

AN ANALYSIS OF ORATURE AND SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS OF
SELECTED CHILDREN'S DEITIES AMONG YEWA-ÀWÓRÌ,
ÈGBÁ AND ÌJÈBÚ IN ÒGÙN STATE
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Abstracts

Several researches have been carried out by the previous researchers on Yorùbá deities, but very few of them focused on the deities specified for children in the Yorùbá traditional religion. This research shows the functional aspects of the Yorùbá children deities to the Yorùbá people in order to fill the vacuum created by the previous scholars. Three children deities known as Kòríkóto, Aláraagbó, and Ègbéò Ògbààgbà were selected from Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú in Ògùn State based on the prominence of the selected children's deities around the three areas. The study identified and characterized the forms and contents of the selected children's deities among Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú. The study analyzed the contents of the orature and the symbolic elements within the theoretical frameworks of Terry Eagleton's Semiotic Theory. All these were done with a view to explicating the contents and functions embedded in the selected children's deities. This study concluded that the symbolic elements, chanting and songs used in the worships of the selected children's deities among Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú revolved around the adherents' social lives, curing of bareness and other forms of diseases, teaching of moral values, inculcating humane qualities into the life of their children and transiting their children into the cult of adulthood. The study concluded that the symbolic elements such as statues, sacred stones, sets of wooden objects, white clothes, banana trees, sacred houses, children toys and other sacred antiquities found around the shrines serves different purposes and performs various functions in the lives of the devotees of the selected children's deities among Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú.

Keywords: Children's Deities, Òrìsà, Symbolic elements, Healings and Childbearing

Introduction

In the opinion of different scholars on òrìsà in Yorùbá religion, the

relationship between the Yorùbá people and Olódùmarè as the Supreme God is maintained through the worshipping of their òrìṣà as their intermediaries. Barber (1981:378-379) reiterated that:

The relationship between òrìṣà and their devotees is very much alike a relationship between big man and his followers. The big man is always big because of the regards of those who acknowledged him to be so. Therefore, Yorùbá people use various genres that are present in their folktales in praising their òrìṣà and their heroes, and this is the backbone of their religion. Oríkì is paramount to them all.

The Yorùbá people on the issues of religion through the worships of different òrìṣà which they believed in their existence, spirits and roles actually depicts the direct beliefs in the God Almighty. They see these òrìṣà as the messengers of the Olódùmarè in their cosmology. Ritual performances and different sacrifices are done together with the use of their orature such as chanting of the oríkì of the òrìṣà, different songs and most time full of dramatic performances. Some symbolic elements, artifacts and motifs are created to signify the images of the òrìṣà they worshipped. Lawal (1996:11) pointed out that: “Before examining the role of arts in òrìṣà worship, it is necessary to stress the fact that the visual arts often combine with poetry, music, and dance to create the right atmosphere for worship.

The major purpose of worshipping children's deities among the Yewa-Àwóri, Èḡbá and Ìjèḡbú could be traced not only to their religious beliefs but for healings in traditional methods. Ajíbádé (2006:197) opined that:

The cultural prototype of child delivery among the Yorubá depends so much on history, faith, environment, social structure and their sensory world. Yorùbá believe that there are physical and spiritual dimension to everything in their world and they hold the belief that there is a deep interaction between the terrestrial and celestial cosmos.

