

Dialectics and Structural Organization in the Èbìbì Festival Performances of the Èpé People in Lagos State, Nigeria

Babatunde Olanrewaju Adebua
Babcock University, Nigeria
adebuab@babcock.edu.ng

Mobolanle Egunoluwa Sotunsa
Babcock University, Nigeria
sotunsam@babcock.edu.ng

Abstract

There is growing interest in the study of festivals by literary scholars in African orature. In Nigeria, the festival resources of the Ìjẹ̀bù in southwestern Nigeria, specifically the Èbìbì festival, has been given cursory multi-disciplinary attention in areas such as anthropology, sociology, religions and history. However, scant attention has been paid to the literariness of this corpus of festivals. Moreover, the variety of the festival celebrated by the Èpé people in the coastal area of the Ìjẹ̀bù people appears to have been neglected in previous studies of Ìjẹ̀bù festivals. Using salient aspects of literary semiotics, this paper explores the Èbìbì festival of the Èpé people by undertaking a literary evaluation of the structural organization, dialectics and interconnectedness of the performances. Observations revealed that levels of structural organization are interconnected to various degrees. Narrative and textual structures are maintained in spite of translations into other languages. Èbìbì is structured beginning with formulaic exchanges, invocation by the *Oluwo* and the beating of the sacred *Gbèdu* drums. Performers sometimes use the formula within a performance to develop oral text. Actions include flogging, as well as acrobatic and gymnastic displays by the performers. The costumes and masks have motifs of riverine animals and fishing accessories. Color codes are symbolically white for cleansing, green for fertility, brown for earth and red for positive energy. The Èbìbì festival celebrated in Èpé is indeed rich in oral

aesthetic forms such as narration, wording, texture and dramatization which enhance its performance aesthetics to a large degree.

Introduction

Though there has been research into various aspects of *Ìjẹ̀bù* traditions, orature and customs, including those by Ogunba (1967), Disu (1987), and Oluyomi (1989). It appears, however, that not much attention has been paid to the structural organization of the festival events. This paper attempts to open new vistas in research into African festivals, by exploring the *Èbìbì*, a major traditional festival of *Èpẹ́*,¹ which is in the coastal area of *Ìjẹ̀bùland*² in Lagos State in southwestern Nigeria, from the ambit of structural organization and interconnectedness of the festival performances.

Festivals are public celebrations that are usually staged by local communities to commemorate unique aspects of their lives and mutual existence. They are also used to meet specific socio-cultural needs of the people, as well as provide entertainment. In Africa in particular, festival occasions offer a sense of belonging for religious, social, or geographical groups. These festivals are mainly religious in nature and usually have historical connotations, as the origin of most festivals is based on the historical development of the community involved. Such festivals are rallying points; occasions for re-affirming the sense of belonging and togetherness of the people. Most modern festivals focus on cultural, ethical and spiritual ideals to inform, educate, and entertain members of the community in which they are held. Many festivals in *Yorùbáland* are celebrated to ensure the health, unity and the general well-being of the people. Festivals such as *Ọ̀sun Ọ̀soḡbo* festival, *Ọ̀gún* festival, *Èyọ̀* festival belong in this category.³ Therefore, these festivals serve as a way of preserving the traditions of the people and reminding them of their responsibilities to the society to which they belong.

Among the *Ìjẹ̀bù* who can be found in *Ọ̀gún* and Lagos States in the South-western part of Nigeria, there are many traditional festivals celebrated annually. The *Ìjẹ̀bù* celebrate *Oro*,⁴ *Agemo*⁵ and *Èbìbì* as major festivals

1 A small town on the back of the Lagos lagoon about thirty-two kilometers southwest of *Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde* in southwestern Nigeria. *Èpẹ́* is predominantly a fishing community.

