

ART AND SPIRITUALITY:
THE IJUMU NORTHEASTERN-YORUBA EGÚNGÚN

by
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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

African art and spirituality are inseparable. Looking at it specifically from the visible, concrete, or tangible standpoint, the latter is nonexistent without the former, as the presence of the former validates the reality of the latter. The origin of this symbiotic relationship is in the Africans' ideology, in which they find it more convenient to establish communication with the transcendent or supernatural realm through visible devices that we label 'art'. Using the Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun* as a case study, this dissertation analyzes the place of art in African spirituality. Applying two conceptual frameworks—*connective theory* and *linguistic approach*, the dissertation first depicts this art as a reflection of African culture. Secondly, it reveals African art as essentially an assemblage or composite of diverse culturally defined and meaningful materials. Finally, it portrays art as a reliable form of historical and iconographical record of the African culture.

In all, the dissertation comprises eight chapters. Chapter one introduces the reader to the research rationales, objectives, theory and methodology, and relevant previous studies. Chapter two concerns the place of art in Yoruba religious beliefs and practices within the larger context of African art and culture. Chapter three illustrates the inter-group relations in the Niger-Benue confluence region—the geographical location of the Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba. Chapter four provides an overview of the cultural practices of the Ijumu people of the Ookun Yoruba-speaking groups. Chapter five focuses on the

spirituality and performance contexts and the devotees' conceptualization of the *Egungun* as a religion.

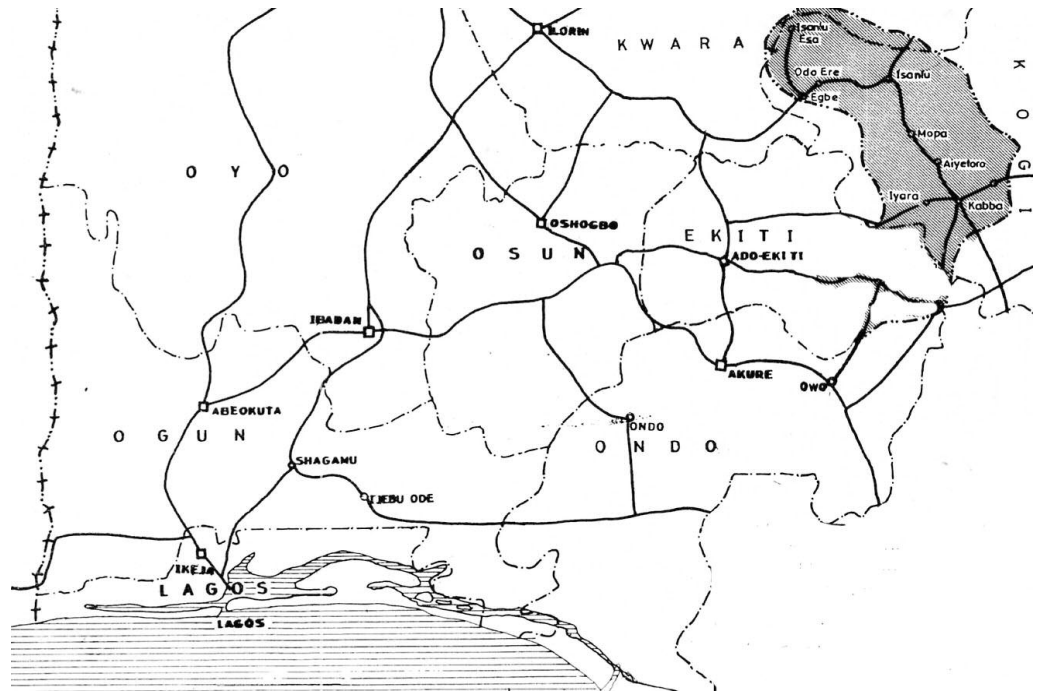
Chapter six is about iconographical interpretations of *Egungun*. Chapter seven illustrates the aesthetic implications with attention paid to the masquerade costumes as well as the performance contexts of the masquerades or masqueraders, drummers, singers, and more importantly, the aftermath of the ritual festival. Chapter eight is about critical perspectives on Ijumu-Yoruba *Egungun* within the larger context of the tradition among the entire Yoruba peoples. It highlights critical issues affecting the *Egungun* tradition today and the relevance of this dissertation to arresting their loss.

CHAPTER I

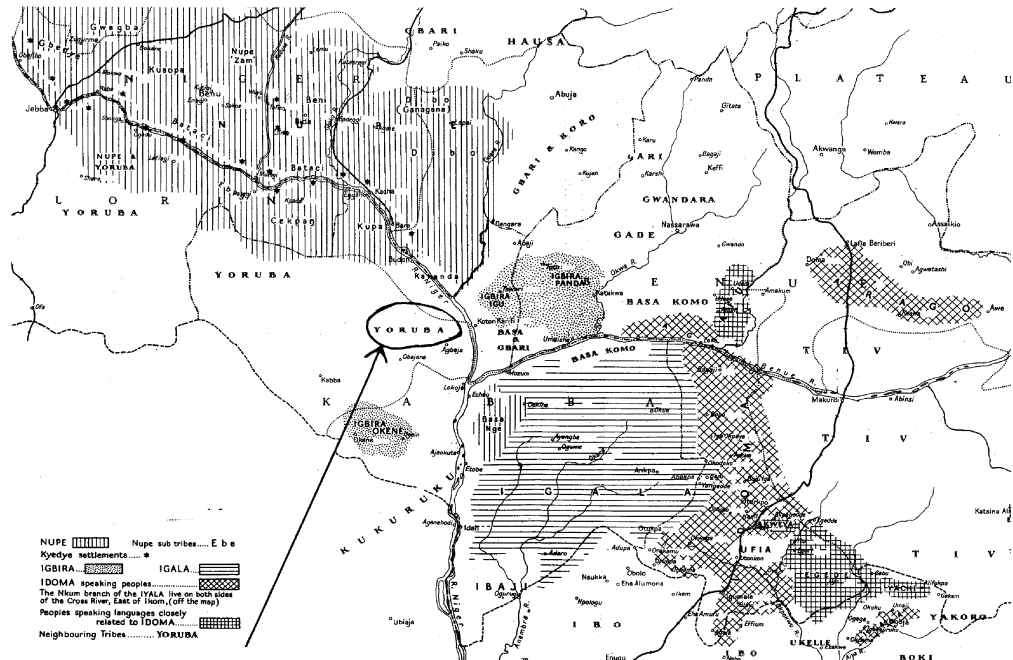
MAPS and INTRODUCTION



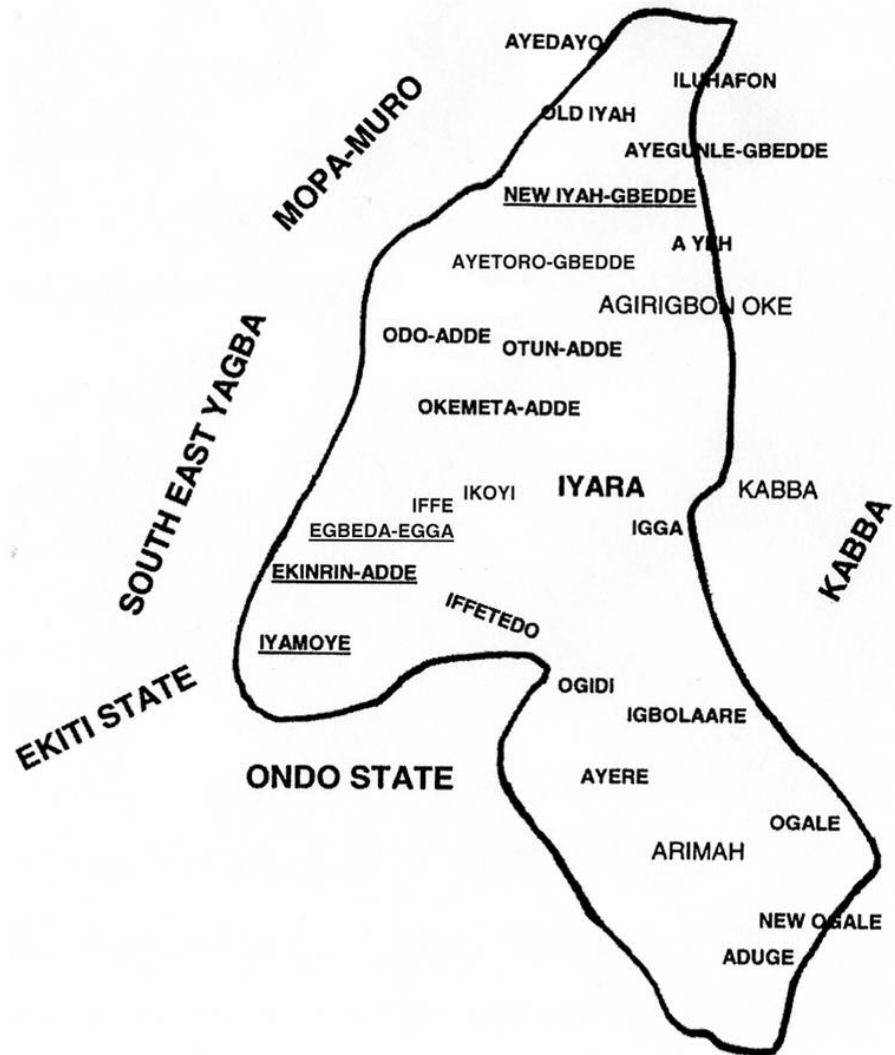
Map 1.1: Yoruba Subgroups and the Niger-Benue confluence non-Yoruba Groups. Note: A modified J.S. Eades' "Map 1. Location of Yoruba subgroups." In *The Yoruba Today* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), xiv.



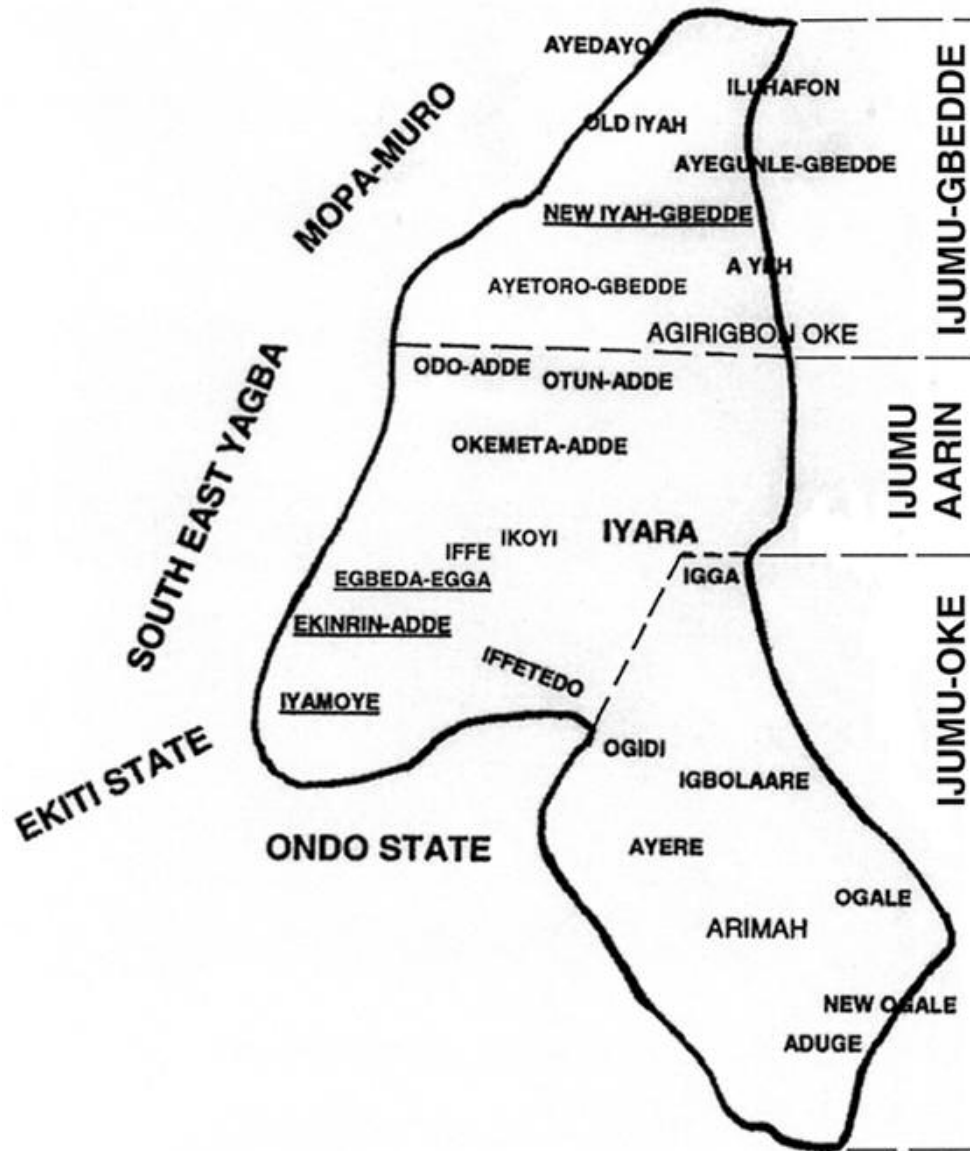
Map 1.2: Yorubaland showing Ooko-Yoruba minority group (in the shaded portion). Note: A modified “Map of Northeast Yorubaland,” *Northeast Yorubaland: Studies in the History and Culture of a Frontier Zone*, edited by O. Ayodeji, Z.O. Apata, and O. Akinwumi. Ibadan: Rex Charles Publication in association with Connel Publications, 2003.



Map 1.3: Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Region. Note: the arrow points to Ookun-Yoruba Subgroup. Source: Daryll Forde, ed., *People of the Niger-Benue Confluence West Africa (Part X). Ethnographic Survey of Africa* (London: International African Institute, 1955), 161.



Map 1.4: Location of Ijumu Communities.
 Based on the "Map of Ijumu Local Government Area," Local Govt.
 Planning Dept., Iyara.



Map 1.5: The three (3) sections of Ijumu communities—Ijumu-Aarin ('Ijumu in the mid point'), Ijumu-Oke ('Ijumu in the upper zone'), and Ijumu-Gbedde (in the northern zone). Based on the "Map of Ijumu Local Government Area," Local Govt. Planning Dept., Iyara.

The Yoruba who inhabit the present-day republic of Nigeria in West Africa have a very diverse culture (Map 1.1). Their society is divided into many different subgroups, such as the Ondo, Ekiti, Akoko, Oyo, Ijebu, Egba, Awori, Igbomina, and Ookun-Yoruba, among others—each having its own peculiar dialectal and cultural traits. These traits make it possible to identify a given Yoruba individual as an Oyo, Ondo, Ijebu, Ekiti, and so forth. For instance, based on a given Yoruba dialect spoken by a given Yoruba person, which could be identified in the greeting words, and the body art that he or she wears, especially facial scarifications, his or her subgroup immediately becomes easily discernible. The following example better illustrates this point. A given Yoruba person with two long facial marks, one on each cheek, and or whose common greeting word (dialect) is *aleo* or *ketii-ke* (‘peace be onto you’ or ‘how are you doing?’), is unquestionably recognized as an Ondo-Yoruba.

The Yoruba occupy two distinctive geographical locations (Map 1.2). The majority-Yoruba, more than ninety percent, live in Southwestern Nigeria. The minority-Yoruba of less than ten percent, commonly known as the Ookun-Yoruba (including the Ijumu, Bunu, Ikiri, Owe, Oworo, and Iyagba peoples), live in the western part of the Niger-Benue confluence in the Nigeria middle belt zone. They share this region with their non-Yoruba neighbors—the Ebira, Northern Edo (Otuo, Ikao, Okpe, and Ogbe examples), Northern Igbo (Ugbene, Nsukka, and Asaba examples), Igala, Gbari (Gwari), and Nupe culture groups (Map 1.3). While the majority-Yoruba (in southwestern Nigeria), to a large extent, maintain their indigenous traditions, the minority-Yoruba (Ookun-Yoruba or Yoruba-speaking groups in the Niger-Benue confluence region) intermingle with the

cultures of their non-Yoruba neighbors. This has resulted in interculturalization,¹ in which some northern and central Nigeria's cultural traditions have been absorbed by the most northeasterly Yoruba-speaking peoples in the Niger-Benue confluence region, while some cultural institutions peculiar to the Yoruba peoples have been absorbed by the non-Yoruba peoples in this area as well. As a result, the Ookun Yoruba peoples do exhibit some uncommon traditions, such as their choice of the red burial cloth traditions that are very strange to the Yoruba in the Southwestern Nigeria. Thus, the latter often refer to the former in the Niger-Benue confluence region as “‘northerners’—a euphemism for the Hausa/ Fulani”² culture groups. Labeling the Ookun-Yoruba peoples as ‘northerners’ is, by extension, referring to them as not purely of the Yoruba culture group.

The above development has two notable effects. First, most of the Ookun Yoruba communities, especially the Ijumu, rarely appear on the Yoruba maps, as if the peoples were non-Yoruba subgroups. Second, with regard to Yoruba art, related scholars have rarely conducted research or published anything on the Ookun-Yoruba's visual arts as if there is nothing “Yoruba” about them. Perhaps the only exception is the Bunu (Abinu) society, where anthropologist Elisha Renne has conducted in-depth research and published extensively on the traditional hand-woven textile traditions, especially the *aso-ipo* or *baletan*.³ In contrast, an array of scholarly publications on the material culture of

¹ Interculturalization as used in this context, as it was used by Austin Shelton (*The Igbo-Igala Borderland*, 1971: 57), means cultural interactions, contacts, and exchange between two or more culture groups, who live within the same geographical region or zone.

² Bayo Ijagbemi, “O-okun Yoruba in Yoruba Art Historiography: History, Problems and Prospects,” M. A. thesis, 1996, 30.

³ Elisha Renne's first hand research publications on the Bunu hand woven cloth traditions include *The Decline of Women's Weaving Among the Northeast Yoruba* (1988); *Aso Ipo, Red Cloth From Bunu* (1992); and *Cloth That Does Not Die: The Meaning of Cloth in Bunu Social Life* (1995).

the northern, southern, eastern, western, and central Yoruba subgroups has continued to escalate in an alarming rate. A good example is the Yoruba concept of *Egungun*⁴ spirituality⁵, the focus of this dissertation. John Pemberton, John Rowland Ojo, John Picton, William Gilliland, Ola Babalola, and a host of other Yoruba art scholars have over-researched the *Egungun* traditions of the Ekiti and Igbomina—the Ijumu southern and western Yoruba neighbors respectively. Contrary to the above observation, the culturally rich masquerading traditions of the Ookun-Yoruba peoples have been completely neglected. It is an attempt to build on the existing body of knowledge on the Yoruba concept of spirituality that will draw attention to the neglected Ijumu *Egungun* traditions that inform my dissertation—*Art and Spirituality: The Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba Egungun*.

This dissertation examines the spirituality in the Ijumu-Yoruba *Egungun* traditions from an ethnographical standpoint. This approach is relevant based on the fact that the Ijumu people have certain peculiar cultural traits that have made them stand out as a unique Yoruba ethnic group. I hope that my argument in this dissertation, that the Yoruba concepts of spirituality, the example of *Egungun*, vary from one Yoruba subgroup to the

⁴ The English translation of Yoruba *Egungun* is “masquerade.” From the Yoruba cultural standpoint, *Egungun* is essentially the physical manifestation into the world of the living, the spirits, whose abodes are in the spirit worlds that include heaven and earth. These spirit beings include the ancestors, believed to live in the heaven, who were once human beings but transformed into spirits at the instance of their deaths, and the unseen therianthrope creatures, believed to inhabit the natural environments such as mountains, forests, rivers, rocks, and so forth.

⁵ Spirituality in the Yoruba concept, and as used in this dissertation, is the Yoruba belief in the unseen spirit beings (*emi airi*), whose (spiritual) powers surpassed those of human beings. The nomenclatures of these spirits as well as individuals Yoruba believe about them varied from one subgroup to the other. However, spirits all over the Yoruba world are believed to be next in rank to the Supreme Being (God, the Creator). While some spirit beings live in the heaven (*orun*), some inhabit the terrestrial world (*aye*).

other, will challenge the Yoruba art scholars, who often take for granted that all the Yoruba peoples have homogenous cosmological concepts.

Research Objectives

1. To critically analyze spirituality in the Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun* traditions with a view to demonstrating that this Yoruba subgroup has a remarkably different cultural landscape that sets them apart from the rest of the Yoruba culture group in southwestern Nigeria. By extension, this study is set to exemplify the diverse nature of the Yoruba culture and the factors responsible for this diversity.

2. To illustrate that a given African art, the example of the Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun*, is a mirror reflection of the cultural identity of a given culture group. Thus, this study is set to demonstrate that the distinctiveness in the Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun* defines the identity of the Ijumu people and sets them apart from the rest of the Yoruba subgroups, that is, the majority-Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria.

3. To show that African art, the example of Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun*, is essentially an assemblage or composite of diverse culturally defined and meaningful components or materials. A step-by step analysis of how the components interconnect, as will be illustrated in this dissertation, would elicit ‘classified’ or ‘esoteric’ information of African art.

4. To demonstrate that African art, specifically the example of Ijumu Northeastern - Yoruba *Egungun*, is a reliable form of historical and iconographical record of the African culture. Thus, African art is not just art; it also operates as visual texts.

Related Studies

The history of African masking traditions cuts across the ages—from prehistoric through modern. Scanty evidence has been advanced to support most speculations about the age and the earliest forms of masking in Africa. However, as of now the ancient rock art in North Africa's Tassili N'Ajjah Mountains in the present Algeria, where images of hybrid creatures, masked humans, or "masked dancers"⁶ have been found, seems to be the earliest discovered examples. They have been dated to between 8,000-6,000 BCE.⁷

In contemporary Africa as well, masking traditions abound—cutting across the northern, southern, eastern, western, and central regions of which a few examples are cited below. Thus, it could be argued that masking traditions epitomize Africa's cultural identity. The Igbo (Ibo) who inhabit eastern Nigeria refer to their masks as *Egwugwu*—functioning as an agent that portrays human ideals and anti-social behaviors—thus serving as social commentary and control. Examples are *Okperegede* and *Eze Nwanyi* that embody feminine ideals, *Okpesu Umuruma* that portray women of the evil spirits,⁸ and *Ekpe* that come out during the harvest festivals, thanking the ancestors and the deities

⁶ Frank Willett, *African Art* (revised edition) (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1993), 51.

⁷ Iris Hahner-Herzog, *African Masks* (1998); Monica Visona, *A History of Art in Africa* (2000); and Peter Stephan, *World Art Africa* (2001).

⁸ Hahner-Herzog, 54-57.

for providing abundant harvests. These masquerades (*Ekpe*) also honor all the community heroes and heroines during this time.⁹

Gelede masks among the Egba, Egbado, Awori and other neighboring Yoruba subgroups, celebrate the women's spiritual power. The purpose of this masquerade tradition is to make the great mothers (*Iya Nla*) use their spiritual power positively. Both males and females participate in the rituals of *Gelede*; while the female attendants often dance with *Gelede* masks that are displayed on wooden trays on their heads, their male counterparts have the masks worn to cover some parts of their bodies. The *Gelede* masks display daily life scenes as well as serve as visual metaphors.¹⁰

The *Sowei* masquerade of the *Sande* female society in Gola; Shabro; Mende; and Temne in Sierra Leone and Liberia illustrates womanhood as the women conceive themselves—their symbol and notion of outer and inner beauty.¹¹

Contemporaneous to *Sowei* is the *Dandai* or *Landai* masquerade of the *Poromale* society in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. Symbolizing the legendary ancestor, the masquerade (*Dandai/Landai*) appears in public during the male youths' initiation into adulthood, where it is believed to ritually capture and swallow the boys, keeping them in its large body until the end of the initiation, when the initiates are believed to be spiritually born again. The costume of *Dandai* is made of fibers, cloth, and animal skins.¹²

⁹ Herbert Cole, *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1986), 114-215.

¹⁰ Babatunde Lawal, *Gelede Spectacle* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1996), 193-238.

¹¹ Pamela McClusky, *Arts from Africa* (Seattle Art Museum: Princeton University Press, 2002), 197-212

¹² Roy Sieber, *African Art in the Cycle of Life* (Washington D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution

Basinjom masquerade of the Banyang and Ejagham who inhabit the Cameroon and Nigeria borderland (in West Africa) represents a supernatural spirit that manifests in public. It exposes the evildoers, thus protecting the community from the negative forces of witches and sorcerers.¹³

Chiwara or *Tiwará*s a popular mask of the Bamana or Bambara of southwestern Mali in West Africa. The male members of the Jow society don *Chiwara/Tiwara* to ensure abundant agricultural harvests. Even though only the males wear it, the *Chiwara* wooden headdress illustrates both the male and female antelopes—the Bambara belief that males and females are complementary in building the Bambara community.¹⁴

Donned by the Dogon (Mali in West Africa) males, *Walu*, *Satimbe*, *Kanaga*, and *Danana* masquerades perform during the Dogon second funeral rite called *Dama*—the ritual that initiates the dead into the realm of the ancestors.¹⁵ Similarly, the performance of *Kpelie* masquerade of the Senufo peoples in Cote d’Ivoire during the funeral rites of an elder, “who contributed to village life, and who had many children and grandchildren,”¹⁶ transforms him into the status of an ancestor.

Egungun are the most popular masking traditions among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria. Linguistically functioning as a noun, *Egungun* is used in two contexts. The first exemplifies the type of masquerades that are not perceived as ‘spirits of the ancestors’ such as *Aladoko* (masquerade that is common in Akure-Yoruba) and *Epa* (the most

Press, 1988), 55.

¹³ Laure Meyer, *African Forms* (New York: Assouline Publishing, 2001), 84.

¹⁴ Christopher Roy, *Art and Life in Africa* (Iowa: The University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1985), 22.

¹⁵ Carol Beckwith and A. Fisher, *African Ceremonies* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 2002), and Walter van Beek and Stephenie Hollyman, *Dogon: Africa’s People of the Cliffs* (2001).

¹⁶ Sieber and A. Walker, 135.

popular masquerades among the Ekiti, Igbomina, and Ijumu-Yoruba). In fact, my current research has shown that all the Ijumu type-masquerades fall within this category. The second context refers specifically to the Yoruba masquerades that connect with ancestors' veneration. They are often called *Ara Orun* (dwellers in heaven), *Baba* (father), and *Eegun Agba* (the Elders' masquerades), whose ritual is meant to invite the spirits of the ancestors into the mundane world to commune with and bless their children. Thus, this type emblemizes the physicality of the dead on the earth.

Yoruba native scholar and clergyman, the Reverend Samuel Johnson of Oyo-Yoruba Church Missionary Society (CMS) in the late nineteenth century was one of the first to publish on *Egungun* traditions. Although the manuscript was completed in 1897, it was not published until 1921, twenty years after Johnson's death. Entitled *The History of the Yorubas*, this book over the years has been a model that is often used to validate all the existing publications on Yoruba *Egungun* as if its focus is entirely on the *Egungun* traditions. As a matter of fact, information relating to *Egungun* in it occupies fewer than seven pages and is restricted to the Oyo-Yoruba subgroup. Nonetheless, *The History of the Yorubas* has continued to provide rudimentary information about *Egungun*. The author described *Egungun* tradition as the worship of the spirits or the souls of the ancestors. He asserted that Yoruba masquerade costumes (*Ekun-Egungun*) are worn by:

human beings of the exact height and figure of the deceased, covered from head to foot with cloths similar to those in which the said deceased was known to have been buried, completely masked and speaking with unnatural tone of voice.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Connecticut: Negro University Press, 1970. Originally published in London in 1921), 29.

It is evident from this statement that Johnson based his research only on *Oku-Pipe* (literally: ‘calling of the dead’), one of the two ways in which the spirits of the Yoruba ancestors manifest in the world of the living (*aye*). The funeral of *Oku-Pipe* is held a few days after the first burial rite that is called *Isinku* (burying of the corpse). The author did not mention the more popular ritual of *Egungun* that is called *Odun Eegun* (festival of masquerades) that lasts between two and twenty-one days—when all the community ancestors and/ or the spirits who occupy the natural environments are invited into the visible realm (*aye*). Johnson contended that the mysteries (*awo*) of *Egungun* were brought to Oyo by the Oyo-Yoruba enslaved in Nupeland together with the Nupe natives who emigrated to Oyo. He cited the examples of *Alapinni* (head of *Egungun*) and other officials—*Elefi*, *Olohan*, *Oloba*, *Aladafa*, and *Oloje* as of the Nupe descendants.

William Gilliland has examined the *Egungun Eshise* in Ado-Ekiti in eastern Yoruba. He recalled that this particular masquerade does not speak; rather, it makes an unusual whistling sound. He explained that *Egungun Eshise* wears a costume made of palm leaves (*moriwo*). The owner(s) perceived it as linking the world of the living and the ancestors’ realm.¹⁸ Thus it seems that it is not in itself perceived as an ancestor.

Adeyinka Adedeji offered two possibilities regarding the origin of *Egungun*. First, he traced it in the corpuses of *Ifa* (body of knowledge in form of oral history that was passed down to the diviners by *Orunmila*, the Yoruba god of divination and wisdom)¹⁹, in which two of its verses (*Oworin-Meji* and *Oturupon-Meji*) reveal that the *Egungun* originated in

¹⁸ William Gilliland, “*Egungun Eshise*,” in *JSTOR Man* 60, 158 (1960): 122-123.

¹⁹ *Ifa* corpuses (*Odu-Ifa*): Numbering two hundred and fifty six, the *Ifa* corpuses (*Odu-Ifa*) are of two types—*Oju-Odu* (the senior/main verses) and *Omo-Odu* (the minor verses). All of them contain/provide the esoteric knowledge of the Yoruba histories and epistemologies.

