

Minstrelsy, Apprenticeship, Origin and Features of *Biripo*, the Ilaje Folk-Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Issues of minstrelsy, apprenticeship, origin, features of *Biripo*, the Ilaje oral performance in chanting and singing modes, and the influence of modernity and technology on it have never been subjects of any known research in folkloric literature or other fields of human knowledge. This paper thus, investigates the issues of minstrelsy, apprenticeship in *Biripo*, origin and features of *Biripo* among the people. The paper employs sociological approach to the study of *Biripo* since it operates within its society of origin. Sociological approach to the study of literature or folklore examines a text or indigenous oral performances through sociological binoculars with a view to examining how the text has been influenced by the society and vice-versa which justifies the adoption of the theory. The paper also gathers information through oral interviews and secondary materials such as textbooks, journal articles and cyber materials. The research finds out that: the issues of minstrelsy, apprenticeship is present in *Biripo* the way it is in other indigenous forms, the oral (*Biripo*) artist occupies special place in his community and enjoys special privilege from the community leaders and the people, *Biripo* is a product of the people's tradition and quotidian existence from the pre-literate and post-literate eras and that modernity and technology have tremendously influenced *Biripo*, functional application and that the use of ideophones, call and response, affinity with ritual and masquerades songs etc are features of *Biripo*. The paper advocates the technologising of *Biripo* for the 21st century exigencies and realities.

KEYWORDS

Minstrelsy; apprenticeship; modernity and technology; people's tradition; oral performance.

INTRODUCTION

Several ethno-cultural prejudices and biases have been precipitated and propagated about the existence and survival of *Biripo*. For many years some members of other Yoruba sub-groups have concluded erroneously that there is no folklore worthy of literary attention from that part of Yoruba land from where *Biripo* originated. This is due largely to ignorance on the part of some of them while on the parts of others, it is due, incontrovertibly to chauvinistic prejudice, supremacist tendency and the insidious human propensity to downplay what belongs to others and promote theirs; a postcolonial dialectics. The kernel of this paper is the investigative voyage into the issue of minstrelsy, apprenticeship, which boils down to the issue of learning, transmission of the form before the advent of modern technology which culminated into the invention of books and other technological gadgets of documentation and electronic retrieval, features and origin of the form.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Origin of *Biripo*

Biripo is as old as the people of the region where it is practised. It is a part of the people's culture which is also a part of the totality of their being. This is corroborated by Emaye (2022) during an oral interview used in this study. He postulates that *Biripo* is an aspect of folksongs which is akin to the western forms in origin, contents and medium of expression. It began in Ilaje (Emaye 2022). It started at the royal courts at Ode-Ugbo, Ode-Etikan and Ode-Uhopen all in the present Ilaje Local Government Area of the present Ondo State in the South-Western Nigeria. In ancient days, *Biripo* was used for regal entertainment of the nobles, royalties and royal entourage or guests at the palaces or during the gathering of Oja (township convocation at the town squares). Thus, early *Biripo* artists were palace griots, chroniclers, palace historians, custodians of the cultural heritages and royal entertainers and royal bards. With time, they proceeded to minstrelsy as they began to be hired for occasions by people who were not members of the palace but who could afford to pay for their service.

Ehinmore, O.M. (2011) postulates that apart from *Biripo* being a source of entertainment, it also serves as an alternative to dispute resolution. To him, during the convocation of "Oja" (towns people), it was used for settling disputes between parties and communities. The claim that *Biripo* began in Ilaje stemmed from the historical fact that the Ilaje were the aborigines of the old Okitipupa Division. Oral traditions and written historical sources believed that the Ilaje were the earliest settlers of the region. *Biripo* might have been acculturated by the Ikale and Apoi who are neighbours of Ilaje on the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean. This acculturation might be as a result of inter-marriage, commerce or politics of the Erun-omi (the confederates or mini-states) with the headquarters at Ode-Ugbo and Olugbo as the president (J.F Ade-Ajayi & Crowther, M. 1974) cited above (224). *Biripo* was a part of the liturgy employed at any gathering of the mini-states. Thus, the Ikale kingdoms which were parts of the mini-states fell in love with the unique oral poetry (*Biripo*) and began to practise it. This may account for the widespread of *Biripo* along the littoral Yoruba-speaking parts of Ondo State.

