

Igala History as Dramaturgy: The History-Literature Nexus

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ABSTRACT

This research is collaboration between a historian and a literary critic for enlightenment and entertainment. It reveals Igala history as a raw material for literature and dramatization, and its potential for wealth creation and employment generation. The data for the study were collected through field work and use of archives. The data generated through interview revealed that Jukun migrants were the first to be installed as the Attah Igala. Other historical sources have revealed the prince of Benin as the first Attah. The internal mechanism revealed the Igala-Mela origin of Attah Igala. Each version of the origin of Attah Igala including the myth of Aganepoje is a valuable contribution deserving an attention. The origins of Attah Igala are interesting historical events that should be adapted for theatrical performances, The people and the historical events are viable dramatis personae that should be galvanized for stage spectacle.

KEYWORDS: History, Literature, Dramatization, Attah Igala, Igala Kingdom

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INTRODUCTION

The present researchers have not come across a study with a focus on Igala history in theatre. It is not known to the two researchers whether such research exists especially in Igala land. This research therefore targets a yet to be saturated area for human entertainment, job creation, and enlightenment. Empirical evidence has revealed public interest in Igala theatre.

A very close relationship exists between history and literature which is not yet utilised as it should be for the benefit of mankind. Both history and literature dovetail in their social functions. They are both concerned with people and society. E. H Car observes that the dual function of history is to enable man to understand the society of the past and to increase his mastery over the society of the present (p.30). In the above quotation, man and society are presented as the hub of the function of history. In addition, Bikash Bhattacharya notes that history is concerned with man in time (p. 10). In the study of history, man is the subject matter. Similarly, as pointed out by Martin Asiner “literature reflects life as the author sees it” (<https://www.quora.com>). Here, as in Bhattacharya’s opinion, human life is known to be the subject matter of literature. And according to Aadrika Sharma, “literature is indeed a true representation of the way of life in a society” (<https://www.quora.com>). Literature is about people and their society. The concern of both history and literature is the human society; the socio-political and physical environments. They are not just concerned with man and his society but their well-being.

History and literature share certain characteristics that “history has generally been regarded as a branch of literature. Historians have been treated as masters of style or of the creative imagination, to be ranked alongside poets or dramatists, rather than simply as historians, with an art and science of their own” (Bhattacharya, p. 1). This knitted relationship reverberates in Aristotle’s Poetics as follows: “the real difference between a poet and a historian is that the historian tells what happens, and the poet, what might happen” (p.30). Story is an important element of history and literature. This reminds us of Chukwuemeka Ike’s definition of fiction (literature) as a “feigned or imagined story” (cited in Masagbor, p. 3). Moreover, as a prose fiction, the novel has been defined as a book that tells an invented story; a book length story (cited in Kayode-Iyasere, p. 106). Similarly, Bhattacharya sees history as “the record of events or events themselves” (p. 2). As the record of events, history becomes the script that can be enacted on the stage.

This research is an attempt to explore and utilise the opportunities that abound given the shared elements between history and literature. This will be actualised in the area of theatre through the dramatisation of aspects of Igala history. As collaborative research, this study will go a long way to project and bring to limelight, the Igala history.

Both history and literature work for the transformation of the society where they exist. History as a record of events makes available certain forms of knowledge for the avoidance of pitfalls that may occur in human action in the future. Literature is the enactment of narratives for the well-being of society. Dramatisation of events recreates for mental stability and emotional well-being of troubled minds; poetic and narrative works are produced for societal transformation. The historian and the literary scholar therefore have similar goals.

Historical records have for a long time provided raw materials for literature. These have made many literary works especially in Africa a blend of fact and fiction. According to Chinua Achebe: "I borrowed proverbs from our culture and history" (p. 55). History has become a tool in the hands of the African writer to re-create the African past. In African literature, African history is pivotal.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o was one of the foremost African writers who had copiously employed historical events in his works to project African history and their culture. In *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood*, *Wizard of the Crow*, *I Will Marry When I Want*, and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, there are lots of historical events. In fact, Mau Mau struggle for independence is a historical fact in Kenyan history which Ngugi wa Thiong'o has developed as a motif in his works. The introduction of Christianity and Western education are aspects of historical events portrayed in some of his works. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are also iconic in historical records. These novels portray colonial experience in Nigeria. The introduction of Christianity, Western education, and indirect rule in these novels reveals the contact of the white man which is a historical fact in Africa. This underscores the importance of history in literature and the symbiotic relationship between the two.

