

SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS OF OGIGI FESTIVAL AMONG THE IKALE PEOPLE OF ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Among the numerous festivals of the Ikale people of Ondo State, in Nigeria, "Ogigi", which is also referred to as "Oluwa Eriji" - a name coined from River Oluwa by Abodi, the king - because 'parted' to allow the Abodi and High Chief Lema to pass through to Ikale-land - is the most widely recognised festival because of its historical significance. This popular festival has been celebrated annually by the Abodi family and the entire indigenes of Ikoya, usually in August of every year. It commences from the sighting of a new moon. Using key-informant and in-depth interviews, it was found that when the festival is not celebrated, for one reason or the other, it is generally believed that certain negative consequences would occur, such as the mysterious deaths of the chief priest and others; widespread barrenness of men and women, animals, farm-produce, etc. Even, failure to celebrate the festival can bring about the sudden death of the king and other notable dignitaries, including other disasters. However, when the festival is conscientiously celebrated by the people, many benefits accrue to the people and place, ranging from harmony, peaceful coexistence and unity; good health to all and sound healing of sicknesses, grand prosperity; and, even, being responsible for extending the king's lifespan. It also gives an overall sense of identity and solidarity to the entire Ikale-indigenes and, also, boost economic activities in the area as the annual celebration brings home the sons and daughters, from all over the globe.

Keywords: Festival; Historical Relevance; Peaceful Co-existence; Sound Health and Healing.

Introduction

A festival is an event usually celebrated by a community and focusing on some distinctive features of that community, such as religion and/or cultural practices. It is often manifest as a local or national holiday, mela, or eid. The word festival” according to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, means a series of performance of music, plays, films/ movies, etc. usually organized in the same place once a year; a series of public events connected with a particular activity or idea. In the general sense, a festival is an event ordinarily celebrated by a community and centering on some characteristic aspects of that community and its religion or tradition which often serve to fulfill specific communal purposes, especially with regard to commemoration or thanksgiving (Wehmevier Sally, 2008) The celebrations offer a sense of belonging to religious, social, or geographical groups, contributing to group cohesiveness. Festivals also provide entertainment, which was particularly for local communities before the advent of mass produced entertainment. Festivals that focus on cultural or ethnic topics also seeks to inform community member of their traditions, the involvement of elders sharing stories and experience provide a means for unity among families (Wehmevier Sally, 2008).

A festival constitutes typical cases of globalization, as well as the high culture-low culture interrelationship (Caves, R. W. 2004). Food is such a vital resource that many festivals are associated with harvest time. Religious memorial and thanksgiving for good harvests are blended in events that take place in autumn, such as Halloween in the northern hemisphere and Easter in the southern.

Festivals often serve to fulfill specific communal purposes, especially in relation to commemoration or thanksgiving to indigenous deities or saints and often called “patron festival”. They provided amusement which was particularly important to local communities before the advent of mass-produced entertainment. Festivals that relate to cultural or ethnic aspect of life also seek to inform community-members of their indigenous customs and/or traditions. Thus the involvement of elders sharing folklore and experiences provides a means for unity among families and groups.

From time immemorial people have celebrated festivals in order to rise above their own limitations and escape from their dreary lives and light-heartedly share in the essence of human existence. Because every festival is a high-day in the strictest sense of the word. It breaks the monotony of daily life, kills boredom, provides an interruption to the unrelenting burden of never-ending duties, and consequently gives man a feeling of happiness and freedom. During the festival the participants

are transported into a state of elation and ecstasy and experience a feeling of being carried to the very summit of spiritual life. The same feeling of ecstatic excitement is at the root of, and inspires, the religious festival. The idea in which it originated is characteristic of the sacral festival. (G. van der Leeuw 1933 cited in Bleeker, C.J. 1967 https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004378629_003).

