

INDIGENOUS MARKETS' SACRED SYMBOLS IN YORÙBÁ ORATURE

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Abstract

This paper centres on the sacred symbols embedded in Yoruba orature and verbal arts concerning indigenous markets, examines the signs and symbols used in describing and defining indigenous markets in forms like folklores, proverbs, Ifá sacred verses (Odù and eṣe-Ifá), and other verbal arts that construct and convey meaning in the context of orature and spirituality. This study argues that some existing works on Yorùbá indigenous markets focused mainly on their history, structure, and economic value, to the neglect of treating how the indigenous markets are reflected in the sacred symbols in orature and their spiritual essence, meaning that the spirituality of Yorùbá indigenous markets as reflected in Yorùbá orature has not been fully explored. This created an academic gap. Paying attention to the orature and spirituality of Yorùbá indigenous markets will embody Yorùbá people's values, beliefs, and spiritual practices. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gaping gap. This study's data is generated from Yorùbá orature reflecting indigenous markets as gleaned from Yorùbá myth, song, proverbs, folktales, and Ifá literary corpus. The data collected were transcribed and analyzed within the theoretical framework of Semiotics theory. Therefore, unveiling the sacred symbols embedded in the indigenous marketplace as reflected through orature while interrogating the spirituality of Yorùbá indigenous markets. This study found that Yorùbá indigenous markets are not just economic spaces, but are also sacred sites that reflect the community's values, beliefs, and practices.

Keywords: *Semiotics, Yorùbá Indigenous Markets, Orature, Sacred symbols, Spirituality, Culture, Community Empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

The market is a centre for trading and selling of goods and services, and it is part of human existence since the beginning of time. It is also a cultural domain creating wider patterns of relationships within human society. From time immemorial, the market has been an integral part of the Yorùbá life as it facilitates people's economy, as well as being associated with their traditional system. Hence, the inclusion of Ìyálojà (who is usually the head of the markets are more than mere commercial spaces. Yorùbá markets hold profound spiritual significance, serving as sacred

market women), who works closely with Ìyálóde, a member of the policy-making group of Chiefs in the oba's palace. A market can be described as a highly symbolic space seen from a distance, a forum for talking, a zone where functions and uses can be recovered, as well as an ambiguous space (Olúwatóyìn, 2018). The Yorùbá market is that space that can be described as evolving, as it holds different uses and experiences for diverse people. However, Yorùbá indigenous

meeting grounds for humans, animals, and spirits.

Beyond mere transactions, these markets represent a vibrant realm of Yorùbá cultural interface, weaving together people, animals, and spirits in a rich tapestry of tradition and community. This assertion is reinforced by a verse from the Ifá corpus, *Òfún Méjì*, as recited by Babalawo Ifániyò Okúnọla, the Àràbà Awo of Àwọn in Osun State, Nigeria:

Bí ojà bá tú tán	<i>When the market is over and it becomes empty;</i>
A ku olórí pàtẹpàtẹ	<i>The market's domain becomes the space for the head seller's spirit;</i>
A ku àwọn àgbà sànkò-sàńko	<i>The mature elderly ones left;</i>
A ku ojumida omo awo	<i>And the experienced priest.</i>

In this context, *Olórí Pàtẹpàtẹ* refers to the spirit of the market head whose essence meets with those having spiritual power. Their meeting may be a preparation for the next market day, which may be the next day, the next five days, or the next seven days, depending on the market circles. Markets in Yorubaland and most African societies serve as a convergence point for both the living and the dead. A good example of this is seen in the folktale of Orí and Ọlájùmòkẹ. Ọlájùmòkẹ, the most beautiful girl in the town, fell in love with a handsome man she met in the market without realizing that he was only a skull. She followed him as the skull returned the various parts he borrowed to come to the market. At the end, when Ọlájùmòkẹ reached the skull town, she couldn't escape, and every time she tried running away, the guard sang:

Orí Orí o -Ọlájùmòkẹ ń lọ
 Orí o lápá -Ọlájùmòkẹ ń lọ
 Orí ò lẹşẹ -Ọlájùmòkẹ ń lọ
 Orí Orí o -Ọlájùmòkẹ ń lọ

An Ifá verse reinforces this idea, suggesting that even during bustling market sessions, ghosts are present among the sellers and buyers. However, only those endowed with spiritual insight can identify them. It says:

Àwọn bó ó kólá ó kólá	<i>Beings who ask you to buy okro if you want to buy okro;</i>
Àwọn bó ó káta ó káta	<i>Beings who ask you to buy pepper if you want to buy pepper;</i>
Ènikan kí yẹ ojú òkú wò lója Èjìgbòmẹkùn	<i>No one dares to check ghost's faces in Èjìgbòmẹkùn market.</i>

These Ifá corpus underscore the market's significance as a spiritual nexus, where the living and the dead intersect. This is because the Yoruba time perception is based on an interaction between the past, the present, and the future. Those markets are not just about transactions; they are realms of Yorùbá cultural interface that connect people, animals, and spirits. Moreso, Yorùbá market also serves as an important centre for several traditional religious celebrations and ceremonies (Obateru, 2006 as cited in Olúwatóyìn 2018). The main reason for siting markets in front of oba's palace in the olden days was to reinforce the sacred and political significance of the marketplace, ensuring it remained under royal authority and spiritual protection before globalization introduced shopping malls.

