

Egungun Festival as a Tourist Attraction to Foreigners and Its Impact on the Oke Ayedun People

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Abstract:

This paper delves into the captivating world of the Egungun festival as celebrated in the vibrant town of Oke Ayedun, Ekiti. The Egungun festival holds immense cultural significance, intertwining the realms of the living and the departed through intricate rituals, vibrant performances, and ancestral homage. The article provides an overview of the proposed research, highlighting the festival's historical context, its role in community identity, the symbolism of masquerades, and the transformative experiences it offers to participants and observers.

Keywords:

Egungun festival; tourist attraction; foreigners

I. Introduction

Ancestor worship is an essential aspect of Yoruba culture. For worshippers of deities like Egungun and the Yoruba pantheon gods known collectively as the Orisa festivals serve as a connector between the social world of the Yoruba and the unseen world (Oladele O. e., 2010). The Yoruba pantheon consists of hundreds of gods, worshipped for an immense variety of purposes, with each god representing a natural or spiritual element or human emotion (Oderinde, 2003). Some gods predate the creation of the earth, while others are heroes or heroines from the past who attained godhood after their death (Nadel, 1954). Additionally, some gods are associated with natural objects in their environment such as mountains, hills and rivers, which have influenced people's lives and history. Storytelling and the journey of life hold great importance to the Yoruba people and are connected to numerous sacred rituals (Oderinde, 2003).

In Oke Ayedun, these gods are honored, revered, and worshipped, particularly during festivals, which often begin with the retelling of a Yoruba myth (Na'Allah, 2016). This is evident during the Egungun festival. A festival can be said to be an event usually staged by a local community that centers on some unique aspect of that community (Oladele O. , 2010). A festival can also be seen as series of performances involving music, plays, dances, etc. usually organized annually or as agreed upon, where people of particular community come together to dine and wine in order to celebrate and share common traditions.

Many traditional festivals are celebrated in Oke Ayedun and are as old as the people themselves. They are celebrated in different ways and during specified periods of the year. The festivals include the Egungun festival, Ogun festival, Agbe festival, Ora gbigba festival, Iyo fifon festival, Ikara bitin bitin festival, Ajale festival, Omole Esefa festival, ... (Oderinde, 2003)etc. Each festival has its own varieties and purposes. Festivals like the yam festival, popularly known as the Ora gbigba festival in Oke Ayedun, are used to celebrate agricultural products. Another festival is celebrated in memory of powerful and historic figures in a particular community who

have achieved and fought for that community, making history (Oyelakin, Yoruba Traditional Medicine and the Challenge of Integration, 2015). Festivals are therefore organized annually to celebrate them. Examples of some of the festivals in Oke Ayedun are the Egungun festival, Ogun festival, Sango festival, etc. Another category is historical festivals that are organized to remember a particular incident that happened in a community, whether it was good or bad. Rituals are carried out to honor those who have passed on to the ancestors (Oladele O. e., 2010). Some festivals are also meant to mark the worship of their objects of worship before the arrival of Christianity and Islam. For example, Ikara bitin bitin, the people of Oke Ayedun Ekiti, celebrate the annual festival to worship their ancient god called Erelufa.

Festivals are not only a medium of cultural, educational, inter-generational, and communication importance, but they also play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage, transmitting knowledge, and creating communal experiences for future generations.

The origin of Oke Ayedun Ekiti is traceable to its founder, called Olootu (Oyelakin, Yoruba Traditional Medicine and the Challenge of Integration, 2003). He journeyed from Ile Ife and eventually settled in the place now called Oke Ayedun. During a certain period in the history of Ile Ife, Crown Prince of Oduduwa's lineage continually left the Ile Ife kingdom with the ambition to establish their own kingdoms, free from direct control by their fathers' dynasty. These princes ventured to various parts of the Yoruba country, including regions in modern Edo state and even as far as what is now known as Benin Republic. As evidence of this emigration, virtually all Yoruba traditional rulers (obas) today can trace their origins back to Oduduwa, the legendary founder of the Yoruba race, whose kingdom had its capital in Ile Ife (Oyelakin, Yoruba Traditional Medicine and the Challenge of Integration, 2003).

