

THE YORUBÁ FOLKTALES AND THE CHALLENGE OF REALISM: INSIGHTS FROM IFÁ.

By

Olúwolé Tẹ̀wógboyè ÒKÉWÁNDÉ, Ph.D

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Abstract

Ifá is believed to be the foundation of Yorùbá culture. This means every aspect of Yorùbá life, including history has one link or another with *Ifá*. On one hand, to the Yorùbá people in particular and worshippers of *Ifá* in general believed that *Ifá* corpora epistles are real. On the other hand, it is believed that folktales are unreal. This research therefore examines the nexus between *Ifá* and the Yorùbá folktales. Employing semiotics, which is the science of signs for analysis, because, symbolism underlies *Ifá* divination system. Mythical, historicity, musico-poetic, hermeneutics, moral and gnomic codes in *Ifá* are relation with each other. The work relies substantially on Yorùbá literary texts, especially, *Ifá* literary corpus and some Yorùbá folktales texts. It is found out that, folktales are encapsulated and rendered as real in *Ifá*. The study concludes that folktales are better appreciated as an important Yorùbá oral genre beyond fiction.

Keywords: *Ifá*, folktales, realism, Tortoise, code, semiotics

Introduction

This work examines the relationship between *Ifá* and Yorùbá folktales. *Ifá* has been defined by scholars in different ways as a result of numerous scopes of its knowledge, wisdom and values. *Ifá* can simply be regarded as the bedrock of other aspects of Yorùbá life. *Ifá* is also regarded as the spokesperson not only for the

divinities and the dead but, also for the living. It is regarded as the living foundation of Yorùbá culture¹

Ifá's nomenclature is beyond the Yorùbá cultural society. *Ifá* "is considered as the god of divinization in Igala culture. It is believed that, *Ifá* carries messages from the other world to this world. It is also a medium of dialogue between the living and the ancestors."² This informs why *Ifá* is described as "the most universal divinity among the Yorùbá and other West African people."³ *Ifá* is known to different people by different names throughout the world. For example, *Ifá* is known as *Fá* among the Fon of Republic of Benin, *Eva* to Nupes, *Ifá* in Cuba, USA, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Surinam and Togo. *Ifá* is referred to by the Ewe as *Afa*, *Ephod* by Jews, *Geomancy* by Europeans and *Margays*.⁴ With these different realizations of *Ifá* nomenclature which cut across nations of the world, the prominence of *Ifá* is not in doubt. In 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclaimed *Ifá* as one of the 86 traditions of the world to be recognized as masterpieces of oral and intangible heritage of humanity.⁵ By this proclamation, *Ifá* joined the league of heritages and therefore requiring urgent preservation. *Ifá*, as a religion, science or literary text, has over time been of great interest to scholars in different areas of human endeavors, like medicine, philosophy, religion, art, history and culture.

The message of *Ifá* is an archetype of what had happened in the past as it is connected with *Ifá* divination situation. All the cultural contents of *Ifá* have been 'codified.' The codifications are in *Ifá* oracular symbols in forms of *Odu* (major and minor). *Ifá* covers the peoples' religious traditions, philosophy, perception of their ethics, process of worship and a set of scriptures. *Ifá* poetry is a sacred epistle, "preserved and disseminated from ancient times. It is believed that in this way the texts in *Ifá* literary corpus have been kept free from errors. The corpus, therefore, till today, is one of the 'reliable genres of the Yorùbá oral literature.'"⁶ These descriptions

about ~~it~~ no doubt revealed that the prominence of *Ifá* in the life of the Yorùbá people is sacrosanct.

