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Chapter Thirteen

Adamu Orisa Play As An Instrument of Peace, Tourism and State-Building Since 1800

Habeeb Sanni

Introduction

Existing works on the Adamu Orisa festival of Lagos have focused largely on the origin of the festival and a catalogue of the number of times it had been staged since 1854 when the first official record of the festival was taken. Many other works have focused on the course of the play, with particular attention to the itinerary of the fetish Eyo groups in the performance of the rituals at Agodo and Imoku. Much as these works attempts an historical account of one of the most popular cultural plays in Nigeria, none of these works have attempted to look at changes that the Adamu Orisa play have witnessed since inception.

This essay, therefore attempts to look at the origin and stages in Adamu Orisa play since the pre-colonial era with special emphasis on continuity and change over time. Like all cultural activities which are dynamic, the Adamu Orisa play of Lagos is not devoid of so many changes while retaining its precinct form. The essay is divided into three sections. The first one looks at traditions of origin of the Adamu Orisa play, the second considered the various changes from pre-colonial to post-colonial era, while the third section is the conclusion.

Traditions of Origin

Traditions relating to the origin of Adamu Orisa has generated a lot of controversy among different groups and families who claims to be the custodians of the gods. One of the contending issues among these various families was the origin of the Adamu Orisa and the Eyo which are generally believed to have commenced at different tinges.

While many believed that it originated from Benin, some are of the opinion that aside from Orisa Adimu and Ogunran, the other Orisa Oniko and Ologede were introduced from Ijebu Ifeun.

The exact period of the introduction of the Orisa (gods) is also shrouded in obscurity. In view of the contending issues relating to its origin and ownership, at least about four versions of the origin of the Adamu Orisa play could be identified.

One of these was given by the elders of Awe Adimu, who contended that, the main Orisa with which the festival is identified Adamu (female) and Ogunran (male) were brought to Lagos by two chiefs - Alase Odu (Ologun Agar) gold Sagbemi (Ologun Igbesodi) who also brought Elegba Opopo to Lagos.

These chiefs accompanied King Ado from Benin to Lagos. On arrival in Lagos, Ologun Agan sought from king Ado permission to house the Adamu Orisa at Okepa where King Ado and his chiefs often go to witness the Adamu Orisa play. The Adamu Orisa play then held fortnightly at Okepa, later, one Molu, a fisherman from Iperu was said to have introduced one man masquerade (Eyo) using his canoe flag (Igbokeun) made of white fabric as Aropale and his peddle as staff1.

The perception of the Awe Adimu elders is slightly different from that of H.A.B Fasinro who credited only Chief Ologun Agan as the owner of Adamu Orisa and Ogunran. He further pointed out that these two Orisas (gods) were first housed at Ira Ado where Ologun Agan first settled, and they were later transferred to Okepa after seeking permission from Chief Aromire, the legendary founder of Lagos Island. The other Orisa - Oniko and Ologede were credited to Ejilu and Malakin, and these came much later than Orisa Adimu and Ogunran, while Elegba Opopo was credited to Chief Igbesodi2.

Another perception distinct from the Awe Adimu elders and H.A.B Fasinro is that of Sokun ruling family of the Ogboni-Iduntasa (Unilegbale) chieftaincy. According to them, Adamu Orisa play originated from Ibeunf and it was linked to Olori Olugbani (wife of King Ado), whose two brothers-Ejilu and Malakin travelled to Lagos on a visit, only to discover that she was dead. The two brothers then
returned to Ibefun to bring Eyo masquerade to commemorate the death of their sister.

It is this Olori Olugbani and her brothers who were at the centre of the Ogunmade's version of the origin of Adamu Orisa. The perception of this ruling House, who incidentally equally belonged to the Ogbeni-Itafa as the Shokun, is narrated thus: Olugbani with her brothers Ejilu and Malakin came from Benin t-o trade in Lagos. Olugbani got married to King Ado as the third wife and when she had difficulty getting pregnant, her two brothers were consulted and they brought the paraphernalia of some traditional deities Orisa Adamu and Oggunran (female and male), Orisa Oniko and Orisa Ologede through which they performed some necessary family rites.

The Olori subsequently delivered a baby girl named Kutu. As compensation for that role in ending their sisters' barrenness, King Ado honoured Ejilu, the eldest of his in-law with the title of Ogbeni-Itafa. From the passage, all the Orisa were brought to Lagos by Ejilu and Malakin who both reigned as Ogbeni-Itafa after each other, and whose generations later became custodians of the Orisa. While Ogunmade a grand child of Malakin, took custody of Adimu and Oggunran, housed near the tomb of Erelu Kutu, Adimu, descendant took custody of Orisa Oniko, housed at Alagbeji, while Sogbo descendant have in their custody Orisa Ologede. All these three families, Ogunmade, Adamu and Sogbo are three of the four branches recognized by Mr. E.A. Hotonu's Tribunal of Inquiry to the stool of Ogbeni Itafa (Onilegbale) chieftaincy which had over the years been exclusively coveted by the Shokun family (the fourth branch).