The Yorùbá people are a prominent ethnic group indigenous to southwestern Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. With a population exceeding 30 million people (Peel, 2000), they are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa. As of 2024, estimates suggest that their population has grown significantly, surpassing 51 million people, according to Wikipedia. The Yorùbá people have a rich cultural heritage, with a strong art, music, and literature tradition. However, Yorùbá people have thrived for centuries, cultivating a rich cultural heritage that permeates every aspect of their lives. Among the many vibrant expressions of Yorùbá culture is an indigenous market. And it stands out as a sacred space where commerce, community, and spirituality intersect. These markets, often overlooked in favour of modern commercial centers,

embody the very essence of Yorùbá's identity and wisdom.

Yorùbá orature and verbal arts refer to the oral tradition of Yorùbá people -storytelling, proverbs, songs, incantations, panegyrics, legends, and myths. For the Yorùbá, oral literature is deeply intertwined with spirituality and religious beliefs. Thus, the concepts of orature and spirituality are two seemingly related terminologies that work together. Orature could also refer to the oral traditions and stories passed down through generations. However, it plays a vital role in shaping the spirituality and cultural values of Yorùbá people, which is reflected in their indigenous markets. Through the spoken word, ancestors' wisdom, and mythological tales, the Yorùbá people have preserved their history, beliefs, and practices, weaving a complex tapestry of meaning and significance. It is a fact that scholars like Abímbólá (1968), Otakepor, (1996), Òkéwándé, (2017 & 2020), Àjàyí and Fátùróti (2019), and Agboólá, (2021) have conducted studies on Yorùbá Indigenous markets focusing mainly on the history, structure, and economic value without investigating how the market features in Yorùbá orature and the embedded spirituality of market. Thus, orature's depiction of the market and spirituality of Yorùbá indigenous markets has not been fully explored. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap.

However, the exploration of sacred spaces within the context of Yorùbá indigenous markets necessitates a nuanced understanding of the semiotic systems that underpin both her depiction in orature and the spirituality aspect of the market. In Yorùbá culture, markets serve not only as economic centers but also as vital arenas for spiritual expression and community cohesion. This study, therefore, posits that these vibrant environments are imbued with symbols and meanings that transcend mere transactional interactions, reflecting deeper cultural and spiritual significances. Engaging in a semiotic analysis, this study aims to unravel the layers of meaning attached to the spatial dynamics,

rituals, and oral traditions present in these markets. Moreover, the interplay between the physical space of the market and the oral narratives shared therein creates a rich tapestry of meaning that reinforces cultural identity and continuity. In examining this interplay, the study endeavors to contribute to a broader understanding of how sacred spaces function within Yorùbá spirituality.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework provides a foundational structure for data transcription, analysis, and interpretation, guiding researchers throughout the research process. It facilitates the definition of research problems and objectives, identification of key variables, formulation of hypotheses, selection of methods and techniques, and interpretation of findings. However, applying theoretical frameworks to literary analysis is not mandatory but is essential for providing the research with depth, context, and meaning. Therefore, this research employed semiotics theory to ensure the clarity, focus, and reliability of this study's findings.

Semiotics Theory

Many scholars from various fields of studies have worked on semiotics among which are: Peirce (1931) Barthes (1961), Eco (1976), Morris (1980), Danesi and Perron (1999) and Chandler (2001) but this work falls within the theoretical framework of semiotic theory of Peirce 1931 whose theory gives a broader scope, despite Ferdinand De Saussure being the acclaimed founding father of the theory. Peirce widens the scope of semiotics beyond the Sausurian conception, which only recognizes the linguistic signs used in human communication. Peirce (1931) observes that human beings are meaning-makers who make meanings through their creation and interpretation of signs. Man and everything in his environment are signs; thus, they are meaning potentials. Peirce even extends his philosophical semiotics to human ideas, saying that ideas are also signs.

However, Barthes's (1961) opinion on semiotics bridged the gap between Saussurean and Peircian. He employs the Saussurean lexical term "semiology" but adopts the Peircian conceptual scope of semiotics. Barthes (1961) argues that semiology studies all systems of signs - whether images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, or their combined use in rituals and public spectacles. While these may not function as formal languages, they nevertheless operate as structured systems of meaning. Morris (1980) defines semiotics as the study of signs which are initially subjective, as a result of which the discipline cannot offer any universal "theoretical assumption, model, and empiricist". He observes that semiotics not only later became publicized and conventionalized but also was interspersed with syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics based on their respective reflection on language rules and meanings.

Eco (1976) conceptualizes semiotics as a field that has come to teach that reality is a construction. That is, reality is a system of signs that cannot be taken for granted as purely objective, independent of human interpretation. (Eco, 1976, p. 7), once it is imbued with meaning potentials. In semiotics, a sign is seen as a subjective or individual property. Because meaning is subjective, it takes time for members of a speech or cultural community to establish it. In other words, men create meaning out of the available forms of signs, sometimes in an immeasurable, gradual manner. Those meanings are based on how we interpret our world based on values and experience, and make them understandable to others through representation and communicative structures.

Peirce (1931) semiotics involves a triangular relationship between three key elements: the sign (the symbol or representation), the object (the thing or concept being represented), and the interpretation (the meaning derived from the sign), which collectively facilitate the conveyance of meaning. Peirce states that signs could be words, images, sounds, odors,

flavors, acts, or objects. He maintains that signs are what they are - ordinary until they are invested with meaning. Peirce asserts that nothing is a sign until it is interpreted as a sign. Interpretation, therefore, is a meaning-investing mechanism that relates a sign form to a familiar system of conventions or concepts. This is because the former not only subsumes graphitic code but also goes beyond to encompass all objects that have meaning potentials. It is therefore deductible that "everything can be taken as a sign, even though it could be a sign".

This implies that anything can be considered a sign, regardless of its inherent qualities or characteristics. In other words, the potential for something to be a sign is not determined by its intrinsic nature, but rather by how it is perceived, interpreted, or used by individuals or cultures. Peirce opines that a sign is any communicative code system, linguistic and non-linguistic. He views signs from triadic angles.

