Yoruba Folksongs and its Aphorism: A Study of Selected Folksongs

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Abstract
There are several folksongs in diverse ethnic group in Nigeria. And of those within the geographical area of the South Western region of Nigeria stand to be the focus of this study. As it were in every African tradition that folksongs have survived the test of time, standing as one of the major tools used in oral tradition. Diverse scholars have made attempts in the direction of this subject matter Yoruba folksongs amidst different dialects that exist among the Yoruba in Nigeria. This study therefore, examines Yoruba folksongs and its aphorism. In doing this, the researcher employed the bibliographical method in treating the above subject matter, looking into the basic phenomenon of Yoruba folksongs and its aphoristic elements.

Key Words: Yoruba, Folksongs and Aphorism

Introduction
The Yoruba inhabit part of the Western part of Nigeria and said to be one of the ethnic groups in Nigeria. While different dialects constitute the geographical areas within the various states of the region like; Oyo, Osun, Kwara, Ekiti, Ondo, Lagos and part of Kogi states. Likewise, the Yoruba are also found in some of the neighbouring African countries, such as Togo, Benin and Abijan, etc. In the place of cultural heritage and traditional belief system, virtually all the Yoruba states share similar traditional belief system and cultural identity. This particular ideology makes the culture and characteristics features of the Yoruba colossal in nature. However, aside the similarities in the cultural identity of the Yoruba, their musical culture also share a strong link together both in practices and performances. Nevertheless, different accounts have identified divers’ traditions and musical culture that dominates the South-West region of Nigeria in line with the role, functions, practices and historical antecedents that surround each musical culture. According to Vidal:

... South-West is dominated by two principal medium of musical expression; the drum and the voice. Drumming and singing constitute the main forms of musical expression.
This however, does not exclude the use of other musical instruments such as the horn, flute, bell and rattles as supporting or accompanying instrumentation. (43)

Vidal position reveals that both instrumental and vocal serves as major medium of expression among the Yoruba’s. In view of this, the vocal medium which involves music making and singing in divers’ forms and levels through the use of the voice seems to be more relevant in the context of this paper. Historically, the Yoruba culture have been divers’ in the use of songs for different occasions and function for different age groups. This segmentation of songs in the Yoruba society has formed part of the way of life of the people. Looking at the genetic root or origin of the Yoruba, Ogisi attest that:

There are two traditions of origin of the Yoruba: one posits that they migrated from the Middle East and settled in Ile-Ife from where theydispersed to other part of the present-day Yoruba land. The other, the autochthonous tradition is of the view that they originated from their present abode and dispersed to other part of Yoruba land. (32)

The above genesis of the Yoruba gives an insight to the concept and conceptual philosophy of the Yoruba. However, this is not the bone of contention within the context of this paper, but looking at the Yoruba as a homogenous ethnic group with similar characteristics in the context of their folksongs and it aphorism. In this same line of thought, the Edo people who are also part of Nigeria as a nation also share a common traditional feature, political and religious similarities within the confined of the Edoid people. Furthermore, the Edo people stand as homogenous ethnicities with common similarities in their cultural belief system and religion just as the case is among the Yoruba which posits similarity between the two cultures. Aluede and Braimah (123)

In the same vein, Scholars such as Nketia, Waterman and Okunade agree respectively to the established fact that the above common factor is not found among the Yoruba people or Edo people in Nigeria alone, but it is a common characteristic within the sub-Sahara Africa in general. This implies that, there is an identifiable factor and common characteristic feature that pre-dominated the Sub-Sahara African culture which reveals the Africa identity that interwoven from one Africa culture to another.
In re-affirming the scope of this paper, it is highly important to look into the phenomenon of aphorism and folksong in general within the contextual content of the paper.

