



Research Article

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Ifá Divinatory Apprenticeship Methodology for Revitalising and Decolonizing Memory Bank Among the Yoruba of south western Nigeria

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Abstract

Ifá divinatory systems, though an oral tradition, is the memory bank of the Yoruba of south western Nigeria as well as their knowledge dissemination systems. As decolonised future is imagined, this study argues that given the emerging global place of Ifá as oral tradition, it is capable of forging historical memory and nurturing resistance to the Eurocentric memory studies. To this end, this study unearths and unties the question of apprenticeship methodology and how this is deployed to enhance decolonised knowledge production patterns in Ifá School of knowing. What are the apprenticeship processes? How do these apprenticeship learning processes continue to vent and reinvent, frame and reframe, think and rethink, construct and reconstruct such that it is not consumed by western memory frameworks? How is the apprenticeship methodology sustained in spite of the overwhelming influence of western education? Transcending the boundaries of western episteme and to push that Ifá divinatory apprenticeship methodology is a system of scientific practice.

Keywords: *Ifá, Apprenticeship ethnography, Myth, Re-member, Memory, Knowledge ecology*

1. Introduction

Memory study as a great interdisciplinary field of enquiring is particularly concerned with the method of remembering and forgetting. Remembering because of the connection between the past and the present; forgetting because of the limitation of humans which makes human vulnerable to forgetfulness, and therefore there is always the struggle to remember the forgotten events in the bid to build the future. Futurism (imagining the future) is not possible without the past and the present. In the African cosmological, ontological and epistemological traditions, happenings or events are stored in space. These are, in essence episodic, because they happen in time and space. Moreover, they are episodic in the sense that the happenings of yesterdays influence and determine events and happenings of today. The past, present and future are linked by a continuous chain of events.

Thus, in African cosmology, the universe is a block. The past is simply a piece of the universe at an earlier location while the present is a portion of the universe at a later location. It is from this block that people seek to know and what is known is committed to memory. The block is humongous and what is known with this block is what is called knowledge. Events are manifestation of an infinitesimal part of this block. The memorable event is what is known as episodic memory; episodic

because given the strength, effect or impact of the events, the event becomes sacred energy of the *Òriṣà* (deity) that must be kept, nurtured and venerated. This in Yoruba is what is called *Àṣẹ* (divine decree, authority, power; so shall it be). Events therefore should be "membered" and be "re-membered" so as to determine, master and manipulate the future.

Africa, particularly the Yoruba of south western Nigeria do not have history because no event is considered to be squared into the past; every event is always in the present. This is what David Biele (date?) has aptly termed a "constant of the NOW" bringing the then into the now. This explains why the Yoruba use the word *Ìtàn* which means that which is spreading interconnectedly to the degree that it is inseparable. It is *I-tàn* that is roughly but wrongly translated as history. The continued connection of the stories of life is the basis for equilibrium in the cosmos while human predicament is as a result of the disconnection of events. *Ifá*, therefore, is the process of bringing everything into one place so as to foster balance in the space.

In Yoruba ontology, all events are one and the same. *As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be in this endless world.* The effect of interconnectedness of events on humans and other realities in space is subject to manipulation. The process of manipulating events in time and space towards achieving specific goals is what, in this study, is called ritual. When an event is episodic, it becomes a phenomenon, that is, experiential, capable of determining other events. All these are stored in time and space as story which means enacting what is stored. Opefeyitimi (2016: 17) classes it as *Àyájó*; that is, the borrowing of yesterdays to address issues of today or the connection of the past events to address issues of the present. When all these events have lasted for millennia and may enter into the oblivion, it is mythologized and in mythologizing, you metamorphorize all in a bid to code, encode and retrieve what has gone into the oblivion. Opefeyitimi (2016: 27) referring to Babcock calls this "metanaration" to refer specifically to narrative performance and discourse and to those devices which comment upon the narrator, the narrating and the narrative both as message and code" This is what in Yoruba lexicon is called *I-rọ*, that is what is brought out from the space into the thought systems or imagination, fabricated and expressed for the purpose of ideation and out of the compulsion to seek explanation for things (Bewaji, 2012: 201) and to solve problems (Eliade, 1963: 50).

Herzfield (2001: 202) claims that the phenomenon of myth is deeply troubling. In his view, the term is often associated with the notion of fiction or false belief that exists only in the imagination and thus unverifiable: that is, the fabrication of stories to answer fundamental questions and to solve problem. Myth is what Eliade (1949: 143) refers to as explanation of the failure of order. In my view, myth is based on the principle of theodicy, especially when it becomes explanation for why people suffer. However, in the functionalist school of thought, the idea of myth has been removed from the domain of the irrational and the superstitious. Myth therefore epitomizes the potency and validity of uncertainty. *I-rọ*, therefore, is the basis for reality, it is a memory system. The certainty, reality and victory of *I-rọ* as mythology is attested in *Odù-Ifá Ògúndá Ogbè* (also called *Ògúndá Bèdè*) and *Òfún méji* (also called *Oràngún méji*).

