

A Literary Appraisal of Poets as Historians

DR. J.B. Agbaje¹

¹ Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Received: 8 December 2015 Accepted: 2 January 2016 Published: 15 January 2016

Abstract

The Yoruba believe that our past and present histories are being preserved for future generation. Hence, the Yoruba genres can be used to trace the history of a set of people and one occurrence or the other. Various genres of the Yoruba are embodiment of their history. In essence, Yoruba poets are seen as historians or repertoire of knowledge. All the stories which are embedded in Yoruba oral literature are seen in form of allusion. Yoruba orature helps to remember important cultural information and history of the Yoruba people. It is pertinent to note that the role of orature in the construction and reconstruction of history is remarkable as seen in the following genres of Yoruba oral literature such as *alámò?*, *ìjálá*, *è?* *sà* and *orin*. This paper concludes that in the above mentioned genres, like other Yoruba genres, poets play the roles of historians and that our past and present histories are preserved for future generation.

Index terms— poets, orature, history, allusion, culture.

1 I. Introduction and Theoretical Background

In the Yorùbá genres, the poets play the roles of historians wherein our past and present histories are preserved for future generation. This study established the fact that Yorùbá genres can be used to trace the history of a set of people and one occurrence or the other. There are different types of orature among the Yorùbás and all these genres are embodiment of their history. Yorùbá poets are seen as historians or repository of knowledge whereby many of the Yorùbá histories are kept. All these stories are seen in form of allusions. ??lacking (1977: 22) says:

Orature is committed to preserving the history and culture of individual people through performance; and through it vital cultural information is passed down from generation to generation.

Here, Blacking reveals it that Yorùbá orature is based on preserving history and culture, and vital information are known through it. Without orature, many of the cultural information and history might have been forgotten. But through it, they were able to pass it to other generation. That is why it is rightly said that histories are known through poetry. ??jibade (2009: 101) also agreed to this why discussing Yorùbá Nuptial poetry. He said that, Epithalamiums, like other Yorùbá poetry illuminates the culture of the Yorùbá people especially the formation of social groups, kinship, solidarity, sexuality, and childbearing among others. ??latunji (1984: 115) supported this fact in his work titled Features of Yorùbá Oral Poetry. He says: E? se? Ifá can be treated as verbal and a storehouse of information about Yorùbá mythology and cosmology.

Olatunji says this because he knows that a lot of information are embedded in e? se? Ifá. ??bimbola (1975: 32) supports the fact that e? se? Ifá constitutes a compendium of information on Yorùbá world view. He says: "Ifa literary corpus is the storehouse of Yorùbá culture inside which the Yorùbá comprehension of their own historical experiences and understanding of their environment can always be found. It is recognized as a repository for Yorùbá traditional body of knowledge embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore." This also gives another revelation that Yorùbá poets are historian since e? se? Ifá is one of the oratures of Yorùbá, full of history, philosophy, medicine and folklore.

Also Olabimtan (1980: 153) says: Poetry, like religion, is essential to the life of the traditional Yorùbá. It is the vehicle of all that is sublimed in the culture of the people, and that is why there are many genres of traditional Yorùbá poetry to convey the various aspects of the people's cultures. ??arber (1990: 315) says:

Each oríkì gestures away from its location within the performed text to an interland of meaning outside the text. Not only that some are specific historical references and some are generalized comments referring to a timeless or ideal state of affairs. ??we (1974: 331) also buttresses it that the role of orature in the construction and reconstruction of history is tremendous. Going by the Yorùbá Alamo, ijala, esa and orin, it is clearly evident that many of these histories are embedded in them. In the above extract, the chanter makes allusion to the history of Onikoyi's lineage. Here the chanter makes it known that the Ikoyi people are brave people and great herbalists. Besides, the chanter depicts the Onikoyi's lineage to be womanizers that is, they flirt with women. This attitude could be seen in their ways of life wherever they may be either at festive mood or war front. Also, the chanter depicts that the Onikoyi's lineage are warlike people, that is, they have flair for war. They are not tired of going to the battle field at any point in time because of the love they have for their fathers' land. In the foregoing extract, the chanter establishes that Arólú Owó, È? sà Ògbín's lineage are masqueraders. Here, the chanter traces the history of the lineage to Kó? ndú Oníwo? . It is made known that the È? sà Ògbín's lineage are great entertainers. Even, the È? sà Ògbín's lineage uses their masquerades to perform for the audience during their children's marriages. That is to say, the È? sà Ògbín's lineage were known from the time immemorial as great socio-cultural entertainers in the society.

2 Keywords

Kèyìn sókun song is the next example to be consideration c) ??eyin From the above song, the singer alludes to the history of the notorious gang led by Oyenusi in 1970s. The notorious gang caused panic everywhere in the country. The Police Force could not curb them because they usually escape arrest in miraculous way. At last, the Military Force overpowered them when the force discovered the gang's hideout. The notorious gang faced the military tribunal and members were found guilty of armed robbery. All the members of the gang were executed by firing squad. Thus, the above singer brought the events into limelight for the consumption of the present generation. Perhaps, the singer intends to tell the on-coming generation to desist from such irritating social vices in the future. In the above Alámò? the chanter alludes to the history of the inter-tribal war between the Qyqs and Ekiti-parapq (i.e the Kírìjì war). The war was fought in the 18th century. It lasted nine good years. It was the greatest war ever fought by the Yorùbá people in which many lives and properties were lost. It was through the intervention of the colonial masters that the war came to an end. The above Alámò? chanter brought the event into limelight for the memory of the present generation.