Folktales have been categorized as one of the basic genres, not only among the Yorùbá people, but, to the Africans in general. Folktales is defined as "an imaginative narrative (story) in prose form. Generally the story is an imaginative recreation of a memorable experience that is intended essentially to entertain rather than to record history or social experience."⁷ This scholar's opinion about folktales has demeaned this important oral genre as it is not regarded as an historical text. As a result of this, folktale is sometimes described as fabulous, fictitious, fallacious, fabrications and so on. On another note, *Ifá* is associated with 'realities' of life by the Yorùbá people, Africans and the worshipers around the world probably because of its religion and scientific bases it has. The question arises from this observation is that, if folktales generally and in particular those ones involving tortoise are unreal as noted by Akinyemi 2015, why are such folktales found in *Ifá*, wherein consecrated messages of realities are propagated, evinced and disseminated? Therefore, the aim of this work is to describe how folktale is related with *Ifá* in codes so as to establish and account for the link between the two genres. The objectives of this study is to relate and locate folktales to *Ifá*- those folktales involving tortoise and those that did not involve tortoise and to suggest that either all folktales encapsulated in *Ifá* are unreal stories or they are real as *Ifá* stories are generally believed before now.

Theoretical Framework: Semiotic

This work adopts semiotics which is the science of signs, because symbolism is basic to *Ifá*.⁸ *Ifá's* scopes of knowledge are categorized into scientific and religious as "semiology remains a tentative science."⁹ This informs the observation that "bí a bá wo ọrọ *Ifá* dáadà, a ó rí i pé ọnà méjì nì a lè pín in sí: ekinni, ó jẹ̀ ìmọ̀ ìjìnlẹ̀ loto-loto ara rẹ; ohun tí a lè pè ní ẹ̀ka ìmọ̀ 'science' kan. Èkejì, ó jẹ̀ orí i ẹ̀m i ẹ̀dálẹ̀ ilẹ̀ Yorùbá kan."¹⁰ That is, looking at the word *Ifá*

critically, one will observe that it can be divided into two major parts: first, it is a separate knowledge on its own, what can be referred to as a branch of science. Second, it is an indigenous Yorùbá religion.

Semiotics can be traced to the pioneering works of Charles Sanders Peirce, the American philosopher and Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss Linguist. Semiology is the study of signs as part of social life, the functions of social and cultural phenomenon within semiotic system. Saussure classifies signs into two entities: "signified and or sign-vehicle or meaning."¹¹ He refers to the signified, mostly in form of materials (objects, images, sounds and so on). Sign is something which stands to somebody or something in some respects or capacity. This relation of 'standing for' is mediated by an interpretant. "A sign is anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way the interpretant becoming in turn a sign."¹² The knowledge of semiotics covers different aspects of life.

Three modes of signification are regarded to be sufficient to describe any form of sign. These are icon, symbol and index. In an iconic mode, the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified in one way or the other. One can perceive a direct resemblance between the signifier and the signified. In symbol mode, there is no resemblance between the signifier and the signified, that is, the object and what it stands for. A symbol's connection with its object is a matter of convention, rule or agreement between the users. In Yorùbá, it can be realized in form of *Àrokò*, as such an object or something stands for something or somebody in real life. In an indexical mode, the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some ways (physically or casually) to the signified.

The link rule of signs and their meanings are made known by code. A code is "a means of conveying messages, a vehicle of communication."¹³ Code helps to simplify phenomena in order to make it easier to communicate experience. Code, is the semiotic element employed for this study; because, "semiology has so far

concerned itself with codes."¹⁴ The link of signs and their meanings are ~~me~~ known by code. This may be realised in a multi-level codings such as binary, gender, ethnical, codes among others. Code helps to simplify phenomena in order to make it easier to communicate experience. Interpretation of code is important in understanding the meaning of a sign, symbol or text.

Presentation

In Yorùbá folktales in general and particular in *Ifá*, all attributes of human beings are imitated by plants and animals. On one hand, the symbol of *Orúnmilà* symbolizes truth, honesty and transparency. *Opè*-palm-tree, symbolizes *Orúnmilà*'s physical ascension to heaven.¹⁵ This is also corroborated in Abimbola.¹⁶ The symbolization of *Orúnmilà* with a plant, *opè* suggests a form of relationship between human and plant world. That is, "the plants in essence represent the metaphysical forces of good and evil."¹⁷ In this case, *opè* (as a plant) symbolizes the good. On the other hand, folktales "are considered to be untrue stories and hence not objects of serious belief."¹⁸ The interrelationship of plants and animals are also discernible. That is, the characterization of animals in both *Ifá* and folktales cannot be overemphasized. For instance, the role of animals in the accomplishment of sacrifice cannot be underrated, as most of the animals and birds are agents of implementation of sacrifice orders.¹⁹

