Clientelism and social structure: an analysis of patronage in Yoruba social thought
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Abstract

From time immemorial, social relations among the Yoruba have been structured and restructured through proverbs, idioms and songs that reflect the social thought of the group. This is especially shown in the kind of relationships that ought to exist between the patron and the client. The aim of this paper is to undertake an analysis of Yoruba proverbs, idioms and songs with a view to giving insights into how the indigenous social thought stipulates norms, values and expectations within clientelistic relationships among the Yoruba.

Clientelism (patronage) is definitely not a novel social phenomenon. Though it is a non-material aspect of culture, its ontological reality is accepted, not just because it is said to exist, but because of the potency of its inherent exchange relationship, which brings patrons and clients together for the interchange of valued resources beyond the direct control of each actor (i.e. patron and client) within the social structure. Clientelism is therefore a sort of social relationship whereby the more privileged individuals (patrons) exchange goods for the loyalty of the less privileged ones (clients) (Taylor 2004, Garcia-Guadilla and Perez 2002, Joseph 1991). It has existed in diverse cultures from time immemorial. According to Lande (1983: 440):

> What have been called patron-client relationships and horizontally dyadic alliances have been observed in a wide variety of national and institutional settings where they have taken many different forms. They have been found in early chiefdoms, in ancient city-states and empires, in feudal systems, in Western and Third World democracies, in military dictatorships, and in modern socialist states. They have been observed in operation at

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> various levels of societies: among the poorest of the poor, among the rural and urban middle classes, and at the very center of the struggle for power between members of ruling elites.
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> Patron-client relationships and horizontal dyadic alliances exist within civilian and military bureaucracies, inside parliaments and political parties, in urban and rural political machines, and in the relationships between those who till the soil and those who own it, between traveling merchants and their sedentary host, between religious teachers and their disciples, between unskilled workers and labor contractors, between small factory owners and their employees, and between superiors and inferiors in large modern corporations and in certain professions.

Judging from Lande's position above, it could be submitted that clientelism cuts across all segments of the socio-political and economic structures of a given society. It is a system that has survived from ancient to modern times through informal codes, norms and values attached to it, which enables each actor to secure what he needs to survive within the social structure.

Scholarly literature is divided between those that view clientelism as positive and those that see it as negative. For example, whereas Fonchingong (2004), Taylor (2004), Golden (2003) and Marty (2002) consider clientelism as a debilitating aspect of culture with negative impact on the social structure and development, Lazar (2004), Philp (2001) and Zappala (1998) view it as the means through which the underprivileged gain access to resources hitherto beyond their reach. Thus, any attempt at curtailing clientelism may translate into denying the masses and underprivileged access to productive resources which they deserve to have.

Irrespective of the diverse positions of scholarship on patronage, an inherent element of patronage is inbuilt relations of power between patrons and clients. Of course, it is easy to assume that the patron should have a monopoly of power since he is the one who provides material resources. It is however important to note that clients too exercise an enormous amount of power in the exchange relations through the non-material resource they control. Indeed, the patron may control power over state and productive resources, but he requires the loyalty of clients to sustain it. No wonder Joseph (1991: 116) noted that it is only politicians and parties that grant goods that survive on the Nigerian political terrain. This is confirmed by an earlier study in Iwo by Olurode (1986) who discovered that well-acclaimed politicians who did not grant development goods to the Iwo community lost to politicians of lesser pedigree in local government elections in the late 1970s. Omobowale and Olutayo (2007) and Omobowale (2006), use findings from empirical studies to reveal that beyond the granting of goods by the patron, the opinion of clients is of central importance. Without adequately providing goods and considering the opinion of his clients, a patron would lose support.

Hence, dominance is dependent on the degree of importance attached to the good and/or the loyalty each actor in the clientelistic system holds, based on the prevalent social/power relations. If the resources of the patron are more valuable at a particular time, he gains dominance; otherwise the clients' power may prevail, leading to the possible loss of loyalty to another patron. This paper is, however, principally directed at an analysis of Yoruba proverbs, idioms and songs, which give insight into Yoruba social thought, that stipulate the norms and values guiding clientelism/patronage within the indigenous social structure.

The Yoruba are a socio-linguistic-cultural group with a common heritage that has been traced to Oduduwa who was claimed to have reigned in Ile-Ife around 1100 A.D. (Afolayan 2004a, Akintoye 2004, Adepegba 1986). The Yoruba are predominantly located in South-Western Nigeria while others can be found in Kogi and Kwara states (in North-Central Nigeria) as well as parts of the Republics of Benin and Togo (Adekeye 2001). Right from the pre-colonial era, the Yoruba nation has evolved sophisticated forms of indigenous philosophy which have guided beliefs about the environment and social relations up to contemporary times. Some of these have been compiled and discussed by scholars[2]. Since this paper adopts a methodology which analyses Yoruba oral philosophy in order to arrive at epistemological conclusions, it is important to assess the relevance of language and oral philosophy in social relations in Africa and elsewhere.