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation, offers a critical lens through which to explore sacred spaces, particularly within the context of Yorùbá Indigenous markets. In these environments, semiotic analysis reveals how culturally specific signs, such as artifacts, rituals, and oral narratives, communicate complex spiritual meanings and social values. Sacred spaces serve as a canvas upon which the interplay between language and meaning unfolds, creating a rich tapestry of orature that reflects the community's collective consciousness. As suggested in the research surrounding the invocation of oral narratives in Nigerian films, the translation of these narratives into cultural expressions underscores the importance of intertextuality in understanding semiotic relationships within sacred spaces (Usman et al., 2019). This allows for a deeper appreciation of how memory and materiality shape spiritual experiences, thereby enriching the significance of communal rituals and interactions (Penna et al., 2023).

Relevance of Peircian's Semiotics Theory to This Study

Peircian's Semiotics Theory provides an insightful framework for understanding the complex relationships between signs, symbols, and meanings in Yorùbá indigenous markets.

The theory offers a profound framework for understanding the intricate dynamics of the sacred space of orature and spirituality in Yorùbá indigenous markets, where signs, symbols, and meanings intersect to convey spiritual significance.

Peircian's semiotics theory, particularly its classification of signs into icons, indices, and symbols, offers a valuable framework for understanding the spiritual interpretation of signs and symbols within the context of Yorùbá indigenous markets.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE ON MARKETS

The concept of markets, particularly in the context of Yorùbá indigenous markets, has garnered significant attention from scholars across various disciplines. A burgeoning body of literature has emerged, shedding light on these markets' complex dynamics, cultural nuances, and economic significance. Building on this foundation, other scholars like Öztürk (2013), Aliu and Solanke (2017), and Tẹwógbòyè (2020) have further enriched the discourse, highlighting the importance of considering the social, cultural, and spiritual contexts in which these markets operate. This review aims to synthesize the existing literature, identifying key themes, gaps, and areas for further research on Yorùbá indigenous markets.

Concept of Indigenous Markets

The concept of indigenous markets refers to traditional market systems that have evolved, deeply rooted in the cultural, social, and economic fabric of indigenous communities. These markets are characterized by unique

institutional arrangements, social norms, and cultural practices that shape the exchange of goods and services. Indigenous markets often operate outside the formal economy, with transactions frequently based on bartering, reciprocity, and social relationships rather than monetary exchange. They play a vital role in promoting local economic development, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering community cohesion, as seen in the context of Yorùbá indigenous markets in Nigeria, where markets are not only economic spaces but also cultural and spiritual hubs that reflect the community's values, beliefs, and traditions.

Al-Modaf (2009) provides a seminal contribution to understanding culture's role in the marketplace, arguing that despite capitalism's constraints, culture significantly influences economic relationships. Through a sociologically theoretical review and critique, Al-Modaf demonstrates how culture shapes and determines the content of people's relationships within the economy and markets, challenging Marx's notion that culture does not influence capital. Instead, Al-Modaf posits that culture considerably impacts socioeconomic relationships, influencing perceptions, motivations, responses, attitudes, and ultimately behavior. While acknowledging that culture's role is relative and contingent upon external factors, Al-Modaf emphasizes that it is a crucial consideration in any study of economic and market transactions, underscoring the need to appreciate culture's profound effects on human behavior in financial contexts.

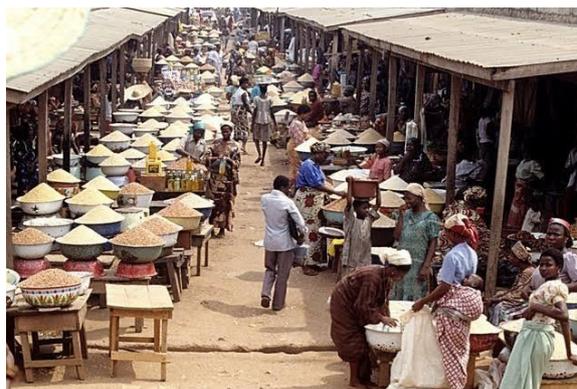


Figure 1. Image of Market Structure

In the context of indigenous market revitalization, the literature suggests that efforts to revive traditional markets should prioritize preserving their cultural essence while enhancing their competitiveness with modern markets. Puspasutari Ujjanti and Dewi's (2021) study on traditional market revitalization in Denpasar City highlights the importance of balancing physical renovations with the need to maintain the "spirit" of traditional markets. The authors caution that altering the fundamental character of traditional markets can erode their value as cultural tourism attractions, ultimately deterring tourists from seeking authentic cultural experiences. This understanding is especially pertinent to Yorùbá local market systems, where cultural heritage and traditional practices are deeply intertwined with market activities. Effective revitalization strategies must therefore carefully consider the potential impacts on the cultural identity and spiritual significance of these markets.

Öztürk's (2013) study on the importance of social and cultural environmental factors in international marketing strategies, using the Turkish market as a case study, provides valuable insights relevant to the context of Yorùbá indigenous markets. The author emphasizes the significance of considering social and cultural factors in marketing strategies, highlighting how these factors can influence consumer behavior and purchasing decisions. This is particularly pertinent to Yorùbá indigenous markets, where cultural and social norms play a crucial role in shaping market activities and interactions. Öztürk's findings suggest that marketers must be sensitive to the cultural and social nuances of their target market and adapt their strategies accordingly. This is of heightened importance in Yorùbá indigenous markets due to the

A specific Ifá narrative from the Òdí Méjì corpus recounts the origin of Akèsán market, naming it after King Akèsán. Babalawo Ifátádé Awóyínká, the Ajítẹnà of Èdẹ land in

Osun State, Nigeria, in reciting this narrative, confirms this. The excerpt below illustrates the significance of Akèsán market:

Concept of Yorùbá Indigenous Markets

The concept of Yorùbá indigenous markets is deeply rooted in the cultural and economic traditions of the Yorùbá people. Yorùbá indigenous markets have existed for centuries, serving as a hub for economic activities, social interactions, and cultural exchange. These markets are physical spaces for buying and selling goods and spiritual and cultural centres where the Yorùbá people connect with their ancestors, deities, and the divine.