Ile-Ife, the most ancient Yoruba city. The author explained that the Ife (often written as Ile-Ife) indigenes refer to this type of *Egungun* as *ebora* (spirits) and not ancestors (*ara-orun*). He identified the second source in the Oyo-Yoruba oral tradition that referred to *Egungun* as *Baba* (father). This source underscored that Sango, the *Alaafin* (King) of Oyo, who was borne by a Nupe princess, first established the mysteries of *Egungun* in Oyo-Yoruba.²⁰

Ulli Beier identified three types of *Egungun*: One, those who have the ability to mediate between the ancestors of the clan and the living; two, the senior masquerades that impersonate the spirits of the dead; and three, the *Agbegijo* (literally ‘we dance with the wood’), who perform entertainment and magic. The first two could be categorized under the rubric of *Ara Orun* or *Baba* (‘dwellers in heaven’ or ‘ancestors’), while the third exemplifies the caricatures that are intended to draw laughter from the spectators—these are itinerant masquerades that travel from one community to the other—performing for monetary gain. Most of Beier’s information on this third type, which he referred to as “the unserious masquerades,”²¹ was collected in Osogbo in central Yorubaland.

John Picton examined the masks of the Ebira (Igbira), who shared borderlands with the Ijumu-Northeastern Yoruba, where both the masks and the costumes are known as *Ekú*. The author observed that like most of the Yoruba sub-groups, *Ekú* among the Igbira manifest as the ancestral spirits.²²

²⁰ Adeyinka Adedeji, “The Origin of the Yoruba Masque Theatre: The Use of Ifa Divination as Historical Evidence,” in *African Notes* 6, no. 1 (1969-70): 70-86.

²¹ Ulli Beier, “The Agbegijo Masquerades,” *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 82 (1964): 188-199.

²² John Picton, “Masks and the Igbira,” *African Arts* 7, no. 2 (1974): 38-41.

The year 1978 could be regarded as the year of breakthrough for the scholars whose research interests are related to the Yoruba *Egungun*—when all their research on it was published in the April (1978) edition of *African Arts*. Henry J. Drewal in the editor’s note spelled out that the edition’s objective was to “present new descriptive and analytic data based upon extensive field research in different parts of Yorubaland.”²³ In spite of this objective, the researchers left the Ijumu-Northeastern Yoruba masquerade traditions uncovered. Below, I review the articles in the order in which they appear in this edition.

Writing on the *Egungun* masquerades of the Ikenne-Remo in southern Yorubaland, Marilyn H. Houlberg did identify two categories—*Ara Orun* (ancestor) and *Onidan* (the trickster or entertainer). She described *Ara Orun* (literally: ‘dwellers in the heaven’) as the ancestors who regulate the relations between the worlds of the living and the dead. Houlberg’s research concentrates on the historical and cultural relevance of the ancestor *Egungun* (*Ara Orun*), who manifest in two contexts—at funerals and during an annual festival called *Odun Egungun*.²⁴

Drewal and Drewal’s research in this edition of *African Arts* concentrates on the *Egungun* in Egbado-Southern Yoruba. The co-authors observed that “*Egungun* are diverse spirits (*ara orun*) who manifest themselves either as voices in the midnight or as masqueraders that honor the ancestors.”²⁵ They noted that there is an order in which the Egbado masqueraders perform and that this order conforms to the hierarchical power and authority of the individual *Egungun*. Their (Drewals’) study established that the

²³ Henry J. Drewal, *African Arts* XI, no. 3 (1978): 19.

²⁴ Marilyn Houlberg, “Egungun Masquerades of the Remo Yoruba,” in *African Arts* XI, no.3 (1978): 20-27 and 100.

²⁵ Margaret Drewal and Henry Drewal, “More Powerful Than Each Other: An Egbado Classification of Egungun,” in *African Arts* XI, no.3 (1978): 28.

classification of *Egungun* in Egbado conforms to the way that powers and authorities are distributed among the *Egungun* cult members. It also supported the mythical origin of *Egungun* in which the *Ijimere* (patas or colobus monkey) is regarded as the first *Yoruba* masquerade.²⁶

John Pemberton III examined in this 1978 edition of *African Arts* the *Egungun* masquerades of the Igbomina in northeastern Yoruba. He identified three types—*Paaka*, *Layewu*, and *Elewe*—all coordinated by the society's officials, who include *Alapinni*, *Alagbaa*, and the community-head (*Oba*). Each of the masquerades has a different significance and iconography. *Paaka* associates with kingship while *Layewu* and *Elewe* connect with the guild of hunters and entertainment respectively. Pemberton's research established that while the *Egungun Layewu* symbolizes the spirits of all the departed hunters, *Egungun Paaka* essentially impersonates the ancestral spirits.²⁷

Marc Schiltz researched the *Egungun* in Iganna in northwestern Yorubaland. His work focused on the possible determinant factors for choosing a specific type or style of the costume of *Egungun*. His research established that the name of an individual *Egungun* has cultural significance.²⁸

Concentrating on the Owo-Eastern Yoruba *Egungun*, Robin Poynor's article, the last in this 1978 edition of *African Arts*, established that the Owo *Egungun* are not manifestations of the ancestral spirits; rather, they represent the *Orisa* (deities), who have come to bring stability into the unstable nature of the community. Poynor emphasized

²⁶ Drewal and Drewal, 28-39 and 98.

²⁷ John Pemberton III, "Egungun Masquerades of the Igbomina Yoruba," *African Arts* XI, no. 3: 1978: 41-47 and 99.

²⁸ Marc Schiltz, "Egungun Masquerades in Iganna," *African Arts* XI, no. 3 (1978): 48-55 and 100.

that the primary function of the Owo-Yoruba *Egungun* is to wipe away death, pestilence, convulsion, and many mishaps in the community. He suggested that the diverse Owo *Egungun* styles and stories of origins leave no doubt that they are an amalgamation of different Yoruba *Egungun* traditions.²⁹

Olufemi Rowland Ojo focused on *Epa* masquerades of the Ekiti and Igbomina people in Northeastern Yoruba. His work explained the cultural significance of the motifs of the carved headpieces of *Epa*, which include ‘mothers with children’, ‘warriors’, and ‘*Osanyin*’ (god of medicine). The mothers-with-children motifs connect with the Yoruba’s prayer for plentiful children, as wealth and fame are measured by the number of children a traditional Yoruba has. The warrior motifs recall the wars that Ekiti and Igbomina waged against their neighbors in the past—thus serving as historical documents, while the motifs based on *Osanyin* iconography illustrate the *Epa* masquerade as giver of good health and longevity of life.³⁰

Sanusi A. Babayemi examined the Oyo-Northern Yoruba *Egungun*. He traced their origins to three sources. The first is oral literature, in which some *Odu Ifa* establish that *Egungun* are the spirits of the ancestors. The second source states that the tradition of *Egungun* was introduced into the Yoruba society by the Igbo in eastern Nigeria, who used it to terrorize the Ile-Ife people in retaliation for their forceful ejection out of this city in time past. The third source underscores that the tradition of *Egungun* was brought to Oyo-Yoruba from the Nupeland. He examined the annual appearances of the Oyo-Yoruba *Egungun* and their functions and concluded with a comprehensive *Oriki* (praise

²⁹ Robin Poyner, “The Egungun of Owo,” *African Arts* XI, no. 3 (1978): 65-76 and 100.

³⁰ John Rowland Ojo, “The Symbolism and Significance of Epa-Type Masquerade Headpieces,” in *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 3 (1978): 445-470.

songs) of the three lineages—*Igbon*, *Ogbin*, and *Olukolo*—which the Oyo-Yoruba oral literature supports as the founders of the Yoruba *Egungun*.³¹

Oludare Olajubu provided the origins, functions, and organization of *Egungun* society in Yorubaland. He identified two forms of Yoruba *Egungun* as *Egungun Oyo*, peculiar to the Oyo-Yoruba people and their neighbors and *Egungun Ado*, those practiced among the Ekiti, Akoko, and Akure peoples in Eastern Yoruba. The author argued that both the *Egungun Oyo* and *Ado* exemplified a creative impersonation of the reincarnated departed souls of the dead called ancestors. This appears to be an overgeneralization as few if any of the Eastern/Northeastern Yoruba *Egungun* are regarded as ‘ancestral spirits’. He concluded with the identification of the people whom the Oyo oral history claimed to have originated the ritual of *Egungun*—*Ologbojo* or *Ologbin*, the coordinator, poet, and dancer; *Olojowon*, the headdress carver; *Alaran*, the textile weaver, and designer of *Ekú* (masquerade costumes); *Oloponda*, the great magician; and *Moriwo*, the masker whose responsibility is to impersonate the ancestors by donning the *Ekú Eegun*.³²

Hackleman Norma Wolff researched the costumes of *Egungun Abeokuta* (also called *Egba*) in Western Yoruba. He described the costumes made of cloths, animal skulls, and wooden headdresses, as embodiments of the ancestral powers that illustrate the ancestors’ physical manifestation on the earth (*aye*).³³

William Fagg examined the *Epa* festival of the Ekiti-Northeastern Yoruba. He reported that the Ekiti *Epa* festival is held biennially—lasting three days, in which the

³¹ A. Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, 1980, 1-123.

³² Oludare Olajubu, “The Yoruba Masquerade Cult and Its Role in the Society,” *Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture*, 1983, 389-409.

³³ Norma Wolff, “Egungun Costuming in Abeokuta,” *African Arts* 15, no. 3 (1982): 66-70, 91.

Epa masqueraders perform series of acrobatic displays, such as jumping over a mound of about one meter in height without falling. Fagg's work established that the cultural significance of the *Epa* masquerade tradition in Ekitiland is essentially "to promote the fertility and well-being of the community."³⁴

John Pemberton III described the Oyo-Yoruba *Egungun* as ancestors, *ara-orun* (literally: 'dwellers in heaven' or 'spirits of the dead who live in heaven'). Explaining the relationship between the Yoruba, who believe in the 'existence' (*iwa*) and the *Egungun*, Pemberton wrote that *iwa* is conceptualized as not only in terms of physical life on the earth, but also as the ability of the dead to exist in the real world (in the form of *Egungun*) and maintain cordial relationships with the living. He described the ancestors as the 'living dead' because they physically manifest on the earth at the times of the *Odun Egungun* (masquerades festival). He traced the history of *Egungun* to two sources. The first illustrates that the people of Oyo-Ile adopted the masking tradition found among the Nupe, their northern neighbors. The second, the Oyo oral history, associates the origins of *Egungun* to two different individuals—one led by *Alapinni*, a member of the *Oyo Mesi* (the king makers), and the other by *Alagbaa* from the *Oloba* and *Ologbin* lineage families. He concluded that the Yoruba *Egungun* rituals are the creations and reflections of social relationships that illustrate the continuing interaction of the dead and the living.³⁵

Wale Ogunyemi examined the origin and functions of *Egungun* in Igbajo-western Yoruba. He cited *Odu Oworin Wosor Oworin Aseyin* (the *Ifa* corpus) as one of the

³⁴ William Fagg, *Yoruba Sculpture of West Africa*, 1982, 20-22.

³⁵ John Pemberton III, in *Yoruba Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought*, 1989, 175-187.

most authentic oral literatures that explained the origin of *Egungun*. This *Ifa* verse illustrates *Ijimere* (colobus monkey) as the father of the king (*Oba*) who upon the advice of the diviner (*babalawo*) started the ritual of *Egungun*. He identified the functions of *Egungun* as follows: They served as executioners of the criminals and witches in time past (pre-colonial time), especially the one called *Agan*. Some *Egungun* in the past had led the communities in wars, such as in Oyo, where *Jenju* and *Lagbookun* led the Oyo warriors in wars. The rituals of *Egungun* serve as offerings to the ancestors who in turn ward off the evil spirits in the land and make the community peaceful.³⁶

Ola Babalola examined the *Egungun Elewe* of the Igbomina—northeastern Yoruba. His work was a development on the same subject (*Egungun Elewe*) as that of Pemberton (1978). He described *Egungun Elewe* as a festival that binds together the Igbomina towns and serves as a cultural symbol by which the Igbomina people are identified. He concluded that this type of *Egungun* is not considered an ancestor, but rather stands “as a carrier of messages of prayers, wishes, and thanks-giving from the living to the ancestors.”³⁷

It could be argued from the above reviewed works, as also illustrated in the introduction of this dissertation, that while the art and rituals of *Egungun* among the Southwestern and Southern Yoruba subgroups have been thoroughly researched, the Ijumu-Northeastern Yoruba has been completely neglected. Specifically while John Pemberton and Ola Babalola have thoroughly researched the Igbomina-Northeastern Yoruba *Egungun* and John Rowland O. Ojo, William Gilliland, and William Fagg,

³⁶ Wale Ogunyemi, “The Origin and Functions of Egungun in Some Parts of Western Yorubaland,” *African Notes* XXI, no. 1&2 (1997): 95-102.

³⁷ Olaniyan Babalola, *Igbomina art and Culture: An Introduction* (Nigeria: Zaria Press, 1998).

among others, have researched the Ekiti and Igbomina *Epa* masquerades of the same geographical region, they have all left out the Ijumu group. It is the attempt to build on the existing body of knowledge on the Yoruba *Egungun* (masquerades) that will especially draw attention to the neglected Ijumu masquerading traditions that inform my dissertation (*Art and Spirituality: Ijumu-Northeastern Yoruba Egungun*).

Theory and Methodology

Until the late sixties, African art history research had been predominantly in the hands of the Western scholars who often approached it with the Western theoretical frameworks.

Anthropologist Willian Fagg has drawn attention to the dangers inherent in such research approaches:

Since the early years of this century, when European artists first discovered how to misunderstand African art, there has been a marked tendency in nearly all publications on the subject, whether by artists or ethnologists, toward over positive statements, toward premature generalization, and toward the erection of conjectural frameworks which hinder rather than help the development of a genuine appreciation of African art. All the emphasis, with a very few exceptions, has been on synthesis and deductive interpretation rather than direct observation and analytical study. This misplacement of emphasis is not only bad science but also bad art criticism.³⁸

Owing to cultural differences between the Western and non-Western visual arts, there is an urgent need for scholars of non-Western art, such as African art, to analyze the art within its cultural context by listening to indigenous voices as well as developing internally generated approaches relevant to African cultures.

³⁸ William Fagg, "On the Art of the Yoruba," *Yoruba Sculpture of West Africa*, 1982, 5.

The need for Africans themselves, who understand their cultures, to train in African art history and related fields, such as anthropology and archaeology, cannot be overemphasized. Unfortunately, this did not start until the late twentieth century. Africanists Babatunde Lawal and Ekpo Eyo exemplify this new direction. The former, a Yoruba from Nigeria, earned in 1968 and 1970 respectively the prestigious Indiana University's M.A. and Ph.D. certificates in art history with specialization in African art. The latter, an Efik from Calabar in Nigeria, received a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in anthropology and archaeology from Cambridge University between 1957 and 1963, as well as a Ph.D. in archaeology from the University of Ibadan in Nigeria in 1974. Both scholars, as well as their native contemporaries, have continued to illustrate in their research publications that African art is a reflection of African culture.

Although these scholars have focused on the cultural anthropological perspectives of African art, my analyses of the Ijumu-Yoruba *Egungun* are much more, incorporating both the internally and externally generated theories. These include the '*connective theory*' and linguistic approach. I believe that this inter-cultural approach will establish a parallel between both the Western and the non-Western visual cultures.

Connective Theory

The term '*connective*' is my own newly internally sourced cultural theory. It relies on the fact that African art, the example of *Egúngún* (masquerade), is essentially an assemblage or composite of a diverse components—animal horns, clothing, animal skins, cowry shells, amulets, and so forth. Step-by-step analysis of how these components

interconnect or co-exist could elicit what Babatunde Lawal has termed “classified information”³⁹ of African art. The costume of *Egungun-Ode* (masquerade of the hunters’ guild) best illustrates the *connective theory*. This masquerade costume (*Ekun-Eegun*) is an assemblage of *aso-pupa* (red cloth), *awo-ekun* (tiger skin), *iwo-agbonrin* (deer horns), and *eegun-ehin-ijimere* (monkey’s vertebrates) among others. When I asked why the costume is made of the above mentioned materials, my informant from Iragbiji (who is the custodian of the masquerade) explained:

They all connect to each other in the spiritual realm. *Aso pupa* invites the fearsome and powerful spirit of *Sango* (the Yoruba thunder and lightning god) from the spirit world to inhabit the masquerade costumes in the visible realm (*aye*), *awo-ekun* enables the masquerade to appear dreadful, *iwo-agbonrin* makes whatever the masquerader commands or says come to pass (*afose*), while *eegun-ehin-ijimere* makes the masquerader become a great acrobat or dancer at the dancing arena.⁴⁰

His explanation of the interconnectedness of the various materials that constitute the costume of the *Egungun-Ode* corroborates the art historian Suzanne Blier’s observation about African art:

An isolated statue or other African work (art) is rare and exceptional. Varied works are usually assembled together, as in a shrine or multicharacter masquerade. And many individual works are themselves composite, having been made from diverse meaningful materials.⁴¹

The ‘*connective theory*’ is related to but not the same as the Martin Heidegger’s ‘*deconstruction and retrieve*’ and Jacques Derrida’s ‘*deconstruction.*’ While the ‘*deconstruction and retrieve*’ breaks down and reconstructs/retrieves a given work of art, ‘*connective theory*’ examines the materials that made up a composition individually and

³⁹ Lawal, “*Gelede Spectacle*,” xix.

⁴⁰ This information is provided by the custodian of *Iyekiyé* (hunter’s masquerade) in Iragbiji (Oshun State) in July 2004.

⁴¹ Suzanne Blier, in *A History of Art in Africa* (ed. Monica Visona, 2001), 18.

then establishes their points of connections. This theory could answer the reason why specific materials and not the others were used in making a given African art work. For instance, this approach would examine why the costumes of *Egungun-Epa* (the Ekiti, Igbomina, and Ijumu type masquerades) are made of palm fronds (*mariwo*) and not sago palm fronds (*iko*), red cloth and not white or black, deer horns and not antelope's, and so forth.

Linguistic Approach

There is a strong interconnectedness of visual (art) and language (verbal) in Yoruba culture, owing much to the fact that Yoruba is a tonal language, in which the same word may have different meanings depending on how it is pronounced. For instance, the word *egúngún* (masquerade) could mean something else when there is a change in its vowel tones. Thus, the importance of the linguistic approach to the analysis of Yoruba art cannot be overestimated. Some scholars have tried this methodology, but unfortunately owing to their lack of understanding of the Yoruba language, many of their analyses were not only misleading but also erroneous. For example, Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher interpreted the word *egúngún* (masquerade) using a linguistic approach as “literally meaning bones or skeleton,”⁴² not knowing that the word *egungun* has different meanings—depending on how it is pronounced. To draw the attention of the reader to how one Yoruba word could have more than one meaning, it is necessary to analyze further the word *egungun* under different intonations as follows. *Egúngún* means “masquerade,” *egungun* (without any marks on top of its vowels) means “bones or

⁴² Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *African Ceremonies*, 2002:376.

skeleton,” while *ègungun* is a tree used for making an animal trapping device. As a Yoruba native, I have the advantage of using this linguistic approach more effectively over the ‘outsider’ scholars who often have little or no knowledge of the Yoruba language.

CHAPTER II

AFRICAN ART AND SPIRITUALITY: THE YORUBA EXAMPLE

This chapter is about art and spirituality among the Yoruba-speaking peoples of Nigeria. In other words, it is concerned with the place of art in the Yoruba religious beliefs and practices. Nonetheless, it is necessary to open the discussion with an overview of African spirituality in order to provide a foundation for understanding this aspect of the Yoruba traditions as a mirror reflection of the ‘unity in diversity’ nature of African art and culture. By so doing, it will also enable the reader to become familiar with the commonality in the religious beliefs and practices among the diverse African culture groups; that is, it helps to explain the Africanness about the African traditional religion.

Spirituality as used in this chapter and by extension, this dissertation, is analogous to religion. It portrays the “human beings relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, spiritual, or divine.”⁴³ Studies of African spirituality have revealed two fundamental tenets common to all of the Africans’ religious beliefs and practices.⁴⁴ The first is the common belief in the existence of one God, the Supreme Being called by different names from one linguistic group to the next, all having the same or similar meanings and attributes. The following examples better illustrate this assertion. *Osanobwa* is the Edo

⁴³ “Religion.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2005. Encyclopedia Britannica Online 27 June 2005 (<http://search.eb/article?tocid=9063138>).

⁴⁴ The studies include Olumide Lucas, *The Religion of the Yorubas* (1948); Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (1962); and Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion* (1973). Others include *African Religions: A Symposium* (ed. Booth, Newell, 1977); *Religion in Africa: Experience & Expression* (ed. Blakely, Beek, and Dennis Thomson, 1994); and *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions* (ed. Olupona, Jacob, 2000).

word for “The Supreme God.”⁴⁵ The Nupe refer to the same Supreme Being as *Tsoci* (Our Lord) or *Soko* (The Sky-God),⁴⁶ while the Ebira address Him as *Ikoko Kou Kou* (the all powerful, the omnipotent who makes the entire universe and all that is in it),⁴⁷ to mention just a few.

The second is the Africans’ shared belief in the existence of the spirit beings and or supernatural powers created and controlled by the Supreme Being. To them, the spirit beings operate as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and human beings. African religion scholars John Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, and Omosade Awolalu, among others, have classified the African spirit beings into different groups, ranging from two to three as follows. John Mbiti recognized two categories:

Broadly speaking, we can recognize two categories of spiritual beings: those, which were created as such, and those, which were once human beings. These can also be subdivided into divinities, associates of God, ordinary spirits, and the living-dead.⁴⁸

Bolaji Idowu identified three classes: divinities, spirits, and ancestors. He described the divinities as “ministers, each with his own definite portfolio in the Deity’s monarchical government... (and) are also intermediaries between Deity (Supreme Being) and man.”⁴⁹ He referred to the second as “those apparitional entities which form separate category of beings from those described as divinities,”⁵⁰ and the third as those that are once human beings but assume the status of the spirit beings after their death.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion* (New York: Orbis Books, SCM Press Ltd., 1973), 152.

⁴⁶ Siegfried Nadel, *Nupe Religion*, 1954, 11.

⁴⁷ Y. A. Ibrahim, “Igbira Traditional Institutions,” *Nigeria Magazine* vol. 119 (1976): 51.

⁴⁸ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 97.

⁴⁹ Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 170.

⁵⁰ Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 173.

⁵¹ Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 178.

The third classification by Omosade Awolalu is based on the standpoint of the Yoruba beliefs system. He identified three categories of spirit beings as “a multitude of divinities, the ancestral spirits, and various other spirits and forces.”⁵² The religious beliefs and practices of the following African culture groups better summarize the fundamental concepts of African spirituality.

The Zulu of South Africa

The Zulu strongly hold the belief that there is a Creator called *Nkulunkulu* (*The Great Great One*), who is responsible for the creation of the cosmos.⁵³ They hold that the fertility of the land, that brings forth abundant harvests, as well as the human and animal fertilities, are the gifts from *Nkulunkulu*, and that He is the author of disasters in the world of the living. Thus, in times of any catastrophe, such as droughts and floods, the Zulu beseech *Nkulunkulu*.

They recognize that *Nkulunkulu* created the human being and in him/her, He (*Nkulunkulu*) also created two spirit forces: *Unembeza* (good spirit force) and *Ubovane* (spirit force that drives man/woman to behave unjustly).⁵⁴ They conceptualize *Nkulunkulu* as the only one that is capable of controlling whatever that is beyond the human beings’ understanding or conceptuality. For instance, when any disaster befalls the Zulu as earlier mentioned, he or she accepts it as an act of God, and instantaneously contacts no miracle worker, but rather the diviner who “has God-given spiritual forces to

⁵² Omosade Awolalu, “Yoruba Sacrificial Practice,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* V, no. 2 (1973): 92.

⁵³ Donald M’Timkulu, “Some Aspects of Zulu Religion,” *African Religions: A Symposium*, 1997, 14.

⁵⁴ M’Timkulu, 16.

make contact with Him.”⁵⁵ In a nutshell, whatever happens to the Zulu is accepted “as a chastisement from God for some reason or other, or simply as an incomprehensible anger from the *Great Great One*.”⁵⁶

Also of enormous supernatural powers in the belief system of the Zulu are the ancestors, who were once human beings but who acquired spiritual powers upon their death. Thus, by the virtue the supernatural powers, the Zulu hold that the ancestors operate as intermediaries between *Nkulunkulu* and human beings, privileging them (the ancestors) to function as the human beings’ solicitors in the court of *Nkulunkulu*, where He judges the activities of humankind. The Zulu build cordial relations with the ancestors, in form of regular worships and remembrance, so that the ancestors may reciprocate by arguing their cases and pleading on their behalf at the court proceedings of *Nkulunkulu*.⁵⁷ ‘Worship’ in this respect does not mean that the Zulu thought of the ancestors as gods on their own or as controllers of ultimate powers but rather, like other African peoples, the Zulu conceptualize the ancestors as links between them and *Nkulunkulu*.

The Baluba Katanga of the Central Africa

That the idea of a true God, the Supreme Being, is fundamental in the Baluba religious beliefs system is indubitable. They refer to Him (God) by various names, most of which illustrate His omnipotent and omnipresent attributes. These include *Vidye Mukulu* (Great

⁵⁵ M’Timkulu, 17.

⁵⁶ M’Timkulu, 17.

⁵⁷ M’Timkulu, 22.

Lord); *Shakapanga* (father of creation or father-creator); and *Shakapanga upanga na kupangulula* (the father-creator who creates and uncreates).⁵⁸

Like other African culture groups, the Baluba also believe in the existence of the ancestral spirits, which they think of as controlling a great deal of supernatural forces or powers superior to any human being. Called *bakishi*, these spirits of the ancestors reside inside the springs, pools, streams, and waterfalls, from where they manifest themselves to the Baluba on special occasions and in particular phenomena, such as at night, moon-day, and so forth.⁵⁹

The Baluba conceptualize the *bakishi* as invisible beings that follow human beings and serve as their guardian spirits—assisting them in their daily activities, especially in the hunts. The *bakishi* are of various types, which include *mundele* (a water spirit), *mwadi* (a female spirit), *kamwadi* (a male spirit), and *buyanga* or *kiluwe* (hunting spirits), and many more. Typically, the Baluba prepare carved or molded objects as the abodes of the *bakishi*, the aim of which is to control, manipulate, and have access to them (the *bakishi*) at all times. Consequently, the objects that give shelter to the spirits of the ancestors are known as ‘spiritual objects’ or ‘spirits in objects’.⁶⁰ The Baluba think of the *mukishi* (singular of *bakishi*) as an embodiment of the spirit of the dead, and by extension, the invisible member of the family, which they invoke and commune with in times of need.

The Igbo of Eastern Nigeria

⁵⁸ Newell Booth, “The View from Kasongo Niebo,” *African Religions: A Symposium*, 1977, 60.

⁵⁹ Booth, 42.

⁶⁰ Booth, 43.

The Igbo worldview is that the immortal world is occupied by the spirit beings that ensure the peace and prosperity of the Igbo, as well as guarantee the continued existence of their lineage. These spirit beings are of at least three categories: the Supreme Being, deities or divinities, and ancestors.⁶¹ Belonging to the first category is the Supreme Being, who is distinctively recognized by the Igbo as beneficent in character, and who they conceptualize as being above all things and beings—human and spirits. “He is believed to control all things in heaven and earth, and dispenses rewards and punishments according to merit.”⁶² He is known throughout the Igboland as *Chukwu* and or *Chineke* (*Cineke*). Robin Horton has observed that while the word *Chukwu* is often used in conversations or prayers, *Chineke* “is principally heard as an interjection expressing wonder.”⁶³ G. T. Barden has described the terms *Chukwu* and *Chineke* as “The Great God” and “God the Creator” respectively.⁶⁴

The Igbo believe in a God that is real and whose powers are beyond any description. This belief is further illustrated in the ways He is acknowledged by many descriptive names from one Igbo subgroup to the other. He is eulogized as *Oke Obina* (Maker of everything) among the Ibagwa of the Northern Igbo⁶⁵ and as *Olisa bulu uwa* (God who fashions the world) in the Central Igboland,⁶⁶ among others.

⁶¹ C. N. Ubah, “Religious Change among the Igbo During the Colonial Period,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* xvii, no. 1 (1988): 71-75.

⁶² G. T. Basden, *Among The Ibo of Nigeria*, 1966, 215.

⁶³ Robin Horton, “God, Man, and the Land in A Northern Ibo Village-Group,” *Africa. London* 26, no. 1 (Jan. 1956): 17.

⁶⁴ G. T. Basden, *Among The Ibo of Nigeria*, 1966: 216

⁶⁵ Horton, 18.

⁶⁶ Basden, *Among The Ibo of Nigeria*, 216.

Owing to His omnipotent powers, *Chukwu* or *Chineke* is not worshipped directly, but rather through the other two categories of the spirit beings, who are thought of as having an active interest in the wellness of the Igbo communities. For this reason, the Igbo visualize them figuratively as the owners of the society. Examples include the Ozubulu-Igbo, who refer to their community as *Ana Akpu* (the land of the deity) and the Okpatu-Igbo, who thought of their community as belonging to *Ugwarerenkwu* (the principal deity), among others.⁶⁷

Other Igbo divinities include *Ala (Ajala)* or *Ani*, the Earth deity who is in charge of moral ethics; *Uhejioku*, the yam deity, who ensures large harvests; and *Agbala*, the spirit of divination.⁶⁸ Basden has observed that the Igbo in Northern Igboland eulogize the *Agbala* deity as “a discerner of the secrets of men, the judge of poisoners, the revealer of witchcraft, the omnipotent one, the forgiver of sins, and the dispenser of blessing of every kind, including the gift of children.”⁶⁹

Others include family gods, such as *ikenga* (household gods), *mmuo* or *mmo* (spirit of the dead), *ci* (personal destiny), and *okute* (fertility spirit), among others. In the third category are the spirits of the departed ancestors, whom the Igbo still regard as members of their lineage. Thus, the Igbo, as among other African groups, commune with the ancestors especially during annual festivals, when offerings are made to them.⁷⁰

As illustrated above with the religious beliefs and practices of the Zulu of South Africa, Baluba of Central Africa, and the Igbo of West Africa, the Africans’ belief in

⁶⁷ Ubah, 71-75.

