

**SOCIO-POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN CONTEMPORARY YORÙBÁ WRITTEN
POETRY: A SOCIO-SEMIOTIC APPRAISAL OF ÀJÀNÀKÚ'S *ORIN EWÚRO* AND
OLÚNLÁDÉ'S *EWÌ ÌGBÀLÓDÉ***

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Abstract

Nigeria's political and social experience has been the main issue that have attracted the attention of the Yorùbá poetry writers in the recent time. This study examined how two poets used their texts to accentuate their views on different political and social events in the country. The poems for the analysis were randomly selected from Àjànàkú's *Orin Ewúro* (1998) and Olúnládé's *Ewì Ìgbàlódé* (2002) and discussed within the theoretical framework of socio-semiotics. This entailed employing context of situation (that is, field, tenor and mode of discourse) and context of culture. Among the findings in the work were that the poets' field of discourse centred on the insensitivity of the political leaders to the problem of the poor, horrible experience of Nigerians during the military regime, bribery and corruption among law enforcement agents and the generality of the people. The tenor of discourse portrayed hatred and unfriendliness between the political leaders and the masses. The mode of discourse was characterized by highly rhetorical confrontational, incantatory expressions laced with satirical metaphorical devices and parallelism. The context of culture exhibited the use of folktale song and cultural symbols. The study concluded that the deployment of both the contexts of situation and of culture to analyse the poems paved way for an intensive study of Yorùbá written poetry, thereby making their meaning embellishments more readily accessible.

1. Introduction

There are few critical works on Yorùbá written poetry which address political and social discourse. Among these are Fólórúnṣọ́ (1989), Adéyẹmí (2001), Adéjùmò (2005) and Olújìnmí (2005). Fólórúnṣọ́ (1989, pp. 194-209) examines semiotic features in Ọlábímtán's poems. He employs a part of Peirce's classification of signs, i.e. icon, index and symbol, and submits that out of these three signs, it is only the symbol that he believes is prominent in Yorùbá literature. Thus, he uses symbol as a semiotic tool in analyzing Ọlábímtán's poems in *Àádọta Àròfò*, especially in “Òtító pẹ̀lú Èké”, “Èní daḗ”, “Ìjà Ìlara” and “Ìjà Ọ̀ṣùpá pẹ̀lú Oòrùn”. Fólórúnṣọ́ (1989) opines that Ọlábímtán wrote these poems on the political intrigue between the leader of the party in control of the old Western Nigeria Government and his deputy between 1960 and 1966. These poems are couched in imagery and symbols. For example, in “Òtító pẹ̀lú Èké” he refers to the leader of the party as ‘Òtító’ (The truth), while his deputy is ‘Èké’ (Falsehood). Similarly, in “Ìjà Ọ̀ṣùpá pẹ̀lú Oòrùn”, the poet employs the symbols ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ to represent both the leader and his deputy. As remarked by Fólórúnṣọ́ (1998, p. 97), the whole account is a scene of an eclipse which in Yorùbá mythology is a fight between two heavenly bodies – the sun and the moon. However, in the real sense, the strife between the two leaders under reference and which the eclipse symbolizes, sets in motion a chain of events that culminated in the first military coup in Nigeria on January 13, 1966. The ‘triumph’ of the sun over the moon in the poem, as reasoned by Fólórúnṣọ́ (1998, p. 98), is perhaps the death of the deputy leader of the party, Chief S.L. Akíntólá in the military coup of January 13, 1966; and the subsequent release of the leader of the party, Chief Ọbáfẹmí Awólówò from prison in August, 1966. Fólórúnṣọ́'s (1989) adoption of semiotics as one of the tools for the study makes the work important to our present study which analyzes selected poems from a socio-semiotic perspective. Another important work worthy of review is that of Adéyẹmí (2001), which investigates political commitment and poetic utterances in Jíbólá Abíọdún's *Àlọ n lọ...Ewì*. Adéyẹmí observes that the text contains forty-three poems out of which fifteen are devoted to Nigerian politics under the Military. The fifteen political poems in the collection are the focus of his critical analysis. Adéyẹmí (2001, p. 82) emphasizes that the poet is opposed to the culture of silence which pervades the society. People keep mute and remain silent under the tyrannical rule of the Military. Thus, the poet negates the option of muteness and proposes a revolutionary reaction. He charges the masses to react and not mind the consequences. The poet, according to Adéyẹmí (2001, p. 83), maintains that if the masses are afraid because of guns, the end result is disastrous. He thus describes Jíbólá Abíọdún as a committed poet in the

progressive and revolutionary camp. However, Adéyemí (2001, pp. 90-91) identifies some weaknesses in the collection, among which is the title, *Àlọ n lọ...Ewì*. He comments that the title is odd considering that it is an uncompleted Yoruba proverb. He, therefore, suggests “*Àlọ n lọ*”, which will attract readers, and it is the readers’ responsibility to find out what is in the book. One agrees with Adéyemí (2001, p. 90) on this position. Another observation raised by Adéyemí that attracts our attention is the poet’s advocacy for metaphysical or magical means to deal with the Military. Adéyemí condemns this option in its totality; instead, he suggests the following underlined option:

We are in the age of scientific empiricism, an age of critical consciousness, an age of computer, an age of rational approach to issues with vigorous prayer...What we think we need is mass mobilization, proper political education for all and sundry which will eventually lead to mass opposition against Military coups in Nigeria instead of invoking magical power on them (Adéyemí, 2001, p. 91).

