



A SOCIO-ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF SONGS AND CHANTS IN AKÍNWÙMÍ ÌȘÒLÁ'S AGOGO ÈÈWỌ

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ABSTRACT: The Yoruba people are well-known for their ability to make use of songs and chants for different purposes. This is why many scholarly works have been done on the use of songs and chants in traditional and religious activities. However, very little has been done on the use of such for political activities, especially as projected in films. This paper is aimed at filling this gap by examining the use of songs and chants for political satire, with particular reference to Akinwumi Ishola's *Agogo Ewo* as adapted by Tunde Kelani in his film. The theoretical framework used for the analysis of this work is an adaptation of Fishman's definitional template of sociolinguistics as the study of 'who' says 'what', 'to whom', 'when' and 'to what end', as well as Dell Hymes' ethnographic theory summarised in the acronym 'SPEAKING'. Twelve songs and three chants were selected for analysis in the film. The first two songs were used by Elder Opalaba, the wise man in the palace to mock the dubious and shameful practices of the politicians in secret and their perpetual effects on the masses. Two were used by Amawo to condemn the corruption of the politicians as they loot the treasury of Jogbo and assure them of nemesis. One was rendered by Bashira to mock Baba Sesan for his habit of polishing and garnishing his car with pride. The next one was used by the chiefs to congratulate Bosipo on his ascension to the throne. One was used to protest against king Bosipo for the failure of his government to entertain the people of Jogbo at his coronation, not minding the fact that the people paid for that. Another one was used by thugs hired by Chief Balogun to disrupt the oath-taking ceremony. Two were used to criticise the king for his hesitation to remove the corrupt politicians in his cabinet. The last two were used to assure him of the singers' support for his government and their readiness to defend him. Two chants were used by chanters in Bosipo's dream as Opalaba taught him how to fight corruption and the syndrome of 'god-fatherism' in his kingdom. The last chant was used by Amawo to warn the politicians against greed, corruption and get-rich-quick syndrome. Songs and chants constitute an important tool in the hands of the masses and socio-political activists to criticise or protest against politicians or to express solidarity for them.

KEYWORDS: Agogo Èèwọ, Songs and Chants, Political Discourse, Greed and Corruption, Nemesis

INTRODUCTION

Akínwùmí Ìșòlá's (2007) duo of *Şaworoide* and *Agogo Èèwọ* have attracted some literary attention, with regard, especially, to the proverbs, songs and chants in the works. Examples of such works are Kekereogun (2011), Jọláosó (2012) and Olúwadorò (2018). In Olúwadorò's (2020) concluding part, he makes a recommendation to upcoming scholars to appraise *Agogo*



A careful look at Fishman's framework brings Hymes (1962) ethnographic framework, captured in 'SPEAKING' to the fore. The acronym's spell-out produces:

- S - Setting/Scene (corresponds to Fishman's When & WHERE?)
- P - Participants (correspond to Fishman's WHO & TO WHOM)
- E - End (corresponds to Fishman's WHY & TO WHAT END?)
- A - Acts sequence (implied in Fishman's order of WHO before to WHOM).
- K - Key (implied in Fishman's HOW?)
- I - Instrumentality (corresponds to Fishman's WHAT).
- N - Norms (also corresponds to Fishman's HOW and WHY).
- G - Genre (implied in Fishman's WHAT, that is act or event).

See Oluwadoro (2018) and Oluwadoro and Ajayi (2016) for more details on how ethnography of communication works. These two theoretical templates are harmonised in this paper to derive the 'socio-ethnographic' framework.