In early days, the performance or rendition of *Biripo* was dominated preponderantly by male artists or performers. This was due to its perceived affinity with ritual or masquerade songs. This, as pointed out by Ajimisan (2011), was because it takes a culturally inclined mind to discern *Biripo* songs from ritual or masquerades songs since they dig their contents from virtually the same source (80). During masquerades festivals, *Biripo* songs are borrowed and during *Biripo* performances, masquerades songs are also borrowed but tinkered with to suit the prevailing contexts. This accounts for the reasons there were no female artists among early *Biripo* artists. However, during performances, especially during festivals, women, children and age-grades form parts of the *Biripo* performances staged to mark the festivals either as dancers, drummers, back-up singers, *alajasa* (side commentators) etc. *Biripo*, like other oral literary forms, is characterised by absence of claim of authorship. It has collective or communal authorship. That is why it is named "*Biripo*" with the formation of a circle which symbolises collective responsibility and communal contribution of every member of the troupe during performance.

Early known and professional *Biripo* artists included Pa Ajao, Pa Olomojuni, Chief Lelere Koko Ajayi, Pa Christopher Ikuesan, Pa Esrom Lucky Ehinmore, Pa Alfred Ajimisan Ojabogun (a singer and a skillful drummer), Pa Zebulon Omoranmowo, Pa Omaboye, Pa Abe, Chief Samuel Omotola Emaye, Chief Ten Kobo and a host of others. Most of them were or are palace chroniclers, princes and chiefs with vast knowledge of the tradition of their people. For example, Chief Lelere Koko Ajayi was a palace chronicler to the Olugbos, Oba Napoleon Orioye Mafimisebi and Oba Adebajon Akingbade Maimisebi with whom he

co-existed. Chief Lelere Koko Ajayi took *Biripo* beyond live stage performances by recording many of his songs on audio cassette tapes. He was the first of all the artists to do so. Some of his recorded tapes have been selected for analysis. Others with recorded performances are Pa Zebulon Omoranmowo, and Chief Samuel O. Emaye whose records we have also selected for examination in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Minstrelsy and Apprenticeship in Biripo

On apprenticeship and minstrelsy in *Biripo*, Ayela (2016) believes that *Biripo*, like other Yoruba oral poetry, such as *Rara*, *Iremoje*, *Iyere/Ese-Efa*, *Ijala* (hunters' poetry) *Laghalogho*, *Dadakuada*, *Obitun* etc is learnt and taught in form of informal education. The stage or venue of performance is usually the classroom for the mentoring and learning process. In *Biripo*, like *Izibongo* (praise poetry in Zulu-South Africa) and *Mbongi* or Yoruba *Ewi*, younger persons attach themselves to or enrol and pay stipulated amount to learn as apprentices under the tutelage of professional performers. The mentor (professional) and mentees agree on the time-frame or span of the tutelage, completion of which the apprentices are hoped to have masterfully garnered enough knowledge and mastery of the vocation or artistry. This is also true of *Biripo*. In *Biripo*, protégés or pupils enrol under the tutelage of already established or professional *Biripo* artists to learn the art or even drumming. Some of them pay enrolment dues while a category called paid band-members learn without paying. Those apprentices in this category of paid members are those who are naturally or innately talented in *Biripo* who wish to go professional or gather more mastery so as to blend training with natural talents.

