly musical mode of rendition, which is different from the recitative mode. Songs can be accompanied by instrumentation and dance because of their rhythmic renditions. Although, as Ogundeji (1991) has pointed out, this may not be a regular scenario as more often than not, recitations of traditional songs are not usually accompanied.

In terms of classification of Yoruba songs, we have the very insightful work of some Yoruba scholars such as Babalólá (1970), Vidal (1980), Oyeşakin (1983) and Ògúndèjì (1991). The classifications or types generally reflect the functional dynamics associated with the songs. Ogundeji's (1991) work identified five classifications or types—festival songs, children's songs, folktale

songs, proverbial songs and dance music. For our purpose here, the intent is to conceptualize the context and significance of some of the songs in cross-selections across the classifications and submit a thesis for their epistemological, instructional and behavioral functionality.

The premise in pursuing this route is fundamentally anchored on the fact that these Yoruba traditional songs across the classifications or types are rooted in Yoruba philosophy and poetry. Indeed, they have transcended the traditional communal settings and constitute the life-spring of popular, neo-traditional music like juju, fuji, waka, and highlife today. However, this is a viable topic for another lecture.

“Language”

The question may be asked: Why designate our vehicle of discourse in the topic and realization of our objective thereof as language? Notice that the term “language” here is put in invited commas. This is deliberate in situating my objective so as to present my description of the functional contextualization of the traditional songs within the dynamics of the unique and integrated genre of verbal communication. How then can we arrive at this thesis based on the general conceived sensibilities of what a language is and its usage? I believe that David Crystal and Robert Henry Robins’ description of language and its functional dynamics clearly supports my usage of it for the purpose envisaged here. They submit that:

Language is a system of conventional spoken, manual, or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release. (Crystal and Robins, 2013)

What is very instructive here is that this tool for the purposes highlighted in the quote is acquired by every person in a given community from childhood both physiologically and mentally. Furthermore, in the specific functionality of spoken language, which is involved in the rendition of songs, the symbol set would consist of noises resulting from movements of certain organs within the throat and mouth. This process ultimately equips people with the ability to impart information, to express feelings and emotions. Consequently, they can then influence the activities of others and at the same time express with varying degrees perspectives of approval and friendliness or disapproval and hostility toward persons who share the same tool of language apparatus. I would like to submit that the narrative above vividly reflects my conceptualization of the functionality of traditional songs as both epistemological and moral tools.

All the above narratives can be tied together in a sentence before moving to consider samples of songs. In this way, traditional songs as “language” can then be conceptualized in the functional dynamics of these structured communal vocalized communications as engaged in two-dimensional religious and socio-cultural prisms of epistemology and behavioral dictates.

Functional Dimensions: Context and Significance

The context and significance of Yoruba traditional songs are reflected in different categories to depict the functional relevance for particular purposes as occasions demand. This is succinctly pointed out by George (2013) when he opined that Africans employ songs for every occasion, be it for joy or sorrow. They use songs to train, to praise or chastise, to comfort the bereaved and rejoice with merry-makers. Here, I seek to contextualize the context and significance of the songs as functional “language” paradigms first as sources of knowledge about Yoruba traditional religious world views, and second as expression and enforcement of moral precepts and expectations in Yoruba communities.

Samples of Traditional Songs as “Language” (sources) of Informative Knowledge of Fundamentals of Yoruba Indigenous Religious Beliefs and Practices: Sample Songs’ Context and Significance

Traditional songs have generally become part of oral sources of information regarding different aspects of Yoruba world views both in the traditional and contemporary settings. This position has been vividly demonstrated in aspects such as religious beliefs and practices that are fundamental to the people’s indigenous world view. Yoruba Indigenous Religion, as part of African Traditional Religion, is one of the indigenous religions of Africans. It is associated with every aspect of the African life. This is why Bolaji Idowu (1994) points out that “Africans are in all things religious.” Also, as an Indigenous Religion, Africans are born into it. It is not a religion of the book like Islam and Christianity. It has neither sacred scripture nor propaganda machinery. Awolalu (1979) describes African religion as:

The indigenous religion of the Africans. It is the religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears of the present generation of Africans. It is not a fossil religion (a thing of the past) but a religion that Africans today have made by living it and practicing it. (53)

Awolalu (1979) further opines:

This is a religion that has no written literature, yet it is written everywhere for those who care to see and read. It is largely written in the people’s myths and folktales, in their songs and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in their proverbs and pithy sayings. Yet it offers persistent fascination for Africans, young and old. (53)



Since African religion is not a religion of the book, it has no sacred writings like Islam which has the Qur'an, and Christianity that has the Bible. The two main sources of information for the religion have been oral and non-oral. Oral sources are verbal means of passing information from one generation to another, or a way of transmitting information and knowledge through word-of-mouth. Examples of oral sources include songs, proverbs, names, stories, myths, and prayers. Non-oral sources are artistic expressions on the beliefs of Africans about the divine and mundane world through a religious spectrum. Examples include masks used by masquerades, dance staffs, instruments of divination, and other sacred artifacts.

It is within this context that traditional songs have become formidable and dependable oral sources for obtaining information about different aspects of the Yoruba religious beliefs and practices. Such beliefs and practices include, but are not limited to, beliefs about the Supreme Being and divinities and the circle of life. Information can also be obtained about values cherished by the society in shaping the development of the individual to become a responsible member of the community. The Yoruba religious belief system, as part of the African Traditional Religion, employs songs and music as an important part in the lives of the people. An examination of the context and significance of some of the traditional songs is provided herein.

Language/Expressions of Belief in and Worship of the Supreme Being

Songs, both traditional and contemporary, have become important sources of information for the Yoruba people's belief in and worship of the Supreme Being. Through the songs, the meaning of His names and various attributes are expressed. Such names and attributes include, for example, OYIGIYIGI OBA AIKU, meaning "The mighty, durable, immovable rock that never dies;" OOLORUN, meaning "The owner of heaven" (Islam and Christianity also adopt the name OOLORUN); OLOFIN ORUN,

meaning “The King of Heaven.” This is particularly demonstrated during worship at which time spirit possession may take place. Such a situation is described by Dopamu (2005):

During worship when the singing and dancing penetrate wholly into every being of the worshipper, spirit possession may follow and the possessed devotee may give message from the divinity. (68)

An example of such songs in words or phrases that depict the uniqueness, Transcendence, Omnipotence, the Immovable Rock that never dies, The Mighty One and The owner of Heaven is:

Oyigiyigi ooooo

Alagbawi Eda aaa

Alakoso Orun un un un

Eyin ma lologo julo

Meaning:

The Immovable Rock that never dies,

The One that Listens to His Creatures

The Controller of Heaven

To you is all Majesty.

As George (2013) succinctly points out, this song clearly indicates that:

All over Africa, people consider Him (the Supreme Being) to be benevolent, morally good and care about humans. He is responsible for the creation and maintenance of the world. (75)

Expressions of Belief in and Veneration of Divinities

Belief in divinities, called *Orisa*, constitute the second hierarchical level of belief in Yoruba Indigenous Religion. The divinities are regarded as representatives of the Supreme Being, deployed to oversee different aspects of nature and human relationships with the Supreme Being in His theocratic governance of the world. Consequently, as intermediaries between humans and the Supreme

Beings, the divinities, for practical purposes, are held in high esteem and offered extensive veneration. This functional disposition has sometimes led the casual observer of African Indigenous Religion in general and Yoruba Indigenous Religion in particular to the mistaken conclusion that the religion is polytheistic. However, a deeper investigation and understanding of the people's religious motivation and practice with regard to their relationship with the divinities clearly reveal that as intermediaries, the divinities are never regarded as ends in themselves; rather they are viewed as means to an end, albeit messengers, who must be reverently treated and accorded the highest form of respect so as to properly and diligently deliver petitions to the Supreme Being.

Veneration of the divinities is conducted in different forms. Sometimes the veneration is informal and at other times it is formal. The formal form of veneration usually involves the whole community coming together at particular times of the year to celebrate divinities as societal "icons." People engage in such celebrations, usually referred to as festivals, by singing, dancing and eating. The content and significance of songs rendered at such occasions are succinctly portrayed by Akinfenwa (2015) when he states that "certain songs dedicated to the divinities are sung in their honor as occasion demands. The characteristics of the divinity are also revealed through songs rendered during worship" (23).