The devotees of children's deities among Yewa-Àwóri, Èḡbá and Ìjèḡbú has the same view with the opinion of Ajíbádé (2006:194) on birthing in their traditional systems. They do not see child delivery only on physical means but see it as the combinations of both spiritual and physiology. The actual choice of the devotees of the selected children's deities among Yewa-Àwóri, Èḡbá and Ìjèḡbú in their ritual performance is to cure bareness and children related diseases in their societies. This is the more reasons why there are propitiation sites of the children's deities in every homes. The most popular ones among the children's deities found in Yewa-Àwóri is Kórikóto and Èḡbá-Òḡbààgbà. There are Priests and Priestesses who leads the ritual performances and sacrifices during the worships of the òrìṣà, devoted for elders in Yewa-Àwóri, Èḡbá and Ìjèḡbú. This is also applicable in the children's deities devoted for their children for worshipping. The roles of Priests and Priestesses is to invokes

the spirits of the children's deities to descend on their Alter by chanting its praise poetry (Oríkì) and leads singing of different songs to be chorused by their members. In the cult of Kòríkóto, the ritual performances often accomplished with some motifs assigned to the shrines of the deity to signifies the functions and values of Kòríkóto in their society.

Children's deities are the agents of communication between earthly children through the heavenly children and Olódùmarè in Yorùbá belief. Among the Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú, there is a belief in the spirits of some mysterious children who they attached the propitiations of the unseen spirits. These children to the people of Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú has terrestrial powers to connect themselves with other children in heaven. This belief in the spirits of some children who dwells in heaven to watch over their members on earth emanated from the sense of “membership” known as Egbé Ògbààgbà as one of the children's deities of the Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú. Actually, modernization has almost eroded the traditional beliefs which hinges on the worships of children's deities in Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú land today, this does not deny the fact that, some devotees of these deities are still very much presents to defend their faiths on the worshipping of the children's deities. Ògunbà (1982:36) opined that:

In many communities in Yorùbá land, purification festivals have undergone changes. It is conceivable that in the distant past, prehab, a thousand years or more ago, they might have been mainly ritualistic, taking the form of symbolic action and gestures to expel evil from a community. Even today, there are a number of places where the symbolic structure remains very strong. But by and large it has been replaced by what can be properly called a festival of songs. This category of annual songs, distinct from festival sacrifice chants or dance chants, we have called 'Occasional Festival Songs'.

Ògunbà (1982:36) argued for the sustainability of the Yorùbá traditional religion in a modern society. It is not hidden to the Yorùbá traditional worshipers themselves today that, more than eighty percent of their children are accepting other religious worships at the expense of their traditional religion. This is as a results of popularizations and sponsorships of the external religion brought into their societies. Also, the sacredness in the traditional Yorùbá religion which restricted females and children from participating in the rituals does not help in propagating the beliefs of the traditional worshipers.

Statement of Thesis and Theoretical Frameworks

This study tends to reveal the motives behind the worships of children deities among the people of Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú in Ogun State. Research shows that ritual performances and sacrificial rites during the festivals of the children's deities in Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú land are meant for communications to the spirits of the heavenly children in the cults of children's deities. Different meanings

are attached to the functions of motifs found around the shrines of the deities and the use of various symbolic elements for sacrifices. In order to depict the deep meanings in the sense of these motifs and symbolic elements alongside the orature used in the worships of the deities, the aspect of Terry Eagleton's semiotics theory is adopted.

Eagleton (1988:) is not the founder of semiotics, but he is one of those who popularized the theory in the aspects of literary studies to analyzing text of literatures. Other scholars in the fields of semiotics includes Webster (2003:1194), Farsluid (2005:27), Stephen Mallarmé (1974:87), Paul Verlaine (1975:94) and Arthur Rimbaud (1977:108), some of who are religious scholars. In semiotics, motifs and symbolic elements including spoken and unspoken words are known as signs which could be used to depict meanings deeper than their actual forms. Also, comparison and inter-switch between signs and what they actually represented are very crucial to the semioticians. There are original notions behind every form of signs which may have different meanings in another context of use. A visible example from the cults of children's deities under this research is the whitish elements (efun/sèṣṣèfun) used as dots to create spots on the children during ritual performance and transitions into the cults of children's deities. This whitish elements (efun/sèṣṣèfun) in its natural form tends to be ordinary materials, but in semiotics, the context at which the material is found made it a sacred motif. Eagleton (1988:100-101) said that:

Pierce, distinguished between three basic kinds of signs. There was 'iconic', where the sign somehow resembled what it stood for (a photograph of a person for example); the 'identical' in which the sign is somehow associated with what it is a sign of (smoke with fire, spots with measles); and the 'symbolic' whereas with Saussure, the sign is only arbitrarily or conventionally linked with its referent.

