The AlémọSóko Festival in Ìdóàní, Ondo State

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Abstract: - This paper investigates the cultural factors that are responsible for the continuity of the Alémọsóko festival among the Ìyàyú people of Idoani in Ondo State of Nigeria. This study is an attempt to unravel the cultural factors that are responsible for the continuity of the Alémọsóko festival at Ìyàyú quarter of Idoani in Ondo State despite the dominant presence of foreign religions such as Christianity and Islam which maintain a negative attitude towards traditions. Findings in this paper reveal that, the continuity of the Alémọsóko festival is hinged on the involvement of every family or house hold in the Ìyàyú quarters. The age group of age of 34 and 44 are made to participate fully in the Alémọsóko festival. Findings also show that, there are age differences among those who participate in Alémọsóko festival and those who masquerade in other Yorùbá towns and villages. While previous studies do not specify the ages of those who can masquerade, the present study on Alémọsóko festival stipulates the ages of the people who can masquerade in the Ìyàyú quarters at Idoani is between 34 and 44 years. For data collection, oral interview was employed by interviewing selected people of Ìyàyú people of Idoani in Ondo State. A simple percentage statistical method was used to test the data that were collected.

Keywords: Alémọsóko, festival, traditions, religions, cultural factors

I. INTRODUCTION

Idóání, a town in Òṣé Local Government Area of Ondo State, is a conglomeration of several ethnic groups which include Amúṣígboro, Ìṣùre, Òkọ, Ìṣẹwá, Ìyàyú and Œwáni. Today, Ìdóání, which is about forty kilometers from Òwá on the way to Igarra in Èdo State and Kabba in Kogi State, is the administrative headquarters of Ìrèkà Area Office. The Area Office comprises Àfọ, Ìdóàní and Ìdógún (see Ìkọtun, 1995). Historically, Ìyàyú people were said to have migrated from Sọṣan, a Local Government Area of Ondo State, to Ìdóàní about four hundred years ago1. The Ìṣẹwá people were said to have left Benin many years ago and had stayed at least in ten different places before they finally settled at the present site called Ìṣẹwá in 1952. Although they would have wished to stay at a place not very far from Ìdóání, especially for cultural reasons, they decided to move to the present place because of lack of motorable roads to the former place. Òwáni people too claimed to have migrated from Benin, in the old Benin kingdom about three hundred years ago. In 1920, historical evidence claimed that they finally settled at the present Òwáni which is about four kilometers from Ìdóàní. Ìṣùre people were said to have left Ilé - ìfẹ for a place called Ìṣùre about two kilometers from Ìdóàní and, on the advice of the then District Officer, Mr. C. Conór, a European, they moved to the present Ìṣùre in 19214. Òkọ people claimed to have left Òwákè Òkà in Ondo State to a village named Òkọ which was very close to the former Òwáni. The Òkọ people later moved to the present site which now forms part of Ìdóàní town.

According to an impeccable historical source, what we know today as Ìdóàní came into being in 1921. At some point, the villages that comprised Ìdóàní community agitated for the establishment of a district court. Thereafter, the then District Officer, Mr. O’ Conór, advised amalgamation as a pre-requisite for the establishment of the court. That was during the reign of Alani-Chief Ìtèwògbọ̀yẹ̀. Òwáni, Amúṣígboro, Òkọ, Ìṣùre and later Ìṣẹwá moved from their various places to a central place now known as Òjì Ìgbàmọ. Alani and some of his people moved from Òwáni to the agreed central place while the rest of the Òwáni people decided to remain at the present Òwáni. The place is also called Ìdó – Ìsàle. The Ìyàyú people, however, did not migrate because the central place was close to them. Unfortunately, Òba Ìtèwògbọ̀yẹ̀ did not live long. He died the following year which was 1921. His death, to some extent, slowed down the merger plan. However, in March 1921, Òba James Fáládè the first ascended the throne and stayed at the central place in order to implement the terms and conditions of the treaty. Since then, Idoani has been known to comprise the following six quarters namely: Òwáni, Amúṣígboro, Ìṣùre, Ìyàyú, Òkọ and Ìṣẹwá. The six quarters are subject to Alani’s control. The quarters are merely represented at the centre by the chiefs and Alani is the only constituted authority. In this paper, we are interested in the factors that are responsible for the existence and continuity of the ‘Alémọsóko’ masquerade festival at Ìdóàní. Linguistically, the Ìyàyú people have a distinct speech form called Ìyàyú and there is no mutual intelligibility between the Ìyàyú speech form and the Yorùbá language.

