

POETIC AESTHETICS IN *KIRIJI* OF ILAJE-ETIKAN, ONDO STATE SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Kiriji is the royal rite of passage and it is an indispensable aspect of the folklore of Etikan Kingdom in Ilaje Local Government Area of the present-day Ondo State, Nigeria. Royal funerary rites and the aesthetics in them have enjoyed a lot of investigative attention in multidisciplinary research. However, the poetic aesthetics in Kiriji of Etikan Kingdom had not been adequately examined. This is the thrust of this paper. Data gathered from primary sources through direct participation and oral interviews were subjected to qualitative, critical analysis, and secondary sources such as textbooks and electronic books through the theoretical prism of Karl Heider's, David Hayano's, and Carolyn Ellis' brand of auto-ethnography. Auto-ethnography is the theory which sees the researcher's experience and practice as both a performer and researcher as a potent way of advancing folkloric knowledge. The study found that a lot of aesthetic features typical of indigenous oral poetry such as prayers, curses, libations, songs, chants, dirges, obeisance, and invocations are innately embedded in Kiriji. The study also found that these indigenous oral forms are revelatory of the belief system of Etikan Kingdom in the power of the spoken word as a tool for piety, devotion, and human fraternization with the world around and beyond. The study found that these oral forms have the same artistic beauty, serve the same thematic purpose, and exert similar aesthetic appeal as Western poetic arts on the minds of global audience who might be alien to the tradition of Etikan people. The study concluded by recommending the perpetuation of the oral forms as tools for education, edification, social and spiritual cohesion. This propagation, technologisation and transmission will guarantee the survival of the oral forms through the instrumentality of the digital media. This will further engender globalisation and the eventual

globalectics will, in turn, project the image of Etikan Kingdom on the cyberspace.

Keywords: *Kiriji*, poetic aesthetics, auto-ethnography, indigenous oral poetry, folkloric knowledge.

Introduction

People usually examine aesthetics with ethno-racial prejudice and unnecessary subjectivity. This is done mostly by dogmatically and conservatively believing that the study of aesthetics is limited to Western poetic forms. While African scholars may not be able to thoroughly critique art forms without depending on Western literary or theoretical canons, several calls for caution and careful introspection had also been made regarding the employment of Western literary canons and paradigms in the appraisal of indigenous oral forms and ethno-racial artistries. The study of the literariness of the Yoruba popular culture and aesthetics in indigenous oral forms are some of the numerous areas where such calls are needed if the research does not place theory above the content for which such a theory is employed. The examination of poetic aesthetics in *Kiriji*, which is the thematic preoccupation of this paper falls within this domain, hence, the need to religiously heed those calls for caution and deep introspection.

Conceptualising Aesthetics

The concept, aesthetics, refers to what constitutes beauty in a work of art or any performance. It also refers to the things in arts, performances or even rites that do not only constitute beauty but also capture one's attention, fancy or sense of judgment or taste in a text, either oral or print/written. What constitutes performance aesthetics is determined and underscored by the "cultural tradition" from which an event originates. It may be extended to what Karin Barber (1992, 264) describes as "gestural tradition". In trying to conceptualise aesthetics, this study is not going to limit itself to words and the meanings ascribed or attributed to them by the cultural worldviews of the people of the society of origin of a performance or rite (as in the case of the royal

funerary rite of the Ilaje-Etikan) which is the subject of this research alone but also layers or shades of interpretation obtainable or discernible from gestural tradition, body movements or objects held by each of the performers in the rite will also be reviewed based on what the people of Etikan Kingdom attribute to them in contextual matrix. In this sense, therefore, what constitutes aesthetics in one cultural community may be minimally relevant with what constitutes aesthetics in another but with different discernible interpretations since the cultures of origin are different. Oloruntoba-Oju (2025) is of the belief that "the principal characteristic of literature is aesthetics- a thing of beauty, a product of creativity (8). This is revelatory of the fact that beauty is the central focus of aesthetics. Rexroth also shares this same belief.

Bacon (1980); Richardson (2002); Dezin (2003); Panaiotodi (2003) have, at various times and from different angles attempted to pontificate on what constitutes, to them, performance aesthetics or better still, aesthetics. Their postulations have seemingly a common ground. The common ground is that what constitutes aesthetic beauty in a cultural or ritual performance is subject to the enhancement of and definition offered by the "cultural scenario" and cultural perception of the people. From their standpoints, aesthetics, whether in theatrical, ritual or profane performances operate within cultural paradigms or complexes and these paradigms or complexes encompass the people who are the collective performers in the performance and the layers of interpretation attributable to their performance. The opinion of Oripeloye (2016) earlier echoed above again, comes to mind. He is of the opinion that:

The bodily performance in such communities is also essential for the determination of what constitutes the aesthetic value of the performance. Yet, what constitutes aesthetics differs from one society to another and, therefore, it may not be feasible for someone who has not been integrated into a particular society and its culture to clearly understand or determine the aesthetic value in such community. (13).

