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Folklore in Yorùbá Novels: A Potential Tool for Culture Documentation and Preservation

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Abstract

Culture documentation and preservation have become a noticed aspect of cultural sustainability within the ambit of development agenda. Folklore in literary arts plays a unique and undisputable role within cultural sustainability by preserving society's heritage. In other words, folklore employed in literature, literary arts to be precise, serves as a means of culture documentation and preservation. One common feature of Yorùbá novels is the significant presence of folklore materials. This study interrogates the role of novelists in documenting and preserving Yorùbá culture by employing Functional theory to critically analyse Ìṣòlá's *Ogún Omódé* and Òní's *Ojú Rí*. The intent is to validate the viability of the novel as a channel for keeping Yorùbá culture alive through the incorporation of folklore materials. The paper argues that more explicit coverage of culture documentation and preservation required not only improves the contributions of writers as agents of culture documentation and preservation, but also presents an increased understanding and appreciation of the value of the writers for their continued survival, individually and collectively. It concludes that

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employment of folklore in literary arts is a viable way of culture safeguarding which every writer should imbibe.

Keywords: Folklore, Cultural sustainability, Yorùbá novels, Functionalism, Incorporation

1. Introduction

Folklore is part and parcel of every oral society globally. It is a larger and wider aspect of human culture that has many genres ranging from oral literature, material culture, traditional life or social customs and traditional dance, music, and festivals. In her recommendation on safeguarding traditional culture and folklore in 1989, UNESCO says “folklore forms part of the universal heritage of humanity and that it is a powerful means of bringing together different peoples and social groups and of asserting their cultural identity”. It is rare to see any phase of tradition and life that aspects of folklore are not touched (Owómóyèlá 1979: 1). However, there is no doubt that oral traditions of several communities in Africa are threatened. Some of these traditions such as languages, skills and practices that formed the root of such communities’ culture and identity have already been lost to western education and civilization. The present generation is now on the surface without any connection to its past. Despite that these communities are made up of rich varieties of cultures with their indigenous languages and folklore, yet, the people of such communities are concerned about the loss of the past of their culture because they are solely preserved and taught through their folklore (Haring 2007: 3).

The UNESCO in conjunction with many countries of the world have been making efforts to find ways of bringing attention of people to this loss of culture, and ways to assist communities in taking the needed steps in keeping their oral traditions alive since these traditional resources are part of their inheritance from

the ages that cannot be exempted in building their societies' future. In consonance with the efforts of the UNESCO, these oral traditions of the Yorùbá people are kept alive in some literary arts, more precisely the novels. Reading Yoruba medium novels will make Yorùbá people learn better about their folklore and at the same time keep them alive for the benefit of generations yet to come. This study is an attempt to create awareness for Yorùbá people to know about their folklore kept in the novels written in Yorùbá language and to honour their oral traditions by learning them better since Yorùbá writers have made it easy for the general public to have access to several genres of Yorùbá folklore by making their books tools of documenting and preserving Yorùbá culture.

Some scholars of folklore have worked on Yorùbá folklore. Ọlátúnjí (1987: 7) opines that the genre constitutes the most vital elements of the Yorùbá people's cultural heritage. Whenever any aspects of this culture are handed from one generation to another, three separate items which are material, behavioural, and verbal elements are transmitted alongside with them. Folklore is a tool through which the Yorùbá engaged with themes and issues pertinent to their life contexts. It reinforces the societal values, and speaks to both old and young in the society. Mustapha (1986:25) affirms that it is all about human's lifestyle. It is so because it exhibits wisdom, knowledge, understanding, instruction and life experience of the Yorùbá the way they are happening from time to time. Mustapha explains further that it is an important channel or medium in which Yorùbá people employ in expressing their thoughts about things that are paramount to their existence on earth such as economy, politics and religion.

UNESCO's 1989 Recommendation on safeguarding cultural heritage notes that folklore role in human society could be social, economic, cultural and political. This study focuses on culture documentation and preservation through incorporation of

folklore materials in the selected Yorùbá novels. The folklore materials considered in the study are *oríkì*, songs, *Ifá* verses, incantations, folktales, riddles, folksongs, rituals, *Egúngún festival*, *ìjálá* and other moonlight games. It addresses the cultural dimension of sustainability. It also examines what happens to those folklore genres that are yet to be documented, or unfrequently used in literary works. Yorùbá novelists that employ these materials in their novels do so because they have enjoyed direct contact with oral resources, and they are more familiar with these materials. They also decided to incorporate them in their works to entertain their readers and to make them learn about their society's worldview. Through this idea, Yorùbá culture is sustained, and it contributes to the development sustainability of the nation at large, because, without cultural sustainability, other aspects of development sustainability of the nation have nowhere to go. It is so, because culture is a way of life of every society. Culture is as important to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability (Hawkes, 2001: vii). As a matter of fact, a sustainable society depends upon a sustainable culture. If a society's culture disintegrates, so will everything else (ibid: 12). This study argues that by collecting, documenting, safeguarding and keeping the material and immaterial culture of Yorùbá alive in literary arts, Yorùbá writers contribute in promoting self-esteem among these populations and social cohesion in their society which is Yorùbá society.

2. Related Works

Various scholars have carried out studies on Yorùbá folklore. These are Bascom (1965, 1969), Babalolá (1973), Ìṣòlá (1973), and Olatúnjí (1984), Ajíkòbí (2013), and Akínyemí and Ajíbádé (2016). They pointed out the importance of folklore branches in their works. Yorùbá novelists who employed folklore materials in

their novels also realise the importance of these traditional resources in the society most especially in safeguarding Yorùbá culture. Such writers include Fágúnwà (1950), Ọgúndélé (1956), Fálétí (1969), Ọgúnníran (1972), Ìṣòlá (1990, 2008), Ọní (2001), among others. Examples of novels that have the significant presence of folklore materials are Ìṣòlá's *Ogún Ọmọdẹ* and Ọní's *Ojú rí* which are part of the selected novels analysed in this study.