The origin of Yorùbá indigenous markets can be traced back to Akèsán and Èjìgbòmekùn markets, because of their being prominently featured in various Yorùbá myths, folklores, Ifá verses, maxims, and proverbs. These ancient markets are also known as Ojà Oba (King's market), and are significant to the Yorùbá people. Notably, Èjìgbòmekùn is believed to have existed since the time of Òrúnmilà, with Ifá frequently referencing this market in its corpus. In other words, Àjàyí and Fátúròtì (2019) claim that the mythical narrative of Òranfè and Ajé's descent from heaven culminates in their eventual settlement in Ile-Ife. The location they chose would later become the renowned Èjìgbòmekùn market. However, Èjìgbòmekùn market was traditionally established by Oduduwa as a king's market. This custom of siting the market in front of the Oba's Palace and calling such a market Ojà Oba -has been perpetuated by Yorùbá monarchs to date (Oluwatoyin 2018).

Osun State, Nigeria, in reciting this narrative, confirms this. The excerpt below illustrates the significance of Akèsán market:

Bírikótó ni wón n pilè àwòn

The net was planned with a small, rounded shape at the beginning;

Tóbá dókè tán	<i>When it gets to the top;</i>
A gbodó	<i>It will carry mortar;</i>
A gboḷo	<i>It will carry a grinding stone;</i>
A si máa ṣenu kàkàkà gbemi	<i>The mouth would have been widened;</i>
A díá fún Akèsán tí í sawo Olùdájà	<i>The Ifá divination made for Akèsán, the founder of the market;</i>
Akèsán n dádé	<i>Akèsán wears the crown;</i>
Aya rẹ́ n dájà	<i>While his wife establishes markets.</i>

This Ifá corpus narrative confirms that the Akèsán market was the first market founded by a king. Consequently, other markets established by kings in Yorùbá society were located near the king's palace. A Yorùbá proverb about King Jáyin in Ọyọ supports this, that "Bó kù dẹdẹ ká gbéwì dọjà Akèsán Ọba Jáyin tẹrígbaso" (When it remains a small distance to parade iwì masquerade to Akèsán market, King Jáyin committed suicide). This proverb highlights the proximity of Akèsán market to the then palace of Aláàfin Jáyin of Ọyọ kingdom.

Similar market names can be found in other Yorùbá communities, such as Aràkèsán market in Àkùré and Èrẹkèsán in Adó-Èkìtì. These markets, although named differently due to dialectical variations, share a common origin with the Akèsán market. The establishment of Yorùbá indigenous markets was not an ordinary process but was rather guided by the direction of the king. This fact is in line with the views of Àjàyí and Fátúrótí (2019, p:99), who noted that:

Before a market could be established, it had to be at the discretion of the king, who in turn would engage the services of the diviners for consultation with the Ifá oracle to determine the location of the proposed market and its period. In most towns, markets are usually located in front of the king's palaces, which were usually the centres of the cities. Such markets were aptly titled Ọjà Ọbà (king's market). In Ile-Ifẹ, for instance, Ọjà Ọba is located on a stone throne in the king's palace. The market is usually given other appellations like Ọjà Ifẹ (Ifẹ market), Ọjà Ajé (Ajé's market), Ọjà Èjìgbòmẹkùn (Èjìgbòmẹkùn market), Ọjà Ìlú (town's market) and most

remarkably Ọjà Ọrúnmilà (Ọrúnmilà's market).

Furthermore, the Ọfinranẹkùn (Ọfún + Ọkànran) corpus of Ifá, as chanted by Babalawo Awólówò Agbójúlẹfá Awógbilé, the Àràbà Awo of Ìka Ọràngún land in Èjìgbò Local Government Area of Ọsun State, Nigeria, reveals that:

Ajá ní sawo mọndún wówó	<i>The dog is known for its barking;</i>
Àgbò ní sawo mọndún mọnmòn	<i>The ram is known for its bleating;</i>
A díá fún Ọba	<i>Is the Ifá divination for the king;</i>
Ọba ní lọ lẹẹ dájà	<i>The king will establish a market</i>
A díá fún Ìnànkí	<i>A divination made for the gorilla;</i>
Ìnànkí ní lọ lẹẹ tújà Ọba	<i>The gorilla will scatter the king's market;</i>
Ó ní àlùtònà ni wón n na ọun	<i>while they give the beating of his life;</i>
Ìnànkí ọ màrà rọjú à n kólù dọjà	<i>The gorilla would not have the chance of taking drums to the market.</i>

This corpus of Ifá reaffirms that most Yorùbá indigenous markets were established by kings. Olúwatóyìn (2018) explains that the role of the monarch in ancient market systems is evident at this point. Ọbátẹrù (2003) notes that the temple played a pivotal role in directing market functions, including procurement, storage, and distribution. This oversight enabled the monarch to supervise all production and manufacturing activities, thereby exerting sacred influence to ensure

honesty and prevent disputes (Kamau, 1973; Obátérù, 2003, as cited in Olúwatóyìn, 2018).