2 Refers to all *Ijebu* communities in *Ogun* and *Lagos* States, in southwestern Nigeria.

3 These are festivals related to deities who are commonly revered by the *Yorùbá* speaking people in Nigeria.

4 A cult manipulated by the *Ọ̀gbóni* secret society to cleanse, appease and act in a correct manner in the society. *Oro* is represented by an effigy on a string whirled around like a bull-roarer. Women are not to witness *Oro* activities.

5 This is a festival peculiar to the *Ìjẹ̀bù*. *Agemo* has sixteen priests, who offer prayers and sacrifices to the deities on behalf of the community.

annually. *Èbí bí* is celebrated annually by the Akilè-Ìjẹ̀bù to the exclusion of Ìjẹ̀bu-Rẹ̀mọ̀.⁶ However, the Rẹ̀mọ̀ people celebrate *Oro* and *Agẹ̀mọ̀*.⁷ The *Èbí bí* festival, which takes place between January and May of every year, features spectacular performances, drama, music, and dance, all accentuated by a rich display of musical ensembles, costumes, and make-up.

However, rich as these festival events are, it appears only general and superficial attempts have been made to study and document them. In fact, there is a dearth of research on the dialectics of the *Èbí bí* festival corpus, which this study seeks to redress, by examining the *Èbí bí* festival with particular focus on the structural patterns and interconnectedness discoverable in the festival performances.

Theoretical Orientation

This study adopts salient aspects of literary semiotics to achieve its objectives. Literary semiotics is an approach to literary criticism informed by the theory of signs or semiotics which is closely related to structuralism pioneered by Ferdinand de Saussure. In the view of Barthes (1970), semiology, which is used interchangeably with semiotics, is the systematic study of signs. Hawkes (1977) and Elam (1980, 21) agree with this definition; they define semiology as the systematic study of signs which function in diverse kinds of signifying systems. Eagleton (1983, 100) also defines semiotics as patterned human communication behavior including auditory/vocal and facial expression, body talk (kinetics), touch (proxemics) signs and symbols (semiology). Nwabueze (1996) claims that semiotics (or semiology), the science that studies the production of meaning in society, has been variously applied to the study and criticism of festival performances, especially with regard to signification and communication. Since it deals with the methods through which meanings are both generated and exchanged, the sign-systems and codes rampant in society, as well as actual messages and texts produced through those means, semiotics has been found to be a veritable academic tool in the interpretation of oral performances.

The choice of literary semiotics for this study is informed largely by the fact that festival performances are literary and replete with signs and codes. According to Sotunsa (2009:69), “literary semiotics concentrates on texts, which are literary in nature in contrast to general semiotics which studies texts,

6 Refers to the majority of the Ijebu excluding the Ìjẹ̀bù-Rẹ̀mọ̀, under the authority of the paramount ruler of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode. The Ìjẹ̀bù-Rẹ̀mọ̀ derive traditional authority from the Akarigbo of Rẹ̀mọ̀.

7 This festival is held between October and November. It is after this event that the date for *Èbí bí* is fixed.

which may be non-literary.” Within the context of this current study, text here refers to the various *Èbìbì* performances.

A study of structural forms in the *Èbìbì* festival readily lends itself to aspects of literary semiotics as stated above. A study of the structure of the *Èbìbì* festival examines the use of vocal and auditory elements as well as the other aspects of kinetics and proxemics, as they relate to the ritual festival performance. Most of these afore-mentioned elements manifest through a study of the oral aesthetics of the ritual festival performances of both the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects.

Background of the People

The people of Èpé in Lagos State are of the Ìjẹ́bù stock, both culturally and linguistically. Èpé is a small town on the back of the Lagos lagoon, about thirty-two kilometres southwest of Ìjẹ́bù-Òde in southwestern Nigeria. Èpé is predominantly a fishing community (Disu 1987, 3). The Èpé people have a belief system that derives mainly from Yorùbá cosmology, and they believe in most of the deities of the Yorùbá pantheon. A riverine people, the Èpé people also celebrate water-related Yorùbá deities such as Ékíne, Òrìsà-nlá, Ọmọ-Okò and Yemoja. The Èpé people, like most African communities (and by inference the Yorùbá), practice ancestral worship. Èpé ancestral figures like Hùràkà, Aláró, and Ogunmùdè are prominent in the worship matrix of the people.