On the whole this idea consists in the celebrating of the sacred, mythical period of time i.e. the moment-whether mythical, cosmic or historical-when the Holy has unambiguously revealed itself. This implies that during a religious festival the participants fall back on the archetypal truth of the faith and live in accordance with the basic idea of their religion. Every religious festival actualizes the archetypal holy period and consequently becomes a holy period of longer or shorter duration. These holy periods have become part of the calendar. Many festivals are dated thus figuring in the calendar. It is possibly better to say that originally the calendar had a distinctly religious function, as it served to indicate when the gods made their true selves and they will be known to the people. This sacred event provided time and again an occasion for celebrating a festival. It is for this reason that many ancient calendars are mainly calendars of festivals. (W. E. van Wijk, *Onze kalender*, 1955 cited Bleeker, C.J. 1967 https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004378629_003).

Many festivals have religious origins that are entwined with cultural and traditional activities. Like Christmas, Rosh Hashanah, Diwali, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha etc. Some other celebrate seasonal change and harvest. While some other celebrate events of historical significance, such military victories or other nation-building events. An early example is the festival established by Ancient Egyptian Pharaoh Ramesses III celebrating his victory over the Libyans (Berrett, LaMar C.; Ogden D. Kelly, 1996).

In this way religious festivals are part of human existence and constitute the highlights and the crises in the rhythm of the religious life of the community and the individual. Sometimes this rhythm results from the order of cosmic life; sometimes it springs from the power of the revelation of God in the course of history. The latter is the case in the ecclesiastical year of the Christian church; here the holy stories of the Old and New Testament are grouped according to their place on the calendar; the ancient festivals are characterized by the former variety of religious experience. Starting from the point of view that religious festivals mark the holy events in the course of life, it is easy to distinguish the following types:

1. Agrarian festivals, which are connected with agricultural work, such as sowing and harvesting.
2. Seasonal festivals, which are celebrated e.g. in spring, mid-summer and autumn.
3. calendar-festivals, the dates of which depend on the position of the sun, the phases of the moon and the advent of the New Year.
4. Family-festivals, which impart a certain cachet to important events in the life of the family.
5. Festivals of the dead, during which the memory of the dead is honoured at regular intervals.
6. Festivals connected with events in the life of the community which are of exceptional religious importance, e.g. the accession to the throne of a monarch.
7. Festivals in honour of mythical divine figures.
8. Festivals in commemoration of events in the life of the founder of a religion. It can be readily concluded from this summary, which does not claim to be complete, that for religious people it was not and still is not, difficult to find a reason for holding a religious festival. In certain religions, or rather during certain periods of the various religions, (Bleeker, C.J. 1967 https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004378629_003).

There are numerous types of festivals in the world and most countries celebrate important events or traditions with traditional cultural events and activities.

A tradition is a belief or behaviour passed down within a group or society with symbolic or special significance that have their origins in the past. The word tradition is derived from the Latin word "tradere" which means "to transmit, to hand over, to give for safe keeping". The word tradition is understood to mean a belief, custom, a way of doing something peculiar to a group of a people, that is, the culture and customary practices of a people: their own conception of reality and what reality is all about." It is that which comes out of people's life experiences. Tradition is a people's experience born out of their environment which influences their structure of life and how they describe reality (Ogbenika Gregory, 2016 cited in Ogbenika Gregory E., 2020).

Among the numerous festivals of the Ikale people of Ondo State, in Nigeria, "Ogigi", which is also referred to as "Oluwa Eriji" - a name coined from River Oluwa by the "Abodi", the oba/ king because it 'parted' to allow the Abodi and High Chief Lema to pass through to Ikale-land - is the most widely recognised festival because of its historical significance. This popular festival has been

celebrated annually by the “Abodi” and the entire indigenes of Ikoya, usually in August of every year. It commences from the sighting of a new or crescent moon.

Literature Review

Types of Festival

(a) Religious Festival

A religious festival is a time of special importance marked by adherents to that religion

Among many religions, a feast is a set of celebrations in honour of God or gods (Bleeker, 1968). Also African Traditional Religion (ATR) like “Ogun” “Sango”, etc.