The controversy over the origin of Adamu Orisa is also given by late Pa Kamajalodun, popularly known as Maji, who was Olokun Opa at Okepa. According to him, Chief Ologun Agan travelled to Benin and brought Orisa Oko (Adamu Orisa) to Lagos and presented it to King Ado.

On his journey to Benin, he was accompanied by his friend and neighbour Ejilu. After the introduction of Orisa Oko, Ejilu advised Ologun-Agan that they should send emissary to Alafin of Oyo to secure from him any magical or other form of state cult that could enhance peace and social security.

Alafin later gave them Awo Opa and Akalamasa which were housed at Okepa. Later, Orisa Oko (Adamu Orisa) was added to them and thereafter, a fortnightly entertainment play was inaugurated which successive kings of Lagos up to the time of Ologun Kutere and other nobilities attend to watch the plays.

Kamajalodun further pointed out that one Molu, an Ijebu man was the first person to appear in Eyo masquerade costume with Orisa Oko at Okepa. The exact period of the merging of Eyo and Orisa Oko is part of the controversy of origin of the Adamu Orisa play. However, by the time of King Ologun Kutere, the play was brought to Lagos Island where it has since been held. Maja, posited that with the movement of the play to Lagos, Ologun Agan then housed the Adamu Orisa at Idumojuokun (Ita Ado) where it has been till today.

It is important to note that all the versions of origin of Adamu Orisa cannot be correct.

The first issue has to do with ownership, i.e. whether Ologun Agan or Ejilu and Malaki were the owners of the Orisa. It is the view of this writer that the Orisa of Eyo viz: Adamu, Oggunran, Oniko and Ologede were brought to Lagos at the same time and that explains their relevance and importance to the Adamu Orisa play.

It is equally important that the owners were Ejilu and Malaki, two brothers of Olori-Olugbani, the third wife of King Ado, the acclaimed first king of Lagos and second representative of King of Benin (after Ashipa) who was first given the title of Ologiogun.

That the Orisa were initially brought to Lagos as fertility gods to cure Olugbani of her barrenness, and after that, King Ado took interest in the propitiation of the gods which were then stationed at Oke-lpa.

It was in appreciation of the feat of Ejilu and Malaki's support for their sister and the eventual cure of her barrenness that Ejilu was first honoured with the Ogboni Itafa chieftaincy, followed by Malaki after the death of the former.

The claim of the elders of Awe Adimu, H.A.B. Fashinro and those of Ologun Ijbesodi cannot be correct in view of the fact that all the civil chiefs in the Akarigbhere class had several Orisas brought with them and the King of Lagos did not deem it necessary to partake
in the propitiation of these Orisas, like they took interest in Orisa Oko.
In fact, the controversy over the ownership of Adamu Orisa is
laid to rest through the Igbe song8. One of which referred to the feats
of Ejilu and Malaki in the Adamu Orisa cult, thus:

Malaki loti ni jaye o
Ijaye Ejilu sayato
Eyin gbooo? (2ce)
Omo lo si Oyo Ajaka o
Oroun mu bo si rele o
O fakala mawo nimesi ikole
Awon ion se oniko eyelo

The above song is translated by a writer thus9:
Malaki lived well
Ejilu's enjoyment was exceptional...
The child went to Oyo Ajaka o
He came back with something tangible
He introduced eagle to the cult at Imesi Ikole Who
(they) is (are) the adept (owners) of Eyo cult.

The claim of ownership by the Ita Ado people, Ologun Agan
had also elicited criticism from Oseni Logo10, an Efe exponent who,
in one of his numerous outings at Iduntafa rebuked the Ita Ado people
thus:

A fun yin dani, elotidi teyin
Eeori pe wobiya yin po (2ce)
Ogunran nita Ado oo
Bawo lo se je tiyin?

This can be literarily translated thus:
We gave you its custody
You now claim to be the owner
Don't you think you are too covetous?
Ogunran, at Ita Ado
How has it become your property?

Oseni Logo's Efe rendition is a pointer to the fact that Orisa Oko
does not belong to Ologun Agan chieftaincy family or any of
those at Ita Ado who now claim to be the custodians.