Folklore is all forms of prose narrative, written or oral, which has come down the years. It may be folk songs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, or other materials preserved in words or in writing (Ihueze 2015:57). Folklore may also be defined as a learned, traditional responses forming a distinct type of behavior (El-Shamy 1967: xi). Choudhury (2014:3) claims that "Folklore is found to be a favourite indigenous resource for an African novelist that s/he draws on for molding the aesthetic concerns in novel writing". Folklore is found to play an integral role in the writings of the Yorùbá novelists, though the novelists employ this traditional resource in their writings for different motifs. Yorùbá novelists do not write in vacuum; that is why both Ìṣòlá (1990) and Ọní (2001) are actively alive to their contemporary realities. Both writers showcase the kind of environments that brought them up in their novels. Choudhury (2014:4) opines that "folklore could be understood to denote the traditional expression of a people as seen in their proverbs, songs, tales, legends, myths, and riddles. In the African context, the folklore could be said to form an inviolable part of the life of the community". Yorùbá folklore has highly unique educative and entertaining values. It imports unending knowledge on the Yorùbá history, values and beliefs, morals, and many other indigenous knowledge that uphold the traditions of the people. Emmanuel Obiechina in Choudhury (2014:4) argues that folklore:

embodies the values and attitudes (of a people) in its proverbs and fossilised saying, its belief in myths and religion, and its consciousness of its historical life, collective outlook and ethics, in its legends, folktales and other forms of oral literature.

Going with this claim, it is undisputable that Yorùbá folklore educates members of Yorùbá society in the way of their societal set-up, social values, taboos, sanctions, and lots more.

Folklore has survived in Yorùbá society despite the advent of western writing and the foreign tradition that owns it. Folklore materials such as Ifá verses, oral praise poetry, legends, myths, folktales, folksongs, moonlight games, proverbs, festivals still perform their significant roles in shaping the values, beliefs, traditions, philosophies and worldviews, actions and behaviour of Yorùbá people. Emmanuel Obiechina in Choudhury (2014:5) says

Traditional forms, rituals, ceremonies provide a framework for experiencing reality. In contemporary Nigeria, these forms continue to mold the sensibility of most Nigerians, not merely of the illiterate majority but also of the educated elite.

Evidently, Yorùbá novelists incorporate folklore materials in their novels, since these elements of folklore are not mere aesthetic device for novelists as said by Choudhury (2014). Choudhury says folklore 'serves as a means to enliven an entire value system and world-view'. However, Ìṣòlá and Òní's role is that of an artist in his society heading towards educating the general public of their oral traditions, most especially in the changing world we are in. Ìṣòlá and Òní are so committed towards documentation and preservation of Yorùbá cultural values, more precisely the intangible heritage of Yorùbá nation. The novelists achieved this by employing folklore materials like *oriki*, *ofò*,

riddles, folktales, folksongs, Ifá verses and rituals within the receptacle of the written channel known as novel. They do so because the writers in question believe that these genres are tools through which the Yorùbá engaged with themes and issues pertinent to their life contexts (Adésínà 2017). These folklore materials reinforce societal values and speak to both old and young in Yorùbá society. Also, they exhibit wisdom, knowledge, understanding, instruction and life experience of Yorùbá people the way they are happening from time to time (Mustapha, 1986:25).

Akínyemí and Ajíbádé (2016:295) claim that literary writers incorporate folklore materials in their arts in order to disseminate messages that relate to the way oral artists are using them. Yorùbá novelists that employ these materials in their novels do so because they have enjoyed direct contact with oral resources, and they are more familiar with the materials. Oral resources impact always serve as source of inspiration for the writers rather than mere usage, or employment. Taire Ojaide in Akínyemí and Ajíbádé (2016:298) agrees that

writers ... are indebted to the oral traditions because they grew up in that tradition. Most grew up in the rural environment and again, most of them have conducted researches on the oral traditions.

For instance, Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá studied Yorùbá genres of incantations and many other oral traditions. Adéléké (2016: 70) affirms that Ìṣòlá's experiences as a child at Lábòdé village via Ìbàdàn is the basis of his *Ogún Omódé*. Kólá Ọní also has an oral tradition background because of the environment where he grew up and the kind of parents he has. Since they are familiar with oral resources they are bound to employ them in their literary works in one way or the other. We must be aware that this intuition

cannot be hidden at all, because they are the one that trigger the inspiration needed for writing written literature.

3. Methodology

This study adopts analytical approach for its discussion. This is so because the study focuses on a textual analysis of folklore materials incorporated in the selected novels as a tool for culture documentation and preservation. The traditional resources considered in the analysis are *oriki*, songs, *Ifá* verses, incantations, folktales, riddles, folksongs, rituals, *ijálá* and other moonlight games. It analytically studies the selected novels with a view to discuss their viability in safeguarding Yorùbá folklore. Though, *Ìṣòlá* and *Òní* cannot be grouped together as contemporaries, however they both heavily incorporated folklore materials in their novels in such a way that the expression of their socio-cultural ethos reflected in their works. Thorough analysis of their works shows that folklore is a reservoir of Yorùbá cultural ethos that enriches Yorùbá novels, either written in Yorùbá or European languages.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is Functional theory, which deals with the roles of folklore in human society. Functional theory is one of the numerous approaches adopted by the American Cultural anthropologists to study folklore. It concerns with examining the contribution of folklore in the maintenance of social institutions. Among the functionalists are Franz Boas (1858 – 1942), the father of modern American anthropology; Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917), Bronislaw Malinowski (1884 – 1942), Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881 – 1955) and William Bascom (1912 – 1981). The clearest picture of the functional theory comes from William Bascom's work

cited in Dorson (1972). In his effort to show the function of folklore in human culture, Bascom regards verbal arts as

the creative compositions of a functioning society,
dynamic not static, integrated not isolated, central
not peripheral components of the culture

(Dorson 1972:21)

In consonance with Bascom's argument, Glazer (1997) opines that every folklore item must have a function that it performs in human society. In other words, every proverb, tale, folk belief, or ballad should satisfy some important cultural, social or psychological function.

Approaches to functionalism are three; biopsychological approach (Malinowski), Reginald Radcliffe-Brown's approach, and Durkheim and Marcel Mauss' approach. Radcliffe-Brown is interested in the functioning of the social structure while Malinowski's interest is on the individual and thereby de-emphasises the importance of the social system as having a reason of existence beyond that of the individual. Glazer (1997) is of the opinion that

the needs of the individual are satisfied by the social
structure of his or her culture, whose function it is
to satisfy those human needs.

