



The Socio-Spiritual Relevance of the Obanta Festival to the Development of Ijebu-Ode and Neighbouring Communities in Nigeria

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Abstract

Festivals are commemorative events set aside by members of a community for the observance of sacred beliefs, religious solemnities, musical and traditional performance of social existence and cultural prowess. In this light, this paper examined the richness of Ijebu culture and belief in the celebration of deities. The study documents one of the popular festivals (Obanta festival) celebrated in Ijebu-Ode; examined the reasons for the celebration of the festival and the socio-spiritual implications of the festival on Ijebu-Ode and neighbouring communities. Durkheim's functionalism and structuralist theories of Malinowski as well as symbolic interactionism were utilized in explaining the role of festivals in the society. The study adopted primary and secondary data. The findings revealed that the celebration of deities and legends is still upheld largely in Ijebu-Ode; several festivals are held to revere the ancestors and deities of Ijebu-Ode but Obanta festival is celebrated for cultural maintenance purposes; and the socio-spiritual implication of the Obanta festival is to appease to the spirit of Obanta not to depart from the life, health and endeavours of the residents and indigenes of Ijebu-Ode. The study concluded that despite the presence and adoption of new forms of religion, certain traditional aspects of Ijebu-Ode culture are still upheld as being socio-spiritually relevant to maintain the continuity of the society and guarantee the physical and social development of Ijebu-Ode and its neighbouring communities.

Keywords: Development, Festival, Ijebu-Ode, Obanta, neighbouring communities, Socio-spiritual relevance.

Introduction

Festival is a universal phenomenon like religion. Although the former is a subset of the latter, religion revolves round man's faith in supernatural forces and it is often associated with emotions, especially with fear, awe, or reverence (Jha, 2007). Several societies

around the world have a wide range of festivals in tandem with their cultural practices and engage in different forms of worship, ceremonies, and sacred objects among others. In Africa viz-a-viz Nigeria, adherents of certain traditional religion mark traditional festivals taking into cognizance

several important socio-cultural and socio-spiritual records of the peoples' lives. These often reflect in the series of rites, rituals, performances, and entertainments (Aluko, 2002). Festivals are celebrated with respect to the cultures of the society, contributions of heroes, heroines and legends (Akintan, 2013).

In the opinion of experts, festivals are generally organized in order to answer the specific needs of a community (Popescu and Corboş, 2012) which may be social, cultural, financial, spiritual, and marital and the likes. Falasi (1987) described festival as a sacred or profane period of celebration marked by special observances for highlighting the importance of this special event in celebrating community values, ideologies, identity and continuity. Getz (2005) sees festivals as "themed public celebrations" to avoid wrong typification which may bring about exclusion of some typologies. Either of socio-cultural, socio-economical or socio-spiritual intention, festival can be seen as a tool of development in a society. In line with this supposition, the study examines the socio-spiritual relevance of the Obanta Festival to the development of Ijebu-Ode and neighbouring communities in Nigeria.

Ijebu-Ode is the capital city of the Ijebu communities in Nigeria. Ijebu was a very powerful Yoruba kingdom in pre-colonial era. According to Iliffe (2007), Ijebu people dominantly occupy six Local Governments' Areas in Ogun State, namely. Ijebu-Ode, Ijebu-North East, Ijebu-North, Ijebu-East, Ijebu Waterside and Odogbolu. The towns under these local government areas come under the over-lordship of Awujale (the paramount ruler of Ijebuland) and Ijebu-Ode is the capital city of Ijebuland. According to Akintan (2013), Ijebus engage in diverse festivals. These include cult-based and seasonal festivals. They are Ojude Oba festival, Oduduwa festival, Agemo festival,

Ogunbeju festival, Senmuja festival, Imale festival, Iyemule festival and Iyemoji festival as well as Obanta festival which this study solely explored.

