

Monarchical Activities of the Yoruba Kings of South Western Nigeria: A Cultural Heritage in Printmaking Visual Documentary

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ABSTRACT

Printmaking is a visual documentary media of art which was used as a medium of expression in analyzing myth and mythology monarchical activities of the Yoruba Kings in South Western Nigeria. The monarchical activity of the Yoruba Kings is the cultural heritage and legacy that people guard jealously and consider to be of high cultural value. The Yoruba Kings of South Western Nigeria are traditional entities which passed through the rites of kings' installation for the throne of their forefathers as a leader with symbol of authority between the people and the spirit world. The kings in Yoruba kingdom are so much respected that they are seen as representatives of God on earth and are exalted into the position of deity because of their monarchical duties to their subjects at large. The funfairs that accompany the monarchical roles are worth documenting using printmaking as a vehicle of visual and historical expression of myths and mythologies which stands out the African culture as being sacred. The study extends access to the use of wide variety of Yoruba heritage objects and collected materials from Nigerian Chieftaincy affairs, archival documents and recorded oral testimonies were obtained from some Yoruba Chiefs. The visual documentary was carried out with the use of prints of different media as an alternative to the conventional photographic documentation. The research examines the philosophy behind the monarchical roles of the Yoruba Kings in print visuals based on the cultural heritage of the Yoruba people. It employs an exploratory qualitative method rely in the literature review.

Introduction

Several experts have expressed different views on the monarchical activities of Kings in the Yoruba Kingdom. All of them seem to agree on the importance and authority that follow the monarchical command in the socio-political and religious lives of the people. Monarchical activities within the royal court in Africa are well cherished and traditional to celebrate the acceptability of an individual to the throne of the traditional ruler-ship of a community of people. The kings' popularly referred to in the Yoruba Kingdom as "ObaAlaye" or "Kabiyesi" are the custodian of the people's authority and custom. In spite of the sacrosanct character of the King, the functions and the monarchical duties of the Yoruba Kings were entirely secular. Apart from his interest in ensuring the health, prosperity and public safety of his Kingdom, the monarchical duties of the King include the conduct of chiefs and critical matters of peace, war and administration of justice with the king as the head of his council as the court of first instance as well as the court of appeal.

In some monarchies, a King wakes up as early as four or five o'clock in the morning to receive complaints from his people and he may find it difficult to take rest until 11.p.m. There are lots of civil wrongs, minor crimes, disorders and complaints that are settled daily by the King within his domain. Larger percentage of matters that should normally go to court are settled by the King. The monarchical activities in the Yoruba kingdom are limited to the royal families. The custom and behavior of the different ethnic society and royal families towards monarchical system in south western Nigerian were under study with the use of Printmaking visuals as a unique communication system that is different from the conventional still photography communication.

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The use of printmaking was explored to analyse the background stories of the monarchical activities of the Yoruba king in the traditional Nigerian societies. Printmaking is a mode of production and receptor of public art and design. According to Oladumiye and Kashim (2013), it is an artwork and its encounter with the audience is that which the print attempts to represent within the dialogue of changing contest and local history. Generally, it is believed that words are the main instruments of documentary, but when aided by printmaking visuals it is a most effective means of sending messages across to the audience. It has proved quite useful in recording history and has helped in the transmission of valuable information from generation to generation. Oladumiye and Kashim (2013) posit that prints are meant to keep design and artworks alive through first hand or second hand testimonies.

One of the governmental systems of the Yorubas is the sacred customs attached to the monarchical activities of the king which is shrouded in mystery while the performance rite is made synonymous with leadership, with its origin in Ile-Ife, the ancestral home of Yorubas. The divinity and royalty of Monarchical institutions in Yoruba Kingship was emphasized and applauded especially the power, authority, integrity and fame of the traditional process. This paper further creates the perimeter of the investigation looking at it from the traditional point of view. The methodology adopted at making the prints before a visual conclusion was drawn. Among the best known West African examples of sacred kings are the kings of the Yoruba Kingdom of Western Nigeria which are known to be deities of an negligible shade lower than high ranking angels and referred to as death lieutenants of God or, supreme judges who deal ruthlessly with bad people. The Yoruba Kings are seen as powerful spirits who are not looked up directly in the eyes by their subjects as a sign of respect. The institution of Kingship is a common phenomenon with state empires, countries and other similar entities in which Yoruba kingdom is one. As a result the King is believed to be a legitimate representation of his Kingdom.

