

ГЕОКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ПРОСТРАНСТВА И КОДЫ КУЛЬТУР АЗИИ И АФРИКИ

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Understanding the Concept of *Ẹbọ* (Sacrifice) within the Context of African Religion: Insights from the Faculties of *Ifá* among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria

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Ẹbọ (sacrifice) is a universal religious concept that negotiates human desires and requests with God — the Supreme Being. This is done through intermediaries, who are religious progenitors or mediators across religions. Among the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria, divinities are religious mediators. However, the opinions of worshippers of foreign religions among African in general and among the Yoruba in particular is that, *ẹbọ* which is sacrifice to God through the divinities are regarded as unholy and ungodly. To this effect, Yoruba indigenous religion worshippers are vilified; regarding them as *ẹlẹbọ* — the owner of sacrifice and infidels; with the wrong notion that, a true or holy worship should be devoid of sacrifice. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the concept of *ẹbọ* within the rubrics of African religion with particular reference to the Yoruba religious belief. Symbolism, a semiotic mode, where a thing or somebody representing one or other things aside itself is adopted; by espousing or unveiling the symbolisms of *ẹbọ* in *Ifá*, the religion of the Yoruba people. It is found out from the study that, *ẹbọ* is an unavoidable religious exercise for worshippers of all religions. Sacrifice takes different forms depending how it should be executed. The study concludes that in worship of any religion, implementation of *ẹbọ* is sacrosanct; and the more the religious adherents get involved in *ẹbọ*, the more they live in peace with spirit-beings, ancestors and God, the Supreme Being.

Keywords: African religion, ancestors, divinities, *Ẹbọ*, God, human-beings, *Ifá*, spirit-beings.

Introduction

The entire life of the Yoruba people, physical and spiritual is controlled by *Ifá*¹. As a result of this control, the influence of *Ifá* reflects on the entire life of an individual, group, and communities at large. For example, *Ifá* plays a great role before, during and after birth of some individuals. Likewise, a city or market is rarely founded without *Ifá* consultation. Occasions such as marriage, coronation of traditional chiefs into different offices, chosen of professions, building of houses or companies, fertility of the womb (for women) among others are guided by *Ifá*. As a result of nomenclatures of *Ifá* that cut-across all aspects of Yoruba life such as philosophy, science, history, religion et cetera, the voice of *Ifá* (through divination) is believed to be voice of God. This is why *Ifá* is regarded as the foundation on which the Yoruba culture rests. However, implementation or execution of *Ifá* divination rests on *ẹbọ* — sacrifice; which is the outcome of *Ifá* divination process. Sacrifice is executed by the tripartite roles of *Ọrúnmilà*², *Odù*³ and *Èṣù*⁴.

It is difficult to understand the religion of the Yoruba without the knowledge of the influence of sacrifice. This observation was made by Clarke when he says “Sacrifices are an essential part of their religious system and are offered on nearly all important occasions. They are made to the Supreme Being through the mediators who are supposed to take them on high” [1, p. 279]. However, among the Yoruba, the worshippers of foreign religions, mostly the Christians and Muslims, tagged the indigenous religion worshippers as *elẹbọ*⁵. This attitude demean indigenous Yoruba theology and evangelism, since, “all over the world, and throughout history, wherever mankind has worshipped the divine being, we encounter the practice of sacrifice” [2, p. 136]. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate and establish the symbolism of *ẹbọ* within the rubrics of *Ifá* epistles. The objectives of the study are to examine the roles of sacrifice in human activities; to account for the impact of sacrifice on religious activities and to establish that, the more worshippers of religions are involved in sacrifice, the more favor of the spirit beings, ancestors and God- the Supreme-Being are obtained.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology: Symbolism

Symbol is one of the three semiotic modes formulated by [3]. Other modes are icon and index. The symbolism of *ẹbọ* in African religion in relation to other religions is misconstrued by foreign religious believers because their ignorance of concept. Symbolism has been defined in various ways. It is used when one attributes meaning(s) “more than its superficial value to a word or action through the way the word is used or action is presented” [4, p. 60]. The etymology of symbol evolves from the Greek word “symbolon” which “denotes two-half of broken coin, which were exchanged by contracting parties”. The use of symbol and its meaning is cultural. This is why it is associated with multiple of

¹ Yoruba divinity of divination and wisdom. Consultation and sanction of *Ifá* on their affairs is the first step that must be carried out.

² *Ifá*'s progenitor.

³ One of the wives of *Ọrúnmilà*, the divinity of fertility. *Ifá* symbols are coded in *Odù*. There are sixteen major *Odù* and 256 minor *Odù* with uncountable *ese*-verses. The identification, interpretation and the inscriptions of *Odù* symbols is carried out by an initiated *Ifá* priest, a diviner.

⁴ Divinity of justice and judgement execution.

⁵ The one who indulges or involves in sacrifice.

meanings. In some contexts, symbols are synonymous with religions and “are a reminder of sacrifice, or of a savior symbol, while in others they are the physical representation of the divine, and in still others, they constitute important lessons to help facilitate and sustain goodness” [5, p. 61].

The cultural roles of symbols is proportional to its values in use, creating multiples of meaning. That is, if we associate a single meaning to a symbol, we may miss “the value of a symbol, however if we think it can mean absolutely anything we wish” [6, p. 238]. This is why to the foreign religion worshippers among the Yoruba, the meanings associated with *ẹbọ* is compromised, misinterpreted and misplaced. The beauty and value of a symbol is enshrined in the ability to invent or generate multiples of meanings from it.

