Review

A postmodernist study of Ijengen: The ritual drama of transition at Ode-Irele

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Indigenous societies survived through myths and folktales these were responsible for the cohesion that existed prior to the advent of colonialism and hybridization of western culture. Consequently, modern African writers could hardly do without these. African writers have a backup in their quest for creative ingredients and oral performances serve as veritable springboard for these materials. Wole Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman is an example of a literary work that relies greatly on the beliefs, practices and mores of the indigenous society in its subject matter, themes and myth.

Key words: Songs, tradition, culture, Ode-Irele, ritual.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous societies survived through myths and this was responsible for the cohesion that existed prior to the advent of colonialism and hybridization of western culture. This may amount to an escape from the monotony of reality at the level of art by conjuring both realistic and fantastical innuendoes in the audience. In the postmodernist point of view, this form of creativity becomes a peculiar reaction to the vast continuum of creative wealth. Modern African writers have a backup in their quest for creative ingredients and oral performances serve as veritable springboard for these materials. The absence of any notable order amounts to the disorder in the apprehension of reality by individuals in every culture. Wole Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman is an example of a literary work that relies greatly on the beliefs, practices and mores of the indigenous society in its subject matter, themes and myth.

Definition of terms

Ijengen, the unique ritual dance of the folks at Ode Irele, Ondo State Nigeria is a performance that could influence the literary climate and creative writers explore such dramatic strategies in their creative endeavours. Ijengen caps up the burial rites of high ranking chiefs and their wives. It dramatizes the transition from the terrestrial realm to the world of ancestors. Apart from serving as a form of appreciation of the contributions of the deceased to the development of the society, it is also meant to serve as a leeway for the dead to the celestial realm. The word Ijengen refers to both the performance in its totality as well as the drum that has become synonymous with the festival over the years. The rhythm of the drum is majestic and it is beaten in accordance with the respect and awe that have been associated with the drum over the years.

Festivals are ‘climactic events’ in the people’s calendar when time is communally unique and spent in honour of the communal spirit just as the stage is held sacred and reserved for the amplification of the values that are held sacrosanct and spent in disorder through collective conviviality. Festivals are synonymous with the suspension of moral codes just as sanctioned disorder holds sway and abnormality is rife. Most indigenous festivals exhibit such behavioural traits among the folks even when decorum and abstinence represent a negation of the acceptable lifestyle as the performance lasts. The whole arena is the stage and normal life patterns are put on hold.

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The emergence of the performance of *ljengen* in the literary tradition of the people may be linked with the incidence of death and the belief in life after life. This understanding makes it imperative for the folks to devise a means of reconciling death with the hazy apprehension of the mythical parallel about reincarnation and the process of smooth transition to the world beyond. Even when reincarnation could not be proved, the folk actually believed that man could transit between the world of the living and the celestial realm as many times as might be necessary in the search for perfection. This may seem similar to the belief in western religion about the connection between the celestial and terrestrial realms. If much care attends the coming of the baby into the world, therefore, it is the case that a similar care must be accorded the dead in the search for the needed purity that could make him transit smoothly into the other realm and thus a leeway for the emergence into the world of the living in case the deceased is yet to complete his assignments. *ljengen* is, therefore, a structure of reasoning that is made manifest through performance. The structure follows a pattern of gradation through birth, growth and death. This becomes a form of register of the thought processes of the folk in Ode Irele milieu even when it may be peculiar to them.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Postmodernism will constitute the tool of analysis of this paper. The study is a synthesis of an oral interview as well as the application of the theory to the dramatic enactments. The preference for postmodernism arises from the relevance of the critical theory to the study of culture as it helps to unveil the negative influences of practices from the western world on the realities of an erstwhile traditional society that enjoyed relative bliss and the peculiarities of cultures the world over especially with the advent of writing. Milner (1994) locates the distinctions among cultures within writings and technicalities as well as different levels of cognition among individuals (141).

Postmodernism is a theoretical canon that recognises the uniqueness of cultures in the apprehension of reality and the fact that no single culture may be superior. In the light of this, the incoherence that seems to be the hallmark of indigenous performances receives pedagogic sanction, as it seems to depict the nature of reality. In the light of the tenets of postmodernism, *ljengen* is a study of the ‘means’ rather than ‘the ends of an action’ (Lyotard, 1984: 98). It is curious that performances are held preparatory to the transition of a deceased member of the society. This is a negation of the belief in the western world that the dead is like a wood that may not be important, as the concept of cremation typifies. Equally tied to the postmodernist concept is the belief in reincarnation among the folk towards which *ljengen* may serve as a form of leeway. Postmodernism represents a departure from the tradition of criticism that seems to place a blanket regulation on the requirements of performance at the arena. In this regard, postmodernism recognizes the dynamism of every performance as a unique script that may not be removed from the artistic peculiarities of the folk that created it. Milner (1994) sees postmodernism as distinct from other cultural theories but as an instrument that is capable of being applied to other cultural theories. In other words, it becomes a form of metacriticism.