Téwógbòyè's (2020) semiotic investigation of the relations between Ifá and Yorùbá indigenous markets, market's location, and marketing theories offers a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play in Yorùbá indigenous markets. By examining the symbolic connections between Ifá, a traditional Yorùbá divination system, and the spatial and economic aspects of Yorùbá markets, Téwógbòyè sheds light on how cultural and spiritual practices shape the structure and function of these markets. Téwógbòyè's research demonstrates how the principles of Ifá influence the location, layout, and marketing strategies of Yorùbá markets, underscoring the importance of contextualizing market activities within the broader cultural and spiritual landscape of the Yorùbá people. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate relationships between culture, spirituality, and economic practices in Yorùbá indigenous markets. His study reveals the profound significance of Ifá in shaping the cultural and economic landscape of Yorùbá indigenous markets, demonstrating how spiritual connotations underpin the institution, sustenance, and success of these markets. The research highlights the intricate relationships between Ifá, market days, and marketing strategies, illustrating how these elements are imbued with religious symbolism that remains unchanged across Yorùbá nations.

In Yorùbá culture, markets are believed to be sacred spaces, imbued with spiritual energy and power. Apter (1992) noted that Yorùbá markets are often located near holy sites, such as shrines, temples, and groves, which are believed to be inhabited by ancestral spirits and deities. The marketplaces themselves are also believed to be occupied by spiritual entities, which are appeased through rituals, sacrifices, and offerings. This spiritual dimension of Yorùbá markets underscores the importance of spirituality in the economic and social lives of the Yorùbá people.

Yorùbá indigenous markets are an integral part of the cultural and economic landscape of Nigeria. These markets have existed for centuries, serving as centers of commerce, socialization, and cultural exchange. Peel (1983) avers that Yorùbá markets are characterized by their vibrant and dynamic atmosphere, with traders and customers engaging in lively negotiations and transactions. Some notable Yorùbá indigenous markets in Nigeria include:

- Ojuwoye Market, Mushin (Lagos State)
- Balogun Market, Lagos Island (Lagos State)
- Oshodi Market, Oshodi (Lagos State)
- Lekki Market, Lagos (Lagos State)
- Idumota Market, Lagos (Lagos State)
- Ketu Market, Lagos (Lagos State)
- Itoku Market, Abeokuta (Ogun State)
- Ita Osu Market, Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde (Ogun State)
- Kuto Market, Abeokuta (Ogun State)
- Ogele Market, Ondo (Ondo State)
- Lafenwa Market, Ondo (Ondo State)
- Igbo oja Market, Ondo (Ondo State)
- Oja Ale Market, Osogbo (Osun State)
- Owode Market, Ife (Osun State)
- Sabo Market, Osogbo (Osun State)
- Ayegbaju Market, Osogbo (Osun State)
- Oja-Ifa Market, Ife (Osun State)
- Odo-Ogbe Market, Ilesha- (Osun State)
- Oja Oba Market, Ibadan (Oyo State)
- Gbagi Market, Ibadan (Oyo State)
- Oje Market, Ibadan (Oyo State)
- Owode Market, Ibadan (Oyo State)

Olúkojú (2003) opines that these markets play a crucial role in Nigeria's economic development by providing employment opportunities for millions of people and generating significant revenue for the government. Additionally, these markets serve as important centers of cultural exchange and socialization, where people from different backgrounds come together to buy and sell goods, share stories, and celebrate cultural events.

In Yorùbá culture, markets have long been an integral part of the social and economic fabric of society. Many ancient Yorùbá indigenous

markets have names that reflect their spiritual significance, often derived from the names of deities, ancestors, or other spiritual entities. These market names serve as a testament to the deep-seated cultural and spiritual values that underpin Yorùbá society. Some notable ancient Yorùbá indigenous markets are listed below:

- Akèsán
- Èjìgbòmèkùn
- Òjé
- Apòmù
- Ojà Oba
- Àtákúmòsà
- Ògèlé
- Ojà alé
- Ojà Ojoojúmó
- Ojà Oṣoṣún
- Ojà Isán
- Ojà Itádógún
- Ojà Beṣe

SACRED SYMBOLS IN YORÙBÁ ORATURE ABOUT YORÙBÁ INDIGENOUS MARKETS

In Yorùbá indigenous markets, sacred symbols play a vital role in connecting the mundane space of commerce to the spiritual realm. These symbols, imbued with deep cultural and spiritual significance, transform the market into a sacred space where the divine and human intersect. By invoking the power of the gods and ancestors, these symbols facilitate communication, exchange, and reciprocity between the physical and spiritual worlds, ultimately sustaining the market community's social, economic, and spiritual well-being.

Ajé (Cowry Shell)

Ajé (cowry shell) is a potent symbol embodying intricate financial dynamics. Beyond its historical use as a currency, the cowry shell represents a profound connection between the market and the Ajé Deity, the goddess of wealth, prosperity, and fertility (Abiodun, 2014). This sacred association underscores the market's reliance on divine benevolence for its prosperity, transcending

the cowry shell's monetary value to encompass a deeper, spiritual significance.

As an embodiment of the Ajé Deity's power, the cowry shell symbolizes the divine forces of prosperity and abundance, thereby ensuring the market's economic vibrancy. This sacred significance is further underscored by the traditional presence of an Ajé shrine (OjúbọAjé) in a strategically located spot within the Market Square.