The symbolism of *ẹbọ* can be understood, looking at the concept from different perspectives in the culture and belief of the people. Relationships between symbol is influenced by the cultural history surrounding such symbol. This is because, it is “a visible object or action that suggests some further meaning in addition to itself” [6, p. 238]. As a result of the possibilities in associating various meanings to symbols and objects, there is flexibility in symbolism as a result of different meanings associated with it.

The cultural significance of symbol is determined by the peoples’ orientation and belief about a symbol. Like any other religious symbol, the religious functions of *ẹbọ*, “discharge two unique roles, signifying what they mean in religion and its practice. The first is functioning as something that ‘represents’, ‘stands for’, or ‘signifies’ something else”. The second is functioning as “the means by which the people orient themselves to the symbol’s referent” [5, p. 60]. That is, in this case, the value of sacrifice is proportional to its use in religious and cultural expressions.

Available secondary data relating to what sacrifice symbolizes or interpreted to represent are collected and analyzed. This is in addition to participant observation of foreign religion worshippers on *ẹbọ* during their services and preaching, analyzed around the religious symbolism of sacrifice.

Concept and Forms of Sacrifice

In African religion in general, and among the Yoruba in particular, *ẹbọ* is central to worship. The nomenclature and prominence of *ẹbọ* in *Ifá* is not only among the Yoruba but with other nations such as among the Igala people of West Africa where the concept is equally known as *ẹbọ*. Among the Igala, *ẹbọ*

manifests the divine outpouring of intuition and inspiration of the Supreme Being. It is the basic participatory character of the human in the divine, without which the glimpse into the hallowed and holy becomes an illusion. Simply put, *ẹbọ* is the gateway to mystical experience and consciousness of the divine presence in the Igala world, creating the pathway for healing and wholeness through destiny (*okai*) and charisma [7, p. 107].

The opinion above buttresses the fact that, *ẹbọ* paves way for “spiritual network” to perform supernatural events. It is equally noted in the above opinion that, it is impossible to dissociate *ẹbọ* from human beings and the supernatural beings, because, *ẹbọ* stands between the gap — a bride builder, between human-beings and supernatural beings and *Olódùmarè* — the Supreme Being.

Generally, across all religions, sacrifice is spiritual. That is, without it, there is no worship. Among the Yoruba, “sacrifice can be said to be the keystone of Yoruba indigenous religious practices because it is the medium of establishing and maintaining a good relationship between two worlds and is a source of spiritual strength” [8, p.329]. That is, offering of sacrifice cannot be discarded from *Ifá* divination as *Ifá* divination process is incomplete without sacrifice. Therefore, sacrifice is,

central to *Ifá* divination and to Yoruba religion as a whole. Sacrifice keeps the belief system going and links the client, the diviner, the divinities and the ancestors together through a system of service and reward. When the client refuses to perform sacrifice, he makes it impossible for this system of action and reaction be completed. Such a client therefore commits a rape of the belief system since he has exploited the divinities by inviting them to identify and solve his problem for him without providing them with their stipulated reward [9, p. 11].

It is better not to consult the spirit-being through *Ifá* than to disobey the order of the divinities and the supernatural-beings; who are believed to have influence on challenges that human beings may face at a point in time. To disobey the order of sacrifice, is to disregard and disrespect the divinity in charge of *Ifá* client generally and in particular *Ifá*, *Oḍù* and *Èṣù* who are the initiators and mediators of sacrifice; as different divinities are charged with different human challenges.

There are different types of sacrifice based on human desires or motifs behind sacrifice, such as thanksgiving sacrifice — *ẹbọ ọpẹ*, which is to appreciate higher beings such as supernatural beings, divinities, the ancestors and God, Supreme Being⁶. Communion sacrifice — *ẹbọ idàpò* is for worship, votive sacrifice — *ẹbọ ẹjẹ* is a sacrifice that emanates from promise to the divinities if their favor is obtained. Propitiation sacrifice — *ẹbọ ẹtùtù* is aimed to appease divinities and spirits. Preventive sacrifice — *ẹbọ ojùkòrìbì* is to wave off some impending calamities and substitutionary sacrifice — *ẹbọ Ayẹ̀pinnu*, which is offer in lieu of something; taking something in replacement [10, p.40]. Misconception about *ẹbọ* among other foreign religions to the worshippers of indigenous religion is erroneous and misleading. This is because, to Africans religion and to the indigenous Yoruba religion in particular, no one can be exonerated from indulging in *ẹbọ*. For example, obedience to a warning is a form of sacrifice — *ẹbọ igbòrà̀n*, that is, sacrifice of obedience. This is the case, in *Ìrẹ̀tẹ̀ Méjì*⁷ corpus, where, *Ifá* supplicant was instructed to keep his affairs secret so as to succeed in life. This requires no any form of sacrificial materials directed to any divinity; but “*Ifá pé tó bá lọ jẹ ẹ̀yà̀n ó gbọ́, ẹ̀ni tí ó ò gbọ́ kan tí ó le ju gbogbo o wọ̀n lọ tún ń bọ̀*”. That is, *Ifá* says, if he lets anyone hears, someone that should not hear, if he hears, he will elaborate the matter beyond necessary, which is more dangerous [11, p.216]. This is also the situation in *Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Ọ̀fún*⁸ corpus, where, *Mógbàgbéolá*⁹ was sternly warned to be careful among women [12, p.79].

⁶ Among the Yoruba Christians in Churches and other religious events, they render song in relation to *ẹbọ* that:

Gbà, / Take

jẹ ẹ / Eat it,

Iwọ lo ní / You are the owner,

ẹbọ ọpẹ mi mò rẹ̀e o baba / Farther this is my sacrifice of praise.

⁷ This is one of indigenous *Ifá*'s major corpus names, meaning two *Ìrẹ̀tẹ̀*.

⁸ One of the names of minor *Ifá*'s corpus.