In other words, there is a need that every social institution has to satisfy such that every item in every culture is not left out as well. That is, every folklore material has a function to perform both at the level of the individual and the society. According to Malinowski, the focus of inquiry through functional theory should be on the survival of a group as a whole rather than taking the explanation of surviving relics in modern life as important as

cultural evolutionary theorists suggested in their arguments. Simply because he believes that every single element in culture, such as folklore materials under study, is a contributing factor to the maintenance and continuity of social groups. Meanwhile, Ben-Amos (1976:223) makes it clear that ‘the functional approach is concerned not with what genres are, but with what the members of the society say they are’. Due to the aptness of Molinowski’s approach to the study of folklore, it is considered as the working theory for the discussion in this paper.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

The Yorùbá literary artist does not believe in the art for art’s sake. Rather, the message, to him/her, is so important that the mode of effective transference also becomes very important. If the mode of presentation is beautiful, the chances are that the message itself will be remembered (Ìṣòlá 1998:1). This claim is very apt in considering the messages that the novelists of the selected novels tried to disseminate to their readers through folklore materials incorporated in their works. Incorporation of oral traditions in their arts is so essential, and the materials are presented in unique ways such that the messages in the novels stick to the minds of their readers. They do so because they apparently still see themselves as members of the group of traditional artists who are regarded as watch-dogs on society’s morals (Ìṣòlá 1998:4). The only way this could be done is to document and preserve folklore in their literature. Ìṣòlá and Òní have no regard for language simplification because of their readers. The duo use words, proverbs and other folklore elements correctly and accurately to suit their stories, not the readers as we notice in most of the novels of other Yorùbá writers.

Folklore incorporation in Yorùbá novel is a strategy in which Yorùbá culture is being documented and preserved by the writers. Ìṣòlá and Òní’s novels show that both Yorùbá oral and

written literatures are mutually exclusive ways of narrative, as well as mutually sustaining. Writers incorporate folklores in plays and novels not only to enhance the understanding and entertainment of their readers, but also to preserve their culture for future generation. Folklores used in creative works of African writers do not occur by accident rather they were being used for specific roles and significance which they perform in the culture (Ihueze 2015:61). Folklore incorporated in Yorùbá novels makes reading them pleasurable. They also mark the structure of the story in the novels in a clear and attractive way. They serve as an integral part of the novels, and the novelists make oral traditions alive in recreated form. Some of these folklore materials such as songs, riddles, folktales provide a participatory avenue for the readers that Ihueze calls ‘audience participation’. When the narrator of a literary art introduces songs, the audience then assist him to produce the chorus, and such literary art makes the readers to develop a pleasurable reading habit. These are the significant functions that the incorporated traditional resources performed in the selected novels. Both writers used their novels to teach Yorùbá oral literature to their readers. How the novelists used the materials are discussed in the following sections.

5.1. Folklore in Ìṣòlá’s *Ogún Ọmọdé*

5.1.1. Oríkì (Panegyric Poetry)

Oríkì is one of the folklore materials that Ìṣòlá incorporated in his novel. *Oríkì* is regarded as a poetic phrase which is used to describe or praise (Ulli Beier and Gbàdàmósí 1959:12). We observe that Ìṣòlá employs *oríkì* in *Ogún Ọmọdé* because he believes that it may soon go into extinction if care is not taken. Hence, he puts it into the mouth of the children for them to teach themselves (Akínyemí and Ajíbádé 2016). Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá in Akínyemí (2008: 441-442) states reasons why Ìṣòlá always incorporates folklore materials such as *oríkì* in his creative

writings. He says there is a need for a writer like him to go back to the teachings in Yorùbá culture because many people including children are alienated because their parents have refused to teach them the values in Yorùbá culture. The children now depend on the information they get from internet and other mass media. Ìṣòlá sees his creative writings as a way of bringing such children back into the culture in such a way that they would enjoy. That is why he takes pleasure in incorporating Yorùbá oral literary and cultural materials in all his creative writings including *Ogún Qmọ*. Anya (2018: 24) confirms that eulogy is an essential aspect of praise poetry. In other words *oriki* is designed to eulogise the virtues of the subject either human or nonhuman. Also, the Yorùbá use *oriki* to correct bad behaviours in their community. It invokes the qualities of the subject via figures of speech such as allusions, metaphors, simile, and onomatopoeia. There is a lineage praise poetry of the narrator (Délódún) that his mother rendered when the boy was going back to school after a long vacation he spent with his parents in the village (Ìṣòlá 1990:141-143). The reader is informed in the *oriki* rendered by Délódún's mother that the narrator originates from *Ìlòkọ* lineage and how powerful his forefathers were. Ìṣòlá also tells us through the praise poem that *Olúgbón*, *Arèsà* and *Onilòkọ* were siblings (p. 142). Some of the noble things that Délódún's ancestors did was brought to the fore in the *oriki*. Good virtues and traditional values and practices are appreciated in the *oriki* presented in the novel.

5.1.2. Qfọ (Incantation)

Incantation is used among the Yorùbá to command or authorise spiritual agents to do certain things for someone. In other words, it is a means by which the chanter wins the spiritual agents to his/her side (Orímòògùnjẹ 2004: 51). There are several kinds of incantations that serve different purposes in Yorùbá society. Some are used for healing while some are used for negative

intentions, which are meant for evil purposes especially when the user has the intention of punishing someone who may have offended him/her. Incantations can also be used to ward off evil from oneself, to secure the love of people, blessing or benefits (Olatunji 1984: 147). In line with Olatunji's claim, incantation presented in the novel is employed by the children to ward off punishment that they may face at home for playing hard games in the bush. When the children were thinking on how to escape punishments at home by *Baálé* who saw them playing hard games in the bush, *Dolápò* remembered an incantation that an Ilorin man taught him. The man told him to use *ògúlùtu* (clod of earth) whenever he needs the effectiveness and efficacy of the incantation. The incantation must be chanted on the *ògúlùtu* which would be smashed on the ground for it to scatter into pieces. If it scatters into different parts, then there would not be any problem at home, but if it does not there would be punishment for them at home. Since none of them wanted to be punished at home, they did according to *Dolápò*'s advice. The incantation goes thus:

*A kì í torí gbígbó pajá, No one kills a dog because it is barking,
 A kì í torí kíkàn ká pàgbò, No one kills a ram for its horn fighting,
 A kì í torí rúkòrùkò pòrùkò No one kills a he-goat for its unpleasant behaviour
 Èrín lòmòdé é rín kowó, Children laugh when they see money
 Èrín làgbàlagbà á rín kòmò Elders laugh when they see a newborn baby
 tuntun,
 Èrín ni kí wòn ó rín kòmi lóni. They must laugh when they see me today.*

Iyìolá and Délódún smashed their *ògúlùtu* on the ground, and it scattered into pieces, but *Dolápò*'s own did not scatter rather it rolled on the ground. This incident created great fear in *Dolápò*'s mind that there would not be a way of escape for him from punishment at home. Fortunately, *Baálé* did not inform their parents about their deeds when he got to the village. *Ìṣòlá*

presented this scene in such a way that makes it more similar to the manner in which the users in Yorùbá society perform it. Incantations are used sometimes to ward off evil from individuals and to secure the love of people. The children chanted the above incantation with a desire to avoid being punished for what they did but to be loved by every one that hears about their case. The love they requested for in the excerpt is the love that would not allow their parents to punish them for their misconducts when they return home.

Similarly, a scene in which Baálé used charms to put off the strange light which he saw on an Ìrókò tree through incantations when Baálé and Jíire were returning home from somewhere is also narrated in the story. Baálé pointed an àdó 'gourd' full of charms at the Ìrókò tree, and the strange light went off. They then continued their journey that morning. Ìrókò spirit began to murmur until they passed by the tree. The spirit later released its light immediately Baálé and Jíire passed by it. It is also mentioned in the novel that the Yorùbá have charms or medicine that can cure snake bite (pp.31-33). Ìṣòlá's experience on the use of incantation in Yorùbá culture gave him the chance to employ it aptly in the novel. The positive function of incantation as employed by the author in the narrative will make many of Yorùbá orature stay alive for a long period.

5.1.3. Àlọ-àpamọ (Riddles)

In Yorùbá society, riddles are usually performed during moonlight storytelling sessions (Ọlátúnjí 1984 and Akiyemí 2015). The riddles always serve as prelude to storytelling and other moonlight games sessions. Ìṣòlá creates a picture of how the setting of riddles session used to be in Yorùbá society whereby boys and the girls may sit separately listening to the elder who is dishing out the riddles. However, there is a little difference in the arrangement of the riddle session presented in the novel. The

writer gives children the privilege of presenting riddles by themselves without the presence of any elderly fellow among them. The girls sat on one side while the boys were on the other side at the frontage of Baálé's house in the evening while presenting the riddles. Among the Yorùbá, riddles are posed most often in the evening after a long day's work. It is at this special time that children and grownups gather in the family courtyard to listen to moonlight stories (Akínyemí, 2015: 14). Six riddles were presented in the evening before moving to the storytelling section. The riddles they presented in the work are *Kín ló bóódò tí ò ró tó mú - Abéré* (What drops into a river without making a sound - needle); *Kín ní ñ kan Ọba ní kòò - Olúkòndó* (What gives the king a knock on the head? - Razor). This riddle refers to a non-human which ordinarily would not be expected to give respect to the king while all human beings must in line with Yorùbá culture; *Pété rỌyó, pété bọ - Àtéléşẹ* (*Pété goes to Ọyó and returns safely - Àtéléşẹ (sole of the foot)*). Others can be found on page 19 of the book.

Riddles always make children think deep to find and provide answer to the question presented before them. Ọwóádé (2019: 83) observes that riddles impart indigenous knowledge and give moral instruction in an entertaining manner. He explains further that riddles help children to solve some critical and practical problems of life. Akínyemí (2015: 26) says

riddles constitute a formidable moral and intellectual exercise for Yorùbá children, and are useful in strengthening a child's reasoning and decision-making abilities.

As a matter of fact, those are the reasons why Ịşòlá used the above riddles in his novel. The main target audience in the novel are the

children. The author uses these riddles to introduce the younger ones to Yorùbá culture and tradition.

5.1.4. Àlọ-onítàn (Folktales)

After sometimes, the children moved on to storytelling (folktales). Àyòkà opened the storytelling session with the tale of Tortoise and Dog that went to steal yam from a farm in their neighbouring village. They did so because there was famine in their village to the extent that nobody could get food to eat (Ìṣòlá 1990: 20-25). In the tale, the dog is portrayed as a clever animal who is more smarter even than the tortoise. Tortoise was arrested by the farmer who took him to the King's palace at the Tortoise's village for rightful judgment. The king's messengers were sent to call Dog to come and react to the allegation levelled against him by the Tortoise. However, the Dog pretended as if he was not part of the operation. Dog was eventually released because the king and his chiefs believed that Tortoise just wanted to implicate him for no reason. Afterward, the king commanded his servants to throw Tortoise down from the top of a tall *Ìrókò* tree. The Tortoise sustained injuries on his back. Cockroach, ants, and *Ìkamòdùn* (stink-ant) helped to remold his back, and he recovered from the injuries. However, Tortoise could not help insulting his helpers because he had no regards for them. His ungrateful attitude made the three fellows to leave him with his rough back, and that is why the back of the tortoise is not smooth till today.

Jíire also narrated the tale of Tortoise that stole Leopard's drum; the tale of how a rat stole and ate locust beans was told as well by Níkẹ́ẹ́; and the narrator himself, Dẹ́lọ́dún, narrated the tale of two wives whose husband abandoned for three years. Ìṣòlá used those tales purposely for amusement and moral lessons so that the children will know the consequence of stealing. However, there are other moonlight games the children performed on that faithful evening, but separately because the boys did not want to

join the girls to perform *Sànsaalùbó* led by Níkèé, the male characters performed another game known as *Olóbìírípò* (pp. 26-28). In sum, Yorùbá folktales offer an ideal format for providing moral, ethical, and cultural information to young people about the world in which they live (Akínyemí 2015: 122). The folktale narrated in the novel shapes children's understanding of the realities of life; it also assists them in building good characters that their society requires for sustainability.