⁶⁸ Ubah, 71-75.

⁶⁹ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 1966, 78.

⁷⁰ Aniakor and Cole, 14-16; Horton, 20-23; and Ubah, 74-75.

God, the Supreme Being, is fundamental to the African concepts of spirituality. The supremacy in all African religious beliefs and practices is accorded to God, while all the other African spirit beings, many in some culture groups and a few in some others and well understood by all as God's creations, operate as a means to an end.

This section of the chapter cannot be deemed complete without pointing out the main difference between the Supreme Being (God the Creator) and all other spirit beings in Africa. While the spirit beings could appear in any forms or shapes, as illustrated above with the Baluba *bakishi* (singular *minkishi*), the Supreme Being, such as the Zulu *Nkulunkulu*, Baluba *Vidyé Mukulu*, and Igbo *Chukwu/Chineke* among others, does not appear in any visual form—artist-made or natural. This issue is fully addressed below, under the subtitle, *Yoruba art and spirituality*.

Yoruba Art and Spirituality

To understand Yoruba spirituality and the role of art in it, it is important to first provide the reader with general background knowledge of the Yoruba worldview, the foundation on which the Yoruba thoughts, epistemologies, and beliefs system are located. Drewal, Pemberton III, and Abiodun have provided some information that can serve as a starting point.⁷¹ They wrote that the Yoruba conceptualize the cosmos as consisting of two realms: *Aye*, the visible and tangible world and *Orun*, the invisible realm. This is so far accurate. They went further by distinguishing between the two realms that the *Orun* belongs to the spiritual realm of the ancestors, gods, and spirits, while the *Aye* is the

⁷¹ Drewal, Pemberton III, and Abiodun, *Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought*, edited by Allen Wardwell (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1989), 14-42.

tangible world of the living. They categorized the living into two: the knowledgeable ones (*Alawo, Alase*), such as the Kings/Queens, *Osugbo*, Elders, Priests, Diviners, Herbalists, Initiates, and Maskers and the unknowing (*Ologberi*), the examples of the strangers, uninitiates, and children.⁷² Looking at the Yoruba worldview from the surface, exoteric level, the points raised by the authors are correct, even though at the great risk of running into the problem of where to locate those spirits and spirit beings that do not inhabit the invisible realm (*Orun*). This problem evidently was manifested in the way they erroneously situated the terrestrial, nature spirits/spirit beings, such as *Oro, Iwin*, and *Osun*, into *Orun* (the invisible realm).

However, from the metaphysical, esoteric level, there are two types of *aye*, as opposed to the *orun* (invisible realm) where there is only one. This is evident in the Yoruba warning and euphemistic statement: *Aye pe meji* (the earth is of two types). One *aye* is inhabited by all the categories of the living (*Eniyan*) already highlighted by the authors, while the other is occupied by the terrestrial, nature spirits and spirit beings. The examples include *Abaramoji* (literally, ‘one person with two bodies’),⁷³ such as witches (*Aje*) and sorcerers (*Oso*) and the bush/forest spirits, such as *Iwin, Oro*, and *Egbere*. Others include *Ebora* (forest spirit beings), such as *Orisa-Epa* (*Epa* deity); *Orisa-Odo/Olu-Odo* (river divinities), such as *Osun* and *Oya*; and *Orisa-Oke* (hills divinities). Other examples include *Olumo* in Abeokuta, *Olofin* in Idanre, *Olosunta* in Ikere-Ekiti, and *Atage-Olomu-Oru* in Ibadan, among others. As a matter of fact, on many occasions

⁷² Drewal, Pemberton III, and Abiodun, 14.

⁷³ *Abaramoji* (‘one with two bodies’) illustrates those human beings that could transform their physical body into another entity, such as animals, birds, winds, trees, anthills, etc., through the use of the spiritual powers that they possess. *Abaramoji* has the capability of operating at both the secular and spiritual levels.

the Yoruba, especially the hunters (*Olode*), who are very familiar with thick forests where they hunt game, relate their experiences of having physical encounters with these terrestrial spirits and spirit beings.

What is more important to this work, however, is not the abodes of the spirit beings, but rather the Yoruba belief in the existence of the supernatural powers and energies that direct and control nature and human lives. The belief necessitates them (the Yoruba), like other African counterparts, to devise ways in which they can maintain interpersonal relations with the spirit beings—the controllers of the supernatural powers, forces, and energies—with the aim of securing their favors. Thus, the ‘why’ of the Yoruba religion, as in other parts of the world, is to have access to, and manipulate the spiritual energies or forces of the spirit beings for their own benefit.

Supreme Being and Spirit beings

I categorize the Yoruba spirit beings into two: the Supreme Being and the spirit beings. Note that the letter ‘b’ in ‘Supreme Being’ is capitalized while it appears in a small letter in ‘spiritual beings’. This is to draw attention to how they are individually conceptualized by the Yoruba—the former is the Creator of both the *Aye* (earth) and *Orun* (heaven), including what they contain, the example of the spirit beings; while the latter are the handiwork of, and subservient to, the former.

The Supreme Being: This is the focus of the Yoruba spiritual beliefs and practices, as among all other African culture groups as earlier illustrated with the Zulu, Baluba, and Igbo. The Yoruba strongly believe that He is the Creator of the cosmos (*Aye* and *Orun*),

visible and the invisible, living and the non-living things, and so forth. This belief is apparent in the meanings and implications of the various Yoruba words designated for Him (the Supreme Being). More often than not, the names, as also applicable to the Yoruba personal names, are in phrasal or sentence patterns, addressing the full attributes of God. They are considered as follows.

The two most common of them are *Olodumare* (or *Eledumare*) and *Olorun* (or *Oba-Orun*)—The Mighty God and Lord of Heaven respectively. The full meanings and implications of the former have been well elaborated by Bolaji Idowu: “*Olodumare* (means) the Deity, who possesses superlative qualities and the added attribute of remaining stable, unchanging, constant, permanent, (and) reliable.”⁷⁴ The latter (*Olorun* or *Eni-tioni-orun*) means ‘The Lord of Heaven’ or ‘The Supreme King of Heaven.’ This last alternative further reflects the Yoruba thought of the exact abode of God—*orun* (heaven). The next common ones are *Eledaa* (*Eni-ti-oni-eda*), that is, ‘The Creator of the human beings; *Aterere-kari-aye* (The One who spreads over the entire earth or universe); *Olojo-Oni* (The Owner of this Day); and *Oyigiyigi* (The Immovable and Immortal Mighty God). Others include *Awa-marii-idi* (One whose source of origin is unknown to no human being), “*A-rinu-rode Olumo okan* (‘the One who sees both the inside and the outside (of a person), the Discerner of the heart),”⁷⁵ and *Oba-airi* (The Great King that is not physically encountered), among others. This last one (*Oba-airi*) partly accounts for why the Yoruba have neither any temple nor emblem (human-made (art) or natural objects) for the Supreme Beings. They do not even worship Him directly, but rather through the

⁷⁴ Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, 1962, 35.

⁷⁵ Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, 1979, 15

spirits and spirit beings that serve as intermediaries between God and the human beings.

This issue will be fully addressed below, under the subtitle, ‘the spirit beings’.

The Spirit beings: The Yoruba recognize three categories of spirit beings irrespective of their abodes— earth (*Aye*) or heaven (*Orun*)—divinities (*Orisa, Imole*), spirit beings/spirits (*Emi*), and ancestral spirits (*Obi, Akoda, Isese*), all having enormous spiritual powers, forces, energies, or authorities (*Ase*). It must be emphasized, however, that even though the spirit beings possess *Ase*, the ultimate controller and giver of the *Ase* is *Olodumare/Olorun* (the Supreme Being). He also gave the *Ase* to all other living and non-living things, such as the human beings, animals, and birds and natural environments, such as rivers, trees, hills, trees, and caves. Even the words that we verbalize (*Oro-Enu*) have their own *Ase*. However, the human beings’ *Ase*, in quantity and quality, is of different grades—some possess it more than the others. For instance, the Kings (*Oba*) control more of it than anybody. In fact, their *Ase* is even next in rank to that of the divinities or deities (*Orisa/Imole*); thus, the Yoruba referred to the *Oba* as *Alase-Ekeji-Orisa* (‘the controllers of power and authority and second in command to the divinities’). Rowland Abiodun has summarized the concept of *Ase*:

The word *ase*, is generally translated and understood as ‘power’, ‘authority’, ‘command’, ‘scepter’, ‘vital force’ in all living and non-living things and as ‘a coming-to-pass of an utterance’ in the Yoruba cosmos. To devotees of the Yoruba *orisa* (Yoruba deities), however, the concept of *ase* is practical and more immediate. It includes the notion that *ase* inhabits and energizes the awe-inspiring space of the *orisa*, their altars (*oju-ibo*), along with all their objects, utensils, offerings and including the air around them. Thus, it is not uncommon to find religious artifacts being kept on the altars of the various *orisa* when not being used or performed in public ceremonies or festivals.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Rowland Abiodun, “Ase: Verbalizing and Visualizing Creative Power Through Art,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* xxiv, no. 4 (1994): 309-310.

There are two basic commonalities among the spirit beings (‘divinities or deities, spirit and spirit beings, and ancestral spirits’): First, they are worshiped, thus, each has a peculiar pattern of shrines, temples or altars dedicated to it. Second, because they are worshiped, they have spiritual or ceremonial objects connected to them, most of which are always kept in their shrines or altars when not in use. Most of the objects are artist-made, such as sculptures, pots, shrine paintings, shrine furniture, and nature-source, such as unique river boulders, seashells, young palm fronds (*Mariwo, Moriwo*), and so on. I am particularly interested in these ritualistic objects, especially the artist-made ones. What is their significance in the contexts at which they are found? Let us first consider the views of the scholars in the *Encyclopedia Britannica Art*:

Ceremonial and ritualistic objects have been utilized as a means for establishing or maintaining communication between the sacred (the transcendent, or supernatural, realm) and the profane (the realms of time, space, and cause and effect). On occasion, such objects have been used to compel the sacred (or divine) realm to act or react in a way that is favorable to the participants of the ceremonies or to the persons or activities with which such rituals are concerned, to prevent the transcendent realm from harming or endangering them. These objects thus can be mediatory devices to contact the divine world, as for example, the drums of shamans (religious personages with healing and psychic-transformation powers). Conversely, they can be mediatory devices used by a god or other supernatural being to relate to man in the profane realm.⁷⁷

The Encyclopedia’s reference (above) bears some striking similarities with the Yoruba spiritual objects. First, most of the Yoruba ceremonial objects, which include art and natural items, function as communication channels through which the devotees commune with and maintain interpersonal relations with their spirit beings, and by extension,

⁷⁷ “Ceremonial object.’ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2005. Encyclopedia Britannica Online 27 June 2005 (<http://Search.eb.com/eb/article?tocId=9109497>).

Oludumare/Eledumare (The Supreme Being). In some cases, the objects are emblems or representations of the spirit beings, such as *Ekú-Egungun* (masquerade costume), that represents the spirits of the dead (ancestors). The emblems enable the devotees to personally claim ownership of the spirit beings, manipulate and situate them within their reach, and restrict their movements to where they want them (the spirit beings) to be. For instance, as I am currently in the United States, to locate my family ancestral spirit within my reach, I could arrange for the shipment of my family's *Ekú-Eegun* (masquerade costume) to me—that is if the family members cooperate.

Confusions often arise, especially among the Westerners, experiencing, viewing, or studying the Yoruba spiritual beliefs and practices for the first time. First, they question whether or not the spiritual objects (art) are spirit beings in themselves. And second, they wonder whether or not the spirit beings are what the Yoruba worship instead of the Supreme Being, believed to be far away from them (*Deus Remotus*), as illustrated in one of the Yoruba words for the Supreme Being, *Oba-Airi* (The Unseen King/God). It is important to address these two issues one by one. At the exoteric level, the spiritual objects (art) often serve as emblems, or represent the spirit beings, but at the esoteric, iconological level, the objects are not the spirit beings, but rather the channels or routes that link the visible (human beings) to the invisible (spirit beings). The Yoruba, like other peoples, Westerners and non-Westerners alike, find it more convenient to establish or maintain communication with the transcendent or supernatural realm through visible devices that we label 'art'. Babatunde Lawal corroborates this point when he writes that

when termites destroy a Sango⁷⁸ shrine sculpture, it is discarded and replaced. This is because, according to him, it is not Sango deity himself, but rather ordinary wood and a link between the visible (Sango devotees) and invisible (Sango deity).⁷⁹

The second issue, as to whether or not the spirit beings are what the Yoruba devotees worship instead of the Supreme Being, could be addressed by considering the Yoruba tradition of respecting or honoring the elders (*Ibowof' agba*). This tradition is taken very seriously to the extent that it overshadows all other factors considered as attributes of a successful, responsible, and famous person (*Omoluwabi*). For instance, as a sign of respect for the elders, an *Omoluwabi* will not confront directly his or her father for 'something', but rather through an intermediary, someone who is less superior (age-wise, economically, or spiritually) to the father, such as his/her mother. Likewise, a non-titled holder (euphemistically, *Ilesanmi*) will not approach the King (*Oba-Ilu*) directly for something, but rather will go through one of the King's chiefs (*Ijoye*). In the same manner, the Yoruba make their request to the Supreme Being through the spirit beings, whom Bolaji Idowu describes as the appointed ministers over each department of the realm of the government of *Olodumare* (the Supreme Being).⁸⁰ He explains further in a related development that the Yoruba spirit beings "serve the will of *Olodumare* in the creation and theocratic government of the world."⁸¹ Accordingly, the Yoruba strongly believe that the spirit beings are not independent, but rather responsible to their Superior

⁷⁸ "*Sango*" is the Yoruba deity of thunder and lightning. He was an Oba (King) of the ancient City of Oyo, the capital of the Yoruba Kingdom, who became a deity after his death owing to his unique and hot temperamental attributes. For instance, it is said that when he spoke, flames flew out from his mouth and nostrils.

⁷⁹ Lawal, "Yoruba Sango Sculpture in Historical Retrospect," Ph.D. Dissertation, 1970, 43.

⁸⁰ Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, 1973, 148.

⁸¹ Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*, 1962, 57.

and Creator (*Olodumare*), and that the spirit beings are nearer to Him (*Olodumare*) than they (the Yoruba) are to Him. When the devotee of a given spirit being, say *Egungun* (masquerade), communes or relates with the ancestral spirit, he or she by extension is worshipping *Olodumare*, not the *Egungun*. In other words, the spirit beings are not an end, but rather, a means to an end—the end being the Supreme Being (*Olodumare*).

Similarly, during ritual ceremonies or festivals, offerings or sacrifices (*Ebo*), usually of animal victims such as goats (*Ewure*), fowls (*Adiye*), and pigeons (*Eyele*) or food crops, such as kola nuts (*Obi*), bitter kola (*Orogbo*), and alligator pepper (*Ataare*), are offered to a given spirit being via the shrine objects. It should be made clear that the sacrifices are neither to the ceremonial objects (art) nor to that which the shrine items represent or emblemize. Rather, the presenters strongly believe that what they present are intended for *Olodumare* (The Supreme Being). This point is corroborated by Omosade Awolalu's position:

To whom is sacrifice offered? This is a complex question. The four main categories of spiritual beings, the Supreme Being, a multitude of divinities, the ancestral spirits and various other spirits and forces, in Yoruba belief, have influences in making or marring one's life. The divinities and the spirits are subservient to God, and they owe their "almightiness" to God. Furthermore, from our observation we know that even though the name of the particular divinity being worshipped is invoked, we hear the worshippers say *Ase, Ase* (May it be so); and they add *Lase Edumare* (By the power of *Edumare*) or *Olorun a gbo* (May God hear). This means that the final say rests with God.⁸²

Divinities (*Orisa, Imole/Imale*)

The Yoruba words for divinities or deities are different from one Yoruba subgroup to the next, but the most common of them is *Orisa* and the next common, *Imole (Imale)*.

⁸² Awolalu, "Yoruba Sacrificial Practice," *Journal of Religion in Africa* v, fascicule 2 (1973): 92.

Regrettably, there has been an alteration of the data by some outsiders such as P. R. McKenzie, as to the senior among the two divinities—*Orisa* or *Imale* (*Imale*). The quotation and consideration of what he wrote about this issue are necessary: “The *orisa* occupied much of the space within the triangle, graded according to their importance and power. Below them were the *imale*, the spirits, many of whom were unpredictable and dangerous.”⁸³ He (McKenzie) cited Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief* (1962) as his source without providing the exact page. If indeed Bolaji Idowu is his informant, apparently, McKenzie is somehow confused with the author’s information, which I traced out and quote verbatim as follows:

There are a few other generic names by which the Yoruba designate the divinities. A common one, next to *orisa*, is *Imale*. This is less frequent than *orisa*, although it is now as universally employed and has its place in the oral traditions. It is also interchangeable with *orisa* as, for practical purposes, the two have become synonymous.⁸⁴

Clearly, what the author meant is that the word ‘*Imale*’ for divinities is not as frequently used as the word ‘*Orisa*’. Nevertheless, both of them mean the same thing—divinities or deities. As a matter of fact, the usage of the word *Imole* (*Imale*) as alluding to the ‘divinities’ and not inferior (in power or importance) to the *Orisa*, is very common among the Ekiti and Ijumu-Yoruba peoples in Northeastern and most Northeasterly Yorubaland respectively. The Yoruba studies’ scholars, especially the outsiders, should therefore always bear in mind that there are many dialectical variations of the Yoruba language, in that nearly every Yoruba-subgroup has some words peculiar only to the people(s) living within the geographical zone where the given subgroup is located.

⁸³ P. R. McKenzie, “Yoruba Orisa Cults: Some Marginal Notes Concerning Their Cosmology and Concepts of Deity,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* viii, 3 (1976): 190.

⁸⁴ Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*, 1962, 61.

There is a myth that explains the etymology of the word *Orisa* (divinities or deities) from the linguistic standpoint: *Nigba ti Olorun da ogbon si'le aye nigba iwase, awon ti O-RI-SA ni a npe ni orisa titi di oni*. This means, 'in the beginning, when the Lord of Heaven cast the wisdom into the earth, those spirit beings that succeeded in acquiring them (*ri-sa*) are known as the divinities or deities (*O-RI-SA*) till this day. The key idea in this myth is the Yoruba thought of the *Orisa or Imole* as the custodians of wisdom. In fact, they are conceptualized as having the infinite knowledge and understanding of that which is unknown to human beings. Essentially, there are three categories of the Yoruba divinities (*Orisa, Imole/Imale*): Primordial divinities, deified ancestors, and nature divinities examined as follows.

Primordial Divinities

These are the humanized spirit beings, which the myth supported to have descended from the heaven (*Orun*) to the earth (*aye*) with the aid of an iron chain (*Ewon*). Thus, they are referred to as *Orisa-Atewonro* (the divinities who descended by a means of the iron chain). This implied that they originally lived in the heaven (*Orun*) together with *Olorun* (God or Owner of the heaven). Some Yoruba subgroups, especially in Southwestern Yorubaland, say that the primordial divinities are 401 (four hundred and one) in number, while some, the example of the Yoruba-speaking peoples in the Niger-Benue confluence region, believe they are 201 (two hundred and one). I examine as follows, two of them, *Obatala* and *Ogun*, which are relevant to this dissertation, laying emphasis on the significance of their spiritual or ceremonial objects (art). For more

examples of the primordial divinities, see Olumide Lucas, *The Religion of the Yorubas* (1948); Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief* (1962); and Omosade Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (1979).

Obatala: Also known as *Orisa-Nla* ('great or mighty divinity'), *Obatala* is regarded as the second in command to *Olodumare* (the Supreme Being). He assumed this position, according to the Yoruba myth of the creation, in connection with his appointment by *Olodumare* as His divine sculptor. Thus, he assisted *Olodumare* in molding the human body with clay, after which *Olodumare* gave life to the sculpted body. This assignment also fetched *Obatala* the appellation—*Alamo-Rere* ('one who creates something good out of the clay').

The myth revealed further that *Obatala* is one of the four-hundred-and-one (401) or two-hundred-and-one (201) divinities (*Orisa/Imole*), who had been in existence in the heaven long before the creation of the earth (*Aye*). At one time when *Olodumare* (the Supreme Being) completed the arrangement of creating the earth (*Aye*), He gave the power of the creation (*Ase*) to the divinities and asked them to go to the earth and create the world. Led by *Obatala*, the divinities descended at once from heaven to earth with the aid of a strong iron chain and founded the world in Ile-Ife.⁸⁵ This is how they acquired the appellation—*Ateworo* ('one who descended with the aid of the iron chain'). Because the Yoruba world was founded in the City of Ile-Ife, the City became the cradle of the Yoruba race since that day that the Yoruba world was formed there (*Ni-igba-iwa-se*).

⁸⁵ Many Yoruba regard "Ile-Ife" (also called Ife) as the ancestral home of the Yoruba race and the location at which the earth (*aye*) was formed.

Owing to the great importance of the human body sculpted by *Obatala*, especially the sense organs—eyes, nose, and ears (*Eni-so'ju se'mu*), it takes no time for this divinity to attract many followers, who diligently worship him even to this day. Their belief is that, as a great and divine king (*Oba-ti- o- nla*),⁸⁶ *Obatala* has the spiritual and creative power (*Ase*) that can answer their (the worshippers') petitions or prayer requests.

Like the other spirit beings excluding *Olodumare* (the Supreme Being), *Obatala* is anthropomorphic. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find in his shrines sculpted figures in wood or clay that represent or emblemize *Obatala*. For instance, Bolaji Idowu has provided two examples that he photographed at the divinity's principal shrine at *Idita* compound in Ile-Ife.⁸⁷ *Obatala* is a pure divinity who is celebrated for his straightforwardness. Thus, he is associated with anything white. Little surprise then that his shrines and ceremonial objects, such as sculpted images (exemplified above) and ritual pots, are painted white. The importance of these visuals (objects) cannot be overestimated. As the divinity's emblems, they provide an avenue for the worshippers to have a direct encounter with *Obatala*, whom they strongly hold as representing their wellness before *Olodumare*, the Supreme Being. For instance, the ritual pots contain the sacred water of *Obatala* which the lead priest or priestess, who must also appear in a white robe as a worker for a holy spirit being, serves the attendants-worshippers at the end of the worship that is held once every week. To them, the sacred water embodies the divinity's spiritual power, capable of curing any diseases they apply it to. Barren women drink out of it with that strong belief that *Obatala*, who is also referred to as *Orisa-*

⁸⁶ Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*, 71.

⁸⁷ Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*, 71.

Olomo-Yoyo (the divinity that owns an uncountable children), will bless them with children.

Ogun: Also known as *Osin-Mole* and *Olumokin*, the Yoruba regard *Ogun* as the iron and war divinity. Thus, everything made of iron is his emblem or representation—cars, factory machines, knives, guns, cutlasses, and so forth. What is the etymology of this belief? It is available in the Yoruba myth of the creation related as follows. Every one of the primordial divinities was provided by *Olodumare* with a particular emblem, as they were about to travel from the heaven (*Orun*) into the earth (*Aye*). For instance, as their leader, *Obatala* was given a sword made of copper—a precious metal, which the Yoruba believe never rusts (figuratively, ‘dies’) or loses its lustrous quality. *Orunmila*, who is also known as *Ifa*, the inventor of the Yoruba *Ifa* divination system, was provided with a fly-whisk (*Irukere*)—a spiritual power object (*Ase*), capable of causing wishes (such as prayers) to be approved, especially when shaken by its owner (the person making the wish). *Olodumare* gave to *Ogun* a pair of iron swords/cutlasses. The rest of the divinities also had their own particular emblems as they left heaven for earth. On getting to the earth, they saw that everywhere was busy, confusing them as to how to forge ahead. *Obatala* tried to clear the bush with his sword but was unable to because the latter was made with copper that bends easily. *Orunmila* shook his fly-whisk all to no avail. When it came to the turn of *Ogun*, he used his pair of iron cutlasses to clear/pave the way for all the other divinities on which they trekked safely to their first abode in the City of Ife-

Oodaye, also presumably known as Ife-Ife. Bade Ajuwon has, however, argued that no one is sure of the exact location of the Ife-Oodaye.⁸⁸

For the job well done, *Ogun*'s contemporaries bestowed on him the chieftaincy title of the *Osin-Mole*. [Note: *Osin* means 'king or leader' and *Mole* or *Imole* means 'divinity'. Thus, it is not an overstatement to refer to *Ogun* (*Osin-Mole*) as the leader of all the Yoruba divinities.] Being the first to have owned and used the implements made of iron, all iron objects, up till this day, are emblemized or thought of as *Ogun*. Henry John Drewal corroborates this point when he wrote:

The innate qualities of iron are a manifestation of its *ase*, a metaphysical concept central to all Yoruba thought and action...Iron possesses that supernatural force. Hence, objects made of iron are not only primary symbols of *Ogun*, they are *Ogun*.⁸⁹

Other important emblems of *Ogun* are the palm fronds or young palm-leaves (*Moriwo*, *Mariwo*). Every shrine that is associated with the divinity must be dressed with them (*Moriwo*, *Mawiro*). It is necessary to explain the reason. The myth records that upon his permanent settlement on the earth in Ife-Oodaye, *Ogun* took hunting as his profession. One day, he went on the hunting expedition, where saw a beautiful hill. He became attracted to it and decided to make it his permanent abode. Thus, each time he went hunting, he returned to the hill top.

However, at a certain time, *Ogun* became tired of the solitary life. Hence, he resolved to return into the city of *Ife-Oodaye*, but unfortunately, his hunting gown (*Gberi-Ode*) had become a rag, soiled with the blood of animals that he hunted. Thus his praise poem:

⁸⁸ Bade Ajuwon, "Ogun's Irewoje: A Philosophy of Living and Dying," *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New* (second expanded edition), 1997, 173.

⁸⁹ Henry John Drewal, "Yoruba Body Artists and Their Deity Ogun," *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New* (second expanded edition), 1997, 204.

L’ojo ti Ogun nti ori okee bo, aso ina lommu bo’ra, ewu eje lowo s’orin (‘The day that *Ogun* was returning from the top of the hill, the gown that he wore was soiled with the blood of animals, as red as the flame of fire’). In view of his divine status as the *Osin-Mole* (king or leader of the divinities), he thought it not befitting to appear into the city with such a raggedy look. Thus, he made himself a garment prepared with palm fronds (*Moriwo, Mariwo*). Since that day, anyone that impersonates *Ogun* during the *Ogun* festivals must appear in the garment that is made of palm fronds. So also every shrine dedicated to *Ogun* must be dressed with palm fronds.

Who are the *Ogun* worshippers? Using *connective theory*, an answer to this question could be found in *Ogun’s* emblems— anything, either in part or whole, made of the iron. Since every human being directly or indirectly benefits from iron (*Ogun’s* representation), by implication, everybody is connected to *Ogun*. Thus, every human being is entitled to call on him (*Ogun*), especially whenever inside the vehicles, ships, airplanes, and so on, which are thought of as not only the symbols of *Ogun*, but *Ogun* himself. Thus, it is very common to hear the Yoruba saying the following prayers, as they are about to embark on a journey by sea, road, or air. ‘*Ogun*, please do not bathe or soak yourself with my blood; let me arrive at my destination safely without any accident’ (*Ogun ma fi eje mi we o; je ki ngun’le layo o*).

Deified Ancestors

This is the category comprised of the divinities (*Orisa, Imole*) that were once human beings (*Eda, Alaaye*) but who have assumed the positions of divinities after their death.

However, not all the deadn Yoruba thought and practice assumed the status of the divinity. Those that were community heroes and heroines who contributed immensely to the welfare of the society in which they lived during their lifetime are awarded the statuses of the divinities. Examples include *Ogboni*, the Yoruba goddess of the Earth, which the myth records to have been born and lived in the Yoruba City of Ile-Ife, where she is known by the name, *Abeni* ('We begged or petitioned God before He gave us the baby girl'). However, individuals with extremely bad or hot temperaments could also be deified after their death out of the fear that their spirits could bring disasters into the community, where they were born and lived, if they are not referenced or honored as divinities. A typical example is *Sango*, the thunder and lightening deity, who was said to be the fourth *Alaafin* (King) of Oyo, the ancient capital city of the Old Yoruba Kingdom. These two examples, *Ogboni* and *Sango*, are examined as follows with particular references to their respective emblems or ceremonial objects.

***Ogboni*:** The Yoruba regard *Ogboni*, whose other names include *Abeni*, *Ade*, and *Etigbure*, as the earth goddess. This kind of earth is not the same as *Aye*, the opposite of *Orun* (mentioned under the Yoruba cosmos). Rather, it means the land or soil on which we walk, build houses, plant crops, and bury corpses, and so on. It is also used to demarcate or distinguish one region or zone from the other, as in Yorubaland in western Nigeria; Igboland in eastern Nigeria; and Hausaland in northern Nigeria.