Figure 2: Image of Cowry Shell

Babaláwo Ifátúndé, a respected Ifá priest from Ilé-Ifè, Òsun State, gave a testament of this when he recited this excerpt from Èjì Ogbè, one of Ifá literary corpus that:

Ajé ló bí ojà	<i>Ajé is the mother of market;</i>
Ojà ló bí Ajé	<i>Market is Ajé's mother;</i>
A díá fún Èjìwòwò	<i>Is the Ifá divination for Èjìwòwò;</i>
Tó lóun ó lọ ná ojà láì mowó lówó	<i>The one who wants to go and buy things in the market without money;</i>
A kíí perí ojà láì lówó lówó o	<i>No one talks about the market without having Money;</i>
Èjìwòwò má najú rojà láì mowó lówó	<i>Èjìwòwò, do not just go to market without money.</i>

This excerpt illuminates the inextricable bond between Ajé (wealth) and the market, underscoring the sacred significance of the Ajé shrine within the marketplace. As the Yorùbá goddess of wealth, Ajé embodies the vital force that sustains commercial activity,

rendering the shrine an indispensable nexus between financial prosperity and the market's dynamism.

This is also confirmed in the folk riddle below, which reveals the sacred symbolism of "Àdàbà" in the context of market structure and paraphernalia. Àdàbà serves as a semiotic representation of money, which is the ultimate goal of market experiences.

Alò Apamò:	<i>Riddle;</i>
Àdàbà kelúkelú	<i>Àdàbà is curly and twisted;</i>
Àdàbà kelùkelù	<i>Adaba is curly and twisted;</i>
Ojoojúmọ ní pàrà oja	<i>It parades itself in the market every day;</i>
Ìdáhùn:	<i>Answer: Money.</i>

In the riddle above, "àdàbà" is used as a metaphor for money. The description of adaba as "curly and twisted" may symbolize the complexities and challenges associated with acquiring wealth. The riddle's answer, "owó" (money), reinforces the idea that àdàbà represents a valuable and sought-after commodity in the market. From a semiotic perspective, àdàbà can be seen as a signifier that represents the concept of money. The use of àdàbà in this context highlights the cultural significance of money in Yoruba society and the importance of markets as spaces for economic exchange.

Èṣù, Oya and Ajé

Èṣù and Oya are two prominent Yorùbá deities whose spiritual significance in the market cannot be overstated. Èṣù, the messenger god, is revered as the guardian of crossroads, markets, and commerce (Pemberton, 1975). His presence in the market ensures the free flow of goods, services, and ideas. Oya, the goddess of storms, change, and transformation, is also worshiped in the market, as her power is believed to bring prosperity and protection to traders (Washington, 2005). The reverence for Èṣù

and Oya in the market highlights the Yorùbá people's recognition of the spiritual forces that shape their economic and social lives.

Beyond Èṣù's fundamental role as guardian of crossroads, markets, and commerce, the Yorùbá proverb "Ajé ló bí ojà" (Ajé gives birth to the market) suggests that Ajé is the embodiment of the market. The Èjì Ogbè corpus in Ifá divination supports this notion. In semiotic terms, Ajé serves as a sign that conveys meaning about the market, as posited by Peirce's semiotics theory (1931). This idea is reinforced by traditional Yorùbá market greetings, such as "È kú Ojà" "È kú ajé", "È kú orò Ajé", "Yòò bá Ojà o" and "Yòò bá Ajé o". These greetings imply a prosperous market experience. The intrinsic connection between Ajé and the market (Oja) underscores their inseparability. This, in turn, highlights the significance of the primordial bond between Èṣù and Ajé, which necessitates the inclusion of the Èṣù shrine in the market square.

Saadu's (2021) research on the form and content of Èṣù-related poetry reveals that there is no uniformity of facts in the myth surrounding the primordial bond between Èṣù and Ajé. Although various versions of the myth exist, each with unique aspects, one constant theme emerges: Ajé is consistently depicted as a female deity with a primordial bond with Èṣù. This implies a profound connection between Ajé and Èṣù, which aligns with the Ifá corpus, specifically Ìdin Èṣù, that:

Ifá ni koko fèrè odere gèsìgèsì	<i>Ifá says koko fèrè odere gèsìgèsì "name of Oluwo";</i>
Ibi tí a bá fì igbó sì lóníí ibè ni a ó bá a lóla	<i>Wherever we see bush today, that's where we will find it tomorrow;</i>
A díá fún Èṣù Òdàrà tí ní lọ lè e bi owó bi orò sílé	<i>The Ifá divination made for Èṣù Òdàrà,</i>

Awo	<i>who goes to vomit, money, and wealth at a priest's residence;</i>
Wọ̀n ẹ̀ ọ̀gòròr	<i>They say in plenty;</i>
Èṣù màá n̄ bì	<i>Èṣù continuing to vomit;</i>
Bí ó ẹ̀ n̄ bì okùn (fàdákà) ni ẹ̀ n̄ bì idẹ	<i>Just as he vomits Silver, so he vomits Brass;</i>
Ọ̀gòròrẹ̀ Èṣù màá n̄ bì.	In plenty, Esu continues to vomit.

This excerpt confirms that Èṣù Ọ̀dàrà possesses the power to control and distribute Ajé wealth at will, supporting the Yorùbá proverb "Èṣù ló ni owó" (Èṣù owns the money). Consequently, individuals seeking wealth often make atonement to Èṣù Ọ̀dàrà. The strategic placement of Èṣù Ọ̀dàrà's shrine within the Yorùbá Indigenous market is justified by these beliefs. Notably, there exists a distinct entity, Èṣù Alájé, specifically dedicated to Ajé and initiated for that purpose.

The presence of Èṣù, Oya, and Ajé shrines in the Yorùbá indigenous market is a deliberate occupation of sacred space. These shrines serve as signs representing the values that govern the market's atmospheric conditions, transforming it into a vibrant hub for human transactions, animal interactions, and spiritual convergences. From a semiotic perspective, the shrines of these divinities convey distinct meanings. Oya, embodied as a female, symbolizes the traditional role of women as market custodians. Èṣù, on the other hand, represents security and justice, ensuring balance and order within the market. Meanwhile, Ajé, as the god of wealth, exercises control over the market's prosperity, underscoring the intricate relationships between commerce, spirituality, and community.