(b) Arts Festival

An Arts festival encompasses a wide range of art-forms, including music, dance, film, fine arts, literature, and poetry. It does not solely focus on visual arts.

Among the many offspring of general arts festivals are also more specific types of festivals, including ones that showcase intellectual or creative achievement such as science festivals, literary festivals and music festivals (Storr, Francis, 1911). . Sub-categories include comedy festivals, rock festivals, jazz festivals and buskers festivals; poetry festivals (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C%C3%BAirt_International_Festival_of_Literature) theatre festivals, and storytelling festivals; and re-enactment festivals such as Renaissance fairs

(c) Food festival

A food festival is an event celebrating food or drink. It often highlights the output of producers from a certain region. Some food festivals are focus on a particular item of food, such as the National Peanut Festival in the United States, “Oji”/kola nut, “Nji” festival or Yam festival among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. Many countries also hold festivals to celebrate wine. One example is the global celebration of the arrival of Beaujolais nouveau, which involves shipping the new wine around the world for its release date on the third Thursday of November each year (Haine, 2006; Hyslop, 2013).

(d) Seasonal and Harvest Festivals

Seasonal festivals, such as “Beltane”, are determined by the solar and the lunar calendars and by the cycle of the seasons, especially because of its effect on food-supply. New yam festival is one of the examples of Harvest festivals.

The Concept of Festivals Among the Yoruba People

Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, festivals serve as a connector of the social world of the Yoruba with the unseen world. The Yoruba pantheon consists of hundreds of gods, worshiped for an immense variety of purpose, each representative of some natural or spiritual element or human emotion. In Yoruba land some gods are said to be in existence before the creation of the earth and others are heroes or heroines from the past that were deified after their deaths. Other gods are natural objects in their environments such as mountains, hills and rivers that have influenced people’s lives and cultural history (Beier, U. cited in Ogbenika, Gregory E. 2020). These gods are honoured, revered and worshiped particularly during festivals, which often begins with the telling of a Yoruba myth. This is evident in their festivals; for example, *Oranmiyan* festival which explores Oyo history in order to explain its foundation and the ultimate destiny of ancient Oyo Empire. Many traditional festivals are celebrated among the Yorubas in different ways and during specified periods of the year. Festivals among the Yoruba can be grouped into three categories. First are festivals used to celebrate agricultural products such as the New Yam festival. Second are festivals celebrated in memory of some powerful and historical figures in a particular community who had achieved and fought for that community and made history. Festivals are thereby organized annually to celebrate them (Beier, U. cited in Ogbenika, Gregory E. 2020). Examples of such festivals include *Ogun* festival, *Sango* festival, *Oya* festival, *Oranmiyan* festival, to mention but a few. The third category falls under historical festivals which are organized in remembrance of a particular incident that happened in a community; be it good or bad. Thus, rituals are carried out to honour those who have passed on to the world of the ancestors and provide a space where people may explore the profound and experience phenomena. Among the Yorubas of Western Nigeria are festivals that are rich, which can well influence the world both artistically and morally and at the same time earn foreign exchange for the Nigerian nation as a whole. One of such festivals is the *Oranmiyan* festival. The festival has its inherent aesthetic structures, such as dances and songs which are linked with ancestors’ worship, historical figures and notable events either in the lives of its adherents or in Oyo town. Generally, festival among the

Yoruba people of Nigeria is structured around ritual ceremonies and worship but it also serves as a source of entertainment and cultural display. Every festival among the Yoruba has its own dos and don'ts, which its adherents or participators must take heed of. For example, the *Agemo* festival among the Ijebu people forbids females from looking at the masquerades called *Agemo*. Songs, prayers, sacrifices, incantation, sacred chants and dance play crucial roles in festival celebration among the Yorubas. Festivals are also used to strengthen the bond of unity among different communities in Yoruba land, one of such festivals is *Egungun* festival. Most people, regardless of their religious affiliation participate due to the interesting atmosphere (Ogbenika, Gregory E., 2020).