The Èpé people revel in festivities. Ogúntómìsìn (1999, 13) mentions *Ìkí-Baálé*, *Ìlẹyá*, *Ọmọ-Okò*, *Ékíne*, *Obalúaye*, *Ọgun* and *Èbìbì* as the most prominent festivals celebrated annually by the people of Èpé. The festivals serve as occasions for bonding and the wellbeing of the people. In this study, the paramount concern is the *Èbìbì* festival, which is the major and most important event in the life of the people.

The Èbìbì Festival

Among the Ìjẹ́bù people of Èpé in Lagos State, the *Èbìbì* festival is central in the corpus of festivals celebrated annually. The *Èbìbì* festival falls into the category of festivals meant for the cleansing and purification of the town, towards the achievement of good health and prosperity for the people. The festival consists of a wide array of festival events, ranging from rituals and re-enactments to pure entertainment. Sometimes, it involves a mixture of all of these elements. The *Èbìbì* festival is celebrated among the Akilẹ̀-Ìjẹ́bù as previously stated, and it involves plenty of symbolic action, song, dance, and pantomimic dramatization of short archetypal incidents from the experience

of the people in the outgoing year. The *Èbìbì* takes place between January and May every year.

Structure in Oral Performance

Barber and de’Farias (1989) opine that to understand oral narratives and performances, scholars must be grounded, literally and metaphorically, in the structure, idioms, and conventions created by the people themselves and their own understanding of the meaning of these narratives. This view is corroborated by Brown (1999). Barthes (1970) also espouses the principle of universality of structural forms in myths, jokes and riddles. Barthes suggests that the logicity of simple structural forms is responsible for the nature and interrelationships in the various oral events. He regards the structure of oral performances as a principle of human thoughts which are then concretized in language. Jolles (1972) agreeing with this, posits, “Barthes’ simple form refers to verbal objects in the mind of the composer or performer who tries to inject meaning into his world.” This disposition by the critic is universal and emerges from the belief that these structural forms in the mind of the composer are born out of concrete linguistic and formal structures.

In an attempt to give a clearer perspective on the concept of structure in oral performances, Jason (1977, 15) offers the following categorization:

- i. Wording--the language material with which linguistics deals.
- ii. Texture--the organization of wording. This includes the poetics: prosodic features of prose and verse of any order, the style of a genre, a culture or a school of narrators and singers, and the individual idiosyncratic style of the performer.
- iii. Narration--the organization of the narrative’s plot.
- iv. Dramatization--the organization of the performance: acoustic, visual, and kinetic aspects which are constituent elements of every performance of a work of oral literature, no matter its length.

Jason further asserts that these levels of structural organization are interconnected to various degrees. Narrative and textual structures keep their structure in spite of translations into other languages. These parameters also apply to the *Èbìbì* festival corpus.

The Structure of *Èbìbì* Festival Performances

A large part of the *Èbìbì* festival performances has a high level of structural organization and interconnectedness. Within the concepts of the

structure of oral performances, the following categorization was identified: wording, texture, narration, and dramatization.

Wording

The *Èbìbì* festival is an *Ìjẹ̀bù* festival in Yorùbáland. The language material is the *Ìjẹ̀bù* variety of the Yorùbá language. The use of language and choice of words is the prerogative of the creator/composer of an event, who has versatility in the performance of that oral event. The performer utilizes keys to oral performance such as special codes in the form of dialects and attire. *Èbìbì* is not a generalized Yorùbá festival. Therefore the *Ìjẹ̀bù* who have given it prominence basically use the *Ìjẹ̀bù* variety of the Yorùbá language in an artistic manner.