The King is not a sole administrator of his Kingdom despite that he has the following Monarchical and cultural duties to perform:-

1. One of the duties of the King is to oversee the traditional festivals and ceremonies in the Kingdom because it is in the custodian of the people's culture. So each festival and ceremony has to be taken care of by the King.
2. He is the highest authority of his Kingdom. As a result, he has the power to confer Chieftaincy title on deserving subjects within his community.
3. He acts as the Judge and resolve conflicts among his people
4. The King is seen as the father of the community and he is superintending over all irrespective of their religion.

Research Objectives

The Research Objectives are:

- i. To examine the philosophy behind Monarchical Activities of the Yoruba kings through print visuals;
- ii. To examine the role of the kings in Printmaking visuals
- iii. To analyse the various prints used in the research

The objectives are further scrutinised with a few unstructured questionnaire item and the methodology employed in this study brings on the use of visual analyses.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative method where both historical and quasi experimental design method were used. Data was collected from traditional rulers, Chiefs, Elders and some other custodian of history and with observations made from visit to places, which include the States located in the South Western Nigeria. The National Arts Theater, National Library, Cultural Centres and Ministry of Information who is in custody of written and archival documents on Kingship in South Western Nigeria were visited. A few selected art galleries in Nigeria are the bases and locations for field works specifically; these are the galleries that have materials that deal with Nigerian cultural heritages. Also secondary data was collected from printmedia, photographs and video clips on the subject from agencies that have direct link with culture and chieftaincy affairs in Nigeria.

Background of the Study

Yoruba Cultural heritage pride itself in having highly refined traditional way of life when it comes to monarchical activities, kingship and others, This is encompassing many aspects of customs, traditions and the intangible aspect of a cultural heritage. People within specific cultural framework in Nigeria often arrogate the superiority to their general way of life as rooted in tradition even when practical evidence points to the contrary. Despite the fact that cultural heritage in Yoruba land of South Western Nigeria are elements such as religion, values, norms, language, art and socio-economic traditions which are justified by the people to be the acceptable standard. As a result monarchical activities of the Yoruba Kings of South Western Nigeria with its seeming rigid structures have been argued to be dynamic, having satisfied the varying degrees of past exigencies. (Fulani 2003).

The diversified structure and nature of Nigerian cultural heritage is responsible for a very reasonable quota of inspirations for printmaking visuals: Printmaking is an arm of graphic design it embedded with relief printmaking, intaglio, wood engraving, etching, dry point, mezzotint, wood engraving and aquatint. Also surface printing process includes lithography, serigraphy, marbling and monoprint. All these printmaking methods superseded photography production. As a result this study examines the role of kings in Yoruba land through printmaking documentation.(Eben-Sheba 2003)

Visual Designs and Documentary in Printmaking

Visual documentary in print media is a universal medium of documentary and communication of ideals. It is as old as man; visual art is used to document personal socio-cultural experience and to reproduce myths and mythology beings. It is from the works of visual art that later generation derived much information about the ways of life of the past generation. This form of art seeks to present the variety of ideals and complex emotions as recorded by the artist and designers. This in turn is communicated to the audience through variety of visual appeals and response. Over the years visual arts have been a reflection of social and historical forces and the cultural elements of the period in which they were produced. They are products of a given cultural psychological and social experiences of a time and therefore served as records of events of such epoch.(Oladumiye2005)

Like other art forms, printmaking has made tremendous contributions to man development of documentation. It is basically a creative process of obtaining graphic impressions, transformed in ink or paint from a 'Block' 'plate or mesh' to another of two dimensional. Such design which could be accepted as original works of art involves innovative additions eliminations, explorations and exploitations during execution.