Most importantly, there are authors that have rewritten and recreated history using literature. This is by way of transmutation and enactment of history. Good examples of this are William Shakespeare's history plays. *King John* is the enactment of the reign of King John in England from the late 12th to early 13th century. *Richard II* is the story of King Richard II in the 14th century. *Henry IV*, part 1 and part 2 are the portrayal of the rule of King Henry IV after the disposition of King Richard II. *Henry V* enacts the reign of King Henry V. *Henry VI*, part 1, part 2, and part 3 are the story of King Henry VI whose reign encountered political instability and fought the Wars of the Roses. *Richard III* is the transmutation of the rule of Richard III. *Henry VIII* recreates the reign of King Henry VIII after the events of the Wars of Roses. These plays enact the history and the reign of the kings they are named after. Therefore, they are transmutations.

Like Shakespeare's history plays that are enactment of the reign of kings in England, historical sources are perfect raw materials for literary creativity. The Igala people of Kogi State, Nigeria have abundant history that can be transmuted into literature but this is yet to materialise significantly. An interdisciplinary collaboration like the present one is necessary but yet lacking. It is necessary because of its contributions to the entertainment sector and the knowledge of the history of the Igala people. This study, therefore, is very unique.

Every nation has a history. Every group of people has past events that are either recorded or memorised. The Igala land as a nation has history with many historical events. These events which are in abundance in the land can be harnessed for theatrical performances. This study is not an attempt to write the history of the Igala people, but to investigate those aspects of the history that are suitable for dramatisation. The Igala history is available through written records and oral tradition. The authenticity of the events that will be selected for dramatisation will be investigated before recommendation for theatrical performance.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A study like the present one which is a synergy between a literary scholar and a historian is not common but possible. The present researchers have not come across any kind of this collaboration thereby making the study unique. As a product of collaboration between a historian and a literary scholar for transmutation of historical events on the stage, this study is pristine; an exploration of a virgin area that is not yet saturated. It is a focus on aspects of Igala history and the dramatisation of these events for entertainment purpose. Collaboration between scholars of history and literature like the present one creates wealth: it is an area that can make graduates of history and literature self-reliant. With the present level of unemployment in Nigeria, a synergy between historians and literary scholars should be encouraged for job creation.

Furthermore, this study will provide an inspiration for both history and literature departments in their development of Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS). The CCMAS encourages the Nigerian University System to be practically oriented in its programmes. With history as dramaturgy, students of history and literature can come together to operate a theatre. It is an opportunity to practise what is learnt in the classroom. Therefore, this study opens a new vista to make departments in the Faculty of Arts see how to gravitate towards practical demonstration of knowledge.

Given the availability of historical records in Igala nation, and the importance attached to them, the ability to explore and utilise them for theatrical performance will be beneficial to the researchers in the fields of literature, history, their students and the general public but this appears not to be yet discovered. Monetarily, it is a monumental loss that this area has not attracted attention because of the potential for revenue generation. A shot at theatrical business in this area will definitely increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Igala nation.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to reveal aspects of the Igala history that are suitable for dramatization. The specific objectives are:

- (i) to investigate Igala historical events that are popular among the people,
- (ii) to investigate and identify historical events that can attract a large audience,
- (iii) to collect different versions of the origin of Attah Igala

LITERATURE REVIEW

An interdisciplinary collaboration between a historian and a literary scholar as well as transmutation of Igala history still exists in embryonic form. There is little or no progress in this area therefore there is dearth of literature. The present research can be described as being in the formative stage on the dramaturgy of Igala history. To investigate how the synergy between a literary scholar and a historian can contribute to knowledge and the development of society, we shall present some definitions of history and literature.

According to Joseph and Janda, "it has been established and widely accepted that the term History has its root from the Greek word *Historia* which means inquiry, knowledge acquired through investigation" (p. 163). Although this definition sheds light on the concept of history, it does not provide an impetus to this study. In the same vein, Walter Ugwuagbo observes that:

The noun – literature is derived from the Latin *littera*, which means an individual written character or letter. In broad terms, literature refers to written materials on any subject or discipline. Thus, one can talk about history literature, medical literature, and biblical literature and so on. The leaflet attached to a product is that product's literature (p. 139).