Language and the social significance of African oral philosophy in proverbial sayings

Indeed, language serves as a medium through which individuals engage in social relations, are shaped and internalise the culture of their immediate environments, even as they too modify cultural expectations through language-based social interactions. In essence, as Ahearn puts it, as people communicate through language, they construct meaning and social reality within the context of the culture wherein they exist. And so '…language does not merely reflect an existing reality; it also helps to create that reality' (Ahearn 2001: 111; see also Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000, Johnstone 2000, Cicourel 1970). This may explain what Errington (2001) described as the 'capture' and use of indigenous languages by the colonialists and missionaries in the sub-

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2 See for example, Agbaje (2005, 2002), Afolayan (2004b), Ajayi (2004), Na'Allah (2004), Akinyemi (2003), Ayantayo (2000), Lawal, Ajayi and Raji (1997), Adegbite (1993), Gbadegesin (1991), Oladeji (1988), Olatunji (1984, 1970), Ojoade (1983), Owomoyela (1981, 1972), Welch (1973) and Bamgbose (1970, 1968).

jugation, re-orientation and administration of the local population in Africa and Asia. By gaining control of the socio-political system and codifying and reducing indigenous languages to writing, they were able to redefine what was acceptable socially through the imposition of European philosophies (i.e. social thought) and cultures using the languages of the colonised people.

Ever since, European philosophies and, by extension, cultures have gained predominance over African social thought and ways of life, even in African citadels of learning. In view of the fact that philosophies and cultures evolve in line with the experiences garnered from each socio-cultural and physical environment (Aja 1999, Solomon and Higgins 1996, Copleston 1980), imported philosophies and aspects of culture may not be fully in tune with the indigenous socio-cultural environment, as there may be disjunctures between imported social thoughts and the immediate environment, which may lead to misinterpretations of the prevalent culture as well as to recommendations of inappropriate development initiatives. It is for this reason that Olutayo (in a forthcoming work) advocates the interpretive understanding of local social thought (which he termed African indigenous knowledge) in development approaches in order for development to be successfully conceived, designed and implemented. Thus, one is obliged to ask what actually constitutes indigenous social thought within the context of African cultures/ societies.

Indigenous African social thought is encoded in proverbs, idioms, riddles, folktales and other oral sources of knowledge, which have survived over time (Oladipo 1991, Akiwowo 1983, Momoh 1981). Although numerous works have emphasized this link between social thought and oral traditions, opposing views are formulated by those who question the potency of oral resources as a media of social thought and the ability of the African mind to philosophize. The greater challenge, however, comes from the scientific realm (both natural and social) whose scholars view proverbs as mere linguistic expressions devoid of rigorous scientific originality, authenticity and epistemological conviction. In fact, Shapin (2001:753) posits that the learned evaluate proverbs as '… tokens of vulgar knowledge'. If they are indeed of little value, then there is nothing of value we can extract from them for epistemological purposes.

This may be the opinion of a good number of the learned. But this does not mean it is the most valid and/or superior opinion. One may align with such an opinion if one takes epistemological convictions from a unilateral dimension favouring only supposedly 'scientific' methodologies. Nevertheless in order to draw appropriate conclusions about cultures/cultural traits, it is also very apposite to approach research from the ethnographic perspective. An ethnographic perspective permits us to gain an in depth understand-

ing of culture and society. Such a perspective is relevant to the study e.g. of what Shapin (2001: 735) describes as 'proverbial economy':

> … a network of speech, judgment and action in which proverbial utterances are considered legitimate and valuable, in which judgment is shaped, and action prompted, by proverbs competently uttered in pertinent ways and settings: that is to say, a cultural system in which proverbial speech has the capacity of making a difference to judgment and action.

Hence, proverbs guide human actions because they provide the basis for and transmit the norms and values of a society (Kiros 2001, Summer 2001). They are not mere '… tokens of vulgar knowledge' (Shapin 2001:753). Rather they reflect the '… continuity of the ancient in the consciousness of the present …' (Akiwowo 1983: 139-140). What social consciousness therefore gains from the past are experiences which are germane to the enhancement of constructive social relations and social order (Scheub 1985). Thus Shapin (2001: 739) further states:

> … Proverbs are oriented towards experience. They report on accumulated experience, human and natural; they make those reports efficiently available to people who mean to act in the world; they recommend courses of action in [the] light of experience; and therefore … represent a widely distributed form of expertise. The 'expert' is, after all, someone who has relevant experience, and expertise in that embodied experience.

