

The Analysis, Significance and Positive use of Èpè in Yorubá Traditional Healing System

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/3050-2357/2024/v1n2a4>

Samuel Káyòdé Oláléye PhD,

Department of Religious Studies,

University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

E-mail: kayodeleye2005@yahoo.com Phone: +2348036777305

Abstract

Èpè (curse) is believed to be a type of verbal expression that can be uttered or expressed to invoke negative or evil effects upon any living or non-living thing. These words are rarely spoken by anyone in the Yorubá society except when there is misunderstanding, stealing or killing that is suspected to have involved witches and wizards in the land and when mysterious things have happened. However, the matter relating with Èpè has always been viewed from deleterious perspective without consideration for the positive aspect of the subject matter or positive things that can be achieved through the use of Èpè. Thus, this paper looks at the significance and positive use of Èpè (curse), particularly within the Yorubá traditional healing and therapeutic system, to highlight its applications beyond the commonly perceived negative outlook. Fifteen herbalists reputed for their use of incantations in healing were interviewed, and their perspectives were content analysed. The study revealed that Èpè can perform both positive and negative functions simultaneously and recommends that care must be taken in its use to derive its beneficial aspects.

Keywords: *Significance, Positive use of Èpè (Curse), Yorubá, Healing System*

Introduction

The general view and belief among Yoruba people regarding Èpè (curse) is that it is a terrible thing that can happen to someone. It is perceived as something that could derail the course of one's life and even alter one's destiny in a negative way. Èpè, also referred to as *ohùn-òdì*, are negative words with harmful or negative effects on the person they are directed at, and no Yorubá person want anyone to use such words against them¹.

One school of thought posts that Èpè was created by Àgbónmìrègún, who came to the world with the 16 *Odu*s to deliver himself from the hands of *ese* (another name for witches). Another perspective suggests that Èpè originated from *Odu Ìwòyè Ìrosùn*, which centres around *Àdàbà*, a bird that sought the help of Èsù after her two children were taken by humans. Èsù gave *Àdàbà* Àṣe-command, which she used on the people of Ìwòyè that stole her kids. Additionally, some believe that Èpè, originally known as Àdòásùré, was invented or owned by Èsù who changed the name to Èpè when he cursed *Aja*-dog his first born. *Iwori Ogbe*² validates this assertion where Ifa says:

<i>Ìwòrì Ogbe,</i> <i>Takẹṣe nù.ṣe láárin òwù</i>	Iwori Ogbe Gossypium arboreum's words would always come to fulfilment in the mist of cottons
<i>Tì Ọ̀ni nì.ṣe ní Ilé-Ifẹ̀</i>	Ooni's words would come to realization in Ile-Ife
<i>T'Ọ̀ràngún nù.ṣe ní ilé Ilá</i> <i>T'alaafin nù.ṣe lóde Ọ̀yó,</i>	Orangun's words would come to pass in Ila Alaafin words would come to recognition in Oyo
<i>T'alaké nù.ṣe lóde Ègbá</i> <i>T'awujale nù.ṣe lóde Ìjebu-Mere</i>	Alake's words would come to pass in Egba Awujale's words would come to execution in Ijebu
<i>T'awo nù.ṣe lóḍò ògbèrì tí kò nírukẹ̀rẹ̀</i>	Awo's word would come to fulfilment in the mist of novices
<i>Tó nì Ìrọ́fá tí kò n'ídè</i> <i>Tó nwípe nínú nì Ifá wà</i>	That has Irofa but has no ìdè would That says Ifa is in the belly
<i>T'awo kà.sàì maa.ṣe</i> <i>Ló dífá fun Èlẹgbára</i> <i>Tó kò adó mērin lónó</i>	Awo's words must come to fulfilment Cast divination for Elegbara Who was holding four gourds

¹ Ayo Opefeyintimi, 2010, *Itupale Epe*, Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 4

² E.A. Lijadu, 2001, *Ifa Mimo Alabalase*, Ondo: J. A. Ifeoluwa Printing press, 103

Òkàn t'owó	One for making money
Òkàn t'omó	Another one for giving birth to children
Òkàn t'àsùrè	Another one for all good things of life
Òkàn tó kù ló fí nm'ílé ayé lògbòlògbò.	The remaining one is what he is using to trouble the whole world

There is another story that claims that *Àṣẹ*, *Èpè*, *Ọfò*, and *Àjé* were humans who came from heaven to live at Otúufẹ, now known as Ile-Ife, where they lived together. However, *Àṣẹ*, *Èpè* and *Ọfò* later discovered that *Aje* was betraying them by revealing the secrets of their discussions to other humans, which ultimately led to their separation. The perspectives of these schools of thought differ significantly from that of Oladiipo Olukoya Iginla, one of the informants, who believes that *Èpè*, an *Irunmọlẹ*, is an instrument sent into the world for healing purposes³. This paper aims to explore the validity of these claims through interviews and content analysis of the views expressed by those interviewed.

