

# Egúngún Festival in Ìdó-Àní, South-West Nigeria

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## Abstract

Much work had been carried out on the traditional festivals and traditions of Yorùbá people. However, sufficient attention had not been given to traditional festivals in *Ọ̀sẹ́* area of Ondo State, Southwest Nigeria. This study, therefore, explores Egúngún festival among the Ìdó-Àní people. The work examines the socio-cultural significance of the festival, its relationship with traditional structures of the community as well as what extent modern change has corroded the festival. This work relies much on field work and the theoretical framework is based on the sociological approach which deals with culture of the society. The study reveals that the festival not only strengthens the bond among the quarters in the community; it also indicates that Ìdó-Àní people did not allow modernization and foreign religion to eradicate their cultural values and identity. The study also shows the aesthetics and didacticism of oral performances and expands our understanding of traditional festival in this part of Yorùbá land.

**Keywords:** Yoruba people, traditional festival, Ìdó-Àní, Egúngún, Yorùbá land

## 1. Introduction

Ìdó-Àní is a single community by administrative definition, but it is composed of several communities. Until 1921, it was six separate settlements (Àsábíà and Adégbèsan 1970; Ògúnṣolá 1986; Olútóyè; 2003, Àlàbí 2009, Oḷáiyá 2012). Ìdó-Àní is located in the North Eastern part of Oṅdó State and is a major town in Òsé Local Government Area. Ìdó-Àní is known to comprise the following quarters: Ìsùré, Ìyàyú, Ìṣẹ̀wà, Oḡwààní, Amùsìgbó and Àkò. Each of the settlements is to varying degrees, autonomous with their own political organization. Aláàní (the king) is at the centre of the community. Ìdó-Àní can be classified into a group that will, for convenience, be called the 'ÀO' group (Àlàbí 2009:8, Oḷáiyá 2012:2, 28-29). These are the people that salute themselves mutually with short acronym ÀO. They share so many other cultural traits such as dialects, age grade system and traditional festivals.

Like most Yorùbá towns, Ìdó-Àní comprises various settlements that have come from various sources, in search of safety against external attacks and with future prospects in coming together to form larger towns. This was particularly so in the 19th century when inter-tribal wars and slavery disturbed peace and settlements. That was what led the settlements of Amùsìgbó, Àkò, Ìsùré, Ìyàyú, Ìdó and Ìṣẹ̀wà to have meeting grounds at Ojàgbàṃṃ in the 19th century and to consolidate later into the two towns of Ìdó-Àní early in the 20th century. The six communities were known to have been existing in their various settlements before this time (Johnson 1921: 443; Akíntóyè 1971: 50; Àpáta 1986: 434-439). The colonial administrators encouraged various settlement around Ìdó-Àní, like several towns of Western Nigeria to come together and form a new unit. The new town created from this merger was called Ìdó-Àní, thus retaining the name of the old metropolis. After the merger, all the communities retain their individual identities except old Ìdó-Àní that change to Oḡwààní. (Intelligence Report on Adò District of Èkiti Division, Oṅdó Province. 29734/Vol. I (1933) by N.A.C Weir, Assistant District Office).

It is observed that many studies on festivals have been concentrated on Òyó speaking areas of Yoruba land. There is still a lot to be done on festivals in many areas of Yorùbá land as rightly noted by some scholars. This work, therefore, research into the Egúngún festivals of Ìdó-Àní people in Òsé area of Yorùbá land. The work examines the socio-cultural significance of the Egúngún festival, its relationship with traditional structures of the community and find out to what extent modern change has weaken the festival.

## 2. Egúngún Festival in Yorùbá Land

In traditional Yorùbá society, the masquerade is a highly revered entity. The reverence flows from a belief and perception of the masquerade as a spirit-being with supernatural powers. Egúngún are seen to be God mouthpiece on earth. Egúngún festivals are instituted first and foremost to honour the ancestors. This is a means of keeping their memory alive as spirit beings and of making them to participate in the affairs of the living. The significance of the Egúngún in that case, therefore, lies in relating yesterday to today and tomorrow, that is "bringing the past into the present" (Ògúndèjì 2014:28). Yorùbá people believe in the active existence of the spirits of the dead ancestors – Egúngún. They pay homage inform of festival

that stands as the magnetic force that draws us nearer to God through worship. Egúngún is an ancestral spirit in which descendants harness spiritual power to purify and cleanse the society and it inhabitant of malevolent forces. They are also seen as the source of answers to all the problems of the worshippers or community.

The role of Egúngún in the community is very important in Yorùbá land, most especially in the time past. Egúngún used to serve the community in a large number of contexts; it served as a basic survival, several judicial functions, and keep moral order. Egúngún happens to be one of those things to be trusted. They helps to keep moral order in the society, this is because they believe that moral order helps them to work out and know among themselves what is good and evil, right and wrong, truthful and false (Aremu 2012:286). Among the Yorùbá people, Egúngún festival functions more on a communal rather than on individual basis, Its belief are held in a high esteem by the society or community in most cases. The festival is celebrated mainly by a group of the family, relatives or the whole society in a community or by those engaged in a common belief. Thus, Egúngún festivals bring together the people as a group, thus strengthening their unity and cohesion.