Furthermore, we are reliably informed by Òke (1972) and Ìkọtun (1995) that the Ìyàyú speech form is a variation of Bini/Akoko Edo language in Èdo State. Generally, the Yorùbá language serves as the linguistic reference in Ìdóàní. Alémọsóko otherwise known as Igwezan festival has not been traced to any particular timeframe in the history of Ìdóàní Ìyàyú’ to be specific. While some claim that it was started for purely recreational purposes, others are of the opinion that it was started for the purpose of entertaining the village folk at the...
beginning of the harmattan period. Others claimed that it was
to serve as a panacea to severe a smallpox epidemic that
occurred in Idoani at that time. This group believed that the
festival had been in existence before the solution was
discovered. They believed that while the festival was going
on, it was discovered the sick in houses whose walls were
beaten with the canes of the masquerades were miraculously
healed. The more logical origin of the Alémọsọkọ festival is
the claim that it started simply as a means of ancestral
veneration and also as a means of bringing a form of
excitement and fun to the sleepy town of Idoani like most of
the other festivals.

The Alémọsọkọ festival is a yearly festival which attracts the
indigenes of Ìdòání both at home and in the diaspora. It is
important to mention that the celebration of Alémọsọkọ festival in Ìdòání does not in any manner affect the co–
existence of Christianity and Islam in the community as the
three major religions, Christianity, Islam and traditional
religions are embraced by the Iyayu people. Although, Alémọsọkọ festival which can be said to be condemned by the
imported religions as pagan, the festival still continues. At
present, Christianity, Islam and Alémọsọkọ festival exist side
by side in the community. The question that arises is: what are
the cultural factors that are responsible for the continuity of the
Alémọsọkọ festival even when Christianity and Islam
frown at the festival? This question will be addressed in this
paper.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

In an attempt to identify the cultural factors that are
responsible for the Alémọsọkọ festival, the following are the
research questions:

1. Which of the family in the community is involved in
Alémọsọkọ festival?
2. Which period of the year is Alémọsọkọ festival
celebrated?
3. How many days or weeks do Alémọsọkọ festival last
in a year?
4. Is Alémọsọkọ a performing masquerade or for the
purpose of entertainment?
5. What are the ages of the people that participate in the
festival?
6. Are there cultural reasons or factors that influence
the Alémọsọkọ festival?

In relation to these research questions we have this null
hypothesis:

There is no significant difference between the Alémọsọkọ
festival of Idoani and the masquerades that perform in any of
the Yorùbá communities. This hypothesis is premised on the
fact that the factors that are usually responsible for the
celebration of masquerades in the Yorùbá speaking areas of
Nigeria are the same as Idoani where Alémọsọkọ festival is
performed.

III. SOME RELATED WORKS

In most of the Yorùbá speaking areas of Nigeria,
masquerades are a common sight. They are believed to be
ancestral spirits which are observed annually. The works of
Ogunbowale (1962), Olajubu (1972), Ogunniran (1972) and
Adeoye (1989) on masquerades in the Yorùbá speaking areas
will serve as the conceptual framework for our present study
of Alémọsọkọ festival of Idoani in Ondo State of Nigeria.
Ogunbowale (1962:67) argues that a masquerade can be
performed any time of the year. He also claims that a
masquerade must be directed by at least a person when it is
out for performance. But we can also argue that it is not every
masquerade that has to be directed by at least a person. For
instance, a masquerade called “Eegun Edinmo” of Erinmo in
Oriade Local Government Area of Osun State does not require
a person as its director while performing. Olajubu (1972:1-5)
claims that masquerades can be grouped into four different
categories. The first category comprises masquerades that
perform magic from town to town and from village to village
for the pecuniary purpose. The second group is made of
masquerades that do not perform for the purpose of collecting
money from the audience but who are interested in barbaric
and animalistic behaviour such as flogging and victimizing
those that may have offended them in one way or the other,
while the third group creates fear for children to make them
behave well at home. The fourth group creates fear even for
the grown-up ones by wearing torn cloth (see Olajubu 1972:
1-5).