It is noteworthy that the option of prayer, as suggested by Adéyemí, must have brought the masses out of the military rule. God’s intervention must have brought about the mysterious death of the late military despot, General Sanni Abacha, an incident that facilitated the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria on May 29, 1999.

Another work that relates to our study is that of Adéjùmò (2005) which appraises Àtàrí Àjànàkú’s *Orin Ewúro*. Adéjùmò analyses some of the poems in the text using the sociological approach. Adéjùmò claims that the poet, in an attempt to comment on issues in *Orin Ewúro*, makes use of satire as one of its weapons. She notes that in both the classical and African satire, invective is one of the weapons satirists employ to wage verbal attack on their target. Hence, the use of invective is prominent in Àtàrí Àjànàkú’s verbal ‘missiles’ at the ruling class and people who abuse their leadership position at all levels of the society. In other words, the poet, according to Adéjùmò (2005, pp. 38-39), advocates for a change of power and also predicts a reversal of fortune for looters of the people’s wealth. There will be a tragic end of all evil doers and there will definitely be retributive justice. Adéjùmò stresses that to show the seriousness of the desire to see a change of power as a satirist, the poet calls on the gods to reject the ruling class. On the other hand, the poet suggests the probable physical solution out of lack and poverty to the masses. He directly attacks the idea that robbing the ruling class by the masses,

or begging, is the solution to oppression. The way out of poverty and oppression is hard work (Adéjùmò, 2005, p. 42).

Adéjùmò succeeds in appraising the poems in *Orin Ewúro*, but fails to give her own judgement on the work. It would seem that she agrees with everything the poet says. If her work is compared with Adéyemí's (2001) work, they are similar, except in the area of theoretical framework. Adéyemí points out the weaknesses in his data and also suggests some solutions. Another weakness noticed in Adéjùmò's work is its structureless pattern. The whole work runs in prosaic form from the beginning to the end, without any sub-heading. It should have been divided into sections to make it logical and scholarly.

Another author whose work is relevant to this study is Olújìnmí, (2005, pp. 101-117) who examines the works of two female authors (Adébòwálé and Adéjùmò) and assesses the image of the woman in their works. He is of the opinion that male writers, who promote the experiences and interest of men over women alongside the patriarchal school of thought, had dominated Yorùbá literature, hence the need for women writers to rise up to redeem the image of the woman created by male writers. Olújìnmí (2005, p. 115) submits that the authors are able to portray the woman through their personal and creative experiences as a regenerative symbol of motherhood, procreator and the child-bearer. The woman is also depicted as a nurturer, comforter and homemaker. Olújìnmí says further that the woman is portrayed as sustainer, helper, supporter and a faithful wife. She is a defender, protector and guardian of both her husband and children. The woman also possesses the image of a precious jewel, an indispensable person and that of a deity, who deserves to be worshipped.

On the contrary, as observed by Olújìnmí (2005), Adébòwálé and Adéjùmò did not conceal the frailties of their fellow women (p. 101) as women who are wolves in sheepskin among the flock are also painted. There are women whose portraits suggest them as anti-womanists. They are the women who are promiscuous, child-abusers, indolent and abortionists (p. 115). However, this present study takes a departure from the earlier studies by employing a socio-semiotic approach in examining socio-political discourse in Àjànàkú's *Orin Ewúro* and Olúnládé's *Ewì Ìgbàlódé*.

2. Theoretical Framework

The socio-semiotic approach is the framework adopted for this study. Socio-semiotics is a branch of the field of semiotics which investigates human signifying practices in specific social and cultural circumstances, and which tries to explain meaning-making as a social practice. It expands on Saussure's founding insights by exploring the implications of the fact that the "codes" of language and communication are formed by social processes (Wikipedia, 2010). Social semiotics is thus the study of the social dimensions of meaning, and of the power of human processes of signification and interpretation (known as semiosis) in shaping individuals and societies. Social semiotics focuses on social meaning-making practices of all types, whether visual, verbal or aural in nature (Thibault, 1991). Social semiotics, as noted by Hodge and Kress (1988), can include the study of how people design and interpret meanings, the study of texts, and the study of how semiotic systems are shaped by social interests and ideologies, and how they are adapted as society changes. The main task of social semiotics is to develop analytical and theoretical frameworks which can explain meaning-making in a social context (Thibault, 1991). Social semiotics is currently extending this general framework beyond its linguistic origins to account for the growing importance of sound and visual images, and how modes of communication are combined in both traditional and digital media (Kress and Leeuwen, 1996), thus approaching semiotics of culture (Randviir, 2004).

Harris (2006) posits that socio-semiotics is an approach inspired by Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, which emphasizes the importance of context, both context of situation and context of culture, in reconstructing the meaning of a text. The socio-semiotic approach views language as the embodiment of the social process in a society. This view consequently shows that context is very important in the understanding and interpretation of a text. All texts written in language are context dependent. There is no text which can stand alone. Therefore, to understand a text, the context of the text must be reconstructed.

The most important part of the socio-semiotic approach is the dynamics of the interrelation of language and social context; which ensures that, in the micro-encounters of everyday life where meanings are exchanged, language not only facilitates and supports other modes of social action that constitute its environment, but it also actively creates an environment of its own, so making possible all the imaginative modes of meaning. Context plays a part in

determining what we say; and what we say plays a part in determining the context (Halliday, 1978, p. 3).