Having tried to give new insight to the origin/ ownership of
the Adamu Orisa it is equally imperative to point out that Eyo -
masquerade was a later addition to the worship of Orisa Oko.
However, the origin of Eyo is not in doubt. It is an Ijebu masquerade
whose real origin like Orisa Oko is also contentious.

The Ologun Agan version and H.A.B Fashinro are of the
opinion that one Molu, an Ijebu man was the first to add the one man
masquerade to the celebration of Osa Oko (Adamu Orisa) at Okepa.

In Fashinro's opinion however, the introduction of Osa Oniko
and Ologede came from Ibefun, where Olugbani and her brothers
came from.

This version however failed to explain why these two Osa
were merged with Osa Oko (Adamu Orisa and Ogunran), that he
claimed originated from Benin.

That Adamu Orisa came from Benin may not be in doubt.
Also, the origin of Eyo from Ijebu either through Ibefun where one of
the descendants of Ejilu-Ibiyeroye married from or Iperu, where a
semblance of Eyo masquerade are occasionally staged may not also
be controverted. In fact the various Aro rendition contains a lot of
Ijebu dialect as well as reference to Iraye an Ijebu town11. Viewed
from this perspective, it could be rightly concluded that Adamu Orisa
represented an episode in Lagos history, while the Eyo added to it
later, could be seen as a change in continuity of the venerated deities
that solved the barrenness of the wife of Oba Ado.

Continuity and Change in Adamu Orisa Festival

From its introduction into Lagos and subsequent domicile at
Okepa, Erelu square and later at Idunmojukun, the Adamu Orisa
festival of Lagos had over the years witnessed some changes while
maintaining its uniqueness. Desultory attention has been paid to this
aspect in Lagos history and Adamu Orisa Festival. This section is
therefore devoted to examine the various changes and continuity in
the festival.
The Pre-Colonial Era

At the inception, Adamu Orisa was introduced from Benin to Lagos first as fertility ritual for Olori Olgubani. At this stage, it was purely a case of propitiating the Orisa. Subsequently, Oba Ado chose to celebrate the Orisa every seventeenth day in appreciation of the "gift of the womb" to his third wife. Thus we can see the continuity in celebration.

The celebration at Oke-Ipa continued until the reign of King Ologunkutere who not only brought the festival from Oke-Ipa to Lagos but also became the first king whose obsequies were celebrated with the staging of Adamu Orisa play. He was also noted to have changed the seventeenth day worship to such period when special circumstances demands it.13

Viewed from the role played by Ologunkutere, in transferring the Orisa from Oke Ipa to Lagos, a change in the frequency of worship could be seen to have taken place, while the continuity aspect could be viewed from his interest in promoting the festival like his forebears. Furthermore, the introduction of the masquerade to the celebration of the Orisa indicates not just the continuity, but also the change while retaining the ritual aspect as a form of continuity, the masquerade represented the change.

Another important aspect of continuity and change in the Adamu Orisa festival especially in the pre-colonial era could be viewed from the staff of the masquerade-Opanbata, one of the traditions relating to the introduction of masquerade credited one Molu, an Ijebu man from Iperu as the first to introduce one man Eyo masquerade, using his canoe’s kite (Igbokun) and paddle (Aje) as costume and staff to dance behind the Adamu Orisa.14

Molu's paddle later became Opanbata (made from a specie of palm-tree). The introduction of a masquerade and its paraphernalia such as Aropale, Opanbata etc could also be viewed as change. The exact period of the transformation from paddle to Opanbata is also lost in history but it is part of a change to the continuous celebration of the Adamu Orisa play.

Colonial Development

Fundamental and more important changes to the Adamu Orisa festival however took place in the period following the establishment of Pax-Britannica in Lagos society. In fact the British conquest of Lagos made possible the record of the first colonial era celebration of the Adamu Orisa festival which took place on 20th February 1854, in commemoration of King Akitoye's death. Since this period, subsequent records of Adamu Orisa performances had been kept.

Unlike the previous festivals that took place in the pre-colonial era, the 1854 festival was not just a watershed in view of the official British sanctioning of the staging of the play, but it also represented a change in traditional sanctioning hitherto given by the successive kings of Lagos, whose official function was taken over by the British.

From then onward, subsequent developments had contributed to both the continuity and change in Adamu Orisa festival. One of these major developments was the elevation of the Eyo Oba (Laba) into the fetish group. This development took place in 1898 when King Oyetam Sought to distinguish the Eyo-Oba from other Eyo groups of various chieftaincy families. The elders at Awe Adimu then granted Oyetam's wish of elevating the Eyo-Oba into a special group by allowing it to use the LABA bag.