Shapin's position is empirically reflected in a number of studies that have been conducted round the world including, Asia, Africa and even the West. For example, Williams (2001) discussed the uniqueness of Scottish proverbs and how they are utilised by the mass media and producers of domestic utensils to emphasize and enhance Scottishness, despite British rule. Likewise, Blackwood (2001) discusses the use of *Adat* tradition (both oral and written), which revolves around local customs, beliefs and practices of matrilineal social relations relating to kinship and inheritance among the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, Indonesia. The tradition was taken up and employed by the Dutch colonialists in the colonial administration of Minangkabu.

While this paper discusses some examples in Ghana, it is primarily concerned with the Yoruba. The distinctive work of Yitah (2006) is worthy of acknowledgement as a major contribution to knowledge in this field. Yitah critically discusses existing works that explore society and culture of the Kasena of Northern Ghana. He expands the scope of these works by focusing on the impact of social change on oral philosophy. The author starts by ac-

knowledging the works, which discussed the use of indigenous oral philosophy in the Kasena society and culture (in Northern Ghana). The author however expanded the works' contributions by focusing on the impact of social change on oral philosophy. In particular, the author looks at oral traditions that reflect how women are treated as being of a subordinate status. The paper argues that Kasena women create, modify and utilise proverbs to verbally protest against the subordinate status assigned to them in Kasena culture. They, therefore gradually and consciously engage in processes that may modify the local patriarchal culture.

Numerous works done on Yoruba social thought emphasize the relevance of oral philosophies in Yoruba socio-cultural relations. Bamgbose (1970) for example described tonal, lexical and semantic word play (i.e. repetitive use of the same word) for emphasis and symbolic communication with deep normative and cultural meanings among the Yoruba. Welch (1973) focused on *Oriki* (praise-poetry); a form of oral philosophy, given to a child at birth. It is based on the historic experiences and heroic exploits of the newborn's ancestors. The orature is chanted periodically to the individual by his parents and admirers to remind him of the greatness and beauty of his being in order to prepare him for great achievements. Olatunji's works (1984, 1970) discuss aspects of Yoruba social thought as encoded in proverbs, praise poetry, oracle poetry, incantations and riddles, emphasizing their linguistic and sociological relevance.

Furthermore, Gbadegesin (1991) emphasizes the communal nature of Yoruba culture as reflected in oral philosophy. Embedded in social thoughts are traditional, moral and ethical values directed ultimately at social and universal survival. A similar point is made by Ayantayo (2000) whose work revolves around ethical guides for economic relations as reflected upon in Yoruba social thought. Likewise, Agbaje (2005), Ajayi (2004) and Akinyemi (2003) discuss how the Yoruba oral philosophy is used in the education and socialization of the young to teach and 'build' in them knowledge about the social and physical environments and the qualities of an *Omoluabi* (i.e. a good personality), whose actions will comply with social norms and values. Other authors show oral philosophy addressing sexual relations (Ojoade 1983, Owomoyela, 1972), indigenous health beliefs and practices and their impact on the acceptance and practice of modern medicine and vice versa (Jegede 2002, Jegede 1996, Owoeye 1997, Adegbite 1993). Agbaje (2002) further discusses forms of oral philosophy directed at conflict resolution while Na'Allah (2004) shows the influence of Yoruba oral philosophy on Christian and Islamic religions.

Of course, the literature briefly reviewed above reflects the capability of oral philosophy to structure social relations and social structures. These works, however, do not integrate their findings into a larger theoretical model.

Akiwowo (1986a and b) sets out to formulate a theory of sociation based on the *Asuwada* Social Thought[3]. The *Asuwada* social thought is contained in the Yoruba *Ifa* epistemology[4]. And, according to the author, it is usually recited when a new community is to be founded. Broadly speaking, the *Asuwada* social thought underscores the pivotal relevance of sociation (or association) in the emergence, evolution, sustenance and development of mankind. Akiwowo posits that an individual is an *asuwa* (physiological being) who has the capability of becoming an *asuwada* (social organism) (Lawuyi and Taiwo 1990). Every individual is thus expected to become an *asuwada* as *aisuwa* (self-alienation/deviance) may not only wreck the individual, but also pose a threat to social survival. Akiwowo condensed his postulation to the following propositions including:

The unity of social life is the individual's life, being, existence, or character.

Although each human being is metaphysically a unique emanation-emi-of a Divine Being, each individual's life, as a corporeal self, needs the fellowship of other corporeal selves to feel and be whole and complete.

The corporeal individual essentially, cannot continue in the state of being without a community.

Since the social life of a group of individual beings is sustained by a spirit of solidarity, any form of self-alienation for a purely selfish aim is, morally speaking, an error or sin.

A good society, in an axiological sense, is one which recognises the uniqueness of each life's authentic nature and its right to self expression and self-actualization.

A genuine social being is one who works daily, and sacrifices willingly, in various ways, his or her cherished freedom and material acquisitions for self-improvement as well as for the common good. For without one, the other cannot be achieved.

Every individual, as may be observed within the diverse contexts of social life in Africa, is capable of being an initiator or a recipient of true (good) or erroneous (bad) conduct.