It is, rather, a particular cultural space available for analysis to many different kinds of contemporary theory and for intervention to many different kinds of contemporary cultural politics (137).

Lyotard (1984), however, considers “postmodernism as a historical/cultural ‘condition’ based on dissolution of master narratives or meta-narratives, a crisis in ideology when ideology no longer seems transparent”. The strength of postmodernism is the break from convention and recognition of creativity and innovations.

Barrett (1988) considers postmodernism to be “...a cultural climate as well as an intellectual position, a political reality as well as an academic fashion” (xxxiv). As “an intellectual position” postmodernism is a convention that is achieved through consensus. It represents the generally acclaimed position consequent upon the postwar era (Milner, 1994: 137). It is salient to note that postmodernism thrives on what Milner quoting Lyotard (1984) calls “internal logic of the meta-narratives themselves, which proceeds from scepticism to pluralism by shifting attention from the end of actions to its means” (139). Consequently, it is a rebellion on “totality”.

Postmodernism recognises the difference in performances and considers it to be a form of revolution. The hallmark of postmodernism as a critical model in the explication of indigenous performances arises from the recognition of reality as a perception that may not have the same appeal to different people especially when they are not likely to face the same challenges. Again the deployment of language is considered fundamental in the achievement of co-referentiality. This recognition informs the possible performance of verbal scripts that do not have coherence because reality may not be a straight forward script that may be apprehended and measured at will.

The incoherence in the performance of indigenous scripts is a demonstration of the fact that the scripts are not time-bound and thus meant for timeless appreciation. In other words, no conclusion seems to be made by festivals during their performances. Rather, the conclusions that are salient to individual members of the audience depend on the appeal they could make upon beholding the spectacles. According to Jameson (2013), festivals make no clear-cut moral position and may harbour different genres in a single performance. Soyinka
(1990) captures the multiple scripts in indigenous art as well as the inter-relatedness of the performers and the audience.

The moment for choric participation is well defined, but this does not imply that until such a moment, participation ceases. The so-called audience is itself an integral part of that arena of conflict; it contributes spiritual strength to the protagonist through its choric reality, which must first be conjured up and established, defining and investing the arena through offerings and incantations (39).

Ijengen portrays both the attitude of the people to death as well as their worldviews especially about existence and transition.

APPLICATION/ANALYSIS

The demise of the head of a family may be a cause for a dramatic performance in order to achieve the objectives of consoling the siblings and educating them that minimal mourning must be accorded the deceased having lived a fulfilled existence as well as making the occasion a cause for a grand performance; a general memorial where all important folks in the society are in attendance. The place of acculturation about the inevitability of death may even be apprehended in the performance. Thus, everyone strives to make an impact in the society in order to be accorded the dignity and respect that go with selfless service to the society.

The quest for reincarnation equally comes to the fore in that the return of the deceased to the world of the living is made possible by virtue of the grand ritual celebration that could attach him permanently to the milieu. When the time for reincarnation comes, the deceased makes no mistake about the environment where he earlier meant so much to the people that such a dramatic performance could be held in his honour. It is equally salient to the folk to want to retain the deceased permanently in the environment. This quest is tied to the need to make the deceased a permanent member of the domain. To such people (ancestors) are libations poured during rituals. The belief is rife that the domains of kings and other high-ranking members of the monarchy are their different milieux. In other words, the deceased are not likely to visit a place called heaven; which is just a concept to the folks as their own heaven is their kingdom. Therefore, much effort is exerted in order to retain the deceased in the town and make him a permanent member of the spiritual climate. When libations are poured, the collective spirit of the ancestors could be relied upon to engender efficacy. The second world of the unborn is equally a partaker in the ritual devolution and therefore there is a frequency of communication from the terrestrial realm to the two other worlds. The two celestial realms cohere and may appraise development on earth through uncanny measurement of the ability of the people to maintain decorum and fulfill all ritual obligations where a negation of the golden rules may be observed. Of course, this could discourage foetal rejuvenation and birth and the need for cleansing may be a reason for this development. Ijengen may be a means of appeasing both worlds of the ancestors and the unborn especially about the preparedness of the folks to engender unity and ritual correspondence.