The level of context, therefore, is the phenomenon which determines the ‘contextualization’ of a text. That is, any text will be principally governed by any one of the levels of context, context of situation, context of text and context of culture. The selection of linguistic structure depends on the predominating level of context, which in turn is strongly motivated by language medium (Leckie-Tarry, 1995, p. 3).

2.1 Context of Situation

The context of situation is the immediate environment in which a text is actually functioning. This notion is used to explain why certain things have been said or written on this particular occasion, and what else might have been said or written that was not.

The term ‘context of situation’ originated from the anthropologist Malinowsky in his essay “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages” (1923/1935 cited by Halliday and Hasan, 1989, p. 5). To Malinowsky, language usage has a context. The ‘textual’ features enable the discourse to cohere not only with itself but also with its context of situation. He, therefore, analysed the context of situation into three components, corresponding to the three metafunctions. These components serve to interpret the social context of a text, the environment in which meanings are being exchanged. The three components are the field, tenor and mode of discourse.

These are certain principles that we can use for choosing an appropriate way of describing the context of a situation of a text. Therefore, in this study, Malinowski’s three components of interpreting the social context of texts are employed because they are all-encompassing for and relevant to our analysis.

2.2 Field, Tenor, and Mode of Discourse

Field is the total event in which the text is functioning, referring to inherent features of the situation and the events taking place with the emphasis on institutional areas of activity and function. The physical setting and its inherent features and activities, participants, world

knowledge and semantic domain constitute both variable and invariable elements of the field of discourse (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p. 22)

Arena/activities refers particularly to the locations of the interaction, both in terms of their inherent features, and in terms of the social institutions which determine them. The arena and the activities which take place are the most basic elements of context, motivating the possible range of selections in other elements of field, and in elements of tenor (Leckie-Tarry, 1995, p. 36). "Participants," according to Leckie-Tarry, refers to inherent features of the participants, that is, their physical and mental attributes and the knowledge they bring to bear on the setting and events. Such attributes include characteristics such as race, gender, class, wealth, age, appearance, intelligence, cognitive and educational level, occupation, etc., and also the background knowledge which the participants bring to bear on the situation: cultural knowledge, including intertextual knowledge, linguistic knowledge, situational knowledge and textual knowledge.

Semantic domain refers to the broad domain, the general subject matter or content of the specific language event. The two variables of arena and participant will have a considerable predetermining effect on semantic domain. The arena/activities will tend to narrow the range of possible events/subject matters, which will be further constrained by the participants.

Tenor refers to the participant in the social event, the characteristics of the participant, the status as well as the social role which he/she holds (Harris, 2006, p. 3). Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 22) define tenor as "the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary among the participants". The elements of the category of tenor are related to and motivated by aspects of field. While field refers to the inherent characteristics of the situation, tenor refers to the non-inherent features – elements which vary according to the social interactions taking place. Wales (2001, p. 388) posits that tenor involves the relationships between participants in the situation, their roles and status. This will affect the kind of language chosen, particularly in respect of the degree of formality. Formality, according to Leckie-Tarry (1995, p. 39), refers to the degree of formality associated with activity, particularly from the degree of institutionalization involved. Where settings are highly institutionalized, a higher degree of formality will tend to prevail. Where the institution involved is more in the nature of a social practice rather than a formally constituted institution within the society, levels of formality will tend to be lower. It is apparent that the field has a primary influence on this tenor variable; however, the interaction of all field variables constrains the degree of formality. Levels of formality are motivated by the schematized background knowledge of the participants derived from the context of culture, that is

knowledge of cultural mores which establish a relationship between areas of interaction, types of participants and semantic domains to levels of formality, and situational knowledge as to role assignment (Leckie-Tarry, 1995, pp. 39-40). Mode refers to what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organization of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?) and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic, and the like (Halliday and Hasan, 1989, p. 12).

2.3 *Context of Culture*

The context of culture is a large and complex knowledge system spread among the various members of a particular culture, and hence consisting of many sets of knowledge, including, in particular, the institutional and ideological. In any given interaction, that is, a particular context of situation, the context of culture is accessed by means of the knowledge systems which the various participants bring to bear on the situation, where the knowledge is triggered by aspects of the context of situation.

Halliday and Hasan (1989, p. 46) posit that the context of situation, however, is only the immediate environment. There is also a broader background against which the text has to be interpreted: its context of culture. Any actual context of situation, the particular configuration of field, tenor, and mode that has brought a text into being, is not just a random jumble of features but a totality – a package of things that typically go together in the culture. People do these things on these occasions and attach these meanings and values to them: this is what a culture is. All these factors constitute the context of culture, and they determine, collectively, the way the text is interpreted in its context of situation. It is helpful to build in some indication of the cultural background, and the assumptions that have to be made if the text is to be interpreted in the way poets intend.

3 **Analysis of Data and Discussion**

3.1 *Socio-political discourse in Àjànàkú's Orin Ewúro (The bitter Songs)*

Orin Ewúro is written by Àtàrí Àjànàkú. The text contains twenty-six poems and four were randomly selected for analysis. The four poems selected from Orin Ewúro are “Níbo Là N

Rè?” (Where are we heading for?), “Ìjankúkujàn” (folktale song), “È fahán Pere Mèkúnnù” (Speak good of poor) and “Àdáàkó Àjọ” (non-refundable contribution).

