

On the Content and Form of *Ìwúde* Songs in Òkè-Igbó

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Abstract

There is hardly any society where the dead are not celebrated and honored with the rites of passage. This accounts for the popularity of funeral dirges across the globe. Given this background, this paper examined the content and form of iwúde songs in Òkè-Igbó, a Yoruba community in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. Data for the study were drawn from ten recorded performances of funeral rites and iwúde songs and seventeen songs were purposively selected from them for analysis. The analysis of data revealed that iwúde funeral songs often contain various themes such as appreciation, mixed feelings and grief, praises, and supplication. The songs were also found to be very short in length but rich in figurative devices such as euphemism, metaphor, imagery and rhetorical questions. The paper concluded that iwúde dirge is a communal event which has, in the recent times, been influenced by Christianity and Islam.

Keywords: dirge, iwúde songs, themes, literary devices, Yorùbá people, Southwestern Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

There is hardly any culture where the dead are not valued when people reflect on the feats and the wonderful things they did when they were alive. Even those that did not achieve much are honored with the rite of passage as a matter of tradition. The death of a loved one is usually accompanied with emotional outburst, wailing and shedding of tears. And in the course of expressing their emotional attachment with the deceased, people can chant the praise of the deceased and that of his lineage as well as sing in honor of the departed soul. This form of orature known as funeral dirge is a universal genre which is ubiquitous across the globe (see Ajuwon 1981; Mutia 2003; Okpewho 1992; Shapiro 1991; Tolbert 1990). It consists in the “spontaneous outburst of distress by the living on sustaining a loss” (Ajuwon 1981:272).

Generally speaking, in most cultures; women play more active roles than men in funeral dirges. Finnegan (1970: 148) justifies the dominance of women in funeral dirges by saying, “The fact that these songs often involve wailing, sobbing, and weeping makes them particularly suitable for women – for in Africa as elsewhere such activities are considered typically female”. In some cultures, especially among the Yorùbá of the South-western Nigeria, the dead are celebrated and sometimes offered sacrifices to with a view to pleading with them to protect the living and provide for their physical and spiritual needs. The dead, the Yorùbá believe, are capable of intervening in the affairs of man. Among the Yorùbá, when somebody dies especially if the person is old, all the funeral rites have to be performed in order to enable the deceased to proceed to heaven (Idowu 1973; Ogunbowale 1966). The importance of the mystical power that the Yorùbá believe the dead have is evident in prayers such as: *Máájé kíyà jẹ̀awoṃṃ ẹ̀ ọ* (Do not allow your children to suffer) and *Dáàbòbòawoṃṃ ẹ̀ ọ* (Protect us your children). The deceased can use his power negatively if all the necessary rites are not performed in his honor; if he is not pleased with the funeral rites performed for him, he can cause calamities on the living. Lawal (1977:54) says: A glorious funeral will no doubt encourage the deceased to use his spiritual power to help his children. On the other hand, failure to complete all the funeral rites will delay his departure to heaven; he will then be forced to wander about the earth, constituting menace to the living. It can therefore be argued that dirges which are essential parts of funeral rites are beneficial to both the living and the dead.

It is against this belief that rituals of passage are often performed for a deceased and one of the major components of such a ritual is the funeral dirge which, among the Yorùbá, can be in form of oriki (descriptive poetry) or songs. The present paper is therefore aimed at analyzing the content and form of ìwúde in Òkè-Igbó.