Like Joseph and Janda's definition of history, the above definition of literature is etymological, which cannot drive our discussion on history as a dramaturgy. It cannot explain history as transmutation in literature.

According to Roger Fowler, "Literature is for Aristotle a mode of imitation, a representation of the world, the separate identity of persons, their use of language, their thoughts, the succession of events and actions through time, the sights that are seen and the sounds that are heard" (p. 27). Fowler here focuses on man, his actions, the world and the events in it. History, as defined by Ibrahim Khaleel Abdussalam, "is not just the art of telling story, it is an organised knowledge about the nature of man, of environment, of society and of the changes in the natural world and all aspects of endeavour, hence the term History" (p. 181). Similarly, this definition directs our attention to man and his society. These two definitions show the characteristics that are shared by both history and literature which can be the basis for the collaboration between a critic and a historian. History tells us about man, the environment, and society. In the same vein, literature is a representation of man and society, in other word, the world. History records events while literature portrays those events. The above definitions reveal some elements of history and literature that can guide in the selection of events for transmutation, therefore they can drive our discussion in this study.

Enoch Oyedele defines history as "the totality of man's experience within the scope of economic and political structure, ideology and religion, witchcraft and the arts of everyday life" (p. 163). Literature, on the other hand, has been defined as "the imaginative recreation of human experiences, consciousness and action" (Ugwuagbo, p. 139). Once more, the two definitions point out some of the common features of these two areas of human endeavour. History notes and records man's economic and political experiences while literature is an enactment of these experiences. These definitions reveal a thin border line between history and literature. They serve as an inspiration for a workable relationship between a historian and literary scholar.

Human experience is central to the nature and function of history and literature. Abdussalam notes that "another word for History is Experience" (p. 181). On the other hand, literature, as observed by Yakubu, "is about people's culture, their language, and experience collectively or individually" (p. 47). Taylor's contribution reveals that "literature is a reflection of human experience, an expression of the sensibility of a given culture ..." (193). While history records human experience literature is a representation of the experience.

Emmanuel A. Ngara's definition of literature is pertinent and worthy of consideration. He states that, "since it is a process of thinking in images, the literature of a people draws upon their collective experience; in other words, upon their history, which is embodied in their language" (p. 40). As noted earlier, history is experience. This point has also been made by Ngara in his definition of literature that history is experience. Human experience is therefore an important element of both history and literature. Our experience and action when recorded or specially memorised becomes our history and when portrayed through creative imagination becomes literature. The enactment of documented or specially memorised events is the dramaturgy. Like the earlier ones, Ngara's definition defines our perspective in this study. Any history or historical records that should be considered for dramatisation should project human experience. Ngara's definition is utilitarian. It is a guide on the aspects of history to choose for theatrical performance. The definition is also an impetus to collaborative work between a historian and a critic. This collaboration should be geared towards solving a problem. By coming together to operate a theatre, graduates of history and literature can perform aspects of the history of Igala people. This will attract a large audience to the theatre. Theatre is an avenue for money making as we see in Nollywood.

Yakubu, Isah, and Jinjiri have noted that, "African culture has a lot of potential for entertainment. This has not been fully exploited by Nigerian youths whom, after graduation from schools keep searching for the white collar jobs with little prospect of getting one" (p. 22). Working together, a literary scholar and a historian with the knowledge of history can both use historical records for theatrical performances. Yakubu, et al, have identified a number of cultural practices that can be transmuted for stage performance

but history is missing from their list. As the record of human experience, history is an interesting material for theatrical performance, hence, the focus of this research. Enactment of history in theatre is to give it entertainment value to attract monetary benefit. Apart from the entertainment value and monetary benefits, it will enlighten the people on aspects of their history not known to them. The knowledge of the history of any society is essential for nation building, therefore, a lot of benefits abound in this study.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this research is divided into the following areas: study samples, research instrument, and data collection and analysis.