Civilization and religion have brought about changes in the worship and belief system in modern society in Yorùbá land; Yet, Ìdó-Àní people, to some extent, did not allow modernization and foreign religion to eradicate their cultural values and identity.

### 3. Egúngún Festival in Ìdó-Àní

As stated earlier, Ìdó-Àní is made up of different quarters with different origins. Their traditional belief system is bound to be different from one quarters to another. According to my respondents at Qwáàní and Amùsìgbó, apart from new yam and Ìkégbésókè festivals, Christianity has taken over the festivals and traditions of their quarters. Amùsìgbó quarters have the highest number of people who embraced Christianity in 1892 (Qbánlá 1992:5). According to oral source and available work at our disposal, an incident in Amùsìgbo brought an end to Egúngún festival in the quarter. The period of Christmas in 1913 was also the period of Egúngún festival. Christians from Qwáàní came to celebrate Christmas with Amùsìgbó Christians and there was curfew imposed by the Egúngún worshippers. They would also spread their costume outside which they believed was a taboo for women to see. Charms were spread on the path to harm whoever crossed them. The Christians would cross as well as see the costumes without inflicting any harm on them. This made the man in Egúngún costume (agò) converted and was later baptised. This incident brought an end to masquerade in Amùsìgbó till today (Ògúnṣolá 1986; Qbánlá 1992; 7; Qláiyá 2012:82). Ìsùré and Ìyàyú are two quarters of Ìdó-Àní which did not allow Christianity or Islam to have much influence on their culture. Therefore, in discussing the Egúngún festival in Ìdó-Àní, there will be more concentration on the two quarters; Ìsùré and Ìyàyú quarters.

At Ìdo-Àní, Egúngún are the material representatives of ancestral spirits, but at the same time Egúngún are human beings who put on specially created costume called *agò* or *èkú*, endowed with the spiritual power of the ancestors they represent. Those clothes cover the human form so completely that no part of the wearer is visible. The individuals wearing Egúngún dress (*agò*) do not become the ancestors, but the ancestors make use of the living essence of these

carriers to return to the world. Egúngún is the designated spirit of the deceased making a temporary reappearance on earth (Ìdòwú 1962:193). The living, have an obligation to summon the ancestral spirits from time to time in order to enable them to taste the pleasures of the world. To relive their past adventures, to inspect the community in order to ensure that things are as they had left them, and to see that they are still feared and respected. As well as representing the ancestors, however, the appearance of the Egúngún was also both a source of power and an expression of it.

During the appearance of the Egúngún, the oríkì of various ancestors will be chanted, to show that they are remembered, to please them and help them re-live their past adventures. As the Egúngún hear their oríkì, they will dance, to demonstrate their pleasure. It was during this period that individuals can approach them to strike bargains with them, promising to do certain things if the Egúngún would help them in some way to achieve some objectives like giving them children, or to prevent the occurrence of a misfortune, like untimely death in the family, that had been foreseen for them. Some also give out present in cash to the Egúngún.

The characters of the Egúngún vary. As representatives of the ancestors, they exhibit the characteristics of those they represent. Some Egúngún are known for their special concern with child care, while others are known for the strength of their curse and some are known for the aesthetics of their dance and performance. This reflects in an excerpt from their oríkì thus:

Ọmọ Eléégún ire  
E jèèrò yúlé  
Child of the owner of good masquerade  
That does not permit people to go home

Some Egúngún represent specific ancestral individuals while others represent collective ancestral and Ìhàrẹ (Elder) power. Those who represent collective ancestral power seem to have been summoned on specific occasions to deal with issues. Names of Egúngún in Ìsùrẹ include Àlórò, Òkèrípe and Ìrúèrùè; while Alémosóko, Ùjóbó and Igwule are Egúngún in Ìyàyú. As we have said earlier, our concentration will be on Ìsùrẹ and Ìyàyú quarters, though all Egúngún in these quarters are important, but two most prominent ones are discussed in this paper, one in each quarter.

#### **4. Ìgwúlè Masquerade**

Ìgwúlè is a festival which comes up between January and February every year. It is a masquerade festival. This festival did not originate in Ìyàyú like Ùjóbó it was brought from another place and incorporated into Ìyàyú culture. Ìgwúlè is usually lasts for nine days. Adórò – the Chief Priest is the sole authority. As far as the festival is concerned, he does not need to consult anybody before announcing the day of the festival. On the last day of Ùjóbó festival, the Chief Priest will send to Afíèèké and Afannkùnù families that he will announce the day of the festival on that day. Each family in turn will go to Adórò's house with a keg of palm wine, with palm leaves tied round the neck of the keg. This palm wine is called 'Ọyọn eṣinṣin kò bàlé' (palm wine which was tapped overnight that flies have not touched). The two families

including the Adórò will travel to the grove where the Ìgwúlè shrine is located. This grove is called ‘Ùmàleke or Àtẹ̀ Idapèlẹ̀’. On their way, Afankùnnù would stop at ‘Apàde’ where the public road joins the way to the grove. Afíèèké’ and Adórò will continue the journey till they get to ‘Ukùmiègba’ – Orí Òkúta (this is a flat stone located some distance to the shrine) where Afíèèké will wait, leaving the Adórò and his two sons to perform the necessary rituals at the shrine.