My disagreement with this opinion bothers on the fact that what constitutes aesthetic value, like humanity, is the same everywhere. What differs from culture to culture or community to community is the meaning or interpretation ascribed to such performative acts. For instance, in *Kiriji*, which is the royal funerary rite of the Ilaje-Etikan and Ilaje-Ugbo, during the Ijo Oloro (Oloro's ritual dance or glee), the Oloro (the clownish officiant) appears from the traditional grove, which is akin to the backstage in a modern theatre, sits comically on the traditional stool, and eventually begins to dance comically to the tremulous rhythm of the Olumoghonne (Etikan traditional) drums. As he dances, he plays ludicrous pranks to make the people laugh against the taboo that they must not laugh at him and his comical dance and gestural act. If a folklorist extracts that scene from the traditional or ritual dance and plays it among the people of any culture across the world, the "Oloro's dance," which is an "aesthetic act," will still be seen as a dance or, more accurately, a ritual performance. Only the meaning made of the dance will be different. As is the case with the Etikan Kingdom, the Ijo Oloro is the clownish mimicry of human follies or human existence in the theatre of life, which starts, ends like a very short or ephemeral dance act or performance and fades from human memory within a short period of time.

While an unlettered Etikan person in the things of drama or theatre sees the dance as just "Ijo Oloro" and nothing more, a dramatically and theatrically inclined person in Dublin, Ireland or Copenhagen in Denmark sees the dance within the practical context of mourning a beloved king and a dancer offering what is akin to comic relief to the mourning audience even though the people do not consciously intend it to be for that purpose. To the Irish or the Danish culture from Dublin and Copenhagen, dance constitutes an aesthetic beauty or value as it is to the people of Etikan who are from different cultural backgrounds and isotherms. Thus, the Danish man may find it difficult in fathoming out an accurate interpretation to the dance and the traditional essence of the act, but he identifies the bodily activity (Ijo Oloro) as a body movement to a rhythm and a dance. This

standpoint does not totally disregard Adrienne Kaeppler's (161) call for caution regarding how to understand what can be termed as aesthetics in cultural performances such as the royal funerary rite of Ilaje-Etikan.

Kaeppler's call for caution is worth taking seriously in studying the aesthetics in cultural performances such as the royal funerary rite of Ilaje-Etikan and what it represents among the people. A robust understanding of the culture of the people helps in deepening the understanding of the performance which does not exist or operate in a vacuum. Tanure Ojaide (1996) posits that "the aesthetics of any art form tends to be conditioned by the total experience of the people who practise it" (17). This "total experience of the people" emphasises the accentuation of the people's cultural worldviews since the performance or the rite derives its essence of perpetuation, propagation and continuity from the people who are the repertoire of the culture which produces the rite. Asante, Molefi is of the position that aesthetic qualities reflect the value of a community derived from the assemblage of a performing repertoire that culminates in a functional aesthetics that "possess a meaning within the communicator's and audience's worldview, a meaning that is constructed from the social, political and religious moments in the society's history" (63). This opinion does not seem to take cognizance of the fact that there are some aspects of the people's culture that are characterised by cultural code of secrecy as in the case of the rite of ascension to the throne and passage to the great beyond known as *Kiriji* among Ilaje-Etikan.

To Amadu Khan (145), aesthetics also connotes "the whole gamut of socio-cultural conventions, patterns and practices that embody the appreciation and production of cultural norms and practices as well as entertainment and social interaction and among the individuals or communities". Khan too does not seem to take exceptions to the things in cultural practices that are considered cabalistic in nature. However, whether cabalistic or public, any aspect of a culture that is "beautiful" enough to catch the attention and fancy of a critic or be worthy of critical attention to the critic is considered an aspect of the aesthetics. Thus, socio-cultural contexts are cardinal to the

understanding of aesthetics. This cardinal nature of socio-cultural context is substantiated in the theorisation of Argenti, Nicolas (when he theorises that:

A balanced analysis of non-Western aesthetics must, therefore, be found on a solid grounding in the social context in which the artefacts are produced and/ or consumed, but will also be considered seriously iconographic and formal questions and their relevance for the significance of the objects. What is needed at this stage is the theory that distances itself from the reductionist interpretation of material culture as the objectification of verbal thought processes and addresses the relation between the objective historical conditions within which the individual operates. (200)

So, to understand the aesthetics in most African performances or rites, a researcher needs to familiarise himself or herself with the socio-cultural contexts in which the performances evolved and operate.

This context also extends to the people within that cultural milieu or isogloss. Ododo, S. Enessi (2001) extends the scope of socio-cultural context or configuration which must be put into consideration before pontificating on issues of aesthetics to the worldviews of the people, their belief in the world around them and beyond them and even the historical identity of the people whose performance or rite is being appraised as aesthetic object from literary point of view. By this stand of his, a virile knowledge of the people's language is also central to such appreciation. From Gyekye's binoculars, aesthetics "is characterised by the delight, interest, and enjoyment experienced by human beings in response to objects, events and scenes" (125). Gyekye's opinion here places "the enjoyment experienced by the audience of a performance above the primary or primacy of essence which is the critic's or researcher's immersion in the culture of the people whose aesthetic objects, performances, rites or oral poetry are being investigated". He seems to take this for granted.