Printmaking is different from printing in that the latter involves basically mechanical or manual mass production of stereo-typed designs. However, printmaking is the mark made by the sole of your feet upon stepping on wet mud or laterite or any relief objects.

Material analysis of Printmaking

Printmaking is basically a creative process of obtaining a graphical impressions, transform in ink or paint in block, plate or mesh on a two dimensional surface. It is usually referred to as a creative reprographics medium. In spite of the fact that printmaking production has been hindered by the dearth of materials for its practice in Nigeria, this study makes use of various printmaking media to illustrate the coronation of kings. Using the following media (Oladumiye2012).

- i. Relief (wood/Surface),
- ii. Intaglio,
- iii. Serigraphy,
- iv. Etching and
- v. Monographic prints (glass),

All the above media were used to present variety of ideas and complex emotions as the artist prints indicate. Both mechanical and manual processes were adopted for the mass production of stereo-typed designs as discussed below in the story line through the first print titled "Transferring Monarchical Authority" to the last titled "Judgments"

Monarchical Activities of the Kings in Printmaking Visual Analysis

The monarchical activities of the Yoruba Kings touch aspects of traditional religion and spirituality and their functions in the life context of the Yoruba cultural heritage. Magic and religion are inextricably mixed up in the perception of Yoruba cultural heritage. Oladumiye and Kashim(2013) pointed out that before the selection of a King to the throne of his fore fathers *Ifa oracle* the traditional consulting deity of the Yoruba has to be consulted for it has a lot of roles to play in selecting the right candidates to the throne The deity *Ifa oracle* has the ability to discover things to come and to uncover past events and secrets. They (Oladumiye and Kashim) further said that the divination instruments are made of shells of hard nuts tied in rows of four shells before the installation the King is empowered with various kinds of supernatural power, these he had to show by demonstrating them during his monarchical duties as the King of the kingdom One of the important powers to be bestowed on the kings is the eating of the specially preserved heart of his predecessor, thereby taking over completely the dynasty of the previous kings. It is therefore manifested on him as one being, one spirit and father of the kingdom. He now transformed beyond an ordinary man. He also has the new king has the capacity of calling upon the spirit of his forefathers while conducting the affairs of his divine office. (Oladumiye and Kashim 2013) (*See Plate one*).

Transferring of Spiritual power

Visual analysis

The King is seen in white garment holding the heart of the former king in his hand while the chief priest is looking at him performing this rite (Plate1). In front of them is the pot inside where the heart is being kept. The colours used for the visual are cool and the two men in the print are in



Plate 1: Transferring of Monarchical Authority

Source: Emmanuel Bankole Oladumiye; *Research, 1999*

Medium: Mixed media (Rubber and glass print),

Colour: Courtesy the Artist

Semi-circle. This is to show a sense of unity between them. The chief priest have horns of bulls in his hands called *Ase*, one of the powers given to the king immediately after eating the heart of his Predecessor is known as *Okan* in Yoruba language. While he is eating the heart of his predecessor, every other person

will prostrate in submission and shout in unison by saying “may the king live”.Field observation revealed that as from that moment, he becomes recognized as the rightful king to the sacred throne.

Destiny

Visual analysis

The destiny is tested here by trying the Kings faith and asking him to choose one out of the items kept in the basket, which would determine his monarchical rule as the king of the town. That is, salt, honey, pepper, gun, cutlass and snail. Calabash of salt and honey signify pleasant governance and prosperous administration accompanied with prosperity in the town. The choice of pepper, cutlass, and gun predicts evil reign, which might be associated with war, bad omen, while snail is meant for peace in the town.(Oladumiye and Kashim2013).