After the ritual the Priest will meet the other two families, after which they will go back to the town to announce to the public that Ìgwúlè festival will commence in nine days time. The presence of women is forbidden, and anybody who does not belong to any of the three families: Adórò, Afankùnnù and Afíèèké cannot follow them during the process of announcement. The issue of absence of women in some aspects of traditional festival underscores women in Yorùbá society. In most Yorùbá traditional celebrations women are kept at bay and they are not expected to know secret things. This still exists in Yorùbá traditional celebrations. In many instances, women are emotional and like to show their feelings about their experiences in society. Men have mistaken this to be a trait of weakness on the part of women, that they cannot keep secret matters (Ajíbádé 2009:22). I want to suggest that this should change, deep things of culture should be made known to women, after all, they are the mother of the community.

After the announcement, everybody will know that the festival would begin in nine days time. Participants will start to get prepared for the celebration. As Egúngún festival is characterized by the use of charms and magic, it is the same thing in the case of Ìgwúlè festival. Participants have to protect themselves against magical powers that may be used against them. During the period of the festival, the celebrants are forbidden to go to the farm. Before the festival commences, they will go to their farms to do all necessary works and bring home all that they would eat during the festival.

On the eve of the festival, Afíèèké and Afankùnnù families will carry a keg of palm wine each to Adórò’s house as they did on the first day. They will travel to the grove Afankùnnù and Afíèèké will wait at Apàde and Okúniegbá respectively. The Adórò and his family will go and perform the necessary rituals at the shrine. Adórò with two masquerades will meet the other two families and all of them will go back to the town. The two masquerades are clad in palm leaves, white cloth and a net to cover their faces. On getting to the town, Adórò will remind and warn the people that nobody should beat drums, strike gong, use abusive words or fight throughout the period of the festival. From this moment, the spirits are believed to have been brought by the two masquerades and the Adórò, and that they have been in the midst of the people, hence they should be respected.

Ìgwúlè festival features different types of masquerades and it lasts nine days. On the first day, four masquerades will come out they are called Èsìṣorò, two from each clan. They will use tender palm leaves to cover their bodies, nets to cover their faces, and different types of cloths are tied round their waists. They will use camwood to adorn their legs and tie Ìbèrè on their ankles. Different types of feathers are arranged on their heads and they will hold long

canes. They will pay homage to the ancestors at those specified places and run round the town chanting:

*Hù Hù wìrì hi hi*  
*Àbìmò lémo o àrómo pònpòn o*  
*Àṣòní ṣùmòdún o Anene Ṣare o*  
*Hù Hù wìrì hi hi*

*People will multiply year by year*  
*As we do this year, we shall do so next year and year to*  
*come*

Women will be chanting oríkì in praise of the masquerades saying;

*Omọ léṣìṣorò yá jìjọ ọdọ́n o*  
*Ènì yú Ìyàyú mọ rùn yí Ìyàyú ṣe*  
*Sile ro mimó o*

*Owner of Èṣìṣorò (masquerade) come and dance festival*  
*dance*  
*Anyone who does not come to Ìyàyú cannot know what*  
*Ìyàyú is doing*  
*the land that cannot be moved*

They will later retire to Upòkòrò (masquerade's house) after running round the town.

At this stage of the festival, Ebòkòrò age group will no longer sleep in their houses. Fire will be set at the front of the masquerade's house for people to roast yams, cocoyams and plantains. Elders will be smoking tobacco provided by the Ebòkòrò and there will be curfew in the night for women till the final day of the festival. Tobacco is a form of stimulant that can help in keeping them awake throughout the night till day break. On the second and third day they will dance. A number of the masquerades will come out to dance. Other masquerades besides those that came out on the first day will come out. They are called Akuku (the senior masquerades) their costumes are without feathers. They will line up from their houses to the place where they will dance, singing:

*Òhòrò hé-èn hé-èn*  
*Àwòrò hé-èn hé-èn*

*Àsòní sùmódún hé-èn hé-èn*

*Anẹẹ sare hé-èn hé-èn*

*Òhòrò hé-èn hé-èn*

*Àwòrò hé-èn hé-èn*

*As we do today, we shall do next year hé-èn hé-èn*

*and many years to come hé-èn hé-èn*

On getting to their dancing stage, masquerades with feathers will form a circle, and two of their seniors will lead them in singing. Those with feathers will be dancing while those without feathers will be observing them. Their first song goes thus:

*Woro o ẹyọ o wo,*

*Ẹyọ wo wo ẹyọ wò o he,*

*Aşowo le gberẹ,*

*Amòjó le gberẹ,*

*Ọkònrẹn le gberẹ,*

*Obìnrẹn le gberẹ,*

*Wò ẹyọ wò he*

*Wòro o ẹyọ o wò*

*Ẹyọ wò wò ẹyọ wò o he*

*Woro o ẹyọ o wo,*

*Ẹyọ wo wo ẹyọ wò o he,*

*Thanks be to Aşòwò,*

*Thanks be to Ámòjó*

*Thanks be to men*

*Thanks be to women*

*Wò ẹyọ wò he*

*Wòro o ẹyọ o wò*

*Ẹyọ wò wò ẹyọ wò o he*

After this song, they will sing other various songs before going to another open place.