However, it is important to add that the number of songs at each veneration varies and they must be rendered accordingly for sacrifice to divinities to be accepted. This is because each of the divinities is unique not only in nature but also in functionality and expectations from devotees. The following are examples of songs in praise of the divinities in Ijebu-Igbo (Akintan, 2013). As worshippers proceed to the riverside to perform rituals of veneration, they continue to chant invocations and sing the following:

*Ona o, t'orisa
Ore ilee O, ye mi
Ore ileeo, o maye,
yeye boo
do, mo wa ri, ro ri sa
Ese bi ra ku, ese bi ra
ku, e se*

**Song of adoration in
praise of Orisa-Nla.**

*Eni soju se'mu,
Orisa ni maa sin.
A dani bo ti ri,
Orisa ni maa sin.
Eni ran ni waye,*

In Relation to Ifa:

*Ifa gba mi,
mi o lenikan,
yeye omo nii gbomo.*

Meaning:

*The path belongs to the deity
All hail my mother, who heals
totally
All hail my mother, my mother
Has returned from the stream/river.
To the deity do I pay my homage.
All hail our mother,
All hail our mother.*

Meaning:

*He who makes eyes makes nose,
It is Orisa I will serve.
He who makes one as he chooses,
It is Orisa I will serve.
He who sent me here on earth,
It is Orisa I will serve.*

Meaning:

*Ifa accept/save/deliver me,
I have nobody
It is mothers that deliver/save
their children.*

It is interesting that such songs have been employed as important tools in demonstrating the thought process of early Yoruba converts to both Christianity and Islam in justifying their passion for the survival of their indigenous faith. They consequently assert the need to sustain their traditions in the face of sometimes intimidating conversions that seek to erase their religious and cultural beliefs and practices through syncretic strategies of "double loyalty."

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In this context, different songs were rendered during festivals and other traditional events to indicate that accepting and practicing the foreign religion(s), as the case may be, do not translate to abandoning the old cultural beliefs and practices. Indeed, it is very common for Christians and Muslims to accept traditional titles and actively participate in celebrating different communal festivals in their localities. For such Yoruba people, as long as life continues, the celebration of annual festivals is inevitable. Supporting this view, Akintan (2013) attests to this position when he states:

They (Yoruba Christians and Muslims) could not be dissociated from the traditional festivals and its ritual practices into which they were born or make them to revert or backslide from it. They would continue to revive, resuscitate and revitalize it from time to time. (57)

Two of such songs come to mind here:

a. *Áwa ó sorò ilè wá O,
Áwa ó sorò ilè wá O
Ìgbâgbó kò pè, é o
Ìgbâgbó kò pè
Ka wa ma soro O
Áwa ó sorò ilè wá O*

*Áwa ó sorò ilè wá O
Áwa ó sorò ilè wá O
Imale ko pe, e o
Imale ko pe
Ka wa ma soro
Áwa ó sorò ilè wá O
Ore yeye o*

Meaning:

*We shall perform our traditional rites
We shall perform our traditional rites
Christianity cannot prevent us
Christianity cannot hinder us from
performing our traditional rites
We shall perform our traditional rites.*

*We shall perform our traditional rites
We shall perform our traditional rites
Islam cannot prevent us,
Islam cannot hinder us from performing
our traditional rites
We shall perform our traditional rites.*

*b. Igbagbo ooni a ma sode
Igbagbo ooni a ma sode
Ta ba ti sosi de a gbe bon wa
Igbagbo ooni a ma sode*

Meaning:

*Being a Christian does not
forbid being a traditional hunter
Being a Christian does not
forbid being a traditional hunter
When we return from church
service, we will go hunting
Being a Christian does not
forbid being a traditional hunter*

Expression of Belief in the Life Circle

The belief in the human life circle is a fundamental aspect of the overall Yoruba world view on the different stages of human existence made up of both the earthly and divine spheres. The circular nature of the Yoruba human life, as part of the African concept, contrasts with the western horizontal concept. For the Yoruba people, life is circular in the sense that it moves from birth through puberty, marriage, and death and a return to birth again; the process goes on and on. This is why death is not regarded as the end of life but a transition to the next stage and the beginning/preparation of a return to the 'birth' stage.