Catalogue of Obanta 'the King'

Obanta is a name for the past hero of Ijebuland. He is attributed to be the custodian of defence and prosperity in the land. The king "Obanta" (whose name was originally Ogborogan) was the first Awujale of Ijebuland who reigned in the 14th century (Belasco, 1980). He was said to have led a migration of people from Waddai, an area traced to the modern day Sudan (ibid). When Ogborogan arrived at Ijebu, the inhabitants of the area warmly welcomed him by screaming around for the awareness of others *Oba wa nita* (The king is outside). This partly explains how Ogborogan was popularly referred to as Obanta (Smith, 1969).

His descendants have continued to hold the title of the Awujale and alongside the chiefs the powers were being shared as we experience in the contemporary Nigeria where the executive and legislators jointly make decisions in the interest of the nation. According to Yesufu (2012), fifty two kings have ruled in Ijebu-Ode and the current Oba Sikiru Adetona being the fifty-third. The list of the kings of Ijebu-Ode since the reign of Awujale, Oba (King) Ogborogan popularly known as Obanta is presented below:

1. Ogborogan also known as Obanta – 1430
2. Obaguru – 1445
3. Munigbuwa – 1455
4. Obanla - 1460 (from Obanta family)
5. Obaloja - 1470 (from Obaguru family)
6. Obalofin - 1482 (from Munigbuwa family)
7. Apasa - 1496 (from Obanla family)
8. Obaganju - 1508 (from Obaloja family)
9. Tewogboye - 1516 (from Obalofin family)
10. Obaruwa-Muda - 1520 (from Apasa family)
11. Ofiran-Ekun - 1532 (from Obaganju family)

12. Lapegunwa - 1537 (from Obaruwa family)
13. Owa Otutu-bi-osun - 1537 (from Tewogboye family - later became Dagburewe of Idowa)
14. Moko Idowa Ajuwakale - 1540 (a blood relation of Owa Otutu-bi-osun)
15. Agbadisa - 1552 (from Lapeguwa family)
16. Obajewo - 1561 (from Ofiran family)
17. Obalewuileke - 1576 (from Ajuwakale family)
18. Obalumodan Elewu Ileke - 1590 (from Gbadisa family)
19. Mase - 1620 (from Obajewo family)
20. Olutoyese - 1625 (from Obalewu family)
21. Mola - 1635 (from Oba Gbadisa's family)
22. Ajano - 1642 (the first female Awujale - from Oba Lumodan's family)
23. Ore or Gadegun - 1644 (from Mase family)
24. Obaguwaja - 1654 (from Ajana family)
25. Jadiara or Olowo joye meji - 1660 (from Olotoyese family - was formerly the Dagburewe of Idowa before being enthroned as Awujale)
26. Sapokun - 1675 (from Ore family - same as that of the first female Awujale)
27. Folajoye - 1687 (from Mola family)
28. Mekun - 1692 (from Oba Jadiara's family)
29. Gbodogi - 1702 (from Sapokun family)
30. Ojigi Amoyegeso - 1710 (from Folajoye family)
31. Obaliyewe Arojofaye - 1730 (from Mekun family)
32. Moyegeso Olope - 1730 (from Godogi family)
33. Ayora - 1735 (from Oba Guaja's family)
34. Fesojoye - 1745 (from Oba Liyewe's family)
35. Geje - 1749 (the second female Awujale - from Olope family)
36. Saponuwa Rubakoya - 1750 (same Olope family as the second female Awujale)
37. Orodudujoye - 1755 (from Ayora family)
38. Tewogbuwa I - 1758 (from Fesojoye family)
39. Gbelebuwa I - 1760 (from Orodudujoye family)
40. Fusengbuwa - 1790 (from Tewogbuwa family)
41. Setejoye - 1820 (from Ojigi Amoyegeso family)
42. Anikilaya Fugbajoye Aboogunsa - 1821 (from Sapenuwa Rubakoye family)
43. Afidipotemole Ademuyewo - 1850 (from Setejoye family - was dethroned in 1882 and banished to Epe)
44. Tunwase Adesinbo - 1886 (alias Orojojoye Adele tejiteji from Funsegbuwa family)
45. Ogbagba Agbatewole I (Adeleke) - 1895 (from Anikilaiya family)
46. Fusigboye Adeona - 1906 (from Fidipote family)
47. Fesogbade Ademolu - 1916 (from Anikilaiya family)
48. Adekoya Eleruja - 1916 (from Tunwase family)
49. Fesogbade Ademolu – 1917 (the 47th Awujale was reinstalled on January 1917 through the help of Bishop James Johnson, who pleaded his case of wrongful dethronement with the then Governor)
50. Adenuga Afolagbade - 1925 (from Tunwase family)
51. Fibiwoga Ogunaiké - 1929 (from Fidipote family)
52. Daniel Adesanya Gbelebuwa II - 1933 (from Oba Gbelegbuwa I family)
53. Alaiyeluwa Oba Sikiru Kayode Adetona, Ogbagba II enthroned in 1960 – till date (Anikilaya family).