Synopsis of *Agogo Eewo*

Agogo Eewo is a political satire of Nigeria's politics during the Obasanjo regime as he battles to fight corruption and the syndrome of 'godfatherism'. Nigeria is given the name Jogbo (extremely bitter) due to her agonising years under military dictatorship and corruption. Jogbo kingdom, after the death of a military dictator called Lagata (representing General Sanni Abacha), some corrupt politicians who were part of Lagata's cabinet sponsored Bòsípò (representing former President Olusegun Obasanjo) to become the next king. After becoming king, Bòsípò made up his mind to sanitise the system devised an oath-taking ritual, thus forcing his chiefs to take oaths of office in the traditional way that will make them to conform to their oaths of office and stop corrupt practices. This attempt was resisted with stiff opposition and threats of violence. In spite of the resistance and opposition, the king forcefully established this system of accountability as he and the chiefs were made to take the oaths of office before Amawo (the traditional chief priest of the kingdom of Jogbo). The corrupt chiefs were warned that any deviation from their oaths would lead to death. Two of the corrupt chiefs confessed their past atrocities and were spared; the two that refused to confess their evil deeds (Balogun and Şerikì) died on the spot. Bòsípò himself took the oath of office as an example of good leadership. The film in summary is a reflection of how Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was sponsored by some politicians to become Nigeria's President after his release from prison. It captures how he established the Oputa Panel, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) to fight corruption in the nation.

Data Presentation

The data for this paper are made up of **12** songs and **3** chants, totalling **15** in number; which were extracted from the film "Agogo Èèwò".

**Part A: Songs**

SN	Data Presentation	Literal Meaning	Contextual Meaning	Purpose/Function
i.	Alákísà n' jó l'óru } Bó pé ilè á mó lóla. } (2 times)	The ragged man dances only in the night. In the daytime he has to go into hiding.	The corrupt politicians' evil deeds, perpetrated in the dark will be brought into judgement openly.	Criticism against politicians' corruption.
ii.	Òjò tó rọ Òjò tó rọ tí ò dá Ọlọrun ló m'oye ẹni tí ó pa.	The rain that continues to fall without ending, only God knows the number of people that will suffer the consequence.	The politicians' unending duplicity and corruption will lead to the suffering of many people.	
iii.	E wá w'ayé òsèlú } Òsèlú alábòsí. } (2 times) Wọ́n k'ówó ilú s'ápò Wọ́n f'owó mutí	Take a look at the lives of the politicians. They pocket the money meant for all and waste it on drinks.	The politicians are very dubious. They lavish their stolen wealth on drinks.	
iv.	Ifá ló n'ilé ayé } Elédùmarè ló l'òrun } (2 times) Èniyàn gò l'ágòjù. Wọ́n sọ p'áwọ́n gbọ́n.	The Ifa oracle governs the earth, while the Almighty God rules in heaven. Man's stupidity makes him to think he is wise.	Ifa rules the earth while God reigns in heaven. Man's ignorance makes him to think he is in control, whereas God is the ultimate.	



v.	Kórópe ló rà tí ò jé á rí'mú mi o. (2 times) Okò t'áwọn Òyìnbó fí n s'èkólè. (2 times) Kórópe ló rà tí ò jé á rímú mí.	He bought a rat- trap and boasts with it. The vehicle used by the whiteman as waste disposer.	He boasts with his small car as if it is not the same kind of vehicle the whiteman uses to dispose waste.	Criticism against self- aggrandisement.
vi.	Bí a ti fé k'óri Bèè náà ló rí Emi la ò ní í yò sí?	Just the way we want things to be, they are exactly like that. We have to celebrate.	We wanted Bosipo to be king and he has become king, there is cause for rejoicing	Solidarity for the king (self- motivated).
vii.	A sanwó iyán A ò r'iyán o. A sanwó aṣo A ò rá sọ Oba fún wa lálàyé o A sanwó aṣo a ò r'áso	We paid for food, we were given none, we paid for clothes, we were not given any. King, give us the reason for these.	The politicians took money from us for food and clothings, they did not give us either of the two. King, since you are the head of the cabinet give us explanation on this.	Corruption questioned.
viii.	È má fiyà jẹ Balógun mó o. (2 times) Bé bá danwò pére, e r'ógo o. (2 times) È má fiyà jẹ, eh, eh, eh È má fiyà jẹ Balógun mó	Stop punishing Balogun. If you don't, you will suffer the consequence	Stop exposing Balogun to unnecessary stress, else we will cause trouble for you.	Threats against anti-corruption fight.
ix.	Jogbo bí orò tamurege o. (2 times) Ìlú yókù wón r'ésè w'álè ró Jogbo bí orò tamurege	Jogbo looks like a limping cult while other towns are stable.	Other kingdoms are making steady progress while Jogbo (Nigeria) could be likened to a limping cult with retarded progress.	Jogbo's backwardness condemned.
x.	È bá ni bè 'jọba wa o Bè jọba wa Kò sóúnjẹ nílè yíi o Kò sómi nílè yíi. È bá wa bè 'jọba wa	Help us to plead with our government, our kingdom is going through famine of food and water.	Appeal to our government to make food, water and other social amenities available for us in the land.	Poor infrastructural development criticised.
xi.	Ó dámi lójú gbangba. (2 times) Ó dámi lójú gbangba Àsà ò gbòdò wọ'lé gbéyèlé.	I am very sure that the hawk cannot enter into the house and carry a dove there.	The hawk may carry a wandering chick, he dare nor trifle with a caged dove the same way. The hawk	Support for the government's anti-corruption fight/solidarity expressed.