Ogunniran (1972) is in tandem with Olajubu’s
(1972). It claimed that masquerades perform magic from town
to town and from village to village for monetary purpose. We
can therefore refer to these masquerades as professionals who
earn their living by entertaining spectators. We are of the
opinion that both Olajubu (1972) and Ogunniran’s (1972)
studies are not comprehensive enough, the studies do not for
instance, address a masquerade called “Eegun Adoko” of Ado
Ekiti which does not perform magic but which goes from
town to town, from village to village praying and collecting
money. Furthermore, the studies conducted by Olajubu (1972)
and Ogunniran (1972) fail to indicate the age bracket of the
people behind the masquerade. Adeoye (1989:132) claims that
a masquerade is a deity. According to him, masquerade is the
celebration of the ancestral spirits. has. While we accept
Adeoye’s (1989:132) claim about masquerade as a belief in
immortality of the souls of the dead, we want to point out that
sacrifices and the festival of worship of Oya, Osun, Ogun and
Sango to mention a few are some other ways through which
the dead are also remembered. However, the factors that can
be deduced from the studies conducted by Ogunbowale
(1962), Ogunniran (1972), Olajubu (1972), and Adeoye
(1989), are money, observance of tradition, entertainment and
defereence to the ancestral spirits. According to researchers,
these are the factors which are responsible for the continued
existence of masquerades in the Yorùbá speaking areas of
Nigeria. The present study which examines the cultural factors
that are responsible for ‘Alémosóko’ festival at Idoani will accept the information provided by Ogunbowale (1962), Olajubu (1972), Ogunniran (1972) and Adeoye (1989) as its background.

IV. DATA COLLECTION

This is a historical research work. The data that were used for this research were collected through the formal method. The formal method that was used included elicitation of information through a questionnaire. The respondents were sixty and they were randomly selected from the Iyayu quarters. All the sixty questionnaire forms that were distributed to the respondents were returned. Apart from the fact that the questionnaire was the multiple choice type, the researcher’s intimate knowledge of the quarters was also a contributing factor to the one hundred percent return of the questionnaire forms. The researcher also assisted the uneducated respondents to tick their response in the questionnaire that was read to them.

V. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In this section, we report and analyze the responses of the subjects in relation to our research questions. For ease of analysis, the subjects’ responses are categorized into given tables. The information in table one shows the percentage distribution of respondents on the involvement of families. Table two contains information on the period of the year when the festival is celebrated. The percentage distribution of respondents on the number of days that the festival lasts is shown in table three. Furthermore, while the information in table five will tell us the percentage distribution of respondents on the factor that are responsible for the Alémosóko festival the information in table four will show the percentage distribution of respondents on ages of the participants. Our null hypothesis is that there is no significant difference between the Alémosóko festival of Idoani and the masquerades that perform in any of the Yorùbá communities. The distribution of the responses is shown in Tables 1 – 5.

From the Table 1 above, it was discovered that all the families in the Iyayu quarter were involved in the Alémosóko festival. This finding is different from what the case is in any other Yorùbá town or village. For instance in Yorùbá towns and villages where masquerades are performed, a particular household or family is usually saddled with the festival activities. However, few individuals especially youths may serve as spectators when the festival is on. So, names like “Ojétólá”, “Ọjẹríndé”, “Ọjẹwúmì” usually distinguish the families which participate in masquerades from families that do not participate in masquerades in Yorùbá towns and villages. Table 2 below shows the distribution of responses on the period of the year when distribution of responses on the period of the year when Alémosóko festival is performed.