Description of the Study Area

Ìkàlè is one of the several dialects spoken by the Yorùbá of Nigeria (Adeoye, 1979). The name also refers to the people who speak the dialect. This subgroup is made up of fourteen communities in the southwestern part of Ondo State of Nigeria. They share boundaries with the Ìlàjẹ , Ìjọ Àpòì, and Ìjọ Àrògbò to the South; Òdígbó Local Government Area to the North; Edo State to the East; and Ògùn State to the West. Ìkàlè communities include Ìkoyà, Òde-Ìrèlè, Omen, Igbódìgò, Àyèkà, Ìdèpé (Òkìtipupa), Òde-Aye, Erínjẹ , Òş óòró, Ìgbìnsìn-Ọloto, Àkótógbò, Àjàgbà, Ìyànsàn and Ìjù-Oş un. The last four communities were formerly grouped under the Benin Confederation because traces of Edo language and culture abound clearly in their ways of life. Òş óòró is a conglomeration of Igbótako, Ìlútítun, Iju-Odò, Iju-Òkè, Erékìtì, and Òmotoş o towns. The Ìkàlè also have kindred communities in parts of Ògùn State, viz., Ayédé, Àyílà, Aràfè and Mobolorundúró.

While some Ìkàlè communities claim direct descent from Ilé-Ife, others claim Benin, or Ugbò descent, and a few others elsewhere. Oral tradition confirms that there were migrations from Ife Oòyè before the Benin contact of the sixteenth century, which tend to link Ìkàlè dynasty to Ọba Esigie (Bajowa 1992:3). In an interview with Chief M.A. Fabunmi, he narrated the Ife version of the Ìkàlè migration from Ile-Ife.

Ìkàlè or Old Ìkàlè Local government is part of the Yoruba tribe of Ondo state in Nigeria which was originally a combination of the present Okitipupa Local Government and Irele Local Government before the two local governments

were split into two namely: Ìrèlè local government and Okitipupa local government.

Data Collection Methods

Two key-informants who are members of that community participated and assisted the researcher in conducting the in-depth interviews (IDIs) with the Oba/King, and some four High Chiefs in Ikoya community, where the Ogigi festival is majorly celebrated. Other (IDIs) were conducted on some other two High Chiefs from Okitipupa community. The responses were transcribed and presented in content-analysis form.

Summary of Findings

The summary of the responses from the King and high chiefs are analyzed with subtitles below;

History Of “Ogigi” Festival In Ikoya Land

The history of the festival was narrated thus “Oluwa Eriji” or “Ogigi” festival came into being as a result of the coming of “Abodi” from Ode-Irele to Ikoya. But, when the “Abodi” and Chief Lema wanted to cross to the other side of the Oluwa river, through Okitipupa, there was no means of crossing over. Suddenly, they found a big long wood in the river which performed the function of a bridge, while the “Abodi” had crossed to the other side of the river, Chief Lema wanted to drink some and wash his face as he stood on the wood. As he shook the wood with his sword, the wood was shaken and, then Chief Lema looked down at the wood and realized it was a sea snake-“ere” and, immediately he called the “Abodi” and told him of the strange occurrence. Then, the “Abodi” said to Chief Lema: “because you are the one that saw the snake, it would, therefore, be a taboo for you and your descendants to eat snake”. And, up till today, the Lema family in Ikoya-land is forbidden eating to of snake in sheer defence to an unusual snake that rendered such peculiar assistance in crossing the river.

Then, the “Abodi” said to the river: “because the river has helped him to cross to the other side of the river, (by making a snake to serve as a bridge for him and Chief Lema), the, “Abodi” named the river “Oluwami” or, “truly you are my Lord” and the name of the river has remained river-oluwa up till today. Also the

“ Abodi” made a covenant that at the same period, which was the 8th month or August of every year, the and the people of Ikoya-land would be remembering the river by worshipping it with everything edible and drinkable. Up till this moment, the festival is popularly celebrated annually by the “Abodi” and the entire people of Ikoya.