			stands for the rioters while Bosipo stands for the secured dove under the watch of its owner.	
xii.	<p>Ọlórún ló mà lẹ gbàniyàn o e e Ọlórún ló mà lẹ gbàniyàn A fáparò sábé à n gbín kà Ọlórún ló mà lẹ gbàniyàn</p>	It is only God that can save a man who plants his corn in the presence of quails.	It is only God that can save our kingdom whose treasure is left accessible to the corrupt politicians.	

Part B: Chants

SN	Data Presentation	Literal Meaning	Contextual Meaning	Purpose/Function
xiii.	<p>Bàtà ò jé n'résè jó. (3 times) Màá bọ o dànù</p>	If my pair of shoes does not allow me to dance properly, I will simply do without it.	If the corrupt chiefs are bent on frustrating my efforts as the king, I will simply remove them.	Anti-corruption fight (strategy).
xiv.	<p>Arèkú gba bàtà dúdú Gba bàtà Arèkú gba bàtà pupa Gba bàtà</p>	Areku, the master of masquerades, take different kinds of shoes and dance with them.	Just like the chief masquerade has access to different kinds of shoes, the king can choose to work with chiefs that match his regime.	
xv.	<p>A fipá l'ówó wọn kì í ká'dún A fi wàràwàrà là bí olókun Wọn kì í d'òla A d'ífá fún adigunlà Tí yòò di'gun sèṣe</p>	He that enriches himself dubiously cannot live long is the oracle that divines for an individual that goes into armed robbery. Such will sustain a fatal injury.	He that engages in greed and dubious practices (the politicians) will definitely suffer the consequences.	Warning against ill-gotten wealth and abuse of power.

As shown above, (i) – (xii) are songs while (xiii) – (xv) are chants. We proceed to analysis of data in the next section.



DATA ANALYSIS

(i) – (ii) Opalaba mocks the politicians as they secretly loot Jogbo's treasury and laments bitterly as the masses suffer the consequences of their duplicity. This took place at the corridor of his house very close to the palace. The medium of rendition is the standard Yoruba language. The tone is that of derision, derogation and lamentation. His audience constitute those who care to listen because the songs were rendered as monologue.

(iii) – (iv) Amawo, the chief priest of Jogbo denounces the corruption of the politicians as they greedily steal and lavish the money meant for the public. He warns them on the inevitability of the wrath and judgement of the deity. They were rendered by the second chief priest at the oath-taking ceremony. The tone is sarcastic and loaded with warnings. This took place in an open square close to the palace.

(v) Bashira, Seriki's wife mocks Baba Sesan, the self-aggrandised driver as he proudly cherishes and garnishes his small car. She likens the car to a rat-trap or a whiteman's waste bin. The tone is both critical and disdainful. The medium is the standard Yoruba language. The scene was in front of her shop close to where Baba Sesan was polishing his car proudly.

(vi) The corrupt chiefs led by Balogun and Seriki, sing joyfully as Bosipo ascended the throne of Jogbo, hoping that he would condone their dubious practices. The tone is that of victory and fulfilment of set goals. The scene was at the first meeting Bosipo had with his chiefs in the palace. The medium was the standard Yoruba.

(vii) The masses, led mainly by youth leaders ask king Bosipo to give account of how the money they contributed for entertainments during his inauguration was spent, since they were not offered anything at all. The medium of rendition is the standard Yoruba language. The tone is that of aggression.