Origin of *Èpè*

There are about six schools of thought regarding the origin of *Èpè*. One perspective is that it was *Àghónmìrègún* who came to the world with the 16 *Oḍus* to deliver himself from the hands of *èṣe* (witches). He discovered that the witches knew the secrets of the herbs he was using, and were rendering them ineffective. In response, he took white chalk and other items to prepare *àṣẹ*, which all *Irunmọlès* called *Èpè*. This incantation was so powerful that even *Àjé* (witches) could not overpower it, leading to *Èpè* being recognized as *Ọlọjá Oògùn* - the king of herbs⁴.

Another account traces *Èpè* back to *Oḍu Ìwòyè Ìrosùn*⁵. According to *Ọpẹfẹyintimí*, the story begins with a barren bird named *Àdàbà*, who consulted a Babalawo. She was assured that she would bear children if she offered two types of sacrifices—one for her children and another to *Èsù* to prevent the loss of the children. After offering the first sacrifice, she had two kids. One day she went to look for food for the kids but upon returning, she could not find her kids. Remembering the second

³ Oladiipo Olukoya Iginla, Herbalist, *Telephone Interview*, Odolowu, Okunowa, Odogbolu LGA, Ijebu, Ogun State, 29/06/2017

⁴ Ogunleye Foluso, Herbalist, *Personal Interview*, Itapa Ekiti, 21/6/2021

⁵ Ayo Opefeyintimi, 2010, *Itupale Epe*, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 6

unoffered sacrifice to *Èsù*, she quickly made the offering and *Èsù* aided her by lending her *Àṣẹ* -power, to rain curses on the people of *Ìwòyé* who had taken her children. She rained the curses in this way:

<i>Kékeré Ìwòyé ó kú</i>	The little ones in Iwoye will die
<i>Kékeré Ìwòyé ó kú</i>	The little ones in Iwoye will die
<i>Àgbà Ìwòyé kò ní i rójú</i>	The elders of Iwoye will not be at peace
<i>Ìlu Ìwòyé á tú.</i>	

Èsù instructed her to be patient for about three days, assuring her that nothing would happen to her children. However, the curse that *Àdàbà* rained upon the town had caused everything to turn upside down within a single day. By the evening of the second day, all the elders in the town had gone to consult an *Ifá* priest, and the *Odu* that emerged stated:

<i>Oroforofo, eye abiyé gbàá</i>	Oroforofo a bird with big feathers
<i>Àwọn Àdàbà, eye abiyé rékeréke</i>	Doves are with short feathers
<i>Èyè méjì n fò lókè</i>	Two birds are flying in the sky
<i>Bèè la ò mobí</i>	We neither know the female
<i>Bèè la ò makò</i>	Nor the male
<i>Ló dífá fún wọn n'ìlú Ìwòyé</i>	Cast divination for them at Iwoye
<i>Níbi tí wọn ti nfojú, seraun ire gbogbo.</i> Where they are crying for good things of life	

The Babalawo informed them that they were the cause of their predicament because they had caused someone pain; the curse *Àdàbà*' had laid on them, due to her missing children, was what brought about their troubles. Therefore, for them to be out of trouble, they were required to search for the kids and let go of them.

There is yet another story that claimed that *Àṣẹ*, *Èpè*, *Ọfò*, and *Ajé* were humans who came from heaven to live at *Otunfè*, now Ile-Ife, where they lived together. However, *Aṣẹ*, *Èpè* and *Ọfò* later discovered that *Ajé* was betraying them by revealing the secrets of their discussions to other humans. This led to other people favoring *Ajé* over her friends. They reminded *Ajé* of the warning they had received in heaven not to separate from one another or disclose their secrets to others. Despite their warnings, she insisted that she could not dissociate herself from humans. As a result, they parted ways with *Ajé*. Later, the remaining three also had a misunderstanding regarding seniority. They consulted an *Ifá* priest named *Ọrègbéḗlẹ̀ta*, who advised them against fighting and suggested they

part ways. Heeding the priest's advice, they went their separate ways: *Àjẹ* went to Ijebu, *Ajẹ* to the Atlantic, *Èpẹ* to Ekiti, and *Ọjọ* to Oyo.⁶

Another school of thought claims that in the beginning, *Èpẹ* was known as *Àdúásúre* and that it was *Èsù* who changed the name to *Èpẹ* when he cursed *Ajá* (dog). According to this account, an *Ifá* priest named *Obun-ghogbo-inwón-ló-dùn-mọ* divined for *Ajá* and warned him to be cautious so that his favorite food would not lead him into trouble and advised against repaying good deeds with evil. At that time, a decree was issued in *Ìnàrún* (heaven) stating that no one should have relations with another person's wife; anyone found guilty would be executed in public. *Èsù*, being second in command and the father of *Ajá*, intervened when *Ajá* committed the offense of impregnating one of *Oninvarun*'s wives. Although he was sentenced to death for this crime, the king pardoned him and instructed *Èsù* to impose a lighter punishment instead.

