

Orature: A Strategy for Socio-Religious Harmony in Yorùbáland

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Abstract

Before the advent of Christian and Islamic religions, African Traditional Religion was solely practised among the Yoru?ba? without any interference or hindrance. However, in the 19th century, when Christian and Islamic religions emerged, there was a marriage of inconvenience initially, but later, these religious practitioners found a way of peaceful co-existence among one another. In this paper, we evaluate the importance and use of Yoru?ba? orature in relation to the spread and peaceful co-existence of Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion in the Yoru?ba? society and argue that one of the ways adopted to ensure peace and unity among the three groups is the use of Yoru?ba? orature and that during the advent of Christianity and Islam, the Yoru?ba? manipulate proverbs in various degrees to also enhance the spread of the two religions in the Yoru?ba? society. We further argue that, since all the adherents of the three religions have the same cultural background, they find it very easy to adjust to the prevailing religious situations. It is also observed that the deadly wave of westernization has not been able to do any havoc to the sociocultural unity, peaceful co-existence and religious harmony in the Yoru?ba? society but instead, it has helped to boost the use of Yoru?ba? orature and the effect is that socio-religious harmony is noticeably waxing stronger and stronger among the adherents of the different religions in the society. Finally, we conclude that the use of the Yoru?ba? orature in churches, mosques and shrines has paved way for the socio-cultural unity, peaceful co-existence and religious harmony in the Yoru?ba? society.

Index terms— proverbs, folksongs, adherence, harmony, society.

1 I. Introduction and Theoretical Background

Some scholars have written on religious practices among the Yoruba? people of Southwestern Nigeria. Such scholars include Abdullahi (1922), Ido?u? ??1962), ??ebster (1968), Peel (1968), O? mo? ýajowo? (1971), ??wo?alu? (1981), Fa?o? la? ??1982), O? la?í?o? la? (1989), Adejumo? (1989), Babalo? la? ??1991), Adedeji? (2002) and ??de?iji (2002). For example, although Abdullahi (1922) writes on Islam in Yoruba? land he does not discuss the place of Yoruba? oral literature in the co-existence of Christian, Islam and traditional religions. In the work of ??do?u? (1962) titled "Olodumare? in Yoruba? belief" also, Ido?u? (ibid.) only explains in full the concept of Olodumare? in Yoruba? culture he does not discuss the relevance and importance of orature in the promotion of Christianity and Islam vis-à-vis the Traditional religion.

Author: Department of Linguistics and African Languages, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Nigeria. e-mail: bodeagbaje14@gmail.com While Webster (1964) bases his work on the Christian churches in Africa only Peel (1968) concentrates on the activities and spread of Aladuù?a? movement among the Yoruba? people. However, none of the two discusses the functions of Yoruba? oral literature in the harmony of the three religions. O? mo? ýajowo? (1971) deals with Cherubim and Seraphim in Nigeria only at the exclusion of Islam and traditional religions while the focus of Awo?alu's (1979) work is traditional religion in West Africa without discussing the relationship between traditional religion, Islam and Christian religions. Besides, Fa?o? la? ??1982) bases his

work on religion, rituals and the Yoruba? precolonial domestic economy without discussing the impact of Yoruba? oral literature as a means of harmonizing Christian, Islam and traditional religions in Yoruba? society.

Similarly, O? la?i?o? la? (1989) concentrates on the social impact of new religious movements on contemporary Yoruba? life using the Aladu?a? as an example. The main thrust of Adejumo? 's (1989) work is O? s? un festival and fertility without discussing the issue of Islam and Christian religions. Babalo? la? (1991) also discusses the economic impact of indigenous religions on the Yoruba? society at the exclusion of the place of Yoruba? orature in the co-existence of Christian and Islamic religions. Adedeji? (2002) too bases his work on the impact of acculturation on African music, using Yoruba? music to buttress his explanation while Ade?i?i? (2002) concentrates on Islamic values in relation to the political and socio-religious systems of the traditional Yoruba? community at the exclusion of Christian and traditional religions. Agbaje? (1995) focuses on the literary study of the folksongs of the Ekiti? people of Nigeria without relating it to any religion while O? mo? ?e (1998) concentrates on the collection of African proverbs and usages not minding the impact it has on the harmony of Christian, Islam and Traditional religions in Yoruba? society. From the foregoing, none of the authors discusses Yoruba? orature as a means of good relationship among the practitioners of Christian, Islamic and traditional religions. Therefore, this work sets to fill the academic vacuum created by the previous works or reseachers. In this paper, the use of orature as a means of promoting peace, unity and cultural co-existence among the Yoruba? people who share different religious beliefs is our concern. We will show that the use of orature among the adherents of Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion has helped immensely in promoting a good understanding and harmony among the adherents of the three religions in the Yoruba? society.