Aphorism
The word aphorism has been looked into from different points of view within the context of a particular phenomenon revealing the facts and truth that surround the phenomenon. The historical trend that surrounds aphorism have been traced down to the middle French word “aphorisme”, which sprang from the Late Latin word “aphorismus” that originated from the Greek “aphorismos”. The combination of two syllabic word apo + horizein serves as the genesis of the word aphorism which was first known in the year 1528. It is historically clear that the word was first used in aphorism of Hippocrates. This was applied much later to different and other sententious statements that deals with the philosophical issues (logic), physical science, moralistic or literary principles. The earliest collective kinds of aphorism were that of aphorisms of Hippocrates. This includes notable phrases such as “Life is short”, “Lost time is never found again”, Mediocrity is forgiven more easily than talent” and “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm”. However, it is of great necessity to look into different definition on the word aphorism. The word aphorism from the contextual analogy could be defined as a tersely phrase-illogical statement that stress or state the truth or express a blunt opinion about a particular phenomenon. Also, it has been define from the literally context as the word that express and denotes an inventive thought that came in form of a written or spoken word with a clear laconism feature and memorable recollection that has its distinctive form. (www. wikipedia.org)

Folksong
Folksongs stand in different ways as the pivotal tool that connects the past to the present by giving a clear opportunity of understanding the past in the present; so as to have a better understanding of the present from the past. Euba, (475). Furthermore, looking at the philosophical concept of folksong, different scholars have established divers idiosyncratic ideology on this phenomenon. Folksongs are traditional songs that are used in various cultures having imbedded in them the philosophical issues of life and the cultural values system which serves as a channel of educating and information in a particular culture. Babalola, (56) and Okunade, (31). In a similar vein, folksongs stand as the contextual phenomenon that serves as a
medium of continuity in preserving the traditional values and norms in African society and culture. This particular method is being passed from one generation to another through oral tradition. Kennedy buttressed this that: "folksongs are song of unknown authorship passed orally from one generation to generation." (232). By implication, folksongs have proved and stand the test of time in African tradition as a practicum means for cultural sustainability. Aluede stated that:

…it could be observed that folksongs are always closely bound to a culture within which it fulfils positive functional purposes. Similarly, folksong in essence, show a degree of continuity and link the present with the past even though they are created by anonymous individuals and transmitted orally through singers. (123)

The above quotation buttressed the fact that folksongs play an indispensably role in the sustainability of cultural heritage in the existence of any society by knitting the past and the present together and projecting it into the unknown future. In a similar train, scholars like Ofosu and Aluede respectively submitted that folksongs are the unknown authorship and ancient traditional songs that formed part of the cultural heritage of a society through the means of acceptability that has also witnessed and passed the test of time from one generation to another. While in view of Miller, folksongs are unplanned expressions through musical turns within a certain geographical area of some people that display their norms and interest. However, in a general view, folksongs are songs that cannot be separated from any culture and society, irrespective of the culture. In relation to the subject matter of folksongs, the Yoruba folksong cannot be separated from the belief system of the Yoruba which has a strong link attached to their culture.

**Yoruba Folksongs and Its Aphorism**

The indigenous cultures of the Yoruba have some certain phenomenons that are imbedded in it, as the case may be in other world cultures. This includes norms and tradition, belief system, folksongs, cultural philosophy, religion and literature. All of these constitute and form the way of life of the Yoruba people. Two epoch of witness have been established in the philosophy of the Yoruba. This includes the historical epoch in cosmology and mythology that deals with the historical making through the oral philosophy; while the
metaphysical philosophy serves as the second epoch. The philosophy of the Yoruba set to be in narrative forms, revealing the intricate of knowledge and causes imbedded in the nature and spiritual syncretism of the universe. Likewise, the different philosophical view on aphorism and lore are well established and practice in the traditional society of the Yoruba. In view of this, the Yoruba folksongs and its aphorism are not left out amidst the philosophical concept of the tradition.

The traditional folksongs of the Yoruba cannot be separated from their cultural value, identity and historical antecedents. Neither can it be separated from the cultural transmission that passes through the oral tradition of the Yoruba society. Through this singular act, the indigenous belief, norms, cultural heritage and tradition of the Yoruba are been transmitted and preserved orally from one generation to another. Vidal putting into consideration the act of the Yoruba folksongs from the perspective of the significant role, function, its applicable method(s) and relevance in the society; one will conclude that the folksongs of the Yoruba span from birth to deoth. This therefore, implies that, there is no phase or phases of life in Yoruba society that folksong is not applicable to; even though in the traditional Yoruba society, the youths are more at home with the folksongs than the older members of the society. This incorporation could be in the act of their stories tale, traditional rites and specific games which could be in form of language games or number games.