2.0 Ìwúde in Òkè-Igbó

Òkè-Igbó (meaning Hill in the bush) is a relatively small community founded around 1830 by a warrior known as Dérin Ológbéńlá, a warrior from Ilé-Ifè. Dérin Ológbéńlá was a warrior who was known for prosecuting war on behalf of the poor and the oppressed. He was invited by the then Osemawé of Ońdó whom his people wanted to oust and kill. On his way to Ońdó, he and his soldiers stopped at where Òkè-Igbó is located today to probably have a stop-over before besieging Ońdó. Unfortunately, before they could get to Ońdó, the Osemawé had been killed. They were in Ońdó for some time to restore peace and after he had installed a new king for them, he moved back to Òkè-Igbó and settled down. Being a renowned warrior, people from different parts of Yorùbá land moved down to Òkè-Igbó to seek refuge during the inter-tribal war and, in no time, Òkè-Igbó, became a heterogeneous community. The evidence of this heterogeneity is still apparent in Òkè-Igbó till today as we have such quarters as Àgò-Ijebu and Àgò-Ìjèṣà; with several other groups tracing their ancestral roots to Abeokuta, Ifèwàrà, Òfà and so on. We can also see the evidence of this in the descriptive poetry (oríkì) of some people in Òkè-Igbó. However, though for administrative convenience, Òkè-Igbó is in Ońdó State, it is dominated by the Ifèṣ and the two dialects – Ifè and Òkè-Igbó dialects – reflect this in no small measure. Dérin Ológbéńlá later became the 45th Oòni of Ilé-Ifè who reigned between 1880 and 1894 (see Johnson 1921).

Òkè-Igbó is blessed with rich traditions and cultures. Some of these include the Egúngún festival which brings together almost all the indigenes annually and Àlúkú festival during which the vices of wicked people are often exposed in satirical songs. The focus of this study does not fall under any festival but rather on a cultural phenomenon that has no fixed time of occurrence. The phenomenon, ìwúde, is a dirge that is mainly sung and danced to in Òkè-Igbó. Although one or two men who serve as drummers may participate, the musical aspect is performed mainly by women especially the children and relatives of the deceased. These women will dance around the town singing and dancing with their drummers accompanying them. This event always takes place in the evening around 7 to 8pm when everybody will have been around and it can go on till around 11pm because the ìwúde singers must ensure that, apart from singing round the town, they visit all the relatives of the deceased one by one. The major significance of ìwúde is to announce the passing on of the deceased to the whole community and to create awareness that he or she would be buried the following day. In ìwúde dirge, the performers tell the world how good the deceased was and that he/she did not commit any grievous sins while alive.

Before the advent of Islam and Christianity, ìwúde used to be for every deceased. However, Muslims no longer partake in this culture for a very obvious religious reason: a Muslim is buried almost immediately he/she dies in line with the Islamic belief. If a Muslim dies in the evening, he or she must be buried the following morning. So, there is usually no time for ìwúde to be performed for Muslims. The influence of Christianity is such that ìwúde, which used to be pure traditional cultural songs, now has some Christian songs injected into it. However, in Òkè-Igbó, Christianity has not become strong enough to eradicate this cultural performance unlike in some Yorùbá communities where the practice is no longer popular.

3.0 Literature Review

Ajuwón (1980) investigates how Yorùbá tradition can be preserved through hunters' dirge known as irèmòjé. Irèmòjé is a form of specialized dirge usually chanted when a hunter dies; it is specialized in that it involves elaborate rituals and a wanton display and test of charms. So, when irèmòjé is being performed, children and women are not often encouraged to witness it not to talk of participating in it. Again, the chanting of irèmòjé usually starts in the evening and goes on till late in the middle of the night. During this emotional outburst of the hunters in honour of a member, a chanter may praise the character, the techniques and the feats that the departed hunter performed in the forest when he was alive. In hunters' dirges, the lineage of the departed hunter can be sung; it can involve the extensive use of gestures and improvised drama to bring to the remembrance of other hunters the past deeds of Yorùbá heroes and deities. Ajuwón (1980:68) notes that one of the important ways through which chanters of irèmòjé help to preserve Yorùbá tradition and culture is by making references to past Yorùbá rituals and ancestral skills in their performances.