Eagleton (1988:100-101) had confirmed that, the use of signs, tangible and non-tangible elements, antiquities, artifacts, body movements and other materials around us could be use in communication without the linguistics components. Semiotics can include signs, logos, gestures and direct linguistics components for communications. The connotations of signs, logos, gestures and direct linguistics components used in communications must be derived from their deep structure and not surface meanings in ordinary senses. This made it a semiotic ideology in Terry Eagleton School of thoughts. This same theory propounded as semiotics in the ideology of Eagleton has been adopted in this research for critical analysis of the contents found in the worships of selected children's deities in Yewa-Àwóri, Èḡbá and Ìjèbú land.

The Symbols of ÈḡbéeÒn Phenomenon in the Worships of Children Deities

It is a great belief in Yorùbá land general that individual creatures, mostly human beings came to existence through their spiritual entity. The abode symbolically derived from womb of a pregnant women where fetus developed from some spermatozoa into a baby is seen as heaven in Yorùbá cosmos. This journey from

heaven to the earth through the womb of pregnant women are not mere a journey humor in the belief of the Yorùbá people. This belief in the symbolical journey of each person who passes through the womb of a pregnant woman transforms into the ideologies behind spiritual attachments to childbirths. Regardless of the modern religion around Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú land, the spirituality attached to one selves are not neglected. In simple sense, it appears in our supplication to the Olódùmarè to safe our head-hood which depicts the highest spirit guiding the activities of individuals. This head-hood phenomenon goes deeply into knowing the past, presents and the future of every individual, if direct process is taken traditionally in Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú land.

In the cult of children's deities among Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú, there are symbols assigned to the shrines of the deities which show the connections between the unseen spirits and the devotees of the deities. These symbols and signs are directed to the communication between the devotees and the unseen spirits (òrìsà) in the cult of children deities. The major spirits in the cults of Aláráagbó, Kórikóto and Egbéògbàagbà are the images representing the groups or members of the societies living in heaven. The below images directly symbolizes each of the Groups or Members of the Societies on earth and in the heaven thus:



Fig. 1: The Images of the Nine Heavenly Chiefs in the Cults of Aláráagbó at the Shrine of Aláráagbó in Yewa-Àwóri (Image taken by the researcher dated 15-09-2020)

The above images symbolize the spiritual connection between the devotees and the children's deities in Yewa-Àwóri. These nine wooden objects are replica of the powerful High Chiefs who heals the earthly children directly from heaven without much delays once they are consulted. The spiritual attachment to these images by the devotees hinges solely on the believe that, all members of the Aláráagbá worships on earth are under the controls of the Nine Chiefs in heaven. The titles of these High

Chiefs are as follows:

- 1.) Ìyálóde
- 2.) Ajagùnnà
- 3.) ? fún Ajagùnnà
- 4.) Òsì Ajagùnnà
- 5.) Ajagaàsèò
- 6.) Òsì Ìyálóde (Ìràwòṣṣ gbéṣṣ)
- 7.) Òsùpá-Ayé
- 8.) Bùkúù
- 9.) Kúláàtàn

The second images below are the symbols of the members of Alaráagbó on earth thus:



Fig. 2: The Images of the Nine Earthly Chiefs in the Cults of Alaráagbó at the Shrine of Alaráagbó in Yewa-Àwóri (Image taken by the researcher dated 15-09-2020)

Membership (Eḡbéṣṣ) is the souls of worship for the efficacies of the sacrifices and any ritual performed to the children's deities. To be in a state of perfect health, each Members of children's deities are conditioned to follow the norms and ethics of their memberships as rules and regulations must have been pronounced on them

before initiating them into the cults of children's deities. This rules and regulations guide individual member of the society on the right things to do and curbing them from going against the wish of the society. No member (s) do at will, sacrifices, ritual performances, social relationships or marital life without proper considerations for the wishes of the children's deities. There is a strong belief on these aspects of following the rules and the wishes of membership (Ègbé) in the cults of children's deities. If any of their members faces challenges or bitter-pills of life, she/he must have go against the rules of membership (Ègbé).