Different kinds of songs have been employed among the Yoruba people to vividly demonstrate the context, importance and relevance of their concept of the human life circle and various activities at various stages of the circle. Awolalu and Dopamu (2005) stressed this position by expressing that:

Songs are employed in almost every sphere of their lives in worship, in naming ceremonies, in wedding, in funeral, in wrestling, in cultivating the farm, in working, in going to war, in praising the ruler, in rocking babies to sleep and in many other activities. (64)

To be considered next are some Yoruba songs at three important stages of the human life circle: birth, marriage and death.

Birth Songs

The birth of a child is always a very joyous occasion among the Yoruba communities, regardless of whether the child is a boy, girl or even twins. Songs at the birth of a child express appreciation to the Supreme Being and acknowledge Him as the Giver of children. For example, the following Yoruba birth song says:

*Maa bolomo yo
Kemi naa lebi
Ki won le bami yo
Maa bolomo yo*

Meaning:

*I will rejoice with those who give birth
So I can give birth to mine.
So others can rejoice with me
I will rejoice with those who give birth
During a Naming Ceremony*

Omo o!

Omo o, ke i pe d'agba (In no time, a child is all grown)

Omo o, ke i pe d'agba (In no time, a child is all grown)

Kekere, jojolo, mo feran re (Little one, jojolo, I love you ((Jojolo has no real meaning, but could be something nice, fresh, smooth))

Omo o ke i pe d'agba (In no time, a child is all grown)

Omo o ke i pe d'agba (In no time, a child is all grown)

Engagement/Marriage Songs

The traditional engagement ceremony is very important to be observed before the actual marriage ceremony that takes place either in the Church, Mosque or Registry. During the engagement, a number of items ranging from tubers of yam, kolanut, honey to salt, a she-goat, and other traditional items are presented by the husband's family to the wife's family. Examples of songs during the engagement period are:

a. *Nitori omo lase wa/2x o*
Omo dara, omo dara lehin
obinrin
Nitori omo lase wa

Meaning:

We have come because of our child;
Children are precious gift to see on the back of a woman
We have come because of our child.

Omo mi ni gilasi mi o (2x)
Omo mi ni gilasi ti mo fi nwoju
Omo mi ni gilasi timo fi n reran
Kaye ma fo gilasi mi o

Meaning:

My child is my mirror (2x)
My child is the mirror I am using to observe myself
May the wicked ones not break my mirror.

Funeral Songs

In Yoruba traditional society, funeral songs are accorded to the elderly men and women who died at a ripe, good old age. Words depicted in such songs usually portray some level of grief, pain and joy that the old man or woman died at a good age and is survived by children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. On the other hand, according to George (2013), such songs “may dwell on the irreversibility of death; the helplessness of man in the hands of death; the transitory nature of man on earth, and most importantly, the abode of the dead.” An example of a song in this category is:

a. *Oku otosi osu meta*
Oku olowo osu mefa
Oku olomo ase' se tan

Meaning:

The funeral of a poor fellow lasts three months
That of a rich man lasts six months
The funeral of a person with children goes on forever

Traditional Songs as

Expressions and Enforcements of Moral Values and Public Shaming of Immoral Behaviors—Individual, Family and Community—Samples and Significance

The Yoruba communities both in the traditional and contemporary settings take the elevation of societal values and the condemnation of moral decadence very seriously. Consequently, there are quite a number of Yoruba songs that in content and significance vividly express the perspectives of the people on either praising or condemning these virtues or vices in various circumstances. Values of education, on moral sensibilities, particularly moral vices ranging from stealing and corruption to sexual, immorality and exploitation are discussed next.

On Education

There are various Yoruba songs that place a premium on values of education and the commitment of attaining them or otherwise. For example, the value of historical and literary ideas are celebrated regarding poets, historians and philosophers as fountains of knowledge available for both children and adults to draw from. An example of such songs is:

*la'aye Olugbon
Mo ro 'borun meje
La'aye Aresa,
Mo ro 'borun mefa
La'aye Orongun
Mora koko mo ra 'ran
Mora sanyan baba aso.
Afi ole lo le pe ile yio dun
Ko keru ko gboko lo.*

Meaning:

*During the reign of Olugbon
I bought Seven veils
During the reign of Aresa
I bought six veils
During the reign of Orongun
I bought koko (a type of green cloth)
I bought velveteen, I bought sanyan,
The best of cloths
Only lazy fellows will say
That this land isn't interesting
Indeed only lazy fellows
Would pack their load or stuff and
depart into the bush*