Such references, Ajuwõn argues, are capable of providing “their audience with oral information” and thereby “bringing their cultural heritage once more into the limelight” (p.68). In another work, Ajuwõn (1981) discusses the geographical and cultural areas where dirges are sung and performed with a view to categorizing and comparing the stylistic features of these dirges. Citing examples from different cultures including the Akan of Ghana, the Australian aborigines, the ancient Chinese, the Tigre people of Abyssinia, the Tumbuka people of Malawi and the Yorùbá in Nigeria, Ajuwõn argues that dirges are universal as “Humans often react to the occasion of death with passionate expressions of sorrow for the deceased. In order to assuage the grief, relatives of the bereaved gather around them for consolation as they burst spontaneously into cries and wailing as a means of emotional outlet”(Ajuwõn 1981:272).

Ajuwõn classifies dirges into three major groups. The first group consists of dirges sung by non-professional female mourners of the deceased. Whenever a beloved one dies, female mourners in the household or the community of the deceased may come around to mourn him and, in the course of doing this, even though they may not be well-equipped in the art of chanting dirges, may start a lament. The second group of dirges comprises the ones by professional dirge-singers. These dirge-singers are often hired by the family of the deceased for the purpose of mourning and singing dirges. The difference in the performances of these two groups lies in the aesthetics and creativity that the latter usually brings into their performance. The last group of dirges consists in those performed by occupational guilds such as the one often performed by hunters whenever they lose any of their members (Ajuwõn 1980).

Ajuwõn observes that irrespective of the geographical or cultural contexts of dirges, they are usually characterized by the praise of the dead, grief, consolation and proof of the loss sustained by the mourners. He notes that although dirges may differ in terms of the preponderance of stylistic features, most dirges start with exclamations, make use of rhetorical questions and extensive dialogues between the lead chanter and members of her groups. Also usually present in dirges are imperative clauses and sentences as well as repetitions. Ajuwõn concludes that “in spite of stylistic features occurring in varying degrees in dirges, it is vital to bear in mind that the expression of sorrow and grief for the dead is carried out by mourners in conformity with the traditional norms that govern dirge performances in every culture” (p. 280).

Tolbert (1990) reports on the Karelian lament in eastern Finland. This form of dirge, according to her, is deeply rooted in the ancient Karelian religion. While dirge among the Yorùbá is restricted in context to the honoring of the dead, in the Karelian tradition, lament has a wider context as it can be observed during weddings and for a reunion with friends whom one has not seen for a long time. What this means is that basically what is celebrated is not just transition but separation between two parties. Tolbert (1990:80) says “Laments were sung to accompany all stages of separation, transition and incorporation phases of the rite of passage, easing the transition from deceased to ancestors, or bride to wife.” The laments during funeral in Karelian culture often start with the washing and dressing of the body of the deceased, making the coffin and are also “an essential part of the remembrance feasts for the dead that continued for years after death at specified intervals” (p. 80). Tolbert concludes that the ritual aspect of the laments is fading away in Karelian tradition. She notes that laments are not mere expressive form of grief but they also serve as icons of emotion through which religious principles are expressed and guided.

Sharndama and Suleiman (2013) examine the rhetorical devices used in gwadang and mbaya funeral dirges among the Kilba people of Adamawa State in Nigeria. The study which focuses on the common figurative languages in the two dirges also discusses the effects of such language use in the performance of Kilba funeral songs. The analysis of the two funeral songs shows that there is an extensive use of metaphor, simile, rhetorical questions, symbolism, among others, by Kilba artists generally. It was demonstrated that the preponderant use of these devices can be linked to the rich history, tradition and culture of the Kilba people. The study concludes that “the use of figurative expressions enabled the Kilba performing artists to express feelings and thoughts implicitly rather than explicitly” (p. 172).

4.0 Methodology and Data Analysis

In this section, we present the methods adopted in gathering the data for the study as well as the analysis of the data.

4.1 Methodology

The data for the present study were drawn from ten live performances of ìwúde in Òkè-Igbóin Ondo State of Nigeria. The singers' consent was sought and they indicated that they did not mind being recorded. The researcher, being an indigene of this town, was able to watch most of the performances and recorded them through a video camera. The researcher thus made use of participant observation in the gathering of the data for the study. The recording of the performances took place between March 2014 and July 2016. There were three contacts in the town who were informing the researcher any time ìwúde was to be observed. We noticed that the songs in the performances are similar; so some of the songs were purposively selected based on the content for analysis. The songs were listened to and transcribed for analysis. Our analysis was guided by the works of Ajuwon (1981) and Tolbert (1990).