Ògúndá Bèdè

A paró, paró, Irọ ò kú o

Irọ dọ̀'pitàn èlufẹ

-We made several attempt to kill lies, Lies refuses to die

Lie became the story teller of Ilé-Ifẹ (or lie is the valid story of the origin of human being).

-A paró, paró, Irọ ò kú o

Irọ dọ̀'pitàn èlufẹ

-We made several attempt to kill lies, Lies refuses to die

Lie became the story teller of Ilé-Ifẹ (or lie is the valid story of the origin of human being).

-Oràngún méji

Ìpádé ọ̀nà a b'enu simìni

A d'ifá fún Irọ

Irọ mibẹ ni aárin ọ̀tá

Wọ̀n ni kó kára nílẹ̀ ẹ̀bọ̀ ni kó ẹ

-The convergent point of the road is narrow
Divined for Lie
Lie is surrounded by enemies
Lie was instructed to make sacrifice
-*Iró gbé ebo, ó rú ebo*
A pa Iró, pa iró, Iró kò kú
Ara ni Iró fi ñre
-Lie made the sacrifice
In spite of all attempts to kill Lie
Lie waxes stronger

Mythology, therefore, is the science of retrieving events that have gone to the oblivion to enable the interconnectedness of events necessary to answer fundamental questions of human origin, solve contemporary problems and as well imagine the future, that is, futurism. Opefeyitimi (2016: 17) aptly argues that the context of myth is ritualistic; it allows for the exertion of events that were once possible so that these events are made new, energized, reinforced and re-integrated into the current events. Therefore, the core of the problem of humanity from the etiology of the Yoruba is the differentiation and disconnection of events as epitomized in the dichotomization and differentiation of the past, present and the future which is expressed mainly in artificial dating. What happens, in my view are events, not time and date; time and date were created within events as they unfold.

The ancient mystical oral tradition called *Ifá* has for millennia been unknown, obscured and hidden secret but has, in recent times, started to become popular; in fact, an household name. It speaks of the macrocosm and microcosm; it talks extensively about *Olódumarè* which Idowu (1962) name the Supreme Being; it narrates the origin of the universe, origin of tribes and nations; advent of the *Òriṣà* and about the activities of all creations including the transformation, transmigration and translocation of *Òriṣà*. Like the Kabbalah of the Judaist and a few other religious traditions in the east and western parts of the world, *Ifá* can be said to be the blueprint and DNA of the universe. More specifically, *Ifá* is very much associated with Yoruba understanding and teachings about the universe. The suffix '*fá*' in *Ifá* means to pull together, to bring into one place while the prefix '*I*' means the force or energy that pulls together. *Ifá*, therefore, is seen as energy or a force that pulls every reality into one space. By implication, differentiation and alienation in space are foreign to Yoruba ontology. To this end, humans and all earthly predicaments are surmountable through the unification of realities, that is, pulling everything into one space to the degree that past, present and future in time and space are pulled together as they happened within space. What this means in studies of memory is that the future has long been expected. In other words, the 'was' in the past is what translates into the present 'is' and it is the present 'is' that translates into the 'will be' of the future such that futurism is "built out of the relation of our attitude towards a whole active mass of organised past reactions or experiences" (Bartlett, 1932: 213). In line with Fischer Spies *et al* (2018) and Henry and Pene (2001), the physical and spiritual are seen as interconnectedly located, portending the unity of time and space.

Ifá is an endless learning system generally acceptable by Yoruba people. The knowledge system is multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary. But it is neither classified nor departmentalised and formalised like the colonial educational systems. The colonialist knowledge systems condemn and alienated the indigenous memory systems in order to extirpate it, thus making it to go into extinction. *Ifá*, which in 2005 was declared as *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is often described as an oral tradition and divination system with roots in Yorubaland of south western Nigeria. Scholarship has credibly demonstrated that *Ifá* has pervading influence on Yoruba epistemology, ontology, cosmology, cosmogony, and particularly ecology, ethics and ethos (Bascom, 1969: 125; Jegede, 2010: 75; Oyelaran, 2016).

2. Research Method

The study utilizes apprenticeship methodology. This is what (Lave, 2011; Downey, Dalidowcz and Mason, 2014) called apprenticeship ethnography. By way of definition, apprenticeship ethnography is an ethnographic method wherein the researcher does not do research only for the purpose of data gathering and analysis but also to gain practical know-how of the issues being researched. In doing this, the researcher would not just gain knowledge but also skills. The researcher therefore will be able to develop from novice (*omo Awo*) to a skilled practitioner of *Ifá* under the guidance of an experienced and skilled expert, who by virtue of his training is called *Babaláwo* (father of secret memory or knowledge system). Apprenticeship is not only to learn about skill but also an ideal way to learn about how one learns (Goody, 1989). So, the researcher, inspired by Patricia Hill's (2013) intellectual activism, became what she calls an *outsider within*, hence, the researcher is deeply immersed in the study. This means that the researcher went through the labyrinth and concluded all the initiation rites and rituals associated with *Ifá* priestcraft.