The fourth day is called 'Ìsà kún dùde' (big curfew). The day is set aside to prepare for the fifth day, their costumes are spread in the sun and there is no dancing activity. They will cut new palm leaves and the frond will be used as Àlùpò (walking stick in place of the cane.) The paint and local dye to be use will also be prepared. There is special song they sing on this day just to tell women that they should not come to that area, especially where they spread their costume. It goes thus:

*Òní sà̀n l'obìnrẹ̀n m̀arìn*

*Wò̀ò wò̀ò han han,*

*Obìnrẹ̀n yó meégún*

*Òun òrèlè méjì*

*Wò̀ò wò̀ò he e*

*This day is not good for women to move about*

*Wò̀ò wò̀ò han han*

*Woman that says she knows masquerade*

*The consequence is between her and masquerade*

*Wò̀ò wò̀ò he e*

On the sixth day, they will come out very early in the morning and pay the usual homage. They will not dance as they did in the past days. What is special about this day is that they exchange positions. Those masquerades from Ipàrà will go to Idósi and those of Idósi will move to Ipàrà will they be in a possession and meet at the market place. There, they will exchange greetings and jokes before departing for their destinations. When they get, there they will dance in the three open places. The last place which is Úde dùde (big open place) is where they have to stay for long. In this open place, they have to sing seven times and dance. At the end of each song they rest for a while. While they are resting, those that made vows during the last festival would start to redeem it and others will make new vows.

Each clan will sing different types of songs those who had at one time or the other done what is wrong in the society will be exposed. There was a year the Alààní was mocked for the role he played in Qwáàní and Ìdo-Àní's case. One of these songs goes thus:

*Òrèkéreke p̀alolo,*



*Òh pàlòlò*

*E kànún kúkú jónà re*

*Òh pàlòlò*

*Enikéni ke má yú bè*

*Òh pàlòlò*

*Mo yú bè mi róràn*

*Òh pàlòlò*

*Alààní wè kẹ fọ o*

*Òh pàlòlò*

*A kú sọmọ nọ wè kẹ fọ*

*Òh pàlòlò*

*A kú sómọ nọ jé bẹ ọmọ*

*Òh pàlòlò*

*Everybody should be silent*

*Òh pàlòlò*

*They said nobody should go there*

*Òh pàlòlò*

*I went there without trouble*

*Òh pàlòlò*

*Are you talking of Alààní,*

*Òh pàlòlò*

*You are talking about the double dealing man*

*Òh pàlòlò*

*Are you talking of the person who died and leave the  
children*

*Òh pàlòlò*

At the end of the seventh song, an elderly person will be ready to recite the homage. This is called ‘Ayéwóríko’. This person will be behind the scene. People will cover him up so that

the audience will not know where the voice is coming from. He will sit on palm leaves, and use water to wash his mouth before he starts the chanting. Throughout the period of recitation, he will not break by the way. All the masquerades have to wait and listen. The audience is warned not to make noise so that they can hear the chanting clearly. In the recitation, he will pay homage to all Qbás in the neighbouring towns and their ancestors. He will mention the names of towns and villages in the community and claims that he is paying tribute to them. He will state the purpose of his visit to these towns, that he is looking for masquerade that is beautiful as Ìgwúlè, but unfortunately he cannot find any and he had to come back and report to Adórò. The recitation goes thus:

*Ayé wóríko mì wóríko*  
*Ayé wóríko mì wóríko*  
*Ìbà fṣn okònrṣn lẹ̀ mì wóríko*  
*Ìbà fṣn obìnrṣn lẹ̀ mì wóríko*  
*Ìbà fṣn Aṣòwò mì wóríko*  
*Ìbà wan Amòjò mì wóríko*  
*Ìbà wan Àsabà mì wóríko*  
*Bí mí wóríko mi re mì wóríko*  
*Kí mà mà sì fọ̀ mi wóríko*  
*Mo dele Aṣòwò mì wóríko*  
*Mí sì w'Élà ire mì wóríko*  
*Aṣòwò ní mi kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*  
*Mi ro 'rèlè ì kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*  
*Mo délé Ámòjò mì wóríko*  
*Mí mà b'Élà síbẹ̀ mì wóríko*  
*Ámòjò ní mi kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*  
*Mi ré òrèlè ì kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*  
*Mo délé Aláàní mì wóríko*  
*Mí mà b'Élà síbẹ̀ mì wóríko*  
*Aláàní ní mi kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*  
*Mi ro 'rèlè ì kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*  
*Mo délé Apelè mì wóríko*  
*Mo délé Aláfò mì wóríko*

*Aláfò ni mi kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Mo mà délé Onikún mì wóríko*

*Onikún ni mi kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Mi mo rèlẹ̀ ì kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Mi tú dé dùde mì wóríko*

*Mi sì w'Élà i rè mì wóríko*

*Mi ma b'Élà sibẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Èlà no odò Épẹ̀n mì wóríko*

*Mo mà do d'Épẹ̀n mì wóríko*

*Mi mà b'Élà sibẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Èlà nu ùdedùpara mì wóríko*