There are also songs highlighting the attitudes of the child that could lead to success or failure in his or her educational endeavor and the envisaged consequences. Here are some of them:

a. *Omo ti ko gbeko,
Odami loju pe yo jiya] 2x
Ise buruku ni won nse,
Ti won ba jale
Won atun lo fole
Edakun ye eyin obi wa, te
ba lowo ,kefi seto wa]2x*

Meaning:

*A child that refuses to learn will suffer in life
Such a child will be involved in Acts of misconduct, such as armed robbery and stealing
Please, our parents endeavor to send us to school.*

b. *Bata mi adun kokoka [2x]
Ti nba mowe mi
Bata mi adun kokoka
To bamowe re
Bata re adun kokoka*

Meaning:

*My shoe will make great sound (2x)
If I do well in my studies, my shoe will make great sound.*

c. *Omo ti ko ba foju si eko re,
yio gbofo lojo idanwo/2x
Emi ko ni gbofo /2x
Omo ti ko ba foju si eko re,
yio gbofo lojo idanwo.*

Meaning:

*A child that refuses to face his/her studies will fail the examination woefully
I will not fail the examination.*

Respect for and value of Parenthood—Particularly Mothers

*Iya ni wura Iyebiye
Ti kose fowora(2x)
O loyun mi fosu mesan
O pon mi fodun merin
Iya ni wura iyebiye
Ti kose fowora*

Meaning:

*Mother is gold
That cannot be bought with money (2x)
She was pregnant with me for 9 months
And carried me on her back for 4 years
Mother is gold
That cannot be bought with money
(A priceless piece of gold)*

On Condemnation of Moral Vices

The Yoruba people expect high moral standards from various segments and individuals in the society in whatever areas they are located and function. Such expectations are in tandem with the desire for order and stability in the society where the interests of the community take precedence over that of the individual. When such standards are not met, different lyrics composed in songs become the 'language' of admonition not only to condemn such acts or behaviors by the perpetrators but also and more importantly to serve as a deterrent to others contemplating such acts or behaviors. Some of these songs are 'satirical' while at other times they directly address the moral laxity at hand. In whatever forms they are rendered, they cover various societal activities and moral expectations. Also, the singers can be individuals or groups of people. Sometimes the songs are accompanied with dance performances. Such performances take place at different locations, including in front of the homes of the perpetrator(s) of the moral vice(s).

For example, in Ijebuland, particularly in Ijebu-Ode, Ogunba (1992) reports that:

The performers can be as many as possible! These people position themselves in front of the house of their target with clappers (apepe) and there the 'owner(s)' of a particular song teaches the song to the rest. They sing the song for some time before leaving. (6)

One other feature of such songs is that they are normally short and fit into the rhythm of the local community. This is because the songs are composed in a particular traditional form as dictated by the need to not only prick the conscience of the evil-doer but to also make the songs easy to be remembered by the community for a long period of time. In fulfilling these objectives, the song according to Bowra (1968) has to be "shaped ultimately by the

economic and social conditions in which it is born and by the needs which these create in men” (93). Here are examples of such songs and the moral vice(s) they are targeted at. The songs are predominantly from the Ijebu ethnic extraction and consequently reflect that dialect as compiled by Tunji Azeez (2006).

Against an Armed Robber

This particular song was rendered against one Atanda who, though was an armed robber in Lagos, lived an ostentatious life when he came home to Ijebu-Ode.

*Olode oru o!
Atanda nbo o!
Olode oru o!
Atanda nbo o!
Atanda wa nule
Jagun oloru
Atanda wa nule
Jagun olosa
Toba jade naruko
Emu o, emu o
Olode oru o!
Atanda n bo!*

Meaning:

*Lord of the night!
Atanda approaches!
Lord of the night!
Atanda is at home!
Terror of the night
Atanda is at home
Terrible robber
If he appears at dawn
Accost him, accost him
Lord of the night!
Atanda approaches!*

Against Corrupt Public Officials

Yoruba communities require that persons entrusted with public offices in whatever form should be held accountable in honesty and hard work. If it is perceived that their claims to these standards are false, they are chastised through different songs. For example, such a song was rendered against a young man who was employed as a cashier and, once he got the position, began to live above what would ordinarily have been his social and economic status.