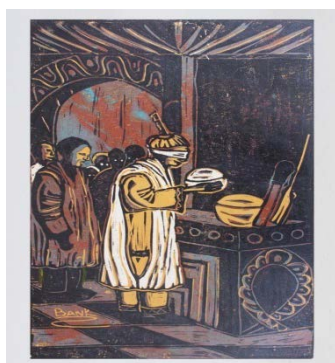


Plate 2: Determination of Destiny

Source: Emmanuel Bankole Oladumiye; Resesarh, 1999

Medium: Mixed media (wood, Rubber and glass print),

Colour: Courtesy the Artist

Plate2 depicts two calabashes placed on a pedestal decorated with traditional motifs. On the pedestal are a gun and a cutlass, one of the calabashes is in the hand of the king. These materials with the contents inside them represent destiny in Yoruba mythology. The composition represents the Yoruba cultural motifs, which form the background of the pictures. The relationship between the calabashes the gun and the cutlass with the floor and the pedestal appears poetic and it arouses the viewers' imagination towards a spiritual symbolism. The high point of the Monarchical ceremonies is the climbing of the mound with king's eldest daughter who will be crowned along with him. The eldest daughter would in future act as regent whenever the father passes away and this necessitated her crowning. The climbing of the mound signifies the real transformation and resurrection from an ordinary being to a deity

Crowning the king

Visual analysis

Plate 3,4,5,6,7and 8 address the issue of coronation. In this composition titled crowning the king, the king is sitting on a royal throne, about to be crowned by the king makers. At the left and right hand side of the background are crowd watching the ceremony at a distance (Plate3). In this scene, there is a sensation of a fullness of life as depicted by the way the king is sitting patiently in an implacable business atmosphere. An immense dignity is also shown through the reflection of light from the throne to the king.



Plate 3: Investiture with regal of Monarchical power
Source: *Emmanuel Bankole Oladumiye; Research, 1999*
Medium: *Mixed media (Rubber relief and print),*
Colour: *Courtesy the Artist*
Instrument of power

Visual analysis

The instrument of power and authority are the crown and the bead, which depict the most important instruments of power in the Yoruba race. These two symbols or objects of the king's authorities are set against a background of a human silhouette. The crown which has a predominantly brown background is accompanied with numerous designs of light brown background, designs in light brown and yellow. The crown is a veiled type and surrounded with beads.

Beads have always been prominent in the regalia of the king and this custom of wearing masses of beads still persists. Ceremonial beads are worn in multi rows; some close to the neck, while others extend to the navel (Plate 4).

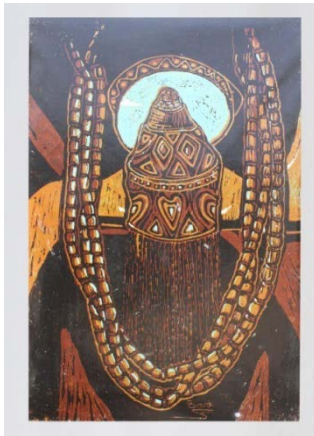


Plate 4: Monarchy Symbolism of power
Source: *Emmanuel Bankole Oladumiye; Research, 1999*
Medium: *Mixed media (Rubber and Wood relief print),*
Colour: *Courtesy the Artist*

Instrument of office

Visual analysis

Crowns of various styles have long been an important part of the king's costume. There are crowns like pill-boxes; covered with rows of large beads and those like tasa shaped crown or brimless tongs.

Usually an upstanding emblem arises from centre, front or top of the crown. This denotes the importance of the wearer (Plate5).