Field of Discourse

The field of discourse of “Níbo Là N Rè?” (Where are we heading for?) is the confused state of Nigeria’s socio-political condition. The arena the poet refers to as the location of interaction is Nigeria. The participants are the political leaders and the masses who constitute the victims of bad leadership. The poet expresses concern on the pitiable condition which the crop of Nigerian leadership has turned the country to. The idea is presented in the rhetorical questions as thus:

Níbo layé dorí kọ?
 Níbo là n rè?
 Níbo layé dorí kọ?
 È máa gbọ o
 Níbo là n rè ò?...
 Ìyà yí mà pọ o eee
 Èyí mà le ooo... (p. 12)

(Where is the world heading for?
 Where are we going?
 Where is the world heading for?
 Listen to me
 Where are we heading for?...
 This suffering is much
 It is so difficult...)

The subject matter of the poem is a revelation of the poet’s state of mind towards the hardship being expressed by the masses. In “Ìjankúkujàn” (folktale song), a similar field of discourse is observed:

Ló bá òjankúkujàn
 Ìjankúkujàn
 Mo ló òjankúkujàn
 Ìjankúkujàn

Kí ló janmọlọya mọlẹ níjànkujàn

Ìjànkúkujàn

Tápá fi di kánndá

Ìjànkúkujàn

Tésè fi di kọndọ

Ìjànkúkujàn

Téyìn fi di gulu

Ìjànkúkujàn... (p. 59)

(It has turned absurd

Ìjànkúkujàn

I say, it has turned absurd

Ìjànkúkujàn

What was it that defeated the child of 'ọlọya'

Ìjànkúkujàn

That made his arm broken

Ìjànkúkujàn

That made his leg dislocated

Ìjànkúkujàn

That made his back bent

Ìjànkúkujàn...)

The extract above refers to how the socio-economic system of the country had collapsed, and its citizenry helpless. In the same vein, “È fahán Pere Mèkúnnù” (Speak good of the poor) creates a similar semantic domain of suffering being experienced by the poor masses. The two groups of participants in the poem are the poor masses and the insensitive leaders.

Apart from political issues that are generally discussed in Àjànàkú's collections, there are other social vices which the poet laments. Such thematic preoccupations are bribery and corruption, which have continued to threaten the continuous existence of Nigeria. The 'cancerworm', called corruption, has eaten deep into the fabric of all aspects of the society. Àjànàkù espouses this idea in “Àdààkó Àjọ” (non-refundable contribution). The degree of corruption among the Nigerian law enforcement agents that are entrusted with the responsibilities of protecting the lives and properties of the citizens, is emphasized. These

agents have turned themselves into road side ‘tax collectors’ extorting money from the motorists. Àjànàkú puts it in this way:

Awakò lójú pópó
 È kú àmúmọra
 È kúu sùúrù
 Nítorí àjọ àdáàkó
 Tẹ ẹ n dá fáláṣọ ọfọ níronà:
 Àjọ tipátipá
 Àjọ àfẹlẹgbà
 Bí ọ tilẹ tóndá lórùn (p. 41)

(Motorists
 What perseverance
 What patience
 For the non-refundable contribution
 That you always pay to the men
 in mourning uniform along the roads:
 A forceful contribution
 That the contributors are not pleased with).

This extract captures the atrocities committed by the law enforcement agents, especially the police, on the Nigerian roads. The poet thus equates them with armed robbers on the highways

Àtawọn, àtìgára
 Tó n fòru dúdú bojú dánà, ẹgbara (p. 41)

(They, and the armed robbers
 Who rob in the night, are same)

According to the poet, the police are not alone in the practice. Other law enforcement agents such as mobile police, soldiers, and the road safety officers are inclusive. He says:

Naira márùn-ún kò tó mùkọ
 Mẹwàá ni taláṣọ dúdú lásán
 Múrí ni tapani-má-rosẹ...
 Bó o bá róníkakí láàrin wọn

Mò pé Wàsóbìà lo ó fi jura.
 Májámájá pàá ò kèrè
 Irúkìírú ni gbogbo wọn...(p. 42)

(Five naira is worthless
 It is ten naira for the police
 Twenty naira for the mobile police
 If you sight soldiers among them
 Be sure that you will part with fifty naira
 Road safety officers also are not left behind
 They are all same)

The subject matter of the poem is a strong condemnation of the gross indiscipline and corruption among the officers.

Tenor of Discourse

The social relations in “Níbo Là N Rè?” is confrontational and directed at corrupt leaders who have squandered the resources that are meant for the well-being of the generality of the people. The poet writes that:

È yígbà padà
 Omàsùwà Onílẹ̀ẹ̀wàrà
 Káyé lè dorí kobi ire
 Ká wáá máa gòkè... (p. 15)

(Turn a new leaf
 You leaders of this country
 So that we can have a right direction
 And be progressive...)

Similarly, the social relations highlighted in “È fahán Pere Mèkúnnù” is an indication of mutual hatred between the two classes. This is why the poet warns that if these leaders fail to think of better life for the masses, the consequence may be grave. Considering the field of discourse espoused in “Àdààkó Àjo”, the corresponding tenor of discourse is predictable. This

poem castigates the corrupt law enforcement agents who have become thorns in the flesh of the motorists on the highways. The kind of interpersonal relationship that an extract like this would generate, especially between the subjects (Police and their accomplices) and the readers (public), would be influenced by such images as ‘aláṣọ dúdú’ (policemen), ‘apani-má-rosẹ’ (mobile police), ‘oníkakí’ (soldiers), and ‘májámájá’ (road safety officers). The participants’ social relations in these lines is an indication of mutual hatred between the corrupt law enforcement officers and the public.