From the foregoing, it is important to note that despite the fact that it has been about 586 years since his demise and fifty-two kings have reigned, Obanta is still being revered among the Ijebus (mostly in Ijebu-Ode and Awa-Ijebu). Akintan (2013), revealed that one of the abiding features of traditional religion is the annual festival of divinities and the veneration of the deities through the spirit of the ancestors, one of which Obanta belongs.

An Historical Explanation of Obanta Festival

Obanta festival was not only named after the heroics of Oba (King) Ogborogan but claimed to be celebrated in his name because of his immense positive contributions to the development of the old Ijebu Empire (Yesufu, 2012). Amongst the royal kingdoms in the region, Obanta's kingdom was one of the highly respected and most developed with a complex and highly organised government. His statue was formally located along the Itale round about, in Ijebu-Ode until recently when development as a result of road construction saw it removed. The festival is often celebrated with *Ikokore* (water yam porridge) with very little or no salt added to it (salt level reduced for the sake of the festival only). Although, he was not the only king to have ruled over Ijebuland as a paramount ruler, but his involvement in shaping the old Ijebu empire into a mega city that currently occupies over 154,032 people can be attributed to the political structure he initiated which gave the Ijebus the privilege to convert their boundary to power and wealth later when their territory became a trade route for the merchants plying trade between the Europeans and indigenes.

The festival, since inception, has several features: prayers, divination, and propitiation. The prayers involve the king, chiefs and traditional worshippers. Mainly, there are some salient aspects of the prayers that the large chunks of community members are excluded from participating which often take place at night in secluded places such as *Igbale* (a ritualistic and secluded hideout). On a general level, there exists the practice of kolanuts sharing to the royalty households for prayers for all kins and kiths of Ijebu kingdom which is usually used for divination and propitiation. Today, there exists a cenotaph in Ijebu-Ode specifically situated in Obanta shrine. Furthermore, research revealed that

Obanta festival is a celebration of the bravery and legendary acts of the first king of Ijebu-Ode "King Obanta" being the Awujale of Ijebu land who reigned between 1430-1445. Fig.1 shows the Statue of Ogborogan also known as Obanta, the first Awujale of Ijebu Land.



Fig. 1: Statue of Obanta in Ijebu-Ode

Source: Google Images.

Unlike most festivals in the world where the kins and kiths mediate, present and celebrate diversities; Obanta Festival is a celebration of complex homogeneity of the indigenes of Ijebu particularly those of Ijebu-Ode origin. The festival also brings about the ascription of their varying success stories to the landmarks and bravery of the first monarch who literature revealed was a strong fighter and defendant of the people in his time until he disappeared around the Itoro area of Ijebu-Ode where his shrine is situated for annual worship (Oyeneye and Shoremi, 1985). This has been the tradition for decades despite his physical exit from the midst of the Ijebu-Ode people.