Since *Ajá* was not executed, *Èsù* then used his power known as *Àdúásúre* to speak ill words into *Ajá*'s life. These ill words became known as *Èpẹ* and went as follows:

<i>Ọsáá bósá</i>	Osaa bosa
<i>Oreè bore</i>	Oree bore
<i>Ànàmú ntogà</i>	Whatever chameleon stretches to take, it takes
<i>Ìtọ́ tó bá tí balẹ̀</i>	Any spit that goes from mouth to the ground
<i>Kù padà senu mọ́</i>	Does not go back to the mouth again
<i>Lati oní ló</i>	As from today (henceforth)
<i>Kí Ajá dí erú èniyàn</i>	May the dog become human slave
<i>Kí ó má tẹgbẹ́ eeyan mọ́</i>	May it never attain the status of man(equal among human beings)
<i>Kí oní Ajá má tó enu mọ́</i>	May the dog never be able to cater for itself
<i>Àgbàbó ní kẹ́ ó jẹ láarin ilú.</i>	May human always cater for it within the town

In one of the *ọfọ* that was explained by Arolu⁸, one of the informants expounded with the *ọfọ* below:

⁶ Ayo Opefeyintimi, 2010, *Itupale Epe*, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 12

⁷ Ayo Opefeyintimi, 2010, *Itupale Epe*, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 8

⁸ Arolu Okunade, Herbalist, *Personal Interview*, Ode Oolo, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, 23/4/2021

<i>Awotola lo ko eegun nifa</i>	Awotola was the one that taught the masquerade Ifa,
<i>Ajagunbeleke baba Oniteele</i>	Ajagunbeleke the father of Oniteele
<i>Lo ko Oosa ni ase pa</i>	Was the one that taught Oosa how to command
<i>Ika-ni-ka-ebiti</i>	Ika-ni-ka-ebiti
<i>Lo ko Epe ni ogede Ifo</i>	Was the one that taught Epe the act of incantation
<i>Iku nikan lo da wa saye</i>	It was death that came to the world alone
<i>O panayan panayan</i>	He killed people in their thousands
<i>Sugbon hese ni omo araye nda</i>	Human never reckon with him
<i>Lo ba to Olodumare lo</i>	He went to Olodumare
<i>O lo gbase</i>	To receive a command
<i>Edumare fun un lase tan</i>	Olodumare gave him a command
<i>Lo ba tun fi iku mo iya a re</i>	Olodumare made death's mother known to him
<i>Eni ti oruko re nje Okiki-ranin</i>	Whose name was Okiki-ranin
<i>Ti iku ko fi igba kan mo o tele</i>	That death did not know from time
<i>Lati igba naa lo ti di pe</i>	Since then
<i>Bi iku ba pa enikan</i>	If death killed one person,
<i>Ki okiki ma a kan ka ghogbo adugbo ranin.</i>	The news will be made known in all the nooks and the crannies
<i>Ihuntola ni oruko a a p'ase</i>	Ihuntola is the name we call command
<i>Ika-o-mesi ni oruko a a p'ogede</i>	Ika-o-mesi is the name of incantation
<i>Ajagun-orun-malale-waye ni oruko a a p'asasi</i>	Ajagun-orun-malale-waye is the name we call spell
<i>A-a-se, koni sai se</i>	It shall be so, so shall it be.
<i>Nitoripe, Asipatako ni baba ase</i>	Because, Asipatako is the father of command
<i>Tu somo bibi inu Ejio</i>	The offspring of Ejio
<i>Oun naa lo b'Epe</i>	He was the one that gave birth to Epe
<i>Tu somo bibi inu Aloran.</i>	The offspring of Aloran
<i>Oun naa lo tun b'ogede</i>	Who also gave birth to Ogede (incantation)
<i>Tu somo bibi inu Orunmila</i>	The offspring of Orunmila

What the story narrated in these *Ofo* let us know that there is a relationship among *Ase*, *Ofo*, *Ogede*, *Ayajo* and *Epe*. The reason is, if one wants to rain curses on somebody, one would make use of them all as we have it in the expression below:

<i>Ojo ta a b'Epe la b'Ase</i>	It was on the day Epe was given birth to that Ase was born
<i>Ojo ta a b'Obun la b'Epe</i>	It was on the day Voice was given birth to that Epe was born
<i>A b'Ase, a b'Epe tan</i>	After given birth to Ase and Epe,

Ohùn ló wá kù⁹.

It remains the voice

However, all the narratives above are contrast with Iginla's¹⁰ view on the issue of *Èpè*. According to him, *Èpè* was one of the Irúnmòlè-gods sent by Olódùmare to the world to assist humanity, particularly in addressing incurable diseases that afflict the world. He links *Èpè* with the 16 *Agemo* which is celebrated by the Ijebu people in July and August each year. According to him, *Èpè* is a fire. When all the Irúnmòlè were coming to earth, *Èpè* did not accompany them. Upon realizing that there were important tasks left undone by these Irúnmòlès, Olódùmare sent *Èpè* to fulfill those duties. This is why he came alone, earning him the title *Dàdàwà*. When he was in heaven, he was *Èbora*- spirit and fire. *Àbón*- a blacksmith who was the heavenly blacksmith was the one who made use of *Èpè* to make *ide* for *Ọsányìn*, *ìkòkò* for snail, *ìgbá* for tortoise, *àkókó* *sabalà* for the witches and so on.