⁹ A Yoruba name, literally meaning ‘do not forget wealth’.

The belief of the Yoruba holds that, if the prediction of *Ifá* is good, sacrifice will make it come to pass and if otherwise, sacrifice will make it to be good [13]. To the Yoruba people, “ohun to ba dara ní fẹ̀ àdúrà kó má baà bàjẹ̀, èyí tí kò dára náà ní fẹ̀ àdúrà kó lè dáa”. That is, what is good needs prayer so as not to turn bad and the bad thing needs prayer so as to be good. Prayer symbolizes sacrifice¹⁰. The performance of *ẹbọ* complements one’s destiny in life. The belief of the Yoruba on destiny anchors on persistent *ẹbọ* which can improve the bad state of the destiny. In *Ọyèkú*¹¹ corpus, *Ọrúnmilà* vehemently says (in author’s translation) that:

<i>Gbogbo nìkan tẹ̀ bá yàn tí ò bá dáa</i>	All those things which man chooses as destiny that is not good
<i>Ọun ni ó mọ̀ọ́ báa yín fi ẹ̀bọ́ gbé e sójú ọ̀nà</i>	It is he that would use sacrifice to mend it [12, p. 79].

Hazards such as accident, death and calamities are put off by complying with the order of sacrifice. This is the situation with *Ọrúnmilà* in *Ọyèkú Ọtúúrúpò*¹² (in author’s translation) corpus that:

<i>Wọ̀n ní ikú n sọ́ ọ</i>	And that Death is watching him
<i>Àrùn n sọ́ ọ</i>	Sickness is watching him
<i>Ọ̀fò n sọ́ ọ</i>	Loss is watching him
<i>Gbogbo aṣogun pátá n sọ́ ọ</i>	All evil spells are watching him
<i>Ó bá rúbọ</i>	He performed the sacrifice.

[12, pp. 90–91]

The *Ifá* corpora above affirms the only way of escape from evil or an impending calamity is premised on sacrifice. However, the only category of human beings that cannot be appeased by *ẹbọ* is the Gossipers. This opinion aligns with the Yoruba belief or philosophy on *ẹbọ* that:

<i>Ẹ̀bọ́ oṣó ẹ̀ ẹ́rú</i>	There is sacrifice to Sorcerers
<i>Ẹ̀bọ́ àjẹ́ ẹ̀ ẹ́rú</i>	There is sacrifice to Wizards
<i>Ẹ̀bọ́ aláàròkà nì kò ẹ̀ ẹ́ rú</i>	There is no sacrifice to the Gossipers.

The only way out of the problem of Gossipers is to avoid them by keeping their knowledge blank from them. That is, the sacrifice of carefulness and watchfulness, by dissociating from such people.

Ifá teaches that one can only be favored by performing sacrifice.

<i>Rírú ẹ̀bọ́ níí gbé nì</i>	Sacrificing brings blessings
<i>Aírú kì í gbèèyàn</i>	The neglect of it pays no one
<i>Ẹ́ wá bá mi ní wọ̀wọ́ ọ̀mọ́</i>	Come and join us where there are plenty of children.

[10, p. 46]

¹⁰ It is often canvassed and thought in Christian teaching that *àdúrà ẹ̀bọ́ onígbàgbọ́*. That is, prayer is the Christian sacrifice.

¹¹ This is one of indigenous *Ifá*’s major corpus names, literally meaning ‘death evasion’.

¹² This is one of indigenous *Ifá*’s minor corpus names.

Ifá warns against disobedience to sacrifice. This is encapsulated in *Òtúúrúpòn Méjì*¹³, *Ìrètè Òyèkú*¹⁴ and *Ìrètè Ìwòrì*¹⁵ corpora [12, pp. 662, 754, 758]. Sacrifice is central to *Ifá* divination to the effect that, *Ifá* diviner is greeted in the process of divination as “*àbòrúboyè bọ síşẹ* (may the sacrifice be accepted and blessed)” [13, p. 2]. Those that fully complied with the *Ifá* sacrifice prescriptions succeed in life and those that defy the order regret.

Èbọ serves as “spiritual glue” that binds or connects the physical world with the spiritual (unseen) world. Sacrifice serves as a catalyst for realizing human desires. It reinforces and enforces the human-spirit relationship “in case, the relationship is disrupted by any act of sin, sacrifice restores and repairs the rupture and reconciles human beings to their deity” [8, p. 239]. Sacrifice serves as a unifying force between the human and the supernatural. The unification, cooperation and integration roles or functions of *èbọ* between the human and the supernatural beings and in the ultimate, to God, the *Olódùmarè* is negotiated by *èbọ*.

Interactions between human beings, spirit beings and God are mediated by *èbọ*. It serves as a means of interaction for peaceful co-existence between the human (visible or physical) and the supernatural beings, divinities and ancestors (invisible or spiritual) world. That is, “from religious perspective, the world can be said to be divided into the physical (visible), and the metaphysical (or the spiritual) levels. Both realms have binding and interactive forces exchanging between them to function harmoniously” [12, p. xiv]. *Èbọ* serves as Holy Communion — an interactive forum or gathering between the human and the spirit (other world), “without which the glimpse into the hallowed and holy becomes an illusion” [7, p. 107]. One of the contents of *ẹşẹ Ifá*¹⁶ is *èbọ*. There is no one exempted to perform sacrifice.

It is compulsory for every individual to perform sacrifice no matter whether the *ori* he chose in heaven is good or bad. The divinities will not support anyone who refuses to offer sacrifice since this is their only reward for their ceaseless watch over human life... Thus, sacrifice is presented in *ẹşẹ Ifá* as the means whereby a man makes his peace with the divinities and improves upon the defects inherent in his own life [9, p. 33].