2 II. Proverbs

In Yoruba? culture the value of proverb is immeasurable. It helps in the process of expressing ideas such that when an elder wants to capture the mood of a prevailing situation clearly and sufficiently, he takes recourse to an appropriate proverb. For example, a Yoruba? proverb which says 'Oju? o? run te? ye? e? ? fo? laifara gba?a' (The sky is wide enough for birds to fly without any obstruction) when used shows that the world is big enough to accommodate everybody. Therefore, the significance of proverbs in the process of socialization among Yoruba? cannot be over-emphasized. The Yoruba? child is exposed to proverbs from the early age and throughout life he comes across and masters their use. When he is old, he would have become a repertoire of proverbs and collective wisdom of the people expressed in orature. In addition to the above, Ido?u? (1966:10) says, There are those gems of Yoruba? language the proverbs adage, and epigrams-which have become the sine quo non of Yoruba speech and often convey deep theological or metaphysical meaning.

During the advent of Christianity and Islam, the Yoruba? manipulate proverbs in various degrees to enhance the spread of the religions in the society. The use of proverbs among the adherents of Christianity, Islam and Africa Traditional religion has helped immensely to promote a good understanding and harmony in the society as will be discussed below: a. Bi? O? lo? ?un ba? pa?i lo?i? yoó? firugbo? ? di? i (If God makes you a bald headed man, b. it will be compensated with heard) c. O? lo? ?un adaba? naá? lo? da? e? ye? le? ? (God that created dove also created pigeon)

The above proverbs are frequently used by the Christians to sink religious ideas into the hearts of their followers. For instance, the first proverb indicates that God is a God of compensation while the second proverb connotes that God is the creator of all things. Some proverbs are also commonly used by the Muslims to enhance their religious practice, thus; a. Imo? le so? ro? ta? ojo? ku, o? ni? O? lo? ?un je? ?ii? so? ?o? ? oún (After a Muslim's speech, the rain rumbles, he then confirms God's sanction of his speech). b. Bi? O? lo? ?un ba? fe? ? s? e idajo? ? Lemo? ?u, ko? ni? s? oju? o? mo? ile? ke?u? (If God wants to judge an Iman, it is not going to be in the presence of Quranic students).

Going by the above proverbs, the first one simply means that Islam is a true religion from God. The second proverb indicates that God will judge individuals accordingly no matter the status. The adherents of African traditional religion are not left out in the use of proverbs. For example; a. Oris? a? bi? o? ba? le gbe? mi, fi mi? si?e? bi? o se ba? mi (Divinity if you cannot help me, leave me as you met me) b. E? ni? ba? ran ara re? ? lo? ?o? ? ni Oris? a? oke? n? ra? le? ?u? (The divinity helps those who help themselves)

From the foregoing, the first proverb says that 'Oris? a' (divinity) can render some help or do otherwise. While the second proverb connotes that, if you want any assistance, you then have to help yourself first. Generally speaking, all the above proverbs are coined around the three religions. The totality of the aforementioned proverbs is socially, religiously and culturally used to enhance good morals and peaceful co-existence among the religious practitioners in the society.

It could be deduced easily that proverbs are universal phenomena because Jesus Christ spoke to his followers in proverbs. Even there is a section of the Holy Bible devoted mainly to biblical proverbs. Proverbial sayings are very common also in the Holy Qur'an. It has been known from the time immemorial that great people of the world including the religious people, spoke in proverbs to plant their socio-religious and cultural ideas into the minds of their followers. In Yoruba?and also, Ifa? is well known with proverb use. Ifa? as a divine divinity in Yoruba? society often speaks in parables for the consumption of wise adherents. Therefore, the Yoruba? are always at home with the use of proverbs in socioreligious and cultural environments they find themselves. In short, proverbs could be regarded as a means of promoting harmony among the religious adherents in the society.

104 3 III. Folksongs

105 Folksong is a universal phenomenon which cuts across cultures. Folksong permeates the Yoruba? life. That is,
106 folksong is made use of in everyday life in the society. Folksong is socially, religiously and culturally relevant in
107 the contemporary Yoruba? life. Any talented person can compose folksongs which can easily get disseminated
108 in the society. Like other African folksongs that are effectively used by the adherents of religions in Yoruba?
109 society to enhance socio-religious and cultural harmony, Ido?u? (1966:10) has rightly said;

110 The Yoruba? are a singing people in their singing, which comprises song, lyrics, ballads and minstrelsy they
111 tell stories of their past, the circumstances of their present and their hopes and fears of the future. If all that a
112 Yoruba clan has ever sung could be collected, there is no doubt that a fairly accurate history of the clan could
113 be built up. And their songs are permeated with their beliefs.