In the worship of Kòrikóto as one of the selected children's deities for this study, there is a phenomenon known as Èù Ègbé which simply mean the accrued materials from the wealth of the devotees to make a sacrificial to the deity. In any state of hardships, it is believed that once accrued materials (Èù Ègbé) is scarified to the deities, such member of Kòrikóto Society must be relieved of his or her hardship. The loads called accrued materials (Èù Ègbé) would be packed into a big calabash, which contains different fruits, children menus like sweet, biscuits, àádùn, sugar canes, sugar and honey for the sacrifices. The below image explains much of these accrued materials (Èù Ègbé) symbolically:



Fig. 3: The Images of the Accrued Materials (Èù Ègbé) in the Cults of Kòrikóto at the Shrine of Kòrikóto in Ègbá (Image taken by the researcher dated 15-09-2021)

The below text depicts how the contents and themes of the children's deities appears in the orature used in the worships of the deities. This is a song from the Kòrikóto Groups at the Shrine of Kòrikóto in Ègbá. The song in its contents corroborates the functions of Accrued Materials (? rù ? gbéè) thus:

(**Lílé:** Ìyáa Jókòó ín ta beèbeò
Ègbè: Aa máa lá beèbeò
Lílé: Ìyáa Féèrù ín ta beèbeò
Ègbè: Aa mín la lá beèbeò
Lílé: Eṣàríyáá
Ègbè: Aín sòṣààyà Egbéèòò
Lílé: Eṣàríyáá
Ègbè: Aín sòṣààyà Egbéèòò
Lílé: Eṣàríyáá lólí oo
Ègbè: Aàà!!!
 Àwa ín sòṣààyà Egbéèòò
Lílé: Eṣàríyáá
Ègbè: Aín sòṣààyà Egbéèòò)

Lead: Ìyáa Jókòó is selling peppermints
Chorus: I will look peppermints
Lead: Ìyáa Féèru is selling peppermints
Chorus: We want to go and lick peppermints
Lead: Let us go on entertainments
Chorus: We are on humors for our Members
Lead: Let us go on entertainments
Chorus: We are on humors for our Members
Lead: Let us go on entertainment today
Chorus: Ah!
 We are on humors for our Members
Lead: Let us go on entertainments
Chorus: We are on humors for our Members

As they mentioned different materials found in the accrued materials (? rù ? gbéè) in the above text, it symbolically signifies the interest attached to these materials in the cults of children's deities. ? gbéèÒùn therefore stands to mean the two sets of the people in the children's deities; the Earthily Members and the Heavenly Members. The Heavenly Members in the cults of children's deities are more powerful than their Earthily Members. The two forces come together to form one as ? gbéèÒùn in the worships of children's deities around Yewa-Àwòrì, Ègbá and Ìjèbú.

Motifs of Child-Bearing in the Cults of Children Deities

To the Yorùbá people factually, all human problems, especially those of barrenness, are solvable through the children's deities they worshipped. The greatest

In the spiritual aspect of the selected children's deities among Yewa-Àwòrì, Èḡbá and Ìjèḡú, the devotees of the various deities often doubled as Traditional Birth Attendance (TBA) as recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO). The functions of these TBAs is to attend to the pregnant women for prenatal, antenatal, and postnatal within their community. Ajíbáde (2004:121) once said that:

In reality, the knowledge of birthing attendant is not limited or restricted to the known professionals. Almost every mother in the Yorùbá traditional society possesses some knowledge of birthing. In fact, female children are usually acquainted with birthing and nursing education as soon as they grow up.