It is apt to note that the work of reformist modernist in the west under-guarded by the colonial agenda brought about damaging disparagement of divination and the indigenous knowledge around it, particularly in the twentieth century. This necessitated what in this study is referred to as "I want to see and experience principle of knowing" (Devsch, 2012: 78). For this purpose, the study reinforces lived experience anthropology, deep and in-depth ethnography in order to have direct access to crude data, to overcome the modernist colonialist ethnocentric prejudice and to foster decolonization and provincialisation of memory studies. To this end, the researcher became an apprentice ethnographer (Lave, 2011: 48) under three *Ifá* priests in Ibadan, Oyo State; Sagamu, Ogun State; and Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. My study, like that of Devisch (2012), deliberately departs from the general esoteric and mystification scrutiny which reduces African tradition to only religious phenomenon. This kind of ethnographic intervention was to enable an insight into what is generally considered unfathomable liminoid (Johnson, 2014: 34). It is imagined that this study is capable of contributing to the agenda towards the decolonization and dis-occultation of memory.

Attempt is made to demystify in order to enable studies in *Ifá* as a memory bank and a memory system to be subjected to more scholarly rigour. *Ifá* apprenticeship is unique as it is ritualistic, liturgical and ecological. Apart from going through an arduous process of initiation called *itefá* (receiving the one hand of *Ifá*), there was also the ritual of apprenticeship called *Ìlèté Ifá* (initiation into *Ifá* priest craft). One was able to go through a sophisticated professional training that fostered an acquisition of skills in divinatory practice. Although you learn under what I will like to call a rabbi called *Olúwo*, that is, master or teacher of the secret knowledge. Apart from the *Olúwo*, all other elderly and young *Babaláwo* including senior apprentices are also teachers. However, Merck *et al* (2016), drawing upon Hirst and Stone (2015), view memory as formative and thus reject the teacher student memory system which is epitomized in the individual and the collective memory system. Explaining further, they argue that each recollection is constructed from not only an intrinsic potential to remember but also external factors, including social factors. As a result, memories are partly stored in the head, encoded in some yet understood way in neurological tissue; and partly grow out of the interactions between the internal and external.

The learning method, in my apprenticeship, is by observation, participation and direct teaching. In the over six years of these apprenticeships, I ably participated in several divination and initiation rites as well as other ritual sessions including direct teachings on the symbols, processes and protocols during divination and ritual sessions. In the process of my apprenticeship, I was able to get a grasp of the divination and ritual processes, the rendition of *Ifá* poems, incantations, music and prayers. There are also sessions where the *Olúwo* (the Rabbi) teaches the apprentice specific ethics and issues of taboo. Critical to the learning process especially at the very onset of the training is the taking of *obì* (kola nut) with *ataare* (*Afromum melegueta*) known as alligator/guinea pepper to quicken the brain so that apprentice can memorize complex *Ifá* verses easily. Because the memory system is such that the source of *Ifá* knowledge is from *Odù* (roughly interpreted as the chief, head,

bulk or chapter), it is possible to forget and many at times difficult to remember. Therefore, in each of the learning stage, an ancient protocol in the *Ifá* apprenticeship is the periodic taken of one form of concoction or the other for the purpose of brain enhancement called *Ìsòyè*, which means that which enables easy remembrance. Apprentices must take this and other concoction to quicken the brain from time to time. This is because the volumes of what is to be learn is so enormous thus very tasking to the comprehension of ordinary human brain, hence, the need for periodic taking of medicine for the stimulation or activation of the brain.

3. *Ifá* as a Memory Bank and the Pre-mordiality of Knowledge

Memory bank is a word used mainly in computer. For instance, memory card or sim is a place for storage or a storage system. Memory bank is a disk (hardware) where data, programs or software are stored. In this paper, *Ifá* as a memory bank means that *Ifá* is a bank of knowledge about the universe that can be decoded, encoded, consolidated and retrieved. It presupposes that the knowledge of *Ifá* which exists in time and space is a bank where the knowledge about the universe stored from the ancient time can be retrieved. It can also be said to exist as a bank intrinsically within human intellect and through ritual of initiation and other rituals, including extensive and rigorous training as well as inspiration. Through concentration, the knowledge can be activated within. In *Ifá* memory system, reality is located in the *òkàn* (heart or mind, that is, the seat of intelligence and knowledge) or what the *Babaláwo* roughly called *inú* (innermost being) or figuratively termed as *ikùn* (stomach). *Ifá* is not something constructed but something found in and emerging from the ancestral realm, outside of the head, extended and distributed across social and cultural world. This is what Devisch (2012: 86) calls 'out there'. At times, a *Babaláwo* can say *Ifá* is in his *ikùn* (stomach). It can therefore be said that apart from time and space, *ikùn* (stomach) of the *Babaláwo* is the memory bank or the storage place of *Ifá*. In recognition of the inseparable link between brain and stomach, the *Babaláwo* locates intellection in the interaction and activity within brain and the stomach.