The death of high-ranking people in Ode Irele is celebrated amid pomp and drama during a performance named Ijengen. This is celebrated at the burial rites of High-Chiefs simply known as Ijama and their wives and the objectives might not be removed from the quest for attention on the life and style of the deceased member as a means of emphasizing the virtues inherent in leadership and virtuous existence. At the arena, the folks are bound to reflect on the communal recognition that may be accorded the deceased and the twin motive of entertainment and moral amplification and indoctrination would have been achieved. The choice of the arena as the setting for these important renditions might not divorced from the verbal nature of indigenous societies.

It is not time bound like other festivals. Ijengen may hold whenever death strikes. It defies the seasons just as the scorching sun may not be a barrier. The rain may not be enough to necessitate a postponement. Ijengen is a ceremony of transition prelude to the burial of the deceased. The performance is meant to usher the dead into the realm of the ancestors. It is a form of preparatory performance that shows the importance of the deceased and thus meant to facilitate his transition to the ancestral realm. In fact, only accomplished members of the society are accorded the ritual. This is partly a demonstration of the importance of service and selflessness to the development of the milieu.

Kehinde Oladehin-Ojumu, 55 and Oladele Adereleye, 40, members of the tradition bearers in Ode-Irele, revealed that nine birds were originally associated with the performance in the primordial era. The birds were invited through the chanting of appropriate incantations and songs. However, as the custodians of the ritual songs died without handing over the secrets of the communication with the birds, it became imperative for human beings who danced and replicated the dance steps of the birds to be saddled with the responsibility of performing the feats.

The festival under consideration was performed in 2004 during the burial of Dedun Olamiti-Jawosinmi, the wife of the fourth Gboroye of Ode Irele high Chief Jawosinmi who hailed from Gboroye-Eerinomo family of Ode Irele. It lasted seven days. The woman was considered worthy of the ritual because of her marriage to the fourth Gboroye of Ode Irele and for having died at a very ripe age. During the performance, two hundred and one songs were rendered and each song was accompanied with the appropriate drumbeat. The dance
steps were also tailored towards realizing the desired aesthetic thrusts.

The setting is usually the Malokun arena. This shrine serves as the centre of convergence whenever ritual celebrations that involve all the folks are to be held. It is the grand arena, and may not be surpassed by any other shrine in the milieu. It harbours the traditional effigies that define the locality and tie her to the original home in Ugbo-Ijaje area of Ondo State from where they migrated to the present location.

Ijengen is a didactic performance as it revolves round the inevitability of death. Death is indispensable as it is deference to nature, concluding the cycle of birth and decay. Consequently Ijengen is a tutorial on the futility of achievements; thus reconciling man to the inevitability of death and the futility of earthly pines and struggles. It is also a tutorial on the need for pliability to positive attitude in relation to eternal transition. The dissimilarity between biblical account on the emergence of death and indigenous Yoruba belief points to the divergence in the apprehension of ideas among peoples of the world. The two accounts refer to a concordance on the necessity of death; but while the biblical account tries to invent a pre-Adamic age full of bliss and hope of immortality for man, the Yoruba myth of creation does not subscribe to immortality as part of the original design. Ijengen is, therefore, a reference to the desirability of longevity, which could only be attainable through harmony between man and nature, especially through ritual devolution and its negation is untimely death arising from human excesses. It is also a means of transiting the deceased into the world of the ancestors having lived a fulfilled life and thus ushered into the ancestral realm with the needed rituals lest the transition be marred. In other words Ijengen is a means of idolizing accomplished members of the society via an elaborate festival.

Two unique features can be identified in Yoruba indigenous festivals such as individual and communal celebrations. The two categories may not be all embracing as many festivals involve local deities that are restricted to a group of believers; even when they are not personal, they lack the clout to make them communal. Thus, festivals are vehicles that are directed towards cultural and socio-economic charters that encompass the beliefs in deities and incorporate the philosophical aura of the environment. These manifest attributes may be embedded with the documentation of peculiar history especially in many Yoruba societies.

Many indigenous festivals are, however, not strictly directed at gods. Some are meant to entrench the positions of monarchies and others may be transitional in which case the journey motif is celebrated. Ijengen is an example of a festival directed towards eternal journey. Festivals are, indeed, miniaturized versions of the philosophical dispositions of the people. Some celebrate success, the vastness of nature and the indispensability of celestial harmony. And in each case, the festival is brought to a spectacular height through the employment of mime, drumming, dancing, singing and feasting. In whichever case, the enactment is a repetition of the primeval development which faint recollections constitute their modern equivalents.