It is equally observed that animals are most of the time personified in the contexts of *Ifá*. This is symbolically represented on the *Ifá* paraphernalia: *opón ifá*; where images of different kind of animals are represented. The *opón-Ifá*-divination tray "allows the use of representations of all types of animals, human and other *Ifá* paraphernalia and all forms relating to decorate the tray."²⁰ Tortoise, which is the protagonist of most Yorùbá folktales, is also represented on the divination tray. That is, "the edges of each tray dominated by intricate patterns of different objects such as birds, reptiles, tortoise."²¹ These decorations, including tortoise have to do with

relationships with *Ifá*, which suggest and demonstrate that the interrelationship of animals, plants and human beings cannot be underrated in both *Ifá* and the Yorùbá folktales.

Discussion

Relations between *Ifá* and Yorùbá Folktales in Mythical, Historicity and Musico-poetic/Poetic Codes

Myths form a vital aspect of the basis of *Ifá* corpus. *Ifá* corpus remains the main source of information about Yorùbá mythology.²² It is by these mythological documents in *Ifá* that the Yorùbá solve some cultural problems. "Ifá literary corpus can therefore be regarded as a set of historical and mythical poems offering to us through the use of analogy images and symbols what to do in order to be at peace with God, the supernatural powers, or neighbors and indeed, ourselves."²³ The relevance of myths in African society generally and among the Yorùbá people in particular is so fascinating that is being expressed in the national dailies. For example, *The Nation* of February 2 2019 reports that, "empiricists may raise posers upon the mythic tales but they remain a vital resource-base in the study of a people's history and culture."²⁴ That is, African culture cannot be devoid of African myths.

Ifá corpus is historical, containing the past histories as well as its link with the present and the future. All *Ifá* corpora are believed to be events, stories that have happened in the past, coded in *Odu* (sixteen major and two hundred and forty minor *Odu*). That is, the proceeds from *Ifá* corpora are oracular, sacred and never taken for granted. To the worshippers and the *Ifá* priests, "what has emerged so far is that *ese-Ifá* is a type of "historical" poetry. Every poem of *Ifá* is an attempt to narrate, through the particular structure of *Ifá* divination poetry, *things which the Ifá priest has been taught to believe actually happened in the past by narrating these stories of the past*"²⁵ (italics mine).

The opinion that some events and stories believed to be unreal in the present time have been addressed by scholars and

theorists. Our limited knowledge about nature may account for our ignorance on some natural existence and events about things, that is,

when something in nature seems ridiculous to us, absurd or bad, is because we just have a partial knowledge of things, because we generally ignore order and the coherence of nature all together, and because we need that everything is disposed according with the dictations of our own reason; although what our reason declares bad is not bad according to the order and laws of universal nature but only according to the laws of our own nature separately considered.²⁶

The relationship and coexistence of animals and plants at the object world may presently look obscured to us, as we have limited knowledge that accounts for such relationships. This limited knowledge is further complicated by the lack of written materials that account for such historical coexistence; but we have oral evidence to buttress this assertion, established in *Ifá*. Also, the "possible world's theory-states that anything that you can imagine is real. This means that, we have infinite choices, it does not mean we have to choose."²⁷ The attributes of human nature of the inanimate and animals are evident in *Ifá*. For example, "it is interesting to find in the existing works and fresh information on *Ifá* that *Orúnmilà* himself, the *Odù*, the divinities as well as animals and inanimate objects had once been *Ifá* clients. They consulted *Ifá* oracle for various reasons."²⁸ That is, the plants and animals, including Tortoise as protagonists in most Yorùbá folktales had at one historical period or the other been human. *Ifá* oracular epistles support this notion that,

Eranko n dèniyàn, èniyàn n dèranko.
Òpò èdà ló wà láàrinjà,
*tí wọn n se bí adàríhunrun.*²⁹

Animals do turn to human-being, human-being do turn to an animal.
Many creatures are in the markets that are behaving like human-beings.

These opinions above show that, there is no demarcating line between human nature and animals.