Mode of Discourse

Owing to the fact that “Níbo Là N Rẹ” is directed towards bad leadership, the rhetorical mode is inciting (?). At a point, the poet charges the oppressed to hold their destinies in their hands and fight for their rights. The idea is presented thus:

Nítorí ìgbà ò lọ bí òréré;
 Ìyà yí kò lè tọ lọ bí ọpá ìbọn
 Àmọ ọ́ ọ, Iṣẹ Alátíṣe ni
 Kálátíṣe ó fọwọ ara rẹ
 Tún gèlè orí ara rẹ wé o
 Kó fẹnu ara rẹ ko iwọ... (p. 14)

(No condition is permanent
 This suffering cannot last for ever
 However, it is one’s own determination
 One should determine
 To hold one’s destiny
 And resist oppression...)

The poet is not well disposed to bad leadership and its attendant hardship, hence his call for change. He charges the masses thus “Kálátíṣe ó fọwọ ara rẹ tún gèlè orí ara rẹ wé o,” meaning that the masses should not keep quiet or mute; rather, they should stand up and challenge the oppressors of the land. The rhetorical mode in “Ìjankúkujàn” is satirical – condemning the insensitivity on the part of the leaders which characterizes the poor state of the country. For instance, a picture of a forty year old person, who is still a toddler, is drawn to depict Nigeria at forty which still remained undeveloped in the following:

Omọ ogójì odún
 Ìjankúkujàn
 Tí kò lé dá mùkọ
 Ìjankúkujàn
 Tí kò lé dá gbésẹ̀
 Ìjankúkujàn
 Tó wá ya àràrá kalẹ̀
 Ìjankúkujàn... (p. 60)

(A forty year old ‘child’
 Ìjankúkujàn
 Who cannot feed himself
 Ìjankúkujàn
 Who cannot walk
 Ìjankúkujàn
 Has eventually become a dwarf
 Ìjankúkujàn...)

This is intended to paint a picture of a failed state which after forty years of independence could not sustain itself. The zig-zag graphological structure of the poem is indicative of the situation of the country.

The mode of discourse i.e., rhetorical mode in “È fahán Pere Mèkúnnù” is incantatory. At certain points, invocative and incantatory apparatus are used as radical ways of achieving the ultimate goal of having a better life for the masses as captured in the following extract.

Àmọ́ bó ẹ̀ tawọ̀n ọ̀jẹ̀lú
 Àwọ̀n afigègè ré báá sí lára mèkúnnù:
 Kílẹ̀ wọ̀n ó gbóná girigiri
 Kẹ̀ẹ̀dẹ̀ wọ̀n ó pọ̀ pọ̀ gùdùgùdù.
 Bó ẹ̀ tawọ̀n agbórígbẹ̀-dìgára ilẹ̀ yìí
 Tí wọ̀n n fẹ̀ké ẹ̀tẹ̀tẹ̀
 Tí wọ̀n n fÀlàbá wòDòwú:
 Èrè lobìnrin n jẹ̀ lábọ̀ ọ̀jà
 Èrè tó tó ilọ̀po mẹ̀wáá
 Báá sí ẹ̀ran Àlàbá tẹ̀ ẹ̀ ré kéDòwú;

Lonílé oríta ó ʃu sẹ̀èdẹ̀ tẹ̀yin...(p. 24)

(In respect to the looters

Those siphoning the money meant for the masses:

May their homes be terribly hot

May calamities visit them and their families.

The bad leaders of this country

Who are governing with lies

Who are cheating on others

Profits abound for women on return from market

Profits in ten folds

The portion of Àlàbá's meat you gave to Ìdòwú

Will 'èṣù' (Yorùbá god of justice) repay you

and your household)

The poet employs the euphemism “òjẹ̀lú” (treasury looters) to replace “òṣẹ̀lú” (politicians) as they are commonly called. This device is deliberately used to bring the corrupt politicians to a state of disrepute. He invokes the spirit of “onílé oríta” (èṣù, Yorùbá god of justice) to deal with the treasury looters and their household. Furthermore, the mode of discourse in “Àdààkó Àjọ” is both accusative and confrontational. Since the trust of the common citizens in the law enforcement agent that is supposed to defend and protect them has been dashed, the poet is poised with leaving no stone unturned in expressing his view in the following lines:

Ìdigunjalè kan ò jùyí

Gbogbo yin ló yẹ̀ kò fẹ̀yìn tàgbá.

Àtògá tó wà nínú oyé

Àtòmọ̀ọ̀ṣẹ̀ tí n bẹ̀ nínú òdòrùn

Alágbèédá ni gbogbo yin porogodo;

Gbogbo yín ló tọ̀ kó ẹ̀wà.

Àmọ̀, níbo lagbófinró òhún tún kù sí?

Ta ló tún lè múrúu wọ̀n jófin? (p.42)

(There is no armed robbery that is greater than this

You are all supposed to face the firing squad

Both superior officers seated in the air-
 conditioned offices
 And the subordinate ones standing in the sun
 You are all thieves
 You are all supposed to be imprisoned.
 But, where can the so-called law enforcement
 agent be found?
 Who can bring such offenders to justice?)