The Olootu who founded Oke Ayedun kingdom was one of the Crown Prince of Oduduwa's lineage, who migrated from Ile Ife. Like other princes, he left Ile Ife with a group of determined and loyal followers, aiming to establish his own kingdom. He traveled while remaining within the Yoruba territory, passing through various Yoruba settlements, including Ila Orangun, in search of a suitable place to settle down and establish his kingdom. Eventually, he arrived at the present-day Egbe Oba land, where he briefly stayed in a place called AUN, which is now a quarter in modern Odo Oro. In the meantime, Elekole, a senior prince of Oduduwa's lineage, had already settled in the location that later became the headquarters of Egbe Oba land (Nadel, 1954).

After sometime there, Olootu moved on and soon found a large expanse of fertile agricultural land in a thickly forested area. It was relatively empty of previous strongly organized settlers. He settled at the precincts of a large water pool, which he named after himself-Olootu Water Pool (Na'Allah, 2016). He named the whole area Eyingbo because it was a big jungle with primeval forests covering the land. It was indeed an ideal place to establish the nucleus of his kingdom: well-watered, fertile soil, and relatively unoccupied (Nadel, 1954). He called the spot of his first stop Agase. Eyingbo became Olootu's earliest settlement, where he established his residence around the Olootu Water Pool. From there, he earnestly began expanding his domain westwards across the Omologbe stream, encompassing Igbo-Olu and the modern site Oke Ayedun (Oyelakin, Yoruba Traditional Medicine and the Challenge of Integration, 2015). As Ogbe, Idemo, Igboroko, Iluga, Itafin, Ilisin and Omu became parts of Olootu's domain, his territory extended further until it reached the modern boundaries shared by Oke Ayedun with places such as Ara, Ijebu, Agege, Ikunri, Odo Oro, Esun and Ipao in the South, West and North. Odo Ayedun lay on the East.

Years later, the Olootu moved physically westwards from the initial spot of settlement around Omi Olootu in Eyingbo. He firmly retained his ownership of the entire place and continued his farming activities there. Indeed, even today, the water fetched from the Olootu water pool is used in certain important traditional rites during the installation and demise of an Alaaye (Oke Ayedun King). A large part of the same Eyingbo has now been surveyed and registered as Alaaye Estate, while the areas where the Odo Ayedun people (a neighboring town) had erected residential buildings before 2002 have been acquired and released to Odo Ayedun for settlement. Meanwhile, Olootu settled in the aforementioned area, and the Owas also settled some distance away in the Eastern part of the place. History suggests that Olootu and the Owa arrived at their contiguous places of settlement at times that were not very far apart, with Olootu arriving first.

Contrary to what Chief John Akinyemi wrote in his book, the Olootu who founded Oke Ayedun never sojourned in Kotokarfi or any other part of Ebira land. He was not the Olootu whom the Owa claimed to have met at Ebira Koto, nor was he the bow and arrow-carrying hunter reported to have accompanied the Owa during his travels from Ebira land to Agase, where the Olootu of Oke Ayedun history had already settled and named Oke Ayedun before Owa's arrival. Throughout his journey from Ile Ife, the Olootu who founded Oke Ayedun traveled within the Yoruba country, whose language and culture he understood. He was never in Ebira Koto, where as reported by Chief John Akinyemi, the Owas spent fifty years without understanding the language of his admiring hosts before leaving presumably in frustration, to resume his journey to the site of modern Ayedun. There is nothing in the culture, tradition, customs and language of the Olootu of Oke Ayedun that can be linked to the Ebira people. The Olootu of Chief John Akinyemi's "Short History of Odo Ayedun" is totally alien to Oke Ayedun history. The two monarchs, the Owa of Odo Ayedun and the Olootu of Oke Ayedun, have lived together in a state of mutual respect for each other. Oke Ayedun was formerly known as Oke Igbira but was changed to Oke Ayedun in 1954 by Reverend Akindele. This change was made due to misconceptions and manipulations surrounding the town.