*Mi tú dé du pará mì wóríko*

*Mi mà b'Élà sibẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Èlà no odò Àyọngbẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Mo mà do d'Àyọngbẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Mi mà b'Élà sibẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Èlà no odò Ùthufàn mì wóríko*

*Mo mà dó odò Ùthufàn mì wóríko*

*Mo mà b'Élà sibẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Èlà ní mi kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Mi ré èsèrè í kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Mo mà bèrè Adórò mì wóríko*

*Adórò nó 'ké Èsà mì wóríko*

*Mo mà dòkè Èsà mì wóríko*

*Mo mà b'Adórò sibẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Adórò ní mi kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Mo ma si kúnálẹ̀ mì wóríko*

*Mo mà yún mo mà bọ̀,*

*Mi ma rùn urun bí Ìgwulè*  
*Adórò fún mi lóbì méjì*  
*É rí mi fòkan wún Èsù*  
*E rí mi fòkan wún Ègbà*  
*Eégún la rùn ma li e larùn gbòrò*

*I am going on tribute*  
*I am going on tribute*  
*I pay tribute to men*  
*I pay tribute to women*  
*I pay tribute to Aṣòwò*  
*I pay tribute to Ámòjò*  
*Tribute to Àsabà*  
*As I am going on my tribute*  
*I should not make mistake*  
*I got to Aṣòwò's house*  
*he said I should kneel down*  
*As Òrèlè (orò) I cannot kneel down*  
*I got to Ámòjò's house*  
*he said I should kneel down*  
*As Òrèlè (orò) I cannot kneel down*  
*I got to Alààní's palace*  
*Alààní said I should kneel down*  
*I told him a king does not kneel down for another king.*  
*I got to Apelè's palace*  
*Apelè said I should kneel down*  
*I told him a king does not kneel down for another king.*  
*I got to the palace of Aláfò*  
*Aláfò said I should kneel down*

*I said a king does not kneel down for another king.*

*I got to the palace of Onikún*

*Onikún said I should kneel down*

*I said a king does not kneel down for another king.*

*I got to Udède dùde (big open place)*

*I was looking for Èlà (masquerade)*

*I did not see Èlà*

*Èlà was in Odò Èpè̀n (a family house)*

*I did not see Èlà*

*Èlà was in Àyongbè*

*I did not see Èlà*

*Èlà was in Íthùfan (a family house)*

*I found Èlà, he said I should kneel down.*

*I told him that a masquerade does not kneel down for another masquerade.*

*I asked of Adórò*

*Adórò was in Èsà (his house)*

*I met Adórò, he said I should kneel down and I knelt down*

*I told him that I have gone round all towns*

*I could not see what looked like Ìgwùlè*

*Adórò gave me two kolanuts*

*He said I should give one to È̀sù and one to other evil spirits.*

At this point other masquerades will answer:

*È̀ yò he he han he*

*Ayé wóríko mi wóríko yo*

*he he han he*

After the recitation, all the masquerades will dance round the three open places again and sing the last song thus:

*Ere ere o*

*Wò o yo he he he*

*Erere wò han he he*

*Enene feto leto*

*We are going*

*Wò o yo he he he*

*Everything should be done orderly.*

As stated earlier, people who made vows in the previous year will pay up their vows and this will be announced by the Àmú – this is the age group that is regarded as the father of the age groups that put on the mask. All items collected will be given to the Adórò who is also on seat and well dressed. He takes them to the elders where they will be divided and he will take that of the ancestors to the bush on the last day of the festival. The recitation of the homage is the climax of the day's activities.

The seventh day is not so full of activities, they only come out once, and this is so because they have to rest from morning till evening. The day is called È-mà-jábò (report back). They have to report back to the elders all they did during the period they interchanged. The tribute will be recited and the senior masquerades will pay tributes to those who had performed before them through songs. One of the songs goes thus;

*Asàbà mo fibà hún*

*È yò o he he*

*Apelè mo fibà hún*

*Arişemódù mo fibà hún*

*È yò he he*

*Tribute to Asàbà*

*È yò o he he*

*Tribute to Apelè*

*Tribute to Arişemódù*

*È yò he he*

The elders will greet them through their spokesman and say – Ò fẹ̀lẹ̀ wà (you are welcome). They will pray that they will all come back next year. They will be reminded to report back to the ancestors all that they have seen. The reason why the masquerades in the two clans do interchange is that they will be familiar with one another and know the problems of both clans. It enables them to exchange greetings as the descendants of Aṣòwò and Àmòjò.

On the eighth day, two different masquerades will come out. These are Èlà and Aṣònmọ/Ọmọlòbì. Èlà is believed to be a man, while Aṣònmọ is a woman. Both of them has a son each, beside this, Aṣònmọ also has a baby she carries on her back. If she carries the baby this year, the baby must have been walking the following year while the mother would already be pregnant. Èlà is dressed with woven leaves, white cloth and a mat to cover the face. He holds a stick and carries fire on his head. He uses camwood to paint his legs. He does not allow anybody to look at his face, whoever does, he will throw the stick at him. Such a person will continue to shake till his death. Aṣònmọ and her baby are dressed in white cloth, red cap and nets to cover their faces. The baby carries a small pineapple and a horse tail while the eldest son holds two canes in his hands.