Again, it was *Ládèsuà* who brought *Èpè* to the world with *Aṣo Ọdun*- a kind of cloth. They landed in a blacksmith's workshop, and it was it was on that day that *Ládèsuà* died. This is the why *Alágemo*, the earthly representative of *Èpè*, must pay homage in the blacksmith's workshop whenever he emerges. Another informant corroborated this by stating that *Agemo* is a messenger of Olódùmare,¹¹ but differs from others from others regarding where *Èpè* first landed and the name he bears. While she maintained that *Èpè* landed at *Imodi mosan* and his name is *Agemo*, Iginla asserted that *Èpè* first arrived in *Okunowa*, a village in Ijebu, Ogun State, where he was named *Èpè*.

From there, he performed all the functions and duties assigned to him by Olódùmare on earth. Later, when *Èpè* was ready to depart this world, he entered mother earth alive, leading the people of that area to begin worshipping him. The worship center for *Èpè* was eventually relocated to *Imodimosan*. Thus, the *Agemo* worshiped by the Ijebu people today is this *Èpè*. As they honor this *Agemo*, those who possess *Èpè* will benefit from its powers.

⁹ Raji S.M, 1991, *Ijinle Ofo, Ogede ati Aasan*, Nigeria: Onibonoje Press & Books Industries (Nig.) Ltd, xi

¹⁰ Oladiipo Olukoya Iginla, Herbalist, *Telephone Interview*, Odolowu, Okunowa, Odogbolu LGA, Ijebu, Ogun State, 29/06/2017

¹¹ Kehinde Ogunjebe, *Interview Respondent*, Oke Jagbori Street, Imosan Ijebu. 2/6/ 2017.

Iginla further stated that it was this *Èpè* that gave birth to *Àṣe*, *Gbetugbetu*, *Àyájó* and *Ògèdè*¹². This report may hold truth since the *Agemo* festival that the Ijebu people celebrate annually around the months of July and August is a celebration of *Èpè*. The sixteen masquerades gather at *Imọsan*¹³ to showcase their mysterious charms before departing to their respective locations until the following year. This is why one informant referred to the *Agemo* festival as *Oḍun èpè*—festival of curses—as previously explained.

The Division of *Èpè*

Èpè is categorised into two types: *Èpè orí ahón* and *Àwònrìnnwòn èpè*. There *Èpè orí Ahon* refers to ordinary *Èpè* believed by the Yorubá not to have any significant effect on those they are directed at. This type is commonly encountered among mothers in various contexts like while talking or rebuking their children of wrong doings. Similarly, the Ijesa people of Osun state are known for playfully using curses among with friends, saying phrases such as *sámùsà lá jojú rẹ*- “it is ... that will eat your eyes and *lúkú lúkú lá pa ó*- “it is epidemic that will kill you”.

We also have *Awonrinwon Èpè* which refers to the type of *Èpè* that people believe is used for evil purposes, although this is not necessarily the case. It is important to note that *Èpè* was brought to the world for healing purposes. Therefore, 80% of *Èpè* is intended for healing, especially for ailments that are devoid of solutions, while the remaining 20% are to teach unscrupulous individuals in the society one lesson or the other. These kind of *Èpè* are used to alter the destinies of humans, animals and other creatures. For instance, sickness can be cursed by saying:

Ìnọ àìsàn yí ò
Àlẹjọ nì.ò lágó ara lágbájá.omo lágbájá

You this ailment
You are a stranger in the body of this fellow

Ìnọ àìsàn tó nda.eni yí láàmú

You this ailment that is tormenting this person,

Ọmọrí igbá kù rídí jókó

A calabash cover does not possess a buttock to seat

¹² Oladiipo Olukoya Iginla, Herbalist, *Telephone Interview*, Odolowu, Okunowa, Odogbolu LGA, Ijebu, Ogun State, 29/06/2017

¹³<http://www.ijebuonlinehistoryofAgemofestival.org.com>. Accessed on 01-06- 2017.

Èkú àwòsàn kùí ghékún omó kó dúró

Awosan rat does not hear the cry of its children and wait

T'ósán bá pón,íse ni wàrìwà nhùn

When the day is bright, Wariwa will make noise

T'ósán bá pón,íse ni, ògà òòjò ngbòde When the day is bright, Oga Ojo will take over

Ó yá gbéra

Rise up

Ikún kùí gbélé baba rẹ̀ dafẹ̀

Ikun never stays in his father's house till evening

Ìrẹ̀ kùí gbélé baba rẹ̀ dafẹ̀

Cricket never lives in its father's house till evening

Ọlóbounboun kùí dagbéré kó tó fílú sílẹ̀

Olobounboun (a kind of flying insect) never says goodbye before it leaves the city

Àkà kùí jó ènìyàn kí gbédígbédí má gbéní

Hedgehog will not sting someone without standing up

Ìnọ̀ àìsàn yí, ó yá fọ̀ jade

You this ailment, jump out

Torípé ihẹ̀ kùí se ilẹ̀.