Festivals are artistic instruments that are meant to compel nature towards a favourable disposition in the climatic and physical spheres of life. This quest is, however, deployed towards the attainment of aesthetic satisfaction. The idea of separating festivals and art is a latest contrivance such that religious colourations are associated with festivals while art is secular. However, the demarcation is deficient because no watertight difference could be employed in this regard. The genesis of creativity could be traced to the primordial necessity that confronted man, intent on the satisfaction of the quest for entertainment, the resolution of nagging, natural contradictions as well as confronting basic socio-economic imperative. In the medieval era, art was not separated from religion and economics. This explains the multiple themes in festivals that are utilitarian, artistic and moral.

The dance steps are symbolic and may refer to the grand performances of the birds that begin their flight in a systematic manner till they are seen no more. The nine birds are also symbolic as they represent perfection and their relevance are mythically subsumed and the behaviour of birds at the attainment of maturity when they are independent may be responsible for their association with transition rituals in the primordial era.

The audience during Ijengen makes no conscious efforts to participate in both the dance steps and singing. The taboo in the enclave restricts the performance to the main protagonists and the audience could only savour the spectacle without making any contributions. This further confirms Soyinka (1990) in his analysis of the roles of the audience during some dramatic performances.

... in traditional mask-drama: a symbolic struggle with chthonic presences, the goal of the conflict being a harmonious resolution for plenitude and the well being of the community. Any individual within the ‘audience’ knows better than to add his voice arbitrarily even to the most seductive passages of an invocatory song, or to contribute a refrain to the familiar sequence of liturgical exchanges among the protagonists (Soyinka, 1990: 38-39).

Indigenous performances are anchored on series of approbations and negations that succinctly sum up the totality of the society in its application to individuals, the physical and spiritual essences through drama. The space becomes the means through which the society, in its metaphoric sense, could be brought to life in Ijengen drama.
Ijengen is a reflection of the cultural differentiation that exists in traditional societies. Like the postmodernist foundation, Ijengen may not be worthy of a coherence or credibility that could make it acceptable to all and sundry. Rather, the incoherence is capable of being appraised through different wavelengths by critics and each time with different but uniform conclusions. In other words, indigenous societies are not totally unitary and this may help to resolve the scepticism about whether or not indigenous societies are unitary, Ijengen further amplifies the class distinctions that exist in Ode Irele where only members of the Ijama guild are qualified for the celebration. Apposite to this is Milner (1994) as he recognises the stratifications subsisting in indigenous societies.

It is only in relatively classless, tribal societies that one find relatively unitary, oral cultures (and even these are internally differentiated by age and gender (141).

Categories are salient to the environment through titles, the peak of which is the celebration that marks some people to be worthy of ritual celebrations at their demise while other chiefs of lower ranks are excluded from the performance. The ritual performance in Lagos is Adimuoria and important members of the society are celebrated at death. At Igobini, Ju is the name of the performance and only achievers are considered worthy of the celebration.

The class distinctions in indigenous societies may be approached through gender, knowledge of the lore of the land, position and importance in the smaller divisions subsisting in the families, financial capabilities, number of wives and children and their conformity to the behavioural traits of the society as well as size of the farms. Other distinctions may be considered from the age of folk, whether or not they are culturally knowledgeable. Women that are versed in tradition may occupy higher positions in the scheme of things above their male counterparts. Such women may be allowed to harbour masquerades and could also be allowed to visit the sacred shrines in some societies.

From a postmodernist point of view, Ijengen is a representation of the incapability of achieving total cohesion or a total apprehension of what seems a fleeting reality, a piece of which reveals itself through specific conditioning, as may be compelled by specific age, and collective bargaining (limited or unlimited sanctions). The road to the enclosure may be paved with gold or bumpy. A critical study of Ijengen may serve to show the other side of progress in the modern era. The movement towards progress is entangled through a web of confusion, arising from a negation of primal energies towards artificiality, finding expression in economic interdependence, technological infiltration of privacy and global annexation of liberties through economic dictatorship and manipulation by the capitalist few. The desire to grapple with the leaping age leaves the younger generation with an option of reversal of order and negation of decorum through cyber crimes. The vicious cycle of progress catches humanity in critical condition and reversal of intentions. The past becomes more glorious and ennobling. The truth dawns on humanity that no single discourse constitutes a universal doctrine and that a synthesis of cultures is salient to the global community as no critical theory may be considered absolute.

Ijengen festival drama is latent with many ingredients of performance. Imitation ties the performance to the primordial parallel, which nine birds were reputed to have performed. However, the inability of modern performers to chant the right incantations that could compel the birds to stage the performance leaves active bearers of tradition with the choice of replacing them with human beings; a kind of imitation. However, the attempt at replicating the dexterity of the birds is awkwardly performed to the delight of the audience for the obvious failure as the performance of Ijengen is accompanied with the symbolic imitation of the movement of the deceased to the world of the ancestors. The nine performers attempt through physical and spiritual rites to pave the way for the deceased from the terrestrial realm to the celestial abode of ancestors.