a. *Oba ko ye gba mi sise o
eh eh!
Oba dakun gba mi sise o eh
eh!
Kemi ma yoju ni panu o
bi tawon Owolabi
Awon to nyoju ni paluko
Awon yen ti ri ja je
Ko pose, ko posu o
So un yokun gbedemuke
Oba ko ye gbami sise*

Meaning:

*Oh king (Government) please
employ me!
Oh king of (Government) I beg
you employ me!
So I can peep out of a kiosk
As Owolabi does
Those people have made it
who peep out of kiosks
Within weeks, within months
They develop a bulging stomach
Oh king (government) please
employ me
As you employed Owolabi*

b. *Oyi biri o (twice)
Oke somo gere gere
Ewen re mi jowo ulu
E ma rora o!
Ko sewen remi jowo itu
Ema rora o!
Oyi biri o (twice)
Oke somo gere gere
Ewen remi jowo ulu
Ema rora o!*

Meaning:

*Things do change (twice)
A man may fall from a sloppy
surface.
All those embezzling public
funds, beware!
Whoever is embezzling public
funds, beware!
Things do change (twice)
A man may fall from a sloppy
surface.
Those embezzling public funds,
Beware!*

There was also a song against a fraudulent local government official who took from government coffers a huge amount of money, more than the amount he spent to erect a cenotaph. Here, according to Oyin Ogunba (1992), is the song to deplore this.

Ogun ke mi ri o (twice)
Ogun ke mi ri
Koran ma dun eniyan.
Ogun ke mi ri o
Won fogun apo sule
(twice)
Kai mo ...
Owo ru won fi ko kiti
gogoro Sule Oba
Won owo titan nule
Oyo ni won gbe orule
bare (twice)
Ireke sanjo, idigbon pepe.

Meaning:

Strange thing happen these days (twice)
Just because we decided
Not to complain too much
Strange things happen these days
(twice)
Before we knew it
They spent twenty bags of money
on that lean structure
Money spent to build a monstrous
structure
in front of the palace
They now say there is no money in the
kitty
Yet they now have succulent cheeks
(twice)
And trembling buttocks.

Against Wayward Women and Men

Wives or women, who live wayward lives of infidelity, particularly when they are caught in extramarital affairs, are not spared. There are some songs they are derided with, alongside wayward men. The consequences of their lecherous escapades may lead to their contracting diseases or becoming the victims of "Magun". The song below is about a man on pilgrimage to Mecca where he became a victim of Magun. The song depicts not only the waywardness of the man but also the potency of Magun that was able to be effective in faraway Mecca. It is a deterrent to lecherous men who think distance can save them from the consequences of immoral sexual escapades.

Oyi o, Oooyi oo (twice)
Tabo tiyi o,
Me mo me ra mo o,
Eyin gbo doyawore oyi wereke
Ebute ijidah lo ti lo ro wale
(twice)

Meaning:

He turns, he tumbles
Has he been twisted?
Don't you know?
After copulating with X's wife
He was twisted into a
monstrous

O feja loru we
Sigbon warwa (twice)
Bi won su bara lohun o
Bi won to bara lohun o
Ijalugbo agabalagba
Njo langbalangba
Oyi o, Oooyi oo (twice)
Tabo tiyi o,
me mo me ra mo o,
Eyin gbo doyawore oyi wereke

Olule ibe kilo ilo, kilo ilo,
kilo ilo (twice)
We kilo raya re, kilo ilo,
Sidi wereke kilo ilo (twice)
We de wa gbobisu meji
Ko mu raya re
Sidi wereke (twice)
Kilo, ilo kilo ilo kilo ilo.

Aya baba o petekuwo (twice)
Aya baba ka mefa sile
E e dawo duro
Oro mi Jebu oran mi yo o!
Aya baba o petekuwo (twice)
Mori ne, mori reji, mo keta
Mo wa kiti ogan
Ewu yo lo
Aya baba petekuwo
Aya baba ka mefa sile
E e dawo duro.

shape
All the way from Jeddah
Airport
He howled home (twice)
His scrotum is falling off
His cheeks swelled up
There was great commotion,
pandemonium
An old man involuntarily
dancing tango.

Meaning:

Owner of this house warn you
(twice)
Warn your wife
She's a bottom twister, warn her.
Come take two water yams
And give to your wife
She's a bottom twister
Warn her, warn her.