Ifá divination and the oral tradition of the Yoruba operate on the principle called *O-dù* (roughly interpreted as the chief, head, bulk or chapter). More specifically, the word *Odù* refers to the primordial divinities who are direct messengers of *Olódùmarè* (hence, the term 'head' or 'chief' is justified). Technically, *Odù* implies a pre-existence of everything or a transcendental energy that accommodates what is knowable. *Odù* is a place where knowledge is deposited and everyone is struggling to get her. Symbolically, *Odù* is typified as a pot deposited with infinite knowledge about the universe (which is a justification for the term 'bulk' or 'chapter'). There are 256 *Odù* (pots, bulks or chapters) in *Ifá* religious tradition which constitutes the knowledge of the University of the Universe, otherwise called the *intangibile* holy book of *Ifá*. Out of these, the first 16 *Odù* are the principal ones while the remaining 240 *Odù* are the minor ones, otherwise called *àmúlùmálà* (derivatives or combinations). The entire 256 *Odù* is precisely based on 16 x 16 combinations while each bulk or chapter has endless *èsè-Ifá* (*Ifá* verses). Each of the 256 *Odù* (with its innumerable *Ifá* verses) has its peculiar teachings. Together, this is what constitutes knowledge of the University of the Universe. As a university of the universe, it is a complex yet systematic knowledge system, vast and endless. There is, however, no specific number of years or sessions that can be spent to learn it... the learning system is a continuum and eternal. As contents (verses) of each *Odù-Ifá* are infinite, any printed book of *Ifá* is a mere miniature of the whole memory bank of *Ifá*.

Yoruba myth has it that the progenitor of *Ifá* is *Qrúnmilà* who was said to have descended from *Ìkòlè Qrun* (skye-heaven) to *Ìkòlè ayé* (the earth). The meaning of the word *Qrúnmilà* etymologically interpreted means 'heaven knows the one who shall be saved; or, heaven knows the solution to all problems and answers to all questions'. It also means that access to heaven will bring knowledge and clarity. The idea of heaven or heavenly domain (*Ìkòlè Qrun*) strongly suggests a place of reality that is conceivable but neither knowable nor reachable; yet what is known and knowable in this domain emanates from there and what is not yet known will come from there. It is the *Ìjì mi jí* (dawn, beginning, source of existence); hence, there is a pre-existent dimension to it.

It can be asserted without fear of contradiction that *Ìkòlé ayé* (the earth) was designed to be that which is filled with problems and solutions. By implication, when *Ọrúnmilà* was coming from heaven, he came with the solutions to alleviate earthly predicaments. With this, one is able to think that the unimaginable reality called *Ìkòlé Ọrun* (Skye-heaven) is where knowledge dwells. This knowledge is received through the ritual of knowing from *Ọrúnmilà*. In turn, *Ọrúnmilà* handed this knowledge over to *Babaláwo* of the ancient times, and it is passed from generation to generation. This is why the real owner and custodian of *Odù-Ifá* is *Olódumarè*. The prefix *Olódù* means 'He is the owner of the *Odù*'; He knows the unknowable; He (together with the *Odù*) is endless without beginning nor end, infinity and infinitude. Therefore, *Ifá* knowledge system is primordial; it exists before the beginning of time. In this regard, the *Babaláwo* or *Olúwo* (rabbi or master) is not necessarily the only teacher. The other teachers include experience and the totality of life and living. Because it is a primordial knowledge system, it comes naturally from within as a memory system and is therefore not opinionated, imperialistic, assertive, and indoctrinating; rather, it is emancipatory, intrinsic and intuitive. This means that this knowledge system is a memory system, a system of remembering. It means that what is to be learned is already known, dwelling within; the essence of the apprenticeship is to stimulate it.

In line with Avrum Stroll Wittgenstein (20007: 181), we assert that this kind of knowledge is fundamental, different from the straightforward example of empirical knowledge. It is innate, not exactly, not absolute but well intrinsic. The validity and veracity of *Ifá* cannot be subjected to justification through debate because it is not a knowledge system that can be established through western scientific experiment; yet it is valid because it is ecological and experiential. The following *esè-Ifá* (*Ifá* verse) further explains the above assertion.

-*Èni mọyí ò mọyí*
Dífá fún Ọrúnmilà,
Ifá n lọ rè é kọ'fá lọwọ Amósù ọmọ rẹ
Èbọ lá'wo ní ó ẹ
-He who knows this does not know the other
Performed *Ifá* divination for *Ọrúnmilà*
Ifá wants to go and learn from Amósù his son.
He was instructed to perform sacrifice

In this verse, *Ọrúnmilà*, the progenitor of *Ifá* went to learn *Ifá* from *Amósù*, his son. According to this verse, no one can/should claim monopoly of the entire *Ifá* memory bank, not even *Ọrúnmilà*. Moreover, a person or group or even a nation cannot claim to be more knowledgeable than the other as superior-inferior dichotomy has no place in knowledge and knowledge. This is because knowledge is not in the custody of only a people, person or age group. It is what everybody will continue to look for endlessly. Knowledge is a river that no wise man can finish drinking; it is like sands of the earth that no great mathematician can finish counting. Sometimes, knowledge may come on *Ifá* devotee through inspiration or intuition or through dream, reading and experience.