3 III.

4 Conclusion

It is established in this paper that Yorùbá orature is the compendium of information and storehouse of Yorùbá culture inside which the Yorùbá comprehension of their own historical experiences and understanding of their environment can always be found. Orature is committed to preserving the history and culture of individual people and the community through performance; and through it vital cultural information is passed down from generation to generation. Yorùbá poets are seen as historians or repository of knowledge whereby many of the Yorùbá histories are kept. All these stories are seen in form of allusions.

Finally, this paper concludes that in the Yoruba Ìjálá, È? sà, Alámò? , and Orin (song) like other Yorùbá genres, poets play the roles of historians and that our past and present histories are preserved for future generation. ¹

¹© 2016 Global Journals Inc. (US) s

a) Ìjálá chant

Ìkòyí

Ìkòyí O? mo? Arógun dádé

Olúkòyí o? mo? akú dá gbè? dú àkàlà

O? mo? ogun bámi nígbó mo dolú igbó,

Ogun bámi ló? dàn mo dèrò ò? dàn,

Ogun bámi ní pàlàpàlá

Ìjè? nì mowé? ju ò? pá ìbo? n lo?

Ogun àjàwè? yin lomuu ilé Olúkòyí
wùmí gbé,

Ogun joojúmó? ló mú ilé baba wo? n
súmi í lo? ,

O? ba kò? , O? ba ò sígun

E? sè? òsì O? ba ò pe? sè? dà,

O? ba ní káfi o? dún yí kàgbò o? fe? ,

È? mí isoògùn làyà,

: poets, orature, history, allusion, cul-
ture.

Olúkòyí, son of Akúdagbò? diàkàlà

The son of war meets me at forest

I become the master of forest

War meet me at grass-field

I become the master of grass-field

War meet me at a tight corner

War fought without retreating is why I
love to live in

Olúkoyí's house

War at everyday makes me be tired of
their father's

house

The king refuses to declare war

The left leg of the king doesn't change
his legs

The king said we should use this year to
prepare àgbò
o? fe?

[Note: That I got war to put on like cloth Ìkòyí o? mo? ojú oróoró Ìkòyí the child of Ojú oró oró Ìkòyí o? mo? o? rà o? rà Ìkòyí the child of O? rà o? rà Kín àbá mú rel'e re? ? What would we have taken along to your house Gbabí wá Branch here Olúkòyí o? mo? ogun ló? sà-án olè lóru Olúkòyí the off-spring of war in the daylight but stealing in the night Bí ewúré? re? bá so? nù If your goat is lost Mábi è? só? Ìkòyí Don't ask è? só? ìkòyí S? ùgbó? n tóbínrin rò? gbò? dò? re? bá so? nù But if your beautiful wife is lost, Wábi è? só? Ìkòyí Ask è? só? Ìkòyí Olúkòyí lo? ogun s? ùgbó? n kò wálé mó? Olúkoyí went to war but didn't come back home again Wo? n gbé orí Olúkòyí ge? nge? Then, they carried Olúkòyí's head majestically Lo? sí ààfin o? ba To the king's palace Olúkòyí so? pé òun ò t'iidé oórì bàbá òun Olúkòyí said he had not reached the burial ground of his father Agbede gbédé Agbede gbédé]

Figure 1:

A Literary Appraisal of Poets as Historians	
b) È? s? à Chant Ológbojò	
Arólú owó,	II. Analysis Arólú owó
È? sà ògbín	È? sà ògbín
Qmq lé? è? gi ò? wó? so?	The child of Lé? è? gi did not wear cloth
Qmq ò? wó? so?	The child of those who wear cloth
Wó? yè nígbàlè?	To belittle chieftaincy in secret
Qmq ò? wó? so? ké? ké? rè? gbe?	The child of those who wear ké? ké? 's cloth
Rèè gbégún wale	To the bush to bring a masquerade home.
Ológbojò qmq kó? ndú oní wo?	Ológbojò, son of Kó? ndú Oniwo?
Àiná ni Ìyá Ògbín je? ,	Àiná was Ògbín's mother
Báágidé ni baba Ológbojò ní gbahun	Baagide was Ológbojò's father then
Year 2016	Mo? lé mò? le ará òde Ò gbólúké? A builder, a family of those outside One who cares for Olú Ológbojó Ológbojó Ológbojó
22	Mo mo? lé yín o E? sà ògbín I know your house È? sà Ògbín
Volum	Bó yo? o? la O? ló? un afòní bùn If God wishes, He grant us this day È?
XVI	ni E? sà ògbín moríké Mo yáa súnké sà Ògbín I'm cared for I quickly Arólú
Is-	sí Arólú owó Awon lo? mo? arágò? owó They are the children of Àrágò?
sue	gbálè? Nígbàlè? Awon lo? mo? oní gbálè? In secret They are the children
VII	sékété N wére Arólú owó È? yin lo? of the owner of sékété In a hurry Arólú
Ver-	mo? pálasà Ológbojò má gun igi ilá owó You are the children of Pálasà Don't
sion	Ìwo? ni o? mo? Arégunsinmo? délé back okro to limb Ológbojò You are the
I	o? ko? Lóní àti lánàa àm úyagàn children of Arégúnsinmodele o? ko? To-
	ní iyá jé? fó? mo? day and yesterday, everyone is proud of his/her mother.
(A	
)	
Global	
Jour-	
nal	
of	
Hu-	
man	
So-	
cial	
Sci-	
ence	
-	
© 2016 Global Journals Inc. (US) s	

