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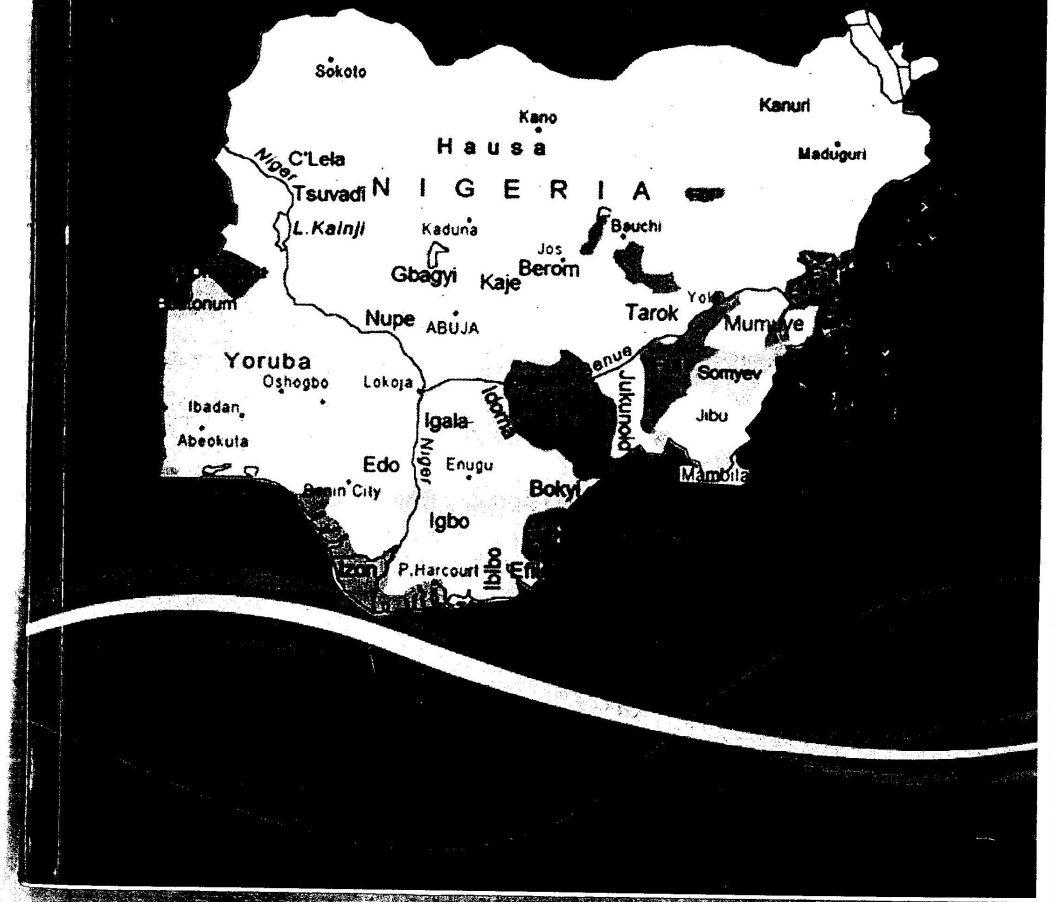
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A RE-CLASSIFICATION OF YORÙBÁ CONTEMPORARY POETS

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Abstract
Poetry is one of the literary genres in Yorùbá studies which scholars have endeavoured to classify in various categories. This study aims at closing the gap the existing classifications have created by a slight modification. The study relies on existing literature on classifications of poetry in Yorùbá studies. Examples of such classifications are Olábímtán (1974), Fólórunṣó (1998) and Fálétí (2009) that are critically examined to come up with a new classification. The study reveals that though these classifications are helpful, but they are not all embracing of the Yorùbá poets. The study concludes by suggesting a four broad classification of the Yorùbá poetry and poets. These are literate poets, commercial poets, poem recorders and poem translators.