No human being can live a peaceful and meaningful life or exist without *èbọ*. *Èbọ* must be carried out within the specified period of time. In other words, sacrifice offered outside the specified or prescribed time by *Ifá* is, as sacrifice not offered at all. Therefore, “timing is very crucial under any prevalent circumstances in the Yoruba custom, religion, deity, and tradition. All as limited under sacrificial difference between the person that refuses to offer sacrifice on time and one that did not offer at all. Spiritual resonance and intonation changes with time” [12, p. xv]. *Ifá* believes that, “we should do the right thing at the right time. We have informed that both positive and negative factors exist. Nobody is free from challenges. *Ifá* will teach us that we would experience both sadness and joy at some occasions” [14, p. 23]. One should never give up to any bad situation in life. *Èbọ* is of such attempt of continued struggle to make life a better place to live.

¹³ This is one of indigenous *Ifá* names.

¹⁴ One of minor *Ifá* corpus chapters.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Ifá's* verse.

The Yoruba believe that, the invisible agents (earlier identified above), will be appeased when material things are offered to the *ajogun* (a group of Yoruba supernatural agents) in form of sacrifice, they receive those things and leave the supplicant untouched. Therefore, *ẹbọ* is a material means of exchange between the human, supernatural and the God.

Sacrifice, in its ritual or ceremonial use, means “a making sacred, an offering that becomes divinized”. Whatever is sacrificed crosses from humans to the divine, and objects are empowered to facilitate the process. Indigenous Africans speak and think of sacrifice essentially as a religious act, which takes the form of rendering something to the supernatural being or beings, and with various intents and purposes [15, p. 75].

Different kind of materials are required for preparation of *ẹbọ*. The prescriptions are done by *Ifá* priest, who act as an intermediary between human and the spiritual beings. These materials ranges from food and raw foodstuffs, cloths, living animals — goats, rams, rats and birds, cloths, plants, leaves and roots, sand and stones among others [13]. *Ẹbọ* is a means that, opens channel or network of communication or interaction between man and the ancestors, divinities, supernatural agents and with God the *Olódùmarè*. While the provision of the sacrificial materials can be waived by the *Ifá* priest if the client is incapable of fulfilling all the requirements, however obedience to *Ifá's* instructions in lieu for sacrifice must be seen to be obeyed.

Implementation of *Ẹbọ* in *Ifá* Divination

In Yoruba religion, the prescription of the sacrifice order is exclusively given by *Ifá* through an initiated *Ifá* priest. The prescription in regards to the time frame the sacrifice must be offered, how the sacrifice must be conducted, who is to perform the sacrifice and where the sacrifice is to be carried out among other things are prescribed by the *Ifá* priest. Therefore, consultation of *Ifá* oracle is the first step towards the implementation of the sacrifice order. In addition, such consultation is associated with financial obligation (mostly in form of cowries as it was a medium of exchange in the olden days). However, even-though, *Ifá* is central to the management of *ẹbọ*, the implementation and execution is that of tripartite roles among *Ifá*, *Èṣù* and *Odù* (as earlier explained)¹⁷. This is expressed that:

Mo ti sọ lẹ̀ẹ̀kan pé ọ̀rẹ̀ minú Ifá, Èṣù àti Odù, imùlẹ̀ ni wón (I had once said that, there is intimacy in the relationship of *Ifá*, *Èṣù* and *Odù*) [16, p. 29].

Èṣù is the Yoruba divinity of justice and execution of justice. Abimbola describes *Èṣù* as “the universal policeman and keeper of the *àṣẹ*, the divine power with which *Olódùmarè* created the universe and maintained its physical laws” [13, p. 1]. His role in ensuring the strict compliance with sacrificial order by *Ifá* attests to this. His engraved image at the center of all *ọpón-Ifá* — divination board indicates that he is part and parcel of the divination and that he follows up the execution of the divination order, especially as it relates with

¹⁷ The wife of *Ọ̀rúnmilà*. All the symbols of *Ifá* are coded in *Odù* mostly within the 16 major and 240 minor *Odù*. This symbolism of *Ifá* and *Odù* are inseparable. The channel of communication of *Ifá* is expressed by *Odù*. The final initiation into *Ifá* divination profession is the introduction of the *Ifá* trainee to sight *Odù*. This is called *ifojú-bodù*- sighting of *Odù* divinity.

sacrifice. He takes his own portion of the sacrifice as role performer in *Ifá*¹⁸. He is an impartial arbiter deity. He punishes the law breakers and rewards the law abiding individual. However, clarification needs to be made here that:

Èṣù is not completely Satan or the Devil as the Christians and Muslims regard him. He is not opposing the Supreme Deity (Olodumare) as the Christian and Muslim Satan opposes God. He has no hell as the Devil of Christianity and Islam. He is always with Olodumare (God). *Èṣù* does not feature in Yoruba cosmology unlike Islam and Christianity that associate Satan with the account of creation. We often hear the expression: *Èṣù! A ṣe burúkú ṣe rere* (*Èṣù! One who does evil and still allows some good*). *Èṣù* supports those who offer sacrifice and takes away his evil eyes from them. His name features prominently in different categories of incantation for positive ends [19, p. 44].