The rhetorical questions raised in the last two lines portend hopelessness about the present crop of Nigerian law enforcement agents. The poet is desirous of having a society where the people would handle the issue of their security themselves and not rely on the law enforcement agents.

He presents this in the following as:

Àwa ló yẹ́ ká ọ́sara gírí
 Ká jára gbà
 Lówọ́ jẹ́gúdú-jẹ́rá...
 Agbófinró kan kò sí
 Tó ju ará ìlú lọ...
 Onínú funfun ló lè gbófin ró o jàre,
 Kí ọ́e dánàdánà (p. 42)

(We have to brace up
 And liberate ourselves
 From the corrupt agents...
 There is no law enforcement agent
 That is greater than the people themselves...
 It is a plain-hearted person that can enforce laws
 Not armed robbers).

Context of Culture

The context of culture deployed in the poem “Ìjankúkujàn” (folktale song) is located in one of the Yorùbá folktales which has a musical refrain, “àlùjannjánkújan”. The folktale is centred on ajá (dog) and other animals. There was a severe famine in the land which made all

animals to agree that they kill their parents, one after the other for food. After this arrangement, dog, being a clever animal, took his mother to heaven while he joined other animals to eat their parents. In no time, they exhausted the available parents for food, yet the famine persisted. However, prior to this time, dog was visiting his mother in heaven via a long rope which descended from heaven. He usually ate to satisfaction before he returned home. While other animals were becoming thin, dog was growing fat. One day, tortoise visited the dog and pleaded with him to tell him the secret of his well-being. After much persuasion, dog took the tortoise to his mother in heaven and they both were fed well. Meanwhile, each time dog wanted to see his mother, he used to sing a song which would alert his mother. The song goes thus:

Ìyá, ìyá takùn wálẹ̀ o
 Àlùjannjankíjan
 Gbogbo ayé pa yèyè rẹ̀ jẹ
 Àlùjannjankíjan
 Ajá gbé tirẹ̀ ó dọrun
 Àlùjannjankíjan...

(Mother, mother let down the rope

Àlùjannjankíjan
 Everybody killed his mother
 Àlùjannjankíjan
 Dog carried his to heaven
 Àlùjannjankíjan...

On hearing this song, his mother would let down the rope and he would climb the rope to reach his mother. The same procedure was followed as he invited tortoise to join him. Tortoise, in his usual characteristic manner, told other animals how he and dog had been feeding. He later took the animals to the place and started singing as dog usually did. When dog's mother heard the song, she let down the rope thinking that it was her son, dog. As they were climbing the rope and singing, the mother realized that it was not her son, therefore, she cut the rope, tortoise and his cohorts fell down. Some of them died instantly. Although the tortoise escaped death, the shell on his back cracked. That was the incident that made tortoise's shell looks cracked till today. It is this folktale narrative that the poet transforms to a poem.

The cultural import of this folktale in which the dog loved and cared for his mother, negates the feelings of the crop of Nigerian leaders, who, through their actions have turned the

country to a pitiable condition despite the huge natural and human resources the country is endowed with. The poet is of the opinion that one of the problems of this crop of leadership is non-commitment to the principles of loyalty and love displayed by the past heroes to fight for the independence of the country. They ignored words of reasoning and embarked on their personal agenda. The result of such an attitude is the killing, jailing and going on self-exile of some prominent Nigerians during the military rule.

3.2 *Socio-political discourse in Olúnládé's Ewì Ìgbàlódé (Modern Poems)*

Táíwò Olúnládé is a contemporary Yorùbá poet whose selected poems reflect on the social and political happenings in the society. Forty poems are contained in *Ewì Ìgbàlódé* and four were randomly selected for analysis. The four poems selected from *Ewì Ìgbàlódé* are “Abájọ” (No wonder), “Odù Ìrọwọpọnlá” (Game of corruption), “Awo” (Cult of unity) and “Múra síṣẹ” (Be diligent).

Field of Discourse

In “Abájọ” (No wonder), the subject-matter, i.e., the field of discourse, centres on the Nigerians’ experience during the military regime. The poet is of the view that no military government can give its citizens the desired benefits, since it is not accountable to the people. He accuses the military rulers of high-handedness and insensitivity. The idea is developed in the following:

Ṣàngó la ní ní Balógun
 Abájọ tá ò fi lè faraya
 Olúkòso la ní lẹgbọ̀n-ọ̀n
 Abájọ tá ò fi lè pèròpò... (p. 60)

(‘Ṣàngó’ is our warlord
 No wonder we cannot react
 ‘Olúkòso’ is our brother
 No wonder we cannot reason together...)

The extract attests to the fact that people were incapacitated by authoritarian rule of the military, and that they could neither talk nor protest against inhuman treatment meted out to

them. The semantic domain in “Odù Ìrọ̀wọ̀pọ̀nlá” (Game of corruption) reflects on the issue of corruption. The poet describes corruption as the bane of Nigeria’s development. Corruption, has become a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of every system and individual. This, according to the poet has hindered the progress of the country. Olúnládé espouses the idea of the circumstance in which and for which this poem is composed in the following lines:

Gbogbo ohun tá a mọ̀ láyé ijọ́sí
 Ni wọ̀n ti yí bìrì mọ̀ wa lọ̀wọ̀
 Wọ̀n láyé ohun tó tọ̀ kọ̀ la wà
 Wọ̀n láyé ọ̀wọ̀ pípọ̀nlá ló nìgbà
 Wọ̀n lóun a bá fẹ̀ jẹ̀ làgbà oun a fẹ̀ ẹ̀... (p. 40)

(All we knew in the past
 Have turned awkward
 They said this is not the age of righteousness
 They said this is the age of corruption
 They said what we stand to gain supersedes what
 we intend to do).