The four Èsìsoro masquerades that came out on the first day will come out again. They will line up from the market place and move round all the streets in the quarters. This is called Àwọ-ọ-dá (movement that does not end) because masquerades from the two clans will come together so they are many. During this movement no masquerade should step on another masquerade's heel and they must not stumble, so they will give themselves space. The belief is that anybody that fall down will not live to see the following year. As they move, they will be saying;

*Ho ho ho e le e e*

*O ma di o ma gbe o*

*A sòní sùmòdún o*

*A ne ne sare o*

*E ma sọjọ a fun o odi o*

*Hó hó ho e le e e*

*Hò hò ho e le e e*

*Ho ho ho e le e e*

*Until another time*

*As we do this year*

*We shall do it many years to come*

*Enemies will not have power over us*

*Hó hó ho e le e e*

*Hò hò ho e le e e*

They will do this round all the streets and go back to the market place. Èlà and Aṣọnmọ will pay homage to the ancestors. Èlà and Aṣọnmọ do not move together, each moves with his or her children. When they meet, the wife (Aṣọnmọ) has a way of greeting her husband (Èlà), and the husband has a way to reply by bending and twisting waist by both masquerades. After all these, Èlà and Aṣọnmọ will retire to their grove. All men from Ebòkòrò age group and above will go to the market place to meet the masquerades. No woman or anybody below the Ebòkòrò group should see them. The Adórò will stand in-between the people and masquerades and say:

*È ẹ kere fòpá kòkàn fá Àsabà*

*Everybody should keep silent and use one cane to touch  
Àsabà*

People will answer: *Wò o o*

Priest (Adórò): *Ìbà Àsabà, e yo he he*

*Ìbà Aṣòwò ile ri wa*

*Ìbà Àmòjò ile ri wa*

*Ìbà Ọkònrẹn le ri wa*

*Ìbà Obìnrẹn le ri wa*

*Tribute to Àsabà*

*Tribute to Aṣòwò*

*Tribute to Àmòjò*

*Tribute to men*

*Tribute to women*

The Adórò will pray for the peace and prosperity of the community. Selected elders will pray as well, as they pray, others will be pointing towards the mentioned clan. The prayer will be rounded off by the Adórò, the chief priest.



The ninth day is the last day of the festival is called ‘Àyèré’ (Remember.) Èlà and Aponmo will pay a visit to their relatives while other masquerades will be dancing. The last song for the festival goes thus:

*Àyèré ò Àyèré o è e*  
*Àyèré ma yèrè*  
*Kí wo yèrè ké mi yèrè o e*  
*Àyèré ma yèrè*

*Everybody should remember,*  
*You should remember,*  
*I should remember*  
*Everybody should remember.*

With this song, they will move to the market place. All members of the public will despise to their different homes, this mark the end of the festival for that year. At the market place, the masquerades will remove their masks and put them on their shoulders. They will line up and parade the streets shouting:

*ho, ho, ho, ho*

after which they use their canes to sweep the ground. This symbolizes the sweeping away of diseases, death, poverty, calamities and any form of evil from the town. After the parade, Àmú age group will send a message to the Adórò at Udèdè Àyongbè (Àyongbè open place) that all masquerades have gone. This message will be repeated seven times he will follow them back to the town singing:

*É mè rè, é mè rè o*  
*Wò o le*  
*Ọjà kan gbojo lójó a fúràn*  
*Ibále bále Ígwúlè*  
*Ibále bále Adórò*  
*Ibále bále Àsabà*  
*Ibále bále Apelè*  
*Ibále bále Ọkònřen le*  
*Ibále bále Obìřen le*

*Wò o le o*

*It is going, it is going*

*Wò o le*

*One market cannot take the day of another market*

*Tribute to Ìgwúlè*

*Tribute to Adórò (Chief Priest)*

*Tribute to Àsabà*

*Tribute to Apelè*

*Tribute to men*

*Tribute to women*

*Wò o le o*

This will be done round the town with Adórò holding a goat called Ebu Ùpè (festival goat). When they get to the market place, everybody will depart to his house, except Adórò who will go to the grove that night to perform a sacrifice at the shrine. He will be chanting;

*We e wee he e*

*Ègbé gbe ya o*

*Emu mu ya o*

*We e wee he e*

*It is finished for wicked people*

*Emu mu ya o*

It is believed that if the sacrifice is not offered that night, the spirits of the ancestors will not leave the community.

## **5. Àlórò Masquerade Festival**

Àlórò masquerade festival is an important annual festival that is being celebrated in Ìsùrè. Ètú Àlórò age group is in charge of the festival. Àlórò masquerade can be said to be equivalent to the Ìgwúlè masquerade in Ìyàyú. The festival begins with preparation of Èrò. The elders will announce that women should stay indoors for a certain period. During this period, the elders will carry a container or bucket round the quarters to collect palm oil from house to house in the quarters. All palm oil collected will be in one container, and they will take it to Ìsílè in

front of Olúsùré's house and do some rituals into the oil. All the oil will be poured inside the *Ìsilé*, the concoction made from it is called *Èrò*, which is used as an antidote to chickenpox and measles among children in the community.