Because there, is not your abode

Aja ngbò lósán

The dogs bark in the afternoon

Ọwàwà ngbó lórú

Owawa (an animal that resembles the dog, that climbs the tree with its face down-wards) barks at night

Ìdúnkúdún ni karaun ndún

The snail shell makes sound/noise anyhow

Adígbonránkú kùí fọ́jó ikú, è dọ́la.

Adigbonranku (an insect that usually fakes death) never postpones the day of its death till the following day.

Iná ni wón fí mọ́e iná, Èpè ni wón fí mọ́e Èpè, so it is this Èpè that would be used to remove the sickness away from the body.

Therefore, the words and all the *àyájó* that is recited in the ase is Èpè because he was the one that gave birth to them all. If we use *àyájó* to expel snake poison in the body, it is also Èpè like the one below:

Ìnọ̀ oró ejò yí

You this snake venom

Ibi tí o wà yí kùí se ilẹ̀ rẹ̀

Where you are is not your abode

Torípé,

Because

Ọ̀nà ghonran bá yí ni torìghonran

The broad way is that of the road

Ọ́jù kùí s'ẹ̀gi òréré

The eye never misses far-away tree

Òréré ní, s'aya ọ́jù

Far-away is the wife of the eyes

Ìsẹ̀lẹ̀ ní, s'aya ọ̀wúrọ̀

Isela is the wife of early morning

Ibikibi tí o bá wà kí o má a bọ̀
Tá a bá d'omi sorì, ilẹ̀ nùú bọ̀

Ori, emó kùú sé ọ̀pọ̀

Wherever you are, come out
 If water is poured on the head, it
 comes down
 The head of brown rat never misses
 its path

Still on sicknesses, *Inárun*- Blood bacteria, a kind of sickness that causes dizziness, prevents the victim from seeing clearly or that causes itching of the body that damages skins with black patches can be cured with herbal preparation and this *àyájo*¹⁴;

Agbégba lérí ò rọ́jó

Apantètè ò rọ̀sù.

Ó dífá fún òtálẹ́lẹ́gbẹ́je Ọ̀jọ̀jọ̀ (àìsàn)

Nígba tí wón t'íkòlẹ̀ ọ̀run bọ̀ wá s'íkòlẹ̀ ayé

Inárun lóun làgbà
Àwọn Ọ̀jọ̀jọ̀ tó kù l'áwọn lẹ́gbẹ́n

Inárun ní tó bá se bẹ̀ è ní,
Ó ní kí àwọn Ọ̀jọ̀jọ̀ tó kù
Lọ pa àádọ́ta ènìyàn lósù mètá

Ọ̀rìsà rán wón wá sáyé
Kan ló pa àwọn ènìyàn wá
W'ón lo ogún odún àti méjọ láyé

Wón ò ríwón pa.
Ọ̀rìsà bá rán Nárún sóde ayé

Inárun npa igba àt'eyokan lójúmó,

Ọ̀rìsà pe Nárún padà ó fí s'ògà

He who carries calabash on
 his head does not see the sun
 Nor does the person that
 carries load on the head
 without touching it sees the
 moon
 Cast divination for six
 hundred and eighty
 sicknesses

When they were coming from heaven
 to the earth

Blood bacteria says he was the eldest
 The rest of the sicknesses said they
 were the senior

Blood bacteria says if that is the case
 It ordered the rest sicknesses
 To go and kill fifty people in three
 months

Orisa sent them to the world
 To go and kill human beings
 They spent twenty eight years on
 earth

They could not kill them
 Orisa then sent Blood bacteria to the
 world

Blood bacteria was killing two hundred
 and one daily

Orisa recalled Blood bacteria and
 made it the leader

¹⁴ Kola Anifalaje, Herbalist/ Farmer, *Telephone Interview*, Ire Ekiti, Ekiti State, 12/11/2021.

Òrìsà wá bí Nàrun pé,
Ànwon omò toun to wá lóde ayé,
Báwo ni kò, se ní ríwon bá já?

Nàrun ní kí won lo w'égbò inàbìrì,

Kí won wá sáká si

Kán fi gbáyè Èjìogbè

Kán má a yán je...

Orisa then asked Blood bacteria
My children that were on earth
How would Blood bacteria not attack
them?

Blood bacteria said they should go and
look for the root of
Plumbago zeyla

And add saka (heart wood) Ayurveda
to it

They should imprint Ejiogbe
signature on it

They should be using it...