Introduction

Adeosun (2012, pp. 10-11) observes that there are various scholarly works on Yoruba oral poetry, among which are Babalọlá (1966, 1973), Abímbọ́lá (1968, 1977), Ọlátúnjí (1984), Barber (1979), Àlàbá (1985), and Fánilọ́lá (1991). These works have individually examined different Yoruba oral poetic genres. For example, Babalọlá in (1966) and (1973) worked on Yorùbá *Ìjálá* and *Oríkì Orílẹ̀* respectively. Abímbọ́lá (1968 and 1977) did a study on *Ifá*. Ọlátúnjí (1984) examined the features of Yorùbá oral poetry, such as *oríkì, ẹsẹ ifá, ọfọ̀, òwe* and *àlọ́ àpamọ̀*. On her own part, Barber (1979) worked on Yorùbá *Oríkì* using the sociology of literature for her analysis. Àlàbá (1985) worked on a multimodal genre of Yoruba oral poetry, *Ọrin Agbè*, using a socio-stylistic analysis. The study contextualizes *agbè* verbal art in a socio-historical perspective, showing its religious and secular dimensions. It also discusses its entertainment and oral-poetic aspects, and how it resembles and/or differs from other genres. Fánilọ́lá (1991) also did a descriptive and analytical exposition of contemporary Yorùbá oral poetry between 1970-1986. To him, the uniqueness of 1970-1986 politically, economically and socially is essential to determine how the changing social structure affects the various genres of contemporary Yoruba oral poetry.

However, few works exist on the analysis of Yorùbá written poetry and its classifications. For example, Ọlábímtán (1974) did an analytical exposition of Yorùbá written poetry which covered 1848 to 1948. Fọ́lọ́runṣọ́ (1998) examined the Yorùbá written poetry between 1949 and 1989, the period he referred to as a preparatory period for the in-coming modern Yorùbá poets. These works are, no doubt, helpful to our present study, because they offer insights into some areas that deserve attention. We are of the opinion that Yorùbá written poetry deserves a much wider and depth in its critical analysis than it has hitherto been given.

This study would complement major works like Ọlábímtán's (1974) historical study of Yorùbá written poetry (1848-1948), Fọ́lọ́runṣọ́'s (1998) sociological study of Yorùbá written poetry (1949-1989) and Fálétí's (2009) study of the Yorùbá poets, past and present. Their various classifications

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have helped in the teaching of Yorùbá poetry in tertiary institutions where Yorùbá is taught as course. In this study, these classifications are examined and an attempt is made to do a slig modification to the existing classifications in order to generate an all embracing classification o the Yorùbá poetry and poets.

Review of the Existing Classifications

Olábímtán's Classification:

Olábímtán's (1974) work on the early Yorùbá poets focuses on the first one hundred years o Yorùbá written poetry (1848-1948). Olábímtan (1974, pp. 35-36) identifies three phases in its development. The first phase is the poetic writing in Christian hymnal form (mission poetry). Yorùbá poets in this group include those whose poetry is patterned on the Christian English hymns and their contents informed by the various themes which are foregrounded in Christian doctrines. Líjàdù's works represent this group. The second phase is the poetic writing in Yorùbá oral poetic form (compromise poetry). Both Sóbò Aróbíodu and Oyèsílè Keribo belong to this group (Olábímtán, 1974, p. 36). To Olábímtán, "the *orin àrùngbè* mode employed by the poets to propagate their Christian faith is a sign of compromise". This is so because the poets were indifferent to the use of *orin àrùngbè* mode (a traditional chanting and singing mode) for their poetry as long as they achieved their desired evangelical goal. The third phase is poetic writing in both Yorùbá indigenous and foreign poetic forms. Thus, Olábímtán (1974, p. 36) identifies three different types of poetry in this group. These are poems by the 'compromise poets'; the 'colonial poetry' of Yorùbá poets whose poetry show apparent influence of the English poetry both in form and diction. Àjàó, Ajísafe and Johnson belong to this group of poets, and 'protest poetry'. Poets in this group (i. e. protest poetry) employ poetry as a means of showing their disapproval of wrong doings. Obasá and Odúnjo belong to this category under the third phase.

It can be observed that Olábímtán's (1974) categorization of Yorùbá early poetry into three phases is borne out of the fact that propagation of the Christian doctrines is a typical feature common to them all. This is so because most of the poets were products of Christian mission schools.

However, Folorunso (1998, p. 26) remarks that as illuminating as Olábímtán's pioneering work is, it creates a gap by not acknowledging the influence of printing technology, as well as the role of the print media in facilitating the development of Yorùbá written poetry from 1848 to 1948. Notwithstanding, Olábímtán's work deserves some commendations. Being the first of its kind, it serves as a precursor of the Yorùbá written poetry criticism. It gives direction to Folorunso's (1998) work which he entitled *The Written Yorùbá Poetry (1949-1989): A study in the Sociology of Literature*. In the work, he examines the Yorùbá written poetry in the period 1949-1989, the period he refers to as a preparatory period for the incoming modern Yorùbá poets.