Ifá as a university of the universe of endless knowledge is seen as a phenomenon that cannot be understood by reading books only because it is a study of life, or life itself although there are specific teachers. To use the words of Jonathan Draper and Kenneth Mtata (2012: 97), the memory system is "essentially performative and communal". Since the knowledge is primordial, the issue of performativity and communality is not a secondary or marginal issue; it is integral to the nature and content of *Ifá* as handed over from generation to generation (Finnegan, 1977: 29).

4. Ecology of Memory: *Ifá* and the Decolonization of Memory

The idea of ecology in this study is to examine the interface of environment and what can be memorized and what can be forgotten. This study argues that what is easily knowable and what should be known should not be alien to the knower. It further argues that if what is known and

memorable is alien to the knower, what is known will not be easily applicable and cannot serve the purpose of development. Ecology of memory therefore presupposes that the environment of the knower is fundamental to the knowable and the known. Ecology of memory matters because the edifice of memory is constructed such that it projects the interdependence between people, nature and others things that the people conceived as realities.

As far back as 1955, Julian Steward criticized possibilism as this assigns the environment passive role in human affairs and advocated a more detailed, holistic understanding and more sensitive ecological analysis (Steward, 1955: 57). Possibilism is a theory of memory that situates knowledge with the western colonial epistemology devoid of the environment where the knowledge is being impacted. The word ecology is written as Eco/logic which means one good way of verifying the validity of knowledge is the extent at which what is known and the method of knowing is in consonance with the environment. It represents traditional and collective ecological knowledge about the universe from generation to generation. Clearly, there is an adequate recognition of the relationship between human communities and the ecosystems, stressing the integral role of people in the ecosystem. This is in a multiple wrap of knowing that rest on careful observation of the world and how animal, plants, human and other transcendental energies in nature interact to bring into bear the socio-cultural-ecological aspect of knowing.

What is learnt, knowable and known by the apprentices are what they are familiar with; that is, that which can easily be identified, located and related with. When reality is said to have gone into the oblivion, it is symbolized in such a way that the reality and what it symbolized are one and the same. The ecology of knowledge is the basis for validity and verifiability. This is because issues that are raised with respect to places, towns, animals, plants, people, mountain, rivers and other things including stories that are mentioned in *Ifá* corpus are neither strange nor alien to the apprentice. Thus, ancient histories and antiquities can easily be verified; and almost all subject matters from medicine to religion, history, governance, philosophy, arts, music, linguistic and other aspects of knowledge and knowledgeisation are covered. What is taught includes:

Didà Ọwọ: The use of *Ìkín* (sacred palm nuts) and *Ọpẹ̀lẹ̀* (divining chain) for Divination

In *Ifá* divination, the instruments of divination include *Ìkín* (sacred palm nuts) and *Ọpẹ̀lẹ̀* (divining chain). *Ìkín* (sacred palm nuts) are sixteen (16) palm nuts while *Ọpẹ̀lẹ̀* (divining chain) is made of eight (8) palm kernels tied together with a string or chain. The sacred palm-nuts system is more complex and it is used mainly to inquire regarding communal and other individual difficult issues. In the use of *Ìkín* for divination, the 16 palm nuts are put on the left hand, shuttle between the left and right hands for a while, and then put on the left hand while the right hand attempts to take all the 16 palm nuts from the left hand at once. In these attempts, if two palm nuts remain on the left hand, it signifies “open” (I); if one palm nut remains on the left hand, it signifies “close” (II). The attempts to take all the 16 palm nuts from the left hand by the right hand is repeated until the diviner has eight signatures inscribed on the *iyèròsùn* (wood dust or powder of divination) spread on the *ọpón-Ifá* (*Ifá* divining tray).

Ọpẹ̀lẹ̀ (divining chain) has eight (8) half seeds of palm kernels (otherwise called eight nodes) which can either open or close when thrown or cast on a mat or *ọpón-Ifá* (*Ifá* divining tray). That is, each node has two possibilities (open or close). These two possibilities multiplied by eight nodes (or, eight other possibilities) give a total of sixteen possibilities. *Ọpẹ̀lẹ̀* is slammed on the floor randomly; hence, the theory that guides the use of divination chain is the theory of randomness. The theory of open and close random process is a sequence of random variables whose outcomes do not follow a deterministic pattern but follow **an evolution described by probability**. In *Ifá* system of divination, randomness implies that the *Babaláwo* should not predetermine the *Odú* that would appear. This randomness also determines the level of objectivity and validity of the divination protocols. The emergent *Odú* is determined by the open and close theory. The *Babaláwo* is not supposed to make any adjustment when the *Odú* appears on the floor.