Èpè is an *Òrìsà*. This is the reason why people say that Ijebu people have *dadawà* because they worship *Èpè* through *Agemo*, a festival that is annually celebrated throughout the whole of Ijebuland through the sixteen *Agemo* that usually converge at Imodimosan, the head quarter of all the *Agemo*. There are sixteen of them as listed below and where they came from before they converge at Imodimosan for the celebration;

1. *Tàmi and Oba Oníre*

2. *Pétu Arámásà*

3. *Seréfùsì*

4. *Bàjèlú*

5. *Màgodo*

6. *Nopà*

7. *Olúmokò*

8. *Èdelúmòrò*

9. *Àjàgàlòrù*

10. *Posa*

11. *Onúgbó*

12. *Idebi Olumoninwa*

13. *Olúbámisan*

14. *Olúbámisan*

15. *Ògégbò*

16. *Alofà*

Odogbolu

Isiwo Ijèbú

Igbile Ijèbú

Imukú Ijèbú

Aiyépé Ijèbú

Òdo-Nopà Ijèbú Imusun

Okun-Owa Ijèbú

Imòrò Ijèbú

Oru Ijèbú

Imosan

Oke Nugbo, Ago Iwoye

Ìsámorò Àgò-Iwòyè

Ago-Iwoye

Imosan Ijèbú

Ibonwon

Ijèsà Ijèbú

As said above, all these *Agemo* will come together at Imodimosan (a town in Ijebu...) where they will make sacrifice to *Èpè*¹⁵.

Differences among *Èpè*, *Àfòṣe*, *Gbètugbètu*, *Àyájó* and *Ohùn Ifè*

Èpè is believed to be like a gun in the hands of security agents; some use it correctly while others misuse it. Just because of some misuse, it does not mean it should be withdrawn from the security agents who wield it responsibly.

It is also believed that *Èpè* was the one that gave birth to *Afòse*, *Gbètugbètu*, *Ayajo* and *Ohun Ifè*. However, they all have their different areas of performance. *Àfòṣe*, which is an ability to say or command something and make it come to pass, is meant to pray for people in every circumstance, whether for good or for bad. For instance, if a child does something great for the father, mother or a group of elders in the community, to reward such a child, the people concerned would pray for such a child. For such prayers to come to pass quickly, the power of *Àfòṣe* may be involved. On the other way, if something is missing and no body owns up to the missing of such an item, a curse - in form of a prayer - would be placed on whoever took such an item through the use of *Àfòṣe* so that either the item is found or the culprit comes out to confess or something tragic happen to the person depending on the words spoken to the *Àfòṣe* during such a prayer. This is the reason the Yorubá usually say *ejó láá boògùn rò* - one lodges his/her complains to *Oogùn*-charm.

Gbètugbètu or *Agba* and *Mayeun* are powerful charms that are used to command or used to take something from people. Voluntarily the person will release the item but he or she may not conscious of the release. They can be used with the aid of incantation. It is very useful when one is faced with a dangerous situation that may involve death. For instance, during the war, one can use *gbètugbètu* to command his opponent to do whatever one wishes. Either to walk away, kill himself or stay at a particular place till one is safe enough from such an enemy. It can also be used to collect cutlass or dangerous weapons from lunatics that are ready to attack someone or people. Once any of the two is kept at the corner

¹⁵ Bukola Ayanlaja, 2018, *The Socio-Economic Significance of Agemo Festival in Ijebu Land*, A Long Essay, Submitted to the Department of Religious Studies in partial Fulfillment of B.A. Horns, University of Ibadan, 39

of the mouth, and the incantations chanted, whatever the chanter asked the opponent to do will be done without questioning.

Ayájó is a set of words that are very common in *Ifá*. It goes with telling story of what happened in the past that is coming to repeat itself now. It is very uncommon to find *Ifá* verse without such stories because this is what will explain the situation of the client that came for divination. Sometimes, this may go with incantation as we have in *Obara Meji*¹⁶ where *Ifá* says:

<i>Ìgbúnṣò ti kékéré yóké</i>	Fist has hump form early age
<i>A dífá fún Agunlénubiagogo,</i>	Cast divination for Agunlénubiagogo (name of a person)
<i>Ojò ló p'alabaun</i>	It was rain that beats Tortoise
<i>Pel'enu ìlẹ̀kẹ̀ lórùn</i>	With beads clothe on its body
<i>A dífá fún eni a sòrò fún</i>	Cast divination for a defiant person
<i>Tò loun ò ní jẹ</i>	That says he would not like it
<i>Eni a sòrò fún</i>	A defiant person
<i>Tò loun ò ní jẹ</i>	That says he would not hear
<i>Enwé e jẹminibò</i>	Leaf of jeminihoo (answer me without declining)
<i>Ló ní o má a jẹ mi ní hòò.</i>	Says you should answer me without declining
<i>Wón ní bí agbe bá jì</i>	They said if Agbe- a kind of bird wakes up
<i>K'agbe ó má a jẹmi ní hòò</i>	Agbe should answer me without declining
<i>Ìgbà t'agbe jì,</i>	When Agbe woke up
<i>Agbe nẹmi ní hò hò ò</i>	Agbe was answering me
<i>Lagbaja, má a jẹmi ní hòò hòò...</i>	You this person continue to answer me