4.2 Data Analysis and Discussions

There are two sub-sections in this section. The first deals with the content of the ìwúde songs in Òkè-Igbówhile the second sub-section provides a brief comment on the form and structure of the songs.

4.2.1 The Content of Ìwúde Songs

The content of ìwúde songs, like most funeral songs, can contain several themes. However, the deceased is always the focal point in these songs. One of the themes which are common to all the performances we observed is appreciation. Whenever a group of performers is ready for Ìwúde, one of the first songs by a deceased daughter, usually the eldest, is to appreciate other members of the group participating in the dirge. Below is an example of this.

Song 1

Hà à! Èyín egbé mí ẹ̀ mọ̀ sẹ̀ é	My group, thank you
Hà à! Èyín egbé mi ẹ̀ mọ̀ sẹ̀ ò ò	My group, thank you
Mo bójúwẹ̀yìn mó rẹ̀gbé mi	I look back and see my group
Èyín egbé mi ẹ̀ mọ̀ sẹ̀ é	My group, thank you

Unlike most Ìwúde songs, this song has no chorus because it is sung by just one person –usually the daughter of the deceased. The song is meant to thank all the other women that have come out to participate in the dirge. It is after this appreciation that a lead singer will start other funeral songs and other women will be singing the chorus. Immediately after the appreciation, songs that serve as an announcement of the death of the deceased may then follow. Provided here are three of such songs:

Song 2:

Onílẹ̀ relé o o o	The owner of the house has gone home
Bábá mi mọ̀ lọ o o	My father has gone
Ojú mí ro wá o o,	We are sad
Ìjídoyinmọ̀ relé o o	Ìjídoyin has gone home.

Song 3:

Leader: Àwágbọ̀ lóko	We heard from far away
Chorus: Àwábọ̀ wálé é	And we came home
Leader: Àwágbọ̀ lóko	We heard in the farm
Chorus: Àwábọ̀ wálé é	And we came home
Leader: Kílọ̀şeyín ò ò?	What happened to you?
Chorus: ÌyáDémúreléló lọ o o o	Démúrelé's mother has gone

Song 4:

Gbogbo ọ̀tọ̀nhkùlú	All dignitary here present
È bá mi yayọ̀ ọ̀ rẹ̀ ẹ̀	Celebrate with me
È bá mi dárò arà mi	Mourn with me
Bábá mi mọ̀ relé ò ò	My father has gone home

The three songs above are targeted towards announcing the death of the deceased. The announcement in the three songs is foregrounded through the use of the verbs 'relé' (Song 2, lines 1 and 4; Song 4, line 4) and 'lọ' (Song 3, line 4) which translate to *gone home* and *go* respectively. The Yorùbá believe that this world is not our home and that heaven, where our ancestors live, is our home. This is evident in the common saying among the Yorùbá:

Òrun nilé (meaning *Heaven is home*). It is this belief that often occasions the foregrounding of expressions such as *go*, *gone* or *gone home*. The songs also show that the singers are not happy about the loss as they sing “Ojú mí ro wá dò (We are sad) in Song 2. In Song 4, there is a mixed feeling of celebration and mourning as shown in “È bá mi yayò ọ rẹ è (Celebrate with me) and “È bá mi dárò arà mi” (Mourn with me). As Ajuwon (1981) and Finnegan (1970) have noted, grief constitutes an important content in dirge poetry. One of the performance strategies often adopted by Ìwúde singers is to make a direct reference to the deceased. References to the deceased constitute an important ingredient of Ìwúde. Sometimes, the name of the deceased can be mentioned so that everybody knows who is dead as in the song below.