Títẹ̀-Ilẹ̀: Divination by making a figure of the *Odú* on the ground

This literally means the pressing of the ground. *Títẹ̀-Ilẹ̀* is a process that accompanies *Didà Ọwọ*.

More technically, *Títẹ-Ilẹ̀* is the pressing of the figure of the emergent *Odú* on the *iyèròsùn* (powder of divination) spread on the *opón-Ifá* (*Ifá* divining tray). This is particularly relevant in the use of *Ìkín*, the 16 sacred palm-nuts. When one sacred palm-nut remains on the left hand during the performance, two lines (II, signifying 'close') will be made on the divining tray and when two palm-nuts remain on the left hand, one line (I, signifying 'open') will be made on the divining tray. Whatever comes up when this is done eight times is the emergent *Odú*. Here also, the principle of randomness comes into play.

Èkuru Èbọ́ Híha: The procedures of performance of sacrifice

This is a method by which food is prepared for the *Òriṣà* and other realities in the space. This method is what is called *ẹ-bọ́*, which means feed. The knowledge of the technique employed in the preparation of food for the *Òriṣà* as well as the methodology for the placement of the food is fundamental to the apprenticeship systems. The word *ẹ-bọ́* means to feed the energies in the space in order to appease them to bring favour to an individual, group of people or community and ultimately for the equilibrium of the cosmos. The idea emanated from the assumption that feeding every reality is the basis for equilibrium. This is what in English language is translated to mean sacrifice.

Jíjá Ẹwé: Removal of leaves for Trado-medicinal preparation

This is the aspect of medicine in the apprenticeship methodology. The training is not just about divination but also about healing through the application of flora and fauna (plants and animals). Flora and fauna play significant roles for the transformation of natural to approachable energy. Plants are used to reconfigure ordinary reality into a powerful reality that can be imputed with extraordinary powers. However, the foundational level is concerned with the names, natures, structure and characteristics of plants and animals as well as methods for the harvesting, buying, preparation and administration of plants and other items for ritual and medicinal purposes. In fact, knowing the name, nature and characteristics of plants, and animals is fundamental to the knowing tradition. Thus, medicinal preparation is guided by special taboos and complex protocols.

Wíwa Ẹgbò: Removal of roots and stems of plants for Trado-medicinal preparation

This is the removal or harvesting of roots and stems of plant for health purposes. It is guided by taboos which must be observed. Crucial to the idea of *Wíwa Egbò* (harvesting of roots and stems of plants) is the question of the conservation of nature. The idea is that when the root of a plant is removed, it can totally eliminate the plant, so it is expected of the person removing it to push sand back to the hole where the root was removed so that the root can sprout again. Necessary incantations that should be said and possible rituals needed before roots are removed are crucial in developing expertise in the knowledge of *Ifá* medicinal preparations as a memory study.

Pipe Ofọ́: Recitation of potent speech or incantations

This is particularly concerned with language. Yoruba is the liturgical language of *Ifá*. The word *Ofọ́* simply means you've spoken; which means words that have energy and is able to have effect. It is a verbocentric system because everything is dominated by words when it is expressed. The incantation is ritualistic as well as systematic and it can be said to be language of communication. In the verbalisation of incantations, there is the application of the laws and decrees in nature regarding names and how the fixity of nature and the expression of other laws and history in the universe become authority for the validation of language.

5. Language, Memory and Knowledge Ecology

Ifá Yoruba oral tradition is knowledge of the people by the people and for the people. This is because the language of *Ifá* among the Yoruba is Yoruba language. Even those who practise *Ifá* divination in the diaspora such as Brazil, Cuba, United State of America (USA) and many parts of the world still use Yoruba language. This makes *Ifá* so easy to learn and memorized because the memory system is ecological. The language with which a subject is taught is part of the knowledge ecology. The idea of language and ecology became central to scholarship in the social sciences and humanities as a result of the work of Bourke (2004). However, other efforts to conceptualize the often vaguely used term

“collective memory” come to the conclusion that “collective memory” is deeply related to linguistic and narrative phenomena. Apart from the environment which forms the culture and what is to be leant, there is the strong place for linguistic parameter which determines the validity of the knowledge.

The profound importance of language in memory is thus stressed by Halbwachs (1992: 45, 170) when he states that “verbal conventions constitute what is at the same time the most elementary and the most stable framework of collective memory”. However, he said “it is a ‘rather slack’ framework which fails to entail complex memories and representations”. Continuing, he averred that the importance of language as a “memory framework” is an implication of the fact that “words and language presuppose not just one person but a group of associated persons”. In other words, as Paul Ricoeur (2004: 129) puts it, the language is naturally and inevitably “the language of others”.