Emaye (2021), Ehinmore (2021) Ayela and Leviticus Ajimisan (2021) jointly confirm that though there are natural talents in drumming and singing in *Biripo*, people still go under the tutelage of professionals to learn more. Emaye specifically mentions that he has natural talent, but he went for talent refinement under Zebulon Omoranmowo. He also said that "Pa Zebulon told me that he learnt *Biripo* from Chief Lelerekoko Ajayi at Ode-Ugbo in Ilaje". He claims that some "pupils" are currently training under him and that he had also organised a number of pupils to go and learn from Baba Zebulon Omoranmowo, his mentor. Leviticus Ajimisan (2021) during an oral interview lends credence on matter of apprenticeship in *Biripo*. He says

"I inherited it (*Biripo*) from my father, Pa Alfred Ajimisan Ojabogun, a singer, dancer, dexterous drummer who could sing and drum simultaneously and the Palace historian to the Olikan (monarch of Etikan Kingdom) who reigned during his time. I inherited the tenor voice or even all that I know how to do in *Biripo* from him. I also know more by observing keenly the performances of other skilful artists and put my observation to practice at my leisure time"

This opinion lends credit to fact that there is natural talent in drumming, dancing, and singing of *Biripo*. This talent may be refined by training, practice and close/keen observation of an already established performer. It is however observed that people learn more about *Biripo* these days not through registration as we have in those days when people still stayed with their trainers. Isidore Okpewho (1992) lends us credence (20-21).

Nowadays, people who have natural talents only learn by performing under the professional who allows them to practice towards the tail end of the performance and corrects them where necessary. So, the apprentice-artist relies greatly on keep observation of his trainer, imitation and the power of retentive memory to thrive. These proteges, on attaining some level of proficiency either in general performance or drumming, continue to freelance and perform as minstrels especially during off-season of fishing. A minstrel is a quotidian wandering or nomadic performer, oral poet or griot who, in the ancient times and even in the modern days, performs from door-to-door and place without the hiring or anticipation of the patronages specific patron or matron. They perform from one community or village to the other in search of source of livelihood and fame, either by trekking on land or by canoes or boats in littoral locations and terrains.

Oroyo (2021), Omasogbe (2021) and Oronla (2021) opine that this practice of performing *Biripo* like local, itinerant and quotidian poets and performers (minstrels) evolved not as a result of the 21st century vicissitudes and realities but is as old as the art itself. Thus, it is established that minstrelsy is one of the intricacies of *Biripo* (Luse and Ijegbe performances) among the people. Evident fact with which to buttress our claims here is the evolution of the surname Ogbere in Ilaje land. O-gbe-ere/ eni-ti-o-n-gbe-ere (the play-maker) means one who moves about to entertain the people either for fun, funds or fame. Stanley Ogbere (2020) lends us credence.

The place of Biripo Artist/Performer in Ilaje Society

Biripo artist, like other oral artists or performers in Yoruba land and other cultural societies of the world are accorded great respect because they are regarded as the knowledge bank or fountain among the people. They are believed to be greatly knowledgeable in the history of the people and they are also seen as “learned” men in the culture and tradition of the people. In Ilaje society, *Biripo* artists are treasured specially, the way the Western world treasures libraries. They are seen as mobile libraries and are consulted from time to time for facts and credence on matters concerning the history and culture of the people. That is why, early *Biripo* artists were palace chroniclers and prominent chiefs who knew the nitty-gritty of the culture and tradition of their people. Kings scouted for them because they were believed to be useful assets in the preservation and propagation of the people’s history and cultural heritages. This is supported by Isidore Okpewho (26). L.O. Ajimisan (2021) during an oral interview establishes that most *Biripo* artists are court or palace griots at Ode-Ugbo or Ode-Etikan. Odolo (2021) also shares similar opinion on the personality or the place of *Biripo* artists in Ilaje society when he opines that they are like teachers or pundits from whom people always come to learn.