Understanding of and familiarisation of oneself with an aesthetic object comes before the enjoyment, delight which Gyekye talks about above. Gyekye, seems to see works of art, performances and rites from the same point of view from which Vansina, Jan (132) has earlier seen it. To him, utility or utilitarian value is key to examination of an aesthetic object. In a more all-encompassing spectrum, Isidore Okpewho argues that the "aesthetic principles" that inform the creations of art in Africa are the mimetic principle, the ecology of art and tradition and originality (301). From Okpewho's vantage point, which others consulted earlier like Gyekye, Vansina etc have not considered, the ecology of art and if I must add, (the anatomy of art), and tradition and originality are not of utmost significance while dealing with the aesthetics in works of art, rituals and performances. Originality is discernible only through the understanding of the tradition from which an aesthetic object originates. Wolff sees aesthetics as "the experience and evaluation of art that are socially and ideologically situated or constructed, and at the same time, irreducible to the social or the ideological"(84).

Aesthetics cannot be secluded to only the social or ideological construct. Ideological and social perceptions are just aspects of the "evaluation of art". This evaluation can also be narrowed down to the spheres of other customary and indigenous lore as we have set out to do in our study of the aesthetics and motifs in the royal funerary rite of Ilaje-Etikan. To keep the discourse on the definition of aesthetics going, let me add my position. Aesthetics is an unbiased and objective evaluation of the various folkloric elements or nuances in a work to study the oral performance that makes it worthy of critical attention and scrutiny. It refers to what constitutes beautiful effects in a work which can be best appraised through the knowledge of the "world" which evolves it.

There are some theories or schools of thoughts in Aesthetics Studies. They include impressionism and intentionalistic schools. Impressionism devotes attention to the impression created or impressed on the minds of the reader or those appreciating a work of

art or an art work which influences or affects their aesthetic judgement on the work under review. This is mostly applicable to painting, sculptures and other art works. Another interesting and thought-provoking school in Aesthetics Studies is the intentionalistic thought. This theory is hinged on the critique and judgement of a work of art based on the intention of an author for the creation of a work. Critics therefore, juxtapose the intention of the author for the creation of the work with the accomplishments of such intentions behind the creation of the work. Such questions as what does the author seek to achieve by creating this work? What message does the author intend to send to his/her audience or readers? By creating this work, what aspect of the societal life does the author portray and why? All these questions suffice under intentionalistic criticism. Notable in the school are W.K. Wimsatt (1907-1975) and Monroe C. Beardsley. The duo jointly published a work entitled *Intentional Fallacy* (1954) as a way of popularising the school and the theory. This study aligns itself with intentionalistic theory of aesthetics (221). The reason for the alignment is that the theory helps to examine *Kiriji*, the royal funerary rite of the people of Etikan Kingdom; as an aesthetic object; the indigenous aesthetics in the rite and the intention of the people of the Kingdom for the perpetuation of the rite and what they seek to achieve through the perpetuation of the rite; which is morality. Here, the rite is being critiqued like either the modern drama or indigenous drama which is a work of art capable of eliciting aesthetic judgement or criticism.

Songs/ Dirges, Chants and the Quests for Admonition, Valediction and Veneration

Calls for caution had been made regarding hasty categorisation of indigenous oral forms using Euro-morphic or Euro-centric classificatory paradigms. Graham Furniss (1995) and Mohammed (1979) have differing opinions on the distinction between Hausa songs and oral poetry. Furniss, relying on Mohammed's work, argues that songs, including praise-songs and modern popular songs, are distinct from poetry or verse. However, Mohammed's attempt to categorize

these forms into Waka I (oral Waka) and Waka II (written Waka) has created confusion. Hausa Oral Poetry and Song Classification, according to Furniss are: Waka Baka (Oral Song). Composed and performed orally, without written records, characterised by fixed rhythmic patterns. Rubutacciyar Waka (Written Poetry): Composed in written form, often using Arabic script, with regular stanzaic form and end rhyme. Both Furniss and Mohammed's classifications have been criticised for oversimplifying the complexities of Hausa oral literature. Scholars like Olajire Olajubu (1977) and Olatunji (1984) caution against rigid categorization based on morphological arrangement or versification, emphasizing the importance of articulation and amplification in oral art forms. The Hausa language has a rich literary tradition, with poetry and songs playing significant roles in cultural expression. Understanding these forms requires considering their historical context, cultural significance, and the nuances of oral performance.

This study share Olajubu's and Olatunji's sentiments or hesitations here and agree that Furniss and Muhammed have failed to thoroughly school their readers in their attempts at distinguishing between songs and oral poetry. Both Furniss and Muhammed have not successfully freed themselves from the academic prejudice of one practitioner or practitioners trying to impose or imply the supremacy of their art form over "others" in such a way "that implies a cultural superiority of one form over the other". Furniss goes further to establish the fact that "a process is at work by which practitioners cross the cultural boundaries to borrow characteristics of the other, sometimes simply to adopt them into their own form, sometimes to make substitutions or alterations which reflect back in opposition to, or as a subversion of, the source". What Furniss (1977) claims distinguishes poetry from songs, in his submission is not totally theoretical or acceptably pragmatic, but authoritatively discretionary.