- A. Study Samples:** firstly, four areas of historical monuments were visited. These were, the Attah Igala palace at Idah, the headquarters of the Igala kingdom; Igala-Mela, Igala Ogwa, and Ugwolawo. Furthermore, the National Archives of Nigeria, Kaduna Branch (NAK) was visited. These are areas with information on Attah dynasty. Secondly, the Achadu Attah at Igala Ogwa was visited. A similar visit was paid to Jibrin Iye Ali Idakwo, the Eju Achadu (Ebije), who provided valuable data.
- B. Research Instrument:** the interview method was applied for data collection. One question was administered and this was on the origin of Attah Igala. The interviewee is a chief. The researchers chose one interviewee and decided to use one question for efficient data management as written records were also consulted.
- C. Data Collection and Analysis:** two approaches were used in the process of data collection. One, is through field work and the second one is use of archives. Below are the presentation and analysis of the data collected. First is the version by Jibrin Iye Idakwo, Eju Achadu, (Ebije):

The first Attah Igala was Ebulejonu. On the way from Wukari along the Benue River, the leader of the Jukun migrants died and the leadership of the group fell upon the daughter, Ebulejonu. She led the group to Idah. Ebulejonu was an influential leader which made her to be installed as the Attah.

As the Attah Igala, Ebulejonu became a very powerful ruler without popularity among the people. This generated conspiracies against her which led to her removal. As the first Attah was a female, it has become a tradition that every successor would have to pierce their ears. This ceremony is observed at a hut in Ugwolawo; after the ceremony, the Attah in company of his chiefs would trek to the palace at Idah to sit on the throne.

Below is another version of the origin of the Attah Igala: A group of migrants from Wukari, led by their leader, Abutu Eje, a noble of the Jukun Court, came to the South bank of River Benue and settled at Amagedde. After the death of Abutu Eje, the leader and the Attah, the leadership of the group fell on his daughter, Ebele Ejaunu (also written Ebulejonu according to some sources). She led the group on their journey until they reached Idah. At Idah, she was installed as the Attah Igala.

As the Attah, Ebele Ejaunu met Omeppa, a hunter, believed to have come from Ibo land a supposed slave whom she got married to and conferred the Achadu title on him. According to Joseph Ukwedeh, "one of the powerful traditions relating to the rise of the Attah dynasty published in the 1930s connects the first Attah with the Jukun court at Wukari" (p. 14). A lot of historical sources link the origin of Attah Igala to Jukun migrants from Wukari.

The following version of the Attah origin is mythic: it reveals that Agenapoje, believed to be of divine birth came and settled on a rock in Idah. He had a daughter called Ebeljawno. Ebeljawno became the first Attah.

According to M. Clifford, Agenapoje was a 'sky-god' who descended miraculously upon a rock in the Niger opposite Idah and was the founder of the divine kingship under whose aegis Igala was colonised (p. 395).

Another version of the Attah Idah origin that illustrates migration theory like the Jukun migration story goes like this: A long time ago, a Benin Oba came to the throne. The tradition at the time was for the first son of the royal family to succeed the Oba. The Oba had more than one wife and there was a quarrel between him and one of the wives. The wife with whom he quarrelled first gave birth to a baby boy but hid the information from the Oba. Shortly after, a co-wife had a male child but informed the Oba who went ahead to perform certain ceremonies by taking all the insignia of the title including the hat and placed them in a neighbouring community in the name of the second child. This second child later became the chief of that community.

The two princes had their followers. When the Oba died, discussions surrounding who became the successor heated the polity. This was so because the younger prince was given insignia of office while tradition provided that the senior prince succeed the father. The argument generated a crisis that led to bloodshed which made the junior prince to leave Bini after surrendering the matter to god for settlement. He took this decision to avert bloodshed and restore peace. He left Bini with his followers. He first arrived at Asaba but later proceeded to Idah. On their way, those who grew tired were allowed to settle down wherever they chose.

Upon arrival at Idah, the indigenes were fascinated by the insignia of office and other items of royalty in their possession and reported to the elders. The elders' assessment convinced them of the nobility of the prince and invited him to settle down among them and later, he was made the Attah Igala. It has been reported that the Attah's ceremonial brass pectoral mask (Ejubejailo) is of Bini origin (Murray, p. 379).