To the poet, both the leaders and the followers, i.e., the participants, are guilty of this allegation. The poet is of the opinion that in the past, people discharged their duties with a sense of commitment and dedication, without requesting gratification. Today, at every level of the Nigerian system, people request gratification before giving what one duly deserves. This is the primary source of corruption. The poet identifies some features of corruption, namely, title giving to undeserving people, giving positions on ethnic basis and document manipulation.

Babaláwo wo ló kifá fún wọ̀n níjọ́sí?
 Afipòdánìlọ̀lá awo ilú
 Afàyèàtàtà jàbúrò awo Ìran
 Agbáratáàfíṣolóri awo Èlẹ̀yàmẹ̀yà
 Gbogbo wọ̀n ni wọ̀n jọ̀ n ọ̀sawo pọ̀...
 Wọ̀n ní kí làwọ̀n lè ẹ̀ táwọ̀n fi lè tètè rí ẹ̀
 Wọ̀n ní kí wọ̀n ó rúbọ̀ ifọ̀gbọ̀nẹ̀kọ̀rọ̀ wápò
 Wọ̀n ní kí wọ̀n ó mète iwé yíyí... (p. 42)

(Who was the ‘babaláwo’ that divined for them?)

One-who-bestowed-position on others, the cult of the land
 One-who-bestowed-juicy-potfolio on younger ones, the cult
 of ethnicity
 They all belonged to same cult group...
 They inquired what they could do so that they could
 quickly enrich themselves
 They were asked to prepare a sacrifice so that they
 would be favoured with exalted positions
 They were asked to employ the tricks of manipulation...)

The extract above attests to the claim that ethnicity, in Nigeria, promotes corruption in public service as regards the issues of appointment and promotion, favouritism, nepotism, award of contracts, manipulation of constitution, racial / ethnic discrimination and the likes.

However, in “Awo” (Cult of unity), the field of discourse, i.e., theme is erected on unity as a panacea for national development in Nigeria. The poet emphasizes the need for the people of Nigeria to be united in order to lift the country to a greater height. He carefully selects some creatures which by their natural endowment have a feature of moving as a team. Examples of these creatures are “ikán” (termites), “èèrà” (ants), “ègà” (palm-birds) and “tata” (grasshoppers). These creatures, as used by the poet, symbolize the unity which he wants Nigerians to emulate.

In “Múra síṣé” (Be diligent), the subject matter is the dignity in labour. The poet condemns the act of indolence in its entirety. He posits that achievement in whatever respect, is not attained without hard work. This view corroborates a biblical verse which says “The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” (Proverbs, 13:4). The idea is summed up in the following:

Iṣé takuntakun níí mú
 Kénìyàn ó le kẹṣejárí
 Iṣé níí múni gbón
 Àṣìṣé níí múni gò ju taṣutaṣu lọ
 Èní bá ṣìṣé á lówó lówó... (p. 2)

(It is hard work
 That makes one to be successful
 It is work that makes one wise

Indolence makes one to be stupid
 One who works will be financially independent...)

Tenor of Discourse

In relation to the tenor of discourse, i.e., social relations in “Abájọ” (No wonder), the participants are the military leaders and the people of Nigeria. The relationship between these two groups can be said to be unfriendly due to the high-handedness of the military. People’s opinion did not matter since they assumed power through the gun. It can also be said that the poet aligns himself with the feelings of the oppressed, by identifying with them when he uses the collective pronoun ‘a’ (we) in “tá ò lè faraya” (that we cannot react) as is evident in the following:

Şàngó la ní ní Balógun
 Abájọ tá ò fi lè faraya (p. 60)

(‘Şàngó’ is our warlord
 No wonder we cannot react)

The theme in “Múra síşẹ” (Be diligent) exhibits the role-relation that exists between elderly people and young ones. The tenor of discourse in the poem (Múra síşẹ) is a way of foregrounding the way and manner the Yorùbá advise the young ones or somebody perceived to be lazy by saying ‘işẹ lòògùn işẹ’ (work is an antidote to poverty).

Mode of Discourse

The symbolic organization of “Abájọ” (No wonder) is the use of parallelism made up of very short lines. Also, the symbols which permeate every interval of the poem have been used to convey the ‘emotional feeling’ of the poet to the audience. The symbols are “Şàngó” (god of thunder), “Olúkòso” (another name for Şàngó), “Ọya” (Şàngó’s wife), “Olúẹri” (Şàngó’s in-law), “ejò” (snake), “adití” (a deaf), “kòlòkòlò” (fox), “ẹgún” (thorn), “yèrèpè” (nettle) and “ẹgbẹjí” (a herbalist). All these symbolise the military leaders and their hard posture to the issue of governance. The poet deliberately selects “Şàngó” among other Yorùbá deities to represent the high-handedness of the military rulers. “Şàngó”, the god of thunder and lightning, is the most powerful god of the Yorùbá and a warrior. It is well known that “Şàngó” is subject

to frequent outbursts of ungovernable temper, during which he hurls down stones at those who have given him cause for offence. He was king of old Ọ̀yọ́ in Yorùbá land, and became so unbearable through rapacity, cruelty and tyranny. He also had certain mystical abilities to command and control great storms of varying sizes. This device has proven to be a most effective medium of making a goal-ended presentation in Yorùbá poetry. The effect of this device, therefore, is to attack the oppressors (military) and their government. The rhetorical mode in the poem is condemnation of military rule.