(viii) The thugs (hired by Balogun and Seriki) attempted to disrupt the oath-taking ceremony as Amawo, the chief priest administered the oath of office to Balogun who shivered feverishly. The tone was aggressive. The medium was the standard Yoruba. The motive was actually to disrupt the oath-taking ceremony, but that plan failed.

(ix) – (x) Were rendered by a traditional musician hired by two political activists (Fadiya and Oloṭo) who angrily resigned from Bosipo's cabinet because of what they perceived to be his hesitation at bringing corrupt chiefs to judgement. The songs are songs of lamentation at the recession Jogbo was passing through as a result of corruption. The tone was pathetic and scornful at the same time. The medium was the standard Yoruba. The scene was an open space in the market square of Jogbo.

(xi) – (xii) Political activists in support of Bosipo, led by Akewe (the youth leader) and the Iyaloja (the market women leader) sang in protest as hired thugs threatened to disrupt the swearing-in ceremony instituted by Bosipo to curtail corruption. This was in response to (viii) above. The tone was pathetic, threatening and full of warning. The language was the standard Yoruba.

(xiii) – (xiv) Women chanted in protest as Arèkú (the master of dancing masquerades) battled with those who gave him shoes to dance disturbed him and hindered him from dancing skilfully. This captured the image of king Bosipo as he battled with the self-styled godfathers



who reacted vigorously as the king tried to institute an oath of office mechanism to curtail their excesses. This happened in Bosipo's dream in an encounter with Elder Opalaba, thus teaching him how to fight against corruption. The tone was repulsive and disdainful. The medium was the standard Yoruba.

(xv) Amawo sounded a note of warning as he prepared king Bosipo and his chiefs for the oath-taking ceremony. The chant is loaded with the implication of the danger awaiting those who conceal their evil acts and take the oath deceptively (which is sudden death).

Summary of Findings

Three important features are common to the songs and chants, analysed in this paper. First, all of them are rendered in the medium of the Standard Yoruba (SY). Second, most of them [at least eleven, see (i-iv), (vii-x) and (xiii-xv)] are used as weapons of criticism and condemnations of the selfishness and corruption of the chiefs; which has led to untold suffering and impoverishment of the masses. Only one (see v) was used by Bashira (Chief Seriki's wife) to criticise a driver who uses his small car for commercial purpose. Another one (see vi) was used by Bosipo's chiefs to congratulate and assure him of their support. The remaining two (see xi and xii) were used by singers led by Akewe and Iyaloja, to express solidarity for the king and their readiness to guarantee the success of the oath-taking ceremony. We move to the last section of this paper by drawing our conclusion and making some recommendations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As hinted in the introductory part of this paper, *Saworoide* and *Agogo Èèwò*, written by the Late Professor Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá, are political satire which captures the agonising and impoverished condition of Nigeria in the hands of corrupt politicians and military dictators. The ancient kingdom referred to as 'Jogbo', meaning 'extremely bitter', is a metaphor for Nigeria as a polity. The two kings – Lápité and Lagata in *Saworoide* represent General Ibrahim Babangida (who adopted the title 'President', instead of 'Head of State' and Late General Sanni Abacha (who died suddenly in office).

In *Agogo Èèwò*, the newly inaugurated Bòsípò represents the former President Olúṣégún Ọbásanjó. His institution of the Oputa Panel, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) as well as the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) was aimed at public conviction of and verdict on former and current politicians who were involved in corruption. This was captured in the oath-taking rituals which brought corrupt politicians to public accountability. The songs and chants analysed in this paper sound a note of warning to politicians who perpetrate political atrocities, such as bribery, corruption, looting of national treasury and so on, to desist from such acts. Political leaders should faithfully and meticulously adhere to their oaths of office.

Any act of violation of their oath of office will cause civil unrest and political violence. They should be mindful of the fact that the people who gave them their mandate are to be faithfully served and not exploited. The politics of 'godfatherism' is an evil concept that renders politicians powerless and makes them to become the 'godfathers' servants instead of the 'public servants' (they ought to be). It incapacitates them from performing their public duties



and stops them from dealing with corrupt ‘godfathers’. It should be jettisoned by politicians to ensure fair play, equal treatment and justice. Finally, politicians should know that:

...God is the supreme law-giver, His laws must be followed into detail by all His servants who have submitted without condition to His will. (Oladosu, 2011: 129-144)

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