The Chief Priest Functions during the celebration of “Ogigi” festival

According the information gathered during the interview sections the function of the chief priest is explained below by High chief ‘Gbo’ 70 years old;

1. ALAKA is the chief priest and the leader among the priests.
2. OBAJA is the second in command and he is the person to renew the “Abodi’s” vow at river-oluwa.
3. BOJUTORO: Is the least and he is in charge of the aspect of the festival at the shrine or worshipping centre (that is, Oghwa-Oluwa)

There is also Kogun-Oba who he serves as the guard of “Abodi” and he also lead the Omakoko (the calabash carrier) and the crowd from Ikoya to Okitipupa and then back to Ikoya.

The Ogigi Festival

In narrating the how the main festival is been celebrated; High Chief ‘L’ 65 years old explained that ; *When a new or crescent moon appears in the eighth month, the Obaja, a priest would, put a big calabash on the ground and wait five days thereafter the commencement of the festival which, usually lasts for fourteen days. On the fifth day, “Obaja” would lead the people to the Jegun of Idepe palace to perform the necessary rites after which the king would send one of his guards (Kogun) to accompany the “Obaja” and the people to river-oluwa to the fetch water.*

A young man, dressed in white is made to carry the calabash and he is referred to as “Omakoko”. The young man carries the calabash to be used in fetching water and Ogigi would also be carried along. The Omakoko that carries the calabash must not look back while carrying the calabash to river Oluwa until he has dropped the calabash.

After the water is fetched from the river, both the Omakoko and Obaja become empowered as it were. Then, the next day, a big calabash would be placed outside the shrine for everybody to see, then, the Abodi and the chief priest would offer a special prayer for the people. After the special prayer the dog for the sacrifice will be killed by Obaja. The

materials needed for the sacrifice include; Kolanut (obi), Dog (Aja), Nature-chalk 9Efun), Alcohol (Ogogoro) among others.

Before the commencement of the festival, the people forbidden from eating new yam but after the festival the people rejoice and jubilate with one another because they have the freedom to eating the new yam usually called "Igbodo".

Advantages of the Festival

Like many festivals worldwide 'Ogigi' festival also has its advantages as enumerated by of the High Chiefs;

1. It brings about peaceful coexistence and unity.
2. The people of the community have access to new yam (Igbodo).
3. There is long life-span for the king and the people.
4. It brings sound health and healing.
5. It draws the kings and people of the land together the more.

Consequences of Not Celebrating the Festival

One of the High Chiefs also explained that, there are consequences attached to the festival not being celebrated usually for one reason or the other; and they include but not limited to:

1. The priest in charge of worshipping of Ogigi can die mysteriously.
2. The people of the land can die mysteriously one after the other.
3. There can be barrenness in the land e.g Animal farm products, human-being etc.
4. The king can die a painful death (Oba awaja)
5. Destruction could befall the land. One of the High Chiefs claimed that "the destruction that befell Okitipupa, the headquarters of Okitipupa Local Government Area, during the Endsars protest where the youths burnt the Divisional Police Office, burnt the Local Government Secretariat, the tax office, welfare office etc. that were destroyed on 22nd October 2020, was a sign that the Oluwa river was angry with the people of the area, because the "Oghwa-Oluwa" tree was cut down at the river bank".

Conclusion

From the first day of the festival the “Abodi” and the High Chiefs would provide both pounded yam and palm wine for the worshippers of “Ogigi” at the oghwaluwa shrine. And then, if anybody should fight during the period, it would attract a fine of a matured dog both as a penalty for disobedience and for violating the rules and regulations of the festival. The sanction is imposed in order for peace to reign in the community during the festival period and then beyond.

Finally, on the 14th day, which is the last day (Obaja, Alaka and Bojutoro) would go to Abodi and give him the necessary report about the festival. Thereafter, everything would be rounded up by praying, pouring libation to the ancestors and, with wine and kolanuts for the people of the community and harmonious co-existence. And most importantly if “Ogigi” festival is given the proper publicity it deserves, it can become a useful cultural tourist attraction for the community.

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