Rituals and ceremonies in Yorùbá Indigenous markets utilize symbols like Ajé, Èṣù, and Oya to connect the market to the spiritual realm. Rituals and ceremonies like Ọ̀dún Ajé, Èṣù,

and Oya reinforce the connection between the market and the spiritual realm. These events involve sacred objects, cowry shells, and other items of sacrifice and oratures that invoke divine blessings and protection. The following oratures are commonly rendered during various market ceremonies to invoke the spirit of Ajé:

Ajé wámi wá o nílẹ̀ ayé	<i>Ajé visit me in this world;</i>
Ajé wámi wá o mo màá ti ẹ̀tùtù	<i>Ajé visit me, I have done the necessary sacrifice;</i>
Ajé yalé mi wá jẹran ọ̀gèdẹ̀	<i>Ajé visit my house and eat banana.</i>

These oratures serve as invocations, seeking Ajé's blessings, protection, and prosperity in market endeavors. Ajé, the Yoruba deity of wealth, prosperity, and fertility, is revered for her role in facilitating success and growth. The following orature illustrates the Yoruba people's reliance on Ajé for prosperity:

Ajé maa bọ̀ lódòmi o	<i>Ajé come to me;</i>
Ajé maa bọ̀ lódò mi	<i>Ajé come to me;</i>
Èmi ọ̀ lẹ̀ nikan ẹ̀lẹ̀ ayé	<i>I cannot succeed in life alone;</i>
Èmi ọ̀ lẹ̀ nikan ẹ̀lẹ̀ ayé o	<i>I cannot succeed in life alone;</i>
Ajé maa bọ̀ lódò mi	<i>Ajé come to me.</i>

These oratures emphasize the importance of Ajé's guidance and blessings in achieving success. Another orature highlights Ajé's significance in human development:

Ajé ní n̄ sọ ẹ̀wẹ̀ dàgbà	<i>It is Ajé that turns younger ones to elders;</i>
Ajé ní sọ ẹ̀wẹ̀ dàgbà	<i>It is Ajé that turns younger ones to elders;</i>
Àdàbà kẹ̀kẹ̀lúke o	<i>Àdàbà is curly and twisted;</i>
Ajé ní sọ ẹ̀wẹ̀ dàgbà	<i>It is Ajé that turns younger ones to elders.</i>

This song underscores Ajé's role in nurturing and guiding individuals from youth to adulthood, emphasizing her influence on human growth and development.

The symbolism in these oratures reinforces the idea that the market is a sacred space. Ajé, as a symbol of wealth and prosperity, is invoked to ensure the market's continued success. The use of Adaba, representing wealth and material prosperity, further emphasizes the market's connection to the spiritual realm. These various forms of oratures demonstrate how Yoruba market participants acknowledge and honour the spiritual forces shaping their economic and social lives. By invoking Ajé and using sacred symbols, market participants seek to ensure prosperity, protection, and blessings in their endeavors.

Òsùnwòn (Measurement)

Òsùnwòn, or measurement, is a seemingly mundane aspect of market transactions, but it holds profound spiritual significance in Yorùbá Indigenous markets. To cater to the diverse needs of traders and customers, the Yorùbá market employs various traditional measurement units. These units are designed to accommodate different quantities and types of goods, ensuring accuracy and fairness in transactions. The traditional measurement units used in the Yorùbá market include the ahá, apèrè, igbá, and ságo measurement. The ahá is carved from the gourd of a calabash and is used for measuring small quantities of liquids or solids. The apèrè is a local basket used for measuring dry goods like grains or tubers. The igbá is a sizable calabash for measuring larger quantities of liquids or solids. Lastly, the ságo measurement is specifically used for measuring palm wine. These measurement units are vital in facilitating trade, particularly for farm produce and liquid commodities. The market primarily features farm produce such as maize, corn, groundnuts, soya beans, and millet.

Standardized measurements are believed to ensure fairness, honesty, and transparency in

trade (Lloyd, 1953). However, beyond its practical application, measurement is also seen as a means of maintaining balance and harmony in the market. The precise measurement of goods is thought to prevent chaos and disorder, reflecting the Yorùbá concept of "iwà" (character or balance), which is essential for maintaining social and cosmic order. The òsùnwòn holds a revered position in the Yorùbá market, embodying a profound spiritual significance that transcends its functional use as a measurement tool. Its sacred essence is deeply intertwined with the market's dynamics, influencing the ebb and flow of commerce. This spiritual dimension of òsùnwòn is eloquently captured in the Òdí Meji corpus, as recited by Awo Ifámákindé in Èjìgbò Local Government area of Osun state:

Igbá tó bá fọ ní máa n gbá kasan	<i>A sacred calabash that settles disputes and brings balance;</i>
Àfọ̀nńfótán ikòkò a máa dikàrò mónrùn;	<i>The revered one with a high sense of judgment;</i>
A díá fún òsùnwòn	<i>Is the divination for òsùnwòn</i>
Níjọ tí n lọ sójà Èjìgbòmekùn;	<i>When he went to Èjìgbòmekùn Market;</i>
A díá fún òsùnwòn	<i>Is the divination for òsùnwòn;</i>
Níjọ tí n lọ sójà Èjìgbòmekùn;	<i>When he went to Èjìgbòmekùn Market</i>
Wọ̀n ẹ̀ gbédè má lọ o;	<i>Go gently into market;</i>
Òsùnwòn ó bà mà mà dúró o gbédè má lọ	<i>Òsùnwòn do not wait, go gently;</i>

According to Yorùbá mythology, òsùnwòn was a revered spiritual being renowned for his wisdom and sense of justice. In the face of injustice and disorder at Èjìgbòmèkùn market, òsùnwòn was invoked to restore balance. Despite initial resistance from his disciples, òsùnwòn persevered and successfully brought peace and orderliness to the market. Since then, òsùnwòn has become an integral part of the market structure.