Depending on the wealth of the king, a royal family can own many crowns of different shapes. Some of these may be modern and others antiquity. As represented in the print, many crowns are completely covered with ancient coral beads. The crown in the picture is called layer type of crown. It is fully a beaded crown rendered in brisk red against a dark background. Under it is the cow's tail referred to as *irukere* in Yoruba language, which is usually spotless white. This symbolizes peace and grace. It is an important dress regalia, which the king carries at all time. Ford and Christine(2012),outline guides on print making provided a significant insight into the various production techniques adopted for these prints. This combination of different media, which brings one design technique on top of the other as exhibited on this print, makes identification of a particular method somewhat difficult (Oladumiye 1999)



Plate 5: Symbol of monarchical office

Source: Emmanuel Bankole Oladumiye; Research, 1999

Medium: Mixed media (Rubber and Pantograph relief print),

Colour: Courtesy the Artist

The beaded crown was not simply regarded as a symbol of the divine nature of the king but was believed to be, by virtue of the elements of its design, an instrument of power by which the king is able to intercede with the spirit world and particularly with his royal ancestors for the benefit of humanity.

According to Oladumiye (2013),the king assumes total dignity befitting royal office on the day of coronation. The king would be imbued with the ritual power along with paraphernalia of royal office to perform his monarchical duties. The crown is the most significant of the royal insignia, it stipulate the sacred royal power of the king. He further says that the crown is a sign of divination as it depicts the great moral insight into the person of the king (Adebayo and Ibitayo, 2009)

The king in Yoruba land day-to-day monarchical activities was far from absolute.Although, other institutions, such as secret societies and religious cult were believed capable of communicating with and influencing the all powerful spiritual world, the King in Yoruba land is accorded with great regard and reverence His beaded crown is alsoaccorded a similar regard even when not on his head

Monarchy's authority

Visual analysis

The beaded staffs of authority or scepter are always in custody of the chief messenger at any proceedings. It is to emphasize the authority of the king. The print was rendered in light brown with the beads being shown on the staff (Plate6). The medium of execution is rubber sheets.

The beaded staff is a sign of authority in the monarchical role of the king. Wherever the king cannot go he has the right to send its staff and the staff also served as a messenger of authority of the king or the representative of the king's generalissimo. It is an important staff of office of the king.



Plate 6: A Staff of Symbol of Monarchical Authority
Source: Emmanuel BankoleOladumiye; Research 1999
Medium: Mixed media (Rubber and Pantograph relief print),
Colour: Courtesy the Artist

Celebration of power

Visual analysis

Plate 7a depicted the king sitting on his throne. The palace was built with ancient pillars with traditional motifs and the top of the throne is adorned with beautiful motifs. The king is seen as the father of all and the representative of the gods on earth. In the Yoruba culture, respect for the king is



Plate 7a: Men Pay Tribute to the King as an Authority
Source: Emmanuel BankoleOladumiye; Research 1999
Medium: Mixed media (Rubber relief print),
Colour: Courtesy the Artist

highly elaborate and cherished. Here the women generally kneel down for the king as a support while men prostrate for the king as mark of respect as shown in plate 7a and 7b.

The king in Yoruba land is seen as a powerful spirit who dared not look directly into the eyes of his subject. Gboyega(1994) confirms this point when he called the king one that was never challenged and was next in rank to God. This, however, gives credence to the fact that the kings were highly respected and they were also exalted to the position of a deity. As a result one of the ways to show respect and obeisance to the Yoruba kings is for men to prostrate, while women kneel down.



Plate 7b: Women Pay Tribute to the King as an Authority
Source: Emmanuel Bankole Oladumiye; Research 1999
Medium: Mixed media (Rubber relief print),
Colour: Courtesy the Artist

The three elders

Visual analysis

Plate 8 was rendered in wood cut relief. The three elders have only two legs depicted with round motifs showing oneness. The print is decorated with African traditional motif. At the background of this picture is the street light pointing to the city been administered?

The Yoruba system of government is extremely complex and might appear confusing to outsiders in the sense that the king is not an absolute ruler. His powers are checked in a number of ways and more importantly, he did not rule single handedly but in conjunction with a council of elders or chiefs.



Plate 8: Monarchical Unity of the chiefs
Source: Emmanuel Bankole Oladumiye; Research, 1999
Medium: Mixed media (Wood Relief),
Colour: Courtesy the Artist

Adenla (1998) specified that the sacred aspect of Yoruba Kingship did not lead to the king becoming an autocrat but rather the reverse. Not only was he bound by rules and precedents in his personal life these also required him to submit all businesses to councils of elders and officers. After consultation and deliberation by these bodies only, could a policy be made and proclaimed in the name of the king.