In consonance with Yorùbá customs, there is no day in Yorùbá society that wards are not performing moonlight games and folksongs. However, if it rains and the frontage of their parents' houses are full of mud and water, and the weather is cold, they may use open places inside their various houses. This is confirmed in the following excerpt from the *Ogún Omoḍé*:

Alé tí òjò bá rọ̀, a kì í ráyè ẹ̀rẹ̀ alé níta nítorí òtútù
àti ẹ̀rẹ̀. Ẹ̀gbón bí a bá wà nínú ilé náà, a máa n fí
ẹ̀nu dá ara yá

Ìṣọ̀lá (1990:83)

We do not use to play outside anytime there is rainfall due to cold weather and mud. However, if we are in the house, we always sing folksongs to amuse ourselves.

The narrator states further that *àrọ̀*, *ìmọ̀* and other *àrọ̀fọ̀ omoḍé* (children folklore) are always performed inside whenever rain falls. They are prevented from playing outside due to cold and mud that often accompany such rainfalls. Examples of such children folklore used by the writer to teach moral lessons to children are found on pages 83-85. Such folksongs are deeper in meaning and difficult for the children to understand but they do enjoy them because they are songs that they can dance to. Délódún makes it clear that they love to sing them anytime they

are playing in their houses. The songs make reading of the novel pleasurable for readers, and always remind them of how their childhood were spent.

5.1.5. Egúngún Festival

Egúngún festival is another folklore material that Ìṣòlá employed in his novel. The Narrator and his friends went to watch the performances of masquerades when they travelled to Ìbàdàn. One of the masquerades is *Atìpàkó*, the leader of *Eégún alágbò* in Ìbàdànland. *Atìpàkó* uses a big and heavy mortar as head mask, whenever the mortar is becoming too heavy while performing, and the masquerade employs èsà chants to communicate using the following incantation to express the heaviness of the mortar to his followers. The effect of the incantation is that the mortar will then become light for him to carry during his performances. The incantation goes thus:

<i>Ará iwájú È gbé e.</i>	<i>People at the front, carry it.</i>
<i>Èrò èyìn, È gbé e.</i>	<i>People at the back, carry it.</i>
<i>Gẹgẹ lòwú alántakùn n fúyẹ,</i>	<i>Cobwebs are always light in weight,</i>
<i>È gbé e è è! (p.106)</i>	<i>Carry it !</i>

After chanting the above incantation, the mortar becomes light as cottonwool on his head. *Atìpàkó* prays for Olúbàdàn and all his chiefs during the festival every year. The Yorùbá believe that such egúngún (i.e. *Atìpàkó*) are capable of appeasing, propitiating and ejecting evil spirits from the society (Babáyemí 1980: 42). In other words, the major role that Egúngún *Atìpàkó* and other *egúngún alágbò* perform during Egúngún festival in Ìbàdànland (and Yoruba society in general) is to ward off evil spirits out of the town and promote peace and tranquillity in the land. Sometimes *Atìpàkó* starts by showering blessings on the chiefs

and ends the session with curses and vice versa. Both dimensions are symbolic during this period because it is all about the certainty that surrounds whether the chiefs would still witness his performances the following year or not. Due to this, chiefs are always afraid and dreadful when the celebration of this masquerade gets to that level because whatever prediction he makes will come to pass before the next celebration. The typical blessing and curse that goes out from Atipàkó are: *N ó bá ọ lẹ̀mìù; N ò níí bá ọ lẹ̀mìù* (p.106) (I will meet with you next year; I will not meet with you next year). The excerpt signifies that any chiefs addressed by the masquerade in this manner would not make it to the next celebration. But if the masquerade states otherwise, such a chief would surely be alive to witness yet another celebration. Such chiefs always burst to celebration because they believe that nothing would happen to them till the following year. The statement goes thus: *N ò níí bá ọ lẹ̀mìù, N ó bá ọ lẹ̀mìù* (p.107) 'I will not meet with you next year, I will meet with you next year'. However, every masquerade that comes in contact with *Atipàkó* must bow for him for such masquerade to continue being alive to witness another masquerade festival celebration.

It is clear in the novel that drummers always add colour to *Egúngún* festival celebrations in Yorùbáland by instigating fight among the masquerades using the premise of one disrespecting the other. Other masquerades celebrated in Ìbàdàn which were mentioned in the novel are *Afidìlẹ̀lẹ̀gẹ̀gẹ̀, Dúrónkíkà, Alápánşánpá*. *Alápánşánpá* must give Olúbàdàn and his chiefs some strokes of the cane during the celebration before he returns to *Ìgbàlẹ̀* (the underworld) every year. It is a tradition of Ìbàdàn that must be carried out by the *Alápánşánpá* masquerade. Other masquerades are *Olóòlù* and *Tònbòlò* (children's masquerade). Ìşòlá makes it known in his novel that Ìbàdàn people believe greatly in worshipping their ancestors during *egúngún* festival.

Other folklore materials which Ìṣòlá employed in *Ogún Qmòdé* to entertain his readers and teach children some Yorùbá cultural values are *Etíyèrí* and *Ìjálá* which are more prominent among Òyó people (Ìṣòlá 1990: 33-38). The villagers came out en masse to watch *Etíyèrí* performers at the front of *Baálé's* house. This is the manner in which *Etíyèrí* performers carry out their performances in the region. They move from village to village and town to town to entertain people and inform them about some happenings in their environments. *Ìjálá* is a Yorùbá poetic form which is performed by hunters or Ògún devotees, the Yorùbá divinity of iron. It is used in the novel to describe the qualities and physical appearance of the character called Baba Láfià (p. 82). Ìṣòlá was privileged to have grown up in Ìbàdàn, and he had come in contact with several Yorùbá oral artists and gained a reasonable experiences from them before writing the novel.