After collecting his own part of the sacrifice (being among the sacrificial agents), it means that, whoever complies with the sacrificial order has

identifies himself with *Èṣù* so that anyone attacking or doing evil to him is presumably doing it to *Èṣù*. *Èṣù* will therefore bring calamity on the enemy on behalf of the operator. This is clearly an area where *Èṣù* is used for protection by someone who knows how to use his name. His name is also used in magic of good luck and other areas. In the olden days, *Èṣù* was part of the names given to his worshippers, such as *Èṣùbíyí*¹⁹, *Èṣùkòyí*²⁰, *Èṣùgbàylá*²¹, *Èṣùrómbí*²², *Èṣùkòyà*²³, *Èṣùgbàmi*²⁴ and *Èṣùtóósìn*²⁵. Despite all the positive aspects of *Èṣù*, however, evil is more associated with him than good and his main hobby is to spoil things for human beings and cause confusion *Èṣù* [19, pp. 44–45].

Nothing can be successful without sacrifice; which is a connecting force between the physical (human) and spiritual (supernatural) world; without which nothing spiritual can be achieved. That is, “sacrifice helps to unite all the forces both natural and supernatural that operate in the Yoruba society. Broadly speaking, these forces are four in number namely, the gods, the ancestors, witches and other supernatural powers and human beings. The function of sacrifice is to enlist the support of these four forces for whatever one may want to do so that none of them may work against one’s purpose” [13, p. 37]. Forms of the sacrifice can be broadly grouped into these four categories, however, this is in addition to *Olódumarè* — the Supreme Being. That is, the four spiritual agents earlier mentioned act as intermediaries between someone that offers sacrifice and God. *Ògúndá Òtúúrúpòn*²⁶ corpus clearly puts God, the Supreme Being on the overall power when it says:

<i>Òrọ̀ tó burú o</i>	Any sad incident or event
<i>Èdá làá fún</i>	It is one’s creator that one should hand it over to

¹⁸ See: [9; 13; 17; 18].

¹⁹ Meaning that, *Èṣù* gives birth to this.

²⁰ Meaning that, *Èṣù* rejects this.

²¹ Meaning that, *Èṣù* saves this one.

²² Meaning that, *Èṣù* gives birth to someone.

²³ Meaning that, *Èṣù* rejects being punished

²⁴ Meaning that, *Èṣù* delivers me.

²⁵ Meaning that, *Èṣù* worth being worshipped.

²⁶ One of *Ifá’s* minor corpus chapters.

Ọ̀ràn gbogbo ọ̀run ẹ̀ni
Ọ̀run ẹ̀ni

All events are related to one's destiny
One's God.

[12, p. 426]

Since the divinities, spirit beings, the ancestors, the living beings, living and non-living things and all the visible and imaginable things are believed to be the products of God; he is the ultimate end of sacrifice. It is based on these agents on which the belief of the Yoruba is encapsulated that the concept of sacrifice in this study is examined.

Sacrifice to the Divinities

Although, there are different postulations by scholars on the number of Yoruba divinities, however, the most prominent figure projected is 401 [18]. Each of the divinities can be sacrificed to, in order to obtain favor of God through them. As earlier explained in this study, *Èṣù* is one of the important Yoruba divinities; especially, in the implementation of sacrifice. He also has shares in all the sacrifice offered and possesses the power to control some spiritual forces against or in favor of the spiritual forces. *Ọ̀yèkú Ọ̀túúpòn* corpus affirms that, *Èṣù* commands all the evil agents. The corpus says (in author's translation) that:

*Ẹ̀gbà ó jẹ́ pé Èṣù ni Baba àwọn Ajogun
Oun ní pàṣẹ̀ wọn*

And since *Èṣù* is the leader of all the *Ajoguns*
He is the one that instructs and make provisions for
them all.

[12, pp. 90–91]

Not only that *Èṣù* performs the monitoring function in the performance of sacrifice, but in addition, he monitors *Ifá* clients' compliance to the sacrifice order as he enforces the execution of the sacrifice with the divinities and spirit-beings.

One of the divinities that plays central and critical roles in the implementation of sacrifice is the individual *Orí*²⁷, as a divinity that must be sacrificed to, before any other divinity. It is the belief of the Yoruba that, *ògùn ló lojọ kan ipónjú orí ẹ̀ni ló lojọ gbogbo*. That is, while charms work against evil in a day, one's head works for all days. As all the divinities and spirit-beings may be against one, one's head will always stand by one. As a result of this, it is appropriate to perform sacrifice to *Orí*²⁸ in addition to other divinities or without them. Among the Yoruba, prayers are offered that, one's head must not be implicated or harbor any evil thing against someone. This is encapsulated in *Ìrosùn Ọ̀sá*²⁹, (author's translation) that:

*Ọ̀rúnmilà yanrí ẹ̀ tán
Ó tún yan ọ̀mọ ẹ̀dà
Níjọ tẹ ẹ̀ bá yanrí
Ẹ̀ má nàájà
Ẹ̀ẹkan kúkú lèyàn ó yanrí ẹ̀*

*Ọ̀rúnmilà chose his Orí
And chose for man Orí
On the day you chose Orí
Do not go to the market
Since it is only once that one chooses his Orí in life.*

[12, p. 66]

²⁷ The head.

²⁸ Head. This is believed by the Yoruba as a divinity.

²⁹ One of the *Ifá* minor corpus chapters.

The belief of the Yoruba holds that, individual's journey commences from heaven where, before God — the *Olódùmarè* and *Òrúnmilà*, everyone chooses his *Orí*³⁰. This informs why *Òrúnmilà* is regarded as *ẹlẹrít-ìpín ẹdá* — a witness of human destiny. Likewise, *Òbàtálá*, the divinity of creation is the molder of humans' heads. He is referred to as *Àjàlá alámò* — Àjàlá the owner of clay. Sometimes, solution to *Ifá* supplicant(s) is to perform sacrifice to one's head — *Orí*. This is the situation in *Ìká Ọsá*³¹ corpus when *Ifá* client was ordered to make sacrifice.