There exist different schools of thought that his spirit dwells among the people guaranteeing their safety and rescuing them from external aggression from neighbouring

and foreign communities and countries respectively (Oyeneye and Shoremi, 1985). A school of thought explained that during the economic crisis of the early nineteenth century, several families in Ijebu-Ode not only suffered economically but from different environmental disasters which were attributed to the fury of the spirit of the first King of the ancient Ijebu Kingdom, Obanta. As a result, several consultations and propitiations were made to appease his spirit which helped to subside the calamity befalling the society. This was noted to have subsequently resulted into an annual festival called Obanta Day in Ijebu-Ode.

Another school of thought explained that Obanta is of Awa-Ijebu (a community in Ijebu-North local government) origin but significantly beneficial to the people of Ijebu-Ode in particular and the entire Ijebu kingdom in general (Yesufu, 2012). He was a brave hero and strong defendant of the Old Ijebu Empire. To continually venerate his attributes and contributions to the existence of Ijebu-Ode which would have been invaded by war, he is usually remembered with a festival called Obanta Festival which is annually celebrated with *Ikokore* (Water yam porridge) and prayers by the indigenous religious leaders of both Awa-Ijebu and Ijebu-Ode (Falasi, 1987).

There are several other explanations of Obanta festival directly or indirectly linked to the first Monarch of Ijebu-Ode but because of dearth in literature and lack of empirical evidence, a lot of these claims could not hold waters but still significant in the engrafting of the Obanta festivals in the league of notable Ijebu viz-a-viz Ijebu-Ode festivals peculiar to the environmental development of the Ijebus socio-spiritually. It is on this light that this study explores the findings of Yesufu (2012) on the continual relevance of Obanta festival in the league of all festivals in Ijebu-Ode and how this festival has fared in the face of socio-

development of several areas of Ijebu-Ode taking into consideration its socio-spiritual relevance.

Relevance of Obanta festival

- i. **It gives peace and breaks the monotony of the people:** the period of festivity is the moment to ease of out of the usual daily stress that ware out people. Because a lot of people often look forward towards the celebration of Obanta festival, accompanied with the preparations, there exists the aura of peace in the season of the festival.
- ii. **Promotion of tourism and economy:** Festivals are being used for promoting tourism which in turn boosts the economy. Also, it opens several key locations of the Ijebu community up for tourism and exploration which if well planned, would be a source of income. Obanta brings about opportunity to have leisure, engage in business relationships with people who come along for the festival.
- iii. **Establishing bonds and Reuniting old folks:** Relations and allies who have long lost contacts meet and capitalize on the platform of the festival to reunite and further their relationships.
- iv. **Familiarization with history and cultural artifacts:** During the event, visitors have a unique chance to interact with the local community, gaining a deeper experience of the ambience, customs and local culture.
- v. **Breeds connection with the supernatural being:** The period of Obanta festival serves as avenue to be spiritually inclined towards having a closer relationship with the supreme being to guarantee safety of life and ensure safety in journey, success in business transactions, fruitfulness in marriage, freedom from curse and

obtaining favour (Awure) from all and sundry among others.

- vi. **A period of cleansing and propitiation:** Obanta festival is known to be a period of cleansing of the entire Ijebuland of evils, calamities and threatening occurrences. This is usually done through some rituals which are in tandem with pattern of Obanta. Although, researchers have attempted to document the details of the rituals, there have been strict warnings on the part of the High Chiefs that it should be kept from documentation. Male researcher are often invited to observe the ritual at will but were not permitted to document the constituent of the process of the ritual.
- vii. **Explanation of unknown and irregular physical occurrences:** Through the propitiation and ritual process, several deep revelations are unveiled and these are unconnected with the irregular occurrences which had occurred and that will occur to either an individual, family or community. The period of the festivity is an avenue to consciously understand and explain these irregular occurrences (which may be negative or positive) for the purpose of aversion or avoidance (if negative) and quickening (if positive).