Ohùn Ifẹ are the kind of words or incantations that are used when one finds himself or herself in a difficult situation. These are a kind of incantations that can be used to escape death and calamities. Part of such is *Aásán*. It is used to overpower enemies that can sometimes result into death of one's opponent (s)¹⁷. This is common with hunters who hunt for dangerous animals like lion, tiger, leopard, elephant and so on. Again, in the olden days, warlords also make use of *Aasan* against their enemies or opponents to defeat them in battle. They were also used against

¹⁶ Wande Abimbola, 1968, *Ijinle Ohun Enu Ifa Apa Kinni*, UK: W.M. Collins, Sons and Co. Ltd, 83

¹⁷ Yemi Elebuibon, 2000, *The Healing Power of Sacrifice*, New York: Athelia Henrietta Press, Inc. 82

Onísunmòmi –kidnapers in the past to render them powerless or cause their sudden death so that the victim can escape¹⁸.

The Works and Functions of *Èpè* on earth

It is the belief of the Yorùbá that *èpè la fi nw'èpè*– curse is used to cure or eradicate curse. This is so in the case of epidemics. In Yoruba belief, epidemics are perceived as the result of invisible forces from the spiritual realm. These occurrences are thought to arise from the displeasure of spiritual entities towards certain individuals or communities, often due to perceived disloyalty, neglect, or the violation of agreements made by humans. Such a spiritual being may curse people to make them feel its impact. To address this situation, *Èpè* can be employed. *Èpè* can also be used to kill dangerous animals. For instance, in an incident where a lion, tiger, cheetah, or wild pig killed a hunter, specific rituals involving *Èpè* can be performed to ensure the animal is killed within a designated timeframe and with minimal effort. With the aid of *Èpè*, the animal may be guided to a location where it can be killed or may even die on its own within that timeframe.

Additionally, if a house is engulfed in flames and water cannot extinguish the fire, *Èpè* can be used to address the situation. It would be said:

Ìnọ̀ ìtapàrà, ọ̀ ta iná sílé yén,

You sparkle, go and set ablaze that building

Ìnọ̀ labalábá ọ̀ fé atégùn sí iná yén

You butterfly go and blow air (breeze) unto the fire

Torí pé,

ojó tí èdúwé ikókò bá fojú kan iná

Because, the very day cocoyam

leaf sets its eyes on fire,

Ojó nàà ní èjè ntán lára rẹ̀

Is the day its blood dries up

Ojó tí ètù bá fojú kan iná

On the day gun powder sets its eyes on fire,

Ojó nàà ní gbà

Is the day it explodes

Kí iná kí ó sọ nínú ilé nàà.

Let fire break out of that house.

The moment the fire starts, it will put off the existing one. This is what is called *Àwònrínwòn Èpè*. *Èpè* can also be used to expel water from somewhere to another place by saying;

¹⁸ Olu Ojo Odewale, Farmer/Hunter, *Personal Interview*, Omi Adio, Ibadan, 12/11/2021

<i>Ìwò omi yí,</i>	You this water,
<i>Bí wòròwò bá fọ́jú kẹ́an oòrùn,</i>	If worowo (<i>solanecio biafra</i>) sets its eyes on the sun,
<i>Ìsẹ ní rọ.</i>	It withers
<i>Bí rinrin bá fọ́jú kẹ́an oòrùn,</i>	If rinrin (<i>peromia pellucida</i>) sets its eyes on the sun,
<i>Ìsẹ ló nọ.</i>	It withers
<i>Ìgbín ọ lapa,</i>	Snail has no hands
<i>Ìgbín ọ lese</i>	Snail has no legs
<i>Ayà nìgbín fí mọ</i>	Snail crawls with its belly
<i>Ẹ̀nìkẹ́n kù fí wúrurùrù ìyẹ́ ẹ́gún rọ́tí</i>	No one pricks the ear with vulture's feather
<i>Ọ̀kú tó bá kú sọmí</i>	Whoever dies in water (river?)
<i>Wón kù gbe wálẹ́ ná sín</i>	Will never be brought home for burial
<i>Ìwò omi yí, ịsẹ ní kẹ́ ọ gẹ.</i>	You this water, dry-up

It was common practice in the past that when establishing a town, it had to be done in the presence of Èṣù. This is because Èṣù is regarded as a guardian and representative of the Creator, Olódùmarè, before both the gods and humans. He reports the actions of both to Olódùmarè. Consequently, if a statue representing Èṣù needs to be removed due to development or other reasons, and if the kolanut is broken for Èṣù but he refuses to move, Èpè would be used to facilitate its removal.

Èpè can also be used to checkmate armed robbery, sanitise the society from hoodlums and checkmate the activities of the witches and wizards. In every town and village in Yorubaland, there must be a meeting place where ritual for the establishment of such a town or village took place like that of Ogunojalu-war cannot subjugate Ogbomoso land¹⁹ in Ogbomoso. This is where the elders will go to place a curse on people that are trying to derail the wheel of progress of such a town or village.