Fólórunsó' Classification:

Fólórunsó (1998, p. 22) categorizes the period of his research into four as follows: First, 1949-1959; second, 1959-1969; third, 1969-1979, and fourth 1979-1989. He submits that five Yorùbá poetry books were published in the first decade (1949-1959), five in the second decade (1959-1969), nine in the third (1969-1979) and twelve in the last decade (1980-1989).

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appearance in 1934 of Professor Oyèrìndé's *Ìwé Ìtàn Ògbómọ̀ṣọ́*. Oyèrìndé had a collection of one hundred and thirteen poems (forty-two long and seventy-one short). He was able to gather these poems because, according to Fálétí, he demonstrated his belief in the interdependence of history, and consequently, he included in his book the *oríkì* of whoever it was that has any sort of influence in contemporary Ògbómọ̀ṣọ́ history. Ọbásá was the first to recognize other forms of Yorùbá poetry than *oríkì*. He achieved fame with his first collections which he called *Ìwé Kínní Àwọn Akéwì* published in 1927. Ọbásá's book came at a time when the reading public wanted a diversion from *oríkì*. Consequently, Ọbásá's *Ìwé Kínní Àwọn Akéwì* readily became a best-seller. Its success was probably due to the fact that it had no irrelevances and so was produced cheaply (Fáléti, 2009, p. 5). The success of the first book led to the second *Ìwé Kejì Àwọn Akéwì* in 1933. Ọbásá's *Ìwé Kẹ̀ta Àwọn Akéwì* and *Oríkì Orílẹ̀ Àwọn Yorùbá* were published posthumously in 1945.

Some other people Fálétí (2009, pp. 7-8) adds to the list of poem collectors are Rev. E.M. Líjàdù and E.O.O. Moore. This is done for their contributions to *Ìwé Karùn ún* in 1916. It is due to these two poets that we have glimpses of the first book of Ṣóbọ̀ (in *Ìwé Karùn ún*) and other odd collections of Ẹgbà poetry. Another person is Oyèladé, who in imitation of Professor Oyèrìndé, published *Ìwé Ìtàn Ọlọ* in 1947. In his *History of Ọwọ* published in 1951, M. B. Asara gives us in a jumbled form the famous Igogo chants in the traditional Ọwọ dialect. In 1953, Rev. E.A. Atilade published *Ìrìn-Àjò Ọpálábá* in which he piled up a good collection of *oríkì* of the Òrìṣàs. This collection also affords us an opportunity to see how Yorùbá poetry has grown through the ages. Chief Badà of Ṣakí also makes some contributions in his *Ìwé Ìtàn Ilẹ Yorùbá* published in 1954. In this book, we have the *oríkì* of Odùduwà and that of Ọrányàn (Fálétí, 2009, p. 8). The new additions to these recorders, as reported by Fálétí (2009, p. 8), are Adébóyè Babalọlá in his *Ìjálá Àtẹnudẹnu* (1956) and E.L. Láṣebìkan's *Ìjìnlẹ̀ Ohùn Ẹnu Yorùbá* (1958).

Poem translators: The third category in Fálétí's (2009) classification of the Yorùbá poets is the poem translators. As remarked by Fálétí, the quest for knowledge and the desire to make Yorùbá poetry gain some reputation have brought about a completely new set of recorder – the translators. According to Fálétí (2009, p. 8), the most outstanding of the translator group is Ulli Beier. In his book, *Yorùbá Poetry* published in 1959, Beier was able to present to those in the English-speaking world a wide and varied anthology of Yorùbá poems in a language they could understand. The second name in the translator group is Adébóyè Babalọlá, who, in the *Anthology of West African Verse* made some valuable contributions to Yorùbá poems in translation (Fálétí, 2009, p. 8).

A New Classification of Yorùbá Poetry and Poets

The earlier classifications have helped us a lot in identifying the category of poetry and poets in Yorùbá studies. However, one discovers that a slight modification is required on the classification of Yorùbá poetry and poets done by both Fólórunṣó (1998) and Fálétí (2009). The modification will be a fusion of both Fólórunṣó (1998) and Fálétí's (2009) classifications. This is necessary because one discovers that the groupings are not all embracing, hence, it is hoped that the modification will accommodate some poets who do not belong to the lists of earlier classifications. In a broad sense, four groups of poets are suggested, that is, literate poets, commercial poets, poem recorders and poem translators. This is done to avoid having a multiple group of classifications of contemporary Yorùbá poets.