Language constitutes the collective nature of memory for the reason that we use language to communicate and share past experiences with other people; and because language serves as that which commodifies memory, that is, what is used to make sense of the world. Hence, language is not of individual creation but acquired in the process of relating and interacting with people. Language therefore, is collectivism, collectivity and connectivity. Although language can be glossolalic yet no language of memory is idiosyncratic. But even a person who is glossolalic does not understand the language spoken although there could be conjectural interpretation. This foregrounds the fact that when something is expressed by the people, then it is ecological; when it is ecological, then it is verifiable; and when it is verifiable, then it is valid. The collective memory implies that our memories remain collective under any circumstance as we are being reminded by others. In fact, we are never alone. We are always bearing a certain amount of different people within ourselves and with ourselves (Halbwachs, 1950: 6).

6. Methodology of Remembering

Apart from the fact that there is knowledge ecology as well as the indigenous language that make remembering easier, there are specific ways that make remembering easier such that the apprentices will not easily forget what is leant. The methodology of remembering is so systematic and as well procedural yet informal. Although it requires total commitment and concentration, it is possible to develop expertise, deep and high intellection practically covering every facet of human life. An apprentice is also able to develop high moral standard because of the ethical teachings particularly instructions during ritual divination, initiation and the exemplary life of the *Olúwo* (teacher, rabbi). Some of the methodology of remembering is presented as follows:

6.1 Poetisation

The expression in the rendition of the result of divination is to a large extent poetic. This is the way the *Ifá* priest makes his statements more coded, yet easily understandable. This poetic expression, I observed, is a way by which long sentences and long stories are condensed in one sentence, word or phrase. Every word in a poem has a meaning, and the total sum of those words creates an emotional response for the audience...that's the genius of poetry. See below an example of a short poem in the holy *Odù Èjìogbè*.

-Abẹ ẹnu kódóró

Abẹ kọmọ lọwọ

A dífá fún Ajé

Ajé ńtorí èrè lọ ojà Èjìgbòmẹkùn

-The knife with a curve edge

Cut the hand of the baby

Performed Ifa divination for Aje (the Yoruba Òrìṣà of wealth, riches and prosperity).

Aje was going to Èjìgbòmẹkùn market because of profit

This is a story of how *Ajé*, Yoruba *Òriṣà* (deity) in charge of prosperity, went to a market to trade with the desire to make profit. The short poem gives clue to the story and this enables quick memory and understanding of the whole story. Although the story would still be told, but the short poetic expression will enable an understanding of the whole story before it is told.

The burden of interpretation is not just that of the priest but also that of the client; and so the essence of poetising the expression is to foster collective interpretation and this is the basis for the science and validity of the knowledge systems. A special and analytical interpretation of poetic words is unique; and, with lyrical poetry, the rhythm and rhyme allow for lightened clarity and simplicity. Words can alter the course of moods, as can be experienced in love poems, war poems, poems of grief (dirge) or poems about nature, and poetic collections by the great poetic masters. See below an example of words and ideas weaved into lyrical poems.

-*Orúnmilà ní mò nkii yín lóhùn èyìn*
È n jé mi lóhùn òjé
Orúnmilà ni kíní dé tí mò nkii yín lóhùn èyìn
Tí è n jé mi lóhùn òjé
Akápò ní òkè ní ò ní àpèjúwe
Orúnmilà ni kíní dé tí òkè wọn ò ní àpèjúwe
Orúnmilà asked,
Wọn ní sé àgàn tí n bẹ ní Ifẹ
Tí kò tọwọ àlà bọ osùn
Tàbí aláboyún tí nsukún àilè è bí
Tàbí èyí tí ó n fi ọwọ osùn nu ògiri gbígbe.
-I am greeting you with a straight voice
And you are answering with a deceitful voice
Orúnmilà (deity of divination) asked them, "why am I greeting you with a straight voice
And you are answering with a deceitful voice?"
Akápò (Ifá priest) answered that the mountain cannot be described
" why is your mountain is indescribable?
He (Babaláwo) said, "it is because of the barren people that littered the whole Ifẹ
Who did not put hand inside pomade to rub baby?"
Or the people who are crying because their pregnancy stay unduly long and are unable to deliver?
Or the barren that uses hand full of osùn to rub dry wall?

6.2 Story Telling

One of the effective ways the Yoruba of south western Nigeria understand the world is through narratives of one form or the other. Story telling is one key memory process in the *Ifá* oral tradition. Story telling is the root of our ability to communicate and understand what is going on around us because stories covered practically all aspects of human life. Understanding and memory are intertwined and also serve as powerful mnemonic devices. These stories are sometimes called myth-saying, soothsaying and folklore. It is the key method for the conveyance of the result of divination. These stories are ancient happenings that are seeing to be relevant to the problem of the client. The story mirrors the problematic, proffer solutions and other practical steps that are to be taken. One key aspect of training in *Ifá*-craft is the method of storytelling. The *babaláwo*, his apprentices and others who may be assisting him will tell the story one by one in order of seniority. When one has told a story, no one should repeat the same story. The indigenous Yoruba of south western Nigeria are deeply attached to many of these stories. Musicians inject some of these stories into their music. Lessons to be derived from the stories are also applied to teach morals; settle disputes and inculcate good governance among others. An example of such a story from *Odù Èjìogbè* is presented below.