Èpè can be used to secure farm produce and property. In the past, one did not supposed to be present where he or she displays his or her goods for sale. Particularly farm produce that one can display along foot path and used stone to indicate the amount you wanted to sell your goods and go do some other things. One would go and come back to either meet the goods, money, or both without any fear that somebody will steal your goods. That is why in the past, any elder without Èpè is a

¹⁹ Johnson Okunade, 2019, *A Story of Invisibility: Ogun Ojalu Ogbomoso (war cannot subjugate Ogbomoso land)*, <https://mywovenwords.com>, retrieved on 6/9/2021

useless one. The fear of *Ẹ̀pẹ̀* in those good old days is believed to be the beginning of wisdom.

Conclusion

Rather than see *Ẹ̀pẹ̀* solely from a negative point of view, it is beneficial to consider its positive aspect - to see how useful *Ẹ̀pẹ̀* was in the past and that was what this paper actually did. *Ẹ̀pẹ̀* is a blessing in disguise, even the so called negative side that people are looking at today. If one examines the situation critically, it becomes clear that *Ẹ̀pẹ̀* plays a significant role in maintaining law and order in society and curbing hoodlums. Our society could improve if we reverted to some traditional practices, such as incorporating *Ẹ̀pẹ̀* into our economic, political, geographical, social, and religious systems. This belief holds true across Africa, particularly among the Yorùbá people, who maintain faith in the efficacy of *Ẹ̀pẹ̀* regardless of their religious affiliations or social status. As the Yorùbá say, "*ó hénhẹ̀ kò hénhẹ̀, àdúrà tó r'Ẹ̀pẹ̀ lọ*"—no matter how small or insignificant, a prayer uplifts the spirit more than a curse.

Ẹ̀pẹ̀ is a powerful tool that can be used today to cleanse our political system and encourage politicians to act responsibly and listen to the citizens who elected them. In the past, no political officeholders, including kings, could misbehave without understanding the consequences of their actions due to the influence of *Ẹ̀pẹ̀*. Overall, the study revealed that *Ẹ̀pẹ̀* can have both positive and negative effects. Therefore, it is recommended that caution be exercised in its use to maximise its beneficial aspects. At the same time, *Ẹ̀pẹ̀* can be advocated for use in cleansing our society of social vices.

Notes and References

- Arolu Okunade, Herbalist, *Personal Interview*, Ode Oolo, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, 23/4/2021
- Ayo Opefeyintimi, 2010, *Itupale Ẹ̀pẹ̀*, Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.
- Ayo Opefeyintimi, 2010, *Itupale Ẹ̀pẹ̀*, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.
- Ayo Opefeyintimi, 2010, *Itupale Ẹ̀pẹ̀*, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.

- Ayo Opefeyintimi, 2010, *Itupale Èpè*, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.
- Bukola Ayanlaja, 2018, *The Socio-Economic Significance of Agemo Festival in Ijebu Land*, A Long Essay, Submitted to the Department of Religious Studies in partial Fulfillment of B.A. Horns, University of Ibadan.
<http://www.ijebuonlinehistoryofAgemofestival.org.com>. Accessed on 01-06- 2017.
- Johnson Okunade, 2019, *A Story of Invisibility: Ogun Ojalu Ogbomoso (war cannot subjugate Ogbomoso land)*, <https://mywovenwords.com>, retrieved on 6/9/2021
- Kehinde Ogunjebe, *Interview Respondent*, Oke Jagbori Street, Imosan Ijebu. 2/6/ 2017.
- Kola Anifalaje, Herbalist/Farmer, *Telephone Interview*, Ire Ekiti, Ekiti State, 12/11/2021
- Ogunleye Foluso, Herbalist, *Personal Interview*, Itapa Ekiti, 21/6/2021
- Oladiipo Olukoya Iginla, Herbalist, *Oral Interview*, Odolowu, Okunowa, Odogbolu LGA, Ijebu, Ogun State.
- Oladiipo Olukoya Iginla, Herbalist, *Telephone Interview*, Odolowu, Okunowa, Odogbolu LGA, Ijebu, Ogun State, 29/06/2017
- Oladiipo Olukoya Iginla, Herbalist, *Telephone Interview*, Odolowu, Okunowa, Odogbolu LGA, Ijebu, Ogun State, 29/06/2017
- Olu Ojo Odewale, Farmer/Hunter, *Personal Interview*, Omi Adio, Ibadan, 12/11/2021
- Raji S.M, 1991, *Ijinle Ofo, Ogede ati Aasan*, Nigeria: Onibonoje Press & Books Industries (Nig.) Ltd.
- Wande Abimbola, 1968, *Ijinle Obun Enu Ifa Apa Kinni*, UK: W.M. Collins, Sons and Co. Ltd.
- Yemi Elebuibon, 2000, *The Healing Power of Sacrifice*, New York: Athelia Henrietta Press, Inc.