A song, like spoken words or canticles, can be recited like an ordinary rendition imbued with strong mesmeric power on its referents. Likewise, a poem can be sung (as a medium of amplification,

realisation or vocalisation) depending on the discretionary volition of the artist which is consciously context-dependent or context-driven. The kernel of this argument is that in Africa, precisely among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, what constitutes a poem can also constitute song since versification is naturally common to both forms. To me, what differentiates one from the other is the preponderance of more musical instruments or percussions in songs than are deployed in the rendition of oral poetry. Even, in the real sense of it, musicality and rhythmic composition are inherently integral to both forms. Furniss is trying to use western classificatory paradigms to classify indigenous oral African forms. This experimentation had been carried out in the past and had been found to have failed woefully. Thus, caution is needed in classification or categorisation of indigenous oral forms especially the ones that originate outside the culture that are not the researchers'. Akporobaro (2006) succinctly avers that

Songs normally assume a variety of forms some are rich, imaginative and elaborate in the play of words, rhythm and melody as in the case of many Dinka songs as presented by Deng in the Dinka and their songs and in folk ballads, bridal chants and funeral songs in many cultures. But some can be meaningless rhythmic sounds in a pithy form. Some songs are sung solo, with or without musical accompaniment, others are a choral choric involving many singers. Others are madrigals involving choric exchange of voices in counter-pointed form. (228)

From the opinion of Akporobaro (2006) above, what distinguishes poems and songs from each other constitutes a theoretical conundrum as the two forms are from the same formal root and borrow features that are different from each other. If we claim that a poem is distinguishable from song due to the musical accompaniment, we must also tread with caution as we bear in mind the fact that there is a rapidly burgeoning branch or area of poetry now designated as performance poetry which also integrates songs and some musical instruments and

percussions. So, the drive or the insidious tendency of trying to achieve distinctions between the two forms characterised by stylistic fluidity is fluid. Almost all the characteristic features of the poem identified by Akporobaro (2006) are innately shared by songs especially from African cultural matrix. To this end, too much of efforts must not be dissipated on trying to mark out the distinctions between poems and songs whether from African perspectives or other linguistic and cultural borderlines. This is because songs and poems share seemingly similar characteristics and elemental features across cultures. These elemental features are what Adolf Bastian called “elementargedanken”. Poems and songs are performance-driven.

Ayela E.D. (2016) and Ehinmore O.M. (2016) made their positions on **dirge** / song known especially with reference to funerary rites. Because songs and dirges are arranged morphologically and sequentially in poetic form, they are for the purpose of this research, examined together, based on how they help in engendering the tone and attitude of admonition, valediction and veneration of the late monarch among the Ilaje-Etikan people of Ondo State, Southwestern, Nigeria. According to Ayela and Ehinmore (2016) cited above, songs or dirges rendered during *Kiriji* (royal funerary rite) in Etikan Kingdom are esoteric forms of Biripo adapted for entertainment and admonition. Dirge, also known dialectally as “Ijegbe” or “Luse” as the case and context may, according to Ajimisan (2016), be seen as an example of occasional features of Biripo because of its seclusion to be performed at funeral ceremonies of elders or great men and women.

Akporobaro (2006) goes further to assert that a dirge “is a highly stylistic form of expression that is governed by specific poetic recitative conventions used to express the feelings of the mourners in a determinate form and performance procedure”. According to Ajulekun, Owolola M. (2018), while examining the place of songs in Ijusu festival of Etikan Kingdom opines that songs are “vital elements of the festival”. Like Ijusu Festival and other indigenous festivals, or performances, songs are vital, integral and indispensable ingredients of customary performances and rites. According to Ajulekun, songs are

“coded verbal elements used in almost every day of the festival”. An in-depth understanding and analysis of the songs help to underscore the meaning, message or the people’s quest for admonition, valediction and veneration in the rite and other customary practices of the people. According to Ehinmore (2016), Biripo songs are borrowed during performances at venues of indigenous rite and festivals.

Such Biripo songs are esoteric and cannot be understood by non-initiates of the Oro and the Ubeji/ Ibeji cults. Such songs cannot be decoded or deciphered by natives of the community who are not deeply familiar with their customs. In the opinion of Ajimisan (2016), *Kiriji* is a form of *Biripo* meant for ritual. Despite the “adaptation of *Biripo* in form, during rituals, there are lines of demarcation between the art form, *Biripo* and the sacred venture for which it is deployed”. *Kiriji* is the adaptation of *Biripo* in form during this ritual performance and the adaptation is sacred. Some of the songs used in the performance of *Kiriji* are not just entertaining, they are topical and didactic in intents and contents. The topicality and didacticism of the songs are rooted in the strong words and messages they pass across to the interpreters or listeners who can pick the words one by one and demystify them constructively. Some of such songs are analysed below for illustrations and meaning configuration. One of the songs selected for analysis and illustration was the one collected during the interview with Okun-Omo, M.B. (2026) and it goes thus;

Alolo re e, Oja oo,	Hear with caution, my townspeople
Oja, oja laye	The world is a market place
Alolo re e, Oja oo,	Hear with caution, my townspeople
Ake n’aye,	We cry on earth here
An ma gbo n’oron	But they hear not in heaven
Alolo re e, Oja oo,	Hear with caution, my townspeople,
	the world is a market place.