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demic poets who publish their poems in books, journals and periodicals. They are subdivided into five groups as maintained by Fólórunṣó (1998). They are occasional-poets, critic-poets, teacher-poets, journalist-poets and artisan-poets (see pp. 38-40). Following this categorization, the poets mentioned by Fólórunṣó (1998) under each category still stand, except with some additions. One of the additions is under the grouping of artisan-poets. Ṣóbọ Aróbíodu, whom Fáléti (2009, p. 2) describes as the first Yorùbá literate poet and his contemporary, Oyèsílẹ́ Kẹ́ríbo belong to the group of artisan-poets. Aróbíodu did not finish his elementary education before he was engaged in the services of Ọba Gbádébò Aláké as a prison warder and later became a farmer. Another addition is in the area of making the five sub-categories of literate poets an open-ended group which can accommodate other poets that are not mentioned under the Folorunso's classification but are fit into the categories.

Commercial poets: They are poets who read or perform their poems through the electronic media. Apart from the poets Fólórunṣó (1998) mentions under this category, there are other poets who fit into this group but were not mentioned. Prominent among them is Ògúndáre Fọyánmu whose poetry is patterned on 'Ìjálá', one of Yorùbá traditional modes of chanting. He has produced several poems on discs which have also been subjected to literary criticism. Another poet in this category is Sulaiman Àrẹmú (a.k.a Ajóbíewé) whose pattern of Yorùbá poetry is *oríkì*. He has produced several poems on discs. It is also important to state that Fáyẹmí Ẹlẹ́bu-Ìbọn who Fólórunṣọ (1998) includes in the category of commercial poets also fits into the groups of critic-poets and poem translators. Ẹlẹ́bu-Ìbọn teaches in several Universities in the U.S.A. and has published most of his poems in book forms. Some of his poetry texts have been translated into the English language to reach a wider audience.

Poem recorders: The poem recorders, according to Fálétí (2009), are those who wrote the Yorùbá traditional poetry in book form (see pp. 33-35). The poets in this group are Hethersett, Oke, I.B. Akínyẹlé, Oyèrìndé, Ọbásá, Líjàdù, Moore, Oyelade. Others are Asara, Atiladé, Badà, Babalọlá and Laṣebikan. There are other poem recorders that are not accounted for by Fálétí (2009). Prominent among them are Wande Abimbola's *Ìjìnlẹ̀ Ohùn ẹnu Ifá* (1968), *Àwọn Ojú Odù Mẹrẹẹrìndínlógún* (1977) and Adébóyè Babalọlá's *Àwọn Oríkì Orílẹ* (1973). These are Yorùbá traditional poetry in book form. This present classification gives room for other poets that are fit into this category.

Poem translators: These are poets who, by the quest for knowledge and the desire to make Yorùbá poetry gain some reputation, translated their poems into other languages like English, French, German, etc. The poets in this category are Ulli Beier and Adébóyè Babalọla who also fit into the groups of poem recorders and literate or academic poets. Other poets who make the list of poem translators are Fáyẹmí Ẹlẹ́bu-Ìbọn and Wande Abímbọlá. The duo have translated their *Ifá* poetry books into English. While *Ifá: The Custodian of Destiny* (2004) is written by Fáyẹmí Ẹlẹ́bu-Ìbọn, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus* (1976) and *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifá* (2015) are written by Wándé Abímbọlá.

Conclusion

This study has examined the works of three earlier scholars on the classification of Yorùbá poetry and poets. They are Ọlábímtán (1974), Fólórunṣó (1998) and Fálétí (2009). It was discovered that

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…es in the development of Yorùbá written poetry namely; poetic writing in Christian hymnal form, poetic writing in Yorùbá oral poetic form and poetic writing in both indigenous and foreign poetic form. Fólórunṣó (1989) like Ọlábímtán (1974) identifies three groups of poets according to the mode of presentation of their poems. They are; poems printed in books, journals and periodicals, poems read on radio and television and, poems recorded on disc. Fálétí (2009) also makes a classification of the Yorùbá poets into three categories as, Yorùbá literate poets, poem recorders and poem translators. Based on these classifications, a slight modification was made to arrive at another four categories of poets following the mode of presentation of their poems. These are: literate poets, commercial poets, poem recorders and poem translators. This present re-classification will enable scholars to categorise both the present and future Yorùbá written poets into various group they belong without restriction.

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