Dialetics and Structural Organization in the Èbibì Festival Performances of the Èpé People in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

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

**Introduction**

Though there has been research into various aspects of Ìjèbù traditions, orature and customs, including those by Ogunba (1967), Disu (1987), and Oluyomi (1989). It appears, however, that not much attention has been paid to the structural organization of the festival events. This paper attempts to open new vistas in research into African festivals, by exploring the Ëbì bi, a major traditional festival of Òpẹ,¹ which is in the coastal area of Ìjèbù-land² in Lagos State in southwestern Nigeria, from the ambit of structural organization and interconnectedness of the festival performances.

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

Among the Ìjèbù who can be found in Ogun and Lagos States in the South-western part of Nigeria, there are many traditional festivals celebrated annually. The Ìjèbù celebrate Òrò,⁴ Agemọ⁵ and Ëbì bi as major festivals

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¹ A small town on the back of the Lagos lagoon about thirty-two kilometers southwest of Ìjèbù-Ode in southwestern Nigeria. Òpẹ is predominantly a fishing community.
² Refers to all Ìjèbù communities in Ogun and Lagos States, in southwestern Nigeria.
³ These are festivals related to deities who are commonly revered by the Yorùbá speaking people in Nigeria.
⁴ A cult manipulated by the Ògbònì secret society to cleanse, appease and act in a correct manner in the society. Òrò is represented by an effigy on a string whirled around like a bull-roarer. Women are not to witness Òrò activities.
⁵ This is a festival peculiar to the Ìjèbù. Agemọ has sixteen priests, who offer prayers and sacrifices to the deities on behalf of the community.
annually. Ẹ́bí̀bí̀ is celebrated annually by the Akílè-Ìjèbú to the exclusion of Ìjèbú-Rémo. ⁶ However, the Rémo people celebrate Oró and Agémọ. ⁷ The Ẹ́bí̀bí̀ festival, which takes place between January and May of every year, features spectacular performances, drama, music, and dance, all accentuated by a rich display of musical ensembles, costumes, and make-up.

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

**Theoretical Orientation**

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

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

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

⁷ This festival is held between October and November. It is after this event that the date for Ẹ́bí̀bí̀ is fixed.
which may be non-literary.” Within the context of this current study, text here refers to the various Ẹ̀bí bì performances.

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

Background of the People
The people of Èpé in Lagos State are of the Ìjèbú stock, both culturally and linguistically. Èpé is a small town on the back of the Lagos lagoon, about thirty-two kilometres southwest of Ìjèbú-Ode in southwestern Nigeria. Èpé is predominantly a fishing community (Disu 1987, 3). The Èpé people have a belief system that derives mainly from Yorùbá cosmology, and they believe in most of the deities of the Yorùbá pantheon. A riverine people, the Èpé people also celebrate water-related Yorùbá deities such as Èkíne, Òrìṣa-nlá, Òmọ-Oko and Yemoja. The Èpé people, like most African communities (and by inference the Yorùbá), practice ancestral worship. Èpé ancestral figures like Húrìkà, Alárá, and Ogúnmúde are prominent in the worship matrix of the people.

The Èpé people revel in festivities. Ogúntómísin (1999, 13) mentions Ìkí-Baalé, Ìlèyà, Òmọ-Oko, Èkíne, Obàlùàye, Ògùn and Èbí bì as the most prominent festivals celebrated annually by the people of Èpé. The festivals serve as occasions for bonding and the wellbeing of the people. In this study, the paramount concern is the Ẹ̀bí bì festival, which is the major and most important event in the life of the people.

The Ẹ̀bíbì Festival
Among the Ìjèbú people of Èpé in Lagos State, the Ẹ̀bí bì festival is central in the corpus of festivals celebrated annually. The Ẹ̀bí bì festival falls into the category of festivals meant for the cleansing and purification of the town, towards the achievement of good health and prosperity for the people. The festival consists of a wide array of festival events, ranging from rituals and re-enactments to pure entertainment. Sometimes, it involves a mixture of all of these elements. The Ẹ̀bí bì festival is celebrated among the Akilè-Ìjèbú as previously stated, and it involves plenty of symbolic action, song, dance, and pantomimic dramatization of short archetypal incidents from the experience
of the people in the outgoing year. The Ẹ̀bìbì takes place between January and May every year.