He believes that *Biripo* artists are studious people with all facts about the tradition and custom of their people at their fingertips. They are cultural gurus who sometimes are even more knowledgeable than some kings or who even teach them what they do not know about their people. This is backed by Djeli Mamoudou Kouyate, the artist interviewed by Niane, D.T. (1965) in which the artist claims thus:

“I am a griot. It is I, Djeli Mamoudou Kouyate, son of Bintou Kouyate and Djeli Kedian Koyate, master in the arts of eloquence. Since time immemorial the Kouyates have been in the service of the Keita Princes of Mali. We are the vehicles of speech; we are the repositories which harbor secrets many centuries old... I

teach kings the history of their ancestors so that the lives of the ancients might serve them as an example. My word is pure of all untruths; it is the word of my father; it is the word of my father's father (1).”

Like the opinion above, many kings who ascend the thrones at tender age or who were groomed in the cities are taught the customary practices of the royalty during festivals or the totality of royalty by the *Biripo* artist or performers. The place and royal grace accorded such artistes is described by Okpewho (1992) cited above in the lines below:

“for these services, the court poet was rewarded in a variety of ways. In some cases, the poet was given residence in the palace or its environs. If not paid a regular salary, the poet was at least given handsome gifts and occasional allowances, sometimes even a portion of land on which to farm. The poet enjoyed the protection as well as the privilege of being the official mouthpiece of the ruler of the land... the griot was traditionally a poet attached to royal family (26)”.

What Okpewho described above is true of the following *Biripo* artists in Ilaje land. They were Lelere Koko Ajayi, who was the palace chronicler and griot for the Olugbos of Ugbo Kingdom Oba Samuel Ejagbomo Mafimisebi, Oba Napoleon Orioye Mafimisebi and Oba Adebajo Akingbade Mafimisebi who ruled during his lifetime; Pa Alfred Ajimisan Ojagbogun, Christopher Ikuesan and Pa Number Odolo the *Biripo* artists who were also palace chroniclers and griots. All these griots are still today highly revered if not deified for their creative ingenuity and historical cum customary studiousness. In one of the records of Late Pa Lelere Koko Ajayi selected and referred to in this research, he was able to establish a founded fact about the founding and the origin of Ode-Aye, an ancient town in Ikale (Okitipupa Local Government) starting from the tale of the crocodile that took (swallowed alive) Moluken the hunter referred to in one of the texts critiqued in this paper.

Sequel to historical studiousness, he was able to prove that after the killing of the crocodile, the eventual dissecting of the crocodile's stomach in order to bring Moluken out alive and the eventual failure to give Halu (the man who dissected the crocodile's stomach) what they pledged him, he cut the crocodile's head and mysteriously disappeared with it. He landed at the beach of the place now known as Ode-Aye. Till date, no trained or professional historian has been able to fault his submission. Apart from royal privileges, *Biripo* artistes are well regarded and accorded the honour of the ancestors in public places or functions. This is because, in Ilaje land, they are regarded as the custodians of ancestral heritages such as history, culture, tradition and custom. They are loved and cherished by the communities and villages as the customary libraries of the people. Whenever they visit anybody as guests, they are entertained and served with palm wine and kola-nuts to show that they are mouthpieces of the ancestors and the guardians of the sacred treasures.

In the interview with Odolo (2021), the informant's opinion summarises the functions of the *Biripo* artists to include functioning as an entertainer, historian/chronicler, palace griot, custodians of customs and people's culture, teachers or royal tutors and instruments of

transmission and amplification of the people's tradition. In short, they are the people's libraries or books that they read to know the unknown and learn more about the already known facts. Thus, losing a *Biripo* artiste in Ilajeland is as worse as setting a whole university library ablaze and insulting them is also tantamount to mutilation of a library material or defecating in the library building. The brain of a *Biripo* artiste is like the memory of a computer set which accommodates vast materials about the people. So, what is true of the artists or performers of Mbongi (oral poetry), Izibongo (oral panegyric) of Zulu South Africa, the "Jeli" griots of the Mandika, wailers of the old Akan, Fon or Ewe of Ghana are true of the *Biripo* artists among the Ilaje.