The second stage of the festival is called *Èpà Àlórò* (preparation for *Àlórò*), and it lasts nine days. Most of the events during these nine days are usually carried out in the night. *Orò* will be the first to come out from the Ododòde family shouting round the quarters. After *Orò*, all the *Ètú Àlórò* age group that is doing the masquerade will come out in the middle of the night. They will dance round from house to house singing and mentioning those who have done bad things in the quarters. They will mention the name of that person and what she or he does, even in secret, right at the person's doorsteps. This is done to enforce law and order in the society, thereby complementing the system of justice in traditional societies. Satirical songs are used as checks and balances against misdemeanor in society; it is also effective against those offences that are considered too minor for public prosecution (Afólábí 2000:13).

No one is being spared including the *Ìhàrès* (most senior age group/elders), no matter how highly placed they may be, they will have one or two things to say about them. This songs serve as checks and balances against misdemeanor in society. Such misdemeanor as theft, promiscuity, co-wives of a husband fighting each other, wayward ladies, the person that doesn't have good human relations, indolence, a person that has many children that he/she cannot cater for, a strict father that does not allow males to visit their female daughters, housewife that engage in illicit affairs, elder that is not trustworthy, person that steals farm produce from another person's farm, husband that does not take care of his wife, women cheating on her husband, and those offences that are considered too minor for public prosecution. Some of their songs go thus:

*Mo rí ẹ mà fò hún ẹ*

*Mo ri ẹ mà fò hún ẹ*

*Gúle gúle*

*Gúle gúle*

*Gúyan gúyan*

*Gúyan gúyan*

*È kí Jèení hún mi*

*È kí Jèení hún mi*

*Afàdá kábì*

*Obìnrin kù kábì*

*Afàdá kábì lóko olóko*

*Obìnrin mè é kábì*

*Olè màà ráyé wá*

*Gúyan, Gúyan*

*I see you, I will tell you*

*I see you, I will tell you*

*Gúle gúle*

*Gúle gúle*

*Gúyan Gúyan*

*Gúyan Gúyan*

*Greet Janet for me*

*Greet Janet for me*

*She uses cutlass to pluck kolanut*

*A female does not harvest kolanut*

*She uses a cutlass to pluck kolanut from another  
person's farm*

*Theft is not good.*

*Gúyan gúyan*

Janet is a housewife who was involved in stealing kolanut from another person's farm. What she thought was done in secret was exposed, and was warned to desist from the ignoble act. Another one goes thus:

*Mo ri ẹ má fọ hún ẹ*

*Mo ri ẹ má fọ hún ẹ*

*Gúle gúle*

*Gúle gúle*

*Gúyan gúyan*

*Gúyan gúyan*

*È kí Olú hún mí*

*È kí Olú hún mí*

*Mì í re kokólóre í wa*

*Mì í re kokólóre í wa*

*Gúyan Gúyan*

*Wheel biro lé tì nígbà ogbo*

*O sọ ó di Peugeot*

*Oní Peugeot ọ̀nà oko*

*Gúyan, Gúyan*

*I see you, I will tell you*

*I see you, I will tell you*

*Gúle gúle*

*Gúle gúle*

*Gúyan Gúyan*

*Gúyan Gúyan*

*Greet Olú for me*

*Am going to kókòlòre (name of a farm)*

*Gúyan Gúyan*

*He pushes wheel barrow every time*

*He turns it to a Peugeot car*

*Owner of Peugeot on the farm path*

*Gúyan Gúyan*

The song above is about Mr Olú, a young hardworking farmer, who dedicates all his time to his farm work. He uses a wheel barrow to convey his products from his farm, Kókòlòre, to the his house at Ìsùré. They are telling him that he is not getting younger; he should find time to rest and look for another means of transporting his farm produce from farm to town. He struggled to buy a motor bicycle before the next festival according to him. This shows from the point of view of sociology of literature that songs are not rendered for fun. They are reflections of on-going in the community. Reflectionism in this context is not for fun, it has a corrective import. It castigates Mr. Olú so that others will learn that there is need for moderation in whatever they do, it shows that literature corrects and counsels on wrong doing in the society.

As the Ètú Àlórò age group moves from one house to the other, after each song they will say:

*Mo forí mi lèsè o*

*Mò forí mi lèsè o*

*I hide my head*

*I hide my head*

This means that all that they have said should not be counted against them. It is not their fault but tradition, so they hide their heads from any evil or repercussion of their actions. People they abuse do not fight them, nor abuse them back. Some may laugh it off, some will be clapping for them, and some may praise them by reciting their *oriki* while others may pass money to them underneath the entrance door. Women are forbidden to see them but elderly men may see them. They will do these for nine days, it used to be three months in the olden days.

The Àlórò masquerades will come out immediately after the nine days of Èpà Àlórò. If the Ètú Àlórò age group members are twenty, it means twenty masquerades will come out if they are thirty, thirty masquerades will come out. This means that all the members of the Ètú Àlórò age group must put on masquerade costumes. Some of them will use different types of beautiful clothes, while some will use raffia (*iko*) and cover their faces with nets. They will come out beautifully dressed in their masquerade costumes. This day is called ‘Ojò Àwó-ì-dá’. All of them will be in a procession as they move round the whole quarters. They will stop at some locations and pray for the progress of the Ìsùré quarter and the entire Ìdó-Àní community, after which they will withdraw to masquerade’s house to off their costumes. This marks the end of Àlórò festival for that year. The term *Àwó-ì-dá* in this context has a significant meaning, it means over-flowing or flow without ceasing. The masquerades parade incessantly praying for the good of the people, so it is seen as a day of ceaseless blessedness and benediction for the community. This shows that in the traditional practice, praying for the good of the community can have a great advantage on the moral and spiritual lives of the people.