Ajé (*Òriṣà* of wealth, riches and prosperity) was one of the traders at *Èjìgbòmeḱùn* market. Whenever she went there to sell, she never made *èrè* (profit) because *èrè* bird always come around to eat up all that she was selling. *Èrè* bird is a mythical bird that belongs to *Òḱṣà* (*eyẹ* *Òḱṣà*). This bird is also the

mythical bird representing profit. Thus, Ajé was having losses instead of making èrè (profit) in her business. When the bird came to the market, the traders would say that èrè bird (ẹyẹ Ọ̀òsà) had come to eat up their èrè (profit). In Yoruba religious tradition, whoever offers sacrifice to Èṣù, those are the people Èṣù always support. Èlà had earlier offered sacrifice to Èṣù using gum as part of the items of the sacrifice. Èlà had cleverly placed the gum of the sacrifice on the goods he was selling. When èrè bird (ẹyẹ Ọ̀òsà) got there, and just as the bird was about to eat the goods of Èlà, the gum just gummed the bird with one of the goods. Èlà held the bird and forcefully remove the head of the bird from the body and the bird died. The news spread everywhere that Èlà had killed èrè (profit). After killing the bird, Èlà ate it. Then the people started saying that Èlà jẹ èrè , literally, Èlà has eaten profit, which means Èlà has made profit.

6.3 Musicalisation

There is the musical aspect of the divination system. In nearly every *ẹsẹ-Ifá* (*Ifá* poetic verse), there is a problem to be addressed. After the resolution of the dispute, conflict and problem the character in the verse usually bursts into joy and dancing to some form of music. This kind of music serves as aid to memory of such verse. Moreover, to enable easy memorability of some chapters and verses of rendition, there could be an interjection of drumming and the beating of gong towards total musical harmony and symphony. An example of songs in the memorization process is presented below.

*-Mọ ti ẹbì sori Ìkín
Tori kí n gbó ó ó
Tori kí n bí yaya
Njẹ ipònrì Ìkín wọn kì í kú o
Ìpònrì Ìkín wọn kì í run
Mọ ti ẹbì sori Ìkín
-I have cut kolanuts on Ìkín (Ifá sacred palm nuts)
So that I can live long to an old age in good and strong health
That I might expand
The lineage of Ìkín (Ifá sacred palm nuts) does not die
The lineage of Ìkín (Ifá sacred palm nuts) does not get sick
I have cut kolanuts on Ìkín (Ifá sacred palm nuts)*

Although this is like a poem but it is a song expressing actions that was taken to enhance longevity and prosperity. The basis for this is because the lineage of *Ìkín* (*Ifá* sacred palm nuts) does not get sick and because kolanut is always on *Ìkín* (*Ifá* sacred palm nuts).

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper is a springboard of my years of apprenticeship ethnography, and so it reflects a narration of my direct experiences as gathered in the field. As can be noted, *Ifá* is a memory system among the Yoruba of south western Nigeria. Embedded in *Ifá* Yoruba oral tradition and system of divination are proverbs, poems, history, religion, myths as well as other aspects of life. Although *Ifá* religious tradition is of Yoruba origin but it is (by virtue of its inherent wisdom and power) becoming a global phenomenon. Moreover, the memory system within the traditional milieu is not static. The fact that it is getting global is making it more dynamic and stable at the same time, responding to the concern of the past, present and future by predicting the future of humanity using its own scientific procedures. There exist specific methodology and rules of engagements with well coordinated though not formal training memory system, so that it is possible to challenge someone who is not following lay down rules. Yet there is always a space for creativity and adaptation to new situations.

As a result of the spread and influence of the written tradition of Christianity and Islam as well as the overriding impact of modernity, there are emerging developments subjecting *Ifá* Yoruba oral

tradition to written tradition, configuration and reconfiguration as well as computerization processes. Although there are a number of books that spell out the 256 *Odù* and a few of their associated verses entailing all the stories, music, rituals and others features yet the tradition is still substantially oral memory system. At no point during the period of my research did any of the practitioners ever referred to any printed *Ifá* book during divination sessions or when rendering the result of divination. It is rendered by heart, that is, from the memory. Though many *Babaláwo* are now educated in the western sense, nevertheless, educational qualification does not replace the oral and memory characters of *Ifá* Yoruba oral tradition. Despite the fact that *Ifá* texts indicate the inherent value of *Ifá* Yoruba oral tradition for global humanity, one major issue is that it has become more bemoaned and marginalized in the religious, political, economic and cultural spaces of power. Toward revitalizing and decolonizing memory therefore, there is the need for decolonized scholars to open-up vista of knowledge so as to seriously engage in the documentation of this oral tradition particularly its relevance to the interface of culture and development in Africa. It is in the revitalization of memory that Africa can control and own her narratives.

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