114 What Ido?u? is saying in essence is that folksongs of the Yoruba? serve as a reservoir for their socio-cultural
115 and religious practices. Let us see the exemplifications below: The above song is a Yoruba? lyric specially used
116 by the religion adherents in Christian churches to show appreciation to God for the good He has bestowed on
117 them.

118 But initially, the above song is used socially and culturally among the traditional people before the advent
119 of Christianity. When this religion was established in Yoruba? society, the above song was acceptable to the
120 Christians and it is being used in their churches up to day. The adoption of the above song was due to its
121 nonconnection with any divinity. Also, the Christians often use the above song to woo the adherents of the
122 traditional religion to their fold. The foregoing is another Yoruba? lyric often used by Christians during children
123 thanksgiving service in appreciation of God's protection and affection over the children. It is to be noted that
124 the above song was inherited from the traditionalists and later coined around Christian worship. The above song
125 like song (1) above is used as strategy to conquer the minds of the indigenous people. These then show that they
126 are well at home since some of their songs are well acceptable in the Christian churches without any alterations.
127 This means that their (indigenous) cultural interest is not being jeopardized being members of the Christian
128 body. In song (3a) and (3b), it is clear that the acculturation is done line by line. For instance, (3a), line 1 and
129 (3b), line 1 differs in meaning but have the same tune. The same occurs in (3a), lines 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6; and (3b)
130 lines 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 respectively. The adaptation is in rhythm and not in meaning.

131 4 4) Ebi i? pa mi?

132 Mo

133 5 want children I turn to Jesus

134 There is no day that mouth will not taste salt I appreciate the way of Almighty Song (4a) is purely Yoruba?
135 folksong, while song (4b) is the acculturated version of song (4a). It is often used by Christians in their churches
136 to suit their religious purposes.

137 A cursory examination of songs (4a) and (4b) reveal that (4a) line 1 and (4b) line 1 have the same meaning
138 and tune. In (4b) line 2, Olu?a is substituted for Ye?e? in (4a) line 2. Both lines have the same tune but with
139 different meaning. Also, (4a) line 3 and (4b) line 3 have the same tune and meaning respectively. But in (4b)
140 line 4, Jesus is substituted for Oris? a? in (4a) thus making them to have the same tune but different meaning.
141 Lines 5 of (4a) and (4b) have the same meaning and tune while lines 6 of (4a) and (4b) have the same tune but
142 differs in meaning because Baba wa lo?e? in (4b) line 6 is substituted for Balo? ja? Igede? in (4a) line 6.

143 It is worth of note that Islamic adherents are not left out of either adaptation of Yoruba? folksongs into
144 Islamic worship or Muslim social activities. Three things are used to enjoy life One is money One is children One
145 is good health Whoever is poor will not be recognized Whoever is childless They will make jest of him Whoever
146 is not healthy, The life will be meaningless to him My creator grant me those three things that I may enjoy life
147 let me have those three things that I may enjoy life.)

148 6 5) Kaábo?

149 From the foregoing song, one will see that the three major essential blessings important to Yoruba? are embedded
150 in the song. That is, the blessing of money, the blessing of children and the blessing of good health. The Yoruba?
151 usually or seem very comfortable wherever those three major blessings of life can be achieved.

152 7 8) Ba? mi gbadura? mi goke? lo? (2ce,)

153 Oke? to? ?o? ? os? o? o? le? to? Ba?i gbadura? mi goke? lo? Help me carry my prayer high up (2ce) The
154 place where the hands of wizards and witches will not reach Help me carry my prayer high up

155 The song (8) above shows that the adherents of Islam believe that wizards and witches are enemies of progress.
156 Therefore the Muslim pray to God not to allow these enemies of light to obstruct their prayer.

157 Just like Islam and Christianity, African religion has its own special songs for the purpose of ritual worship.
158 These liturgical songs are strictly confided into the shrines. This is to say that there are taboos associated with
159 their use. Below are few of such songs.

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We will do next year's celebration Our fortune has come, The uninitiated does not know Ours is ours, we, we Next year we will mount children like this Iro?o? year we will mount children like this Iro?o? the favourable tree From the above song, it is shown that the worshippers are praying to their divinity to provide them with children before the next celebration. This major request of their indicates that the issue of child bearing is very paramount in minds of the adherents of the three major religions it is my life you must protect

The foregoing song simply connotes that the devotees of O? ri? oluáye? (divinity) pray for security of their lives. This shows that the above devotees are keenly interested in their life's security as it is also applicable to their other religious counterparts in the society.

Going through all the above songs, one will clearly see that individual religious sects are aiming at the same goal but in different ways. Since all the religious adherents have the same cultural background, they find it very easy to adjust themselves to the prevailing religious situations. The timely adjustment of those followers often helps immensely to achieve socioreligious and cultural co-existence in the society.