The judgment

Visual analysis

Among the monarchical activities of the King is delivery of Judgment. He is seen as the Chief Judge within the jurisdiction of his authority. Those who were accused of robbery, kidnapping, murder, possessing of dangerous medicine and practice witchcraft were brought to the king in his palace for judgement. In an attempt to maintain security and avoid jungle justice from the perceived aggrieved people in the community, his intervention is sought as quickly as possible (Plate9).



Plate 9: The Judgments

Source: Emmanuel Bankole Oladumiye; Research, 1999

Medium: Mixed media (Rubber Relief),

Colour: Courtesy the Artist.

The king is the legitimate representative of his kingdom as a result; the king is seen as a judge. There are lots of civil wrong, minor, crimes, disorderliness, cases of adultery, land matters and complaints that are settled daily by the king and chiefs within their domain even where courts exist, a larger percentage of matter that should normally go to court are settled by the kings at reduced costs to the subjects (Ojigbo 1997).

Results

The execution of these plates was carried out under a studio condition and the use of colour was carefully selected to create harmony, even when some of them such as plates 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 were in mixed media with combination of woodcut, rubber plate, monographic glass and serigraphic prints. This project attempted to achieve some level of balance in the use of space, contrast in colour combination to bring out highlights and creation of emotion as indicated in plates 3, 8 and 9. This study has been motivated by works of some great printmakers in Nigeria like Bruce Onabrakpeya, who uses Nigerian folks and tales in his prints. David Dale, Moses Unoka, Olaniyi Ojo, and Jacob Afolabi. Oladumiye B, a student of Irein Wangboje (1997 to 1998) expresses how his style of printmaking has been greatly influenced by his article on Wangboje. The Paragon of Printmaking Technique and Creator of Ori-Olokun Experimental Workshop. He also borrowed from the figures of Onabrakpeya prints, which are vertically and horizontally arranged showing lyricism, which goes beyond the immediate reach and casual viewer.

Discussion

Monarchical activities in Yoruba land is seriously more controlled by the king-makers in conjunction with the *Ifa* Oracles. The expression of the process in the print made the cutting and illustrative effort cumbersome and time consuming. This vigour was gone through so that the original intent is not lost. The role of the *Ifa* oracle in contemporary times is more of theoretical than practical. Some of the Yoruba kings are now being elected without the consultation of *Ifa* priests. The monarchical system of coronation is no more as thoroughly observed in the selection of a new king as it was then. The Yoruba kingship and monarch is a representative system considered as a constitutional monarch.(Ojo1996)This is to say that Yoruba political system is termed to be representative of the past kings, which can only be determined through *Ifa* divination, which may have been set aside by some Yoruba communities in selection of new kings for the monarchical rule in the normal circumstances not more than one king rule over a Yoruba town at a particular time and the king has to pass through the nomination of *Ifa* divination.(Adepegba 1995)

Recommendation and Conclusion

Bruce Onabrakya, a pioneer printmaker in Nigeria has emphasized that printmaking is no doubt one of the most difficult aspects of visual art, yet Nigerians still produce prints that are aesthetically pleasing and highly technical as demonstrated in these previously discussed prints with thematic expression of monarchical ceremonies in south-western Nigeria. The prints are treated in form of historical survey of African arts and culture by creative artists working in the field of visual art (Oladumiye, 2013). The greatest challenge that artists are facing in Nigeria is the attempt to confront the dilemma of managing artistic expression in the context of art, science and technology. This paper expresses art feelings through printmaking within the premise of research that follows scientific procedures. It is, therefore, recommended that, more efforts should be geared toward research that expresses the artist mind to the audience that are scientifically and technologically based, especially in the area of verification of adopted methodologies.

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