Theoretical Exposition

Functionalist Perspective

The functionalist approach of Bronislaw Malinowski exposed the social relevance of festival in the society. Malinowski (1954) utilized the data he gathered from the Trobriand Islanders off the Coast of the New Guinea to explain that festival is not only instrumental in reinforcing the social norms and values as well as promoting social solidarity but an antidote to the emotional

stress that threatens the society (Haralambos and Holboln, 2013). Malinowski stated that anxiety and tension exist in every human society and these often tend to cause crises of life (such as birth, puberty, marriage, sickness, misfortune, and death) and eventually disrupt social life. However, he sees religious ritual (festival) as a means of ending the negativities. In the case of Obanta festival, the spirit of the ancestor (Obanta) is being appeased to reduce the tension of calamity such as flood, contagious diseases, death of important personalities within the community and colossal failure of Ijebu indigenes in their businesses and professional endeavours.

Structuralist view

Levi-Strauss, a foremost anthropologist emphasized more on myths and kinship systems. Levi-Strauss (1963) explained that there were certain structures that underlay all human thinking and social arrangements. Although these structures cannot be directly observed, they can be revealed in human culture which is shaped by these structures. Levi Strauss in Haralambos and Holboln (2013) stated that structures are common to all human societies and evidence of them can be found universally such as kinship, myth, and some other elements of culture (food and festivals). The implication of Levi-Strauss contribution to this study is how fundamental the Ijebu social structures are in maintaining the practice of Obanta festival to remember the heroic attributes of a foremost ruler who gave his all to establish a system which subsequent people operate. Like Levi-Strauss observed, the structure Obanta left behind as legacy cannot be directly observed but have spiritual implication on the society to maintain and to propel the norms, values and culture of Ijebuland. Also, the adoption of Ikokore (Water yam porridge) as a regular food for the festival further solidified Levi-Strauss belief in the manifestation of cultural evidences in maintaining the cultural practices viz-a-viz the religious structure of the Ijebu community.

Symbolic Interactionists' Position

Symbolic interaction is among sociological theoretical approaches that have contributed to the understanding of events and phenomena in human societies. It is a theory developed from the thoughts of great sociologists such as George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley, John Dewey and so on. Symbolic interaction focuses on deep explanation of symbolic meaning of social events. With other focus on the interaction between social institutions, their roles and/or functions, cooperation and antagonism as bases for understanding or explaining events, it also focuses on the creative individuals in society. Specifically, it draws attention to the role of symbol and language in human interaction.

The major concern of symbolic interactionists, therefore, is to explain the meaning of everyday life, events or occurrences, "via close observational work and intimate familiarity". It is believed that it is through this method that the underlying social process/realities and form of human interaction can be revealed for proper understanding of events in the world. For the interactionists, human behaviour is not just a response against "mechanistic or biological instincts". It is indeed, a reaction to interpretation of definition of situations. According to Ritzer (2008), individuals monitor their own behaviours by conscious thought and this thought can only operate through symbol learnt in a social context largely through language. Through shared language we gain access to shared meaning and social expectation.

Gong by this viewpoint, the individual is not and cannot be an isolated individual. He is indeed, interlocked to a network of relationships that lead to diverse occurrences in society. What we can deduce, therefore, is that the symbolic interactionism seeks mainly to explain events in the world from a micro viewpoint rather than a macro one. In this

regard, symbolic interactionism can be described as a theoretical approach that explains events or human behaviour from the particular to the general. Flowing from the theoretical tenets of symbolic interaction, Obanta festival is being celebrated annually by the Ijebu people due to the symbolic meanings attached to the event. Symbolic meanings are equally attached to the way the rituals, wearing of traditional costumes and sacrifice materials are conducted by the people during the festival. Every material and nonmaterial element used in the celebration has its symbolic significance and meanings to the people of Ijebuland. These meanings form part of their religious beliefs for prosperity, security and spiritual backing in order to subdue their enemies and prevail in their aspirations. Also, there is unique interpretation of the meanings which the people of Ijebuland (across all ages, religions and gender-affinity) accorded the celebration of Obanta festival. Thus, Obanta festival can best be understood through the framework of symbolic interactionism perspective.