In the opening sequences of the declaration of *Èbìbì* in *Èpẹ̀* after the *Ìdémunu* festival in *Ìlesè-Ìjẹ̀bù*,⁸ there are some ritual sacrificial rites to *Èṣu*, *Ogunta*, *Ọbáluayé*, and *Ìgbẹ̀rùn*. Once these are done, the king, *Ọba Kàmọ̀rù Ịshọ̀lá Anímásháun (Èlẹ̀pẹ̀ I)*, the *ọlọ̀jà* of *Èpẹ̀*, declares the *Èbìbì* open by stating: “the festival is here, the people gather! Even the rainbows proclaim the festival!” (*Ọdúnjọ! Iwosu! Èsumarẹ̀ Kéùn Ọdún!*) This statement signifies that the festival cycle has begun. This is symbolic of the goodwill that the deities and ancestral spirits have towards the community. Once the declaration has been made, the festival proper begins.

*Ìgbẹ̀sì-Òṣu*⁹ is the next event in the line-up of activities for the *Èbìbì* festival. This event involves a lot of stylized language use as well as codification, due to the fact that the *Òṣùgbó*, which is a secret society, is involved. In this segment, the sacred *gbẹ̀du* drums are beaten and the king with his chiefs and the *Òṣùgbó* dance to the music

The chants and exchanges are formulaic. To Finnegan (1973, 380), formulae are “a group of words which are regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.” A formula is made up of the opening and closing formula. Scholars also acknowledge that there are formulas in the body of oral performance. Performers sometimes use the formula within a performance to develop an oral text. This, according to Finnegan (1970, 381), is called internal formula. The opening formula is used at the beginning of an oral performance to win, retain, and ensure that his audience is ready for the performance. In the *Òṣùgbó* interplay during the *Ìgbẹ̀sì-Òṣu* the public aspects consists of the following opening formula:

8 This aspect of the pre- *Èbìbì* rites heralds the announcement of the date for the festival proper.

9 Masquerades in the *Èbìbì* festival corpus.

- Call: *Eri wo, ya*
Eri wo, ya
Eri wo, ya
- Response: *Aya gbo,*
aya to,
aya je
- Call: Lord of secrets, descend
 Lord of secrets, descend
 Lord of secrets, descend
- Response: Descend for longevity
 Descend for honor
 Descend for prosperity

After this sequence has been repeated severally, the invocation of the divinities and ancestors is carried out by the *oluwo*, leader of the *Oṣugbó* fraternity, after which the *gbèdu* drums are beaten. *Gbèdu* drums are traditional royal drums played with straight sticks and hand producing strong deep tones. They are used in traditional or religious settings, or for kings and dignitaries. They are played in pairs, trios, or septets. *Gbèdu* drums are sometimes adorned with elaborate carvings. The drums are also used during the *Oṣugbó* and *Ogbóni* ceremonies. It is worthy to note that in Yorubaland, there are four main drum families. These are the *gbèdu* family, the *dùndún* family, the *bàtá* family and the *sákàrà* family (Sotunsa 2009). While the other drum families are largely used for social events, the *gbèdu* drum family is used exclusively for sacred and ritual events. Events such as the coronation of a new king, the birth of a crown prince, and major spiritual events are heralded with the beating of said drums. The *gbèdu* drums of the *Èbíbí* are also regarded as sacred and the drums are played only on the specific occasions mentioned above.

For the masquerade aspects of the festival such as: *Jìgbò*, *Alégbagba*, *Okoòrò*, *Èpà*, *Èyò*, *Kí lá jolú*, *Ìgò dò*, *Agbo*, *Agira*, *À jò jì-Imale* and *Àkàlàgùlẹ̀*,¹⁰ the *Ìjẹ̀bù* variety of the Yorubá language is used during performances. The only masquerade which uses a language different from *Ìjẹ̀bù* is the *Èyò* masquerade which communicates in *Èkó* variety of Yorubá and *Ìgunnukó*, which communicates in the *Nupé* language, which is popularly referred to as *Tápá*.