In view of the above, Yoruba folksongs and its aphorism could be seen clearly from various stages of life span of the youths. Categorically, each developmental stage of the youths has different folksongs that are associated with and use as the case may be in the Yoruba society. The account given by Vidal is not different from that of Finnegan, that the recitation of some specific rhythms to the children were been carried out by the elders of the community which is purely different from the infant lullabies songs and the adult songs. (302) and (291)

In relation to aphorism, it is an established fact that Yoruba folksongs serve as a major tool of inspiration and transmission of traditional knowledge just as mentioned earlier on. This implies that folksongs propel the learning ability of the children within a specific confine, using the rote learning method. The children get their knowledge through participant observation in most of the story tale activities, and they also get impacted through the learning of different folksongs. Furthermore, this is easily achieved when the children/youths take after the footsteps of the elder(s) in the society. In a similar vein Aluede noted that:
The Edo culture is rich and lively. They drew their inspiration from the indigenous ways of learning and training — ways that have been passed from generation to generation. (123)

The above quotation reveals that, one of the major channels use in disseminating information, correcting, admonishing, exhort, impacting educational knowledge, (both formal and informal) and sustainability of culture in any African society its folksongs. In further attempt of justifying Yoruba folksongs and its aphorism; it is important to identify and discourse some of the folksongs base on their categorization, role, functions and the content of aphorism which could be derived from the contextual meaning of each folksong. The classifications of folksongs in Yoruba society varies from one stage to another. In the quest of looking into the various forms or categories of folksongs in the Yoruba society, research reveals that there are four classifications given in the account of Vidal. This includes; Cradle songs, Games song, Folktale songs and Occasional songs’. Vidal (290). Cradle folksong usually comes in a musical pattern that creates rooms for more divisional segments in the structural body and form of the song. Usually, this type of song is called strophic form in Western music. While the second category of folksongs falls under the games and social activities of the children in the Yoruba society. This type of folksongs is used to entertain the children during their sport activities. However, the structural form of this song usually goes in form of call and response. The folktale category falls under a different section were the narrator spice the traditional story line with some folktale songs. Prior to this, the fourth category fall under the occasional folksongs used for ceremonies, festival and divers’ dance occasions. The musical structural found in the first three folksongs are imbedded in this kind of folksongs. Looking at the contextual nature of aphorism in the example of the Cradle song ‘Omo to ma iyare loju’ (Rebellious child will suffer).
Cradle song’s Example 1.

**OMO TO MO IYARE LOJU**

Text in Yoruba
Omo to mo iyare loju
Ebi ni o na omo na pa/2x
Iya toji ya nitori re/2x
Omo ti mo iyare loju
Ebi ni o na omo na pa

English Translation
The child that disobey his/her mother
Hunger will put an end to is life/2x
The mother that suffer for you to live/2x
The child that disobey his/her mother
Hunger will put an end to is life.

The aphorism of the above folksong conveys the philosophical truth of the consequences of any child that is found rebellious, either to his/her parents or to the society. The song stand as a major means of preaching and instilling the act of moral and respect in a child amidst the Yoruba society. Stating the consequences that a child will face if a child should indulged in
the act of rebellion to the parents, most especially to the mother. The contextual content of the aphorism found in the song, further recounted and reminded children generally of the irrevocable and altruistic sacrifices that mothers pay during and after the child birth. This kind of song further complement and emphasis the place and the need of good character in the life of every child in the Yoruba society. The Yoruba society believes that good character stands as the foundation of any child that wants to succeed in life. This is been supported and been said of any child with a character through the popular proverbial phrase among the Yoruba that ‘Iwa rere ni eso eniyan’ (Good character is the treasure of life).