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3 This paper prefers the use of social thought instead of oral poetry as used by Akiwowo because beyond the notion of undocumented and unsophisticated saying which 'oral poetry' conveys, social thought represents intelligent and intelligible ideas shared by a cultural community as a whole with imbued interpretive meanings.
4 Ifa is an oracle consulted among the Yoruba during important occasions to seek directions and solution to knotty issues. Inasmuch as its influence has seemingly waned due to modernity and the spread of Christianity and Islam, it remains very important to the traditionalists and many Christians and Muslims who still consult it, though somewhat secretly (see Roache, 1974, Morton-Williams 1966).

The social worth of an individual within his or her community can be measured by the qualitative value of the differential between the types of conduct he or she has initiated or received.

A social scientist at the Nigerian Universities who studies with a view to acquiring an understanding of people and society in Africa and planning effectively to develop the quality of life in both westernized and historical communities may find that he or she needs to work with this derived conceptual scheme of *iwa, ihuwasi, isesi and ajumose* as these apply to a single actor or to a plurality of actors in the community's social life[5].

As stated earlier, Akiwowo's *Asuwada* postulation centres on the association of human beings for the common good. This is broadly related to the notion of social capital, which has been accommodated in Western scholarship and literature in recent times (see for example Lyons and Snoxell 2005, Meagher 2005, Farr 2004). The only difficulty I see with the expression is the overemphasis on seemingly 'spiritist' ideas rooted in Akiwowo's beliefs about the deity of *Orunmila* – from whose thoughts *Asuwada* was extracted. Indeed, Orunmila may have existed as a 'philosopher king' at a time in the past, and his ideas may have survived till today because of their relevance to social survival among the Yoruba. But this paper posits that, at this stage, it is important for scholarship to bring it from the precincts of a mystified belief system to that of empirical evidence of social relations.

Indeed, the *Asuwada* social thought may have been mystified during the process of the Yoruba social evolution in order to develop and preserve a belief system and norms that would encapsulate the need for co-existence and sociation/socialization for social survival. This sort of idea is well expatiated in the Durkhemian theory of sacredness and profanity. The sphere of the 'sacred' encompasses the mystical, set apart personalities or things which must be treated with awe and respect. The profane on the other hand are the commonplace, mundane and everyday objects that do not attract the respect and awe accorded the sacred (Durkheim (1976). These two concepts play vital roles in the meaning adherents of a particular religion attach to religious features and they are central to the way people's behaviour is conditioned to conform to the expectations of the society. Thus 'clothing' *Orunmila* and by extension *Asuwada* with the idea/aura of 'sacredness' may be interpreted as a social action intended for social order as adherents may have been made to believe in the likely retribution from the 'gods' if they failed to comply. However, just as posited by Adesina (2002), scholarly emphasis should be on the epistemic essence *Asuwada* gives and not necessarily its avowed spirituality. By so doing, we will be able to appreciate and utilise *Asuwada* as a theoretical postulation for empirical research.

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5 Akiwowo (1986a:353).

We will now focus on the concepts of *iwa, ihuwa, isesi and ajumose* postulated by Akiwowo (1986a:353), but which were not explained by him in the texts consulted.

The main focus of Yoruba social thought and the Yoruba ethical system is on building an *Omoluabi*[6] (an ideal being or person with socially acceptable character) out of a person (Akinyemi 2003, Makinde 1988, Awoniyi 1975). This will be achieved provided that a person's *iwa* can be rightly constructed through socialization. If *iwa* is so vital for the construction of an *Omoluabi,* then it becomes imperative to understand what *iwa* means. For the Yoruba, *iwa* can translate into two conceptual meanings, which are however mutually engaging. Firstly, *iwa* means 'being' or 'existing'. However, since a person/being cannot exist without some attributes attached to him, which will define his condition and/or reflect his being, *iwa* therefore also refers to the character of a person-being. It is the character formed in an individual through socialization, which informs the personality of the behaviour that will be eschewed by the individual. And so, for the Yoruba, an individual's *iwa* (character) is a testimony of his *iwa* (being/existence and personality), and his being is judged on the basis of the character he reflects (see Dopamu and Alana 2004, Dopamu 2004, Omolafe 1990 and Abimbola 1975, for emphasis). Among the Yoruba, there are proverbs depicting the meaning of *iwa,* e.g.:

> *Iwa ni yoo fi on'iwa han*
> A man's character will reveal him
> *Iwa, l'ewa*
> A person's character is his beauty
> *Eefin ni iwa*
> Character is like smoke
> *Iwa rere l'oso eniyan…*
> Good character is a person's adornment
> *Iwa nii ba ni de saree …*
> A person's character will follow him to the grave*.*

The kernel of all the proverbs above is simply that a person's character cannot be totally restrained and/or hidden perpetually. It will be exposed in the process of social interaction. Consequently the values the person's being is made of will be exposed. Thus, socialization strives towards educating the individual to become an *omoluabi,* a socially compliant individual.