Most of the Yorùbá folktales are coded in myths and histories of the past. These are coded in different statements mostly at the beginning of the story. Such statements are coded as "Ní igbà kan", that is, once upon a time; as in folktale of "Ìjàpá àti iyá ẹlẹpá"- Tortoise and the mother of groundnut sellers.³⁰ "Ní ọdún tí itàn yí ẹlẹ." That is, in the year that this story happened; as in folktale of "Ìjà láàrin Ìjàpá àti Erin"- fight between Tortoise and Elephant.³¹ "Ní igbà láíláí." That is, in the time immemorial; as in folktales of "Ìjàpá àti Àdàbà ọ́ọ dá oko kan" -Tortoise and dove cultivate farm together.³² Such a folktale sometimes reveals the ancient, immemorial and remotest periods as different from the present time; so as not to be misled, misguided or carried away by the change, as a result of the societal development in the present time. For instance, in the folktale of "Ọ̀jòlá ahun sí Ìjàpá"- Cobra was miser to Tortoise.³³ "Ní aiyé àtijó, nígbà tí ọ́ọ sí wà ní orúkún, ní ọdún nà-mí-ng-na'lẹ." That is, in the olden days, at primitive period, time immemorial, such as in, "ní igbà láíláí, aiyé dára ju ti òde-òní; kò sí irọ́-pípa, kò sí èké-ííe, kò sí ẹ̀tàn." That is, in the olden days, life was better than the present time, there was no lying, there was no deceit, and there was no enticement.

At times, in the mythical and historical contents, characters, songs and plots of the Yorùbá folktales are referenced from *Ifá*. These occur in different ways, such as partial or full deployment in different forms. For instance, there is full deployment of the plots in *Ọsá Méji*,³⁴ and folktale rendered in "Ìdí-abájọ tí Igún fí pá lóri." That is, the mythical story behind the bald head of Vulture.³⁵

The mythical and historicity codes are equally explored, which are the same codes used in Yorùbá folktales as well. For instance, "Ìdí-abájọ tí Igún fì pá lórí"³⁶, that is, the cause of the bald head of Vulture. The same events: famine and drought occurred in both stories; including *Ifá* divination to inquire from god, the way out of the predicament that animals found themselves; with the Tortoise acting as the *Ifá* priest. Sacrifice was equally performed in the folktale, just like as enshrines in *Ifá* story. This *Ifá*-folktale story is also related to *Ògúndá Méjì* corpus, that: *Gúnnugún ʃoore, Orí Gúnnugún pá*.³⁷ That is, Vulture bald head arises as a result of its magnanimity. This same folktale story is evinced in this *Ifá* corpus. If *Ifá* corpus contains true stories of what actually happened in the past, then, the Yorùbá orientation on the belief that, *iró ni ń jálòṣò* deserves re-examination, because, the veracity of the Yorùbá culture is authenticated in *Ifá* corpus which contain true stories of past events.

Among the Yorùbá, *Ifá* serves as cultural trace element on the Yorùbá history in various ways. That is,

nínú Ifá ni a ti lè rí ijìnlẹ̀ Yorùbá tí kò ní àbàwọ̀n...Ìtàn t'ò farasin, itumọ̀ orúkọ tí ó farasin, àti litirẹ̀ṣọ̀ t'ò pinmirin kún inú ohùn ẹ̀nu Ifá fọ̀ṣọ̀...Inú ẹ̀ṣẹ-Ifá ni a ti mọ̀ idí tí orí igún fì pá àti idí tí omọ̀ fì ń múmú l'àyà iyá rẹ̀ (ojú-ìwé 82-3). A kì í fẹ̀jò sórí òrùlẹ̀ sùn jẹ̀ òwẹ̀ tí a fà yọ̀ nínú ẹ̀ṣẹ̀ Ifá (ojú-ìwé 136, ilà 67). Gbogbo àwọ̀n ojú-ìwé tí a tọ̀ka sí yìí wa nínú Ijìnlẹ̀ Ohùn Ẹ̀nu Ifá Apá Keji láti ọ̀wọ̀ Wándé Abimbólá³⁸.