Methodology

The study adopted a purposive random sampling in picking the interviewees for the study. Primary data were used for the study. All data were qualitative, gathered through primary sources by the use of participant and non-participant observation and in-depth interviews (IDIs). Ijebu-Ode and Awa-Ijebu were purposively selected due to historical affiliation to Obanta. A cultural consultant was selected to facilitate the entrance into the study areas. A total of eight (8) In-depth Interviews (5 in Ijebu Ode and 3 in Awa-Ijebu) and two (2) Key Informant Interviews (one each from Ijebu-Ode and Awa-Ijebu) were conducted and these cut across the ruling house and the Royal Chiefs.

Findings

The study identified that festival performs several functions in Ijebu-Ode. In Ijebu-Ode, indigenous festivals are celebrated by the adherents of the traditional religion to indicate significant cultural and social events of the peoples' lives and these are encapsulated in series of entertainments, performances and rites as well as rituals. It is on the platform of these festivals, that people demonstrate their values and beliefs, give meaning to the cultural, political, economic, social and religious life of the people who observe them. Findings also indicated that festivals are crucial mainsprings in the traditional education as well as the remit of the people's ethos. However, some festivals have gone into extinction while others which are still celebrated no longer bring out the expected values in them. As such, the study identified that the practice of traditional religion is experiencing serious decline particularly in developing communities that now have the features of metropolitan cities as such there is preponderance of indigenous festival decline not only in Ijebu-Ode but the entire Ijebuland due to the rush for Christianity and Islamic religion.

Meanwhile, the study also revealed that inspite of the rush for the foreign religions, Obanta festival plays multifaceted roles in the entire Ijebuland. These include cementing the security of all and sundry in the community, maintenance of belief in the supreme being as against the erroneous impression of the Europeans that Africans are pagans, protection of lives and property among others. These were captured in the views of the interviewees:

There is no single society that has security problems that has not first had spiritual problems. Despite the prevalence of Islamic and Christianity, Obanta festival still thrives in

the Ijebu community. Why? To maintain the chord we have with the supreme being; apportion relevance to our ancestors who had the spiritual license to dwell in this land from inception; pay obeisance to the divinities whose monopolistic endeavours have kept the entire Ijebu community united in the face of diversity; remain thankful for all the deeds of the deities and to present ourselves as mortals who will eternally need the fervours and favours of our ancestors in our quest for daily living and for our children. **IDI/Interviewee D/Ijebu-Ode**

Another relevance of Obanta festival was expressed as maintenance and sustenance of Yoruba cultural values and an ample time to commit the totality of man's foresight and achievements to the supreme being. It also captures the views of interviewees that everyone who genuinely comes to participate in Obanta festival will have the cause to share testimony. These views were captured in the statement of one of the interviewees:

Aibowo fagba ni o je kaye o gun (failure to pay homage to the elderly is the root cause of universal chaos). A lot of the traditional festivities that usually guarantee good job, long life, stable health, marital fruitfulness and protection from thieves and hired assassins such as Obanta festival have been ignored by our children. Ever since I have assumed the position of Apena, no one has ever been part of Obanta festivity and complain of the

benefits it offers which I stated earlier. It is for the good of our society. Anyone who wishes to run, let him run. I can tell you that a lot of our children come in from diaspora to partake in Obanta festival and are successful in their professions and businesses.**IDI/Interviewee D/Awa**

In the areas of exploits in business and career choice, the role of Obanta festival was also earmarked as responsible for the overwhelming success of Ijebu citizens at home and in diaspora. These were expressed in the following views:

Tell me at any point in time in the history of Nigeria that an Ijebu indigene has never had their own person at the fore front of excellence. Late Brigadier Ogundipe and Chief Abraham Adesanya were usually contributing financially to the festival either present or not. So if anyone wishes to participate it is not an occultic gathering or blood and life demanding festival. Just as you celebrate Christmas or ileya where you kill ram or chicken and you pray for yourself and your family and business. Obanta festival adopts ikokore with little or no salt just as Obanta himself preferred it when he was alive and then eat the food with your bare hands, pray to the hand to be the source of goodies. Thereafter, lick off the major liquid contents on your hands (fingers and palm) and rub the hands on your hair while you pray that

“Ori mi o ni gbebode” (my head will not harbour evil). After then, you may choose to slaughter anything you can afford.**IDI/Interviewee E/Awa**

The interviewees emphasized on the overall development of Ijebu communities structurally and ideologically. Their views were captured in the position of this interviewee:

The peacefulness and expansion of Ijebu communities are connected to odu to yo loju Ifa (the revelation unveiled in the course of Ifa divination) of Ijebu communities’ future when Obanta sought to know what the future holds from Orunmila. As you can see, most of the beautiful houses in the country are either built in Ijebu-Ode or owned by an Ijebu man anywhere in the country. Another fantastic aspect of the importance of Obanta festival is how Ijebus have become successful business tycoons in Nigeria than any other tribe.**IDI/Interviewee F/Ijebu-Ode**

While assessing the effects of Obanta on the development of Ijebu-Ode and neighbouring communities, the study found out that most indigenes of Ijebuland in diaspora in the course of the festival visit their homeland and build several structures for personal and commercial purposes to add glamour to the festival and support economic activities. This was captured in the views below:

Several structural developments we see around

now are brought by our children who have made in the oversea countries. Like the four houses you can see over there, they were built two years ago for commercial activities during the festival. The house owner brings his colleagues and other foreign people to lodge them there. I got to know through my son who was the manager that there is no facility or games that is not available in the compound. And the amazing thing is that after the festival, it is usually locked and repainted few weeks to another festival.**IDI/Interviewee**

B/Ijebu-Ode

Another respondent also revealed: The development I can singularly say that Obanta festival has brought is the construction of roads and drainages. These were not done by the government but by some foreign based indigenes who usually renovate their parents houses and tar the roads leading to such houses because of their friends coming with them from abroad. Several streets in Ijebu-Ode have benefitted from this gesture.**IDI/Interviewee**

D/Ijebu-Ode

Findings also showed that several wealthy and influential indigenes of Ijebu bring their business partners along to the festival and had overtime used the opportunities to woo foreign and local investors to aid the economic development of the Ijebu communities. Findings also revealed that Ijebu indigenes who occupy higher hierarchy in the public and

private sectors as well as political offices in Nigeria often use their position to aid and quicken several construction works in the course of redeeming their pledges and vows towards the Obanta festival.

Discussion of findings

In tandem with the objectives of the study, the study identified that Obanta festival performs multifaceted functions that serve as catalyst for Ijebu-Ode's development. These include security, spiritual, entertainment and social functions. The findings further revealed that these functions give meaning to the cultural, educational, political, economic, social and religious life of the people who observe them. These views affirmed the position of Oyeneye and Shoremi (1985) that Obanta festival has multifaceted functions it performs within the Ijebu community. Also, the study reflected the position of Akintan (2013) that festivals are crucial mainsprings in the traditional education as well as the remit of the people's ethos one of which Obanta festival belongs.

Meanwhile, the findings of the study revealed that out of all the indigenous Ijebu festivals that Iliffe (1995) stated that would have gone into extinction in the early decades of 21st century, Obanta stood out as being crucial and historical to the Ijebu nation because it is still being celebrated unlike some others which no longer bring out the expected values in them. As such, Obanta festival has objected the view of Yesufu (2012) that a lot of core traditional festivals will be eroded alongside the decline that indigenous religion is seriously experiencing particularly in developing communities that now have the features of cosmopolitan cities due to the rush for Christianity and Islamic religion.