II. Research Method

The paper relied heavily on interviews, depended on primary sources. The paper also relied on secondary sources

III. Result and Discussion

Egungun is interchangeably used with the words Egigun and Eegun. Egungun refers to the Yoruba masquerade or masked, costumed figure. It represents the ancestral reference or the collective force of the ancestors. According to Yoruba cultural myth, Egungun is believed to be a descendant from heaven. He is the younger brother of Oro, and both of them descended from heaven. A belief that cannot be substantiated scientifically; upon arriving in the world, they were naked and sought shelter in the bush. However, the elder brother, Oro, refused to leave the hiding place and sent Egungun to assess the situation outside. Before venturing out, Egungun used Mariwo (palm kernel leaves) to cover his nakedness. As he entered the outside world, he was warmly welcomed and worshipped by the people, who started adorning him with various clothes. Egungun's favorable reception caused him to forget about his brother waiting in the bush. After a long wait, Oro grew impatient and angered, resulting in him cursing Egungun. This curse is believed to be the reason why Egungun is always fully covered when parading the town, resembling a mad man wearing tattered clothes. The tattered clothes symbolize the garments

given to him by the people upon his arrival, and the Mariwo represents the leaves he used to cover himself when he first came to the outside world.

However, there are several stories regarding the origin of Egungun. According to a famous Yoruba historian, it is posited that Egungun, the African cultic masquerade in Nigeria, originated from the Nupe country. He states that the interaction between the Nupe and Yoruba resulted in the introduction of the cult to Yoruba nation. S. F. Nadel (1954), another historian, holds different view. He suggests that the masquerade worshippers in Nupe were actually Yoruba who had adopted the Nupe culture. In other words, he believes that the origin of Egungun is rooted in Yoruba religion. Oludare Olajubu (1970), a folklorist and a professor of Yoruba literature, supports Nadel's argument. He fervently asserts that the Yoruba nation originated, owned, and spread the Egungun cult throughout the country. He believed that any opposing opinion was obscure and recounted various Yoruba traditions that accounted for the origin of Egungun among the Yoruba people. It is said that the origin of Egungun can be traced back to Ile Ife, and that all Awo, which represents secret knowledge, had a common origin: they were born at the creation of the world in Ile Ife. Another myth tells the story of two children, one a farmer and the other a singer/dancer, who shared same parents. The singer/dance's fine clothes attracted many people, causing him to feel ashamed. He then pulled a veil over his face and clothes over his head, thus becoming Egungun. Other traditional myths, states that the Alapini, the most senior chief in Oyo, had three children: Ojewumi, Ojesanmi, Ojerinlo (Na'Allah, 2016). These children disobeyed their father by eating the Ijobia, a kind of yam. As a consequence, they became thirsty and went to the stream to drink. One after the other, they drank and fell dead (Na'Allah, 2016). The Yoruba god of divination, Ifa agreed to reincarnate them. On the seventh day, they came back to life but had to veil their faces because they were terrible to look at. They entered the town wearing beautiful costumes and thus became Egungun. Some scholars attribute the Yoruba worship of Egungun as Ara Orun, the one from heaven who came to look after his children. Egungun cured people of illness and granted children to barren women. There were a few other myths similar to the ones mentioned above.

3.1 Egungun Festival in Oke Ayedun Ekiti from the earliest time

Egungun comes out of four compounds in Oke Ayedun: Ona Owa, Itafin, Elesun, and Irutu. Alaaye, the king, will send the town crier to spread information around the town that there will be an Egungun festival in nine days' time. Three days before the festival, the Irutu family will prepare Okiti-Agba. Okiti-Agba is always set high on a hill in the form of a drum, dressed with Mariwo (palm kernel leaves) (Na'Allah, 2016). The drum will be beaten, and the Egungun is free to come out. The Egungun festival commences around August 24th every year in Oke Ayedun (Oyelakin, Yoruba Traditional Medicine and the Challenge of Integration, 2015). The celebration starts in the morning as early as 6am and lasts until the evening. Egungun will come out of the bush known as Gbooro or Igbo Egungun (Nadel, 1954). It is forbidden for Egungun to come out from a house. Women are also forbidden from entering Gbooro, as well as young ones or people who are not matured, because secret rituals take place in Gbooro that must not be revealed. It is also believed that any woman who accidentally or intentionally enters Gbooro will become barren or her children will die suddenly. Egungun has no sacrificial site and is represented as a figure in human form, typically a man. The man dresses in Egungun attire adorned with charms and moves around the town, celebrating, rejoicing, dancing and spreading merriment. During these festivities, they collect money, kola nuts, bitter kola and other offerings from people. Additionally, there are Egungun leaders known as Oloode, Olorugbo, Elemesho and Opon. Among them, the Olorugbo holds the highest authority and power, serving as the leader of the other personnel mentioned. He commands the Egungun from Gbooro, directing their actions and setting guidelines for their conduct. Egungun festival can last for a month if

there are no fights (Oderinde, 2003). People who worship Egungun bears names like Ojebemi, Ojelade, Abegunde, Egunjobi, Ojengbe, etc.