5.2. Folklore in Kólá Òní's *Ojú rí*

5.2.1. Songs

Act of singing has been part and parcel of Yorùbá life. People express their feelings and emotions of joy or sadness in song. Yorùbá songs are not only deeply rooted in the people's cultural lives, but also serve as expressive channels of internal and external experience. The themes or concerns of songs are numerous and vary significantly from one occasion to the next (Akínyemí 2015: 132). This fact is not new to Kólá Òní and that is why he uses songs in his novel to reveal experiences, thoughts, and emotions of his characters. Òní employed songs in his novel to reveal the intent of the hearts of his characters including thoughts or feelings of joy or sadness. Ògúngbè mí, the main character, sang a song that lays emphasis on what his children would do for him in the nearest future if he fails to provide for their needs and give them sound education. The song goes thus:

<i>Àgbè tí kò gbín kòkó,</i>	<i>The farmer who does not plant cocoa,</i>
<i>Bó bá dàgbà tán, omọ rẹ á şépè lé e</i>	<i>When he grows old, his children will rain curses on him</i>
<i>Arékende,</i>	<i>Arékende,</i>
<i>Aayé, arékende. (p.4)</i>	<i>The life, arékende.</i>

He remembered the song when he was thinking of how he could take care of his family. He encouraged himself to do the needful before it is too late.

The same character sings another song on his way to see Ògún-Àjọbọ, his friend, for assistance (Òní 2001:11). He used the song to warn himself not to be delayed so that he would not miss the opportunity of meeting with his friend, Ògún-Àjọbọ. Unfortunately, his friend had died before he could get to their meeting point. The corpse of Ògún-Àjọbọ was found on the railway line where Ògúngbèmi met people watching the dead body, and he ran back home immediately with sadness because his hope of getting assistance from his friend had been shattered. It was a tragedy for him to see the lifeless body of his friend on the ground that rail had scattered. Ògún-Àjọbọ was killed by the night security officers at *Bódijà* during his armed robbery operation in one of the residents' houses.

Ògúngbèmi praised his wife who advised him not to go to work after he had a terrible dream (Òní 2001: 16). Ruth warned her husband not to go to work that day in order to avert any evil that accompanied the dream. She says when there is life, there is hope. The song goes thus:

<i>Rúùtù şá layàà mi, Àbèni àpé,</i>	<i>Surely, Ruth is my wife, Àbèni Àpé,</i>
<i>Béèyàn ò fí taya şe, yòò tẹ́.</i>	<i>He who does not take to his wife's counsel, will be</i>

<i>Yóó tẹ̀ẹ̀ o, bàmu ní ó ròó.</i>	<i>disgraced</i> <i>He will be disgraced, and</i> <i>so embarrassed.</i>
<i>Èyàn tí ò fì taya ẹ̀</i>	<i>He who does not take to his</i> <i>wife's counsel,</i>
<i>Yòò tẹ̀ẹ̀.</i>	<i>will be disgraced.</i>

Ògúngbè mí shows his appreciation through the above song to his wife for her good advice on how he could avert misfortune that may come his way on account of his bad dream.

Bákàrè remembered the songs that Àjànàkú masquerade's drummers at Gbòngán used to sing for the masquerade while he was meditating on what made him become Ìdí-Ayùnré resident. The songs state thus:

<i>Àjànàkú pẹ̀nì kan tì,</i>	<i>Àjànàkú was unable to kill</i> <i>someone successfully,</i>
<i>O bawo jẹ́.</i>	<i>He has violated the cult's</i> <i>principle.</i>
<i>Ohun tó o pọ̀ o ẹ̀,</i>	<i>What you said you would do,</i>
<i>Nígbà wo lo ẹ̀ é?</i>	<i>When will you do it?</i>
<i>Bó bá burú tán,</i>	<i>If things go wrong,</i>
<i>Ìwọ̀ nìkan ní ó kù! (p.32)</i>	<i>It will remain only you!</i>

Bákàrè laughs himself to scorn and admits that it remains only him truly. Bákàrè becomes a resident in Ìdí-Ayùnré after accidentally killing an old woman with his bus at Gbòngán.

Another song used in the novel is the folksong that Bákàrè sings in response to his friend's invitation to do a joint money ritual. Bákàrè replied Ògúngbè mí with a folksong after telling him the tale of the Tortoise and Python to affirm his loyalty and cooperation with Ògúngbè mí. The song goes thus:

<i>Awé irú kan,</i>	<i>A slice of locus beans,</i>
<i>Èmi ẹ la jọ n lọ</i>	<i>You and I are moving together.</i>
<i>Bó ẹ̀òkun,</i>	<i>If it is the sea,</i>
<i>Èmi ẹ la jọ n lọ</i>	<i>You and I are going together.</i>
<i>Bó ẹ̀sà,</i>	<i>Even, if it is the Lagoon,</i>
<i>Èmi ẹ la jọ n lọ (pp.40-41)</i>	<i>You and I are going together.</i>

Bákàrè used the song to assure his friend that he would always be with him, and they would jointly do the money ritual that Ògúngbèní introduced to him since he also had been trying to get out of poverty which he has been suffering right from the time he came out of prison.

Ògúnlabí, Ògúngbèní's son, was imprisoned at Pàntí, Yábàá for his fraudulent act. After spending some days at Pàntí, the police decided to transfer him to Alágbọ̀n, Ìkòyí, where he would be severely punished for the crime he committed. Having heard the decision of the police at Yábàá, Ògúnlabí was scared and made attempt to seek for help not to be transferred to Alágbọ̀n prison. He walked up to an elderly Yorùbá sergeant at the station for assistance, but the man replied him with the following song:

<i>Agbádá labuké n wò</i>	<i>agbádá is the clothe of the hunchback</i>
<i>Agbádá labuké n wò</i>	<i>agbádá is the clothe of the hunchback</i>
<i>Bíké bá dàgbà tán apáa búbá ò ká a.</i>	<i>When the hunch grows old búbá can not cover it</i>
<i>Agbádá labuké n wò. (p.67)</i>	<i>agbádá is the clothe of the hunchback</i>

The police officer told him that he is reaping what he has sown. The Sergeant reminded him of what took him to prison and reaffirmed that no one would deliver him from the situation.

Ògúnlabí spent six months at Alágbọ̀n prison before he was eventually released.