Like other natural environments, *Ile* (the earth, land, or soil) is believed to possess a very powerful spiritual force (*Ase*). Thus, it is often personified, having human body features. The examples include *Oju Ile* (literally, 'face of the earth or land', meaning

‘surface of the earth or land’); *Ori-Ile* (literally, ‘land’s/earth’s head’, meaning ‘on the top of the land/earth’); and *Inu-Ile* (literally, ‘earth’s/land’s stomach or belly, meaning ‘underneath or below the surface of the earth/land’). As a personified spirit being or force, the Yoruba hold that the earth or land has eyes, which it uses to see whatever human beings do on it—good or evil. They also strongly believe that no evil doers can escape the earth’s/land’s deadly punishment. Thus, the Yoruba saying: *Bope boya, Ile a mu asebi* (‘It may be long, but the earth or land will surely catch and kill the evil doers’).

The Yoruba strongly believe that *Ogboni* (*Abeni, Etigbure*) was born and lived in the Yoruba city of Ife-Oore (also Ile-Ife) and that her parents’ names are *Ade* and *Odu* as reflected in her praise poems (*Oriki*): *Abeni Ade, Omo Odu L’Oore* (*Abeni Ade*, child of *Odu*, born in the city of *Oore*). It is said that she had virtually all the earth’s attributes mentioned above while she was alive. For instance, it is held that she was so knowledgeable to the extent that the then *Ooni* (King of Ile-Ife or *Ife Oore*) made her the head of the judicial arm of government, where she became a celebrity for her effective and efficient way of delivering judgments. She determined quickly and accurately whether or not accused people brought into her court were guilty or innocent of the charge(s) against them by a mere look into their eyes—no liædetector could be more effective. Thus, whoever is involved in any antisocial behaviors cannot escape been caught and punished—inasmuch as the person walks, dwells, or lives on the earth or land (*Ile*).

In recognition of her earth-like attributes, she was deified the goddess of the earth after her death. In fact, her cult members, called *Ogboni* or *Osugbo*, still functioned as the

judicial arm of government in all the Yoruba communities up till the late nineteenth century—prior to the arrival of the British colonial administrators.

The most important emblems of *Ogboni* (earth goddess) are *Edan* and *Onile*. The former is a pair of a male and female brass figures with an iron spike joined at the top by an iron chain, while the latter is also paired male and female brass figures, but each is free-standing. Both figures (*Edan* and *Onile*) are paired to illustrate the male and female attributes of the earth goddess—as hard and strong as a male and as gentle, meek, and kind as a female. For instance, she (the earth goddess) is harsh and hard on the evil doers and at the same time simple, gentle, and kind to those who behave well in society. At the cult's court, the figures are believed to witness and guide the proceedings. Both the plaintiff(s) and defendant(s) were made to swear before the emblems that they will speak the truth and nothing but the truth before making their statements. It is believed that whoever makes a false statement will be caught and instantly killed by the earth goddess whose spirit is represented by the brass figures.

When offerings or sacrifices of food, blood of the animal victims, and so on, are made to Ile (the earth goddess), they were actually put in front of the figures, whom the devotees strongly hold as not only the goddess's emblems, but rather as the goddess.

Sango: As opposed to *Ogboni* that was deified in recognition of her great achievements while on the earth, *Sango* became a deity out of fear of his evil deeds while alive. He was described as the fourth *Alaafin* (King) of Oyo who was dethroned by his people for been overly tyrannical.⁹⁰ There are many myths surrounding his dethronement

⁹⁰ Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 1921, 70.

and death, but the commonality in them is that he was disgraced out of the office for being so wicked and tyrannical, killing his people mercilessly. After he was asked to abdicate the throne and was deserted by even some of his close friends and wives, he committed suicide by hanging himself on the silk cotton tree (*Igi Ayan*) at a place called *Koso*.

The news of his cheap and unpopular death soon became known in the whole of the Oyo town and surrounding villages that ‘*Sango* had hung himself’ (*Sango So*). *Sango*’s enemies started making bad comments about him, which angered those of his very close friends who still remained loyal to him (the deposed and dead king). Eventually, they resolved to fight for the spirit of *Sango*, resisting the insults by using voodooos on *Sango*’s enemies. Each time the voodooos were used, thunderstorms struck to death each of the *Sango*’s enemies one after the other, and at each occurrence, the divinity’s followers and friends, who masterminded the catastrophe, made the victims’ survivors believe that *Sango*’s divinity actually caused the thunderstorms because he felt insulted.

They also claimed to have found the thunderbolts used by *Sango* at the location of each stroke. What they took for the thunderbolts are certain smooth stones shaped like an axe with a double face called *Edun-Arøw Ose Sango* (thunder axe or thunder wand). Out of fear the survivors of the thunderstorms began to reference *Sango* as the thunder and lightning divinity. They propitiated him through his priests and priestesses called *Mongba Sango*. The sacrifices were made to the divinity through the thunderbolts, which now serve as *Sango* emblems. Carved wooden versions of the stone emblems, that serve

the same purpose, also abound. They are usually in the shape of a kneeling figure with a double face axe-like head.

The color red is associated with Sango because of his hot temperament when he was alive. At the festivals dedicated to *Sango* divinity (*Odun-Sango*), the devotees—priests and priestesses (*Mongba Sango*) dress in red blouses called *Laba Sango* and dance with the *Edun-Arṳr Ose-Sango* (*Sango's* thunderbolts or wand figures) in their hands.

Nature Divinities

There are some natural environments believed to serve as abodes for, or are identified with, the spirit beings owing to their unique appearance and/or their transcendental attributes. Two prominent examples include the palm trees that unusually have two or more branches (*Ope Olori-Meji*) instead of one, and bodies of water (*Omi, Odo*). The Yoruba strongly believe that there are some spiritual powers or forces that enable the latter to have great supernatural attributes—capable of drowning human beings, even the skillful swimmers; of figuratively killing the fires or flames; of quenching thirst; and so on. Thus, the song, illustrating the Yoruba's astonishment regarding the mysterious nature of the bodies of water (*Omi, Odo*):

Omi n wo yanrin gerere
Omi n wo yanrin gerere,
Omi ko lapa, omi ko lese
Omi n wo yanrin gerere.

[Without having the hands or legs, the bodies of water carry away the sands and, by extension, the human beings with ease.]

Two examples of the Yoruba divinities that identify with, or inhabit the natural environments include the *Orisa -Odo* (river divinities) and *Osanyin* or *Aroni* ('the herbs and leaves divinity' or 'god of medicine').

The Yoruba strongly believe that the nature spirit beings, who direct and control nature, could be beneficial to the human lives if referenced as divinities and faithfully propitiated or placated. With emphasis on their respective ceremonial (art) objects, I examine two of the nature divinities, *Orisa-Odo* and *Osanyin*.

Orisa-Odo: As earlier mentioned, every body of water—river, pond, stream, and so forth, small or big, especially the one that never dries up during the summer season, is believed by the Yoruba to embody or operate as a spirit being called *Olu Odo* or *Orisa-Odo* (water-spirit/spirit being). Thus we have the *Orisa-Osun* or *Iya-Osun* (*Osun* river goddess) of the river, also known by the name in Osogbo (a city in the Central Yorubaland), and *Orisa-Eyinle* or *Orisa-Erinle* (*Eyinle/Erinle* river divinity) in Egbado in the extreme southwestern region of Nigeria, among others.

The objects or emblems of worship symbolizing the water-spirit/spirit being of a particular body of water include pebbles and some quantity of water drawn from the body of waters. Both are well secured inside a lidded earthenware or ceramic plate called *Awo-Ota-Omi* (river-pebbles container). The devotees always aspire to acquire expensive and well-decorated earthenware that could serve as containers of the divinity's emblems as well as enhance their beauty. This is born from the belief that the divinity will reciprocate by providing those who treasure the deity's emblem with whatever he or she desires, which may include but is not limited to the blessing of many children, wealth, good

health and long life. The river spirit beings are also well propitiated annually, especially at the beginning of the raining season (usually between April and May every year), to avert imminent cases of death by drowning. Thus the devotees often go an extra mile in searching for the most renowned potters anywhere in Yorubaland that could commission the *Awo-Ota Omi* at all cost.

Robert Thompson has meticulously studied the works of a renowned potter in Egbado, called Abatan.⁹¹ He recorded that this potter specializes in the making of the sacred pots of *Eyinle* (river divinity) among the Egbado people of Southwestern Nigeria. What attracted the researcher's attention most was the unique sculptural relief motifs in the shape of the Yoruba king's crowns (*Ade*) embedded on the pots' lids. He interpreted the crown motifs as illustrating *Eyinle* divinity as the king of the rivers in recognition of the Yoruba crowns as representing the *Oba* (Yoruba kings).

Osanyin: Also called *Aroni*, the Yoruba hold on to *Osanyin* as the divinity of medicine, whose abode is in the bush or forests, where he uses the natural herbs and leaves, and or animal materials as medicines for the healing of human diseases or helmets. The Yoruba professional medicine men and women (*Oloogun, Ajawe-Sola*) are believed to be the mouthpiece of *Osanyin* or *Aroni* (medicine divinity). Many of them even often claim to have been spiritually carried away into the bush or forests for seven days or seven months by the spirit of *Osanyin* or *Aroni*, where they have learnt the medicinal usage of the various leaves and herbs in the bush or forest.

⁹¹ Robert Thompson, "Abatan: A Master Potter of the Egbado Yoruba," *Traditional and Creativity in Tribal Art*, 1969, 120-182.

For what the *Osanyin* (*Aṣṣi*) spirit being taught them, they regularly worship the divinity with the sacrifices of the blood of animal victims, such as goats (*Ewure*), pigeons (*Eyele*), and fowls (*Adiye*). At times, the spirit being (through diviners), also demands from them the sacrifices of field rats (*Ekun-Emo*) and mudfish (*Eja-Dudu*). The main objects or emblems of worship representing *Osanyin* divinity are clay or wooden sculptures also called by the name *Osanyin* and an iron staff surmounted on the top by sixteen birds called *Opa Osanyin* (*Osanyin Staff*).

Always adorned with beads and or cowry shells and securely placed on a raised earthen altar in the medicine man or woman's office, the *Osanyin* figure is a containment of the sacred power (*Ase*) of the *Osanyin* divinity. Most of the time, the professional medicine men or women profess to regularly receive instructions as to the particular combination of leaves, herbs, and or animal materials that will cure a given disease.

It is a taboo for the top section of the *Opa-Osanyin* (*Osanyin Staff*), where the birds are surmounted, to lie on the floor or ground. Hence, the staff is always tilted or leaned against the wall. The birds on it represent the invisible spirits of the witches, who know the secret powers inside all the herbs and leaves in the bush or forests. Thus, as the medicine men or women propitiate the *Osanyin* divinity, so also they must propitiate the witches. Otherwise, whatever medicine they prepare with the leaves and herbs will not be efficacious. One of the ways in which the witches are referenced or placated is through the depiction of the birds, their emblems and representations, on the top of the *Opa-Osanyin*. Apart from representing the medicine divinity, *Opa-Osanyin* is also carried by the medicine man or woman during important rituals or festivals, distinguishing him or

her from the rest of the attendants and identifying him or her as a Yoruba traditional, professional *Oloogun* or *Ajawe-Sola* (medicine man/woman).

The number of the birds on top of the *Opa-Osanyin*, sixteen, has some cultural significance. The number (sixteen) is a reference to the friendly relationship between *Ifa* or *Orunmila*, the Yoruba divinity of divination and *Osanyin* medicine god. First, it corresponds to the total number of the main sacred chapters or verses of the *Ifa* divination system (*Oju Odu-Ifa*). Second, and most important, it holds that the *Osanyin* divinity works for *Ifa* divinity, as reflected in the way in which both the *Ifa* and *Osanyin* professionals must work together to achieve their goal of averting or solving the clients' problems. In fact, on many occasions, a given *Ifa* priest or practitioner is also the medicine man—he combines both. Thus, on one hand, he uses his knowledge of the *Ifa* divination to divine or ask from the *Ifa* divinity about the nature of the problem(s) confronting his client. On the other hand, he uses his knowledge as a professional medicine man to prescribe, produce, and dispense the appropriate medication(s) that will cure or avert the client's problem(s).

Nature Spirits

These are the spirit beings that are believed to have no human physical attributes or features. They are believed to manifest in the bush and or the air, especially at odd times, such as at midnight or during the day when it is too sunny. Although people, especially hunters (*Olode*), who live most of their time in the bush/forests, often claim to have had encounters with the nature spirits, whenever they are asked to describe what they saw,

they usually have no concrete answers. Their habitual responses include ‘I heard the spirits laughing and or hissing’; I heard their footsteps’, ‘My head suddenly swelled up’, ‘I realized that I was in the midst of the spirits’, and so forth. The examples of the nature spirits include *Aja/Ajija* or *Babaji* (tornado or whirlwind spirits), *Egbere* (spirits of the dead, who have not been given proper funeral rites), *Oro* (demonic spirits), and *Iwin* (terianthrope spirit beings). Most of them are believed to live inside sacred trees (*Igi abami*), such as *chlorophora excelsa* or African teak (*Iroko*); *newboldia laevis* (*Akoko*); hug plum (*Ekikan*); *cordia millenia* (*Omo*); *dracaena fragrans* (*Peregun*); and African satinwood (*Ayan*). [Note: the botanical and or English names of the trees appeared first before their Yoruba names in brackets].

It should be noted that the Yoruba do not worship or venerate the nature spirits; thus, they are accorded with no shrines or altars and ceremonial objects. However, it is not uncommon to find at the base of the trees (mentioned above), the ritual sacrifices (*Ebo*) of eggs, animal blood, coins, corn meal (*Eko*), and so on, all sprinkled with palm oil (*epo-pupa*) and secured inside broken pots (*Apaadi*). The offerings are usually not for the nature spirits who inhabit the trees, but rather for the witches (*Aje*) and sorcerers (*Oso*), who are believed to hold regular meetings at the base or top of the sacred trees. The Yoruba hold the belief that such offerings pacify the witches and sorcerers, compelling them to use their supernatural powers to bring peace and order into the community instead of the disorder that they are known for.

Ancestral Spirits: The Yoruba ancestor is the dead that died a ‘good death’⁹², lived by example, and more importantly, reached an old age (at least 80) before he or she died, and did not die before his or her own parents. There are two main classes of ancestors—family ancestors (*Obi*) and generalized ancestors (*Akoda, Esidale, Isese*). The former includes the spirits of the dead fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers in a given nuclear and or extended family. Such dead are believed to have acquired the supernatural powers that enable them to freely sandwich between their new abode in heaven (*orun*) and earth (*Aye*) and regularly commune with their living children. Thus, the Yoruba saying: *Oku olomo kii sun* (the spirit of the dead, who has children on the earth does not abandon them, but rather pays them regular visits to address their problems). The living children reciprocate by regularly venerating or worshipping the ancestral spirits. The worship may include animal blood offerings at the spot where the ancestor was buried (*Oju Orori*) and/or masquerade ritual, in which the dead (ancestor) is impersonated in the form of masquerade (*Egungun*) and offered a sacrifice of music and dance, food, animal victims, and so on.

The latter, generalized ancestors (*Akoda/Esidale/Isese*) are the dead ancestors that conceivably established given communities, clans, or towns. They are those ancestors that the histories (usually oral ones) supported to be the first settlers of given societies. The Yoruba strongly believe that their spirits are so powerful to the extent that if accorded with befitting worships or veneration, they could save the given towns or

⁹² “good death” is the same thing as “natural death,” in which the death comes naturally (from God), without the dead taking his or her own life by committing suicide.

villages, which they founded or established, in times of crises, such as wars, droughts, famines, and so on. The worship, like that of the family ancestors, can also be in the form of a masquerade ritual and or animal sacrifice. It has been reported that the highest sacrifice to the generalized ancestors or any category of the spirit beings used to be human sacrifice.⁹³ However, nowhere in Yorubaland, Nigeria or any part of Africa is sacrifice of human being(s) made in the present time. In addition, most of the African traditional leaders have converted to either Christianity or Islam, discarding the bad among the old traditions and making the killing of human beings illegal and punishable by law.

From the discussions on Yoruba art and spirituality, it can be summarized that art and religion, in Yoruba thought, are inseparable. It is not an understatement to say that if not for the art (as part of the ceremonial objects), there may have been no way for the Africans to have interpersonal relations with the spiritual beings, which they conceptualized as the directors and controllers of nature and human life. As in other spiritual beliefs and practices all over the world, Yoruba/African art aids the human conceptualization of that which is invisible. By extension, art constantly assures the believer of the spiritual that the spiritual is not a figment of the believer's imagination, but rather a reality.

⁹³ Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*, 119.

CHAPTER III

CULTURAL CONTACTS AT THE NIGER-BENUE CONFLUENCE REGION

This chapter is concerned with the inter-group relations in the Niger-Benue confluence region—aiming at drawing attention to the nature of the cultural interactions between the Ijumu and other Ookun Yoruba and their non-Yoruba neighbors in the region. My hypothesis is that the multi-cultural character of this region, as opposed to the essentially mono-cultural landscape of Southwestern Nigeria, inhabited by the Yoruba majority, accounts for the uniqueness of the Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun* traditions and sets them apart from the rest of the Yoruba culture groups.

Before going into the subject, it is necessary to define the term ‘confluence’ as used in this work. It refers to the place where the rivers Niger and Benue meet in Nigeria’s middle belt zone (map 1.3). Owing much to the diverse amenities and opportunities it affords, over the years different peoples of different cultural baggage have dispersed into, and settled in this Niger-Benue confluence area of “approximately two hundred square kilometers.”⁹⁴ The amenities include but are not limited to the well-watered and fertile land that facilitates good agricultural harvests and fishing industry, and a water transport network afforded by the two rivers—the Niger and Benue. These river routes on which boats, ferries, and ships operate have continued to aid the dispersal of peoples and their cultural baggage from wherever in Nigeria’s regions they originally inhabited—northern,

⁹⁴ Onukaba Adinoyi-Ojo, “Playing at the Crossroads: Social Space as Metaphor in Ebiraland Masked Performances.” Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1996, 1.

southern, eastern, and western—into the region. By extension, the transport system enables the groups to easily link up and culturally interact.

The river routes are not the only transportation factor that encourages peoples' dispersal into this region; it also includes the inland roads. For instance, the geography of the region that is characterized with an extensive open savannah encourages the inhabitants to construct different roads that link one community to the other. The examples include the roads that connect the Omuo-Oke town (in Ekiti State) through Iyamoye, Ekinrin-Adde, Egbeda-Egga, Iffe, Ikoyi, and Iyara (in Ijumu Local Government Area) with Kabba (in Kabba-Bunu Local Government Area); Kabba with the Ebira city of Okene; Kabba with Iya-Gbedde; and Iya-Gbedde with Lokoja (in the confluence).

The impact of both transportation networks on the inter-group relations in the region cannot be overestimated as these networks enhance free movements of peoples from one community to the other. By extension, they make the cultural traditions in each of the ethnic groups become more accessible to one another via such instances as when the people exchange visits during community festivals and market days, when they have the opportunity to buy and sell each other's material culture. For instance, the annual *Epa* masquerade festival in Iya-Gbedde (one of the Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba communities), which will be fully examined in the following chapters, is always well attended by both the other neighboring Yoruba and non-Yoruba groups. The same is true of the Ebira *ekuecici*, an annual masquerade festival in Okene, which attracts the attendance of diverse culture groups from around the region. As the non-native spectators watch their hosts' masquerade performances with one eye, so also they use the other to look for the

opposite sex they could date—an action that usually results in intermarriages and by extension, interculturalations.⁹⁵

Other important factor responsible for the dispersal of peoples into the Niger-Benue confluence region was the Fulani religious war that began early in the nineteenth century, in which the Fulani jihadists (Islamic warriors) raided and conquered most of the Northern Nigeria ethnic groups. Those that could not withstand the attacks or who refused to convert to Islam fled southwards. Two examples that are relevant to this chapter include the Basa-Nge and Ebira episodes. The former, a Nupe group from the northwestern side of the Niger River, fled into the heartland of the Niger-Benue confluence after 1840⁹⁶ and the latter, the Ebira formally of the northern Nigeria, escaped into the same region in the middle of the nineteenth century. Adinoyi-Ojo has elaborated:

the Ebira Kingdoms of Panda and Igu were laid to waste about 1850 by Fulani slave raiders working for Umaru Makama Dogo, the emir (ruler or king) of Nassarawa...Remnants of these Ebira kingdoms migrated elsewhere to form the settlements now known as Umaisha, Toro, and Koto-Karfi in the confluence region.”⁹⁷

It is necessary to draw the attention of the reader to the diverse culture groups in the Niger-Benue confluence region (map 1.3). To the west of the confluence are the most northeasterly of Yoruba-speaking groups, known as the Ookun Yoruba, in which the Ijumu, Owe (Kabba), Bunu (Abinu), Yagba, and Oworo peoples belong. To the south of the Ookun Yoruba are the Ebira-Tao of the city of Okene and its environs, and the Edo-speaking peoples in the south of Okene that are grouped into the administrative unit of Akoko-Edo Local Government Area. To the east of the confluence are the Igala

⁹⁵ Interculturalations are the exchanges of cultural traditions resulting from the inter-group relations.

⁹⁶ William Bascom, *African Art in Cultural Perspective: An Introduction*, 1973, 85.

⁹⁷ Adinoyi-Ojo, 9.

communities of people and their immediate southern neighbors, the northern Igbo (Asaba, Nsukka, Ugbene, and others). Inhabiting the north and northeast of the confluence are the Ebira Panda, Gbari, and Basa Komo peoples among others, and to the northwest, the Nupe culture groups.

Owing to the great quantity and quality of the transportation and communication networks in this region as earlier mentioned, there has never been a time when one culture group stayed away from the other. Consequently, the region has continued to experience mutual inter-group relations. I illustrate the nature of cultural interactions and borrowings among the diverse culture groups in the region with two of their most popular religious traditions—masquerade and divination.

Masquerade

Masquerade is one of the material cultures that exemplifies the intercultural diffusion in the Niger-Benue confluence region. There are striking similarities in the masquerade traditions of the different culture groups in this region—evidential of the cultural interactions, contacts, and borrowings in the region.

Masquerade in the context of this discussion illustrates the physical representation or impersonation of the spirits of the dead family, generalized, and or royal ancestors among the most northeasterly Yoruba and their non-Yoruba Ebira, Nupe, Igala, northern Igbo, and Edo-speaking neighbors in the Niger-Benue confluence region.

From the linguistic standpoint, there is a very close affinity in the words for masquerade among the culture groups highlighted above. For instance, *Egungun* or

Eegun is the word for masquerade among the Yoruba (of the Niger-Benue confluence and of the Southwestern Nigeria). The word manifests as *Ekú* among the Ebira, *Gugu* among the Nupe, *Egwu* among the Igala, and *Egwugwu* or *Egwu* among the northern Igbo. From the above illustrations, it is only the Ebira word for masquerade that appears a bit different, especially in spelling, from the other groups' words. However, it can be argued that not only does the same word *Ekú* occur in the Yoruba masquerade terminology, but it also, by extension, has the same meaning as the Ebira *Ekú*. The Yoruba *Ekú* from the exoteric level means the ancestral masquerade costume, also sometimes called *Ago*, while the Ebira *Ekú* means masked performance, masked figure, and/or the realm of the dead (ancestors).⁹⁸ To show that both have the same esoteric, eschatological meaning, it is important to consider Yoruba linguistic etymology. *Ekú* is a compound word derived from two separate words: *E* ('realm of', or 'something related to') and *KU* ('death', 'die', or 'dead'). Therefore, the Yoruba *Ekú* (*E* + *KU*) means 'the realm of the dead'. In practice, the Yoruba *Ekú* is the masquerade costume that is donned by the masker or masquerader for the purpose of impersonating the spirit of the dead (ancestors) in the same way as the Ebira *Ekú* is an allusion to the realm of the dead (ancestors). Thus, it becomes imperative that both the Yoruba and Ebira *Ekú* have the same eschatological connotation.

On the other hand, from the stylistic point of view, both the OoKun Yoruba and Ebira masquerade costumes have something in common—more often than not, the traditional hand-woven red cloths are prominent in both. Called *Asò Ipo* (red cloths), these hand-

⁹⁸ Adinoyi-Ojo, xxvii.

woven cloths have been reported by Elisha Renne to have been woven and marketed predominantly by the Bunu community of weavers of the Ookun Yoruba-speaking groups.⁹⁹ This information is an overstatement, as there are other Ookun Yoruba groups famous for producing the *Aso-Ipo* in times past. The examples include the cloth weavers in Iya-Gbedde and Ekinrin-Adde communities of the Ijumu group. My interviews with Chief Jemirin, the *Obaro* of Iya-Gbedde and Chief. S. A. Olugbami, secretary of the Ijumu Traditional Council, have revealed a great deal. Both informants emphasized that these unique hand-woven clothes, used as part of the cloth-costumes of *Epa* masquerades in Iya-Gbedde and *Ina-Okò* and *Onigabon* masquerades in Ekinrin-Adde (Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3), were actually woven in large quantities by the weavers in both communities.

Nevertheless, the disappearance of the most important of the yarn types, obtained from the shredded colonial hospitals' red blankets and used in weaving the *Aso Ipo*, led to the extinction of the *Aso-Ipo* weaving industry in the whole of the Ookun communities. Consequently, the *Aso Ipo* that are still in existence, believed to emblemize the family ancestral spirits, are jealously treasured—always kept in the custody of the most senior members of the families that still own the clothes. For instance, Chief Jemirin of Iya-Gbedde, whose family by tradition produces both the male and female heads/leaders of the *Epa* masquerade society called *Aworo-Epa* and *Eleusu* respectively, is the custodian of his family's *Aso Ipo* (Figure 1.1).

⁹⁹ Elisha Renne, "Aso Ipo, Red Cloth From Bunu," *African Arts* xxv, no. 3 (1992): 64-69.

Research has shown that the Ebira were once the only predominant consumers of the *Aso-Ipo*, which are also known to them as *Baleton* or *Ubanito*.¹⁰⁰ They (the Ebira) were also the first culture group of people to incorporate these distinctive traditionally hand-woven cloths into their masquerade costumes before the practice become widely copied by other communities in the region, such as the Ijumu, Bunu, and Igala.¹⁰¹ This assertion has also been authenticated by one of my informants at Ekinrin-Adde, Chief Otitonaye Meseru, the *Eleti* of Ekinrin in Ekinrin-Adde, who explained that *Asø Ipo* were originally used primarily for burial purposes in Ookunland. He added that the clothes have in them some spiritual forces or powers, which enable the spirits of the deceased elders that were buried with the *Asø Ipo* to transit safely into the realm of the ancestors.

The masquerade traditions of the Nupe and their Ijumu-Yoruba southern neighbors, besides their similarity in the words for masquerade, also illustrate some other cultural interactions and borrowings. For instance, anthropologist Siegfried Frederick Nadel's study of the Nupe religion has showed that the Nupe *Gugu* is a derivation of Yoruba *Egungun*,¹⁰² even though they have their own indigenous masquerade-related tradition. Called *Ndakogboya*, this Nupe aboriginal masquerade-related tradition is associated with the annual rites of *Gunnu*, the group's most important religious ritual of God,¹⁰³ while the *Gugu* (a derivation of the Yoruba *Egungun*) represent the ancestral spirits. The cultural borrowings between the two groups have also resonated in the way the Ijumu and other

¹⁰⁰ John Picton, "Women's Weaving: the Manufacture and Use of Textiles Among the Igbirra Peoples of Nigeria," *Textile Art*, vol. 11 (1980): 63-88.

¹⁰¹ Picton, "On Artifact and Identity at the Niger-Benue Confluence," *African Arts*, xxiv no. 3 (July 1991): 34.

¹⁰² Nadel, *Nupe Religion*, 1954: plate 23 (facing page 135).

¹⁰³ Ojo, J. R. O. 1976, 27.

Yoruba-speaking people in the area; the Owe (Kabba) people, for example, have similarly adopted the Nupe *Ndakogboya*, which they renamed *Igunnu or Igunnuko*.¹⁰⁴

In the same way, the Igala and their Ijumu and other Ookun Yoruba neighbors in the western bank of the Niger-Benue confluence region, display some cultural interactions and borrowings in relation to their masquerade traditions. Besides their similar words for masquerade (*Egungun* or *Eegun* among the Yoruba and *Egwu* among the Igala), they both share similar conceptions of masquerade as ‘loosely’ belonging to the King. For instance, by tradition all the Igala masquerades belong to *Ata* (the Igala King). Hence, every masquerade (*Egwu*) is called *Egwu-Ata* (the King’s masquerade), even though the *Ata* has his own particular set of royal masquerades, originally nine and later twelve in number, called *Egwu-Ayegba*.¹⁰⁵ They emblemize the royal ancestral spirits.¹⁰⁶ However, in practice the masquerades that are specifically owned by the individual Igala citizens are called *Egwu-Afia*—the non-royal masquerades that impersonate the individual Igala family ancestral spirits.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, among the Ijumu as well as other Ookun and non-Okun Yoruba peoples, all *Egungun* are conventionally called *Eegun-Oba* (King’s masquerades). Conversely, in practice there are many Yoruba *Oba* (Kings) that have no *Egungun*, either because they do not belong to the *Egungun* lineage or simply because they have disowned their masquerades on becoming ‘born again’ Christians or Moslems.

¹⁰⁴ Jola Ogunlusi, *Igunnuko Festival*, *African Arts* vi, no. 4 (summer 1971): 60.

¹⁰⁵ T. A. Miachi, “The Political Process in Igalaland,” *West African Journal of Archaeology*, 1988, 172.

¹⁰⁶ R. A. Sargent, “Igala Masks: Dynastic History and a Face of the Nation,” *West African Masks and Culture*, 1988, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Sargent, 21.