The concepts of *ihuwasi* and *isesi* are deeply associated with *iwa.* Whereas *ihuwasi* refers to acts of expression of character, *isesi* refers to habitual acts of expression of character. And since the *Asuwada* principle targets sociation

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6 The Yoruba differentiate between *iwa rere* (good character) and *iwa buruku* (bad character). It is the person who eschews *iwa buruku* that is regarded as *Omoluabi.*

for universal survival and communalism, the appropriate internalisation of the values associated with *iwa, ihuwasi* and *isesi* will lead to *ajumose*, which means 'doing in unison'. And so an individual who has internalised socially acceptable *iwa* will see himself from the perspective of working in unison with others for social survival.

Akiwowo's novel contribution to knowledge has not however escaped criticism from other scholars. Adesina (2002), Payne (1992) and Makinde (1988) try to further clarify and extend Akiwowo's work. While Lawuyi and Taiwo (1990) accept that though '… it is possible to do sociology in African languages' (p. 57), they dismiss Akiwowo's work as being '… characterized by an indistinctness which renders it, as it stands, unhelpful for sociological analysis' (p. 61). The basis of their rejection of Akiwowo's ideas is principally predicated on what they describe as his failure to appropriately differentiate between the two meanings of *suwada*, i.e. coexist and coexist for a purpose (p. 60). Their claim is that while it is true that individuals *suwada* (coexist), it is not every time that they *suwada* (coexist for a purpose, i.e. common purpose). They use the examples of individuals in a market place, travellers in a bus (who co-exist) and individuals who come together to form a club as illustrations. To Lawuyi and Taiwo, these actions cannot be described as carried out consciously for a common purpose. Whereas individuals in the market and travellers in the bus coexist, it is not necessarily for a common purpose. Also the actions of those who come together to form a club, for Lawuyi and Taiwo, do not necessarily reflect the principles of purposiveness. Hence, the authors claim '…the idea of purpose is not an inherent element of the concept of *asuwada*' (p. 61).

This paper however disagrees with Lawuyi and Taiwo because Akiwowo's *Asuwada* proposition does not stop at merely 'coming together' or 'coming together for a purpose'. Rather it emphasizes sociation (association) on the basis of expected norms and values embedded in *iwa, ihuwasi, isesi* and *ajumose* for the enhancement of social relations, directed ultimately at the universal and social development of society. Hence, whether the *suwada* is directed/intended merely for 'coexistence' or 'coexistence for a purpose', what is germane is the internalised norms and values encoded within social expectations (in this context *iwa, ihuwasi, isesi* and *ajumose*), which guide social relations for the sustenance of social order among the comity of individuals even when they do not seemingly 'coexist' for a purpose. And so, when they do not seem to 'coexist' for a purpose, they actually do so, whether consciously or unconsciously, because they interact in a way that will not have a negative impact on either social interaction or social order, so as not to threaten social survival. Thus, ultimately, *suwada* (coexistence) is purposely directed at social survival. Consequently, against the submission of Lawuyi and Taiwo, I posit that the contribution of Akiwowo is very much

sociological. And, therefore, I agree with Adesina that it serves as an 'epistemic opening' in the world of sociological imagination and theory (Adesina 2002). It is expected that the epistemic opening will throw more light on the social relations of patronage as reflected in Yoruba social thought – the focus of this study. In what follows, I will discuss the proverbial dimension of patronage in Yoruba social structure.

Patronage and the Yoruba Social Structure: The Proverbial Dimension

Proverbs and proverbial sayings (oral philosophy/social thought) take up a vital position in social relations among the Yoruba. They are considered as the 'vehicle' through which knotty issues can be resolved intelligently to the admiration and satisfaction of all (Ogundeji 1991). Proverbial sayings carry an aura of normative influence through which those who are well-supplied with/have a vast number of proverbs can sway opinion to their side provided they can express them convincingly. Olatunji (1970: 242) describes proverbs as the '… wisdom lore …' of the Yoruba. Proverbs give meaning to social situations and directions on the path to follow or the actions to take. Thus a Yoruba proverb states:

> Owe l'esin oro
> Bi oro ba sonu
> Owe la fi n waa
> Words ride on proverbs like horse
> When words are lost
> They are sought out with proverbs