Ruth also sings some songs in the novel on account of her predicament. She sang the songs on getting home after all her efforts to bring back home her husband whom the spirit of insanity sent out from home proved abortive. Ògúngbè mí ran to Bódijà to display his madness; his wife followed him but she was unable to bring him home. She was so sad and depressed, weeping and singing at the same time (Òní 2001: 69-70). The songs are:

<i>Fọ́lášadé o,</i>	<i>Fọ́lášadé,</i>
<i>O ò lókọ́ mọ́ o,</i>	<i>You no longer have a husband,</i>
<i>Bọ́lókọ́ bá ñ fepo jẹ́ṣu</i>	<i>If those who have husbands</i>
<i>má mà pọ́ o gbọ́ o</i>	<i>are eating yam with palm oil, do</i>
	<i>not mind them</i>

The song made her heavy mind to be relieved, and she kept remembering songs that would make her heart to be free from heaviness. Ìṣòlá is aware that Yorùbá do console themselves with songs whenever they are victims of the situation like what happens to Ruth in the novel, and how they can face the challenges of life without being swept by the circumstances. She sings another song thus:

<i>Adébayọ́ o, Adétilá,</i>	<i>Adébayọ́, Adétilá,</i>
<i>Bó o délé o kí yèyè mi,</i>	<i>When you get home greet</i>
	<i>my mother,</i>
<i>Gbogbo ayé ní ñ ra bọ́lugi</i>	<i>Everyone buys good things</i>
<i>Èyí tí mo fẹ́ rà ni ò jẹ́ ñ wálé.</i>	<i>The one I want to buy doesn't</i>
	<i>allow me to come home.</i>

She informs the readers through her song that it was her misfortune that did not allow her to do what her mates are doing;

consequently, it prevented her from visiting home (*Abéòkúta*) to see her parents. This is the kind of situation many are facing when they travel to places other than their homeland to reside. Some do not come back home because there is nothing to show for their travelling and they decide to stay back until the situation favours them. She was singing and weeping, and there was no one to console her. But she spoke to herself and told her children to stop crying. Afterwards, she gave her children food to eat.

Ògúngbèmi sings a song when his grandson, Kònkòdù, relocated him and his family from Ìbàdàn to Lagos to show that they have become Lagosians. The song (*p.119*) states:

<i>Èkó làwá n gbé,</i>	<i>It is Lagos we are residing,</i>
<i>Èkó làwá n gbé,</i>	<i>It is Lagos we are residing,</i>
<i>È rí 'mọ dẹ' tó mọ wa lénu,</i>	<i>That is why we speaking</i>
	<i>Lagos dialect,</i>
<i>Èkó làwá n gbé o-jàre.</i>	<i>It is Lagos we are residing.</i>

Òní used songs in *Ojú rí* for better understanding and for his readers to enjoy the novel. Apart from that, the songs also inform the readers at every point in time of the challenges of every character and how they overcome their problems. Yorùbá people love to express their thoughts or feelings of joy or of sadness through songs (Ajíbádé 2007: 165 and Fájényò 2016: 157). That is why all the songs employed in *Ojú rí* inform readers about the intent of the hearts of the characters that sing them.

5.2.2. Ifá Verses

Ifá verses are other Yorùbá folklore incorporated in Òní's *Ojú rí*. Abimbólá (1975: 3) describes Ifá as “the Yorùbá god of wisdom, knowledge, and divination, who occupies a premier position among Yorùbá divinities”. While Ifá verse is regarded as a storehouse of information about Yorùbá mythology and

cosmology (Ọlátúnjí, 1984). Yorùbá people recognise Ifá as a repository for their traditional body of knowledge embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore. Ọní is aware of the significant role that Ifá performs in the lives of Yorùbá people. Yorùbá believe that there is no aspect of human life that Ifá does not have information about. Akínyẹmí (2015: 125) explains that Ifá is capable of providing solution to all kinds of problems and life challenges facing human beings. Experiences of the writer about the efficacy of Ifá verses evidently encouraged him to incorporate them in his novel.

Ògúngbẹmí is a son of an Ifá priest who often accompanies his father to various places such as Ìbàdàn, Ifẹ̀, Ọ̀yó, Ọ̀wu, Gbòngán, and Ìpetumodù while he was alive. This makes him to be versed in chanting Ifá verses. Among the Ifá verses employed in the novel is *Ọ̀pìpì, yé mọ níwòn kó o lè rápá beyin* (the featherless fowl, lay few eggs that you may have hands to cover your eggs). Ògúngbẹmí used this Ifá verse to explain his misfortune. He says, assuming he did not give birth to many children, it would have been easy for him to train them, and the problems would have been minimal. He gave birth to eight children. He realised that he was the cause of his predicament by giving birth to many children.

Bákárè remembered the Ifá verse that Ògúngbẹmí, his friend used to chant when they were together. He remembered it because it was apt in supporting his explanation of his predicament. The Ifá verse (p.34) states thus:

<i>Ọ̀dà má torí mi dá,</i>	<i>Famine, do not break out on me,</i>
<i>Ìṣẹ̀lẹ̀ má torí mi ṣẹ̀,</i>	<i>Evil, do not afflict me,</i>
<i>Ọ̀kùnrun má mọ̀hùn</i>	<i>Sickness, take not my voice to</i>
<i>mi rọrun.</i>	<i>heaven.</i>
<i>A díá fún Kúmápàyí</i>	<i>Ifá was performed for Kúmápàyí,</i>
<i>Tí ó fígba pàákàrà ṣẹ̀bọ.</i>	<i>That would use the broken</i>

calabash to carry sacrifice.

The story that accompanies the Ifá verse is also narrated in order to present it the way the Ifá priest chanted it. The accompanying story goes thus: There was a man who was very sick to the point of death. When he was in serious agony, he was praying loudly that *ikú-má-pàyi-o* ‘death do not take this one’, and Ikúmápàyi was someone’s name. Ikúmápàyi then consulted an Ifá priest for his name not to be taken to heaven by the sick person. He was told to offer sacrifice with broken calabash. It was this broken calabash that Ikúmápàyi threw into the backyard of the sick person. Immediately he threw it on the ground, the sick person changed his voice and started asking about the sound made by the broken calabash until he died.