The information in Table 2 above shows that Alémosóko festival usually takes place in August of every year. This conclusion is based on the views of our respondents who unanimously claimed that Alémosóko festival was usually celebrated in August of every year. The consistency of the period when Alémosóko festival is celebrated can be said to be at variance with the period of the year when masquerades are celebrated in most Yorùbá communities. For instance, while individual families who masquerade decide when to celebrate in a year in Yorùbá communities every August has been slated for the celebration of Alémosóko festival. Our informants in the Iyayu quarter argued that the fixing of August as the month of celebration was historical, this is because none of the people that were interviewed could tell the genesis of Alémosóko festival. Similarly, there is no written record that talks about the genesis of the Alémosóko festival. Furthermore, one question which is important is: How do we determine the number of days that the Alémosóko festival lasts. The answer to this question has been provided by our respondents and it is shown in Table 3 below.
The responses of our informants which appeared in Table 3 above showed that the number of days for the celebration of the Alémósóko festivals was three days. Unanimity of responses was also observed because there was no disparity in the opinions or responses expressed by our informants. In addition, the information in Table 4 below contains the reactions of our respondents on the ages of those who masquerade when the Alémósóko festival is being performed. The pieces of information are shown as follows.

Table 4 Percentage Distribution of Respondents on Ages of the Participants.

Although the table shows six age groups, the respondents endorsed the age group of 34 – 44 as the ages of the people who masquerade when the festival is being performed. It would be recalled that those who belong to the age group of 34 and 44 are of the prime age because they are capable of doing so many aggressive things like running, flogging, boxing among others. An observation can be made from the information that is provided by Table 4, every male person who is within the age group of 34 – 44 is expected to put on the approved mask as evidence of participation in the festival at the Iyayu quarters. This is not the case in other Yorùbá towns and villages where only those who masquerade belong to specific families, families such as “Olólù of Ìbádàn” in Oyo State and “Ajángílè of Ìrágbèrì in Osun State” to mention a few. Another question which our respondents were asked to respond to was whether Alémósóko festival was for the purpose of entertainment, acceptance of traditional festivity, money, profession, belief in immortality of souls or magical performance. The responses of our informants are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Percentage Distribution of Respondents on the Number of Days

From Table 5 above, our respondents showed that factors such as acceptance of tradition, festivity and entertainment were responsible for the continuity of the Alémósóko festival among the Iyayu people of Idoani. It would be recalled that the purpose of this chapter was to analyze the findings of the research that was conducted on Alémósóko festival of Iyayu at Idoani. The data that were collected from our respondents were analyzed in their various groups. It was discovered that different factors influenced the continuity of Alémósóko festival at Idoani, and these factors were responsible for the validity of our hypothesis that was previously postulated.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the cultural factors that are responsible for the continuity of the Alémósóko festival among the Iyayu people of Idoani. The study showed that four cultural factors are responsible for the continuity of the festival despite the existence of foreign religions such as Christianity and Islam which maintain a negative attitude towards traditions. The continuity of the Alémósóko festival is hinged on the involvement of every family or house hold in the Iyayu quarters, this is because those who belong to the age group of age of 34 and 44 are made to participate fully in the Alémósóko festival. This finding is additional to the findings of the research conducted by Ogunniran (1972), Olajubu (1972) and Adeoye (1989) which claim that particular families participate in masquerades. Similarly, there is a difference between the ages of those who participate in Alémósóko festival and those who masquerade in other Yorùbá towns and villages. While previous studies by Ogunbowale
(1962), Ogunniran (1972), Olajubu (1972) and Adeoye (1989) do not specify the ages of those who can masquerade. The present study on Alémpọsọko festival stipulates the ages of the people who can masquerade in the Iyayu quarters at Idoani to between 34 and 44 years.

REFERENCES