Structurally, bright colors are peculiar to all masquerades within the *Èbíbí* festival corpus. From the green and red color of *Alégbagba* to the multi-colored costume of *Èpà*, the aura and spectacle of a community in celebration is evident. All the acolytes of these masquerades are usually in uniform to symbolize their membership within these masquerade cults. Worthy of specific mention with regard to the colorful appearance is the *Kí lá jolú* masquerade.

From his mask to stockings is an array of apparel in beautiful colors and symbols. The mask is designed as a boat with frills and decorations. The body gear is made of beautifully colored woven raffia, with mirrors, eye-slits, and cowries. Kílájólú wears a skirt around his waist, beneath which are leotards. This is why Kílájólú is taunted by spectators in this manner: “Kilajolu, thief, who has stolen his wife’s skirt!” (*Kí lá jolú Olè, a jí sí kẹ̀tì ìyàwó è!*) Once Kílájólú is taunted in this way, it pursues the spectators and flogs whoever it can catch with the cane it wields. For those desiring to praise Kílájólú, another song which elicits rapturous and frenzied dancing is rendered in this manner:

Solo: *Kí lá jolú Orò!*
 Chorus: *Óń gbóná join join!*
 Solo: *Oní kọyí Orò!*
 Chorus: *Óń gbóná join join!*
 (Repeated several times)
 Solo: Kílájólú the deity!
 Chorus: As hot as ever!!
 Solo: Oní kọyí the deity!
 Chorus: As hot as ever!

This reaction is symbolic of the actual power and prowess of the legendary Àkàlàjólú, the Ìlàjẹ marauder. Kílájólú has a grotesque appearance with a long cane, which he uses to beat daring spectators. This serves as part of the re-enactment of the attacks of Àkàlàjólú on the Èpẹ people before the intervention of Aláúsá, a prominent Èpẹ warrior.

Another aspect of wording is the frequent use of the Èpẹ incantatory praise chant. This praise chant forms part of most of the supplicatory events of the Èbìbì festival performances. It is apparent that the indigenes of Èpẹ are proud of this incantatory praise chant as follows:

Èpẹ Alárò ọmọ Ọ̀gúnmọ̀dede
Èpẹ Olúku àbàtá
Kúkúru lósàn-án
Gbọ̀ọ gbọ̀ọ l’óru

Èpẹ Alárò the child of Ọ̀gúnmọ̀dedé
 Èpẹ enamored of mud
 Unassuming in the daytime
 Unpredictable at night time

This short incantatory praise is replete with poetic metaphors and symbols that signify the riverine nature of Èpẹ. Evidently the area is surrounded by

water and mangrove swamps and Èpé people are predominantly fishermen. The Èpé people live a sedentary lifestyle during the daytime and burst into life at night when most of the fishing is done. This is observed in the metaphors used in lines three and four.

Texture

The issue of texture in the *Èbibi* oral performances is contextual. It depends on the features which give the performances and traditions their plasticity and malleability. Okepe who (1992, 72) highlights such features to include:

- i. Elements of setting
- ii. Mention of specific iconic areas of the community
- iii. Comparison between a character in the performance and an ancestral or local personality
- iv. The use of period-specific items--paper money as opposed to cowries or coins.
- v. The regrouping of traditional elements
- vi. Intertextuality--characters and stories (in the Propopian sense).
- vii. Rules of composition which include repetition and interjection of songs within the performance.
- viii. Onomatopoeic expressions, the use of body movements, and facial expressions/gestures.

In this study, texture is taken broadly to mean the non-verbal aspects that are audible and visible to the audience, including the contextual--the social aspects situated within the performance. An attempt was made to capture the ephemeral, the evanescence, and the uniqueness of the performances of each sub-genre within the *Èbibi* corpus. These include a perusal of non-verbal, paralinguistic, gestural, facial, and kinetic features. The use of space by the performer and the audience, the costumes and objects carried during the performances--the aesthetic and general stylistics of the performances, were found to be germane and critically observed.