There are approximately twenty-four (24) types of Egungun in Oke Ayedun Ekiti, which include;

AGBE: He uses stick to beat people, rejoicing and dancing around the town. He must be a well grown and matured man. He can come out at any time, such as in the morning, afternoon, and late afternoon, except late night.

IMOLE: He is known to be a spirit who only appears at midnight and invisible to anyone. This spirit is renowned for promoting peace and visits the houses of those who engaged in in fights during the day in the town. The purpose of these visits is to collect meat, and failure to provide the meat would result in the destruction or collapse of the house. Therefore, people are advised not to fight during the Egungun festival.

OWI: Also called Esi or Yalahu, he dances around the town, collecting money and material things, and blessing the people. Unlike other Egungun, he does not dress in Mariwo attire, nor does he speak. Instead, he communicates through distinct sounds.

AGBO: This role is typically undertaken by mature men, starting from the age of 45. He does not carry a stick and instead uses his threatening demeanor as he dances around the town, collecting money and various items such as bitter kola, kola nut and more.

ELE: He always pursues women and throws stones at people. This particular type of Egungun is embodied by a mature youth. There is a material on the back of his neck called Ijori, which he uses to harm people, especially women. The Ijori inflicts scratches.

DODODANWA: This can also be referred to as Balogun Dododanwa. He produces sounds that frighten people, dances, moves around the town.

IRE: It is argued to be the oldest Egungun. He dances and moves around the town, bestowing blessings and collecting money or material items from the people.

EDE: He is also an elder Egungun who rings a handbell around the town while blessing and collecting money or material items from the people.

EGUN ALAGBEDE: He is also known as Egun Ode. He emerges before the other Egungun and signals the beginning of the festival in full swing. After his appearance, other Egungun are free to come out.

AMUDERI: He must be a grown man who prays, foretells, dances and rejoices as he moves around the town.

LAYEWU: Is another "Egun Ode" aside Egun Ode/Egun Alagbede. He can come out anytime and rain must not fall on him.

EGUN OBA: He is followed by the Queen and the princess, is the Egungun from the palace.

Apart from all the Egungun mentioned above, we also have Eye, Odide, Abe e.t.c. All these Egungun are followed by multiple people, drummers and singers while blessing and collecting money and material things as they move from one place to another. Egungun is seen as embodiment of happiness and cheering up the people. There are different types of dressing for each Egungun (Oladele O. , 2010). Their main attire is called Mariwo, which is made from palm kernel leaves. They also wear a cloth underneath to cover their nakedness, and these cloths come in various colors. Additionally, their faces are fully covered. It is important for every Egungun to dress properly. Each Egungun wears sebire, which serves as a shoe made up of beads. It creates a distinct sound as they walk, informing people of their arrival. Furthermore, various charms are placed on their bodies as well.

Egungun festival as a Tourist Attraction to foreigners and its impact on the Oke Ayedun people

Just like in the case of other Yoruba societies that celebrate the Egungun festival, the Egungun festival in Oke Ayedun has had a significant impact on the town. Here are the impacts: The Egungun festival serves as a means of entertainment and provides an avenue for people to relax during stressful times. For instance, the festival brings people together to rejoice and celebrate. The Egungun festival in Oke Ayedun is also used as a medium for praying for the town (Oderinde, 2003). During the festival, time is set aside to conduct traditional prayer rites for peace, development, and progress of the town. The Egungun festival holds traditional significance for Oke Ayedun as it brings people together in happiness (Oladele O. , 2010). During this period, sickness is believed to be reduced since everyone is happy, especially among children who move from one spot to another rejoicing.