Meaning:

Old baba's wife, crazy crazy
(twice)
Old baba's wife confessed to
six men (twice)
Yet she has not stopped
[counting]
Old baba's wife, crazy crazy
(twice)
I count one, two, three
I am shocked!
Old baba's wife, crazy (twice)
Has confessed to six men
Yet she has not stopped
[counting].

Against Exploitative Tendencies

Exploitation of any kind is frowned upon and those who engage in it are negatively perceived. Consequently, there are songs that highlight and decry such acts as unacceptable moral vices. No person, no matter his or status or profession in the community, is spared once identified as indulging in such acts. There was an example of such exploitative acts in Okeho, a community in the Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State in the early part of 1970.

During this period, there was an outbreak of cholera epidemic that killed many people. The people began to seek divine protection from the disease by consulting traditional healers. These healers demanded exorbitant items for sacrifices for protection. It soon became clear that the healers were taking advantage of the situation and became unduly exploitative. As a form of protest and condemnation of this exploitation and supposedly oblivious of the consequences, a singer composed this song:

*Ambo kan mole
Okan tun nso ju wiri
Abi gbogbo yin le ku tan ni?
Ani e ta ape si kini oun
Kee je a moti
Ani baba onisegun ni nmu
egbaafa wa
O ni ntun mede funfun wa
Mo leyaan
ni o je Ifa ki o je e
E e dawo duro.*

Meaning:

*We're committing one to dust
Another is fainting
Do you all want to die?
People, let's pour sand on this
thing
and let's drink our beer.
I consulted a diviner who asks
for 120
pounds and luscious shrimps
I replied
You're the one who needs these
not Ifa.*

Consequences of Disrespect, Particularly Toward One's Parents

Omo to moya re loju o
Osi nio ta omo na pa
Omo to mobaba re loju o
Osi ni ta omo na pa
Iya to jiya nitori re
Baba tojiya ni tori re
Omo to moya reloju o
Osi ni ta omo napa

Meaning

*A child that disrespect his
mother or father
Shall die in poverty.
The father and mother who
suffered that all may be
well with you*

Contextualization of Context and Significance of Traditional Songs in Contemporary Settings

The context and significance of traditional songs can also be explored through the two categories constituting the focus of the discourse so far. These are the epistemological and the moral dynamics.

Epistemological Context and Significance

At the risk of sounding anachronistic, it is my candid submission that these songs continue to be very credible and a source of knowledge for the fundamentals of the unfiltered indigenous religious and cultural beliefs and practices of the Yoruba people. Of course, one must recognize and acknowledge the tremendous scholarship of foundation writers on Yoruba Indigenous Religion as part of African Indigenous Religion in general. There is no doubt that the pioneer works of Bolaji Idowu, Omosafe Awolalu, John Mbiti and Ade Dopamu, among many others, have provided documentation of that which now arguably serves as written sources of knowledge and verification of the traditional as well as the evolving religious and cultural worldviews of Africans in general and the Yoruba people in particular. However, I stand to be corrected (without diminishing the ongoing tremendous efforts of contemporary scholars of Yoruba Indigenous Religion as part of the larger African one) to hold the view that much more needs to

be done in documenting these beliefs and practices without the perjuries of “outside scholars”, either in terms of geographical or other faith syndromes, which unfortunately have characterized the pioneers and possibly the contemporary scholars of the Indigenous Religion. I do not believe that it is our of place to submit that sometimes, though unintentional, the interpretation and descriptions of the people’s beliefs and practices may fall short of the authentic meaning and functional realities as intended and propagated by them. That is why I believe that the songs must remain points of references as the unthematic and true litmus test of written works of “outsider” scholars. Let me say they can also serve as discerning instruments against romanticization by “insider” scholars.

The Moral Dynamics of the Context and Significance of the Traditional Songs (from Shaming to Cheering). The discourse in the segment on functionality of the traditional songs is aimed at depicting their context and significance as the language of moral strategies. Within this context, they become consequential in upholding and encouraging societal moral values as well as condemning and discouraging moral vices that are inimical to individual and communal integrity and well-being, thereby situating individuals as responsible and responsive members of the community. This is based on the understanding that actions or behaviors of individuals can have far-reaching positive or negative consequences for not only the individuals but other members of the community. That is why a Yoruba proverb says:

*Ti ara eni ban je kokoro losan
Ti ako b aba wi
Koho koho e ko ni je ka sun
loru*