The essence of childbearing in Yorùbá traditional society is inevitable as they see bareness as negative, stigma and something awkward. Taking the symbolical practical of the above image into consideration, it signifies the joy in childbearing. This appears in the load carried by the young lady to carry the load and dances round the shrine of ÈḡbéòḠbààgbà with happiness. This is to show that, they are appreciating the children's deities for blessing them with babies and to request for more fruitful life. In the load carried by the young lady in the above picture, we can see that it is full of the baby's toy and other nursing mothers' properties. These simply signifies the essence to which the devotees of children's deities attached importance to childbearing. The following song also depicts the importance of childbearing in the cult of children's deities:

Lílé: Ìràwé mòḡn gbá lójú Èḡbéòḡ
 Ìràwé mòḡn gbá lójú Èḡbéòḡ
 Ìràwé mòḡn gbá lójú Èḡbéòḡ
Èḡbè: Kéḡbéḡḡ fúli lómù
 Ìràwé mòḡn gbá lójú Èḡbéòḡ
(Lead: I am sweeping dirties at the shrine of Èḡbéò
 I am sweeping dirties at the shrine of Èḡbéò
 I am sweeping dirties at the shrine of Èḡbéò
Chorus: So that Èḡbéòḡ give me a child
 I am sweeping dirties at the shrine of Èḡbéòḡ

It shows from the above songs that there is a supernatural power in the children's deity (ÈḡbéòḠbààgbà) being appraised and eulogized in the song. They believed that, ÈḡbéòḠbààgbà is capable of solving their problems of bareness. Procreation is of a great concern to the Yorùbá people to the extent that if it is getting longer for a newly married couple to have a child, they will contact the devotees of these children's deities to assist them. In that regards, sacrifice would be made to the deity with a strong belief that such couple would bear children. Dancing and cleaning the shrine of orisà ÈḡbéòḠbààgbà as shown in the above song depicted the faith and

fates of the devotees of the *orìsà* who can bless them with a child. Apart from this, it is the tradition of the Yorùbá people generally for women to dance with their child as a form of lulling whenever they carried them. Therefore, with strong faith in *orìsà* ÈgbéǸǸgbààgbà who they believed that would bless them with a child whenever a sacrifice is made with such ritual performances, they don't hesitate to yield to the advice of the priests or priestesses. This led to the dancing around the shrine and cleaning of the place of worships by devotees of this children's deity.

Conclusion

Yorùbá people generally believed that God is a superior King that sent some *orìsà* to serve as intermediary between them. They fear God as the Almighty that no one goes to Him directly for request. The respect accord to the God by the Yorùbá people led to the worships of the *orìsà* sent to them. This research has been able to look into the lives of the devotees of the three selected children's deities in Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú from their religion perspectives. It is seen from this discussion that Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú specially separated some deities for their children on the purpose of healing them and building them up with their societal norms and ethics embedded in religious views.

In this research, one holds that children in Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú worshiped the deities devoted for them by the elders of their societies to belonging to the spiritual groups individually in order to acquire the celestial powers in such society. Also, there are mysterious ones amongst these children who transit naturally into the cult of the deities devoted for them in Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú land. The motifs around the shrines of each of the children's deities signifies the symbols of communication between the devotees and the *orìsà* they worshipped. In Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú, each of the images and art designs at the shrines of the *orìsà* coupled with their orature tends to mean the originally prepared works to represent the images of the children's deities. There are other materials meant for sacrifices to the children's deities which also serves different purposes in their worships. The main purpose of worshipping the children's deities in Yewa-Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú is deduced to childbearing and healings of their sick child spiritually.

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The study is sponsored by TETFUND Institution Based Research Grant (IBR)