Àlórò masquerade is a festival that attracts people from far and near till today, because the quarters believe that it has good effect on the health of the people and put a check on people with criminal tendencies in the community. This shows that certain cultural values in our society should not be allowed to perish.

## **6. Importance of the Festivals**

Ìgwulè festival is celebrated to show the importance of children in Ìyàyú quarters. People used the nine days period of the festival to renew their communion with their ancestors through rituals. It is an occasion for praying to the ancestors to protect every member of the community. It encourages morality within the society. Ìgwulè is celebrated during the dry season. People believe that diseases that often afflict children like smallpox and measles are common during the period, therefore, it is believed that Ìgwulè masquerade festival will ward off these diseases. The festival is also used to appease the ancestors for good yield of farm

produce. It is an occasion when people send their requests through the masquerades to their ancestors. It also provides avenue for Ebòkòrò and Ìdíó-Ebòkòrò age group to show their talent in singing and dancing.

The festivals serve the purpose of renewing the life of the community and giving it cohesion. They also strengthen the bond between the clans and the community. They provide avenue for young adults to contribute to the welfare of aged people outside their own immediate families. This is mainly done through money and food contribution which are in turn shared by the elders.

The festivals have positive impact on the economy of the community because distant members come home to rejoice with their people. Certain aspects of the economy witness a great boom. For example, food, palm wine and other drinks sellers make much money. During this period also, decisions for the progress and developments of the quarters are taken. These festivals bring people of the town together and strengthen their unity. Men and women from other quarters come to watch these festivals, they are brought together in one crowd and there is usually a sort of social re-union between the whole quarters constituting Ìdó-Àní. The festivals also bring about peaceful co-existence among different age-groups in the quarters. This provides an avenue for exchanging views and for holding discussions about the development of their age-groups and the town in general.

Also, the festivals encourage the development of art and crafts. For example, different artistic works are displayed during the festivals. Participants use different types of beads to dress their bodies. Different kinds of locally made fabrics are used. Special hair-do of female participants and different types of traditional tatoos in the body reflects the artistic talents of the people. The use of feathers, raffia, leaves, cloths and other materials by the masquerades are also signs of their artistic ingenuity.

The festivals also serve the purpose of upholding public morality. The various songs rendered during the festivals serve some important functions. For instance, during Ìgwùlè and Àlórò festivals, songs are to expose people with questionable characters within the community. This serves as a sort of checks on the morals among the members of the community. These festivals form the basis of the people's belief that life does not end in this physical world that life continues after death. During the festival, prayers are offered for good health, peace, fertility and community well-being.

## **7. Influence of Modern Religion and Civilization on the Egúngún Festival**

Islam had taken root in Ìdó-Àní before the advent of Christianity (Àsábíà and Adégbèsan 1970:31). Christianity was brought to Ìdó-Àní in 1892 (Ajíròba 1972:31) by an enthusiastic group of native of Ìdó-Àní who had returned from their various places of captivity, notably from Ilèṣà and Oṅdó (Àsábíà and Adégbèsan 1970:31). Since the advent of these two religions, both have been trying to exercise their influence on the people culture. This has affected most of the festivals that are celebrated in Ìdó-Àní. There were clashes between the Christians and the traditionalists in the past. Many people were converted and this reduced the number of participants in the festivals. Most of the taboos of the festivals like curfew,

non-beating of drums and staying in-door in the day time during the festivals, have been relaxed. Churches can beat drums during the period of worship and the curfew is only restricted to the vicinity of the masquerades' houses and lasted for a short period of time.

Also, modern civilization has both positive and negative influences on the festivals. With the advent of western education, urbanization, industrialization and foreign religions, enthusiasm for the festivals has died down. Movement from the rural areas to urban areas in search of employment has affected the festivals greatly. People who are up to the age of participation or those who qualify to participate in the festivals are now living in the urban areas. They find it difficult to leave their work and stay at home for a certain period of time.

Most traditional monuments in the quarters have been destroyed. Educated people now consider it primitive to wear traditional costumes for these festivals. They prefer to appear in ordinary dress, feast with their age group and pay whatever dues they are asked to pay by the elders. This makes the festivals to lose their traditional features. Also, the traditional belief that most of these festivals are to ward off diseases and death has been overtaken by modern health care system. It is also observed that the advent of modern religion has reduced the number of participants.

## 8. Conclusion

The adherents of these modern religions consider active participation in the traditional festivals to be against the tenets of their religions. However, with the advent of formal education, involvement of media houses, researchers and government emphasis on revival of our culture, there is still hope that there will be some improvement in preserving our culture and festivals. Also, songs and chants which accompany egúngún festival and other traditional festivals should be properly documented and preserved by researchers in the field of oral literature.

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