Biripo artists, like other oral artistes in other parts of the world are accorded great respect and preferential treatment as expressed by Okpewho (1992) above. The mind and brain of a *Biripo* artist, especially the one who doubles as palace poet or griot is like the universal archive. That is why a *Biripo* artist in Ilaje is referred to as "Omaran-Ufe" or "Agba Opitan Ufe". The kings, their chiefs and the people in general respect the artist for his ability to store so many facts about them in his small head and transmit or propagate such in songs. Thus, a short *Biripo* song or rap is tantamount to reading the history of a kingdom or family. An instance of this is found in the text about the crocodile which swallowed Moluken and how Halu stole the crocodile's head and landed at a place in the present Ode-Aye in Okitipupa Local Government of Ondo State. This informed Omosule's (2019) conclusion that *Biripo* is a form of consciousness from where morality, respect for one another and recognition of taboos may be garnered.

Formation of *Biripo* Troupe

The formation of *Biripo* troupe is a communal or collective effort among the people. This is because *Biripo* is a communal entity, as such, everyone around must contribute his or her quota to the performance or to the formation of the troupe. This claim is supported by Emoruwa (2005) when he states that:

"The interest invested into *Biripo* allows all members of the community to be able to boast of one or more performative skills that are essential for staging a *Biripo* performance. However, there are people whose interests and skills remain unparalleled in the whole land. Sometimes, such set of people seize such opportunities to establish themselves as remarkable *Biripo* exponents. There are some who made it a family-dominated affair, while others prefer to just team up with other compatible minds to form a group. There are also cases of those who single-handedly initiate troupes and co-opt people to execute any engagement that they are lucky to attract. In such cases, the artist s may choose not to belong to anybody permanently, but just freelance".

To form a *Biripo* troupe according to this opinion demands that the would-be artist or band leader must be eagle-eyed so as to discover talented drummers, back-up singers,

dancers or composers who is also vast in the rap aspect of the art. It thus demands the discovery of people of like minds especially those with perfection as their watchword. The leader who is believed to be more knowledgeable than other members of the troupe is discretionary in scouting for members of the troupe as to what number should constitute the right population or figure of a standard *Biripo* troupe. This population involves the number of singers, dancers, drummers and those using the *Katapa* (sizeabe pieces of the Indian Bamboo) to produce clapping sound to the accompaniment of other musical instruments.

There is a stipulated number of drummers since there is stipulated number of drums available in *Biripo* performance. The singers are characteristically, four (4) in number including the leader and the backup singers. Sometimes, members of the audience who are conversant with the songs, recitations or the “raps” may sing along or double as side commentators. In some cases, people of the same background or who are from the same family select the various talents that they have discovered in the family and bring them together to form a troupe. This is considered to be the best way of forming troupes as it affords the members the opportunity of rehearsing and performing together always which is believed to guarantee mastery and proficiency.

On the figure or population of *Biripo* troupe, there is no fixed number. However, Emoruwa (2005) suggests that “an average troupe is expected to comprise at least 15, 20 or more members that are functional”. By being functional, he has in mind the troupe members who are performing one or more functions on the stage or during the performance. These functions must also be relevant to the success of the performance. His breakdown of the population reflects:

- (i) Four (4) drummers
- (ii) One lead singer (band leader)
- (iii) Four male and female dancers
- (iv) The others must be in form of chorus for singing, clapping and playing *Pakata*, *sekere* (rattle/ beaded gourds) and the gong.

This claim on figure is seemingly invalid. This is because the number of drummers named in numerical representation is less than the number of drums used in *Biripo* as reflected in Appendix 3 showing the various drums used in *Biripo*. Emoruwa seems not to take cognizance of the fact that there are about six or seven indispensable drums with each producing a sound different from the other. The number of drummers is more than four which he itemises with the inclusion of the drummers on the “reserved bench” who are to relieve the tired ones during the performance.