It is in *Ifá* we can get an undiluted Yorùbá language...hidden history, the meanings of hidden names and literature are *Ifá*...It is in *Ifá* that we know the reason behind the Vulture's bald head and the reason why a child must shuck breast from the chest of the

mother (page 82-3). We mustn't leave a snake on the roof and sleep is traced to *Ifá* (page 136, line 67). All the references pages are contained in *Ijìnlẹ̀ Ohùn Ẹ̀nu Ifá Apá Keji* written by Wándé Abimbólá. The opinion above shows that the folktales contain in *Ifá* cannot be regarded as unreal.

Another full deployment of folktales that is related to *Ifá* in historicity code is contained in *Ìrètẹ̀ Ìká* corpus.³⁹ In the corpus, besides the *Ifá*'s associated songs, otherwise known as *iyẹ̀rẹ̀ Ifá- Ifá* chanting songs, some of the other songs in *Ifá* are entrenched into Yorùbá folktales for the accomplishment of the folktale story's objective. For instance, *Alábahun/Ijápá*- Tortoise retains its exclusive role as the protagonist in both *Ifá* and folktales contexts, as contained in the *Ifá* corpus cited above. In the story, *Onikanjangbón*⁴⁰ complied with the *Ifá*'s directive to perform sacrifice to *Ògún*- the god of iron. Tortoise did not cease from stealing the *Onikanjangbón* fruits. Through *Ifá* corpus rendered in folktale tradition, one could see Tortoise as the protagonist as in this Yorùbá folktales. The same *Ifá* story is replicated in folktale form.⁴¹ The deployment of folktales into *Ifá* is also contained in Babalọlá.⁴² The contents, events as well as participants in the *Ifá* corpus referred to above are the same, rendered in historicity code in *Ifá* and folktales. For example, Tortoise was the protagonist in the two stories. Tortoise stole the farm produce of farmers (a strange farmer in *ẹ̀ṣẹ̀-Ifá* and, his in-law in the folktales), and tortoise was arrested in both *Ifá* and folktale stories.

Historicity code is also rendered in partial form in *Ifá*-folktales related stories. In this case, the participants and events may be different from that of the folktales, however, the themes or contents in both are the same. In *Ọ̀yẹ̀kú* corpus, *Ògún*, the god of iron, *àáyá onirù mèrìndìnlógún*- monkey with sixteen tails, the king

and the hunter were participants. This is rendered in musico-poetic code in *Ifá* corpus (with author's translation) that:

Mo ròdẹ lodikodi lònà o
Àlùjan n jan kijan.
*Odẹ fapó rọrì*⁴³

I have seen hunter lying haphazardly across
the footpath.

Àlùjan n jan kijan.

The hunter used hid knapsack as pillow...

The story is rendered in lead and follow of the participants vis-à-vis event, coded as *Àlùjan n jan kijan*. In Yorùbá folktale⁴⁴, under the theme "Ìjápá lẹ jẹun l'òdò iyá Ajá"- Tortoise went to eat with Dog's mother, interlude song separates one participant from the other through the same musico-poetic code: *Àlùjan n jan kijan*.

In the folktale, musico-poetic code is as well employed in the story. Musico-poetic code is concurrently used along with historicity code in some *Ifá* and folktales contexts; since it is rendered as the story progresses. The code is realized as a means to an end of stories. The Yorùbá musico-poetic tradition is categorized into two: traditional and neo-traditional. The pre-colonial forms are regarded as traditional while, the ones introduced during and after the colonial periods but follows the traditional patterns are regarded as neo-traditional.⁴⁵ The traditional pattern is however associated with *Ifá* and folktales. Poetic code is realized in poems form in *Ifá* and folktales. The musico-poetic code follows the lead and follows performance as explained earlier under the *Ifá* context which paves way for instrumentation, rhythm, melody and dance.

Ifá divination is based on the past events coded in two hundred and fifty-six *odù*. *Ifá* priest guides his client(s) based on the prescriptions on the associated *odù* on what "to do in the light of the precedent which has been cited for him"⁴⁶ To believe, that this *Ifá* divination corpus is unreal because it involves Tortoise as the

protagonist is to set aside and, negate the reality of the precedence cited by the *Ifá* priest. This opinion is against the opinion of Akinyemi that *Ifá* based related tales that involves Tortoise are untrue stories.