The proverb above further buttresses the importance of proverbs among the Yoruba. It presents proverbs as the 'horse' on which words ride. In a culture where horses were the exclusive preserve of the elite for speedy and comfortable movement, no other animal than the horse could have been adopted to give clarity to the 'pride of place' proverbs hold. As the horse made comfortable and speedy movement possible compared to other modes of transport of that time, proverbs transmit messages to actors with speed and clarity. They also indicate which actions were/are socially approved within particular contexts. In the same vein, the above quotation also describes proverbs as the means by which lost words are sought. 'Words' as used here do not mean 'ordinary words'. What is implied here is the wisdom and the appropriate meanings that should be derived from social situations. Thus, when people are at a loss in terms of the appropriate steps to take to address social situations, recourse is taken to proverbs to decipher the meanings at-

tached to particular situations in order to gain an interpretive understanding that would inform further actions. For this reason, proverbs are taken as the wisdom of the people as pointed out by Olatunji, and it is only the wise that can understand them. Anyone who does not know, or who cannot understand the application of proverbs is regarded as unwise. Hence Olatunji (1970: 242) states that:

> *Bi owe bi owe la n lulu ogidigbo*
> *Ologbon nii jo o*
> *Omoron* nii mo o
> The war drum is cryptically beaten (like a proverb),
> It is wise men that dance to it
> It is informed men that know it.

From the quotation above, it can be deduced that just like drums send out symbolic messages to which man responds as he comprehends their meanings, the messages proverbs send out do not come in simple words. They are transmitted symbolically and it is only the wise who must have been tutored in the deep meanings associated with the proverbs that can understand them and act appropriately.

Having established the importance of proverbs and proverbial sayings in Yoruba social thought, it is time to focus on the central topic of this section: proverbs relating to patronage. In order to have an emic understanding of patronage, we need to know the contextual meanings associated with 'patron' in Yoruba social thought. It is by so doing that we will be able to appropriately situate 'patronage' within the indigenous social thought and differentiate it from the English meaning. Simply put, the Yoruba terminology for 'patron' is *baba-isale*. *Baba-isale* is a combination of the words *'baba'* and *'isale'*. *'Baba'* means 'father' while *'isale'* means 'base'. Therefore, *baba-isale* gives the contextual meaning of 'father from the base'. Why would somebody be called 'father from the base', especially bearing in mind that 'father' simply means a male biological parent in English culture. What is the relationship between 'father' and 'patron'? Omobowale (2007, 2006) illustrates the meaning of *baba* (father) with the following proverb:

> *Iya ni wura*
> *Baba ni dingi…*
> Mother is gold
> Father is the mirror

As the vessel through which a person comes into the world, the mother is seen as an invaluable jewel that attracts the attention of her wards, husband and relations. The man may be regarded as the head of the home in a patriarchal society such as the Yoruba; he however cannot perform the important

functions of biological and social reproduction without the co-operation and assistance of a woman. It is when the goals of biological and social reproduction have been achieved that a man can raise his head and find himself in an appreciable position within society. If he is incapable of biological reproduction, he is regarded as infertile and thus of a lower social status. In case he reproduces himself biologically but fails to socially produce by appropriately socializing his children, the acts of deviance of his wards cause him shame and he might even become an outcast. To prevent this, as he socializes his children, he presents himself as the mirror through which his children view social expectations and strive to live up to them, just as one looks into the mirror to bring one's appearance to socially acceptable standards. Therefore for one to be a father, one must go beyond biological reproduction to being a role-model as well. Good attributes of a father are expected to be internalised in the children and reflected in their *iwa, ihuwasi, isesi* , so that the goals of *ajumose* (communitarian unity/doing in unison) will not be jeopardised . Thus, a patron considered as 'father at the base' (*baba-isale*) is not just to be a 'financier' as the English 'patron' connotes. He must also be a role-model abiding by social norms and values as stipulated by society. This grants him the foundation upon which he stands to provide support and protection for clients, the extent of his wealth notwithstanding.

The Yoruba view elders (*agba*) as the 'encyclopedia' of experience and thus knowledge. Thus, elders are placed in a vantage position in both social thought and social structure. And so, many of the proverbs associated with patronage relations are created around being an elder. Hence, a person who is a *baba-isale* must also be a person who can be recognised as an *agba*. Proverbial sayings emphasize 'the good' that comes with respect and adoration of the *agba*. For example a proverbial saying (song) goes:

E wole f'gba, agba ni gbani
L'ojo isoro, agba ni n gbani
L'ojo airije, agba ni n gbani

Meaning:

Bow to the elders, they rescue
In the time of trouble, they rescue
In the time of want, they rescue/provide

The saying above stipulates the kind of relationship somebody considered as *agba* deserves. *Agba* as used here does not necessarily mean an old man. It means someone superior who may have the capability to help others in difficult situations. Indeed, he is seen not only as *baba-isale*, because beyond the good example he will be able to give, he is also seen as one in whom the apposite qualities and potentials to help out are deposited. By adoring him, he is not being 'worshipped' for his wealth, but praised for the support and pro-

tection he provides for those in need of his assistance (i.e. his clients) (see also
Ajanaku 1998: 53-58 for poems which describe the quality of an elder). Another
proverb highlights the possible implication of disrespect for the *agba.* It says:

> *Aibowo f'agba*
> *Ni ko je k'aye gun*
> Disrespect for elders
> Is the cause of social disorder

This proverb foresees social disorder in a situation where people considered
as *agba* are disrespected. And for social order to be held together elders must
be respected as much as they too must reciprocate this respect, else they lose
their followership. This is made clear in the following two proverbs:

> 1. *Agba to ba roro*
> *Kii ko eniyan jo*
> A wicked elder
> Lacks followership

> 2. *Agba ti ko b'inu*
> *L'omo re po*
> An elder not given to anger
> Has many children

The message the above proverbs convey is that what makes a person an *agba*
is not embedded merely in age or the experience an individual has. He must
be accommodating, nice and welcoming. Otherwise, he is considered wicked
and so avoided in favour of others. "Being nice" is not only seen in terms of
'how sweet his tongue is' or how seemingly accommodating his attitude is.
For someone to be considered *baba-isale* (and *agba*) who enjoys the honour of
the followership, he must be ready to provide the necessary assistance to his
clients. Thus another proverb says:

> *A kii ni ahun*
> *Ka tun ni iyi*
> One cannot be tight-fisted (selfish)
> And be endowed with honour

Just as the English concept sees a patron as someone who must provide sup-
port and protection to clients through the goods he provides, Yoruba social
thought/culture also stipulates the provision of goods desired by clients for
the honour of the patron to be secure and sustained. He may be rich and in-
fluential, but as long as he does not give, he is seen as someone who has the
means or goods, but will not help others. He will be judged 'selfish' and
'wicked'. Hence, loyalty will not be extended to him. The idea that clients
may desire assistance is a result of the Yoruba conviction that a person may

be faced with challenges he may not be able to face and overcome on his own. He may need the help of somebody more experienced and able to help out. Hence a proverb says:

> *Aja to ba leni leyin*
> *A po'bo*
> A dog supported by man
> Will kill a monkey

This is a proverb derived from man's association with nature. No matter the strength and ferocity of a dog, it might be incapable of killing a monkey. While dogs crawl on land, monkeys have the ability to travel for miles jumping from one tree to another without touching the ground. Since dogs do not climb trees, a dog desirous of hunting down a monkey will easily realize its inability. At this stage, it will need the assistance of the hunter (man) to use his dexterity and hunt down the high jumping monkey with his gun. It is only thereafter that the monkey may become game for the dog. Likewise, for man, there are situations when a particular man may not be able to achieve his set objectives. To achieve them, even legally, he may require the assistance of someone who has the wherewithal to help. As one person helps, the other secures what hitherto may have eluded him. And so, since it is common knowledge that a man may need the assistance of another 'superior' person to achieve his aims, the Yoruba have a proverb, which describes what gives the *Oro* oracle its voice:

> *Eniyan lo n'be l'ehin oro*
> *Ti oro n ke*
> Man stands behind the *Oro* oracle
> So it shouts.

This proverb brings the *Oro*[7] from its seemingly socially inscribed mythical nature to the essentiality of one driven by humans. When its instrument is waved, it gives a meaningful sound of warning to the people. It cannot on its own produce that sound. It has to be activated by a man. Likewise, a man incapable of achieving a particular goal may have to be helped by someone, not just a friend, but a *baba-isale* in a patron-client relationship.

In spite of the elaborate emphasis on the assistance the patron may give to clients, attention is also drawn to the fact that both are in a relationship of mutual exchange. Exchange is necessary because neither the patron nor the

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7 *Oro* is a representation of a fierce Yoruba god, that punishes the wicked through annihilation and must not be seen by women. Its approach and presence is indicated through a whirling and roaring sound produced from a specially designed wood, continually and repeatedly swirled around by the faithful.

client may entirely possess the goods or values he desires. For as much as the patron may have goods to dispense, he requires the loyalty of the client to remain relevant. Likewise, the essence of the clients' loyalty may only become relevant when it is recognised as germane and imperative for the sustenance of a patron and thus attracts goods. The following proverbs emphasize this element of reciprocity in the patron-client relationship as both have specific roles to play:

> *Owo omode o to pepe*
> *Ti agbalagba o wo keregbe;*
> *Ise ti ewe ba be agba*
> *Ki o ma se ko o*
> *Gbogbo wa ni a ni sa a jo nbe ara wa*
> The hand of the young does not reach the high shelf
> That of the elder does not go into the gourd
> The work a child begs an elder to do,
> Let him not refuse to do
> We all have to do for each other's good.
> Dopamu and Alana 2004: 166

> *Omode gbon, agba gbon*
> *La fi da Ile-Ife*
> Ile-Ife was established
> Through the wisdom of both the young and the elderly

Simply put, both proverbs emphasize the necessity for both the elderly[8] (patron) and the young (clients) to work together for the benefit of the society because nobody has a monopoly over resources. What one lacks, the other has. And so, mutual exchange(s) may have to take place for the sustenance of social order and human existence. By emphasizing the contribution of both the elderly and the young in the establishment of Ile-Ife, generally regarded as the cradle of Yoruba civilization, the second proverb draws attention to an aspect of Yoruba sentimental social consciousness to further emphasize that nobody fully controls knowledge or development potentials. Rather it is achieved by contributions from everyone. For some, the contribution may be goods (patrons), while loyalty may be that of others (clients).