Dancers are restricted to four in number, according to Emoruwa, but Olomojuni (2020) in an oral interview cited by Enikuemehin (2013) opines that “the number of dancers in *Biripo* performance may range between 4, 6, 8 or more” depending on the context Enikuemehin (2013) sees it differently. His opinion about the number of dancers is that “from time immemorial till date, the approved number of dancers for *Biripo* dance at a given length of performance time can only reflect 1, 2, or 4 numerical figures” (32). What can be deduced is that there is no limitation to the number of dancers depending on the size of the “Oju-agbo” (glee-ground) our finding shows that more than ten (10) dancers can occupy the glee-ground at a time so far there is no congestion. This is supported by Ayela, E.D (2020) in the interview conducted and cited by Enikuemehin (2013). However, the context that accounts for a large number of dancers at a time is a large or grand celebration (the coronation of a new king). In practical sense, the *Biripo* troupe that I prepared for performance during last the Olojo Festival on September 27, 2021 in Ile-Ife comprised twenty members with 6 females, two of whom were dancers.

Features of Biripo as Oral Poetry

Biripo, like other oral forms such as *Rara*, *Ekun-Iyawo* etc is a product of the people's culture and tradition. The following are the features which mark out the form from the others or make it similar to other forms:

- (i) **Affinity with Ritual and Masquerade Songs:** *Biripo* shares affinity with masquerades or ritual songs. In terms of contents and context of rendition, *Biripo* is different but the song modulation and participants vary. To discern *Biripo* songs from ritual songs, a cultural mind is needed. This is because they dig their contents from virtually the same source (80). What Ajimisan fails to tell us is whether to be a *Biripo* artist, one needs to be an initiate of the *Oro* cult or not. *Biripo* is the totality of the people's lives and its words in the rendition and the prevailing situation on the ground determines whether it is a funeral or naming that is going on. If it is funeral rite, it is the wordings of the songs that will show what is happening. Ayela (2020) however shares similar opinion with Ajimisan but does not specify the level of interconnectedness between *Biripo* and masquerades or ritual songs. What is common to the opinions under review here is the unfounded fact about the interconnectedness. Anyway, the claim of interconnectedness (though my emphasis) stems from the fact that both *Biripo* and ritual or masquerade songs evolved from the same source which is the cultural practices of the people.
- (ii) **Contents Drawn from Quotidian Existence/ Experiences of the People:** The notion that the contents of *Biripo* are drawn from daily lives of the people seems to be upheld by Ehinmore(2021). This is because he believes that the issues which form the composition of *Biripo* are from the environment and the socio-cultural attitudes of the people to quotidian events. My reservation about this submission is that this feature is not peculiar to *Biripo* alone. That is perhaps why Enikuemehin (2013) sees *Biripo* as an integration of the people into customs and habits of their traditional society. This opinion of Enikuemehin is weak because it does not specify how *Biripo* does this integration (12). The strength of this opinion is that it shares the general belief that the daily life of a people is inherently plagiarised into their oral literature. This is because literature is the product of its society of origin. Thus, whatever is portrayed in *Biripo* is from the collective lives of the people.
- (iii) **Pervasiveness:** Egboworomo (1999) suggests that *Biripo* cuts across all spheres of the people's life such as birth, death, naming, maturation, rites of passage from one stage of life to another. He likens the people of Ilaje to a dancing bird called "adodo" (107). He opines that like the bird above, the people have extra penchant for singing and dancing not to any other form of music but their indigenous *Biripo*. This opinion appears plausible because wherever the Ilaje are, they go with *Biripo* and in whatever they do, they sing *Biripo* to complement physical activities. In farming, fishing, mat-weaving etc, the Ilaje use *Biripo*. That is why Mbiti (1975) sees Africans, with the inclusion of the Ilaje as singing people. This is because in time of peace, war, struggle, pleasure and displeasure, the people sing. This is true of the Ilaje who use *Biripo* for various occasions and ceremonies in their communal lives. This view is in tandem with that one expressed by Abrams and Harpham (2009) cited earlier. They expand the scope of folksongs in general and *Biripo* in specificity to songs rendered in various places of activities. This justifies the situation of *Biripo* within the ambit of occupational

oral forms. The song-loving people of Ilaje sing when they are happy, unhappy, working, bereaved, etc.