Another important aspect of the Egungun festival is that it serves as a means of worshipping their objects of worship. It is evident that the people of Oke Ayedun are traditional worshippers, predating the arrival of missionaries (Sunday & Jemifo, 2021). Additionally, during the festival, songs are sung to denounce atrocities and discourage activities such as stealing, prostitution, adultery, fornication, idleness, and other forms of irresponsibility (Sunday & Jemifo, 2021). Songs that inspire people to achieve great things are also sung during this period. Example of such song is:

Omo Ayedun to gbe koko o
Ki sara wa, omo Ayedun to ko petesi
Ara wa ni. (Sunday & Jemifo, 2021)

The meaning of the song is that an individual from Ayedun who steals cocoa is not considered a part of Ayedun or is seen as a non-native whereas the one who builds a house is regarded as a true indigene of the town. Egungun festival is not just performed for the sake of it (Interview with Chief Adeniyi Olorunfemi, 2021). Its importance ranges from social, moral, and economic aspects within the community. Festivals are needed to provide relief from busy schedules, allowing us to meet well-wishers and have fun. They enhance social connections and facilitate communication with others. Festivals also bring people together, fostering love and happiness. Furthermore, they encourage people from distant places to gather and experience the economic aspect of Oke Ayedun Ekiti. Visitors are able to witness the town's economic potential and the availability of affordable products such as yam, local rice, cassava, gari, potatoes, etc. This encourages them to purchase goods from the town and transport them to their own dwellings, thereby improving the town's sales (Sunday & Jemifo, 2021). As long as the festival continues, people will continue to travel to the town and make purchases. Some individuals even go as far as investing in the town after recognizing its potential, leading to the establishment of industries or businesses that contribute to the town's economic growth.

Duyile Abiodun explained that an event is likely to have a social, cultural and maybe a tourism impact on both the community and individuals attending the event (Sunday & Jemifo, 2021). When people support an event in their community, it is likely to foster town development as people are given opportunities to interact with each other, especially family and friends. These interactions can encourage participants to spend money, resulting in an economic impact.

Another important aspect to note is the influence of festival rites and prayers on the town's development. This positive impact on the town's economy is worth considering, as it helps propel the town forward. Additionally, when people come together from distant and nearby areas, particularly the indigenous population, they contemplate the next steps in the town's development such as implementing infrastructure improvements like piped water,

electricity, local roads. These initiatives also contribute to the town's economic development (Olorunfemi, 2021).

Over all, the Egungun festival serves multiple purposes and benefits the community socially, morally, and economically. It fosters social connections, facilitates communication, boosts the local economy through increased sales, encourages investments, and stimulates discussions about further development. The annual Egungun festival is of great importance to the entire community of Oke Ayedun Ekiti, as it attracts indigenes who have traveled far and wide to attend this as an opportunity for the reaffirmation of bonds between members of the same tribe or class. It allows for the formation of new friendships and the establishments of new relationships.

In some cases, marriage proposals are made during the festival, and existing engagements are often consummated. Those who come from urban areas also take advantage of the occasion to create welfare associations with residents of the community. These associations collaborate to plan development projects and improve the living conditions of the town, providing an opportunity for the community to come together and strategize for its future at least once a year.

Additionally, the festival fosters a sense of identity, belongingness, and solidarity, which are essential for the survival of the community. For visitors, the Egungun festival offers a chance for recreation. Spectators derive great enjoyment from observing the thrilling and exciting activities. The celebration of the Egungun festival is believed to bring good fortune, peace, and happiness to everyone in the town. Overall, the Egungun festival serves as a unifying and joyous occasion, strengthening the social fabric of the community and promoting a shared sense of well-being.

IV. Conclusion

The Egungun festival provides one of the most festive periods of the year in Oke Ayedun Ekiti. It is a time of happiness and joy due to the wining and dining that accompanies it. Important social engagements take place during this period, and the welfare of the people is addressed.

Despite the forces of urbanization, civilization, and industrialization, which have caused many people to become lost in the race for survival, there are still individuals who find it challenging to be indoctrinated. This study investigates the development and endurance of the Egungun festival in Oke Ayedun from ancient times to the present. It also explores the spiritual and socio-economic dimensions of the festival. Additionally, the study examines the impact of colonialism, Christianity, and Islam on the traditional belief system.