Above all, both classes/groups will contribute to the enhancement of the social structure and social development, provided they have internalised the requisite *iwa* expressed through *ihuwasi* and *isesi* for the purpose of *ajumose*. For as contained in the *Asuwada* principle '… if one *ori* improves, its im-

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8 Elderly or young as used here does not necessarily mean in age. It simply refers to a person's position in the social structure whether a patron or client.

provement will affect two hundred others' (Akiwowo 1986: 352); simply implying that, provided members of a society co-operate, the success of a member will positively impact on the lives of the others. Otherwise, the patronage system will not work towards the survival of a given society.

The social structure of Yoruba society underwent major transformations through colonialism and the imposition of money economy and capitalism. These transformations also changed the nature of patron-client relationships. In the wake of Westernization, Yoruba society has become a society for the survival of the fittest.

With regard to patronage, even though patrons and clients *suwada* (sociate) for the purpose of exchanging resources, they no longer do so for developing the social structure of their society, but for personal benefit only. This is most prevalent in Nigeria's socio-political relations as regards patronage, with patrons extracting enormous resources from state coffers for the sustenance of clientelistic networks to the economic benefit of patrons and their followers, while the impoverished majority is left unimproved in spite of the goods rendered. Patrons, hence, rather give pecuniary goods to sustain immediate loyalty and they do not necessarily provide the infrastructure, which would improve people's lives (Omobowale 2007, 2006). Thus, as exchanges become monetised and marketised with Western economic principles in place, the outcome is not *ajumose*, because it is already mortgaged. What we have is each individual trying to secure for himself what he needs. The achievement thus becomes personalised. This is what Yoruba call *adase* (done individually). But unlike *ajumose,* which develops and sustains the social structure, the Yoruba believe *adase ni hun ni…* (individualism destroys).

Conclusion

This study focused on the values and meanings attached to patron-client relationships in Yoruba social thought by looking at proverbs that relate to these relationships. The proverbs address the positive values the *baba-isale* as patron is expected to portray in order to secure the loyalty of the client. Indeed, aside from providing goods, the patron is expected to be a role-model in his character, which is embodied in the social values of *iwa, ihuwasi, isesi* and *ajumose*. When a patron is seen to be someone who has internalised these ideals, which are germane to the sustenance of the social structure, he would be recognised as an *omoluabi* and the goods he extends to the clients would be meaningful. Nevertheless, the imported Western culture has modified patronage relations, so that instead of enabling social development, the marketisation of patronage relations and the rise of individualism leads to desociation and underdevelopment as the emphasis is principally placed on how

much material benefit may be secured from the patron, even at the expense of social survival. Thus, the value of *omoluabi* depicting good character and personality is de-emphasised to such an extent that if the patron has money to grant to impoverished and disadvantaged clients, they are ready to break the law in order to sustain the patron.

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Zusammenfassung

Klientelismus und Sozialstruktur: eine Analyse der Patronage im sozialen Denken der Yoruba

Soziale Beziehungen bei den Yoruba wurden von jeher durch Sprichwörter, Redewendungen und Lieder (re-)strukturiert. In ihnen spiegelt sich das Denken der Gruppe wider. Dies zeigt sich insbesondere beim Blick auf die Beziehungen zwischen Patron und Klient und den Erwartungen, wie diese Beziehungen aussehen sollten. Durch die Analyse von Sprichwörtern, Redewendungen und Liedern der Yoruba wird gezeigt, wie indigenes gesellschaftliches Denken Werte, Normen und Erwartungen in klientelistischen Beziehungen festlegt.

Schlüsselwörter

Nigeria, Kulturökonomie, Ökonomie der Künste und Literatur, Religion, Wirtschaftsanthropologie

Résumé

Clientélisme et structure sociale: une analyse du patronage en pensée social des Yoruba

Depuis la nuit des temps les relations sociaux des Yoruba ont été structuré et restructuré par des proverbes, des idiomes et des chansons reflétant la pensée sociale du groupe. Cela se montre notamment dans la forme que les relations entre patron et client sont supposés prendre. L´objectif de ce travail est d´analyser des proverbes, des idiomes et des chansons des Yoruba afin de fournir des connaissances sur la façon dont la pensée sociale indigène stipule des normes, des valeurs et des attentes dans les relations clientelistique parmi les Yoruba.

Mots clés

Nigeria, économie culturelle, économie des arts et de la littérature, Religion, anthropologie économique

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