Studies have suggested that *Egwu*, the word for masquerade among the northern Igbo, which is the same as that of their immediate northern neighbors Igala *Egwu*, is an attestation to the Igala's direct religious and political domination over the northern Igbo communities.¹⁰⁸ Other evidences of domination in relation to masquerade abound. Two of them—*Ekwe* and *Agabaidu*—are considered as follows. The most senior of all the Igala royal masquerades (*Egwu-Ayegba*) is called *Ekwe*,¹⁰⁹ which symbolizes the *Ata* (king) himself. As a representation of the King as well as the principal figure among the entire Igala masquerades, the *Ekwe* is distinguished with his (its) polychromatic and exceptionally large robe (costume). Similarly, *Ekwe* is the most celebrated of all the northern Igbo masquerades. Then again, like the Igala *Ekwe*, so huge is the costume of the northern Igbo *Ekwe* that it has been described as having no parallels elsewhere in Africa.¹¹⁰

Also famous among the northern Igbo masquerades is the one called *Agabaidu*.¹¹¹ The most conspicuous evidence of the Igala cultural influence on the northern Igbo masquerade tradition is reflected in *Agabaidu* (the northern Igbo most popular masquerade), whose etymology is undoubtedly traceable in the Igala language and greeting. For instance, even though there is no masquerade that bears the name *Agabaidu* among the Igala, *Agabaidu* is a compound word derived from the Igala words: *Agaba* (tiger) and *Idu* (lion). Thus, *Agaba-Idu* literally means 'lion and tiger', the Igala royal

¹⁰⁸ Seton, R. S. "Notes on the Igala Tribe, Northern Nigeria," *Journal of African Sociology*, xxix (1929-30): 46.

¹⁰⁹ Kenneth Murray, *Idah Masks, Nigerian Field* 14, no. 3 (July 1949): 86.

¹¹⁰ Cole and Chike Aniakor, *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos*, 1984, 142.

¹¹¹ Thomas Miachi Thomas, "The Political Process in Igalaland," *West African Journal of Archaeology*, Supplement to vol. 18 (1988): 169.

totems. On the other hand, *Agabaidu* as a word is a greeting for the *Ata* (King), eulogizing him as Majesty-Lord over the entire Igala people and the culturally and politically dominated immediate southern neighbors—the northern Igbo communities.¹¹² In view of these shared masquerades' characteristics, John Rowland Ojo has proposed that the Yoruba *Egungun* (*Eegun*) may have influenced the Igala *Egwu*, while the Igala *Egwu* in turn influenced the northern Igbo *Egwu*.¹¹³

The masquerade traditions of the northern Edo-speaking groups also have some affinities with those of the Ijumu and Ekiti, their Yoruba northern and northwestern neighbors respectively. First, the northern Edo-speaking people's word for masquerade as well as masking festival is *Igugu*—evidently a derivation of Yoruba *Egungun*.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, the northern Edo *Igugu* costumes, like the Ekiti and Ijumu *Epa* masquerade costumes, often include the helmet masks with figural superstructures. However, as opposed to the Yoruba eschatological implication of *Egungun*, the significance of the northern Edo *Igugu* (masquerade), particularly among the Okpe, Ogbe, Otuo, and Ikao northern Edo communities, is to mark the passage from one age-grade to the next.¹¹⁵ John Picton has likewise noted that “the ritual status of eastern Yoruba helmet masks as *Imonle* (divinities), or material embodiments of metaphysical energy, is clearly very different from the display context in Akoko-Edo (of the northern Edoland).”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Miachi, 169.

¹¹³ Ojo J. R. O., *The Diffusion of Some Yoruba Artifacts and Social Institutions*, 1976, 15.

¹¹⁴ Jean M. Borgatti, “Age Grades, Masquerades, and Leadership among the Northern Edo,” *African Arts* xvi, no. 1 (November 1982): 44.

¹¹⁵ Borgatti, 1982, 43-44.

¹¹⁶ Picton, “On Artifacts and Identity at the Niger-Benue Confluence,” (1991): 42.

The implication of these similarities in the linguistic, cultural significance, and physical appearance of all the masquerades in the Niger-Benue confluence region is that there is an intercultural diffusion of the masquerade traditions among the different culture groups in the region.

Divination

Like their masquerade traditions, there is overwhelming evidence of intercultural diffusion in the divination systems of the diverse culture groups who live in the Niger-Benue confluence region. These include the remarkable similarities in the language, purpose, and apparatus of their divination systems.

First, it is important to consider the basic fundamental concepts of divination that may provide the reader with background knowledge of the subject. Divination could be defined as ‘having or gaining knowledge of that which would have remained forever unknown to human beings’ through the means of prediction or forecasting. Thus, divination is essentially connected with the future. Yet, it (divination) is not limited to the knowledge of the future; it also includes gaining access to the obscurities of the moments.¹¹⁷ Divination also connects with spirituality in the strong belief shared among the practitioners that there is a spiritual force or entity that, by the virtue of its supernatural power, knows all that is unknown or hidden to human beings. To have access to the unknown, therefore, requires that the unknown seekers connect with the forces or spirits behind the unknown through the diviners, who can “read the unreadable,

¹¹⁷ Nadel, *Nupe Religion*, 1954: 64.

who can interpret the will of the spirits (and)...who can mediate between humans and those spirits.”¹¹⁸ They are called by different names from one linguistic group to the other. For instance, the diviner is known among the Yoruba as *Babalawo/Abalao* (‘father of the secret pacts’) or simply *Awo* (‘the knowledgeable one’); among the Nupe as *Ebasaci* (‘one who cast the *Eba*’. Note: *Eba* is the Nupe word for divination),¹¹⁹ and among the Igala as *Ohiuga* (‘royal diviner’ or ‘divination specialist’).¹²⁰ Among the northern Igbo, the diviner is known as *onye n’agbaafa* (‘person who divines’), *Ogbaafa* (‘he divines’),¹²¹ or *Attama* (‘one who possesses required training to cast and read the message of *Afa* to the supplicants’). [Note: *Afa* is the northern Igbo word for divination.] The term *Attama* is derived from two Igala words—*Ata* (‘king, father, chief, or lord’) and *Ma* (‘spirit’)—that flowed into the northern Igbo’s vocabulary.¹²²

The vernacular word for divination occurs among the entire Yoruba as *Ifa*, *Eba* among the Nupe,¹²³ *Ifa* among the Igala,¹²⁴ *Afa* among the northern Igbo,¹²⁵ and *Ifa* among the Ebiraland¹²⁶—the Ijumu’s Niger-Benue confluence neighbors.

Apart from the same or similar word for divination among the different culture groups in the Niger-Benue confluence region, the language employed in the divination procedures and terminology in the entire region is fundamentally the same. For instance, while the Southwestern (mainstream Yoruba) and Ijumu-northeastern Yoruba *Oju Odu*

¹¹⁸ Austin Shelton, *The Igbo-Igala Borderland*, 1971, 200.

¹¹⁹ Nadel, *Nupe Religion*, 1954: 39.

¹²⁰ Boston, J. S. *The Igala Kingdom, 1968*, 107.

¹²¹ Shelton, 201.

¹²² Shelton, 204.

¹²³ Nadel, 38.

¹²⁴ J. S. Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 1968, 107.

¹²⁵ Shelton, 201. Also see Angulu Onwuejeogwu, *Afa Symbolism and Phenomenology in Nri Kingdom and Hegemony: An African Philosophy of Social Action*, 1997, 12

¹²⁶ William Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa*, 1969: 7

Ifa (main chapters/verses or signs of the *Ifa* divination) are sixteen in number, so also are the Nupe *Eba*, and northern Igbo *Afa* divination signs, tabulated as follows:

M/S Yoruba <i>Odu-Ifa</i>	Ijumu <i>Odu-Ifa</i> ¹²⁷	Nupe <i>Eba</i> Signs ¹²⁸	N/Igbo <i>Afa</i> Signs ¹²⁹
1. <i>Ogbe</i>	<i>Osika</i>	<i>Shikan</i>	<i>Akwu</i>
2. <i>Oyeku</i>	<i>Oyeku</i>	<i>Eyako</i>	<i>Ogoli</i>
3. <i>Iwori</i>	<i>Ogori</i>	<i>Gori</i>	<i>Aka</i>
4. <i>Odi/Idi</i>	<i>Oji</i>	<i>Eji</i>	<i>Udi/Odi</i>
5. <i>Irosun</i>	<i>Orosun</i>	<i>Rusu</i>	<i>Ululu</i>
6. <i>Oworin</i>	<i>Oga</i>	<i>Ega</i>	<i>Obi</i>
7. <i>Obara</i>	<i>Obara</i>	<i>Bara</i>	<i>Obala</i>
8. <i>Okanran</i>	<i>Okono</i>	<i>Kana</i>	<i>Okala</i>
9. <i>Ogunda</i>	<i>Ogunta</i>	<i>Guta</i>	<i>Ogute/Ijite</i>
10. <i>Osa</i>	<i>Oha</i>	<i>Esa</i>	<i>Ora</i>
11. <i>Ika</i>	<i>Oyinkan</i>	<i>Yikan</i>	<i>Aghali/Agali</i>
12. <i>Oturupon</i>	<i>Otaru</i>	<i>Rakpan</i>	<i>Atunuka/Tunukpa</i>
13. <i>Otura</i>	<i>Otura</i>	<i>Turia</i>	<i>Otule</i>
14. <i>Irete</i>	<i>Erete</i>	<i>Etia</i>	<i>Ete</i>
15. <i>Osa</i>	<i>Okin</i>	<i>Arikin</i>	<i>Ose</i>
16. <i>Ofun</i>	<i>Ofun</i>	<i>Ofun</i>	<i>Ofu</i>

[Note: ‘M/S Yoruba’ means ‘mainstream Yoruba’ and ‘N/Igbo’ means ‘northern Igbo’.]

It could be noted that the names of the divination signs in all the four groups, especially the last three (Ijumu, Nupe, and northern Igbo groups), who cohabit the Niger-Benue confluence region, are very similar in pronunciations and spellings. This close affinity has necessitated Ade Obayemi to propose that the *Ifa* divination system among the mainstream¹³⁰ Yoruba (in the Southwestern Nigeria) derived from the north of Yorubaland, in the Niger-Benue confluence region.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Ade Obayemi, “History, Culture, Yoruba and Northern Factors,” *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture*, 1983, 83-84. Also see William Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa*, 1969, 7.

¹²⁸ Ade Obayemi, “History, Culture, Yoruba and Northern Factors,” 83-84.

¹²⁹ Onwuejeogwu, 52.

¹³⁰ “mainstream Yoruba” are the Yoruba who live in the Southwestern Nigeria. They are also regarded as the Yoruba majority because their population is more than 90% of the total population of the Yoruba compared to the Yoruba in the Niger-Benue confluence region, whose population is less than 10% of the entire Yoruba population.

¹³¹ Obayemi, “History, Culture, Yoruba and Northern Factors,” 84.

In the same way, Samuel Johnson has proposed that the Nupe divination practice spread to the Yorubaland. He believed that Setilu, a Nupe native, took the tradition to Yorubaland from Nupeland in “about the period of the Mohammedan invasion.”¹³² A close view of the history of the Fulani Jihad (also called Mohammedan or Islamic war) invalidates Johnson’s claim. In actuality, the Fulani of the Northern Nigeria did not begin the Mohammedan invasion/war, in which the Nupe and other northern groups were invaded and forcefully converted to Islam, until early in the nineteenth century.¹³³

Oral history records that *Orunmila*, the Yoruba culture hero and deified god of divination, was the inventor of the *Ifa* divination. He is believed to have lived in Ile-Ife and Ado (both ancient cities of the Yoruba Kingdom) some time between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.¹³⁴ Therefore, by extension, the *Ifa* divination may have been in existence in Yorubaland between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries—well before Setilu, who according to Samuel Johnson, was banished from Nupeland upon his refusal to convert to Islam, took refuge in Yorubaland, and introduced the divination practice there.¹³⁵

By and large, whichever the direction of the diffusion of *Ifa* divination practice—from the Niger-Benue confluence region to Southwestern Nigeria in the mainstream Yorubaland or otherwise—the point relevant to the present work is that there are inter-group relations in the area. This is evident in the way the Ijumu *Odu-Ifa* (divination

¹³² Johnson, 32.

¹³³ Bascom, *African Art in Cultural Perspective*, 1973, 84.

¹³⁴ Tunde Akinwunmi, “Ifa and the Northern Factor in Okun-Yoruba’s Choice of Red Burial Cloth Tradition,” *Northeast Yorubaland: Studies in the History and Culture of A Frontier Zone*, 2003, 86 and 99.

¹³⁵ Johnson, 32-34.

signs) are more similar to those of their Niger-Benue confluence non-Yoruba neighbors than they (the mainstream Yoruba Southwestern Nigeria *Odu-Ifa*) are to the Niger-Benue confluence ones.

Perhaps the most evidential of the mutual relations among the different culture groups in the Niger-Benue confluence region, especially between the Ijumu Yoruba and the non-Yoruba groups, with respect to their divination practices, is in the respective cultures' divination chain(s) or string(s). Divination chain(s) or string(s) is/are the most popular apparatus or implement(s) used to cast (Yoruba, *da'fa*) and read the divination.

Among the Yoruba (in the Southwestern Nigeria or in the Niger-Benue confluence region), the word for divination chain or string is *Opele*. Yet, this apparatus among the Southwestern Yoruba diviners (*Babalawo, Awo*) is different from those among the Ijumu diviners (*Abalao, Awo*). The former is a "metal or cotton string around which eight half-nuts of the fruit of *Opele* tree are sewn. Four half nuts are attached to each half of the chain. In some cases, metals shaped like the *Opele* half-nuts are used."¹³⁶ The latter, also known as *Agbigba*, is a set of "four separate strings with four markers (half-nuts) each."¹³⁷ Ade Obayemi has added that eight strings of the *Opele* or *Agbigba* were also used among the Ijumu diviners (*Abalao, Awo*).¹³⁸ Thus, the Ijumu *Opele* or *Agbigba* is a double or quadruple of the *Opele* among the mainstream Yoruba in the Southwestern Nigeria. The question now remains: Why is the Ijumu *Opele* or *Agbigba* different from the mainstream Yoruba *Opele* in spite of the fact that both the Ijumu and the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria have a common ancestral origin—offspring of *Oduduwa*, the

¹³⁶ Wande Abimbola, *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifa*, 1975, 15.

¹³⁷ Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa*, 1969, 7.

¹³⁸ Obayemi, "History, Culture, Yoruba and Northern Factors," 83.

legendary Yoruba ancestor who founded the entire Yoruba Nation at the City of Ile-Ife in Southwestern Nigeria? The most precise answer is that the Ijumu intermingle their Yoruba indigenous culture with those of their Niger-Benue confluence non-Yoruba neighbors. The result is what Melville Herskovits has described as cultural ‘syncretism’—the merging of two or more cultural matrixes, which in the case of the Ijumu divination strings, produces *Agbigba*, as will become clear as I examine the divination strings among the Ijumu Niger-Benue confluence neighbors.

Vunkpara is the word for the Nupe divination chains or strings. A set of *Vunkpara* consists of “eight cords of hemp, each strung through four perforated, hollow half-shells, placed equidistantly along the cord, about three inches from one another.”¹³⁹ Each of the eight cords ends in four strands, onto which small rings made of perforated or hollowed-out berry nuts and cowry shells are attached.¹⁴⁰ From this vivid description coupled with Obayemi’s observation (above), that the eight strings are also used at Ijumu,¹⁴¹ the Ijumu *Opele* or *Agbiba* is without doubt analogous to the Nupe *Vunkpara*.

Among the Igala, a set of the *Ifa* divination strings consists of four cords, each strung through four hollowed half-shells and each half-shell separated from the other by a cowry shell and or backbone joint of fish.¹⁴² Hence, in comparison, the Igala divination strings are very similar to those of their Ijumu western neighbors.

¹³⁹ Nadel, *Nupe Religion*, 39.

¹⁴⁰ Nadel, *Nupe Religion*, 39.

¹⁴¹ Obayemi, “History, Culture, Yoruba and Northern Factors,” 83.

¹⁴² R. S. Seton, “Notes on the Igala Tribe, Northern Nigeria,” *Journal of African Soc.*, XXIX (1929-30): 42-52, 149-163.

Among the northern Igbo, the implements used in casting the *Afa* consist of four strings of four seedpods of wild almond,¹⁴³ as in the Igala's and Ijumu's. They are stored inside a tortoise shell kept by the diviner (*Ogbaafa*).¹⁴⁴

Olufemi Ojo has suggested that northern Igbo *Afa* as well as the divination chains derive from the Igala *Ifa*. His view is based on the fact that “the Igbo speak of domination of northern Nsukka Ibo villages by the Igala.”¹⁴⁵ This dominion, he argued, is not restricted to political colonization, but also religious control. He illustrated his assertion with the northern Igbo's replacement of their aboriginal Igbo shrine priest with *Attama*, an Igala word and title for shrine priest. In a related development, Shelton has viewed this religious manifestation as an aspect of the interculturalism in the northern Igbo borderland.¹⁴⁶ The similarity in the names for the divination signs, as well as in the divination apparatus among the diverse culture groups in the Niger-Benue confluence region, in William Bascom's view, is indicative of a historical relationship with the mainstream-Southwestern Yoruba *Ifa*.¹⁴⁷

What the similarities in the vernacular names, pronunciations, visuals, and cultural significance of the masquerade and divination traditions among the peoples of the Niger-Benue confluence region also call to mind is clear. The people maintain peaceful relations with one another, which in turn promote cultural interactions, borrowings, and exchanges. Such an interculturalism, as this work sets to establish in the subsequent

¹⁴³ Shelton, *The Igbo-Igala Borderland*, 201.

¹⁴⁴ Shelton, *The Igbo-Igala Borderland*, 201.

¹⁴⁵ Ojo J.R.O., “The Diffusion of Some Yoruba Artifacts and Social Institutions,” 19.

¹⁴⁶ Shelton, *The Igbo-Igala Borderland*, 57.

¹⁴⁷ Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men*, 7.

chapters, accounts for the uniqueness of the Ijumu *Egungun* traditions, especially when compared with those of the mainstream Yoruba in the Southwestern Nigeria.

CHAPTER IV

**THE IJUMU NORTHEASTERN-YORUBA: HISTORY OF ORIGIN AND
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

This chapter provides an overview of the cultural practices of the Ijumu people of the Ookun Yoruba-speaking groups, who live in the most northeasterly Yorubaland in the Niger-Benue confluence region. The aim is to provide a foundation for understanding the spiritual context of the Ijumu *Egungun* traditions.

Before going into the specifics of this chapter, it is very important to first provide the reader with the general overview of the Ookun Yoruba subgroups of which the Ijumu group is an integral part (Map 1.2). The Yoruba word, *Ookun* literally or ordinarily refers to ‘strength’, ‘good health’, or ‘physical power and energy’. However, metaphorically or symbolically, the word operates as a common greeting of the culturally related Ijumu, Bunu (or Abinu), Owe, Ikiri, Oworo, and Yagba Yoruba-speaking peoples of the most northeastern Yorubaland in the west bank of the Niger-Benue confluence region. They live in Nigeria’s middle belt zone with their non-Yoruba neighbors (that have already been fully enumerated in chapter three). Thus, as used in this work and by the peoples themselves, ‘Ookun Yoruba’ operates at two levels. First, it operates as the dialect of the Yoruba of the Niger-Benue confluence region. Second, it refers to the speakers of the Yoruba dialect (language) themselves: that is, the Ijumu, Owe, Bunu (Abinu), Ikiri, Oworo, and Yagba peoples. The land which they occupy is defined by longitudes 5° 30’ to 7° East and latitudes 7° 15’ to 3° 45’ North.

Like the Yoruba groups in Southwestern Nigeria, the Ookun Yoruba peoples have a common legendary ancestral origin, traceable to Ile-Ife or Ife-Oodaye located at the south central part of the Southwestern Nigeria (Map 1.1). However, common ancestral origin notwithstanding, these Yoruba subgroups have certain cultural peculiarities that define their identity and set them apart from the other Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria that I refer to as the Yoruba majority. These distinctive traits are exemplified in their dialect, social and political organization, and religious beliefs and practices among others, matched with those of their Yoruba counterparts in the Southwestern region as follows.

Dialect: Like each of the Yoruba subgroups in Southwestern Yorubaland, such as the Oyo Yoruba, Egba Yoruba, Ondo Yoruba, Ife Yoruba, and so forth, the Ookun Yoruba peoples speak a peculiar Yoruba dialect that is mutually intelligible to them all, thus, distinguishing them from the other Yoruba subgroups. For instance, while not every word verbalized by Ookun Yoruba is understandable to the non-Ookun Yoruba peoples, an Ijumu, Owe, Bunu (Abinu), Ikiri, Yagba, or Oworo-Ookun Yoruba person, in contrast, does not need an interpreter to understand every word spoken by his or her fellow Ookun Yoruba individual. My experience at an Ijumu-Ookun Yoruba community when I was conducting the field research for this dissertation better illustrates this point.

In spite of the fact that I am a Yoruba from Southwestern Yorubaland, not all the words spoken by my Ookun Yoruba informants were mutually intelligible to me during my interviews with them. For instance, when I asked one informant from Egbeda-Egga (an Ijumu-Ookun Yoruba community), by the name Elder Onimodamori Ayinmode, as to the main purpose of the annual masquerade ritual festival (*Odun Eegun*), which he

coordinates annually in the month of June, his response is related as follows. *A maa nse odun eegun lodoodun ka baa le bere si nii je emindin. Lalai se odun eegun, ko si eda Olorun to gbodo j'emindin* ('we perform the masquerade ritual annually so that we may start eating the new yam; no one dare eat the new yam prior to this annual ritual celebration'). It may surprise the reader that even by my racial status as a Yoruba, it took the intervention of my informant's son, who was there with us, before I could understand the key word in my informant's statement—*emindin* (new yam). This is because at Okeigbo, an Ife-Yoruba dialectic group, where I come from, the 'new yam' is called *egbodo*, not *emindin*.

Social and Political Organization: Historically, in the precolonial era and to some extent, presently, in the twenty-first century, the Yoruba societies in Southwestern Nigeria are characterized by highly centralized political systems and large urban capitals led by powerful, first-class, royal personages. As royal fathers or kings, these rulers are born into the designated families or clans for whom it is their birthright to produce the king. Thus, the Yoruba societies in this region of Southwestern Nigeria are referred to as kingdoms. In contrast, in the past as well as arguably in the present day, the Oo kun Yorubaland societies are essentially characterized by non-centralized governments, in which each clan, community, settlement, village, or town is autonomous. Leadership, in this type of social and political setting, is rotated among the clans or lineage that constitute given communities, villages, or towns. Thus, by extension, any responsible and mature citizen of a given clan or lineage can assume the position of an *Oba* (King), inasmuch as he is duly supported and selected by his clan and it is the turn of his clan to

produce the community leader. Ade Obayemi has referred to the societies where this kind of social and political system operates as ‘mini-states’ and the former (the Yoruba societies in the Southwestern Nigeria) as ‘mega-states’.¹⁴⁸

Validating my hypothesis that the social and political setting in the Ookun Yoruba societies is remarkably different from that which operates among the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria, the king (*Oba*) of Iyah-Gbedde Ijumu, *Oba* Gideon Olorunmola Esemikose, responded to the following question that I asked him: Why is it that a leader or king in any given community, village, or town in Ookunland, no matter how thinly or thickly populated it is, is not subordinate, greater, or superior to the other, in contrast to what operates among the Southwestern Yoruba communities? I paraphrase as follows, his answer:

No one king is superior or inferior to the other in Ookunland because each, elected and installed by his community members, manages the polity of his own group of people. No Ookun Yoruba community’s *Oba* (king) received his staff of office from his counterpart in other Ookun Yoruba community in the same way as it is not in the Ookun Yoruba history, where a given Ookun Yoruba leader waged war against, and conquered another given Ookun Yoruba community. Accordingly, how can you, as an *Oba* from a given community in Ookunland then claim superiority over your fellow *Oba* in another given Ookun Yoruba community, when you did not conquer his army at any warfront or give him his staff of office?¹⁴⁹

John Otitoju supported the king’s argument, when he wrote:

Ookun Federation has always been referred to as a collection of different units who lived independent of each other with its own social organization though with bonding similarities. Ookunland had never been a kingdom because there are no historical facts to show that they ever fought and conquered one another.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Obayemi, “The Yoruba and Edo-speaking peoples and their neighbors before 1600,” *History of West Africa*, Volume One (Third Edition), 1985, 261.

¹⁴⁹ *Oba* Gideon Olorunmola Esemikose, the *Oba* of Iyah-Gbedde of Ijumuland, interview by Olawole Famule, 30 July 2004.

Both explanations clearly illustrate the uniqueness of the social and political organization among the Oo kun Yoruba communities in contrast to what operates among the other Yoruba societies in Southwestern Nigeria. For instance, there are copious historical documents that show that at one time or the other, most of the Yoruba rulers in Southwestern Nigeria did exercise superiority over their neighboring communities and in some cases even claimed the ownership of their neighbors (as their slaves) after victorious inter-group wars. In fact, it is only from the beginning of the twentieth century, with the intervention of the British colonial administrators and the amendment of the Nigeria's native laws and customs, that it was declared illegal for one community to pay land tributes or royalties to the other. The constitution affirmed that the land belongs to the government, not a private individual.

Religious Beliefs and Practices:

The Oo kun Yoruba peoples strongly hold the belief that there are two hundred and one (201) divinities, which they refer to as *Ebo* and on rare occasions as *Orisa*. In contrast, the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria refer to the spiritual beings interchangeably as *Orisa* and *Imole/Imale* (the short form of *Irunmole*). In actual fact, the term *Imole*, as conceptualized by the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria, has its linguistic etymology in two Yoruba words, *Irun* and *Imole* (*Irun + Imole*). The former (*Irun*), at the exoteric level, means 'four hundred' and at the spiritual or esoteric level means 'four hundred and one', while the latter (*Imole/Imale*) means 'divinities'. Thus, the word *Irunmole* clearly

¹⁵⁰ Otitoju, *The Okun People of Nigeria*, 2002, 3.

illustrates the belief of Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria in the figure of the spirit beings as numbering four hundred and one.

It is interesting to also note that while the word *Imole* exists within the rubric of the Ookun Yoruba peoples' body of the spirit beings, they conceptualize the word differently in that the *Imole* to them are specifically 'female divinities'. The examples include *Yeye* (Spirits of the Great Mothers or of the Mother Earth, *Ile*) and *Ofosi* (Goddess of the River).

Another aspect distinguishing the Ookun Yoruba divinities from those of the other Yoruba subgroups is in the abodes of the spirit beings, which they understand as comprising the natural environments, such as forests, rivers, trees, hills, and so on. In contrast, their Yoruba counterparts in Southwestern Nigeria as earlier elaborated, strongly hold that some categories of spirit beings, the examples of the primordial divinities and ancestors, live in heaven.

The Ijumu Northeastern Yoruba

The Ijumu people share the borderlands in the northwest with the Yagba; northeast with the Ikiri; east with the Bunu and Owe; southwest and west with the Akoko and Ekiti Yoruba respectively, and with the non-Yoruba Ebira culture group (Map 1.1). As earlier mentioned, the Ijumu people belong to the Ookun Yoruba-speaking groups that live in the western bank of the Niger-Benue confluence region (Maps 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3).

Essentially for administrative convenience and historical reference, the Ijumuland is categorized into three sections—Ijumu-Aarin ('Ijumu in the mid point'); Ijumu-Oke

(‘Ijumu in the upper zone’), and Ijumu-Gbedde (Map 1.5). The Ijumu-Aarin that is located along the eastern side of the land (Ijumuland) comprises the following communities: Iyamoye, Ekinrin-Adde, Ilaga-Adde, Egbeda Egga, Iffetedo, Iffe, Ikoyi, Iyara, Okemeta-Adde, Otun-Adde, and Odo-Adde. Situated along the south side of the Ijumuland, the Ijumu-Oke encompasses the following communities: Igga, Ogidi, Igbolaare, Ayere, Arima, Ogale, and Aduge, while in the north side are the following Gbedde communities: Okoro-Gbedde, Agirigbon Oke, Araromi, Odokoro, Aiyetoro-Gbedde, Ayeh, Iyah-Gbedde, Iddo, Ayegunle-Gbedde, Iluhafon, and Ayedayo.

Introducing the Ijumu people to me, His Royal Highness, *Oba* Gidion Olorunmola Esemikose, the *Oloof* Iyah -Gbedde Ijumu, has described them figuratively as belonging to the same family, whose ancestral fathers that migrated from Ile-Ife, all first settled at Iyamoye, the Ijumu western gateway city, before they later peacefully separated. He added further that they (Ijumu people) all have common social, political, and religious institutions. This concise introduction influenced or informed my categorization of the following discussions on the Ijumu people into four subheadings—history of origin, social organization, institution of the *Oba* (king) and chiefs, and spiritual beliefs and practices.

History of Origin

The Northeastern Yoruba group refers to the Ijumu people as originating from three brothers, whom *Oba* (King) Gideon Olorunmola Esemikose has identified as triplets born

into the *Olu Ode*¹⁵¹ family in Ile-Ife, who migrated to the Ijumu-Ookunland many years ago. Other informants, such as Chief Samuel Olorunmola Babalola, the *Elekula* of Ekinrin in Ekinrin-Adde Ijumu and Chief Raphael Ibimode, the *Olori-Odo* of Iyamoye, have recognized these Ile-Ife immigrants as belonging to different families or clans, who jointly decided to relocate and found Ijumuland. All of the informants have, however, unanimously proposed that these Ijumu first settlers must have left Ile-Ife city, mythical origin of the Yoruba, for what is now known as Ijumuland for the reasons best known to them, which may have included but are not limited to seeking political, social, and economic independence.