<i>Òrúnmilà ní kó rúbo</i>	<i>Òrúnmilà</i> asked him to offer sacrifice
<i>Ó ní kó tójú ẹyẹ Ẹtù</i>	He was told to get a guinea fowl
<i>Ké e bOrí ẹ</i>	And sacrifice it to his <i>Orí</i>
<i>Ọọni bá tójú Ẹtù</i>	<i>Ọọni</i> prepared the guinea fowl
<i>É ee bOrí ẹ</i>	And used it to sacrifice to his <i>Orí</i> .

[12, p. 527]

As earlier explained, the type of sacrifice depends on the divinity in-charge of the *Ifá* client(s) situation. In *Ọsá Ọyẹkú*³² corpus, *Ifá* client situation is related to the farming profession. The farmer wants high productivity in his crops. The Yoruba divinity of soil and farming affairs is *Òriṣà-Oko*³³.

<i>Kí làà bọ ńbẹ̀ bó bá jáde?</i>	To whom do we sacrifice if it is cast?
<i>Òriṣà Oko</i>	<i>Òriṣà Oko</i> ³⁴
<i>Àgbà iràwọ̀</i>	The biggest star
<i>N làà bọ ńbẹ̀ bó bá jáde</i>	Is the god to whom we should sacrifice to if it is cast.

[12, p. 523]

Sacrifice to the Spirit Beings

There are many spirit-beings such as the wizards and the witches, known as the *Ajogun*. Most of the time, they are recipients of sacrifice as contains in *Ọwónrín Ìká*³⁵ (in author's translation) corpus that:

<i>Wón níwọ̀ Ọrúnmilà</i>	You <i>Òrúnmilà</i> they said
<i>Ajogun ò ní mú ọ</i>	These <i>Ajogun</i> ³⁶ will not arrest you
<i>O ó sẹgun wọn</i>	You would win them all
<i>Sùgbọnn ó rúbo</i>	But performed sacrifice.

[12, p. 314]

³⁰ The choice of individual *Orí* in the presence of God and *Ifá* determines one's destiny on the surface of the earth. Individual choice may be *Orí-rere* — good head or *Orí-burúkú* — bad head, which is anchored on destiny.

³¹ One of the minor *Ifá* corpus chapters.

³² Ibid.

³³ The divinity of soil fertility and farm produce.

³⁴ Divinity of farm and fertility.

³⁵ One of the minor *Ifá* corpus chapters.

³⁶ Spiritual forces.

The Yoruba believe that, those that eat of one's food are endangered if they plan evil against one. In *Ogbè Ọwórin*³⁷, *Ifá* supplicant was to go and prepare food for the spirits and divinities. He was to cook different kind of food and plenty of palm-fruits:

Kó se ounjẹ

Bí ọ́n bá tí n̄ jẹun kí wọ́n mọọ mú ẹyìn ọ́hún jẹ

Ó bá rúbọ

Layé bá n̄ yìn ín

He then should cook it

They should pick the oil palm seed and eat it as they eat the food” they instructed.

He performed the sacrifice

The whole world stood up praising him.

[12, p. 16]

Sacrifice to the Ancestors

The dead are approached by *ẹbọ* to seek their support on family matters. However, among the Yoruba, they are never regarded as “dead” but “living dead”. *Egúngún*³⁸ symbolizes an ancestor in Yoruba belief. Yearly festival is set aside to celebrate the ancestors through *Egúngún*. This period is dedicated to the ancestors; when different *Egúngún* emerged across different Yoruba cities. They are accosted by someone who leads them around as they bless people by their words. Their voices are sonorous so as not to be identified by ordinary men; as they are usually covered from head to toes by Masquerade's cloth (costume) known as *agò Egúngún*.

An *Egúngún* represents an ancestor who has returned from the land of the dead to visit his people... Since the *Egúngún*s represent the ancestors who answer the questions of the living, barren women may visit *Egúngún*'s shrine [20, pp. 108–109].

Since the ancestors are higher beings, their favor are sought after through *ẹbọ* from human-beings.

Solution to problems are provided by ancestors — *Egúngún*, through sacrifice especially, on family related matters. This is the situation in *Ọsá Ọ̀di*³⁹ corpus, where *Ifá* supplicants are ordered to let *Egúngún* family comes out after fulfilling prescribed sacrifice. The corpus orders that:

Şùgbọ́n kí wọ́n ó jÉégún baba wọ́n ó jade

Béégún ọ́hún bá jáde

Bí n̄ bá n̄ wọlé

Kí wọ́n ó fọwọ́ kó aşọ ẹ̀ wọlé

But they should allow the masquerade to come out to display

After the outing of the masquerade

And is about to enter into the house

They should use their hands to pack his costume.

[12, pp. 527–528]

As indicated in the above *Ifá* corpus, sanctions of the sacrifice are based on the instructions carried out during the *Egúngún* performance; where the accomplishment of

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Masquerade — divinity of the ancestors.

³⁹ A minor *Ifá* corpus chapter.

the sacrifice is anchored. However, the dead ancestors are more prominent recipients of sacrifice. This is the case in *Ògúndá Òwónrín*⁴⁰ corpus (in author's translation) that says:

<i>A díá fún iṣẹ̀ṣe tó ẹ̀ wá</i>	Cast divination for <i>iṣẹ̀ṣe</i> ⁴¹ , our root
<i>Èyí tí ọ̀lórí orò láyẹ</i>	The leader of all rituals in the earth
<i>iṣẹ̀ṣe ẹ̀ni ni baba ẹ̀ni tó bíni nípilẹ̀/iṣẹ̀ṣe</i>	is the progenitor that brings one to the earth from the beginning
<i>Tori pe baba ẹ̀ni, àṣẹ̀ṣe ẹ̀ni ni</i>	Because one's father is one's <i>Àṣẹ̀ṣe</i>
<i>Ìyá ẹ̀ni, ẹ̀ni àṣẹ̀ṣe ẹ̀ni ni</i>	One's mother is also one's <i>Àṣẹ̀ṣe</i>
<i>Wọn ò fi àṣẹ̀ṣe silẹ̀</i>	They did not abandon <i>Àṣẹ̀ṣe</i> ...
<i>Orí ẹ̀ni</i>	One's <i>Orí</i>
<i>Àṣẹ̀ṣe ẹ̀ni</i>	Is one's <i>Àṣẹ̀ṣe</i>
<i>Àṣẹ̀ṣe mòmọ̀ làá bọ</i>	It is <i>Àṣẹ̀ṣe</i> one will first sacrifice to
<i>Ká tóó b'Òrìṣà</i>	Before sacrificing to <i>Òṣà</i> .

[12, p. 473]

The *Ifá* corpus above identifies one's parents as the “source” “root” or “origin” of the client Their recognition cannot be neglected in the life of the living. Sometimes, ancestors are engaged by their family members with sacrifice at the spot of their graves. The case of *Ọ̀lọ́fin* family⁴² leaving in penury is an example. They offered lamb to their father at the graveyard and had peace thereafter [21, p. 81]. A king occupying a stool of his ancestors can also engage in this form of sacrifice as recorded in *Ìwori Orinkàn*⁴³ corpus [21, p. 159]. The corpus records that, afterward “òjò iròrùn rọ̀, ilú sì bèrẹ̀ sí dára, ire wọ́lé fún Olóore” [21, p. 159]. That is, normalcy and peace return to the city as good things begin to emerge.

Sacrifice to Human-Beings

Human beings are also beneficiaries of *ẹ̀bọ*. This is the case in the *Òkànràn*⁴⁴ corpus that:

<i>...wón ní ó bọ̀lẹ̀</i>	He was asked to sacrifice to the ground,
<i>Ó bọ̀lẹ̀</i>	He sacrificed to the ground,
<i>Ilẹ̀ lu</i>	he ground opens
<i>Wón ní ó bọ̀ Olúbọ̀bọ̀tiribọ̀ baba ẹ̀bọ</i>	He was asked to sacrifice to <i>Olúbọ̀bọ̀tiribọ̀</i> the master of all sacrifice
<i>Ó ní òun mọ̀ pé baba ẹ̀ni leégún ilé</i>	He says he never knew that one's father is house Masquerade
<i>Òun mọ̀ pé baba ẹ̀ni lòṣà ọ̀jà</i>	He never knew that one's father is a market deity
<i>Ó ní òun morí lóri o</i>	He says he accosted honor to the authority;
<i>Ó ní òun ò mọ̀ ohun tí í jẹ̀</i>	He says he is ignorant of
<i>Olúbọ̀bọ̀tiribọ̀ baba ẹ̀bọ</i>	<i>Olúbọ̀bọ̀tiribọ̀</i> the master of all sacrifice
<i>Enu ní jẹ̀ Olúbọ̀bọ̀tiribọ̀ baba ẹ̀bọ</i>	It is mouth being called <i>Olúbọ̀bọ̀tiribọ̀</i> the master of all sacrifice

⁴⁰ A minor *Ifá* corpus chapter.

⁴¹ Another name for one's mother.

⁴² A family name.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ One of the major *Ifá* corpus chapters.

<i>Njẹ́ kín là mbọ ní 'Fẹ̀?</i>	What are we then worshipping in Ifẹ̀ ⁴⁵
<i>Enu wọn</i>	Their mouths,
<i>Enu wọn là mbọ ní 'Fẹ̀</i>	It is their mouths being sacrificed to in Ifẹ̀,
<i>Enu wọn</i>	Their mouths.
<i>Mo fún gbá</i>	I gave to everyone;
<i>Mo fáwo</i>	I gave to all;
<i>Enu wọn</i>	Their mouths,
<i>Enu wọn kó mọ́ lè rí mi bá jà</i>	Their mouths should be harmless to fight against me.
<i>Enu wọn</i>	Their mouths.

[22, p. 69]

In the above corpus, “the ground” as a divinity, “the father” and “peoples’ mouths” are recipients of sacrifice. *Sàlámì* attests to this that, in *Ifẹ̀*, till date sacrifice to the mouths⁴⁶ of the people. This is evinced from *Òkànràn Òtúúrúpòn*⁴⁷ corpus that:

<i>...Té e dóni ẹnu là n bó</i>	Till today, mouth is sacrificed to
<i>Òòṣà lenu</i>	Mouth is a divinity.
<i>Enu niḃorú</i>	Mouth accepts sacrifice
<i>Enu ni bó ẹ</i>	Mouth is an authority of sanction...
<i>Enu ni fi ṣawoó re Àgbá Ègbòo Fẹ̀</i>	It is mouth they used to rule in Ifẹ̀ city
<i>Olukiribítí</i>	<i>Olukiribítí</i>
<i>Enu mọ́mọ̀ lEgúngún o</i>	Mouth is certainly a Masquerade
<i>Enu mọ́mọ̀ lOriṣà</i>	Mouth is certainly a divinity
<i>Enu ni wón n bó lóòtu Ifẹ̀</i>	It is mouth being sacrificed to in Ifẹ̀ city
<i>Táyé fi n dára</i>	That makes life to be good and bearable to live in
<i>E jẹ́ á rójú ká mọ́mọ̀ bó ẹnu</i>	Let us endeavor to sacrifice to the mouth
<i>Enu mọ́mọ̀ lOrò</i>	Mouth is certainly words.