5.2.3. Ritual

Ritual is regarded as an act of communion and communication with supernatural forces. It establishes and sustains spiritual harmony with supernatural forces that Yorùbá people considered to be greater than humans. In the story, Ọ̀gúngbè mí was taken to Fádípè, an Ifá priest at Onímù via Gbòngán in Ọ̀sun state, for healing by Bákàrè and Ruth, his wife. They spent three days at the Ifá priest’s house before Ọ̀gúngbè mí was totally healed from his insanity. Bákàrè and Ruth narrated how Ọ̀gúngbè mí started his madness and the cause of the problem to Fádípè. They informed him of their experiences before coming to him. Having listened to their story, Fádípè consulted his oracle to know what to do and how to approach Ọ̀gúngbè mí’s case. He then spoke to a cowry, and gave it to Ruth with a bone to cover with her palms separately. He consulted Ifá for the second time, and asked Ruth to drop the cowry on her left palm on the ground. She did as commanded. Fádípè congratulated them that Ọ̀gúngbè mí would be healed. All of them were extremely happy for the assurance of

healing given to them by the Ifá priest. Fádípè asked them to give him five hundred naira only for ritual materials, and he said the ritual would be carried out in three consecutive days. Bákàrè and Ruth agreed to stay with Ògúngbè mí till the third day. Bákàrè gave him the money, and Fádípè commenced the ritual immediately (Oni 2001: 97-98).

Bákàrè observed that Fádípè and Ògúngbè mí went out in the middle of the night on the day they got to Onímù, and returned home around three thirty in the morning. As Fádípè promised, Ògúngbè mí recovered even earlier than the stipulated period. It was amazing to Bákàrè and Ruth that Ògúngbè mí could recover so soon from his insanity. Upon the completion of the ritual, Fádípè called his visitors and consulted Ifá again in their presence for the confirmation of Ògúngbè mí's health status. Fortunately, it was Ògúngbè mí that mentioned the corpus which appeared on the divination tray. Fádípè was very excited that Ògúngbè mí had recovered totally, also he is a son of a renowned Ifá priest. Having seen this, Fádípè requested them to return home and assured them that there would not be any problem again. Fádípè warned Bákàrè that he should use his money to do whatever he could do for his riches would disappear since Ògúngbè mí had recovered (Oni 2001: 100).

5.2.4. Incantations

Incantation constitutes the wishes of the chanter as framed or structured by him in provoking unseen forces to perform some certain assignments that will bring his will to pass or to achieve his aim. Yorùbá use incantation to control the physical and spiritual worlds and subject both worlds to their will. When performing incantation, words are uttered in a structured way or in a set of order (Ọlátúnjí 1984). In line with Yorùbá beliefs, Ògúngbè mí chants an incantation to refute and cancel any tragedy that may befall him on account of the dream he had on the

previous night. He assured his wife that there would not be any danger on his way, he would go to work because if he decides to stay back at home, the white men he works with might sack him. The incantation he used to avert the fulfilment of his bad dream is:

<i>Ọ̀gbólógbòò ẹ̀kùn, ẹ̀yinjú níí fí í tanná</i>	<i>An old Tiger which uses the eyeball to ignite fire</i>
<i>Àyànmọ́ ẹ̀kùn, a pèsè</i>	<i>The Tiger's destiny provides</i>
<i>Wọ̀n délé Ọ̀lọ́fín</i>	<i>They got to Ọ̀lọ́fín's house</i>
<i>Wọ̀n nì bú ganranmù</i>	<i>They were threatening</i>
<i>Wọ̀n nì bú ganranmù</i>	<i>They were threatening</i>
<i>Wọ̀n láwọ̀n fẹ́ pa Mùkúseré</i>	<i>They said they want to kill</i>
<i>ọ̀mọ Ọ̀rúnmilà</i>	<i>Mùkúseré, Ọ̀rúnmilà's son</i>
<i>Ọ̀rúnmilà lénìkan ò leè pa</i>	<i>Ọ̀rúnmilà said no one can kill</i>
<i>Mùkúseré ọ̀mọ̀ toun</i>	<i>Mùkúseré, his son</i>
<i>Ó ní wọ̀n kì í torí ẹ̀yìn</i>	<i>He said no one produces palm</i>
<i>kan ẹ̀po</i>	<i>oil because of an unshelled palm nut</i>
<i>Wọ̀n kì í torí ẹ̀kùrọ́ kan pàdí</i>	<i>No one produces unguent (àdí)</i>
	<i>because of a palm nut</i>
<i>Wọ̀n kì í torí ọ̀kà bàbà kan</i>	<i>No one produces wine because</i>
<i>pọ̀n ọ̀tí</i>	<i>of a seed of guinea corn</i>
<i>Ó ní ogbe kì í sí lóri àkùkọ</i>	<i>He said cock does not have</i>
	<i>cock's comb (ogbe) on its head</i>
<i>Ó ní Ọ̀ràngún méjì kò níí</i>	<i>He said two Ọ̀ràngún would not</i>
<i>jẹ́ kí wọ̀n lè pa ọ̀mọ̀ òun.</i>	<i>allow them to kill his own son.</i>

Ọ̀gúngbè mí did not yield to the advice of his wife, but left home for work. Unfortunately, he lost his right hand at work due to his disobedience. Several men have lost their lives on the account of not yielding to their wives' advice.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has brought to light the fact that the selected novels serve as a device for voicing concerns relating to documentation and preservation of Yorùbá indigenous values and practices; and apprehension over decline and decadence of traditional culture. It showed that it is very necessary and essential to document and preserve Yoruba culture in writing, especially in literary arts written in indigenous languages or European languages that would be familiar to the future generation. It argued that such should be done with the aim of preventing the culture, most especially folklore, from going into extinction since preservation empowers the society to protect its culture from misuse and utilize it for development. The paper observed that Yoruba culture needs to be sustained if the people truly want sustained development in the areas of economic, social and environmental lives of the nation. The study established that Yorùbá novel is a viable tool for fulfilling this purpose when folklore materials are incorporated in the story line.

By way of recommendation, folklore forms should be taken as part of Yorùbá cultural archives, having similar functions and facing similar challenges as other groups of items there. This traditional resource must be used often in Yorùbá literary arts in writing story books to teach children the traditions of their forefathers. Society must be aware that literacy is not a threat in any form to orality, rather it presents a special challenge to people and governments to develop strategies that will look after the continuation of our oral traditions (Haring 2007:30). Therefore, all arms of government should be ready to promote and elevate oral traditions in Nigeria to the point of showcasing our folklore globally as practiced in developed nations by sponsoring documentation and preservation of 'all-most-go-into-extinction' oral traditions across the nation.

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