**Structure in Oral Performance**

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

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

i. **Wording**—the language material with which linguistics deals.

ii. **Texture**—the organization of wording. This includes the poetics: prosodic features of prose and verse of any order, the style of a genre, a culture or a school of narrators and singers, and the individual idiosyncratic style of the performer.

iii. **Narration**—the organization of the narrative’s plot.

iv. **Dramatization**—the organization of the performance: acoustic, visual, and kinetic aspects which are constituent elements of every performance of a work of oral literature, no matter its length.

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

**The Structure of Ẹ̀bìbì Festival Performances**

A large part of the Ẹ̀bìbì festival performances has a high level of structural organization and interconnectedness. Within the concepts of the
structure of oral performances, the following categorization was identified: wording, texture, narration, and dramatization.

**Wording**

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

In the opening sequences of the declaration of *Èbì bì* in Òpê after the Ìdé-munu festival in Ìlese-Ìjèbú,¹⁸ there are some ritual sacrificial rites to Èṣù, Oguntà, Òbáluaye, and Ìgbérùn. Once these are done, the king, Oba Kamrù Ishòla Ànímashaun (Elepê I), the Òlọjá of Òpê, declares the *Èbì bì* open by stating: “the festival is here, the people gather! Even the rainbows proclaim the festival!” (*Ọdúnjọ! Iwosu! Èsumare Keìn Ọdùn!*) This statement signifies that the festival cycle has begun. This is symbolic of the goodwill that the deities and ancestral spirits have towards the community. Once the declaration has been made, the festival proper begins.

Ìgbésì-Ọṣù¹⁹ is the next event in the line-up of activities for the *Èbì bì* festival. This event involves a lot of stylized language use as well as codification, due to the fact that the Òṣùgbó, which is a secret society, is involved. In this segment, the sacred gbèdu drums are beaten and the king with his chiefs and the Òṣùgbó dance to the music

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

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¹⁸ This aspect of the pre-*Èbì bì* rites heralds the announcement of the date for the festival proper.
¹⁹ Masquerades in the *Èbì bì* festival corpus.
Call: Erí ́ wo, ya ́
Erí ́ wo, ya ́
Erí ́ wo, ya ́
Response: Ayá gbó,
ayá tó,
ayá je
Call: Lord of secrets, descend
Lord of secrets, descend
Lord of secrets, descend
Response: Descend for longevity
Descend for honor
Descend for prosperity

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

For the masquerade aspects of the festival such as: Jìghò, Alégbagba, Òkóóró, Èpà, Èyò, Kílájolu, Ègòdò, Agbo, Agíra, Àjójì-Imale and Akalagule, 10 the Ijébú variety of the Yorùbá language is used during performances. The only masquerade which uses a language different from Ijébú is the Èyò masquerade which communicates in Èko variety of Yorùbá and Ègunnuko, which communicates in the Nupé language, which is popularly referred to as Tápà.

Structurally, bright colors are peculiar to all masquerades within the Èbìbì festival corpus. From the green and red color of Alégbagba to the multi-colored costume of Èpà, the aura and spectacle of a community in celebration is evident. All the acolytes of these masquerades are usually in uniform to symbolize their membership within these masquerade cults. Worthy of specific mention with regard to the colorful appearance is the Kílájolú masquerade.
From his mask to stockings is an array of apparel in beautiful colors and symbols. The mask is designed as a boat with frills and decorations. The body gear is made of beautifully colored woven raffia, with mirrors, eye-slits, and cowries. Ki lájolú wears a skirt around his waist, beneath which are leotards. This is why Ki lájolú is taunted by spectators in this manner: “Kilajolu, thief, who has stolen his wife’s skirt!” (Ki lájolú Ole, a jí sí kẹẹtì iyawó è!) Once Ki lájolú is taunted in this way, it pursues the spectators and flogs whoever it can catch with the cane it wields. For those desiring to praise Ki lájolú, another song which elicits rapturous and frenzied dancing is rendered in this manner:

Solo:  Kí lájolú Oro!
Chorus: Ọn gbọna jọin jọin!
Solo:  Oní kọyí Oro!
Chorus: Ọn gbọna jọin jọin!
(Repeated several times)
Solo:  Kílajolú the deity!
Chorus: As hot as ever!!
Solo: Oní kọyí the deity!
Chorus: As hot as ever!