- (iv) **Adaptability:** Ayela (2020) and Odolo (2021) share similar view when they aver that one item in *Biripo* can be adapted to suit different occasions. This opinion seems to account for the reason *Kiriji*, *Luse* and *Ijegbe* are for specific occasions. The duo agreed that *Biripo* is for any occasion that the mind of an Ilaje man can conceive. To them, it is the context which is the occasion of rendition that determines the contents, tone and mood of the piece to be rendered. There are *Biripo* songs for various occasions and one song or composition may be tinkered with to suit the ceremony that is going on. A composition meant for naming can be adapted to fit into marriage ceremonies. The strength of this argument by Ayela and Odolo is that it gives us insight into the multifunctional or multifaceted nature of *Biripo*. They equip us with insight into which form of *Biripo* does or does not fit for a specific occasion.
- (v) **Collectivism:** As postulated by Ajetunmobi (2003), there is no claim of authorship of *Biripo* from any individual (188). This is akin to what Ajimisan (2011) posits. This feature is not peculiar to *Biripo* since it is not different from other dialectal or regional form. The community is the author (83). *Biripo* is a collective or communal affair in the lives of the people of Ilaje. This collectivism is symbolically shown in the circle formed during the performance. Ehinmore upholds this view of zero authorship in *Biripo*. The collective spirit is also inherent in the way all the performers will have one function or the other to perform so that everyone contributes his or her quota to the performance.
- (vi) **Reliance on Historical Facts in its Composition:** *Biripo* relies solely on oral history or oral sources for materials of composition. The songs or the rap aspects of it are of historical source. The rap aspect called *Luse* or *Ijegbe* is a product of the history of the people. That is why Ehinmore (2021) during an oral interview sees *Biripo* performers as historicists as they historicise with their composition and performance. Thus, most of the figures referred to in *Biripo* are known historical figures in one village or community or the other. Most *Biripo* poetry or rap form have been found to be helpful in telling or retelling the history of some families, founding and desolation of some kingdoms. The strength of Ehinmore's argument lies in the way he sees *Biripo*, a literary form to be performing historical functions as true of other oral forms. The weakness therein lies in the way he sees *Biripo* as doing totally the job history should do. Thus, the tale of the alligator that swallowed Moluken the obstinate hunter alive, a fact of history used in one of the texts is exemplary in the light of *Biripo* artists relying on historical facts in the composition of *Biripo*. However, this story as referred to in the text is not history in totality but an allusion to facts of history.
- (vii) **Musical Accompaniment:** As we have seen in the postulation of Abrams and Harpham (2009) earlier, their taxonomy and anatomy of folksongs attest to the fact that *Biripo* belongs to the generic family of balladic poetry sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Thus, Emoruwa (2005) and Enikuemehin (2013) may be right to a certain extent to conclude that *Biripo* is only a form of music and not a form of oral poetry. They are however held responsible for their monolithic categorisation of *Biripo* as only a musical or theatrical paradigm. They otherwise deserve, credit at least for giving us the hint that *Biripo* relies on musical accompaniment for a complete realisation. According to Abrams (1999), balladic forms are composed and rendered to the

accompaniment of musical instruments and percussions. This use of percussion or musical instruments is indispensable and it is the major reason why it is difficult for some African scholars to demarcate between songs and other oral poetry. Omosule(1997) shows that *Biripo* is rendered to the accompaniment of indigenous musical instruments during Ore festival to make the profane complement the sacred. He also displays the pictures of the various musical instruments used in *Biripo* to earn his work a credit. *Biripo* is an oral poetic form that is vocalised in musical form or pattern.