[12, pp. 437–438]

The same message is coded in *Òkànràn Òtúá*⁴⁸ corpus in [12, p. 437], affirming the importance of sacrifice to “mouth” through food. This form of sacrifice can be equated with *sààrà* — giving of religious alms such as money or food — cooked and raw food among the Yoruba Muslims of Nigeria. This is a common religious practice among the Yoruba Muslims till the present time.

Likewise, the parents (living or dead), are regarded as divinities on their own. Among the Yoruba, till today, the society cannot be devoid of entertainments of people with foods. Ceremonies such as funerals, house-warming, naming, freedom from apprenticeship among others are accompanied with foods. This is realized as a form of sacrifice of thanksgiving and appreciation as evinced from *Òtúá Òfún*⁴⁹ corpus, after the preparation of food:

⁴⁵ This is an ancient town in Òṣun State of Nigeria. It is believed to be the capital city of the Yoruba nation.

⁴⁶ The Yoruba believe that, one that is fed on one’s food is doomed to be endangered if he plans evil against such person. Those foods in form of a sacrifice is believed to be a poison for whoever, after eating one’s food endangers or plan evil against on.

⁴⁷ One of the minor *Ifá* corpus chapters.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Wọ́n bá yánlẹ̀
Wọ́n ní kí wọ́n ó fún baálé

Wọ́n mẹ́ran fún baálé ilé
Wọ́n mẹ́ran fún ìyáálé ilé

Wọ́n fún ọmọ ọṣú

Wọ́n fún kẹ́bá wọ́n pé/ kẹ́bá wọ́n pé⁵¹

Wọ́n ní gbogbo ẹni tí ñbẹ ní àrọwọ́tọ

Wọ́n bẹrẹ sí fún wọ́n lẹran

Wọ́n se bẹẹ́ tán

Eléyù ní pé yóò dáá

Tòhún ní pé yóò dáá

Ihun t'n sOlúwẹri ba sà

They cut some bits of food as a mark on the ground
They ordered some to be given to the head of
the family

They gave the head of the family

They gave some meat to the women

They gave the ọmọ ọṣú⁵⁰

was not left out of the sharing

All the people close by in their compound

They ordered food to be given to them all

After doing this

The man close by will pray “It would be better”

The other will pray “It would be well”

The sickness afflicting Olúwẹri⁵² then heal.

[12, pp. 741–743]

In the above corpus, entertainment of food to all and sundry including, the unfriendly ones, got *Olúwẹri*⁵³ out of his ailment. This is as a result of everyone being entertained says words of blessings to *Olúwẹri* for his generosity. An enemy that utters pleasant words, eventhough, he or she has an evil thought. However, his pronouncement — open blessing is sanctioned by God. Knowing the importance and power in sacrifice, *Ọ́rúnmilà* in *Ìrẹ̀tẹ́ Méjí*⁵⁴ corpus, enjoined all to perform sacrifice in order to live a life of plenty.

Conclusion

Based on volumes of secondary data and participant's observation on the symbolism of *ẹbọ* among the Yoruba and across religions, this study concludes that implementation of *ẹbọ* is sacrosanct. Therefore, regarding or describing the indigenous Yoruba religion worshippers as *elẹbọ* is discriminatory. This is because, the concept of *ẹbọ* within the spectrum of African culture and among the Yoruba is related to their commitment, dedication and devotion to the worship of God. Contrary to the [mis]understanding of the concept among the worshippers of foreign religions; especially, Christianity and Islam; who believe that sacrifice — *ẹbọ*, is inimical to true worship of God. However, the concept of sacrifice as undertaken by this study establishes that, *ẹbọ* is a universal concept that cut across all religions; without which, the communication with God or the spirit beings will be impossible. As a result of this, “sacrifice is the essence of Yoruba religion as it is in every religion the world has ever known” [23, p. 118].

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⁵⁰ The women that left their husbands' families and came back to their family houses to live.

⁵¹ Literarily meaning one that does not grouped with people.

⁵² A name of river goddess.

⁵³ One of the river goddesses.

⁵⁴ A minor *Ifá* corpus chapter.

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Понимание концепции *эбо* в контексте африканской религии *ифа* народов Йоруба в юго-западной части Нигерии

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Эбо — жертвоприношение — универсальная религиозная концепция, которая согласовывает человеческие желания и просьбы с Богом — высшим существом. Это делается через посредников — религиозных прародителей или посредников между религиями. У народа йоруба на юго-западе Нигерии божества являются религиозными посредниками. Однако приверженцы иностранных религий среди африканцев в целом и среди йоруба в частности считают *эбо*, которое является жертвоприношением Богу через божеств, нечестивым. В связи с этим приверженцы религии коренных народов йоруба подвергаются поношению, рассматриваются как *элебо* — владельцы жертвоприношений и неверные, в связи с неправильным представлением о том, что истинное или святое богослужение не должно включать жертвоприношения. Таким образом, целью данного исследования является изучение концепции *эбо* в рамках направлений африканской религии с особым упором на религиозные верования йоруба. Символизм — семиотический метод, при котором вещь или кто-то представляет ту или иную вещь отдельно от нее самой, — применяется путем поддержки или раскрытия символики *эбо* в *ифа*, религии народа йоруба. В результате настоящего исследования выяснилось, что *эбо* является обязательной религиозной практикой для верующих всех религий. Жертвоприношение принимает различные формы в зависимости от того, как оно должно быть совершено. В исследовании делается вывод, что в богослужении любой религии соблюдение *эбо* является священным; и чем больше приверженцы религии вовлекаются в *эбо*, тем больше они живут в мире с духовными существами, предками и Богом — высшим существом.

Ключевые слова: африканская религия, предки, божества, *эбо*, Бог, люди, *ифа*, духовные существа.

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