This reaction is symbolic of the actual power and prowess of the legendary Àkàlàjolú, the Ìlajẹ marauder. Ki lájolú has a grotesque appearance with a long cane, which he uses to beat daring spectators. This serves as part of the re-enactment of the attacks of Àkàlàjolú on the Èpè people before the intervention of Aláùsá, a prominent Èpè warrior.

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

Èpé Aláró ọmọ Ôgúnmódede
Èpé Olùku ̀bàtā
Kúkúru lósàn-án
Gbọrọ gbọrọ l’órú

Èpé Aláró the child of Ôgúnmódedé
Èpé enamored of mud
Unassumning in the daytime
Unpredictable at night time

This short incantatory praise is replete with poetic metaphors and symbols that signify the riverine nature of Èpè. Evidently the area is surrounded by
water and mangrove swamps and Epe people are predominantly fishermen. The Epe people live a sedentary lifestyle during the daytime and burst into life at night when most of the fishing is done. This is observed in the metaphors used in lines three and four.

**Texture**

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

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

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

For instance, during the Kílá jolú event, the masquerade traverses the entire town, while he avoids the Ígò dò masquerades that are out to capture him. In this process, the mask and costumes have to change hands on several occasions before sunset. The masquerade appears to crisscross the community in a rather haphazard manner. However, it was observed that tradition had delineated where the masquerade would enter, such as the king’s palace, the
Balógun’s house, Obutu compound, Jagun-Ọba’s compound, Agbálájóbi’s house, Elekú’s compound, Ògbọn’s house, among others. During these stops, the personality beneath the costume and the mask changes.

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

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\begin{align*}
Kí lá jolú Àjáso \\
Kí lá jolú Kánsí lọ \\
Àjáso omo Ìyá Èbútè \\
Kí lá jolú Àjáso
\end{align*}
\]

Kí lájolú, Àjáso
Kí lájolú, the Councilor
Kí lájolú son of Ìyá Èbútè
Kí lájolú Àjáso

Presumably, the character beneath the mask was one Síkírí Ògbòméjì, who was a serving councilor at the Èpè Local Government Secretariat at the time. His mother was popularly called Ìyá Èbútè, and she lived at the Lagoon side called Èbútè Afuye. The councilor, Síkírí Ògbòméjì, was also popularly called Àjáso. He got this moniker because he was dropped for the position of councilor and was reinstated at the last minute. Àjáso literally means “cut and joined.”

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

The kinetics of the Èpà masquerades also fit into the discussion in this segment. The Èpà masqueraders are usually small and nimble-footed. Their sole function is to dance and do multiple summersaults, to the admiration of
the audience. Members of the audience can identify the individual Èpa masqueraders through the costume and the technique adopted in accomplishing the summersaults. Faces of members of the audience are filled with awe and excitement when these specific masquerades appear.

Narration

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

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

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

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

Solo: Ojó ro mí jó (2ce)
Chorus: Òní jó óó’ (repeated after each line)
Solo: Omi dúdu (2ce)

Omi dúdu, fo’jú j’aró
Ó fo’jú j’aró kò le rẹ so
Kò le rẹ’so kò le rà’gò
Kò le rẹ kí jípá àwa
O mu mi rantí Òjó, o jó
Wón ní kí n dúró
Mo dúró
Wón ní kí n běrẹ mo běrẹ
Mo dě lé mì o rénu sọ

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

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

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

“Why does the mud act as if it has no relationship with the river?” (Kí lọ se a.batá bí ẹni tí ọ bó÷ò tan?) This proverbial question implies that the character is acting unconcerned with events going on around him or her.

“The palm kernel in the footpaths cannot be cracked by the feet” (Enu lẹsẹ fí ní pa èkùró Ojú ọna). This negative idiomatic assertion implies that the issue is too knotty and needs wisdom to resolve.

“The leaves and the bark of the orange tree, serve the same purpose as the orange itself” (Èwé ọsàn, ọsàn ni. Èpo igi ọsàn, ọsàn náà ni!) The aphoristic statement is used to justify inclusion of friends and families of cult members in some aspects of the secret rites of these groups.
“It is in the home of the woodpecker that mortars are carved.” (Ní ̀ilé ̀àkòkó ̀ni wón ti n gbe’̀dó). The proverb is used to control public speaking among cult members so that non-initiates will be unable to hear the secrets of the group.

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

**Dramatization**

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

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

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

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

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