On getting to *Iyaa*, now called Iyamoye, some informants said that these Ijumu first settlers first settled there for many years before they later separated and established their respective settlements—Adde, Ogidi, and Gbedde—that now constitute the three Ijumu subgroups. Some others, however, have thought differently. For instance, all my Iyamoye informants said that on getting to the foot of a large rock that is now called *Oke-Aro* the eldest or the most senior of the three migrants, by the name Oyeniyi, was captivated by the rock's transcendental appearance. Thus he called on his fellow migrants, “*in ora ara oin, oke ibei ni ma ro si o*”¹⁵² (meaning, ‘my fellow brethren, enough of wandering around the forests; it is at the foot of this hilly rock that I will make my home’). As Oyeniyi stayed behind in *Oke-Aro* (at the base of the rocky hill), so the other two also separated, one turning left, northwards, and the other turning right, down south. *Oke-Aro* that is now known as Iyamoye, later grew enormously in population to the extent that it

¹⁵¹ “*Olu-Ode*” is the Yoruba chieftaincy title, whose holder is the head of all the community warriors (*Eso*) and who is responsible for leading the *Eso* in the inter-group wars.

¹⁵² Otitoju, 154.

grown into seventeen different settlements or clans that include *Ehigba, Idofin, Ihanlu, Aaye, Itegba, Igbaro, Ilaagbon, Ejo, Oke-Aro* and so forth.

Identified by the Gbedde people as the most senior of these Ile-Ife migrants, the one that departed northwards was a great hunter, who later discovered a particular site called *Igbo Ibiti* or *Igbe Ode* (both mean ‘hunter’s forest’) to be very good for hunting game and for farming. Thus he decided to settle there permanently. This part of Ijumuland is what grew in size and population to be known today as Gbedde (short form of *Igbe-Ode*). It used to comprise about two hundred and forty communities. However, as a result of the Nupe perennial attacks and raids on the Ijumu settlements, in search of prisoners of wars, which they sold away and at times used domestically as their own slaves, more than one hundred and forty Gbedde communities were now extinct, completely wiped out. The affected communities include Ere-Sehanu, Iuhase, Erewe, Ijemu, Igbo-Awo, Okekuta, Iuhagba, Efesi, Ere, Okega, Ilomu-Akuku, Epete, and Igbo-Ihanlu, among others. It was the British intervention on January 13th, 1897 that put an end to these incessant inter-group wars, especially in the Niger-Benue confluence region. From then on, inter-group wars and/or slave raids were declared illegal by the British, who took over the political administration not only of the Niger-Benue confluence culture groups, but also of the whole of Nigeria from 1897. The Colonial administration, however, terminated on October 1st, 1960, when Nigeria secured its independence.

The third of these Ile-Ife migrants who turned right, described by some of my informants, especially from Gbedde and Iyamoye communities as the youngest of the Ile-Ife migrants, founded Ogidi communities, after which he turned left again and founded

the Adde communities, which include Ekinrin-Adde, Iyara, Ikoyi, Iffe, Igbeda-Egga, and others. However, the natives of the above mentioned communities have vehemently described as untrue that the founder of the Adde group was the youngest of the three migrants from Ile-Ife and that he founded the other communities, such as Ikoyi, Iffe, Iyara, and Egbeda-Egga. For instance, Chief Samuel Olorunmola Babalola of Ekinrin-Adde told me that Akinrin, one of the descendants of Oduduwa (of Ile-Ife), was the founder of Ekinrin-Adde communities, who left Ile-Ife directly for Adde land. He explained further that the community that Akinrin founded was/is called Ekinrin; and that it was from Ekinrin that other Adde communities, such as Adde town, Odon, Ilojo, Ilufe, Iloho, Igaga, Okega, Okere, Ewuta, and Aku communities among others, sprang up.

Neither did the people of Ikoyi community accept this story of ‘the three migrants from Ile-Ife who founded the Adde, Ogidi, and Gbedde’, as all my informants from this nodal small town emphasized that their ancestral father, called by the name Aremo, was the founder of Ikoyi community. They explained that Aremo was a famous hunter who left his home in Ile-Ife for Ijumaland on hunting expedition, where he founded *Okesala* community. This settlement was located on top of the mountain of the same name, about three miles away from the present location of the town. The *Okesala* people later moved down from the hill at the end of the Nupe wars around 1899. They called their new settlement Ikoyi. The words ‘Aremo’ (name of the founder of *Okesala*, the Ikoyi people’s old site) and ‘Ikoyi’ (the new site) have some significance if looked from Yoruba traditional points of view. One, Aremo is a Yoruba name for the first male child born into a family, thus, by extension in the eyes of the Ikoyi people, suggesting that the founder of

their community was the most senior of all the Ile-Ife migrants who left for the Ijumuland. Two, and the last, Ikoyi is a name of the historical and ancient Yoruba town of which the present location is unknown. The Yoruba strongly believe that this now extinct town breeds all of the most famous warriors (*Eso*), dead or alive, in Yorubaland. Thus, many Yoruba today named their communities after Ikoyi, an allusion to the idea that their ancestral fathers who founded the town were great warriors and descendants of the historic Ikoyi. The Yoruba Ikoyi towns today include Ikoyi-Ijumu, Ikoyi-Eko, and Ikoyi in Oshun State, among others. In fact, the allusion of Ikoyi as a community that breeds great warriors is illustrated in the town's praise poem (*Oriki*):

*Eso Ikoyi won kii gb'ofa leyin,
Gbangawaju ni won fii gba ota.
Oju Oni'Koyi ina, eyin-in re oorun,
Oni'Koyi se ee r'ogun ta bee r'ogun?*

[English translations: The Ikoyi warriors are never afraid of the war fronts, as they receive bullets on their chests without killing them or making any visible wound on their body, so are their physical appearances dreadful to create horror or terror in the minds of their opponents. Yet, they always appear very strong and unmoved in the time of wars, to the extent that they are always at home with long and incessant wars.]

Thus, changing the town's name from Okesala to Ikoyi further corroborates their strong belief, like other Ijumu people, that the Ikoyi community is not subordinate to other Ijumu or Ooko settlements or communities.

What these diverse historical accounts suggest is that, in spite of the general belief that all the Ijumu people have a common ancestral origin, each community lives independent of each other, having its own head or ruler (*Oba*, *Olu*, or *Obaro*), and each head or ruler manages his own domain. John Otitoju corroborates this argument when he wrote that

every Ijumu or Ookun unit or community lives “independent of each other with its own social organization though with bonding similarities.”¹⁵³

Social Organization

One of the most common attributes shared by the entire Ijumu communities is the way in which each community is divided into three sections—*Otun*, *Ohi*, and *Ona* (right, left, and middle). In some communities, such as Ikoyi and Egbeda-Egga, however, the names of the three sections are slightly different but still mean the same thing. For instance, at Egbeda-Egga, the three sections are called *Otun*, *Ohi*, and *Igbede*, while in Ikoyi, they are referred to as *EgburuAkota*, and *Odokoyi*. Likewise each section comprises different clans, ranging from five to as many as twenty, each belonging to one of the three sections of the community. The following exemplifies this point. Ikoyi community comprises seven clans listed as follows: *Iheka-Agba*, *Emebu*, *Iresa*, *Omo-Ajagba*, *Iheka-Omode*, *Omoebe*, and *Igbeka*, each belonging to the *Egburu*, *Akota*, or *Odokoyi* section. In Gbedde, the following clans or settlements constitute *Otun*: Ayetoro-Gbedde, Otun-Gbedde, Iya-Gbedde, Ijemu-Gbedde, and Omibo-Gbedde, while *Ohi* section comprises Odokoro, Agirigbon, Okoro, Ayeh, and Odogbo clans. Likewise, *Ona-Gbedde* encompasses Ayegunle and Oda communities. In Adde, *Otun* section comprises Idiharan, Ilaakun, and Alefere; *Ohi* consists of Ilaga, Iloho, and Okedagba, while *Ona* embraces the whole of Ekinrin, Ilufe, Abudo, Okenare, and Iloja communities.

¹⁵³ Otitoju, 3.

Whenever something, such as public infrastructures like electricity transformers or water bore holes, are to be shared among the three sections that constitute each of the Ijumu communities, they are shared equally. The same goes for leadership, such as the community's kingship position, which must be rotated among the three sections of *Otun*, *Ohi*, and *Ona* of a given town. This last example will be fully discussed under the subheading, 'institution of the *Oba* (king) and chiefs'.

Some social institutions associate with the various occupations practiced by the Ijumu people, such as farming, hunting, cotton spinning and dyeing, cloth weaving, and palm-wine tapping, among others. The practitioners of each of these professions constitute themselves into an association or organization called *Egbe* (literally, 'age-set' or 'age-group'). In practice, however, the members of a given *Egbe* do not have to be in the same age brackets. For instance, I interacted with some young high school graduates who identified themselves as belonging to *Egbe Ode* (hunters' guild or association). They explained further that some of their association's members are old enough to be their grandfathers. Thus, *Egbe* in this context means 'a group of people, irrespective of their ages, having a common interest'. A given group member participates in the activities, such as funeral ceremony, house warming, baby shower or naming, wedding ceremony, and so on, that concerned a group member. Unfortunately, most of these occupationally-related associations are gradually becoming extinct, while some have even completely vanished—for example the *Egbe Ahunso Ipo* (the association of the sacred hand-woven red cloth weavers).

Relating the significance of the palm wine tapping guild to me, one of its members by the name of *Iya Dapo* (Dapo's mother), whose palm wine shop is located at Ekinrin-Adde, said that the guild helps to regulate the quality of palm wine that is sold out to consumers. She elaborated that but for the sanctions accompanied by heavy fines, some palm wine producers would not have minded diluting their palm wine with too much water with a view to making more money at the expense of selling to the general public products of an inferior quality.

Institutions of the *Oba* (King) and Chiefs

As the same or very similar social organizational trait is shared among all of the Ijumu communities, so also are their distinctive institutions of the *Oba* (king) and chiefs. First, like other Yoruba groups, the Ijumu people are led by the *Oba* (kings) called by different titles from one community to the next, such as *Olu*, *Olo*, or *Ala* ('the owner or controller of') and *Obaro* ('the head or leader'), all having the same or similar meaning. The following examples better illustrate this point. The title of the *Oba* (king) of the entire Gbodedeland is called the *Olugbede* of Igbedeland, at present in the person of His Royal Highness Oba Solomon Olorunyomi. The king of Ayetoro-Gbedde bears the title, the *Olu* of Ayetoro-Gbedde, presently in the person of *Oba* J. O. Akanmode, while the king of Iyah-Gbedde also bears the title, the *Olu* of Iyah-Gbedde, currently in the person of His Royal Highness *Oba* Gideon Olorunmola Esemikose. Others in this category of *Olu*, *Olo* or *Ala* include the *Oloyo* of Okoro-Gbedde, Chief Peter Ajibade, the *Ologidi* of Ogidi, Oba Adeyemi Jegede, and the *Alayere* of Ayere, among others. Belonging to the category

of the *Obaro* title are the *Obaro* of Egbeda-Egga, *Oba* Omosanna and the *Obaro* of Iyamoye, the Late *Oba* Salaudeen Obatoyinbo, whose Regent (*Adele Oba*) is Chief Kazeem Omobewojo, the *Obaade* of Iyamoye.

However, there are two major aspects in which the institution of the *Oba* (king) among the Ijumu Yoruba is different from that which operates among the Yoruba communities in Southwestern Nigeria. One, the kingship positions among the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria have been designated to some specific families and clans, commonly called “the royal families or clans.” In contrast, in the Ijumu communities, the position of an *Oba* (king) is rotated among the three sections of the town, *Otun*, *Ohi*, and *Ona*; accordingly, by extension, it is also rotated among the entire clans and families, which embrace a given community. Two, unlike among the Yoruba *Oba* (kings) in the Southwestern Nigeria, where some kings have to obtain the staffs of office (*Opa-Ase*) from their neighboring kings that are traditionally rated as superior to them, no king in one Ijumu town is subordinate or superior to the other.

Next is the Ijumu chieftaincy institution as a whole that comprises the *Oba*, *Olu*, *Olo* or *Obaro* (king, head or owner of a given community), along with his traditional council of chiefs, whom he delegates his authority and from whom he seeks advice. In contrast to the two classes of the chieftaincy institutions among the Yoruba communities in Southwestern Nigeria, called *Oloye-Giga* (high chiefs), and *Ijoye* or *Oloye* (minor chiefs), there are four classes in each Ijumu community, as in other Oo kun Yoruba communities. However, the name of each class, even though it means the same, is different from one Ijumu community to the next. The following examples from two of the Ijumu

communities better elucidate this assertion. The Iyamoye chieftaincy institution comprises four classes apart from the king with the title, *Obaro* (the royal head). They include the *Ipogun*, *Oye Keji*, *Olorota*, and *Ehekun*. The Iyamoye *Ehekun* comprises four members; each rated very close to the *Obaro* (king), but not the same as the *Obaro*. The *Ehekun* positions to the *Obaro* are like the Ministers to the Prime Minister. There are five major clans that constitute Iyamoye—*Oke Aro*, *Aaye*, *Idofin*, *Ijemu*, and *Igbeti*. Thus, each clan produces one *Ehekun*. The rule is, whichever clan produces the *Obaro* (king) cannot produce an *Ehekun* at the same time and vice versa. The *Orota* is third in rank to the king (*Obaro*) and next in rank to the *Ehekun*. Known as *Obrota* (‘member of the council of the high chiefs’), one who is installed into the rank of *Orota* is traditionally qualify to wear the long red cap that is called *Odi* (Figure 5.1). Since this high chieftaincy emblem is rare among the Yoruba chiefs in Southwestern Nigeria, it could be argued that the Ijumu and other Ookun Yoruba high chiefs evidently adopted the tradition from their non-Yoruba Igala neighbors, where the long red caps are commonly wore by the high chiefs.

Even though the names of the chieftaincy titles and ranks among the people of Adde-Ijumu are different from those of their Iyamoye Ijumu neighbors, they essentially mean the same and are of the same number—five grades. They are listed as follows from the highest to the lowest rank. The *OluAdde* (king of the Addeland) is the head of all the Adde people—the titled and non-titled holders.

Next in rank to the *Olu Adde* are the *Iwarefa* (‘we are six members’). They are so called with reference to the number of the members that constitute the rank in the olden

days that used to be six. Nowadays, the members of *Iwarefa* are more than six; but the rule is, the same number of members must be elected from each of the three sections that comprise the Addeland—the *Otun*, *Ohi*, and *Ona*. For instance, assuming the total number of the *Iwarefa* members are six, two members must come from each of the *Otun*, *Ohi*, and *Ona* sections. The rank of the *Iwarefa* to the *Olu Adde* is just exactly like that of the Iyamoye *Ehekun* to the *Obaro* (Iyamoye king).

The rank of the *Iwareje* ('we are seven') is next to the *Iwarefa*. While the *Iwarefa* are clans' heads, responsible to the overall head, the *Olu Adde*, the *Iwareje* function as wards' heads, taking instructions from the *Iwarefa* and thus, being responsible to them. Like the rank of the *Iwarefa*, each of the three sections of the Addeland must be equally represented—two members from each section, while the king (*Olu Adde*) is given the privilege of selecting the seventh member from any of the three sections. Like the *Olorota* in Iyamoye and in the entire Ookunland, as soon as one is initiated into the rank of the *Iwareje*, one is traditionally qualified to wear the long red cap (*Odi*). Thus, the *Adde's Iwareje* is the same as the *Olorota* in other parts of the Ijumu and Ookunland as a whole.

The next rank to the *Iwareje* is the *Igemo Nla* ('the high *Igemo*'). Thus, the members in this rank of which there is no limit in number, are responsible to the *Iwareje*. Like the *Iwarefa* and *Iwareje*, however, each of the three sections of the Addeland, the *Otun*, *Ohi*, and *Ona*, must be equally represented.

The *Igemo Wuru* ('common *Igemo*') is the lowest chieftaincy title in Addeland. It is the same as the rank of the *Ipogun* in Iyamoye as well as in other Ijumu communities.

This rank is the first chieftaincy title bestowed on an individual male member of the Adde group. As soon as one is installed into this rank, one is watched regularly by the chief's makers. If they find that one is very responsible and capable, they will offer the holder of the *Igemo Wuru* the second rank, *Igemo Nla*, and in that order if one continues to exhibit an enviable character. If by the time after which one has been installed into the position of *Iwarefa*, the *Olu Adde* stool becomes vacant and it was one's clan's turn to produce the next king (*Olu Adde*), it is possible for one to be nominated and installed as the *Olu Adde*.

It could be argued that this chieftaincy arrangement, as different from that of the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria, is a product of inter-cultural diffusion in the Niger-Benue confluence region. For instance, a parallel could be found among the Igala culture group, where the early political system in Idah (the Igala capital) was the one in which the political powers of the territory were in the hands of the *Igala Mela* (the nine Igala chiefs). It has been observed that each of them was selected from each of the nine clans that once comprised the Igalaland.¹⁵⁴ In the same way, the Ijumu *Olorota*, or to be more specific, the Ekinrin-Adde Ijumu's *Iwarefa* or *Iwareje* that are uniformly selected from each of the three sections of the Adde land, are to the *Olu Adde* (king of Adde) what the *Igala Mela* were to the *Ata* (Igala king).

Ade Obayemi's archaeological work, which revealed overwhelming evidence of cultural interactions between the Oo kun Yoruba and their non-Yoruba Igala neighbors, has suggested the existence of settlements of Igala-speaking peoples on the western bank

¹⁵⁴ P.A. Oguasha, "Igala in the Pre-Colonial Era," *West African Journal of Archaeology* Vol. 18 (1988): 144.

of the Niger-Benue confluence region, where the present Ookun Yoruba peoples inhabit.¹⁵⁵ It is therefore not an overstatement to assert that the Ijumu chieftaincy institution is evidently a carry-over of the pre-Colonial Igala political institution of the *Igala Mela*.

Spiritual Beliefs and Practices

As defined by J. G. Frazer, religion is “a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man, which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.”¹⁵⁶ This definition is relevant to the Ijumu people’s main reason for spiritual beliefs and practices, as will be explained in this section of chapter four.

It could be noted that the weightiest problem confronted by the Ijumu people during the precolonial era was human-inspired, having to do with the Nupe’s incessant raids on the land. The effects range from the abnormal reduction in the population of the Ijumu people to loss of substantial aspects of their indigenous culture, specifically spiritual beliefs and practices. John Otitoju has corroborated the former as he wrote:

The most noticeable effect of Nupe hostility to the people of Ijumaland was the large-scale depopulation and extinction of many towns and villages. In Gbedde country, for example, of some two hundred and forty (240) populous villages and towns, over 150 (one hundred and fifty) were wiped out completely...Others whose few inhabitants came back 15 (fifteen) years after the end of the war were too few to live in their former towns. They formed new settlements. For instance, Ayetoro (meaning ‘The world is at peace’), of today has mixed population of remnants from destroyed towns and villages of Gbedde namely *Ilese, Ido, Iresi, Alo, Iluhafon, Ikoko, Ikotun,*

¹⁵⁵ Obayemi, “States and Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area,” *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, 1980, 151.

¹⁵⁶ Frazer J. G, *The Golden Bough*, Volume 1 (Third Edition) (London, 1911), 227, quoted in G. J. Afolabi Ojo. *Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis* (Ile-Ife and London: University of Ife and University of London Press Ltd., 1966), 158.

*Ilemi, Ilotin, Mopa, Gbedde, Ewekoro, Ijemu, Ilupin, Idondi, Oye, Oka, and Eyindon.*¹⁵⁷

The latter is exemplified in the way in which the Ijumu returnees from the Nupeland, who were previously captured by the Nupe slave raiders, but freed by the British Administration after its intervention in the late 1897, came back to their land with Islamic religion, the only acceptable religion of the Nupe, and by extension, of their slaves—the Ijumu war captives.

Consequently, the Islamized Ijumu returnees, upon their arrival to their homeland, not only completely lost their Ijumu Yoruba traditional religious beliefs and practices; they also successfully converted to Islam, as did most of their friends and relatives. This compelled the latter to either abandon their traditions or combine them with Islam.

However, in spite of these encumbrances on the Ijumu traditional religious beliefs and practices, my recent field research in Iyamoye, Ekinrin-Adde, Egbeda-Egga, Iffe, Ikoyi, Iyara, Ogidi, and Iyah-Gbedde underscored that no matter what, a good number of the Ijumu people cannot abandon their indigenous traditions. The recent religious war that broke out between the Islamic community and *Egungun* society of Iyamoye better illustrates this view. The brotherhood relationship between the two religious groups began to go sour when the Muslim society of the *Ihanlu* clan ruled that the annual festival for *Egungun* (*Odun Egungun*) must cease as it was in neighboring Ijumu communities like Ikoyi and Ayegunle, where it had been banned in around the year 1945. The latter vowed that in as much as they do not go to the mosques and disturb the Muslims, they would rather lay down their lives and fight for their religion—*Egungun*, than abandon it.

¹⁵⁷ Otitoju, 6.

The battle finally ensued when two masquerades were brutally attacked at the *Ihanlu* quarters. As soon as the members of the *Egungun* society heard the news, they launched a deadly attack on the *Ihanlu* Muslims group, leaving not less than ten people seriously injured on both sides at the end of the battle. Yet, the event also resulted in both religious groups remaining enemies until this day.

I provide as follows detailed information on the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Ijumu people from the following communities: Iyamoye, Ekinrin-Adde, Egbeda-Egga, Iffe, Ikoyi, Iyara, Ogidi, and Iyah-Gbedde.

Iyamoye

The gateway to the Yoruba communities in Southwestern Nigeria, the city of Iyamoye shares borderlands with Omuo-Oke in Ekiti State and Ekinrin-Adde in the west and east sides respectively (Map 1.4 and 1.5). Principally as a result of the advent of Islam and Christianity in around 1898 in Ijumuland, many of the spirit beings known to the people of Iyamoye had completely died out. Nonetheless, prominent among those that survived the tides of time and are still worshipped today are *Orunya* and *Oju Alaro*, *Awaja*, and *Egungun*.

The spirit being *Orunya* is associated with *Oke-Ara* (Arad Hill). The people of Iyamoye hold that their ancestral father *Oyenyi* discovered the *Oke-Ara* and lived at the foot for the rest of his life. *Oju Alaro* (literally, 'face of the *Alaro*') on the other hand is believed to be the spirit of the ancestor *Oyenyi*, whose grave site (*Oju Orori*) is thought to be located at the foot of the *Oke-Ara* (where he lived). Thus, the Iyamoye people do worship

annually at this site, with the strong belief that whatever they request from the spirits of *Orunya* and *Oyeniwi* will be granted them. Similarly, in times of disasters, such as the outbreak of smallpox, chickenpox, and other diseases, the Iyamoye people, through the *Aworo Orunyan* (*Orunya* chief priest), usually make ritual sacrifices to the duo spirits at the foot of *Oke-Aro* with the strong belief that the problem(s) will be solved at once.

Awaja is a spirit being associated with farm products, especially the new yams (*Emindin*). The Iyamoye people, who are predominantly farmers by profession, strongly hold that the spirit of *Awaja* is responsible for bountiful farm products. Thus, before the first harvest of the new yams, the *Awaja* spirit must first be invoked and worshipped for providing the rainwater and fertile land that enhances good harvests. The ritual sacrifices that are offered to the spirit being *Awaja* include a she-goat and palm wine. On the day of the ritual ceremony, both sacrifices were carried into the forest of *Awaja* (some three miles away from the Iyamoye town), where the shrine is located. The chief priest of the *Awaja* (usually the king) led the ritual by directing one of the attendants to slaughter a goat. He invoked the spirit of *Awaja* by sprinkling some of the animal blood and a cup of palm wine on the land/soil. Next, he petitioned the spirit being *Awaja* to bless his people (the farmers) with abundant crop harvests. The ritual concluded when the attendants cut the goat meat into sizable pieces and shared it among themselves.

Odun Egungun (festival for masquerades) is the most popular tradition in the city of Iyamoye. In order to avoid repetition of information, since the next chapter is exclusively concerned with the Ijumu *Egungun*, in which the city of Iyamoye is a part, I hereby postpone the discussion and will fully consider it in Chapter Five.

Ekinrin-Adde

The people of Ekinrin-Adde are the immediate eastern neighbors of the Iyamoye people (Maps 1.4 and 1.5). The popular spirit beings that were worshipped, and in some cases still worshipped in the town, include *Imole* and different types of *Egungun* that include *Ina-Oko*, *Onigabon*, and *Iro*, among others.

However, unlike at Iyamoye, where a particular time of the year is set aside for the ritual festival for masquerades (*Odun Egungun*), *Egungun* Ekinrin Adde come out of their shrines only on two occasions—during the funeral rites for the deceased titleholders and in times of environmental disasters. More light will be shed on this aspect in Chapter Five.

Literally meaning ‘owner of the land/earth’ or ‘one who understands the land/earth’, *Imole* is another popular spirit being that is venerated by the people of Ekinrin-Adde. The people (of Ekinrin-Adde), like other Ijumu and *Ookun* Yoruba, conceptualize *Imole* as the goddess of the land/earth. The devotees known by the common name *Onimole* (literally, ‘owner of *Imole*’) are predominantly women. They constitute themselves into different groups, which include *Asorin*, *Ogidi*, and *Agbigba*, among others. Being a female spirit being by gender, *Imole* is often addressed and eulogized by the *Onimole* as *Iye* (‘Great mother’). As will be illustrated in the next chapter, the devotees (*Onimole*) worship *Imole* essentially during the funeral ceremony of the community chiefs or titleholders (*Oloye/Ijoye Ilu*).

Egbeda-Egga

The community of Egbeda-Egga is located at the immediate eastern end of Ekinrin-Adde (Maps 1.4 and 1.5). The only two spiritual beings whose worships have survived the tides of Islam and Christianity were two, *Egungun* and *Imole*, until sometime in April 2004, three months prior to my arrival at the town, when the latter was suspended. It happened when some custodians of masquerade costumes (names withheld at the discretion of my informants who also want to remain anonymous for reasons best known to them), converted to Christianity. As they become convinced that the worship of other spirit beings other than Jesus Christ is idolatry, they collected as many masquerade costumes (*Eku Egungun*) as they could and discarded them in the forests (Figures 1.6, 7.1, 7.2, 7.9, and 8.1).

However, from the standpoint of *connective theory*, it can be argued that the custodians' become born again Christians was not the primary reason for trashing the costumes. The Ijumu's conceptualization of *Egungun* as *Eborá* ('forest spirit beings') best explains the rationale. The Ijumu understand masquerade costumes as the emblems of *Egungun* spirit beings, which dwell in the forests. Thus, when the new Christian converts trashed the costumes, by implication, they connected or relocate them (the masquerade costumes) back to where they really belong. That their primary, spiritual motive was to help connect or reconnect the costumes and by extension, the spirit beings, to their spiritual space (in the forest) is obvious in the way in which they (the costumes) were neatly packed inside the expensive wooden boxes and carefully laid in the forest

(Figure 8.1). If the owners' main intention is to destroy the costumes, they would have simply set them ablaze or flung them all over the forests.

Nonetheless, the operation did not completely affect my research on the festival for *Egungun* in the town, as I was able to take as many pictures of the discarded *Eku Egungun* as possible. In addition, the leader of the *Egungun* society in Igbede quarters (one of the three clans that comprise each of the two communities, Egbeda and Egga, that embrace the town) by the name Onimodamori Ayinmode gave me necessary information on the subject.

Even though the episode prevented me from observing the performance contexts of the *Egungun* in Egbeda-Egga, my findings will be fully analyzed in the last three chapters of the dissertation (chapters six, seven, and eight).

Imole worship is common among the women of Egbeda-Egga just as it is among their immediate Ekinrin-Adde western neighbors, where the ritual procedures are essentially the same. The leader of the cult group (*Onimole*) called *Iye-Mole* (literally, 'mother of *Imole*') led all rituals of *Imole*. The new initiates are mandated to learn by heart the praise poems (*Oriki*) of all the community titleholders so that at the instance of the death of any of them, especially during the funeral ceremony, the *Onimole* could chant the deceased *Oriki* correctly.

Iffe

The Iffe people are the immediate eastern neighbors of the people of Egbeda-Egga (Maps 1.4 and 1.5). The town is the birthplace of the late professor of archaeology and history,

Dr. Obayemi, who was also a one time Director of the Nigeria's Museum and Monuments. In spite of his laborious efforts to resuscitate the already lost traditions in the town, there was little or nothing to show for it immediately after his death on February 2nd 1998. I was informed that the community's ancestors were known to be ardent followers of the Yoruba *Ifa* (divination divinity), *Ogun* (iron and war divinity), and *Osanyin* (god of medicine) before the advent of Islam and Christianity at the close of the nineteenth century.

As part of his contributions to the development of Iffe Ijumu's traditions in particular and Yoruba history and culture in general, the late professor (Ade Obayemi) built a museum in the town, which he called *AKODI AFRIKA* (Figure 8.8). The term *Akodi* is a Yoruba word that means 'a very large house that is capable of accommodating a whole of a clan or lineage'. The huge and imposing size of the of the museum's structure alone leaves no doubt that the Yoruba *Akodi* may have influenced the owner as well as the builders (Figures 8.8 and 8.9). I was informed that the museum used to accommodate various archaeological and anthropological material cultures of the entire Ookun Yoruba. However, what I saw when I got there on July 4th 2004 would have even disheartened the iconoclasts (art destroyers)! Many if not all of the art pieces have rotted away, while giant elephant grasses have taken over the entire building premises (Figure 8.9). The last straw that broke the camel's back was that the Church Missionary Society has recently built a Church directly at the main entrance of the museum and since removed the museum's signpost and replaced it with the one that reads: ST. GABRIEL'S CHURCH

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF KABBA, IFFE-IJUMU (Figure 9.1). In one word, only two religions are at present recognized in the town —Islam and Christianity.