This song is admonitory in tone and contents. It admonishes people, the survivors of the late monarch and all the people that are present at the celebration of the funerary rite in honour of the late

monarch to bear it in mind, in whatever they do, that the world or the earth is a market place. As a market place, it is just a temporary abode for all human beings. They have all come for trading and they must return home (heaven) on the invitation of the Maker, the owner of the earth (the market place and heaven) which is the permanent home of all the traders (all human beings) on earth here. No matter how much profit one makes in forms of earthly accomplishments or achievements, one must inevitably return home for reckoning and recompense before the Maker in judgment. This song shares similar connotations with some biblical verses such as contained in Revelation 20:15 and Revelation 22:12. The song is rendered not for the hearing of the late monarch but for his survivors who will help in the perpetuation of the tradition and the kingdom left behind by the monarch.

People who live their lives as though they are immortal, are therefore, cautioned to know that no matter how long they live in the market (world), they will return to their permanent home to render accounts of their trading before the Maker who sent them to the market for trading errands in this ephemeral world. The admonitory message there is that the world is a temporary abode for its dwellers both rich and poor; free-born and slaves; the rulers and the ruled. Besides admonition, valediction is also inherent in the song. Through the song, the people bid the late monarch farewell into the elusive realm of no return. The communal ideology or philosophy engendered by the song is the firm and collective belief in the fact that the world is a small place to be inhabited amidst vicissitudes and incertitude within a very short period. Hence, people should behave towards their fellow townspeople and creator in ways that show their acceptance of the fact that they came from one place or realm (heaven) and will inevitably return there at the beck and call of the Maker. It also extends to admonition, valediction and veneration as the people sing in diverse styles, tones and moods to eulogise the virtues of the late monarch, bid him farewell and to also re-awaken the society (community) that he left to moral consciousness. Another song is the one collected from Ajimisan, Johnson B. (2026) which goes thus;

Giriwo, giriwo oo, giriwo!	They will fall, falling is their lots
Oye ighanyi gbe nino egba mi soro	All those who hide inside the mangrove forest to do evil
Giriwo ooo, giriwo	Fall is their lot; it is.

In this concise but epistemologically apt song rendered during the royal rite among the Etikan people, the communal belief of the people in the natural law of rising and falling is underscored by the eventual fall or decline awaiting those who hide in darkness and send evil arrows into the light scenes in lives of their fellow townspeople. In this song, the consciousness of the people in the eventual and inevitable collapse being the lots of evil doers is incontrovertibly inherent. Those “who hide behind the thick mangrove forest to do evil” are cautioned and admonished to desist before it is too late.

The use of “mangrove forest” is an eco-semiotic metaphor, because mangrove trees are the commonest trees in the area. Hence the reference to it, in respect of those who use it as cover or mask for doing evil is didactically sacrosanct. The didactic motif amplified by the song is that no matter how long an evil doer lives, or rises in fame, he or she will fall one day or die, irrespective of material or mundane accomplishments. Hence, the need to do good while alive. The song texts arranged as Appendixes F, G and H are also highly admonitory in contexts and contents. The one in Appendix G goes thus:

Eyi urun uku se	Here is what death has done
Ako	Impetuous child
Uku ti pa bare	It has taken your father
Ako	Impetuous child
O ti pa ‘ye re	It (death) has killed your mother
Ako	Impetuous child
Uku oma oligbogbo	Death, the son of the bludgeon bearing man
Ako	Impetuous child
Uku, olika tenrenpen	the frail-armed death
Uku, Olorigho rogbo	The big-headed death
Uku, uwo na ra ku	Death, you too, will die
Ako!	Impetuous child

In this song, the evil work of death is reported in the killing of the king and the wife. Thus, death being able to kill the king, is also able to kill anybody in life, irrespective of one's social status and accomplishments. Among the Ilaje-Etikan, death is seen as the ultimate and inevitable end of everybody, no matter how highly placed in life. It also shows that death is no respecter of anyone. The kings and the commoners are equal in the hands of death. This is an admonitory call to those who are arrogant or allow offices or power to get into their heads. In the song, the impetuous child is reminded that the same death that killed his father and mother can kill anybody unannounced, including the impetuous child. However, there is a message of hope for the impetuous child (reference to humankind) and the people around to reassure themselves that death (that kills people) himself will die. This is highly homiletic in line with the Christian faith which believes that death will die and "be cast into the lake of fire" as documented in the book Revelation 20:13-14. What is not clear in this communal ideology of the Etikan people is whether it was influenced by the biblical belief occasioned by their contact with Christianity or not. The ego of death is deflated and the hope of those who do good is rekindled and strengthened with the fact that even though death kills them during their existence on this plane of existence, they will rise and ascend onto another realm of existence in the hereafter where death himself will die and will be seen no more, but they (the good people) will rise again, to die no more. The message passed in Appendix G is deep and touchy. It goes thus:

An ka pere uku	Keep blaming it on death
A fara ringi, uya re o	In vain we rob our skin against the tree roughages
Ojo uya keyi a fowo ro ma eee ooo	In vain, we adopt a child against the helpless suffering old age
Ojo dojo muren	Rest on till the other day, the dawn of reckoning in the hereafter
Jaito ri okoto one	When we will meet the man of character
Ojo dojo muren ooo	Till a fresh dawn

Kookoo ooo!