The conflict in the performance is tied to the recognition that the deceased might encounter some difficulties on his way to the ancestral realm and attempts are made to negate all stumbling blocks that might serve as distractions on the way. The dance is, therefore, a ceremonial cum dramatic performance that is geared towards demonstrating the symbolic movement of the deceased through the physical and spiritual realms.

Equally salient to the performance of Ijengen is the representation inherent in it. The nine dancers are synonymous with the nine birds that would usher the dead into the ancestral realm. This claim justifies the exclamation among the people each time a member of the society dies. Many would inadvertently claim thus: Eye Lo! (Meaning: The bird has gone). It is the case, therefore, that every performance of Ijengen is laden with entertainment and enlightenment. The audience is specifically tutored about the inevitability of death and the fact that only good and honest folk would be expected to translate to the world of ancestors.

Even when no perceivable script is involved, as it is the case with all oral performances, and the absence of a ‘good form’, Ijengen is a performance that represents the quest to present what may be considered a spurious claim that lacks empirical substantiation. Yet, this is the hallmark of postmodernism, as it tends to provide an intellectual standpoint for the voiceless majority hinging on the claim that every culture is somehow relevant to the folk to whom it is salient. The performance of Ijengen is accompanied with the rendition of sonorous songs, drum beats and dance steps. They all together stir the
emotional reactions of the audience. And to use Lyotard’s terms, *ijegen* is a kind of ‘war on totality’ and the ‘transcendental illusion’ that characterize all critical theories prelude to the emergence of postmodernism as other theories are culturally bereft of relevance.

The concept of deification is fore-grounded through the series of rituals, and chants preparing the deceased for a smooth transition on the eternal journey. The performers were originally birds comprising nine unique dancers invited through the rendition of the appropriate incantations and drumming. The invocation of the spirits of the ancestors and the offering to death as the supreme porter all exemplify the devotional motif. Death, thus, becomes the last chapter of the human drama and the relevance of the unwritten script is salient to the past as it is to both the present and the future. *ijegen* is thus a universal script that may not be fully exhausted all through time as it ‘subverts all restraints’ (Milner, 140).

This celebration of the last cycle of life, marked by impermanence reduces death to a mere phase. The festive mood of the dancers and the audience calls its bluff. This attitude informs the calculated dance steps by the nine performers, costumed in their ritual robes and dancing to the eternal rhythms of the drums. *ijegen* corroborates the principle of postmodernism as it seeks to ‘erase all boundaries, to obliterate any distinction between the self and the external world, between man and woman, subject and object, mind and body’ (Bell, 1976: 243). The festival songs point to the demise of a woman of substance, another cock of death that has just been slaughtered which puts an end to all earthly struggles and pains. The performance makes no distinction between male and female, free or bondsmen so long as they may be considered worthy of the celebration through age and membership of the *Ijama* society. To the proponents, there is no difference between the living and the dead. The physical dissolution notwithstanding, rituals of transitions have to be performed in order to remove any snag on the smooth transition of the deceased. The *Gbalukerekere* tune contains four verses and induces tears.

*Gbalukerekere made uloro o*
*Uloro ma wa o*

*Sekeseke made uloro o*
*E me sire honkun o*
*Gbalukerekere made uloro o*
*Uloro ma wa o*

*Gbalukerekere made uloro o*
*Olule re le o*
*Gbalukerekere made uloro o*
*Uloro ma wa o*

*Gbalukerekere made uloro o*
*Olule re le o*
*Gbalukerekere made uloro o*
*Uloro ma wa o*

*Gbalukerekere made uloro o*
*Olule re le o*
*Gbalukerekere made uloro o*
*Uloro ma wa o*

*Gently, tread gently, you folk of Uloro*
*We are not crying for fun*
*Unusual you folk of Uloro*
*The owner takes its toll*

*Unusual you folk of Uloro*
*The owner takes its toll*

*Unusual you folk of Uloro*
*The owner takes its toll*

*Gently, tread gently, you folk of Uloro*
*We are not crying for fun*
*Unusual you folk of Uloro*
*The sojourner goes home.*

The celebration is synonymous with the communal spirit made manifest through collective attention to the values that permeate the society. The sojourner is the deceased that is equated with a bird of passage and the demise is the handing over of the breath of life as might be typified by the body devoid of breath. *Uloro* is the owner of the enclave and like the periodic visitor to the city; the time for stocktaking becomes a symbol of transition a form of rendition of the deceased’s scorecard that may necessitate celebration.