Occasional song’s Example 2

**EWURO LAGBA IGI**

Soprano

\[
\begin{align*}
E-wu-ro & \quad l-a-gb-a \quad i-gi \\
G-b-o-g-b-o & \quad i-g-i \quad e-b-o-w-o \quad f-u-n \quad e-w-u-ro \quad e-w-u-ro \quad l-a-g-b-a \quad i-g-i
\end{align*}
\]

**Text in Yoruba**

Ewuro lagba igi
Ewuro lagba igi/2x
Gbogbo igi ebowo fun Ewuro
Ewuro lagba igi

**English Translation**

Bitter leaf is the oldest tree
Bitter leaf is the oldest tree/2x
All trees should respect bitter leaf
Bitter leaf is the oldest tree

The aphorism of the above folksong established the fact that whosoever that is placed or found in the position of authority and leadership should be given the due honour that the person(s) deserve. This single act should be done without undermining of the age and the personality of such person(s) in the
placed or position of authority. This also is been supported by the proverbial phrase found in the song of King Sunny Ade, which says ‘Bose omode lo dade kase kabi esi fun, Bose agbalagba kafi idobala si’. Meaning if a child is found or crowned as a king, that child should be respected and if it to be an elderly person he should be accorded with a dignify prostration.

**Occasional song’s Example 3**

**IYA NI WURA**

*Score by Bolaji, David*

Text in Yoruba

Iya ni wura iye-biye ti akole fi’o owora
Oloyun mi fun osu mesan
O-pan mi fun odun meta
Iya ni wura iye-biye ti akole fi’o owora

**English Translation**

Mother is a precious gold that money cannot buy
She carried my pregnancy for nine months
And she backed me for three years
Mother is a precious gold that money cannot buy

The aphoristic features of the above folksong ascertain the uniqueness of mother as a symbol of a precious possession in the life of a child in Yoruba culture. Stating and educating both children and adult about the suffering
and pains that mothers do under go during the nine months of pregnancy. Also, it went further to acknowledge the three years period that mother’s used in backing and taking care of a child. This specifically, educates every child to value his/her mother with high esteem, stating that there is no amount of money that can quantify the value of a mother in our society and in the world entirely.

Occasional song 4

**MO JA' WE WE GBEGBE**

![Song Score]

**Yoruba Text**

Moti jawe gbegbe  
Aye ema gbagbe mi  
Moti jawe oni tete  
Ki won ma temi mole  
Awa de o awa ma de o  
Oju ki ima ipon rook rook  
Ko gbagbe ile

**English Translation (Literal Translation)**

I’ve plucked *gbegbe* leaf  
The world should not forget me  
I’ve plucked *tete* leaf  
The world should not trample on me
We have arrived we have arrived!
A stranger cannot forget is home
The above folksong established the aphoristic feature that calls for the need to have the virtue of patience in the life of every child. The folksong teaches both child and adult in Yoruba society the essential need of having patience; which serves as one of the attributes and quality of a good character. It went further to acknowledge the fact that a foreigner will surely remember is home country no matter the number of years spent outside which teaches the child that irrespective of his achievement outside the home town or country, the child should always remember is origin.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the submission above emphasizes the Yoruba folksongs and its aphorism. Folksongs generally stand as one of the major tools used in the Yoruba society to imbibe the culture and social norms governing their society into the life of a Yoruba child. Looking at the analytical context of the folksongs used in this study, “Omo to ma iyare loju” Ewuro lagba Igi” “Iya ni wura” and Mo ja we gbegbe”; it is clear that the aphorism of these songs established some cultural values, norms and tradition of the Yoruba culture into the life of a child in the society. Through informal educational activities found in the Yoruba society and as well as other African culture; a child receives his/her first musical foundation from the contextual content of folksongs. Furthermore, a child receives first-hand indigenous educational knowledge through participatory act of that child in the folksong performance that is found in divers setting among the Yoruba. e.g ‘Ere osupa’(The moonlight play). Due to the nature of divers proverbial phrases found in the Yoruba folksongs, it gives clear understanding to contextual content of it aphorism.

REFERENCE
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