Be upright till then!

The message in this one extends to the issue of child-bearing and adoption. Whether a man has a child to bury him or not, he will surely die and be buried. Thus, in vain, we adopt the child in case we cannot bear a child of our own to save us from the suffering agony of childlessness, loneliness and lack of companionship occasioned by old age. The song shows the configuration of communally held ideology and philosophy that, after this realm, there is life elsewhere and only men of good character or virtue will be granted ingress there. Those who do not do good on earth here will be parts of existence of the here-after but in never-ending damnation. The here-after is personified in the use of “a new dawn in the song”.

The tone of the song in Appendix H is premonitory in the sense that it alerts people to the need to expect death any time. Death, according to the song, does not spare the good and bad people alike. It goes thus:

Uku e n'omore	Death knows not the benevolent
Eruwen ee n'omore	The mild bees know not the benevolent too
Esi ma k'omore re	The housefly took his benevolent kindred
O gbe g'anja	and ascended the high rafters
One mo re ee ma ji mi	The kinsmen that I have,
dabo oghun rira	have not allowed me to live uncomplainingly

Death, in this song is portrayed as being indiscriminate to one's virtue or vices because he kills the benevolent and the malevolent. Thus, people are implored or admonished to eschew vices and imbibe virtue so that posterity will record good deeds of them. Besides admonition to do good while alive, the song in Appendix K, however short, delves into the question or issue of proper parenting. The song goes thus:

Oma ne b'one j'aso	Our children clothe us more than clothes
S'ekun bo o	Train them (shield them) well
Oma ne bo'ne jaso	Our children clothe us better than clothes

Here, it is believed that our children can protect, defend or edify us more than clothes, neighbours or external figures when we are helpless if we train them well. This is a call to all parents to train their children or wards well while they are still young and tender for training so that the children can (in turn), take care of them in their helpless, old age. This is a clarion call to parents to wake up to their parental responsibility of training their children or wards towards the acceptable social and moral norms, ethos and standards of life. The song is rendered when the remains of the late monarch is displayed publicly for the last respect from the children, accomplices and the entire townspeople to show how the children of the late monarch have accorded him a befitting burial. The comparison of the children to clothes here is an extended metaphor. "Clothes" is used to denote external or distant relations. In the real sense of it, our own biological children are believed to be more capable of taking better care of us than distant relations, hence the need to train one's children well when they are still tender-hearted and can be easily led on the right path of righteousness and good virtue.

Thus, songs / dirges in the royal funerary rite do not only underscore the quest for entertainment and admonition alone, they also exemplify the quest for valediction among the people. As reflected in the song arranged as Appendix G above, valediction is inherent in the line "O d'ojo muren jai to ri okoto one" which means till another dawn before we see a man of character like the king. Another ritual song of valedictory nature is found in the short song "O deyin ebibi, jaito ri leghe" which means we will not see "Leghe" (a great leader / ruler) until the end of this tide and the wake of another tide. The use of tide here is symbolic of the various phases of human existence on the two planes of existence. The use of "Leghe" to praise the late monarch also epitomises veneration of the departed monarch as a great man of valour and candour. Those lines above are either to be sung or chanted during the rite in demonstration of admonition, valediction and veneration of the departed monarch and the ancestors as applicable in the liturgical proceedings.

Prayers/ Libations, Obeisance and Invocation as Devotion

Prayers, libations (done to the accompaniment of prayers by pouring either wine, water or blood of an animal or bird) is a form of devotion or piety among the people of Ilaje-Etikan. Other forms of devotion that are done alongside prayers are obeisance and invocation of the spirits of the dead in form of prayers and phatic communion. According to Ajulekun (2018), prayers, libations or even obeisance are inseparable aspects or acts in a festival or rite. They complement one another so that there will be spiritual communion between men and their ancestors. There is a manifest act of human devotion to the powers beyond humans. Ajulekun goes further to lend credence to the submission made here by submitting that:

Libation is a form of worship that involves verbal and non-verbal act. The verbal act of libation has to do with prayers said in form of incantations. The verbal act is used to complement the non-verbal act which involves pouring of the drinks. Libation, therefore, is a religious act intended at invoking the supreme being, the deities and the ancestors. It is a form of devotion that brings the people closer to the benevolent spirits or the supreme being, deities and the ancestors. (70).

From this opinion, prayers come first and libation follows or the two of them go simultaneously. During the *Kiriji*, the Abojutoro Oghonne says several prayers in incantatory mood or tone to the simultaneous pouring of libations as a way of placating or invoking the presence of the Supreme Deity, the gods and the tutelary spirits of the ancestors to the midst of the human beings present at the venue of the prayers. Prayers are compendiums of carefully selected words rendered for the purpose of petition, supplications and intercessions, done in utmost humility or genuflection, made to the Supreme Deity or the ancestors for oneself or on behalf of others, with anticipated or instant answer. During the rite of *Kiriji*, the Abojutoro, who is the chief-officiating minister, priest or officiant makes several prayers and petitions for himself, on behalf of the community, the family and the

children left by the deceased monarch at various shrines. Such prayers are reputed for being a careful combination of both curse and prayers simultaneously rendered. Thus, what constitutes curse at one receiving end constitutes prayers at the other receiving end. For instance, the Abojutoro, who doubles as the spiritual adviser to the late monarch in his lifetime and the mediator between the living descendants and the ever-living ancestors are heard praying thus:

Aghan alale ile yi, an gbo	Give ears you foundational deities
Dede aghan oma oghoku	All the children left by Oba
Adedoyin Oyetakin	
Eyi oba Adedoyin Oyetakin	are now put in your hands for protection.
Ku gbanre ghanyi ma dowo ghan	Whoever will look at them in evil ways or think evil of them,
One yi ba ra bino ghan	you people should afflict them with incessant stomach trauma.
Dabi o ra ro ubi si ghan,	Let them be on one spot in
Ji ghan lo ukeke ma ghan ino	excruciating pains, asking for time
Ji ghan gbe ni ubokan ka biro ubo ojo	to from people

So, in most cases prayers are metaphorically said like the African talking drum which faces a direction and turns its back at another direction at the same time. To the well-wishers, it constitutes prayers, but to the ill-wishers, it constitutes curse said simultaneously. The essence of the collective echo or chorus of “Ase” at the pronouncement of every prayer is the strong and earnest indication that whatever is collectively decreed must unfailingly come to pass. Thus, it is a clear and pedantic manifestation of the people’s belief in the efficacy or potency of whatever pronouncement made and power of unanimity why asking for something or decreeing against something. The Abojutoro, the chief officiant must be a person with a vast knowledge of the history and the panegyrics of the founders or ancestors of the kingdom or the community because he is expected to lace or deck the prayers he offers with the praise poetry of the ancestors or the progenitors of each family in the community. Ajulekun (2018) sees

prayers as being “bi-thematic” because some are for seeking blessing while some are for cursing the enemies of the land.

During the prayers, the palm wine or the local gin is poured in form of libation. The symbolic signification of this is that the people have come to pacify, placate and covet the blessings, protection and guidance of the Supreme Deity and their ancestors through what they are familiar with when they were still on the mortal human plane. The allegorical signification is that one does not pacify one’s native spirits with foreign drinks or items since they are not familiar with them while alive or else, his or her prayers will not be acceptable to his or her ancestors. Most of the prayers are said at the main traditional arena or the village’s traditional square because that is the place that houses the “Oju-Osin”, the shrine of the foundational deities /deity. To the people of Ilaje-Etikan, the “Oju-Osin” is reputed, hallowed and revered as the spot or the habitation built and hallowed by the collective efforts and piety of the ancestors of the kingdom. Thus, there is the belief that whatever they unanimously decree for or against at the shrine is sealed, settled, irrevocable and irreversible. Hence, people come together to pray collectively at the hallowed spot and even, in matters of trust, fiduciary agreement or contracts, people often come to the shrine of “Osin” to pray or swear to an oath. The symbolic signification of this is that whatever is resolved or bound there must not be betrayed or reversed except by collective undoing of all the people present during the initial swearing or oath taking. The Oshin shrine, therefore, is a symbolic signification of the people’s collective ancestry or ascendancy and communal spirit of cohabitation and mutual co-existence.

During the nocturnal quotidian proceedings of the rite, the Abojutoro or the “Oma Panran” kneels, sits or squats as prescribed by the nature of prayers to be rendered to the gods or the ancestors. “Oma Paran” is unanimously elected or chosen discretionarily among the people that are present at the venue of the rite as the ceremonial or titular head or co-ordinator of all the activities or proceedings at the shrine. The semiotic or pan-semiotic signification of the Oju-Osin is that the common ancestry and common foundation or spirits which

sustained their ancestors in the past, is still capable of sustaining them in the years to come provided they will continue to perpetuate collective cravings of the supernatural directions and blessings of their ancestors.

The symbolic signification of the unanimous selection of the “Oma panran” is that the people have converged at the place believed to be their cradle in one spirit and accord. “Oma paran” pan-semiotically signifies a unifying force standing as both the human link or mediator between the living offspring and the departed ancestors, one of whom the departed monarch is believed to be canonised or beatified after the completion of the funerary rite in his honour. All the money raised or other materials brought to the arena are laid before him. When it is the time to wine and dine, it starts and stops on his stool. He represents the visible figure of the ancestral spirit of the supreme Deity and the ancestors in the arena. He is the human overseer of all the proceedings, says the opening and closing prayers, keeps the possession of all the materials used during the rite. He does the obeisance or delegates the Abojutoro to do so on his behalf. Obeisance cannot be separated from prayers, libations and invocation. It either comes before or simultaneously with the main prayers. In one of the episodes in the video clip obtained from the royal funerary rite of Oba Adeleke Adedoyin Oyetakin, the Abojutoro is seen saying:

Alale yii mo ma juba ghan oo	Founder of this kingdom, I do obeisance to you all
Erede oghonne, mojuba re o o	Erede Oghonne, I do obeisance to you
Iyofa oro,	Iyofa, obeisance to you
Akenbiyi,	Akinbiyi
Ajaluwa	Ajaluwa
Ilugbomidare, mo juba dede ghan o o.	Ilugbomidare, I do obeisance to you all
Omode ei juba, Ji iba pa	A child is not killed for doing obeisance
Mo juba ghan dede neni	I do obeisance to you all today
An je ji iba mi se o o o	May my obeisance be acceptable to you all!