At a stage, the nine dancers would file out in their white regalia depicting their preparedness to carry out a grand performance that is out of touch with any ordinary business of the day. The next song alludes to the grandeur of the king of the land. It equally attests to the befitting performance of the king as well as the heavy task bedeviling the nine dancers. An interview with Kehinde Oladehin-Ojumu traces the origin of the song to the primordial era when a slave was saddled with the responsibilities of conveying the ritual load to the groove. *Odleleba* dances first and later followed by *Otun*. This is a form of an opening of the floor for the nine dancers.

*Oye re, oye re*
*Eye Olofun o, eye Olofun o e.*
*Opa to Olofun o*

*Oye re, oye re*
*Eye Olofun o, eye Olofun o e.*

*Opa to Olofun o e*
*Oye re, oye re*
*Eye Olofun o, eye Olofun o e.*

*Opa to Olofun o e*
*Oye re, oye re*
*Eye Olofun o, eye Olofun o e.*
Oye re, oye re
Ori o wowo o ori o wowo o e
Eye Olufun o, eye Olufun o e.
Oye re, oye re
Eye Olufun o, eye Olufun o e.

What an honour! What an honour!
This befits the king! It befits him
To Olufun be the cane
What an honour! What an honour!
This befits the king! It befits him

To Olufun be the cane
What an honour! What an honour!
This befits the king! It befits him
To Olufun be the cane
What an honour! What an honour!
This befits the king! It befits him

What an honour! What an honour!
This head is heavy; this head is heavy!
Heavy this head is; this head is heavy!
What an honour! What an honour!
This befits the king! It befits him

He begins the dance majestically, singing and praising the head of the land until he is confronted by the question of life and death. This changes the tempo of the song to something terrifying. Alas, he could no longer retreat. It is important to add that the dance takes place at the Malokun shrine as the nine birds dance and celebrate the transition of one of them through different acts of imitations and this reveals salient references to the bird of passage. These steps, dance, movements and gestures are dramatic, as they sum up the people’s values through unscripted performance.

Two hundred and one songs and dance steps are deployed at this stage. They are meant to provide a leeway for the deceased and mitigate the loss of the householder. The drama of transition reveals the quest of the people for entertainment. The dance sums up the direction of the drama as the ritualist dances last to the Jolojolo rhythm. The song may not be meaningful as it represents the peak of language but the ritual significance may be drawn from the efficacy inherent in it.

Jolojolo o bai
Jolojolo
Jolojolo ama ti boloro jo o
Jolojolo o bai jolojolo

Dance it well father
Dance it well father
Dance it well we have danced with the ritualist
Dance it well father, dance it well.

The final stage of the drama takes place at an enclosure that is covered with raffia-mat and this serves as the conclusion of the drama of transition. The deceased, cleverly represented by a performer drawn from the class of ritualists, assumes the role of the man in transition. Prelude to the appearance of the Ogungun at the Malokun shrine is a conversation between him and the ritualist. He reveals the cause of his death and could even specify the panacea to his death. In other words, the antidote to death is mentioned but they are usually beyond the reach of the ritualist. The implication is that he could no longer be resuscitated. In most cases, the ritual items are beyond the reach of the people. Such ritual items may include: the leaves of a stone, (as if stones have leaves, the liver of an ant, as well as ant that has a tumour of the back and scrotum. The recipes are beyond the reach of the eager folks that had waited patiently for the day nursing the idea of their father’s resurrection. At that stage, it becomes clear that the conversation was only a dramatic item meant to heighten the tempo of the performance. Tears are collectively shed for the last time.

The performance of Ijangen is attended by dialogue between the deceased and the human medium. The conversation is meant to reveal the helplessness of the situation especially when it is realized that the deceased is not prepared to return to the world of the living in view of the impossibility of procuring the ritual items that are meant to revive the dead.

The linguistic appreciation of Yoruba indigenous performances requires the analysis of the affective and utilitarian imports inherent in the preceding festive song. The symbolic renditions are attainable through periodic manifestation of communal unity in fulfillment of what Soyinka considers to be the suspension of ordinary time, transformation of ordinary space and the formalizer of ordinary behaviour (24). Beneath the crowd-infested performance are the texts, deeply buried in language, myths, dance, songs and other scenic accompaniments that envelop the cultural and philosophical thrusts of the milieu. Olufun Olarewaju Lebi (who hailed from Oyenusi Ruling House) is the king of the domain and the hegemonic thrust becomes glaring through the continuous celebration and references to the monarch.

In spite of the saddened tempo of the rendition, Ijangen dancers whirl about in their performances. They imitate birds flying and thus symbolize the flight of the sojourner to an eternal rest. The entertainment in it may be delimited from the perspective of the end of a tortuous adventure laced with challenges and inhibitions. The second level of satisfaction is signified by the reference to the endless rest unto which the deceased is consigned. The arena equally becomes the avenue for the summation of the philosophical aura of the milieu.