Relations between *Ifá* and Yorùbá Folktales in Hermeneutics, Moral and Gnostic Codes

Preamble

The metaphorical value of the Yorùbá folktales has earlier been explained earlier in this work. There is also no aspect of life-human, animals, materials that are left out in *Ifá*. Yorùbá philosophy "has to do with life, perhaps in human beings, animals, rocks, soil and plants."⁴⁷ *Ifá* is a vehicle of Yorùbá philosophy. That is, "Yorùbá philosophy and values are preserved and disseminated through *Ifá* medium."⁴⁸ This is why "Yorùbá proverbialism is a complete representation of the Yorùbá philosophy of life."⁴⁹ These philosophical statements are facts and representation of truth.

The hermetic aspect of philosophy is useful in the present understanding of the Yorùbá philosophy under examination. "The belief that there is a secret, ancient body of wisdom, surviving in written texts of the 1st-3rd centuries AD that accurately discusses the working of the natural and supernatural worlds and that mastery of these texts provides an enhanced understanding and control of nature."⁵⁰ There are ancient philosophical values by which the ancient people (Yorùbá) regulate themselves and their society. No one is above the traditional standard and authority. Any individual that proves stubborn is checked by the norms of the Yorùbá tradition. A norm "is a specific guide to action which defines the acceptable and appropriate behavior in particular situation."⁵¹

The Yorùbá societal problems are solved by philosophical statements, coded most of the time with "àwọn baba wa ní..." That is, our fathers do say that.... This is called "òrò àgbà", that is, words of the elders. To the Yorùbá people, "òrò àgbà bí ò ẹ lówùúrò á ẹ lójò alẹ." That is, elders' words must sooner or later come to pass.

This is sometimes rendered as: "àwọn àgbà ní", that is, the elders say; "àwọn Yorùbá ní", that is, the Yorùbá do say that or "àwọn Yorùbá máa ń pòwe pé" that is, "Yorùbá proverb says that..." These codes are 'generational' words of wisdom which are handed down from one generation to another. "In a culture...the wisdom of the past is highly valued and regarded by all."⁵² That is, these sets of words are indisputable in nature, that is, the authority of such words cannot be challenged.

Some of the *Ifá* and folktales messages are rendered in hermeneutics and gnomic codes. The Yorùbá philosophical beliefs are known and taught through *Ifá* and folktales. For instance, in *Òtùrá Ògúndá* corpus the *Ifá* epistle teaches about honesty or sincerity and faithfulness,⁵³ this is equally entrenched in *Èjìogbè* that:

...Èpè, wọn a sì polè,
Ilẹ̀ didà ní pòrẹ,
Alájobí ní pàye kan t'ó şe bi.⁵⁴

...Curse kills the thief,
Betrayal kills a friend,
Alájobí cult kills a family that does evil.

The Yorùbá people believe that, vengeance belongs to God and that nobody that betrays his or her fellow human being will go unpunished. These philosophical statements are extended to the context of folktales as well. For instance, in *Ìjàpá àti iyá elépa*,

Àwọn àgbàlagbà ní,
Èké ní ñpará,
Èpè ní ñpolè,
Ilẹ̀-didà ní ñpòrẹ,
Alájobí ní ñpa'yekan t'ó şe 'bi.⁵⁵

The elders do say,
Insincerity kills the neighbor,
Curse kills the thief,

Betraying kills a friend,
Alájobí cult kills a family that does evil.