The names featured in the obeisance above are names of the founding founders of the kingdom starting from Erede, the son of Oghonne Ajalorun, believed to be the founder of Etikan Kingdom after migrating from Ile-Ife, the source and the cradle of human existence. All the other names mentioned are names of Erede's children and offspring who became kings and ruled the kingdom after him. Obeisance is a subtle way of calling or praising the ancestors of the land to hasten or quicken their response to whatever petition rendered to them. Only the children or offspring that are exceedingly vast and familiar with the history and praise-poetry of their ancestors can do this appropriately and court their positive responses accordingly. This is because it is believed that when you greet and praise your father with many plaudits, you will easily receive his favour or rapid response to your request. According to Ajulekun O.M. (2018), obeisance during "prayers of solicitation are, therefore, significant as they demonstrate the people's total dependence on the immortal beings. So, obeisance is also a way of quickening positive answers of the ancestors to our prayers during festivals, rites and other customary practices". Invocation is a special way of inviting the presence of the ancestors and ancestral spirits into human presence. Invocation is one of the aspects of human communion or liturgy for connecting into the realm of the spirits. One of such obeisance is demonstrably enacted in his work as shown below:

Olojo oni uba re o	The owner of today, we reverence (do obeisance to you)
Uba Eghare yii gbo	Reverence to the ancient deity
Uba Eghare yii to	Reverence to the prosperous deity
Uba Eghare yii ren kelekele	That journeyed progressively from Ufe
	Gbe n'Ufe wa

As foregrounded above, the observance of obeisance is the demonstration of pure reverence to the ancestors and the powers that men believe rule in their affairs, without which is believed to be impossible to achieve anything tangible and meaningful. The obeisance featured also perfectly demonstrates invocation of the unseen powers

to come into the midst of the pious and expectant humans and give them their requests without delay or much ado. The spirit of the "owner" of the day (Olodumare), the deity of longevity, deity of prosperity and the spirit of the deity that migrated from Ile-Ife are invoked to come to the midst of their children and the faithful adherents so as to bless them beyond bounds. The Abojutoro's prayer is accompanied by libations and the congregation's affirmation, "Ase," which translates to "so shall it be" or "it is done already." This collective endorsement demonstrates the community's faith in the power of spoken words. During the ritual, negative speech is prohibited, as "Olugboghun," the deity ensuring answered prayers, is believed to be present. The prayers serve a dual purpose:

1. Blessings: On the part of the children of the departed monarch and the community.
2. Curse: For enemies of the children and the community.

This dichotomy highlights the complex and bi-thematic or bipolar nature of prayer in this cultural context, where blessings and curses are intertwined.

In sum, prayers, libations, obeisance and invocations are forms of pious devotions of the people to their deified ancestors, spirits and the Supreme Deity. They are forms of supplications and humble plea to the supernatural powers believed to be in heaven or out of the physical reach of men but can be reached metaphysically. Hence, when the chief officiating minister or officiant is done with the petitions in each of the cases, he says "Po!" meaning it is sealed, stamped or it is done as petitioned. The people, in form of turn-taking, will chorus "O t'oron!" which means the petitions have reached heaven or the realm of the ancestors and have been stamped and sealed with ancestral stamp and seal of authority that will make it promptly granted. In some cases, the bull-roaring masquerade (Ibeji/Arubeji) sounds or honk its ancestral voice at the announcement of each of the petition as a mark of acceptance before the ancestors. The voice of Arubeji is the affirmation of acceptance of the earthly prayers of the fervent adherents

of the tradition of the kingdom in the metaphysical realm or the elusive abode of the ancestors and the Supreme Being who is believed to hear anywhere, any time. All the liturgies are done in clear and total exemplification of the devotees' total devotion to their ancestors or the spirits believed to be worthy of their devotion especially in the African polytheistic and pantheistic religious parlance. So, unlike in the monotheistic Christianity, devotion, in the royal funerary rite of the Ilaje-Etikan people are not fixated. Rather, it is multi-dimensional, pluri-liturgical and it takes diverse forms. Prayers, libations, obeisance and invocation are few of the diverse ways of demonstrating devotion to the ancestral spirits, Supreme Deity or other totemic figures.

Conclusion

Although the examination of orality or oral tradition falls within multidisciplinary humanities, this study undertook the examination of poetic aesthetics in *Kiriji* of the Ilaje-Etikan people by situating it within the sphere of popular culture and oral literature. The study also explored the intersection of oral poetry and aesthetics. With the calls for caution mentioned above, the study employed Western theoretical canons and paradigms in the exploration of the subject-matter. The study did not only find that most of indigenous Yoruba-Ilaje oral forms critiqued in this study possess most of the artistic nuances claimed to be exclusive to Western literary forms. The study made a call for the deradicalisation of Euro-Western theories and literary paradigms especially while employing them for the critique of such indigenous performances or oral forms. Deradicalisation and recourse to caution will help in proper re-perspectivisation of the forms thereby engendering globalisation and globalectics.

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