Figure 2:

LeaH: we are begging for children

Explain it to God
A child who puts hand in people's pocket
To steal people's money
Is not a child.
But a child who will uplift his/her father's
house
Who shall favour his/her mother's house God
hear me out It doesn't just start at our time
Ever since, thieves have been dying ruthlessly
Ever since, thieves have been dying shamefully
During the time of Olúgbó? n During the time
of Arè? sà During the time of Òrànmiyàn,
father of the Ifè? land

Theives turned their backs to the sea

May I not turn my back to the sea

ChorA: A child who wakes up in the morning

Who doesn't have a job
Who wants to buy an expensive velvet
Who wants to buy lace
Who wants to buy Damask
Pool of blood on the thieves who turned their

backs to the sea

May I not turn my back to the sea.

LeaH: See them on the tree

See a thick rope on the thief
A big barrel is the trap of death
A big barrel is the trap of suffering
Pool of blood on the thieves who turned their

back to the sea

The head of a thief shall sleep at Ìbòkun

ChorA: Present warn your child

Warn them
A child who wakes up in the morning
Who doesn't have a job
Who wants to buy an expensive velvet
Who wants to buy lace
Who wants to buy Damask
Who wants to buy vehicle
Pool of blood on he thief whose back is turned

to the sea

The head of a thief shall sleep at Ibokun

LílÉ: Bí a bá n? to? ro? o? mo? ló?
wó? O? ló? run

E? sàlàyé e? fǎ??"? ló? run

Qm q tí n? to? wó? bò? pò

Tí n? jáwó olówó

O? mo? kó?

S? ùgbó? n, o? mo? tí yóò gbélée
bàbá

ga Tí yí o s? e ilé iyá lóore

Èdumàre gbóhùn mi Kò s? è?

sè? bè? rè? nígbà tiwa Láéláé

lolè ti n? kúkú oró Láéláé lolè

tí n? kúkú iyà Láyé Olúgbó? n

Láyé Arè? sà Láyé Ò? rànmiyàn

baba nílè? Ifè?

Olè á kè? yin sókun

Kí n? ma s? e kè? yin sókun

Ègbo? mo? tó jí lówùúrò?

Tí ò nís? é? lápá

Tó fé? ra àrán olówó

Tó fé? ra Léèsì

Tó fé ra Damask

È? jè? yòròyòrò lára olè tó kè?

yin

sókun

Kí n má s? e kè? yin sókun

LílÉ: wò wó? n lórí igi

E? wò ìjára okùn lára ìgára

Gorodóòmù ni pàkúté ikú

Gorodóòmù ni pàkúté iyà

È? jè? yòròyòrò lára olè tó kè?

yin

sókun

Ìbòkun lorí olè ó sùn

Ègbo? ló? mo? kílò? fò? mo?

E? kílò? fún wo? n

O? mo? tó jí lówùúrò?

Tí ò nísé? ló? wó?

Tó fé? ra àrán olówó

Tó fé? ra Léèsì

To fé? ra Damask

Tó fé? ra mó? tò

È? jè? yòròyòrò lára olè tó kè?

yin

sókun

Ìbòkun lorí olè ó sùn.

Figure 3:

-
- 84 [Blackings ()] J Blackings . *The Anthropology of the Body*, (London) 1977. Academic Press.
- 85 [Ajibade ()] ‘Finding Female Voice. A Socio-cultural Appraisal of Yoruba Nuptial Poetry’. G O Ajibade .
- 86 RUDIGER Koppe VERLAG. KON: Germany 2009. p. .
- 87 [Barber ()] ‘Oríkì, Women and the Proliferation and Merging of Òrìs? à’. Karin J Barber . *Africa: International*
- 88 *African Institute* 1990. 60 (3) p. .
- 89 [Abimbola ()] ‘Sixteen Great Poems of Ifá’. W Abimbola . *UNESCO* 1975.
- 90 [Awe (ed.) ()] *Yoruba Oral Tradition. Ife African Languages and Literatures series II*, B Awe . Abimbola W.
- 91 (ed.) 1974. p. . (Praise Poems as Historical Data. The example of the Yorùbá Oríkì)