It was also allowed to be the police of all Eyo (Olopa Eyo). Thus, the Eyo Laba or Eyo Alakete pupa was authorized to arrest any Eyo Iga who misbehaves15. Aside from this, the Laba group was given the responsibility of constructing the Agodo (the conclave) at Enu-Owa, where all Eyo must visit for the ritual dance.

Viewed from the inclusion of Eyo Alakete Pupa (Eyo Oba) into the Orisa group and the special function given to it, it could be seen that a change has been brought into the Adamu Orisa play, while the continuity aspect is best illustrated with the fact that Eyo Oba remains that of the royal household, though the Oba is not the custodian of Eyo Laba.16

Similar to the emergence of Eyo Laba in the Orisa group is the emergence of Agere group. Although traditions relating to the origin
of Agere in Eyo play indicate two main sources, Igboho and Abeokuta. However, its inclusion in the Eyo Orisa dates to 1898 when the Adamu Orisa play was staged in honour of Thomas Kinyomi, a son-in-law of late Chief Ogunmade.

On the aspect of costume, it is important to point out that the costume of Ologede group had over the years become part of the dynamic nature of the Adamu Orisa play. At its dawn, the Orisa Ologede's costume was made of banana leaves. This had however transformed into a spherical costume made of green damask, with a token banana leaves worn round its sleeves. The transformation from banana leaves to green damask represents the change while the constant outing of the Orisa could be viewed as that of continuity.

Still on the costume, the initial Aga (the decorated hat) worn by the various Eyo groups was made of palm fronds. This later transformed into the use of many fabric materials and asbestos, the exact origin of which is also not recorded.

The shield given to Orisa Adimu over the years constitute part of the continuity and change. At its dawn, the Adamu Orisa play held at such times when a number of technological advancement such as use of still cameras and motion picture were hitherto non-existing. Its celebration was also restricted to the royal household and the main custodians of the Orisa. With the introduction of colonialism and the advancement of technology especially in the 20th century, taking pictures of Orisa Adamu is considered a taboo.

In order to shield the Orisa from the very clever users of modern still cameras and motion pictures, tent and tent bearers' forms part of Adimu's procession providing the necessary shield. In the recently concluded Adamu Orisa play, the Orisa Adimu chose to remain at the Yoruba Tennis Club at Onikan, in order to avoid coverage of still cameras and motion pictures.

The innovation of tent and tents bearers is part of the change in the Adamu Orisa play, while the shield it provided represents the continuity as well as the secrecy of the Adamu Orisa cult.

Other important changes brought into the Adamu Orisa plays since inception could best be noticed in the colonial and post colonial era. At its inception, Adamu Orisa was propitiated as fertility goddess for Queen Olugbani and thereafter became a fortnight (Itadogun) celebration witnessed by King Ado and his successors. By the era of King Ologunkutere (c.1775-1805), the Adamu Orisa's abode changed from Oke-Ipa in Ikoyi to Lagos Island. The staging of the festival in honour of the departed King also commenced at this time and it was later extended to prominent chiefs and families who had contributed to the development of Lagos society.

In the colonial era however, a number of Adamu Orisa plays were staged either in support of colonial government programmes or in honour of the visit of the British monarch into Lagos. A brief discussion of such plays, one of which was attached to prominent Lagosians therefore becomes imperative at the juncture. The Eyo Red Cross of 3rd November 1917 was staged to support the Red Cross fund during the First World War (1914-1918). The play was staged during the era of Eleko Eshugbayi (1900-1925, 1931-33).

A similar festival was staged during the Second World War tagged Eyo Win The War fund. This was held on May 28, 1944 during the reign of King Falolu to raise fund for the war effort of the British colonial government.

In 1956, during the visit of Queen Elizabeth to Nigeria, Eyo festival was held in honour of the Queen, but was attached to the celebration of the passage of Sir Adeyemo Alakija, a prominent Lagos Lawyer of Egba extraction. This festival was held February 16, 1956.

Postcolonial Era

In the post independent era, a number of Eyo plays were held to celebrate landmark anniversaries and visits by prominent Nigerian citizens to Lagos State. The following Adamu Orisa plays falls into this category: On June 1968, the Adamu Orisa play held in celebration of the first anniversary of creation of Lagos State, but the festival was staged in honour of Prince Kusah Oyekan, father of Oba Oyekan II.