Song 5

Leader: Tin-ín tin-ín tàgbò dinà	A humming bird blocked the road
Chorus: Awó ya a,	A bad incident has happened
Leader: Ọ̀súnfúnkẹ̀ iyá mi mò relé o	Ọ̀súnfúnkẹ̀ my mother is gone home
Chorus: Awó ya a	A bad incident has happened

This is the case in Song 2 where Ìjídoyin, the name of the singer’s father is mentioned directly. In Song 3, though the name of the deceased is not mentioned directly, there is an indirect reference to her through the use of Ìyá Démúrelé (Démúrelé’s mother). In Song 5 above, there is an appositive relationship between Ọ̀súnfúnkẹ̀ who is the deceased and ìyá mi (my mother). The apposition serves to emphasize the emotional attachment between the deceased and her daughter. At times, references may be made to some other ancestral links that the deceased had as in the following song:

Song 6

Ilélón ọ	He is going home
Ìlúrẹ̀ ló lo órẹ̀	He is going to his hometown
Ó n lo si ‘Fẹ̀wàrà	He is going to Ifẹ̀wàrà
Nílẹ̀Bábàrẹ̀	His father’s house.

As can be seen in Song 6, the reference this time is not to the deceased but rather to Ifẹ̀wàrà. Some of Òkè-Igbó indigenes migrated to Òkè-Igbó from Ifẹ̀wàrà. So, there is a strong historical link between Ifẹ̀wàrà and Òkè-Igbó and the two towns have similar cultures and traditions. Many indigenes of Òkè-Igbó have relatives in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and Ifẹ̀wàrà. One other very common theme in Ìwúde is to tell the community that the deceased did not disgrace or bring shame to his or her family by listing the people he or she killed prematurely through witchcraft when he or she was alive. The following song texts illustrate this.

Song 7

Àwá mò dúpẹ̀ é é	We thank God
Àwá mò dúpẹ̀ é é	We thank God
Ìyá o kà o	Our mother did not confess to witchcraft
Ìyá o kà o.	Our mother did not confess to witchcraft
Kó tó ọ sọ̀rùn un	When she was alive
Awá mò dúpẹ̀ o	We thank God

Song 8

Leader: Bábá à wákú o, kòwínńkan	Our father died and did not confess to evil doings
Chorus: Ọ̀lọrunfọ̀kólòbọ̀enuaráyé	God did not allow their expectation to come to reality
Leader: Wónretíretí o o	They have been expecting
Bàbá ò wínńkan	Our father did not confess to evil doings
Chorus: Ọ̀lọrunfọ̀kólòbọ̀enuaráyé	God did not allow their evil thought to come to pass
Leader: Ọ̀lọrunfọ̀kólòbọ̀enuaráyé	God did not allow their evil thought to come to pass
Chorus: Ọ̀lọrunfọ̀kólòbọ̀enuaráyé	God did not allow their evil thought to come to pass

Song 9

Leader:	A dúpẹ, iyá ò bayéjé	We thank God, our mother did not disgrace us
Chorus:	A dúpẹ, iyá ò bayéjé Ìyáèyànlókàkàkà Ó kabàsíà	We thank God, our mother did not disgrace us Some women confessed to killing numerous people Confessed to killing a lot of people
Chorus:	A dúpẹ iyá ò bayéjé	We thank God, our mother did not disgrace us

Songs 7 to 9 allude to the cultural belief of the Yorùbá. It is believed that most aged people often possess the power of witchcraft with which they can kill whoever offend them. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) remark that witches are enemies of the societies where they live and they are often responsible for any calamity that befalls such a society. So, any time an aged person dies, the disgrace he or she can bring to his or her family is to mention numerous people, both young and old, that he or she had killed. Such a disgrace is perceived negatively among the Yorùbá and can affect the funeral dirge to be sung for the deceased that engaged in such a dastardly act. Sometimes, people may decide not to participate in the funeral rites of such a deceased. When an old woman, for instance dies, and there is no account of having killed some people, it is always an occasion for joy. Her children and relatives will be happy and will be proud to tell the whole world that, contrary to what is being expected, the woman was a good person who did not commit any atrocities while alive. The joy is usually so much that it is relatives that will contribute money to fund the funeral rites, Hence, the song:

Song 10

Leader:	Ajangbalajùgbú	We have more than enough
	A ò fowóolówòsòkú	We did not borrow money for burial
Chorus:	Ajangbalajùgbú	We have more than enough
	A ò fowóolówòsòkú	We did not borrow money for burial

Song 10 is a song that shows the spirit of communalism among the Yorùbá. Once somebody dies, the relatives and not just the biological children of the deceased will supply materials needed and contribute money to ensure that the burial is successful. This means that even if the children of the deceased cannot finance the burial, they do not have to borrow much money. Funeral rites are often characterized by mixed feelings. On the one hand, people are sad that their loved one has gone and, on the other hand, the children are happy that they at least survive their parent (see Ajuwon 1981). These mixed feelings often reflect in Ìwúde songs as shown below:

Song 11

Leader:	Erínwó o lónii ò ò	The elephant has fallen today
Chorus:	Erínwó o jàre	The elephant has fallen
Leader:	Àjànàkúfayésilẹ̀ lọ	Àjànàkú (Elephant) left this world
Chorus:	Erínwo o jàre e	The elephant has fallen

Song 12

Bai lo dá á	This is what it turned out to be
Báì lo dà à	This is what it turned out to be
Báì lo dàfún ye lómọ	This is the end of a good mother
Ó digbóòşe e	Bye bye

There are indications of sorrow in both Songs 11 and 12. The grief in Song 11 is demonstrated through the falling of the elephants and probably the possibility of finding another elephant that can occupy the lacunae created by the deceased. The song shows that the deceased was a hero and a very important dignitary in their midst. The last line of Song 12, farewell, can make the hearts of the singers heavy as they would never have the chance of seeing the deceased again at least on this planet earth. However, the first three lines of Song 12 show that they are happy that they are able to honor the deceased with the dirge. As hinted at earlier, rooted in most cultures is the belief that the dead can harm or guard the living. In Ìwúde dirge, women often prayed and appealed to the deceased to protect and take care of his or her children so that no calamity will befall them. Such supplication is evident in:

Song 13

Babáogérelé é	Fashionable father gone home
Babáogérelé é	Fashionable father gone home
Mọ̀ şákúfà o oo	Do not cause serial deaths in the family
Mọ̀ şákúfa o oo e è é	Do not cause serial deaths in the family
Tójuomọ̀ rẹ̀ tọ̀sántòru o	Protect your children day and night
Babáogérelé o o	Fashionable father gone home

In Song 13, the singers entreated the deceased not to cause serial deaths in the family and to protect his children every time (see Odejobi 2014). For the reason given above, *iwúde* in Òkè-Igbó is meant for Christians and most of the singers are usually mainly Christians. This is probably why *iwúde* nowadays has a great deal of the influence of Christianity. It is sometimes possible in *iwúde* to hear Christian songs sung exactly the way such songs will be heard in church. Provided here are two examples of such Christian songs.

Song 14

Leader: Ílé o o, ílé ò ò	Home, home
Chorus: Ílé o o, ílé ò ò	Home, home
Leader: Ílé o olòrun ò ò	Heavenly home
Chorus: Ílé o olòrun o o	Heavenly home
Leader: Ó fẹ̀ lọ jòbalókè è	She wants to go and reign in heaven
Chorus: Ó fẹ̀ lọ jòbalókè è	She wants to go and reign in heaven
Leader: Ó fẹ̀ lọ dádédògo o	She wants to go and wear crown of glory
Chorus: Ó fẹ̀ lọ dádédògo o	She wants to go and wear crown of glory
Leader: Ìyáwarelèrè è	Our mother has gone home
Chorus: Íléló lọ tàràrà à	She has gone home straight

Song 15

Abaṣọ fẹ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀ é é	Angels in white garments
Abaṣọ fẹ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀ è è	Angels in white garments
Abaṣọ fẹ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀ é é	Angels in white garments
Abaṣọ fẹ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀ e e	Angels in white garments
Ángẹ̀lilógbẹ̀Bàbá lọ sọrunrere	Our father was carried to heaven by angels