For instance, during the *Kí lá jolú* event, the masquerade traverses the entire town, while he avoids the *Ìgò dò* masquerades that are out to capture him. In this process, the mask and costumes have to change hands on several occasions before sunset. The masquerade appears to crisscross the community in a rather haphazard manner. However, it was observed that tradition had delineated where the masquerade would enter, such as the king's palace, the

Balogun's house, Obutu compound, Jagun-Ọba's compound, Agbálájobí's house, Èlẹ̀kú's compound, Agbọ̀n's house, among others. During these stops, the personality beneath the costume and the mask changes.

In one instance, the personality changed and the researcher and most of the people in the audience were able to discern the person beneath the mask. This was possible because the bard who accompanied the masquerade immediately composed a verse on the spot, which elicited great laughter and recognition. The verse was as follows:

Kí lá jolú Àjásó
Kí lá jolú Kánsí lẹ̀
Àjásó ọmọ Ịyá Èbúté
Kí lá jolú Àjásó

Kí lá jolú, Àjásó
Kí lá jolú, the Councilor
Kí lá jolú son of Ịyá Èbúté
Kí lá jolú Àjásó

Presumably, the character beneath the mask was one Sí kírù` Àgbòméjì, who was a serving councilor at the Èpẹ̀ Local Government Secretariat at the time. His mother was popularly called Ịyá Èbúté, and she lived at the Lagoon side called Èbúté Afuyè. The councilor, Sí kírù` Àgbòméjì, was also popularly called Àjásó. He got this moniker because he was dropped for the position of councilor and was reinstated at the last minute. Àjásó literally means "cut and joined."

The Ịjì-Ílálá component also has a semblance of this textual feature, as there is a night invocation of Àgan (Ìjàgan-Òru), the Ịjì-Ílálá nomenclature for the Ịjì-Ílálá deity. During this Ịjàgan-Òru, only members of the society are allowed to be outdoors. However, during Ịta-Èbì, when the king, resplendent in his royal paraphernalia, presides at the Ịpẹbì stage, members of the Ịjì-Ílálá fraternity come into the open in their all-white attire, with swords, knives, charms and amulets and symbols of authority of the Ịjì-Ílálá fraternity. At this juncture, people perceive those with whom they fraternize on a daily basis as members of the cult. This is awesome and fearsome. The Ịjì-Ílálá fraternity members are known for their secrecy and brutality and are greatly respected in the community.

The kinetics of the Èpà masquerades also fit into the discussion in this segment. The Èpà masqueraders are usually small and nimble-footed. Their sole function is to dance and do multiple summersaults, to the admiration of

the audience. Members of the audience can identify the individual *Èpà* masqueraders through the costume and the technique adopted in accomplishing the summersaults. Faces of members of the audience are filled with awe and excitement when these specific masquerades appear.

Narration

According to Scheub (1977), in oral narratives, certain repeated spatial relationships are established, which, when the words dissolve, reveal the pure form of the work. A performer of oral narratives utilizes materials of his or her culture just as a painter uses color. The narrative tradition mirrors culture in an intricate and aesthetically contrived manner or form, which has the same effect on an audience as art or music.

In oral narratives, Scheub expatiates, the message of the oral production is generated by the movement of words, evoking the action of characters developed within formal patterns, which guide the artists' arrangement of images. In the *Èbibì* festival performances, narrative techniques vary from one performance in the festival corpus to another. Many of the acolytes of the various cults, sects, or traditional groups have developed secret codes and esoteric expression in their communication such that it becomes awesome to the non-members of these groups.

Generally, the *Ìjẹ̀bù* dialect is employed by most of the performers, albeit with some attempt at poetry, play on words, puns and witticisms. These are done to outwit other groups or performers and oral artists of the previous year, whose performances and dexterity are still very fresh in the memories of the audience.