On October 30, 1970, Eyo Iya Eledie held to celebrate 10th year Independence Day Celebration; August 17, 1974 Eyo in honour of Pa Raimi Okiti, held to commemorate Lagos State Arts Festival. May 1, 1982, Eyo in honour of Prince Yekini Adewumi Dosunmu held to commemorate 350 years of Obaship in Lagos; June 11, 1988,
held in honour of Chief Olayinka Dosunmu (Akinsiku), to commemorate the visit of General Ibrahim Babangida to Lagos State.

In all these instances, the continuity aspect of the Adamu Orisa play could be seen from the honour done to prominent Lagosians in whose memory they were staged while the change represent the specific purposes for holding the festivals. It is important to note that in most of these circumstances, the funding of the Ikaros, usually borne by the family of the deceased being honoured were paid by the government.

Another important dynamics of the Adamu Orisa play could be seen in some of the forbidden acts for spectators seeing the play such as smoking of cigarettes, tobacco and pipes and riding bicycles. While all these were forbidden based on modernity, the use of Mokawiyia (Muslim caps) by Islamic adherents are allowed based purely on religious tolerance.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis represents various stages of continuity and change in the Adamu Orisaa play since pre-colonial period. The list of changes are however in-exhaustive. Future research efforts may be bemed at some other aspects such as the appointment of an Akinsiku (a position given to any personality responsible for discipline erring Eyo member at the Awe Adimu); the introduction of identity cards, collection of Oba's tickets etc.

The Adamu Orisa play, an important culture of the people of Lagos Island, like any other cultures all over the world is dynamic, the nature of which will be subject to changes not only in Isale-Eko, where it is being staged, but also as the exigency of time and space may determine. It is from this perspective that the recently staged festival became the first ever to be seen by people from all over the world through satellite television while spectators were given adequate opportunity through free transportation and the cozy arena of the Tafawa Balewa Square to see a first of its kind 'Eyo festival' an apt description aimed at reducing the Orisa (goddess) usually attached to the previous ones.

Notes and References


Interview with Prince Nurudeen Agara, 60 years, April 16, 2009 at Iduntafa Street, Lagos.

See Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into the Onilegbale Chieftaincy of Lagos headed by Mr. E.A. Hotonu Deputy Solicitor General, Lagos State Published in 1972.

See Dr. A.R. Jinadu's 80th Birthday Commemorative Brochure, Published in 2003.

Interview with Late Pa Rafiu Adio Ogunmade, September 1985 and Mr. Lateef Ogunmade 2007, at Ogunmade Compound, Adeniji Adele Road, Lagos and 20 Muritala Street, Amuwo respectively.

See Illustrious Commemorative Magazine, op. cit, April/ May 2009.

Igbe is the Traditional Royal Song of Praise Peculiar to Lagos Society. Through the song rendered by women of the royal household, Families of Lagos and Chieftaincy History of various Developments are Rendered.


He was an Efe Exponent who led the Ketu Group until the 1940s when he retired. Efe and Gelede Plays are used as Social/cultural Event. It originated from Ketu Kingdom (now Republic of Benin) and among the Egbado. During the late 19th Century, King Gezo invaded Ketu Kingdom and this led
to the dispersal of its (Ketu) inhabitants. Some of who sought refuge in Lagos, settling first at Igboji Sabe and later at Oju-Olokun (where those from Ketu were accommodated), while the Egbado Immigrants settled at Isalegangan.

Iraye-Oke is an Ijebu Town situated North East of Epe, it is bounded by Odo-Egiri to its North-West and Odomola to the West.

Some traditions said the celebration was initially staged every fifteen days and it coincided with the Agbadarigi (Badagry) Market Days. See the Illustrious, Commemorative Magazine op.cit in celebration of the 2009 Adamu Orisa play. See also an account of some Reading about the Lagos-Adamu Orisa play in Bode Osanyin's Adamu Orisa play... Appendix G, pp. 118-120.


Bode Osanyin, Adamu Orisa play op. cit, pp. 73-75.

Eyo Oba or Eyo Alakete Pupa though belonged to the king's custody of the Laba bag had been bestowed on so many families by the Kings of Lagos. Such families that had been privileged to take custody of the Laba over the years are Okunu, Tokosi, Iginla, Ajose Adeogun, Olanipekun and Olaniigbi. The exact dates of the Laba's sojourn in each household is however unknown.


Interview with Honourable Adekunle Alli, 75 years old in Lagos, May 20, 2005.

(20) It is a taboo to take picture of all the main Orisa's viz: Adimu, Oniko and Ologede. That of Adimu is considered a serious taboo that may lead to serious punishment of the culprits and invocation of curses not only on the person, but also on the vicinity where such serious taboo is committed.

This refers to the Adamu Orisa play tagged Eyo Festival held on April 25, 2009.

See Records of Adamu Orisa Performances since 1854.