Ikoyi

The Ikoyi Ijumu people share the borderland with the people of Iffe Ijumu, their immediate western neighbors (Maps 1.4 and 1.5). In fact there is no visible separation, like buildings or bush, between the two communities; thus, it is only the people themselves that know where one community ends and where the other begins in terms of the geographical boundary.

The two most popular spirit beings, once ritualized in Ikoyi are *Ore* and *Egungun*. Also called *Oluwa* ('our savior'), *Ore* operates as the community's primordial divinity, whose spirit is embodied by an enormous rock that is known as *Okesala* ('the rock that protects whoever runs onto it'). As the name suggests, at the times of the Nupe invasions of the Ijumuland, the Ikoyi people always took refuge on top of this rock (*Okesala*), making their invaders withdraw with frustration, since their horses could not climb the hill. The protections which the Ijumu people frequently received from this rocky hill (*Okesala*), coupled with the fact that the site was the abode of their progenitor, Aremo, necessitated them to recognize it (*Okesala*) as the abode of *Ore* spirit being. In the past, every year before the beginning of the dry season, the time the Nupe usually launched the attacks on the Ijumu people, the people of Ikoyi made it a point of duty to worship *Ore*. Their belief was that the spirit being would reciprocate by protecting them from the Nupe slave raiders. Nowadays, *Okesala* has turned into an amusement park or a relaxing center.

People all over the country (Nigeria) visit the place round the year. Thus, it is now recognized as one of the Nation's natural identities. In other words, *Okesala* is to Nigerians what Niagara Fall is to Americans and Canadians.

Odun Egungun (festival for masquerades) had long ceased in Ikoyi. The mystery, however, is that none of my informants in the town, even the very old ones, of approximately between the age brackets of eighty (80) and one hundred (100) years old, could explain 'when' and 'why' the festival died out. The usual response that I got from each of them was: "*Won ti fi Eegun bu ni Ilu Ikoyi, ko si gbodo gberi mo alelae*" ('They have cursed the masquerade tradition in Ikoyi; hence, it must remain dead'). Each time I showed further interest to know the people that did curse the tradition, I mean those that my informants referred to as 'They' (*Won*), the regular answer was "I/we don't know." In fact a native of the town, the retired General Kupolati (who passed on February 2nd, 2005), advised that it is like beating a dead horse if I keep on pursuing the inquiry. He assured me that my informants would not tell me the reason(s) that necessitated the total elimination of *Egungun* tradition in Ikoyi, either because they do not know or they do not want to talk about it. He explained that he too had on many occasions, asked the same questions from his own father and that he had received nothing other than "I don't know." Thus, it is safer to conclude that the tradition of *Egungun* has become extinct in the Ijumu town of Ikoyi.

Other spirit beings recognized in Ikoyi include *Ohoi* (*Osanyin*), medicine divinity and *Odidaran*, whose worship corresponds with the new yam festival (*Odun Emindin*). Thus, by extension, *Odidaran* could be described as the divinity believed to aid bountiful

yam harvests. Both spirit beings (*Ohoi* and *Odidaran*), to some extent, are still worshipped this day.

Iyara

The Iyara people are the immediate eastern neighbors of the people of Ikoyi (Maps 1.4 and 1.5). The town itself is the headquarters of the Ijumu Local Government Council that was created by the Babangida¹⁵⁸ Administration in September 1991.

The aspect of the traditional religion still worshipped in Iyara is *Omo-Elepo* (literally, ‘the child of the oil palm seller’). This spirit being is a masquerade believed to have been brought to Iyara from the city of Iyamoye. At present, the ritual/festival of *Omo-Elepo* has been suspended till further notice. The reason for the suspension will be addressed in Chapter eight, under the subheading, ‘Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun* Today’. Because I was unable to observe *Omo-Elepo* from actual performance context or have any physical encounter with its costume (*Ekun-Eegun Omo-Elepo*) due to the festival’s suspension, the Iyara masquerade tradition is not among those that will be analyzed in subsequent chapters.

Ogidi

Located at the eastern part of the Ijumuland (Maps 1.4 and 1.5), Ogidi is very significant in the history of the Ijumu northeastern Yoruba people, especially in connection with the Nupe’s incessant attacks of the Ijumuland. For instance, the four hills that surrounded the

¹⁵⁸ “Babangida” is the last name of the military president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, whose administration created the Ijumu Local Government along with some others in 1991. Today, the country is a democratic nation, currently led by civilian president Olusegun Obasanjo.

town served as hideouts for the Ogidi people as well as their other Ijumu communities, specially in the year 1892, when the then *Etsu* Nupe (Nupe king), by the name Abubakar, launched a deadly attack on the Ijumuland.¹⁵⁹ For this reason, the main spirit being that was jealously worshipped annually by the people of Ogidi was *Oluwo*, the god of the rocks, whom they strongly believed as the spirit being who protected them against the attacks.

Nowadays, even in the absence of the inter-group wars, the Ogidi people still worship *Oluwo* annually. The *Oluwo* priest leads the worship by making ritual offerings of bean cakes (*Akara*) and blood of animal victims, such as goats (*Ewure*) and cocks (*Akuko-Adiye*) to the spirit being (*Oluwo*). The worshippers strongly hold the belief that the god of the rock (*Oluwo*) to whom the offerings are presented, will continue to protect the Ogidi people against human inspired-problems, such as witchcraft's antisocial activities and environmental or natural disasters, such as droughts, floods, earthquakes, and tornadoes.

Iyah-Gbedde

The town is located at the extreme northern part of Ijumuland (Maps 1.4 and 1.5), bordered with two other OoKun Yoruba groups, the Yagba and Ikiri in the northwest and northeast respectively. Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, before the repeated attacks launched on the entire Ijumu communities by the Nupe invaders, the people of Iyah-Gbedde recognized and worshipped two hundred and one (201) spirit beings. *Epa*,

¹⁵⁹ Paul Olorundami, *Ijumu Yesterday and Today*, 1971: 10-11.

Ori, Segede, Iroko, Ogun, Odofin, Irowo, Imole, and Oro Emindin are just a few examples.

Nowadays, the worship/practice of most of the spirit beings has died out with the exceptions of *Epa* masquerade, *Imole* female divinity), and *Oro Emindin* that is associated with new yam festival (*Odun-Emindin*).

It is a known fact that the Gbedde group, to which the people of Iyah-Gbedde belong, was mostly affected by the incessant attacks on the land by the Nupe slave raiders, is evident especially in the destruction of one hundred and sixty(160) of the two hundred and forty (240) densely populated communities. In spite of this devastation, the *Oloof* Iyah-Gbedde, *Oba* (king) Gideon Olorunmola Esemikose, has associated the Ijumu's success, in which the Nupe imperial power totally collapsed on January 13th, 1897, to the intervention of *Epa* masquerade. He proclaimed further that the Nupe warriors would have totally wiped out the whole of Gbeddeland but for the spiritual protection that they received from *Orisa Epa* (*Epa* divinity).

As established in this study, it could be summarized that there are three Ijumu communities where the traditions of *Egungun* are still prevalent. They include Iyamoye, Ekinrin-Adde, and Iyah-Gbedde. The study also reveals that the tradition is extinct in Egbeda-Egga. Thus, the next four chapters will be devoted to critical examinations and analyses of the *Egungun* traditions in Iyamoye, Ekinrin-Adde, and Iyah-Gbedde, with emphasis on the performance contexts, iconographical and aesthetic analyses, and functions of the masquerades.

CHAPTER V

**THE IJUMU NORTHEASTERN-YORUBA EGUNGUN I:
SPIRITUAL CONCEPTS AND PERFORMANCE CONTEXTS**

The focus of this chapter is on the spirituality and performance contexts of *Egungun* in Ijumu northeastern Yorubaland. It begins with the devotees' conceptualization of the *Egungun* as a religion. It next identifies the types of *Egungun* and concludes with their performance contexts, emphasizing the devotees' expectations following the completion of the rituals of *Egungun*.

Spiritual Concepts

In his view of the religious significance of art among the Yoruba, as it applies to other African peoples, Babatunde Lawal wrote: “(Yoruba) art is used to honor and to communicate with divinities (*Orisa*), whose spiritual support is deemed vital to individual and corporate survival.”¹⁶⁰ While this is true, the Ijumu *Egungun* as a form of artistic response to spirituality is much more. As a matter of fact, the Ijumu *Egungun* operate not just as a channel of communication with the spirit beings; their devotees regard them as spirit beings, called by different names that amplify their spirits' attributes. Examples abound. The Iyamoye-Ijumu people describe their *Egungun* as *Awaye-Amosa* (‘the primordial ancestors that came to the earth and never returned to the heaven’) and *Irin Kirin* (‘the indescribable and mysterious spirit beings, who look like

¹⁶⁰ Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 15.

iron but are certainly not'). The people of Ekinrin-Adde-Ijumu refer to the *Egungun* as *omo tuntun abowo pelupelu* (the sacred and holy beings, whose minds are as pure as that of a newly born baby). Their Egbeda-Egga neighbors address their *Egungun* as *Oke-Sewiliwili* (the spirit beings that dwell on top of the hills) and *Oni-Awaye-Aba* (the one that has been dwelling on earth before any man or woman was born). These divine attributes have unquestionably convinced the devotees of the masquerades' capability of meeting their spiritual needs. Elder Ayinmode Onimodamori, the leader of the masquerade society (*Aworo Egungun*) of the *Igbede* lineage in Egbeda-Egga, has implicitly reaffirmed this statement in an interview that I recently conducted with him:

Sometimes it infuriates me when the Christians persuade us (we), the traditional religion believers to abandon our spiritual beliefs and practices for their own as if theirs is superior to ours. My conclusion is that they are blackmailers; trouble makers, and hypocrites. They condemn and criticize other religions as if they are God, who has the ultimate power to judge the human beings. Have any of them gone to the heaven and verified that Christianity is the only religion that is acceptable to God? What if we *Egungun* devotees wake up one Sunday and go to the Churches in this town of Egbeda-Egga and condemn or disrupt their service just like they persistently attack ours? We did not doubt their proclamation that whatever they worship is good to them; why then should they doubt the efficacy of ours? Ironically, they condemned those that crucified Jesus Christ, yet they determinedly persecute other religions' practitioners.¹⁶¹

Also characteristic of the *Egungun* Ijumu, like other *Egungun* as well as the spirit beings in other Ookun Yoruba groups, is that they are believed to inhabit the natural environment, as in rivers, hills, and rocks, among others. Bayo Ijagbemi, a native of the Ikoyi town of Ijumu, corroborated this point as he stressed that the Ookun Yoruba

¹⁶¹ Ayinmode Onimodamori of *Igbede* lineage in Egbeda-Egga, interview by Olawole Famule, 10 July 2004.

peoples strongly believed that the spirit beings “live in forests, bodies of water (flowing or stagnant), mountains, and other inaccessible places of their recognized territory.”¹⁶²

The belief is better illustrated by the various names of the *Egungun* in the area that reference their terrestrial habitat. The examples include *Oro-Igi* (the spirit being that dwells inside the tree); *Ori-Igi* (the spirit being that lives on the tree); *Oke-Sewiliwili* (the spirit being that appears on top of the hill), and *Ina-Okò* (the spirit of the forests that glows like wildfire), among others.

Types of *Egungun*

There are three distinctive categories of *Egungun* in Ijumu communities with reference to their physical attributes, that is, the composition of their costumes (*Ekú-Egungun*). Hence, it should be noted that the categorization has nothing to do with their spiritual status, but rather is based on their physical appearance. These categories include *Egungun* Iyamoye, whose cloth-costumes are made of industrial-made clothes (Figure 1.4) and *Egungun* Ekinrin Adde and Egbeda-Egga, whose cloth costumes are a composite of locally hand-woven clothes and dyed or natural raffia fibers (*Iko*), with or without the wooden headdresses (Figures 1.5 and 1.6). Belonging to the third category are the *Epa* masquerades of Iya-Gbedde, whose costumes are a composite of palm fronds (*Moriwo*) and locally hand-woven cloths of which the *Aso Ipo* (the red sacred hand-woven clothes) are prominent (Figures 1.2 and 1.7).

¹⁶² Ijagbemi, “O-Okun Yoruba in Yoruba Art Historiography: History, Problems and Prospects,” 18.

Nonetheless, all the Ijumu *Egungun* have one peculiar common characteristic with regard to their formal appearance—the cloth of red or a related color must be included in the composition of the cloth-costume of each *Egungun* (Figures 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.7, and 1.8). In fact, some cloth costumes of *Egungun* are entirely of red color, such as the *Ina-Okò* in Ekinrin-Adde (Figure 2.6). In the past, say until 1960, the *Asò Ipo*, which is entirely of red, pink, maroon, or orange color, was required; but due to its scarcity nowadays, the industrial made red cloths are a possible substitute, as conspicuous in the cloth-costumes of the *Egungun* Iyamoye (Figure 1.4).

Performance Contexts and Analyses

To fully decipher the intentional aspects of African art, the place of the research approach that prioritizes the study of the performance contexts of African religions, rituals, festivals, or ceremonies, such as *Egungun*, where the art (masquerade costumes, music, and dance) vividly plays an important role, cannot be denigrated. As a matter of fact, it is the performance context of any given African religion that gives meaning to the visual arts incorporated into it. This explains why African art taken out of context and re-contextualized in the Western museums and galleries, more often than not, misrepresents the African ethos and worldviews which they are primarily created to illustrate. Donald Preziosi has corroborated this assertion when he described the art studied out of context “as a fragment, or a selection out of, some absent and fuller whole.”¹⁶³ Similarly, Philip Ravenhill has thought “that the initial examination of a traditional art form must be

¹⁶³ Donald Preziosi, “The Art of Art History,” *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 507.

devoted to the ideas of its creators and users.”¹⁶⁴ In other words, the ritual performance context in which the art is put to use better illustrates the ideas of the art’s creators and users.

Ritual performance context has attracted the interests of some scholars, especially of ritual theory and comparative religions, in recent time. Clifford Geertz, Fredric Jameson, Catherine Bell, and John Pemberton are a few examples. Geertz declared that ethos and worldview of any given culture are interconnected, in that both, arranged in various patterns or control mechanisms, fused together in the symbols.¹⁶⁵ Thus, to adequately decode the symbol(s) that embody a given ritual or religious ceremony or festival, it becomes imperative to examine step-by-step the phases, segments, or stages of that ritual performance context. Jameson, on the other hand, asserts that rituals or rites are like texts that can be read and understood.¹⁶⁶ This means that the meaning(s) (intrinsic or extrinsic) is/are right within any given ritual performance context(s). Following the leads of Geertz and Jameson, Bell stated that “ritual is to the symbols it dramatizes as action is to thought.”¹⁶⁷ In other words, what every ritual performance does is decode a given symbol(s). Likewise, Pemberton’s assertion aptly summarizes Geertz’s, Jameson’s, and Bell’s views:

In many respects ritual and, by extension, festivals are like myths in that they may be “read” as textual statements and interpreted in terms of the images, motifs, and structural patterns of which they are composed.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Phillip Ravenhill, “Baule Statuary Art: Meaning and Modernization,” *5 & 6 Working Papers in the Traditional Arts* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Inc. 1980), 1.

¹⁶⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (USA: BasicBooks, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1973), 44-127.

¹⁶⁶ Fredric Jameson, “The Ideology of the Text,” *Salmagundi* 31-32 (Fall 1975/Winter 1976): 205.

¹⁶⁷ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 32.

¹⁶⁸ Pemberton, “The Dreadful God and the Divine King,” *Africa’s Ogun: Old World And New*, second

In this section, I examine the performance contexts of the rituals or festivals for *Egungun* from the following Ijumu communities: Iyamoye, Ekinrin Adde, and Iyah-Gbedde. My intention is to elucidate the symbolic, spiritual implications of the contexts.

Odun Egungun in Iyamoye

Popularly known as *Odun Egungun* (festival for/of masquerades), the ritual performance context of *Egungun* in the Ijumu town of Iyamoye is held annually (*Odoodun*). At the advice of *Ifa* (Yoruba divinity of divination and of the practice of divination) through the King's *Ifa* priest (*AbalaolOlifa Oba*), the festival commences on July 19th, provided this date is not on Friday or Sunday, when the Muslims and Christians observe their weekly religious worships respectively. When I asked from an informant in the town by the name Mr. Bamidele Kaseem as to what would happen if the *Ifa* divinity were to choose a July 19th that falls on Friday or Sunday, he explained:

Ifa, the Yoruba god of wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and as well a great mathematician, who knows every day of the week and its corresponding calendar date of the past, present, and future, will not choose a July 19th that falls on Friday or Sunday for the commencement of the *Egungun* festival. He has never and can never make such a terrible mistake because He knows that Fridays and Sundays are for the Muslims and Christians respectively. Whenever a particular July 19th falls on a Friday or Sunday, *Ifa* invariably chooses the next day (July 20th) that falls on Saturday or Monday.¹⁶⁹

The festival lasts for seven consecutive days, with each day marked by specific ritual performance(s). Usually, when it is seventeen days prior to the commencement day of the festival, the leaders of all the six clans of the *Egungun* society from *Oke-Aro*,

expanded edition (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 106-107.

¹⁶⁹ Bamidele Kaseem of Iyamoye, interview by Olawole Famule, 21 July 2004.

Ilaagbon, Aaye, Ihanlu, Idofin, and Itegba), together with the King's *Abalao/Olifa* (*Ifa* priest) meet at a designated place, usually at the King's palace. The purpose of the meeting is to listen to the sacred words of *Ifa*, the divinity of divination, as to the most appropriate date to start the *Odun Egungun*. As soon as the date is confirmed, it is conveyed to *Obaro* (the Royal King of Iyamoye), who unquestionably agrees to the decision of the god of divination. That same day, the townspeople are notified accordingly. This preparatory rite of choosing and announcing the festival's commencement date is known as *Idijo Odun-Egungun*. There are three important reasons for this preparatory rite. The first, as earlier mentioned, is to seek the ultimate approval from the divination divinity (*Ifa*) that knows all the days of the year that are devoid of any imminent dangers. Second, the Yoruba believe that the odd days like 3rd, 7th, 17th and so forth, are the days when the spirit beings habitually release their spiritual forces or powers for the benefit of humankind. The third and last, seventeen days are fairly long enough for the devotees to fully prepare for the festival, since they need to harvest and store enough food crops that will last for the whole of the seven-day duration of the ritual. This time is also long enough for masqueraders to construct new masquerade costumes or sew any torn part(s) of those that were used the previous year(s).

The following performance contexts of the *Odun Egungun* in Iyamoye is based on what I observed in the town between July 19th and 25th, 2004 and on the data that I collected from my informants, most of whom are masqueraders or who belong to the masquerades' clans or lineages. They include the chief priests (*Aworo*) of *Egungun* from all the six clans that perform *Odun Egungun*, listed as follows: *Aworo Egungun-Ekiri*

(from *Okearo* clan); *Aworo Egungun-Ipobi* (from *Ilaagbon* clan), *Aworo Egungun Ehanle* and *Obanjá* (from *Aaye* clan); *Aworo Egungun-Aigba* (from *Ihanlu* clan); *Aworo Egungun Molako, Aigba, and Ipobi* (from *Idofin* clan), and *Aworo Egungun-Okutegba* (from *Itegba* clan). I also conducted intensive interviews with the town's regent (*Adele Oba*), Chief Kaseem Omobewojo who is also the *Obaade* of Iyamoye. [Note: the chieftaincy titles of *Obaade, Obadofin, Obajemu, Obagbeti*, and their chairman, *Obaro* (the town's king) are collectively called *Ehekun*. The *Obaro* is to the *Ehekun* council as the Prime Minister is to the council of ministers. However, in contrast to the council of ministers whereby any of the members could assume the position of the Prime Minister if the incumbent one is fired or dead, once a chief is promoted to the rank of an *Ehekun*, under no circumstance can he become the *Obaro*].

The most important days reserved for the main rituals of the *Egungun* include the first, third, seventh (and last) day of the festival, while the remaining four days are purely for entertainment, having no spiritual or any ritual importance. I examine as follows, the ritual(s) associated with each of the three days in that order.

First Day

The commencement day as well as its associated ritual(s) is collectively called *Idaro-Egungun*. Literally, *Idaro-Egungun* means 'the invitation of the *Egungun* into the public space; another word that is used interchangeably with *Idaro-Egungun* is *Pipe-Egungun* ('calling of the *Egungun*'). From the spiritual or ritual point of view, the *Idaro-Egungun* is the invocation of the spirits of *Egungun*, calling or inviting them from the spirit realm

into the world of the living (*Ile-Aye*). In contrast to the ordinary day to day words (*Oro*) that we verbalize, the *Idaro-Egungun* operate as sacred and spiritually powerful words known as *Ohun* (also pronounced *Oun*). They contain the spiritual force, energy, or power (*Ase*) that makes things happen immediately. They can be interpreted as commanding words that require an immediate action or answer, just like when the car's ignition is turned on with the ignition key and the engine starts immediately. It is believed that whenever these words are verbalized, the caller or speaker is certain that the spirit, to whom the words are directed, as applicable to the *Egungun*, has to respond instantly.

There are two types of the ritual patterns of the *Idaro-Egungun*—one is characteristic of the *Egungun Ekiri* (from *Okearo* clan) and the other is emblematic of the *Egungun* in the remaining five clans that celebrate the *Egungun* ritual festival in Iyamoye. The rituals are held early in the morning of the first day of the festival. Typically, a room in the house of the *Egungun* clan's leader is set aside for this purpose, inside of which a bare mud platform stands as the altar or shrine of the spirit of the *Egungun*. On top of the altar is a clay container in which the emblems of the spirit are kept, leaning against the wall (Figure 1.9). The emblems are made of special sticks (*Atori*) that have been well-designed with incisions and patinated with the blood of votive animals (Figure 1.9).

When it is about the time for the *Egungun Ekiri* (*Ekirimasquerade*) to perform the rituals of the *Idaro-Egungun*, the leader (head of the *Okearo* clan's *Egungun*) dons the *Ekiri* costume while each of the attendants also don a masquerade costume and stand behind him (*Ekirimasquerader*). Next, he breaks a kola nut, casts it inside the pot that

contains the spirit's emblems, and jumps up three times. Each time he jumps up, he shouts at the top of his voice:

Ekiri wami daro, oro wa!
Ekiri wami daro, oro wa!
Ekiri wami daro, oro wa!

[Spirit of *Ekirimasquerade*, show up and accept this ritual sacrifice!
 Spirit of *Ekirimasquerade*, show up and accept this ritual sacrifice!
 Spirit of *Ekirimasquerade*, show up and accept this ritual sacrifice!]

As soon as he completes the spirit's invocation rituals, all the attendants respond at once by following the lead of *Egungun Ekiri*—jumping up three times, each jump accompanied by the shout, '*Ekiri wami daro, oro wa!*' From then on for the next seven days, any *Egungun* from the *Okearo* clan can go out and perform on the streets on a daily basis. The performances include the masquerades' whipping of their followers and spectators alike, dancing to the rhythms of the drums, and moving from one house to the other, collecting gifts of money, local gin (*Oti-Ogogoro*), peanuts (*Epa*), walnuts (*Awusa*), and other food crops that are grown and harvested at Iyamoye.

The rituals of breaking and casting of the kola nut as well as of jumping up three times by the *Egungun Ekiri* and the other masquerades from the rest five clans are very similar. However, in contrast to the sacred invocation words (*Ohun*) of the *Egungun Ekiri* stated above, the *Egungun* from the other clans shout differently as follows:

Ho ho ho mo daro!
Ho ho ho mo daro!
Ho ho ho mo daro!

[I invoke the spirit of *Egungun* with this ritual offering!
 I invoke the spirit of *Egungun* with this ritual offering!
 I invoke the spirit of *Egungun* with this ritual offering!]

The difference between the two types of the sacred words of *Egungun* (*Ohun Egungun*) notwithstanding, the end result of both rituals is to invoke the spirits of the *Egungun*. It can also be argued that the jumping up and shouting of the *Ohun Egungun* three times as well as the first, third, and seventh day of the seven-day duration of the festival attests to the spiritual allusion of ‘odd numbers’. This structured ritual pattern, however, is not peculiar to only the people of Iyamoye but to the entire Yoruba.

Third Day

The third day of the festival, like other Yoruba religious ceremonies in which the ritual performance contexts last for at least three days, is known as the *Ita-Oro* (also literally, ‘the third day of the ritual(s)'). This is the day when all members of each clan that have and worship the *Egungun* as well as their in-laws, friends, and well-wishers converge at the head of the clan’s domicile to eat and drink together. In fact the highly expensive clothes and body adornments worn by the celebrants (the entire *Egungun* clan’s members), are a pointer that the third day of the festival is unusually special.

It was not possible for me to attend the *Ita-Egungun* in all the six *Egungun* clans of Iyamoye, since they all were held around the same hours of the day, between 8:20 and 9:50 in the morning of the July 21st, 2004. Thus, the following information is based on the *Ita-Egungun* that I attended at the *Aaye* clan, where the *Egungun Ehanle* and *Obanjo* are worshipped. Pa (Elder) Obarun, the oldest member of the clan, could have led the ritual, but he had a very serious body pain that resulted from an abscess formed after receiving a fever injection from a local nurse (*Noosi Kosongbo*). He later died two or

three days after the last day of the festival. In fact, he was in bed throughout the duration of the interview that I had with him (Figure 2.1). Consequently, the year 2004 *Ita-Egungun* in *Aaye* clan was presided over by his nephew, Chief Ose Akinyemi Aodu Ibitoye, the *Eleti* of *Iyamoye* (Figure 2.2).

According to the lead performer, Chief Ibitoye, the most important aspect of the *Ita-Egungun* is *Bibo-Oro* (offering of ritual sacrifice to the spirit of the clan's *Egungun*). This started at around 8:20 in the morning of July 21st, 2004, when he took a little from the blood of the goat that was slaughtered for the purpose and sprinkled it on the emblems that were secured on the spirit's altar. [Note: I was not allowed to take any picture here]. Next, he poured some drops of Schnapps (imported gin) on the emblems as he said the following invocation and prayers:

Ehigba, Obanjo, ki o maa gbo o.
Irin kirin, Orisa keji,
Awaye a mosa
Koto yoroyoro
Olugba keje eni ini hii
Ebora, abowo pelupelu
Eje k'Ile roju, k'Ona toro
Ko yewa kale, kama r'igbona omo, aya, ebi, ara.
Ma jeki oro yi hunwa o.

[*Ehigba, Obanjo* (the clan ancestor), please listen attentively.
 The mysterious and indescribable divinity,
 The spirit being who emerged on the earth and never remained close to the living.
 The huge and imposing one, who destroys those that disrespect or denigrate him.
 The spirit being with loving and caring hands;
 Please let there be peace at home and wherever we go.
 Bless us with honors for life
 Let no sickness befall our children, wives, and relations.
 Do not let this ritual be a curse onto us].

Prayers were followed by eating and drinking, which lasted till around 9:50 am.

Critical examination of the wordings of the invocation and ritual prayers said by Chief Ibitoye (above), underscores the high level of trust and faith which the *Egungun* devotees have in the spirit beings that they worship. Not only do they have faith in the existence of the spirit beings in their world, but they also strongly believe that the spirits have well functioning ears that could be used to hear their petitions. This belief clearly reflects in Chief Ibitoye's petition (in the first line of the invocation and prayer): '*Ehigba, Obanjo, ki o maa gbo o*' (*Ehigba, Obanjo*, please listen attentively).

I also observed that the invocation and ritual prayers were well-structured and precise, consisting of the sacred words (*Ohun*) that are not common like those that we habitually use to speak to our friends, relatives, coworkers, and so on. This usage, by extension, underscores the dichotomy and dialectic nature of the concept of existence (*Iwà*) as it relates to spirituality, the examples of the religious versus secular; the divine versus earthly; the spirit realm versus physical realm; the spirit beings versus human beings; the invisible versus visible, and so forth.

Seventh Day

Called *Ije-Egungun*, the seventh and last day of the festival for *Egungun* in Iyamoye, as I observed in the one held in the year 2004, is very important, owing to an array of spiritual implications attached to the rituals that are performed that day. First, like other odd numbers that are symbolically of the spirits' realm, day seven of the festival is believed to generate enormous spiritual forces, energies, or powers capable of rendering inefficacious the activities of the anti-social elements in the town. These antisocial elements include

witches, sorcerers, and controllers of bad charms or medicines (*Oloogun-Ika*), are believed to always want to work against social and cosmic harmony by bringing catastrophes into the community where they live.

Second and more important, the ritual performance of the seventh and last day of the festival is strongly believed to sweep away all the calamities in the town of Iyamoye and replace them with good fortunes. I describe as follows, the ritual of the *Ije-Egungun* Iyamoye that was held on July 25th, 2004.

At around 9:00 in the morning, most of the *Egungun* Iyamoye, if not all, converged at the west entrance of the town, where they began the ritual called *Ihanle* (the parading of the nooks and crannies of all the streets in the town) (Figures 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5). As the procession continued, so also the masquerades whipped up the spectators as well as the passersby that they met on the roads and footpaths. The procession terminated inside the bush in the northeast end of the town.

The spiritual implication of parading the town before walking into the bush is the general belief that as the *Egungun* moved around the streets, so also they ritually swept and collected all the existing as well as the imminent tragedies, disasters, bad omens, and so on. Invisible to ordinary human eyes, these heavy loads of misfortunes were ritually unloaded when they walked inside or into the bush.