9 IV. Social Changes in the Society

It is worth to note that the wind of westernization known to blow heavily in the Yoruba?and has not made any appreciable impact on the use of Yoruba? orature in the Christian churches and mosques hitherto. According to Yoruba? wise saying 'iji? ki? i? ja? ko? gbe? o? mo? odo' (No wave can blow a mortar). The deadly wave of westernization has not been able to do serious havoc but instead, it has helped to boost the use of Yoruba? orature. The effect is that, socio-religious harmony is noticed and waxing stronger and strong among the religious adherents in the society. It is often noticed that during the socio-political gathering in the society, series of songs are rendered to grace such occasions. Such gathering often encompasses members of the three religions. The songs rendered during such occasions have dual functions to enhance socio-political and socio-religious harmony.

Sometimes in the year 2000, at Os? ogbo, O? s? un State Capital, people of different religious categories converged to celebrate one year anniversary of democracy in the state. During the occasion, one religious personality each from Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion is called upon by the state Governor to offer prayers in accordance with the individual's religious leaning or camp. After the prayers, songs of grace that cut across the three major religions were rendered to mark and grace the remarkable occasion. Also, at Ibada?, O? yo? ? State capital, on the first of January, 2001 people of various religious statuses converged at the instance of the state governor to commemorate the New Year celebration. During this occasion prayers were offered by a religious personality each from the main religions to mark the occasion.

Religious songs and socio-cultural activities were rendered to boost the August ceremony. The crowd was seen socializing, marrying and jubilating together. Since such gathering usually has socioreligious undertone, hence, all these types of sociopolitical and religious gatherings are the order of the day across the Yoruba? country. The main focus of such occasion is to foster unity, good understanding, peaceful co-existence and socio-religious harmony. Hitherto, the Yoruba? orature is often employed as a strategy for socio-religious harmony in the society.

V.

10 Conclusion

Our disquisition connotes that the application of the Yoruba? orature in Christian churches, mosques and shrines has paved way for socio-cultural, unity, peaceful co-existence and religious harmony in Yoruba society. The Yoruba? orature is well blended that it oscillates between the foreign religions and African traditional religion. An exploration into the Yoruba? orature proves that the effective manipulation of proverbs among the adherents of the three major religions of Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religions has helped immensely to enhance good understanding and harmony in the society. Also in this work, it is crystal clear that the folksongs are socially, culturally and religiously relevant in the contemporary Yoruba? life. Hence, the appropriate manipulation of folksongs has helped to promote the needed socio-religious and cultural harmony in the society.

11 Volume XIV Issue XI Version I

12 (A)

It is further observed that the Yoruba?orature has developed a tough skin towards westernization. This is an attempt to sustain the culture of the people.

Besides, the Yoruba? orature which encompasses songs, lyrics, ballads and mitrels are used to tell stories of their past, the circumstances of their present and their hopes and fears of the future to achieve the needed unity, peace, understanding and religious co-existence in the Yoruba? country. ^{1 2}

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²Orature: A Strategy for Socio-Religious Harmony in Yoruba?and



Figure 1: 2)

1

(I come to show appreciation (2ce)
He who does not appreciate good deeds is a
wicked person
I appreciate good deeds
I come to show appreciation)

Figure 2: 1)

I feel hungry
 I turn to my mother
 I want children
 I turn to Oris? a? (divinity)
 There is no day that mouth will not taste salt,
 I appreciate your life, Balo? ja? Igede.
 b) Ebi i? pa mi?
 Mo wi? an 'lu?a
 O? mo? i? re? mi?
 Mo wi? an Je?u?
 Oju? me? ? i mo? ? ke? run mo? ? jiyo? ?
 Aye? re? i? re? mi? Baba wa lo?e?
 I feel hungry,
 I turn to God
 I

Figure 3:

Welcome, do you arrive safely?
 Welcome, do you arrive safely?
 It is a long time we have been
 awaiting you.
 Welcome, do you arrive safely?
 The above song is often used by adherents of
 Islam to welcome both Alhajis and Alhajas on their
 arrival from the Holy pilgrimage to Mecca every year.
 6) Baári?a? re? o? e! (2ce)
 Alhaji to? re Mecca to o bo? ?
 Baári?a? re? o? e
 Alhaja to? re Mecca to o bo? ?
 Baári?a? re? o? e!
 Congratulations to you! (2ce)
 Alhaji who has gone to Mecca
 and returned
 Congratulations to you!
 Alhaja who has gone to Mecca
 and returned.
 Congratulations to you!)
 Like song (5) above, song (6) is also used to
 mark the safe arrival of adherents of Islam from holy
 land in Mecca.

Figure 4:

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