After the installation of the Junior Prince as Attah, he sent his son back to Bini to inform the people of the development for them to crown his elder brother as the Oba. He told them that he was satisfied with his status as Attah Igala. The elder brother was happy with him and accorded him seniority position. From this time, upon appointment of a new Oba, eight slaves would be sent to Attah to make them eunuchs. Four of them would be retained by Attah while sending the remaining four back to Bini.

The version of the origin of Attah that is internal is the Igala-Mela origin. The earliest community within the vicinity of Idah are called the Igala-Mela, meaning the nine Igalas. These were groups of clans that existed as communities. As socio-political entities, each clan had the head who catered for the needs of members. These communities grew to become heterogeneous because of the location of Idah with its abundant natural resources that attracted people who practised different occupations. This development made the earlier arrangement of governance inadequate. Therefore there was the need for central government which led to the appointment of the head of the most senior and influential community or the oldest man among the nine communities as the father (Attah) whose office was not by hereditary. This occurred around c. 1200 – 1450 A. D. P. E. Okwoli observed that the earliest communities that emerged around Idah were the ancestors of the Igala-Mela (p. 25).

With the passage of time and as the population of the nine communities grew, the need for a more powerful authority become inevitable, therefore, the rise of Attah Idah. The first Attah was an appointee of the Igala-Mela chiefs. With the rise of Attah Idah, the nine clan heads (the patriarchs or onus) continued to adjudicate justice in their localities but major crimes, communal land issues, war, etc were handled at Attah's palace. Attah's masquerades such as Abule and Egwu-ahia were in charge of administration of some aspects of law. The Igala-Mela chiefs were the custodian of Ocho, a hunting festival and an important aspect of the Igala culture. This festival was banned in 1956 by the then Government of the Northern region, during the reign of Ameh Oboni.

During the early days of Attah, the Igala-Mela chiefs formed the nine councillors of the palace. The clans with their titles are as follows: Agbenyo (Onu Igala), Etemahi (Takida), Onubiogbo (Aguba), Onede (Ojogobi), Unana (Onu Igala), Achanyuwo (Ede, Okweje) (Ede), Aleji (Ebiye), and Achadu Kekele Ukwaja (Ugukili). Besides these titles was the Atebo who took over the affairs of the land if Attah died.

In those days, the councillors sent gifts of food to Attah after harvest. Gifts of hind quarters of all the games killed during communal or individual hunting were presented to Attah. Furthermore, levies when collected were divided into two with a half for Attah and the other half to be shared among the nine councillors. The sharing was supervised by Agbenyo but the responsibility was later transferred to Etemahi before being taken over by Achadu at the beginning of the present dynasty. As the population grew with diverse occupations, the tributes accruing to Attah increased. This led to the expansion of government structure. More titles were created. The offices of Ogbe (the chief Eunuch), in charge of justice and that of Ochai Attah, in charge of gallows were created.

The Igala – Benin war was fought under the leadership of Ogbe. As Achadu Omeppa began to enjoy the favour of Ebulejonu, the then Attah, he began to wield so much power which led to the relegation of the position of Etemahi, the Onu of Igala-Mela, to the background. He became the chief kingmaker and the Igala-Mela chiefs became his subordinates. He was elevated to become the head of the council and he worked hand in hand with the Ochai Attah.

This research is neither a validation nor an authentication of the origin of the Attah Igala, therefore every version of the origin presented here is relevant for the purpose of dramatization and hence an acceptable dramaturgy. Every version of the origin is a character in Igala history; a distinct phenomenon. Every version is a number of events and interactions that can be developed as cast. The cast are capable of interpretation of history for an understanding and entertainment of an audience. This is the focus of this research. The versions of the origin of Attah Igala presented here are not only sources of enlightenment but also entertainment. The potential should be galvanized for wealth creation and youth employment.

CONCLUSION

Some versions of the origin of the Attah Igala presented here are synoptic in form thereby suggesting the need for details. The lack of details of some of these versions are a part of the limitation of the present study. Further research is required to fill-in some gaps. Every version of the origin of Attah presented here has the time, people, and events. The people are the dramatis personae to be imitated for enactment of their experiences. This is the process of transmutation for performance on the stage. This is the procedure the present research is suggesting for realisation of the dramatization of history in general and the origin of Attah Igala in particular.

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