The *Ìjì-Ñlá* fraternity, *Ọ̀sùgbó* fraternity, *Èyò* Masquerade, and *Ìgúnnukó* masquerades are those that have special narrative systems which can be learned only through membership in the specific groups. The *Ìjì-Ñlá* fraternity, for instance, has a song that is a narration of the experiences of a new member of the group at initiation. Below is the text and translation of the song:

Solo: *Ojó ro mí jó* (2ce)
 Chorus: *Ọ́n jó ọ́ọ* (repeated after each line)
 Solo: *Omi dú dú* (2ce)

Omi dú dú, fò'jú j'aró
Ó fò'jú j'aró kò lè rẹ sọ
Kò lè rẹ sọ kò lè ra'gò
Kò lè rẹ kí jì pá àwa
Ó mú mi rántí Ọ́jó, ọ́jó

Wón ní kí n dúró
Mo dúró
Wón ní kí n bèrè mo bèrè
Mo dé lé mí ò rẹnu sọ

Solo: Is he not dancing (2ce)
 Chorus: He is dancing (repeated after each line)

The dark waters (2ce)
 The dark waters that look like dye
 The waters look like dye but cannot dye cloths
 They cannot even dye the shroud
 Neither can they dye our insignia
 It reminds me of that fateful day
 I was asked to stand and I stood
 I was asked to bend, and I bent
 got home and could not narrate my ordeal.

The song is loaded with innuendos about the rigor of belonging to the Í-
 jí-Níá fraternity. It also showcases the rigors of attaining membership, which
 entails great physical exertion, which cannot really be made public because an
 oath of secrecy that has been sworn by the initiates. Plays on words, puns, and
 clichés are also used to add aesthetic quality to the performance discourse,
 which excludes non-initiates across the various groups. These features are
 demonstrated in the following statements, exclamations and questions:

“Why does the mud act as if it has no relationship with the river?” (*Kí ló
 ẹ àbàtà bí ẹni tí ò bó dò tan?*) This proverbial question implies that the
 character is acting unconcerned with events going on around him or her.

“The palm kernel in the footpaths cannot be cracked by the feet” (*Ẹnu ẹsẹ̀
 fi ní pa èkùrọ̀ Ojú ọ̀nà*). This negative idiomatic assertion implies that the
 issue is too knotty and needs wisdom to resolve.

“The leaves and the bark of the orange tree, serve the same purpose as the
 orange itself.” (*Ewé ọ̀sàn, ọ̀sàn ni. Ẹpo igi ọ̀sàn, ọ̀sàn náà ni!*) The apho-
 ristic statement is used to justify inclusion of friends and families of cult
 members in some aspects of the secret rites of these groups.

“It is in the home of the woodpecker that mortars are carved.” (*Ní ilé àkókó ni wón ti n gbé’dó*). The proverb is used to control public speaking among cult members so that non-initiates will be unable to hear the secrets of the group.

“Splits the grass with the stealth of a cat, the Lion does not joke with its offspring.” (*Ó pa ko bí Ológìní, Kìniún ò f’òmọ è šeré!*) This is used to express ideas of unity, protection, and solidarity that exist in each performance group. In all of these, the audience is awed by this linguistic dexterity and the manner and panache with which the words are arranged and delivered. It leaves the audience with an esoteric and metaphysical experience from participating in the *Èbìbì* festival events.

Dramatization

In oral narration techniques, kinetics (body language, gestures, movement, mimetic songs, and devices) are prevalent. This is usually particularly evident in masquerade performances. Scholars like Adedeji (1969), Ogunbiyi (1981), and Horn (1981) have opined that they form the origin of theatre and drama in Africa. Some of these scholars see the interpretation of literature in terms of myths and archetypes from the ambit of the knowledge of African dramatic forms.