Moreover, the channel of delivery of “Odù Ìrọ̀wọ̀pónlá” (Game of corruption), is imbued with ‘ẹ̀ṣẹ̀ ifá’ (a genre in Yorùbá oral poetry) – an effectual strategy for influencing the behaviour of the readers in support of the poetic arguments. This is borne out of the fact that ‘ẹ̀ṣẹ̀ ifá’ is a corpus where words of wisdom in Yorùbá tradition reside. The rhetorical mode in the poem is advising. This is an attempt to enable all individuals, groups and tribes that comprise Nigeria to have a rethink and work towards building a virile nation which is currently at the verge of decay. In “Awo” (Cult of unity), words and expressions which engender unity are frequently used. Examples like Ikán ɣawo tíí, àwọn èèrà ɣawo tíí, àwọn ègà ɣawo tíí, àwọn tata ɣawo tíí, (termites, ants, palm-birds, grasshoppers, engage in cult of unity) reinforce our perception of the context. The poet deliberately selects these creatures by their natural endowment of moving as a team. The unity and sense of oneness that bring these creatures together to achieve a common goal is what the poet foregrounds. Also, an expression like àwọn ejò ɣawo tíí, awo wọn ò gún (snakes engage in cult of unity, yet they are not successful) is employed in the poem to depict the consequence of not being united. The uncooperative attitude of snakes makes them to suffer. The effect this has is to create awareness on the significance of living in harmony as a united nation.

The mode of discourse, i.e., rhetorical mode in “Múra síṣẹ̀” (Be diligent) is the condemnation of the habit of laziness and indolence, especially among the youth. The message is made more enduring with short and direct lines as shown in the concluding lines:

Ìṭeramọ̀ṣẹ̀ níí mágbẹ̀ ɣeun kánú
 Ìṭeramọ̀ṣẹ̀ níí sọmọ̀ èkọ̀ṣẹ̀ dọ̀gá
 Ìṭeramọ̀ṣẹ̀ níí fàgbéga lenu iṣẹ̀
 Ìṭeramọ̀ṣẹ̀ níí mú màjèsín dépò àgbà (p. 2).

(Hardwork makes the farmer reap bountifully

Hardwork makes an apprentice a master

Hardwork brings promotion

Hardwork propels the young to attain the position of the elderly).

Such directness in the mode of delivery coupled with the recurrent use of repetition “*ìṭẹramọṣẹ*” (hardwork) and parallelism captures the stance of the poet against the perceived lazy ones.

Context of Culture

The meaning of the symbols ‘*Şango*’, ‘*Olúkòso*’ and ‘*Oya*’ used in the poem “*Abájo*” (No wonder) could be further explained from the perspective of Yorùbá culture. For example, ‘*Şàngò*’ is a god of thunder in the Yorùbá tradition, and he is very powerful. He is always appeased so that one does not incur his wrath. Also, ‘*Olúkòso*’ is an appellation used for this god while ‘*Oya*’ is his wife; hence the saying, “*Şàngó Olúkòso ọkọ Oya*” (*Şàngó Olúkòso*, husband of *Oya*). Other symbols in the poem such as; ‘*ejò*’ (snake), ‘*adítí*’ (deaf person), ‘*kòlòkòlò*’ (fox), ‘*ẹ̀gún*’ (thorn), ‘*yèrèpè*’ (nettle), and ‘*ẹ̀gbẹ̀jí*’ (a herbalist) are used to symbolise the military leaders. ‘*Ejò*’ (snake) is a dangerous and poisonous creature which everyone avoids. ‘*Adítí*’ (deaf person) does not easily hear what other people around him are saying. ‘*Kòlòkòlò*’ (fox) is a wild animal fond of eating other creatures like chicken. ‘*È̀gún*’ (thorn) is a sharp pointed part on the stem of a plant which inflicts pains if one mistakenly comes in contact with it. ‘*Yèrèpè*’ (Nettle) is also a wild plant with leaves that stings one’s skin if one touches it. ‘*È̀gbẹ̀jí*’ (a herbalist) has magical power that makes people fear him. The poet, on the one hand, equates the powerful nature of the military with that of *Şàngó*. The military was ‘worshipped’ like a god. On the other hand, he describes the military as, being dangerous and poisonous as a snake. The military turned deaf hear to the cry of the masses. Its men stole and looted the treasury. They were unreliable and wicked.

Conclusion

This study has discussed the political and social themes in the poems of *Àtàrí Àjànàkú* and *Táíwò Olúnládé*, using socio-semiotic tools of field, tenor, and mode of discourse, as well as the context of culture. The poets’ field of discourse addressed insensitivity of political leaders to the suffering of the people, horrible experience of Nigerians during the military regime, bribery and corruption, as well as unity and dignity of labour as panacea for national development. The tenor of discourse exhibited hatred and unfriendliness between the political

leaders and the oppressed. The poet's role-relation in the poem that emphasized the dignity in labour is the one that exists between elderly and young ones. The mode of discourse was confrontation, incantation, satire, and condemnation through the use of metaphor and parallelism. The context of culture was the use of folktale song and cultural symbols. It is evident from our analysis that socio-semiotics has proven to be worthwhile in the analysis of Yorùbá written poetry.

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