That Songs 14 and 15 are typical Christian songs is reinforced by the occurrences of certain expressions which are foreign to Yorùbá traditional belief system. The first expression as found in Song 14 is *jòbalókè* (reign in heaven) while the second is *dádédògo* (wear crown of glory). These are expressions that Yorùbá would naturally attribute to Olódùmarè and not any human being. However, these expressions are freely used with reference to human beings in Christendom. Similarly, in Song 15, there is a reference to *angels*. In Yorùbá cosmology, there are no angels; instead of angels, what exist are deities, gods and spirits. Thus, the reference to angels in the song is as a result of the influence of Christianity.

4.2.2 The Structure and Form of *Ìwúde* Songs

As can be seen from the songs above and some that will be provided below, *iwúde* songs are usually very short in form. However, our observation shows that each of the songs is sung repeatedly sometimes four or five times before another singer in the group comes up with another song. The songs are of two major patterns. First are songs which all performers sing together in one voice without anyone acting as a leader and others as chorus singers (see Songs 2, 4, 6, 7, and 12 for examples). In songs like this, there are no refrain at all. The second group which is characterized by the presence of refrain consists of those where a singer plays the role of a leader and others that of chorus singers as in Songs 3, 5, 9 and 11. As hinted at earlier, the *iwúde* singers do make use of various figurative devices in their performances. Some of these are examined below. The first figurative device which is common in our *iwúde* songs is euphemism. In most cases, singers often try to avoid using the word death directly. So, instead of using *die*, *dead* or *death*, the performers often use such words as “has gone home” (Line 1, Song 2), “has gone” (last line of Songs 3 and 4) and “has fallen” in Song 11. Apart from euphemism, repetition is also common in *iwúde*. The use of repetition can come in the form of lexical items such as the repetition of *ilé* (home) in Songs 2, 6 and 14 and the repetition of *egbé* (group) in Song 1. Repetition can also be in form of a refrain as shown in Song 8 where we have *Òlòrunfókólòbóṣenuaráyé* (God did not allow their evils thought to come to pass) sung repeatedly by both the leader and the chorus singers. The use of euphemism, repetition and refrain is similar to what Sharndama and Suleiman (2013) report in their study of funeral dirges among the Kilba people of Adamawa State.

In Song 11, we quickly notice the use of metaphor as the deceased is compared directly to an elephant: The elephant has fallen. This comparison is suggestive of the enormous roles that the deceased was playing when he was alive and that it is a sad thing that somebody of his personality has gone. Similar to this is the metaphor of a duck used in the song below:

Song 16

Péèpèyè e e	Duck
Ìgbátó ò le è wè kí lo bóludòşe?	When you know that you cannot swim
	Why did you jump into the river?

The deceased was metaphorically referred to as a duck and a rhetorical question, another device, was posed to him or her: When you know that you cannot swim, why did you jump into the river? This question requires no answer as it was posed to the deceased who can no longer respond verbally anyway. The use of rhetorical questions has been found to be very crucial in dirges as questions are sometimes directed to Death or the deceased (see Ajuwon 1981). Another use of metaphor as well as imagery is found in Song 17 below:

Song 17

Ígíélésojìnwìnnì	The fruitful tree
Ígíélésojìnwìnnì	The fruitful tree
Ígíélésojìnwìnnì	The fruitful tree

In Song 17, the deceased was compared to a tree having many fruits. This means that the deceased has many children. More important in the song is that an image of a fruitful tree is created in one's mind.

5.0 Conclusion

Analyzed in this paper are the themes and literary devices in ìwúdedirge in Òkè-Igbó. Using seventeen songs as a point of reference, the paper revealed that there are themes such as appreciation, communalism, grief and mourning, praising the deceased for his or her good deeds while alive and making certain requests from him or her. It was also found out that literary devices such as euphemism, metaphor, imagery and rhetorical question were used by the singers. The paper concluded that though Christianity and Islam have affected ìwúde, the practice is still very common in Òkè-Igbó.

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