This folktale equally teaches sincerity as one of the virtues of *omolúàbí* as explained before. The gnomic code is more pronounced in the folktales than in *Ifá* corpus. This is mostly coded as *àwọn àgbàlagbà ní*, that is, the elders do say that, which makes the statement to be communal. The hermeneutic and gnomic codes suggest indisputable nature of the stories both in *Ifá* corpus and folktales, mostly rendered in form of proverb, both in folktales and in *Ifá* corpus folktales "ídí tí Igún fi pá lóri"⁵⁶ reason behind the Vulture bald head. This statement evolves from the story of Vulture, earlier explained in both *Ifá* and folktales contexts. For example, the event that brought about the bald head of the Vulture has since becomes an adage in Yorùbá tradition that, "ídí rẹ̀ tí àwọn àgbà ñpòwe pé, "oore □òró □e, Igún □oore tí tí ó pàlórí." That is, benevolence has a limit, the benevolence of Vulture makes its head to be bald till today. It has equally become a general saying that, *òjò tí ñ pagún bọ, ọ̀nà jìn*. That is, it's been long that Vulture has been bitten by the rain. This is a code derived from the torrential rain that fell on the head of Vulture as explained above. This code is employed as a metaphor of hardship and problems being encountered by an individual. This is to say that, the time of perseverance and endurance of the individual's concern has been long.

Another hermeneutic code in both *Ifá* and folktales is *oore t'Ígún şe tó fi pá lóri*. Meaning that, the goodness of the Vulture that makes its head to be bald. This is why the Yorùbá do say that *oore níwọn*, that is, benevolence has a limit. Another gnomic code in relation to the *Ifá*-folktale associated with Vulture story referred to above is, *Ta ló ran'Gún níşé?* That is, who sent Vulture on an errand? It will be recalled in the *Ifá*-folktale cited about *Igún* above, that, *Igún* voluntarily released itself to carry sacrifice to heaven as explained in both *Ifá*-folktale stories above, which has since become

This is sometimes rendered as: "àwọn àgbà ní", that is, the elders say; "àwọn Yorùbá ní", that is, the Yorùbá do say that or "àwọn Yorùbá máa n pòwè pé" that is, "Yorùbá proverb says that..." These codes are 'generational' words of wisdom which are handed down from one generation to another. "In a culture...the wisdom of the past is highly valued and regarded by all."⁵² That is, these sets of words are indisputable in nature, that is, the authority of such words cannot be challenged.

Some of the *Ifá* and folktales messages are rendered in hermeneutics and gnostic codes. The Yorùbá philosophical beliefs are known and taught through *Ifá* and folktales. For instance, in *Òtùrà Ògúndá* corpus the *Ifá* epistle teaches about honesty or sincerity and faithfulness,⁵³ this is equally entrenched in *Èjìogbè* that:

...Èpè, wọn a sì polè,
Ilè didà nìi pòrè,
Alàjòbí nìi pàye kan t'ó şe bi.⁵⁴

...Curse kills the thief,
Betrayal kills a friend,
Alàjòbí cult kills a family that does evil.

The Yorùbá people believe that, vengeance belongs to God and that nobody that betrays his or her fellow human being will go unpunished. These philosophical statements are extended to the context of folktales as well. For instance, in *Ìjàpá àti iyá elépà*,

Àwọn àgbàlagbà ní,
Èké nìi ñpará,
Èpè nìi ñpolè,
Ilè-didà nìi ñpòrè,
Alàjòbí nìi ñpa'yekan t'ó şe'bi.⁵⁵

The elders do say,
Insincerity kills the neighbor,
Curse kills the thief,

Betraying kills a friend,
Alàjòbí cult kills a family that does evil.

This folktale equally teaches sincerity as one of the virtues of *omólúàbí* as explained before. The gnostic code is more pronounced in the folktales than in *Ifá* corpus. This is mostly coded as *àwọn àgbàlagbà ní*, that is, the elders do say that, which makes the statement to be communal. The hermeneutic and gnostic codes suggest indisputable nature of the stories both in *Ifá* corpus and folktales, mostly rendered in form of proverb, both in folktales and in *Ifá* corpus folktales "ídí tí Igún fi pá lóri."⁵⁶ reason behind the "Vulture" bald head. This statement evolves from the story of Vulture, earlier explained in both *Ifá* and folktales contexts. For example, the event that brought about the bald head of the Vulture has since becomes an adage in Yorùbá tradition that, "ídí rẹ́ tí àwọn àgbà ñpòwè pé, "oore □òróó □e, Igún □oore títi ó pàlóri." That is, benevolence has a limit, the benevolence of Vulture makes its head to be bald till today. It has equally become a general saying that, *òjò ti n pàgún bọ, ọ̀nà jìn*. That is, it's been long that Vulture has been bitten by the rain. This is a code derived from the torrential rain that fell on the head of Vulture as explained above. This code is employed as a metaphor of hardship and problems being encountered by an individual. This is to say that, the time of perseverance and endurance of the individual's concern has been long.