Findings also revealed that most indigenes of Ijebuland in diaspora use the opportunity of the Obanta festival to visit their homeland and erect several structures to add glamour to the festival and support economic activities of the

Ijebu communities. This supports the perspective of Levi-Strauss (1963) that religion aids development. Findings also showed that several wealthy and influential indigenes of Ijebu bring their business partners along to the festival and had overtime used the opportunities to woo foreign and local investors to aid the economic development of the Ijebu communities. This finding is consonance with the views of Jha (2007) and Yesufu (2012) that the symbiotic relationships between the spiritual and the social often transcend into structural development. Findings also revealed that Ijebu indigenes who occupy higher hierarchy in the public and private sectors as well as political offices in Nigeria often use their position to aid and quicken several construction works in the course of redeeming their pledges and vows towards the Obanta festival. Evidences of support for this findings were also extracted from the works of Oyeneye and Shoremi (1985) that the transformation of most rural communities to cosmopolitan areas are deliberate and marshaled by individual stakeholders who have cultural affinities with such communities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concluded that festivals usually occupy a special place in every known society. Their celebratory roles as well as the cultural and social implications of ritual and festivity will be of attraction in the field of sociology and anthropology. Celebrations in the course of festivals embody an intellectual, behavioural and emotional experiences often accompanied by meanings. As a result of the numerous meanings attached to the festive experience, either at personal, group or cultural levels, they are often viewed as social constructs which vary from area to area, and over time. Hence, the peculiarity of Obanta festival is arguably strengthened by the unique

patterns, styles and acceptability. Also, the study revealed that despite the high level of decline in the practices of traditional religions and the festivals attached to it as a result of the adoption of Christianity and Islam, Obanta among other reknown festivals still maintains its originality.

Without any form of reservation, Obanta festival has socio-spiritual significance to people of Ijebuland. A noteworthy social function of Obanta festival is recreation, tourism, social network between family members and friends. During Obanta festival lineage members, their consanguine and kins as well as friends come together to eat, drink and be merry. It is also a moment of purification and reunification between the living and the death. The social role of Obanta festival cannot be misplaced or underrated in modern day societies. The fullness, colour and diversity of various dancers in Obanta festival make an impressive image of the people of Ijebuland both within and outside Nigeria.

Also, the festival period is a period of fancy dress parade and display of traditional dress code by the Ijebu people. Ijebu-Ode sons and daughters and residents in Ijebu neighbouring communities as well as strangers who are mostly visitors and guests assemble to celebrate Obanta festival. In fact, several indigenous and foreign unmarried men and women find potential spouses during the festival. Thus, Obanta festival is a moment to establish lasting relationships. The festival creates a platform for community gatherings regarding the welfare and development of Ijebu land. Furthermore, the celebration of Obanta festival assists in keeping public morality intact by fearlessly broadcasting and rebuking evil doers in the society. During Obanta festival, the people start going about on the streets of Ijebu-Ode showing their enthusiasm, love and solidarity for the festival.

In the area of development, the study revealed that several Ijebu indigenes in diaspora in their bid to be part of the Obanta festival visit their homeland and build several monumental structures to support the economic activities of the Ijebu communities and add glamour to the festival. Findings also showed that several wealthy and influential indigenes of Ijebu bring their business allies to the festival and had overtime used the opportunity to woo foreign and local investors to aid the economic development of the Ijebu communities. Findings also revealed that Ijebu indigenes who occupy higher hierarchy in the public and private sectors as well as political offices in Nigeria often use their position to aid and quicken several construction works in the

course of redeeming their pledges and vows towards the Obanta festival.

The study concluded that traditional religion and festivals associated with it remain one of the potent platforms on which Africans can stand to retrace and redefine her history to falsify the claims of early European ethnographers and historians that African culture is barbaric and that their religious practices portray them as pagans. The study recommends that further studies be embarked upon to re-orient and enlighten the world about the peculiarity of Obanta festival in catering for the safety of Ijebu indigenes and how African festivals can be explored to become stable and reliable source of income to the Ijebu-Ode and neighbouring communities.

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