The performers are, otherwise, known as Bojutoro. They are drawn from the guild of active bearers of tradition and have been specifically trained in the lore of the folks. Again their regularity at such performances in
the past might have made them grounded in the songs and dance steps. Their grand but uniform performances attest to their mastery of the performance. Their costumes consist of white bits of clothes tied round their bodies. They dance to the rhythms of drums consisting of *iya ilu* (mother drum), *omo ilu* (the baby drum) and *agba* (the giant drum). Each of the drums has its peculiar sound and functions. Apart from their tonal and rhythmic peculiarities, some drums are tailored towards easy identification, which could even be in consonance with the social peculiarities of the milieu. The drums are also expected to catapult the dancers into the realm of possession as the drumming, singing and dancing gain momentum. This feature of drums in African art provides a potent link between secular performance and religion.

Versification is a feature of the songs, and this reveals an undertone of religious solemnity. The chorus' leader usually renders the first lines and they follow the tonal features of the Yoruba language. Embedded in the songs are the cultural traits of the people. This musical arrangement was handed down from ages. The dance steps are also two hundred and one. Members of the audience are drawn from the people and could also draw inspiration from the performance as they savour the performance.

Indigenous people fraternize and find occasions for the resolution of grave political differences especially when the season for the communal performance dawns and certainty, familiarity and unity are engendered. Rituals are spiritual communications and the libations, incantations and renditions of emotion – laden songs are directed towards arousing the spiritual and physical reactions of the audience. They are also meant to satisfy the religious needs of the people, especially in order for peace to reign during the performance.

Interspersing the performance and even transcending the moral and devotional aspects is the celebration that serves as an artistic vehicle by which the communal yearning for entertainment may be achieved. Entertainment is achieved through the aesthetic combination of societal mores within the dexterity and dynamism of pure art. The magnitude of joy is a pointer to the overwhelming attention of the audience. Sociological values are equally inherent in art, which are equally attainable in festivals. These make oral indigenous performances to be laden with symbols that characterized primordial societies while documenting manners and the intellectual climate. The performance equally achieves the infection of other minds through the employment of shared codes and symbols subsisting in the milieu. In the language of postmodernism, the rendition may be equated with 'subversion' especially as no parallel claim may be found in the western world. By thus giving voice to the voiceless, postmodernism has given theoretical backup to the local performance of *Ijengen* even when other supposedly developed cultures may not subscribe to the claims therein.

*Human Link:* It is a pity that you have left us.

*The Deceased:* What a great pity!

*Human Link:* What can we do in order to bring you back to the world of the living?

*The Deceased:* It is not difficult. If only you can find the following items and pound them in a concoction to be sprinkled on the corpse. You must procure an ant that has tumour of the testis.

*Human Link:* You think that is easy to find! What else can we provide?

*The Deceased:* Another is the liver of an ant.

*Human Link:* What a difficult item! What else we must find!

*The Deceased:* The chlorophyll of a stone.

*Human Link:* This is impossible to find, oh God!

At that stage, the offspring and relations of the deceased begin another round of mourning when it dawns on them that their relation is no longer prepared to return to the world of the living. The next stage of the performance takes place at the *Malokun* shrine. The stage is covered with a mat. The children of the deceased and other well-wishers would converge at the arena to see their relation for the last time. Like a flash in the pan, the deceased appears at the other side of the stage that has been covered with mat and a tall object that covers itself with a mat appears and disappears. This development sends everyone crying and bidding the deceased farewell.

The final stage of the performance takes place at the *Malokun* enclosure. The stage is covered by a raffia-mat reminiscent of a modern stage. It is at the back of the stage that the *Ogungun* appears last to his people. He adorns beautiful regalia that his offspring could easily discern their father from the crowd of *Ogungun* performers at the arena. It is imperative to add that the moment the deceased is buried and accorded every rite of passage; the nomenclature of *Ogungun* (ancestor) becomes applicable and may be considered to be occupying the same ancestral realm.

The stigma and fear of death are removed and the human beings are immune from any psychological trauma that might arise from the inevitability of transition. The regular performance of the transition ritual confers a sound knowledge of the need for transition on the folks such that no one fears death any longer. It thus becomes a mockery of the phenomenon and an amplification of the triumph of the society over the incidence of death. It is the case that a single performance becomes a compendium of the totality of the belief, nature, myths and essence of a person in a society. It may not surprise the audience the folks have chosen the opportunity of the demise of one of them to transmit the philosophical aura of the milieu to the younger generation. This choice becomes imperative in view of the absence of writing at a time when writing was not applicable to the people. It was the case that the folks used a combination of sign language and other non-verbal means to sensitize their
offspring and every occasion was a veritable avenue to render their lore, mores and art which they dexterously dramatized in order to preserve them in the memories of the people, keep them fresh and perpetuate their hold on the psyche of the people continually. It was, therefore, difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between the different genres as a unique thrust in the artistic quest of the people, their culture and their religion since each was perfectly scripted in the dramatic renditions of the folks and basic interrelatedness was salient to them.