Ekitis had not focused on tourists centers, they had instead like other Nigerians migrated to other Nations. People migrate for many reasons and these were rightly captured as 'pull of a better life, the push of danger or despair, forces of market and the call of the human heart'. There are different types of migration. It can be within the country or external; it may be voluntary or involuntary and it can be seasonal. It can be permanent, if a migrant return home (ancestral home); long term, if a migrant stay outside his place of origin for up to a year such that the place of migration effectually becomes the new residence/home (Duyile & Nwachukwu, 'Japa' Phenomenom and Nigeria Students In the Mix of a Proxy War in Ukraine, 2023). Migration is referred to a short term when a migrant stay outside his place of residence for a period of at least 3 months. 'External Migration' is movement to a new home in a different

country or continent. 'Emigration' refers to the process of moving into a new country. 'Involuntary' or forced migration' occurs when a government forces a large group of people out of a region. On the other hand, 'impelled migration' or 'imposed migration' refers to when individuals are not forced out of their country but leave because of unfavorable situations (push factors) such as warfare, political problems, or religious persecution. 'Step Migration' is a series of shorter, less extreme migrations from a person's place of origin to final destination, 'Chain.

'Migration' is a series of migrations within a family or group of people. Educational migration is when youths seek admission with the aim of migrating, it correlates to situations that are unfavorable in Nigeria, such as poor funding of the nation's universities, distorting the timeline (period) students over stay in the universities through strike, lack of quality teachers and facilities; and poor accommodation for the students. The students seek enrolment into foreign universities as a result of such laxities of the Nigerian government. The 'japa' phenomenon is about Nigerian youths migrating to Europe, Americas and Asia. Nigeria profits only if these youths send back home remittances (Duyile & Nwachukwu, 'Japa' Phenomenon and Nigeria Students In the Mix of a Proxy War in Ukraine, 2023). Nigeria leaders are not deliberate. Nigeria, including Ekiti State has played and will continue to play a weighty role in the sub region (Duyile, The Sea Factor in Nigeria's National Security, 2015); but tourism isn't considered one of those duties. Despite the huge amount of money the country derives from oil revenue annually, tourist infrastructure was neglected. In fact, during the last decade (2011-2019) there was no investment in tourist projects in the country. Out of this period the government granted contracts for road, building, which happened to be poor in quality and difficult to maintain, it was anti- tourist and not encouraging foreigners to Nigeria. Only about 40 percent of Nigerians have regular access to clean water; which inadequately affects agriculture, food security, sewage system, manufacturing and production in general (Duyile, Ediagbonya, Buhari, & Nwachukwu, 2020). Worse still, only 35 percent of Nigerians enjoy average electricity for up to 50 percent of the time, which has a major adverse impact on most tourist economy. The transportation and communication infrastructures need expansion and maintenance to enhance movements, commerce and economic growth that encourage visits from tourist. Inadequate investment, low capacity including poor maintenance of existing structures, corruption and lack of political will have combined to acutely hinder infrastructural development in Nigeria (Duyile, Infrastructural Development in Nigeria, 1960-2015: An Interrogation of Nigeria Socio-economic growth, 2020). Among the large population of Nigeria, there are many whose lives are greatly influenced by the fact that they live either on the sea coast or in the great network of waterways of the country (Duyile, Allison, Ediagbonya, & Taiwo, 2020). Their culture and traditions are governed by water rather than by any of the other element, and their customs also are influenced by the situation in which they live (Duyile, Contexting and Historicizing European and Riverine Nationalities Patterns of Seamanship and Water-borne Warfare Prior Colonial Nigeria, 2019). There are also many people in Nigeria who, although not of that tradition have in the past acquainted themselves very well for tourism. In context specifically the paper focuses on the Egungun festival in Oke Ayedun Ekiti and utilizes primary and secondary data. By examining the festival, this study demonstrates that Oke Ayedun traces its origin to the Yoruba culture and places significant importance on its Yoruba heritage. In conclusion, the study critically explores Yoruba beliefs about the dead, the afterlife, spirit beings, and ancestral spirits. These entities are believed to possess immense spiritual powers, forces, energies, or authorities over the affairs of humans. It would be of interest to tourist if they visit a place like this.

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