Another hermeneutic code in both *Ifá* and folktales is *oore t'Ígún şe tó fi pá lóri*. Meaning that, the goodness of the Vulture that makes its head to be bald. This is why the Yorùbá do say that *oore níwọn*, that is, benevolence has a limit. Another gnostic code in relation to the *Ifá*-folktale associated with Vulture story referred to above is, *Ta ló ran'Gún nìsé?* That is, who sent Vulture on an errand? It will be recalled in the *Ifá*-folktale cited about *Igún* above, that, *Igún* voluntarily released itself to carry sacrifice to heaven as explained in both *Ifá*-folktale stories above, which has since become

Based on these semiotic elements relationships. It is equally argued in this work that we have very limited knowledge about many of the past historical events. Consequently, if the belief that folktales are untrue is sacrosanct, then, the folktales entrenched into *Ifá* contexts are lies, rendered by the *Ifá* priest who must not be involved, indulged or engage himself in folktales (lies). That is, folktales have been linked with *Ifá*, which is believed to be established on two plains: religion and science as explained above, which are based on facts as, either of the two scopes of study is believed to be untrue. The relationship of the Yorùbá folktales with *Ifá* has also been established around structure, contents, participants, themes and objectives among others.

This study concludes that, since all the contents of *Ifá* corpora are believed to be real events that took place in the past, then, the *Ifá* contents found in folktales have some "flavor of realism." That is, contrary to this suggestion is to negate the Yoruba general belief that *Ifá* cannot lie, and that, all the events of *Ifá* are real. A genre associated with the religion and science aspects of the Yorùbá life (*Ifá*) cannot be described as a genre that lacks sense of seriousness. The semiotic elements of *Ifá*-folktales examined in this work revealed that the values of Yorùbá folktales transcend entertainment, with which folktale is mostly capitalized on before now. The Yorùbá folktales contain among other values mythology, philosophy, and aphorisms. It also encapsulates historical documents, as against the opinion that folktales are "essentially to entertain rather than to record history or social experience."⁶⁰

Endnotes

- ¹ Abimbólá, Wande. *Ifá divination poetry*. New York: Nok Publishers Limited, 1977a, p. 14.
- ² Negedu Isaiah. (nd). The Igala Traditional Religious Beliefs System between Monotheism and Polytheism. <http://dx.doc.org/10.04314/og.v10:1.7., p5>
- ³ Mounz, Louis. *A living tradition studies in Yorùbá civilization*. Ibàdàn: Sayster, 2003, p.179.
- ⁴ Qdèyemí, John. "Ifa and Orisha Temple." <oyekuofun.com/what-is-ifa/>. 2013, p. 5.
- ⁵ Robinson, B. A. "Ifa: the religion of the Yoruba people." <http://www.religioustolerance.org/ifa.htm>, 2008, p.1.
- ⁶ Abimbólá, Wande. *IFÁ: An exposition of Ifá literary corpus*. Ibàdàn: Oxford University Press, 1976, p.20
- ⁷ Akporobaro, F. B. O. *Introduction to African oral literature*. Lagos: Prince Publishing Company, 2012, p.51
- ⁸ Qlátúnjì, Qlatunde. *Features of Yorùbá oral poetry*. Ibàdàn: University Press, 2005.
- ¹⁰ Yémiítàn, Qládipò and Qlájídé Ògúndélé. *Oju òṣùpá. Apá kinní*. Ibàdàn: Oxford University Press, 1970, p.ix
- ¹¹ Saussure, de Ferdinand. *Course in généralLinguistics*. Collins, 1974, p.60
- ¹² Peirce, Sander. "Semiotics." <<http://www.singnosemio.can/peirce/semiotics.asp>> 1931, p.35
- ¹³ Geoffery, Leech and Michael Short. *Style infiction: Linguistic introduction to English fiction prose*. New York: Longman, 1981, p.124