*Ijengen* is a mockery of death and its inevitability even when the folks consider the celebration to be the triumph of mortals over death. The drama of transition takes seven days and different songs and dance steps are deployed. The head of the burial rite is known as *Oloro*. *Odeleba* (the carrier of wine) of wine assists him. The *Oloro* may not go out indiscriminately. He covers his mouth most of the time in order to prevent him from making any utterance. This development may not be removed from the fatal loss of a member of the society, which calls for a restriction of speech from the head of the ritual dance. The *Oloro* holds the effigy of the people in confirmation of the claim that the Cane belongs to *Olofun* while *Aja* belongs to *Olugbo*. This claim may not be the truth as at another forum, it is claimed thus:

*Opa to Olugbo*
*Aja to Olofun*
*Ibeji ti Makun*

**To Olugbo be the cane**
*Olofun owns the jingling bell*
*To Makun belongs the vibrating drum*

It is noteworthy that the three enclaves mentioned were founded by the same people who originally inhabited Ugbo and later migrated to Ode and Makun before finally arriving at Orofun, Ohunmo and Ode Irele.

The dance begins as the *Oloro* holds the ritual effigy, which marks the beginning of the performance. The *Bojutoro* kick off the ceremony by singing. The song is to awake the nine dancers to the beginning of the dance:

*Oto o oro toriwa*
*Mariwo hoda*
*Oto o matoriwa hoda*
*Mariwo hoda.*

*Enough! Let not the ritual throw a cutlass on our account*  
*Throw no cutlass in the guise of palm fronds*

*Enough! Throw no cutlass in the guise of palm fronds on our account*  
*Throw no cutlass in the guise of palm fronds*

The song assumes the form of a challenge to the dancers not to neglect their responsibilities, as the consequences could be very grave. It is imperative to mention that palm fronds are usually associated with ritual sacrifice and the presence of the leaves may be a signal for killing an animal. Well, it is better assumed what consequence would characterise the setting should the business of the day be neglected. The enclave would be marred and disorder would permeate the entire society.

**PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

Indigenous performances are moments of social, religious and economic presentations, achieved through art. The uniqueness of every performance depends on the social climate. Except another medium was devised, which was not likely in view of the non-literacy of the people, it would have been cumbersome if the socio-political sensibilities of the era were not performed towards acculturating and entertaining the younger generation. Verbal art, as a performance, provides a link between the past and the present. It equally represents a significant reference to the future. Even when the plausibility of the term performance is not in doubt, it is significant that a number of aesthetic spectacles may not re-enact a single primordial conflict and resolution.

*Ijengen* does not reflect any conflict. Rather, the movement of the deceased is summed up by his physical vacancy from partaking in the meal of life to which every living being is liable. The activities of the dancers may be classified under performance while the subject and themes dwell on human helplessness and the attachment to decorum between him and nature. The rendition of riddles in indigenous societies is a form of performance even where no visible movement, gesture and dance are involved. However, the artistry in these endeavours is tied to movements, gestures and representations. They combine the quest for entertainment with the need to maintain order, cohesion and the sensibilities of the founding fathers of the milieu. It is, therefore, safer to classify riddles under social cum intellectual interactions. Performance became the only means of documenting the challenges of the people at a time when writing was nonexistent. It was imperative for the people to document their history through art. Therefore, the sensibilities of the era were performed towards acculturating and entertaining the younger generation through a wholesale presentation of the instrument of history.

*Ijengen* is, therefore, a subtle registration of reality through art and the means through which this could be achieved is verbal and periodic performances at the arena. From the postmodernist post of view, this may amount to recognition of the peculiarities of individual cultures just as no single culture may be considered universal to the exclusion of others. Gestures and movements are deployed during *Ijengen*. These are symbolic undercurrents and some of these gestures may represent homage to the departed as well as a preparation for the transition of the deceased into the world of the dead.
having completed her assignments on earth. The dancers that now replace the nine birds are known as Bojutoro. The people have implicit belief in the efficacy of the performance towards paving way for the deceased in her journey to the ancestral realm. Ijengen is, no doubt, entertainment to the people. Thus, Ijengen is a peculiar creative script and it is not meant for a particular time as its application transcends cultural and artificial shores.

REFERENCES