Òsùnwòn, as a sacred item in the Yorùbá Indigenous market, is a potent symbol of peace and orderliness. Its presence signifies the importance of balance and harmony in commercial transactions. The mythology surrounding òsùnwòn reinforces its semiotic significance, emphasizing the need for wisdom, justice, and perseverance in maintaining social order. As a cultural artifact, òsùnwòn embodies the values of the Yorùbá people, serving as a reminder of the interconnectedness of commerce, community, and spirituality.

MARKET AS SACRED SYMBOL IN YORUBA TRADITION

In the metaphysical understanding of sacred space, Yorùbá market holds a profound significance that transcends its physical realm. This is reflected in several Yorùbá sayings that create a connection between life (ayé) and the market (ojà). For instance, a Yoruba proverb In a traditional Yorùbá folk song, Ojà market is metaphorically depicted as a liminal space where the mortal realm converges with the spiritual realm of the ancestors. The song's lyrics reveal this nuanced understanding of Ojà market:

Lílé: Èrò tí n rò jéje market); Ègbè: Òjéje	Lead: Those going to Òjéje (Òjé) Chorus: Òjéje;
Lílé: Èrò tí n rò jéje market); Ègbè: Òjéje	Lead: Those going to Òjéje (Òjé) Chorus: Òjéje;

that says "Ayé lojà, Òrun nilé" (The world is a market and heaven is home) underscores the market's role as a microcosm of life itself. Another saying, "Ayé Loja, Ojà laye" (the world is a market and the market is a world), further reinforces this notion. It implies that the market is not just a physical space, but a reflection of the world's complexities and dynamics. Furthermore, the saying "Èdá wáye wá nája ní" (humans are in the world to bargain and negotiate) highlights the market's role as a space for human interaction and exchange.

In Yorùbá tradition, the market (ojà) is also believed to possess a spiritual essence, comprising both malevolent and benevolent forces. This is evident in the prayers offered by traders, who seek to appease the market spirits and ensure a profitable day. The prayer "A jé o wa, a ó jẹ ojà, ẹ ó bá ojà, ẹ ó bá ajé, a ó jẹ ojà, ojà kò ní jẹ wá " (We will make profit from the market, the market will not eat us) reflects this desire to maintain a harmonious relationship with the market's spiritual energies. The sacred symbolism of the market in Yorùbá tradition is thus multifaceted, encompassing the physical, metaphysical, and spiritual realms. By examining these various dimensions, we can gain a deeper understanding of the market's significance in Yorùbá culture and its role in shaping the lives of individuals and communities.

Lílé: Ẹ bá mí kí yèyè mí o Ègbè: Òjéje	Lead: Greet my mother for me; Chorus: Òjéje;
Lílé: Iṣu tó fí sílè fún mí Ègbè: Òjéje	Lead: The yam my mother left for me; Chorus: Òjéje;
Lílé: Ní orogún ṣe fọmọ rẹ jẹ Ègbè: Òjéje	Was what the stepmother gave her son; Chorus: Òjéje;
Lílé: Iṣu ewùrà tó kan bóbó I'm suffering Ègbè: Òjéje	Lead: the rotten yam that is not edible; Chorus: Òjéje;

Lílé: Ni orogún şe fún mi je Ègbè: Òjéje	was the one stepmother gave to me; Chorus: Òjéje.
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In this Yorùbá folk song, derived from a folktale “Òjéje” could be taken to mean (Òjé market). In Yoruba mythology, Òjé market is a traditional market patronized by the dead during the period of our forefathers (Ìgbà iwásè).

From a semiotic perspective, Òjé market can be seen as a signifier representing the invisible earth where death abides. This signifier is rooted in Yorùbá cosmology, which posits the existence of multiple realms, including the physical and spiritual worlds. Using Peirce's semiotic framework, we can analyze the Òjé market as a symbol that represents the spiritual realm. The symbol is composed of three elements: the signifier (Òjé market), the signified (the spiritual realm), and the interpretant (the cultural context and mythology surrounding Òjé market).

The song itself can be seen as a form of semiotic communication, where the lead singer and the chorus engage in a dialogue that reinforces the symbolic meaning of Òjé market. The repetition of the chorus (“Òjéje”) serves as a form of semiotic anchoring, which reinforces the connection between the signifier (Òjé market) and the signified (the spiritual realm). However, the Yorùbá folk song provides a unique insight into the symbolic meaning of Òjé market, which represents the spiritual realm where death and the living intersect. Through a semiotic analysis, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural context and mythology surrounding Òjé market, and how it reinforces the symbolic meaning of the market as a spiritual realm.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the semiotic analysis of sacred spaces within Yorùbá Indigenous markets reveals profound intersections between orature and spirituality, illuminating the

intricate cultural narratives that infuse these locales with significance. By examining the symbols, rituals, and communal interactions that characterize these markets, one gains insight into how spiritual beliefs are woven into everyday practices. This investigation underscores the notion that markets serve not merely as economic venues but as dynamic arenas of cultural expression and identity formation. As evidenced in the research on oral narratives and their prevalence in various forms of media, including film, the enduring significance of orature resonates in shaping community values and spiritual connections. Thus, the sacred spaces within Yorùbá markets encapsulate a rich tapestry of tradition, reinforcing the relationship between the material and the spiritual in the lives of the community members.

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