Meaning

*If we do not caution a
roommate/neighbor
Eating ants in the afternoon
His/her coughing would not
allow us to sleep
in the night.*

In the particular dynamics of condemning and discouraging all forms of moral vices, the ultimate goal is to employ the rendering of the songs in the hearing of the culprit in order to shame him or her out of the vices. The belief is that such public shaming should be not just an indictment of the culprit but also a deterrent to others who may want to indulge in such vices, in order for them to have a sense of the consequences that would result from such acts or behaviors. There is no doubt that Yoruba traditional songs still find recognition and currency today just as in the past. What may have changed, in my opinion, is the attitude and postures of the rapidly evolving human factors with regard to the relevance and, more importantly, seemingly ineffective consequences for culprits of different moral vices in the society today. The factors responsible for this state of affairs may be traced, in my view, to two main underlining realities. First, while there is no shortage of these types of songs, the focus has been more on entertainment rather than inculcation of moral sensibilities. Many of the lyrics have found their way into different types of music, such as Juju, waka, fuji, highlife, and so on. The second, which I believe is more damning, is that people's attitudes towards moral vices such as corruption, stealing, embezzlement, sexual immorality, and exploitation have unfortunately changed. The consequence of this unholy situation is that members of the community who should be rendering these songs to shame the perpetrators of these vices have themselves become cheerleaders of such people. We have therefore found ourselves in the situation of transitioning from the role of shaming to that of cheering perpetrators of moral vices.

As I was preparing this lecture, I come across an article by Moses Ebe Ochonlu posted on the platform of USA African Dialogue Series (2018). The article, titled "Corruption and Religion in Nigeria" sums up what I have attempted to describe above, and thus I quote: "We abet corruption and vice in our own ways and justify same with a dubious, relativist take on morality." One of Moses's stories in the article and the logic of justification for

cheering rather than shaming moral vices are quite revealing. Moses wrote, and I am quoting him verbatim here:

A close friend once told me (that is Moses) of his relative who was appointed a local government chairman in one of the Northcentral states and decided that he would not 'touch' a kobo belonging to the government. His tenure completed, he returned home to his village not to the rousing welcome of his kinsmen but to curses and condemnations of his 'foolishness. (2)

According to Moses Ochonu (2018), the logic of justification is usually embraced by both the religious and secular-minded Nigerians. In his view, followers of the three main religious heritages tend to unite in the duplicitous approval of corruption and illicit wealth. For the secular *minded*, the discourse to promote corruption and accumulation of illicit wealth is often expressed in the popular Pidgin English sayings such as "na where man dey work na im man dey chop". Or the popular axiom that "gofment property no be anybody property". The logic of justification may even be further embellished by pontificating that since the resources belong to all of us, including me, I would merely be taking my share and that I cannot be said to be stealing from myself. Consequently, the elastically perverse logic is that government resources can be appropriated with little or no qualms. In fact, to not do so when one has the opportunity will amount to bringing shame to one's community.

Does one need to wonder then why even though the context and significance of Yoruba traditional songs continue to be an interesting subject matter, their potency as strategies of epistemological and societal moral paradigms become limited if not unwittingly endangered. Yet we must not be wary of promoting their functional possibilities for the overall good of the people.

Final Reflections

The preoccupation in this discourse has been focused on exploring the context and significance of Yoruba traditional songs as the “language” of, first, sources of information on Yoruba world views on practically every aspect of their lives, particularly in the areas of religious and sociocultural beliefs and practices. Secondly, we also identified how these songs are employed as functional tools in addressing important moral issues in the society. Despite the changing world and the influence of modern technology, the songs have continued to play vital roles in exhibiting the religious as well as the moral beliefs and practices of the Yoruba people. There is no doubt that through the songs one can learn the rich philosophical and religious traditions of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. It is noteworthy that the songs have remained relevant and reliable means of sustaining and expressing the Yoruba religious and socio-cultural world views among Africans, and Africans in the Diaspora, particularly those of Yoruba ancestral heritage. Finally, with the emerging trend of societal transitions from attitudes of shaming to those of cheering moral vices, which is a departure from the intended consequences of rendering the songs, it is my submission that the songs still stand for what is noble and worthy of cherished preservations of the very proud identity heritage. That in itself constitutes a treasure that should be eternal.

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