In the *Èbìbì* festival corpus, several dramatizations and reenactments occur. In the *Kí lá jolú* opening sequences at the *Èkú* shrine and at the king’s palace, the linguistic aspect is virtually subsumed in the imitative actions of the oral performers. *Kí lá jolú* moves with the swagger of a conqueror and actually mimics the earlier conquests of *Èpé* by *Akálá jolú*, the aforementioned *Ìlàjẹ* warrior who pillaged *Èpé* incessantly over a long period of time. In this sequence, the king stretches out his two hands, while *Kí lá jolú* symbolically flogs the king three times. This is done gently, to show the capitulation of the community. Subsequently, the *Kí lá jolú* masquerade swerves-off and goes into the town with a horde of cane-wielding youth who flog one another as a show of strength and flog others who could not run away.

The *Òkòsí* boat regatta skirmishes, the capture of *Kí lá jolú* by *Ìgòdò*, and *Alégbagba* reenactment all fall within the category of activities where the oral performers create dramatic sequences to highlight the symbolism of the clients. The costumes and masks of several of the masquerades, such as *Òkòrò*, *Ìgòdò*, *Kí lá jolú*, *Alégbagba*, and *Agírá*, all have motifs of riverine animals like rhinoceroses, crocodiles, alligators, and fish. All of these are in grotesque shapes and vivid colors, which adds to the overall aesthetic quality of the performances and enhances the plot and actions in the performances.

Conclusion

This paper has observed the *Èbìbì* festival performances of the people of Èpé in Lagos State, in southwestern Nigeria. The study discovered a high level of structural organization, interconnectedness, and intertextuality in the various performances within the festival corpus. Narrative and textual structures were maintained in spite of translations into other languages; formulaic exchanges were observed to be prevalent. Invocations, incantations, spectacular dances, songs and acrobatic displays were also observed. The *Èbìbì* festival celebrated in Èpé is rich in oral aesthetic forms such as narration, wording, texture, and dramatization, which enhance its performance aesthetics to a large degree.

References

- Adedeji, J. A. *The Alarinjo Theatre A Study of Yoruba Theatre Arts from Earliest Beginnings to the Present Times*, PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1969.
- Barber, K, and P. F. de'Farias, eds. *Discourse and its Disguises: The Interpretation of African Oral Texts*. Birmingham: Birmingham UP, 1989.
- Barthes, R. S. IZ. Paris: Seou, 1970.
- Brown, Duncan. *Oral Literature and Performance in Southern Africa*. Oxford: James Curry, 1999.
- Disu, O.A. "The History of Epe." B.A. Project Essay, University of Lagos, 1987.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London: Blackwell Ltd, 1983.
- Elam, Keir. *The Semiotics of the Theatre and Drama*. London: Methuen, 1980.
- Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa*. London: Oxford UP, 1970.
- Hawkes, T. *Structuralism and Semiotics*. London: Methuen, 1977.
- Horn, A. "Ritual Drama and the Theatrical: The case of Bori Spirit Mediumship", *Nigeria Magazine* 136 (1981): 3-16.
- Jason, H. "A Model for Narrative Structure in Oral literatures." *Patterns in Oral Literature*. Eds. H. Jason and D. Seagal. Paris: Mouton, 1977.
- Jolles, A. *Formes Simples*. Paris: Seou, 1977.
- Nwabueze, P. "In the Spirit of Thespis: Theatre Arts and National Integration." 14th Inaugural Lecture, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 14th April, 1996.
- Ogunba, O. "Ritual Drama of the Ijebu People: A Study of Indigenous Festivals", PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1967.

- Ogunbiyi, Yemi. "Nigerian Theatre and Drama." *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Ed. Yemi Ogunbiyi. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine. (1981): 1–15.
- Oguntomisin, G.O. *The Transformation of a Nigerian Lagoon Town: Epe (1852–1942)*. Ibadan: John Archer, 1999.
- Okpewho, Isidore. *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character and Continuity*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992.
- Oluyomi Philips. "Origin and Development of Epe from Earliest Times to 1966," B.A. Project Essay, University of Ibadan, 1989.
- Scheub, Harold. *African Oral Narratives: Proverbs, Riddles, Poetry and son*. Boston: G. K. Hall. 1977.
- Sotunsa, M.E. *Yoruba Drum Poetry*. London: Stillwater Studios, 2009.