- (viii) **Spontaneity:** Ajimisan (2011) believes that in most cases, talented *Biripo* exponents do not sit to compose new songs or rehearse them (81). The watershed in Ajimisan's view here is that it sees spontaneity as being uniquely a feature of *Biripo*. The songs and the rap are drawn extemporaneously at the point of rendition. Most especially in the rap aspect, the topics to be commented upon emanate from the respective place of the presentation. Characteristically, all oral forms are characterised by extemporaneity.
- (ix) **The Use of Idiophones:** Idiophones are onomatopoeic stylistic technique. This idea of the sound-reliance of idiophones is corroborated by Okpewho (1992) when he submits that:

“the idiophone is a stylistic technique that relies on sound. Simply defined, it means “idea-in-sound”, in the sense that from the sound of the word one can get an idea of the nature of the event or the object referred to. Idiophones are not like normal words to which meanings are readily assigned. They are simply sounds used in conveying a vivid impression (93)”.

Okpewho seems to be confusing us here by saying that idiophones are systematic organisation of sounds which are not meaningful independently but are meaningful in relation to the words they precede or follow. If idiophones are not meaningful in themselves, how do they contribute or add to the meaning of already meaningful words? These are very common in *Biripo* performance. In the *Biripo* texts recorded or collected for this research, there are many sounds made like words which whether added or removed do not affect or add to the meaning of the message passed, but which are just for melody's or harmony's sake.

According to Ehinmore, idiophones are for bringing about synchronisation and not for aiding meaningfulness. They are used in *Biripo* for keying the back-up singers into the leading of a new songs, mark the transition from the *egwo* segment onto the *eya* and herald a period of interludes between songs and “rap” (*Luse*). Some examples of idiophones used in *Biripo* are *eee*, *alolo*, *awolo* and so on. They are used sometimes to secure approval of the elders in the arena of the performance or to tell the supporting performers to join in the singing after the lead performer has been done with his rap. Idiophone has a wide a range of applications as a device for the achievement of vividness in narrative performances such as *Biripo* which is a blend of poetic rendition with singing and dancing. This claim is further validated by Mvuli (1982) when he submits that “the images created by using idiophones help the audience to see, feel, hear, smell, touch and enjoy the narrative” (62). Mvuli goes further to state other literary values of idiophone as he argues that a performer employs

idiophones to “vivify his speech, lend him eloquence, complete his thought and help him to create a fresh picture of an event and to convey contrasting images”(63). Mvuli helps to establish the fact that idiophones are useful to oral performance even beyond adding to meaning of another word.

(x) The Use of Call and Response

According to Ehinmore and Ayela, one of the major features of *Biripo* is the use of call and response style in which the back-up singers and the audience are carried along and can also join actively in the performance, in case the performer is singing a well-known song. The strength of this theory by Ayela and Ehinmore is the insight it offers in telling us that call and response is integral to *Biripo*. This, however, is not enough because they have not given us the insight as to whether call and response is unique to *Biripo* or whether it is used in every *Biripo* text. In some texts examined in this paper, *Aye ree* meaning this is life is a clause for keying or the cue for making the back-up singers join in the singing. Sometime, *O ye reeee* meaning “that is wisdom” is used as cue for bringing the back-up artists into the singing after leading the new song.

CONCLUSION

Like other oral performances across cultural isotherms of the world, *Biripo* is characterised by performative liminality. It shares aesthetical nuances common to other constantly researched indigenous oral forms and can be adapted to other modes of amplification or rendition such as singing and chanting. Minstrelsy and apprenticeship are not alien to *Biripo* as it is a form perpetuated through mentorship and pupillage like other indigenous forms. The facts itemised about the features and origins of *Biripo* are true of many indigenous poetic forms of other cultures and peoples of the world intentionally and unintentionally referred to as folks by folklorists around the globe. The formation of *Biripo* is also characterised by adaptability, flexibility and versatility. The perpetuation of *Biripo* is, therefore, recommended to save the form from obscurity and irredeemable oblivion.

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