From the view point of *connective theory*, the final disappearance of the *Egungun* into the bush on this seventh day of the festival further confirmed the Iyamoye-Ijumu people's belief, like that of other Oo kun Yoruba, that the abodes of the spirit beings, the example of *Egungun*, are located inside the bush, in the natural environment. In other words, the

departure of the *Egungun* from the secular world illustrates their connection, reconnection, or relocation to their spiritual space in the forests.

Egungun Ekinrin-Adde

Ekinrin-Adde is a two-in-one town, comprising two distinctive but yet closely related groups—Ekinrin and Adde. They are closely related in the sense that both groups speak the same Yoruba dialect, have one chairman of the council of kings whose title is *Oluof* Ekinrin-Adde, and have no physical boundary or borderland that separates one group from the other, among others. On the other hand, each is distinct from the other because of some slight differences in cultural manifestations existing between the two groups. Differences in the types of *Egungun* as well as the performance contexts for each group exemplify the nature of the cultural disparities.

In the Ekinrin part of the town, the most celebrated and most spiritually powerful *Egungun* is known as *Iro*. He parades the town during the day and stays out for not more than one hour, after which he returns into the underworld or underneath the soil/land (*Wo-Ile*) figuratively. Unfortunately, I was unable to witness the ritual context of the *Iro* masquerade. The reason is clear. According to Chief Otitonaye Meseru, the *Eleti* of Ekinrin and co-owner of the masquerade and Chief Samuel Olorunmola Babalola, the *Elekula* of Ekinrin who is also related to the owners of the masquerade, *Iro* is not for entertainment. He (*Iro*) does not come out and parade the town in an ordinary, normal time, like when I was in the town conducting my fieldwork. Rather, he appears only when the town is experiencing disasters or catastrophes, such as *Akufa-Odo* (an unending

deaths of the youths) and the afflictions of air and or waterborne diseases, the examples of leprosy, measles, cholera, chickenpox, and smallpox, to mention but just a few. The masquerade's ritual procession around the streets occurs when any or all of the misfortunes stated above is believed to be spiritually capable of wiping out the afflictions and bringing everything back to normalcy.

Fortunately for the people of Ekinrin (which they associate with the spiritual supports they continually enjoy from the community's guardian spirit beings), none of the tragedies which may have necessitated the *Iro* masquerade to come out of his shrine and perform the land's or community's cleansing ritual have occurred. Another time that the *Iro* can be seen performing his ritual is when any of the elderly men, of the lineage who owns the masquerade, die. I was told that the last time that the *Iro* was seen was over ten years ago, when one of the masquerade's owners died.

In the Adde division of the town (Ekinrin-Adde), the most popular and most spiritually significant category of *Egungun* is known as *Ajibele*. Belonging to this category are *Egungun Ina-Oko* and *Onigabon* (Figures 2.6 and 2.7). Like *Egungun Iro* (from Ekinrin), *Ina-Oko* and *Onigabon* never come out to the public's view or perform their rituals during ordinary times. Neither is an annual festival for them, in contrast to Iyamoye town where the *Egungun* perform every year in the month of July, as mentioned earlier. *Egungun Ajibele* (*Ina-Oko* and *Onigabon*) perform only at the funeral ceremonies of the community chiefs or titleholders (*Oku-Oloye*), such as when the king (*Olu Adde*) or any of the chiefs (*Iwarefa*, *Iwareje*, *Igemo-Nla*, and *Igemo-Wuru*) have died.

Nonetheless, I was able to collect more than enough information on the performance contexts of *Egungun Ajible* through rigorous interviews conducted with most of the relevant residents of Adde. I remain indebted to Chief S. A. Olugbami, Secretary of the Ijumu Traditional Council, for making this section of the dissertation a reality. He shared with me his great wealth of experience of the traditions of *Egungun* in Adde land in particular and in the whole of Ijumaland informed by his position as a professional keeper of the culture. In addition, he allowed me to make for myself a copy of the video documentation of the performance contexts of the second funeral rites (*Ikaro/Oku-Sise*) for his father, the late Chief Olugbami of *Akodi* family of Otun-Adde in Ekinrin-Adde, which was held on December 14th, 2000. Until his death, the late Chief was a member of *Iwarefa* (*Olorota* in some other parts of Ijumaland), the next grade of chiefs to the *Olu Adde* (King-Head of the Adde section of Ekinrin-Adde). Accordingly, I present and analyze as follows, the funeral rites of the late loving father, Chief Olugbami in the order in which they were performed.

Preparatory Rite

There are two phases of the funeral rites for any deceased chieftain titleholder in Adde, like all other Ijumu-Yoruba communities. In both, the significance of *Egungun* cannot be overemphasized. The first is called *Isinku* (literally, 'the burying of the corpse'). In practice, this phase includes all necessary rites that must be performed as from the time a community titleholder or Chief dies until his corpse is buried inside the grave (*Iboji/ Oju-Orori*). The second is known as *Oku-Sise/Ikaro*, when all other rituals that must

accompany the dead are completed. Without a performance of the second burial ceremony (*Oku-Sise*), the ancestral spirits that are already dwelling with other spirit beings in the invisible realm of spiritual forces will not accept the dead into their group, the spirits' space.

Even though the second burial or second phase of the funeral ceremony (*Oku-Sise*) is separated from the first (*Isinku*), both phases have one particular rite in common that is called *Oro-Ogalata*. In other words, the ritual is stage one of the rites that are associated with each of the two phases of any given funeral ceremony. I present and analyze the rite (*Oro-Ogalata*) as it specifically concerns the second phase of the late Chief Olugbami funeral ceremony. Critical examinations and analyses of the parts of the second burial (*Oku-Sise*) are subheadings, stages II through to V and follow the study (of *Oro-Ogalata*).

Stage I: *Oro-Ogalata*

Ogalata is the ritual display of two of the large robes (*Agbada*) of every deceased chieftain titleholder on the roof of his house during both phases (*Isinku* and *Oku-Sise*) of his funeral rites. Each of the robes is displayed on a wooden frame that is in the shape of the cross and crowned with a red cap (*Odi*) (Figure 2.8). The cap serves as a marker or symbol, indicating the status of the owner as a community Chief, and also specifies the grade or rank of his chieftain title. The rule is, the higher the rank of a given title holder, the longer his cap becomes. For instance, the title holders of the two highest ranks—the King (*Oba*) and *Iwarefa/Olorota*—wear long red caps, the title holders of the last three

lower ranks—*Iwareje*, *Igemo-Nla*, and the lowest, *Igemo-Wuru/Ipogun* wear short ones. The two caps on display on the roof of the late Chief Olugbami (Figures 2.9 and 3.1) are long ones, since he was already in the rank of *Iwarefa (Olorota)* at the time of his death.

Also displayed on the house roof of a deceased if his title is that of an *Oba* (king) beside the *Ogalata* are five (5) types of *Asø Ipo* (sacred red hand-woven cloth). A deceased Chief who until the time of his death was in the rank of *Iwarefa/Olorota* has four (4) of the five (5) types of *Asø Ipo*. The late Chief Olugbami fits into this category (Figure 3.1). One who reached the rank of *Iwareje* has three (3) *Asø Ipo*, two (2) if in the rank of *Igemo-Nla*, and one (1) if in the lowest rank of *Igemo-Wuru/Ipogun*.

The five types of *Aso-Ipo* are discussed in hierarchical order, starting from the highest to lowest grade. The first type is called *Aponnuponrin* (meaning, ‘no difference between the inside and out of the cloth’). Being of the highest grade, it is displayed only on top of the roof of a deceased King (*Oba*) along with the other four. The second highest grade is called *Abata*, distinguished by its heavy weight and breadth; but in contrast to *Aponnuponrin*, the outside of *Abata* has geometrical patterns while the inside is white (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Next is *Ifale*, which is about one third of the size of *Abata*, also with an outside distinguishable from inside. Next to *Ifale* is *Oja* that is extremely long and narrow. That which is of the least grade is known as *Ebe*. It has the same width of the *Oja* but its length is a little shorter (Figure 3.3).

The display of *Ogalata* and *Asø Ipo* on top of the house roofs of the late Chief Olugbami (described above), like other Ijumu titleholders’ *Ogalata* and *Aso-Ipo* ritual display, has two eschatological implications. One, the display serves as a symbolic

medium of communication to the passersby, indicating to them that the second burial (*Oku-Sise*) of the late Chief Olugbami's funeral ceremony is being held. Two, like other *Aso-Ipo* thought of as sacred and advantageous to the spirits of the dead, the late Chief Olugbami's children strongly hold that the *Aso Ipo* on display enhance a smooth and safe transition of the spirit of their late father into the invisible realm of spiritual forces.

As earlier mentioned, there are two phases of funeral rites—*Isinku* and *Oku-Sise*; it is important to add that both could be performed concurrently if the deceased children can afford the exorbitant monetary costs. Otherwise, an interval of between three months to three years could be given between the two phases. I also need to mention that while *Ogalata*—the red clothes (*Aso-Ipo*), red caps (*Odi*), and robes (*Agbada*)—often remain on top of the deceased house roof for many days or weeks prior to the commencement of the funeral ceremony proper, the actual ritual activities last for only one day.

Stage II: *Oro-Imole*

The term *Oro-Imole* can be literally interpreted as 'Imole ritual' or 'ritual of Imole'. In practice as applied to the second phase of the late Chief Olugbami's funeral rites (*Oku-Sise*), *Oro-Imole* incorporates all the ritual performance by the members of the *Imole* group (*Onimole*) at the start of the funeral ceremony. It (*Oro-Imole*) began at around 10:00 in the morning and ended two hours later at Noon on December 14th, 2000.

Before I present the performance context of the *Oro-Imole*, it is necessary to first explain the reasons for its inclusion in the funeral rites for the late Chief Olugbami, as the reasons also apply to other deceased titleholders in Ijumuland. First, the people of Adde

hold that when performing the funeral ceremony for any titleholder, it is important to first placate, with certain ritual sacrifice(s), the spirit being *Imole*, who is considered the mouthpiece of all other spiritual beings. Such propitiatory sacrifices are believed to encourage *Imole* to plead before her contemporaries to accept the spirit of the dead into the realm of spiritual forces. The second and last reason, is that before the dead can be released from inside the grave, underneath the earth/land (the domain of *Imole*), and let go into the world of the spirits, certain ritual sacrifices must again be offered to *Imole*, who is figuratively the ‘owner of the earth/land’. The following is detailed information on *Oro-Imole* performed by the *Asorin* faction of the Ekinrin-Adde’s *Imole* society during the late Chief Olugbami’s *Ikaro* second funeral ceremony.

The ritual started at approximately 10:05 a.m. when the group leader (*Iye-Mole*) poured some drops of blood of the animal victim (a cow) on the floor, very close to where the title symbols of the deceased that include beaded necklaces (*Akun-Oye*) and stool (*Otita*), were laid (Figure 3.4). The insignias symbolized the spiritual presence of Olugbami at the venue of the funeral ceremony, while the blood offering was for *Imole*, goddess of the earth/land. Next, she (*Iye-Mole*) laid a kola nut on top of the blood with her left hand (Figure 3.5i), an allusion of femininity, indicating that the sacrifices (animal blood and kola nut) are specific to the earth goddess *Imole*. Still holding the kola nut on the floor with the left hand, she invoked first the spirit of *Imole* and next, that of the dead (Chief Olugbami) by chanting the praise poems (*Oriki*) of both.

At the end of the invocations, *Iye-Mole* engaged in a ritual dance and was at once joined by the group members (*Onimole*), who danced in an anti clockwise direction,

signifying that the ritual dance was for the realm of spiritual forces. At a certain time, the dancers shifted the venue of the dance to the outside, in front of the deceased's house, where his grave was located (Figure 3.5ii). As the ritual dance continued, so also the participants sang repeatedly one particular song of praise that acknowledged the Supreme Being, whom they addressed as *Orisaloke* ('God in heaven'), as the Creator of *Imole* and all human beings. The song goes:

Oludarin: E e semi ko daa
Olugbe: Orisaloke oun ko da'Mole

Oludarin: E e sawa ko daa
Olugbe: Orisaloke oun ko da'Mole

Oludarin: Ee seyin ko daa
Olugbe: Orisaloke oun ko da'Mole

Oludarin: Ee sewo ko daa
Olugbe: Orisaloke oun ko da'Mole

Oludarin: Ee sawon ko daa
Olugbe: Orisaloke oun ko da'Mole

[Lead singer: I am not the one
 Chorus: God in heaven is the Creator of *Imole*

Lead singer: We are not the one
 Chorus: God in heaven is the Creator of *Imole*

Lead singer: You people are not the one
 Chorus: God in heaven is the Creator of *Imole*

Lead singer: He/she is not the one
 Chorus: God in heaven is the Creator of *Imole*

Lead singer: They are not the one
 Chorus: God in heaven is the Creator of *Imole*.

As simply composed as it is, this song is significant in the sense that it furthers our understanding of the Yoruba concepts of God and spirit beings as they relate to ritual sacrifices or offerings (*Ebo*). In his work on Yoruba sacrificial practice, Omosade Awolalu raised the thought-provoking question: “To whom is sacrifice offered?”¹⁷⁰ A similar question can be asked, as it applies to the song of *Onimole* as well as to the associated rituals above: Are the song and invocation rituals for *Imole*, late Chief Olugbami, or *Orisaloke* (‘God in heaven’)? Before commenting on my question, I want to first consider Omosade’s own response to the question that he raised:

The divinities and the spirit beings are subservient to God, and they owe their “almightiness” to God. Furthermore, from our observation we know that even though the name of the particular divinity being worshipped is invoked, we hear the worshippers say *Ase, Ase* (May it be so); and they add *Lase Edumare* (By the power of *Edumare*) or *Olorun a gbo* (May God hear). This means that the final say rests with God.¹⁷¹

It is evident in Omosade’s response (above) that even though the Yoruba invoked or called the name of the particular spirit being to which the sacrifice is offered, the worshippers strongly believe that the ultimate, to whom all invocations and worships are directed, is God, the Supreme Being. Thus, by extension, it could be argued that any sacrifice made by the Yoruba is in fact not to the particular spirit being, whose name was invoked, but rather to God to whom all spirit beings are subservient. This is indeed reflected in the song sung by the *Onimole*, in spite of the fact that all the invocations and ritual performances were associated with *Imole* and the deceased, they (*Onimole*) still concluded with the proclamation that God is the Creator of all creatures.

¹⁷⁰ Awolalu, “Yoruba Sacrificial Practice,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. V fascicule 2 (1973): 92

¹⁷¹ Awolalu, “Yoruba Sacrificial Practice,” 92.

Stage III: Oro-Egungun

Oro-Egungun means the ritual performance of *Egungun*. As the *Imole* group members were winding up their ritual activities (*Oro-Imole*), two *Egungun Ajibele* called *Onigabon* and *Ina-Okò* (figures 2.6 and 2.7) emerged from their shrine in the forests of *Egungun* (*Igbo-Eegun*), walking directly toward the gravesite of the deceased. As they reached the top of the grave, both *Egungun* (*Onigabon* and *Ina-Okò*) fell to their knees and bowed down so that their heads actually touched the cemented grave (Figure 3.6), a gesture of honor and homage (*Iba, Ijuba*) to the spirit of the dead (Chief Olugbami).

The masquerades did not come alone from the *Igbo-Eegun*, as evidenced by a sea of heads that flocked down with them to the front of the deceased's house (Figure 3.7). Among the multitude are the drummers' group (*Onilu*) composed of four men—*Onifere* (flute player), *Oni'bembe Iya-Ilu* (lead drummer), *Oni'bembe Omele-Ako* (high tone drummer), and *Oni'bembe Omele-Abo* (treble tone drummer) (Figure 3.8). This drum set is totally different from the two types, *Dundun* (hourglass tension drums) and *Bata* (talking drums played with both the palm of the hand and animal skin concurrently) (Figure 3.9) that are commonly played for *Egungun* among the Yoruba who inhabit Southwestern Nigeria. It can be argued that the *Ibembe* (large membrane drums set commonly played for *Egungun* and other rituals and festivals all over the Ijumu and other Ookun Yoruba communities) diffused into the region from northern Nigeria, where they are evidently most common.

Soon after the *Egungun* paid the ritual homage to the spirit of the dead, both (*Onigabon* and *Ina-Okò*) figuratively fell into a long lasting ritual dance performance in

front of the grave. I was made to understand that the dance venue located right in front of the grave was deliberately chosen with the strong belief that the spirit of the dead person would come out of his grave to witness the ritual dance show. As the *Egungun* danced so also did the spectators, especially the deceased's children (Figure 4.1). The crowd cheerfully rewarded them (the masquerades) with the gifts of money.

The performance wound up at around 2:00 p.m. when both masquerades climbed on top of the grave a second time and went down on their knees and again bowed before the grave. Soon after, both beckoned to the drummers and spectators and at once headed back to their abode (*Igbo-Eegun*). The concluding part of the ritual dance in which the *Egungun* paid the second homage on top of the grave further confirmed that the ritual was entirely in honor of the dead (the late Chief Olugbami), in contrast to the preceding *Oro-Imole* that was essentially dedicated to *Imole*. Arguably, therefore, the main significance of the *Oro-Egungun* was to awaken the dead inside the grave and pave the way for his spirit to journey safely into the realm of spiritual forces.

Stage IV: Second *Oro-Imole*

There was a break time of approximately two hours in between the *Oro-Egungun* that ended around 2 p.m. and the second *Oro-Imole* that commenced at 3:50 p.m. To my understanding, the break time was set aside for eating and drinking (*Jije-Minu*). The ritual (*Oro-Imole*) began when the members of *Imole* society (*Onimole*) were led out from inside the deceased's house by their leader (*Iye-Mole*), who carried on the palms of both her hands a large tray containing two smoked mud-fishes (*Eja-Arø*) soaked in palm

oil (*Epo-Pupa*) (Figure 4.2). As she approached the deceased's gravesite with the container, she bent down and gently laid the sacrifice (tray and its contents) on top of the grave, while the group members surrounded her, as soon as she laid down the ritual sacrifice, she joined her group members on the line and they all started dancing around the ritual sacrifice in a counter-clockwise direction, the movement believed to generate the spiritual energies or forces that will prepare the dead for his relocation into the spiritual world. The performance lasted for approximately one hour and concluded at around 4:50 p.m.

Each of the items (oil palm and two fishes) that comprised the sacrifice offered to *Imole* and the late Chief Olugbami's spirit (mentioned above), like other Yoruba ritual sacrifices, has some symbolic implications. Before examining the implications, however, it is necessary to first identify the two main categories of the Yoruba sacrificial items (*Nnkan-Ebo*). The first category includes but is not limited to blood of animal victim(s) and in some cases, some parts of, or a whole of the given votive animal(s). Any ritual sacrifice that comprises any or all of these aforesaid items, especially animal blood, usually connects with votive, preventive, thanksgiving, or invocation sacrifice. On the other hand, an offering that includes one, two, or all of such items as palm oil (*Epo-Pupa*), mudfish (*Eja-Aro*), and the fluids inside a large snail (*Omin-Igbin*) is regarded as a propitiatory sacrifice (*Ebo-Etutu*). The Yoruba believe that these three items specifically have some spiritual energies or forces that can soothe, cool, or calm.

The above background information left me in no doubt when my informant (*Iye Mole Asorin* of Otun-Adde in Ekinrin Adde), told me that the palm oil and mud-fishes

sacrificed to both the earth goddess *Imole* and the late Chief Olugbami's spirit were significant in two ways. First, the sacrifice propitiated *Imole*, goddess of the earth/land, compelling her to cheerfully plead to her contemporaries in the spiritual realm to accept the deceased spirit into the world of spiritual forces. Two, the items that comprised the sacrifice (kola nut and animal blood), by virtue of their spiritual potency, prepared and soothed the deceased's body and soul, enabling him to get well prepared for the relocation into the spiritual world of spirit beings without any stress or anxiety.

Stage V: *Oro-Ikaso*

In theory and literally, *Oro-Ikaso* means the folding into one bundle all of the *Asø Ipo* that were displayed on top of the house roof of the deceased titleholder at the end of the *Oku-Sise* (second burial ceremony). In practice, as it applied to the late Chief Olugbami's *Oku-Sise/Ikaro* second funeral rites, the *Oro-Ikaso* encompassed all the ritual activities that climaxed and concluded the funeral ceremony.

The preliminary of *Oro-Ikaso* started at around 5:00 p.m. when one man in his late sixties identified as *Aba Kafinta* (Carpenter) climbed on top of the deceased's house roof and detached the *Ogalata* from the roof's iron sheets where they had been nailed down (Figure 4.3). As he removed the nails that held each item onto the iron sheets, so also he threw the item down until there was nothing left on top of the roof, when he descended from the house roof. Soon after, Chief S. A. Olugbami (the deceased's son) came out of the deceased's house with a mat (*Eni-Ore*) in his hand. He laid the mat on the ground beside the dismantled *Ogalata* items and took away the red caps (*Odi*) and robes

(*Agbada*), leaving behind all the four *Asø Ipo* that included *Abata*, *Ifale*, *Oja*, and *Ebe*, together with the *Eni-Ore*. As soon as he left, two men from the audience approached the *Aso-Ipo* and neatly folded them into one bundle and carefully laid it on the mat (Figure 4.4). Also placed on the mat beside the bundle of *Asø Ipo* was a container filled with salt (*Iyo*) (Figure 4.5).

It is obvious that the participants and spectators knew that the (*Oro-Ikaso*) ritual proper was to commence at 6:00 p.m. as all seats at the venue in front of the deceased's house were completely occupied some few minutes before six o'clock. The rite began at 6:00 p.m. with an opening speech by a man in his eighties who was simply identified as *Baba-Awo* ('the father of knowledgeable ones'). The brown horsetail whisk he (*Iru*, *Irukere*) held in his right hand distinguished him as an herbalist (*Ol'Osanyin*)¹⁷² (Figure 4.6). By his left side was a man who served as his interpreter to the audience (Figure 4.7). In reality the interpreter did not actually interpret the words of *Baba-Awo*; rather, he repeated with emphasis everything said by the former. The opening speech by *Baba-Awo* and repeated by his interpreter, stating the step by step segments and procedures of the *Oro-Ikaso*, went as follows:

Ookun o Omo l'Oku; E ku ina'wo.
Aye yin maa toro o.
Bon ba ti k'Aso bayi; An f'Erin hi.
Bon ba ti ko'Rin ni ton; An f'Awo hi.
Bon ba ti f'Awo hi; An to'Yo la.
B'Iyo ni se dun, bee gege laye yin maa dun;
Orii Baba a s'adua hun.
Bon ba ti to'Yo la ton; Baba a r'Egbe.

¹⁷² "*Ol'Osanyin*" refers to the *Osanyin* priest otherwise known as 'herbalist'. *Osanyin* is the *Yoruba* divinity of medicine (*Oogun*). Thus, a practitioner of medicine is called *Ol'Osanyin*. After preparing each medicine, *Ol'Osanyin* activates it with the spiritual power of *Osanyin* divinity.

[Peace is onto you, children of the deceased.
 Your life will be peaceful and full of happiness.
 When we fold clothe (*Aso-Ipo*) in this form,
 we need to accompany the bundle of clothes with ritual songs.
 After the songs, we shall activate the bundle of *Asø Ipo* with spiritual powers.
 Next, we will taste the salt.
 As the salt is sweet, so also will you have a sweet (peaceful) life.
 Your father's head will figuratively pray for you.
 As soon as we taste the salt, the father (deceased) will
 commence on his journey to the spirits world.]

In reaction to the short speech (above), all the participants left their seats and formed a circle round the bundle of *Aso-Ipo* (Figure 4.8), singing the following songs as they walked or moved round it (bundle of *Asø Ipo*) in an anti-clockwise direction, believed to generate spiritual force or power.

1. *Oludarin: Ara Awo, Ara kala mi se isee gbadua*
Olugbe: Ara Awo, Ara kala mi se isee gbadua.
Oludarin: Ara Awo, Ara kala mi se isee gbadua
Olugbe: Ara Awo, Ara kala mi se isee gbadua.
Oludarin: Ara Awo, Ara kala mi se isee gbadua
Olugbe: Ara Awo, Ara kala mi se isee gbadua.

[Lead singer: The knowledgeable ones, we do the right thing, as we prepare the dead for the journey to the realm of spirit forces.
 Chorus: Yes, we the knowledgeable ones are doing the right thing.
 Lead singer: The knowledgeable ones, we do the right thing, as we prepare the dead for the journey to the realm of spiritual forces.
 Chorus: Yes, we the knowledgeable ones are doing the right thing.
 Lead singer: The knowledgeable ones, we do the right thing, as we prepare the dead for the journey to the realm of spiritual forces.
 Chorus: Yes, we the knowledgeable are doing the right thing.]

2. *Oludarin: Agala seo agala se; Agala seo agalase; Agala seo agala se*
Oni an bi lona mejeei ko nawo gbaagba Agalase.
Olugbe: Agala seo agala se; Oni an bi lona mejeeji ko nawo gbaagba Agalase.
Oludarin: Agala seo agala se; Agala seo agalase; Agala seo agala se
Oni an bi lona mejeei ko nawo gbaagba Agalase.
Olugbe: Agala seo agala se; Oni an bi lona mejeeji ko nawo gbaagba Agalase.
Oludarin: Agala seo agala se; Agala seo agalase; Agala seo agala se

Oni an bi lona mejeei ko nawo gbaagba Agalase.
Olugbe: Agala seo agala se; Oni an bi lona mejeei ko nawo gbaagba Agalase.

[Lead singer: Listen attentively; I say listen attentively (3 times);
 If you are a person of legitimate birth (i.e., if you are not a bastard),
 Please, signify by raising up your hand as high as possible.
 Chorus: Listen attentively; I say listen attentively. If you are a person of
 Legitimate birth (i.e., you are not a bastard), please signify by
 raising up your hand as high as possible.]

The hymn number two (above) was led by *Baba-Awo*. As he led the song, so also he whisked the bundle of *Aso-Ipo* three times with his horsetail whisk, a ritual action believed to invoke the spirit of the dead (since odd figures such as ‘three times’ belong to the realm of spiritual forces). Likewise the songs (especially number two) have some symbolic implications. For instance, persons of illegitimate birth are traditionally not allowed to partake in the ritual ceremony of the deceased or have any share in his possessions. Thus, the song is a warning, reminding whoever was not recognized by the deceased during his life time as his child not to expect any of the deceased’s assets at the end of the funeral ceremony, the time they are usually shared among his legitimate children.

Immediately after singing the last song (number two), each of the participants took a little out of the salt that was placed near the bundle of *Aso Ipo* and tasted it and left some money on top of the *Aso Ipo* as they went back to their seats. The sweet taste of the salt assured the deceased’s children and relations that the late Chief Olugbami would continue the peaceful and honorable life he spent on the earth in the invisible world of the spirits. They (the participants) had hardly left the ritual space after tasting the salt when

Baba-Awo made the second and last speech, but this time added an announcement. As usual, his interpreter reechoed all his words as follows.

*Omo looku eku inawo
 Baba maa hun wa o
 Baba nko loni! Ibaba ma nko loni!!
 O'i Oniba je n'wo, Omo re agbaa
 Moi Ibaba ma nko lonii!!!
 Oniba je Baba nwo; Omo re a gba
 Moi Oniba je Baba nwo, Omo re a gba ni gborogboro i.
 Oni Baba nba je owo, ko wi ni ni gborogboro i.
 Omo Baba asan-an.
 Ibaba moi ko o!*

[I commend you children of the deceased for spending so lavishly on your father's funeral.
 Your father (his spiritual power) will surely compensate you abundantly for your time and money
 Please listen to this announcement, all the townspeople.
 The late Chief Olugbami is announcing today.
 He (the deceased) said that if you owed him any loan (money), you need to come out now and pay it to his children.
 The father is saying repeatedly that his children must collect any unpaid loans today.
 Similarly the deceased is announcing that if there is anybody he (the dead) owed any loan, such a person or group of persons needs to come out now, so that his children can offset the loan(s) at once.]

After the children of the deceased had waited for about twenty minutes following the announcement (stated above) without any reaction from the audience, it was assumed that their late father had neither lent out any money nor owed anyone any debt. The importance of the announcement, especially if the deceased owed any debt while alive, cannot be underestimated. The Yoruba strongly hold that if the deceased accrued any unpaid loan and his or her children did not pay the debt on their late father's behalf, the

spirit beings that inhabit the realm of spiritual forces will discover and deny the dead an access to their spiritual space.

Baba-Awo next concluded his own part of *Oro-Ikaso* and by extension, the last phase of the *Oku-Sise/Ikaro* second funeral rites, as he led the following song that was sung several times by the participants.

Baba-Awo: Babai r'Egbe

Olugbe: Ajin-jin win

Oludarin: Ir'Egbe

Olugbe: Ajin-jin win.

[*Baba-Awo*: The father is going for good into the world of the spirits.

Chorus: We wish him journey mercies.]

As they were singing the song, two men among them carried the bundle of *Asø Ipo* away into the deceased's living room accompanied by only the children, brothers, and sisters of the deceased who continued with the song there for the next five to ten minutes.

The participants hardly completed the song (above) when the two *Egungun* (*Onigabon* and *Ina-Oko*) emerged again from the forests (*Igbo-Eegun*) and took over the ritual space for the second time, engaging in what could be described as 'a war of dance'. The participants-spectators spontaneously reacted with regular and melodious handclaps that complemented the drummers' percussion. Within a twinkle of an eye, all the children and relations of the late Chief *Olugbami* bombarded the dance space (*Oju Agbo*), rewarding the *Egungun* with gifts of money as they wasted no time in competing with the *Egungun* (Figure 4.1).

At a certain time, *Onigabon* (one of the two *Egungun*) left the dance arena for the deceased's living room, where the *Asø Ipo* had been secured. As he (*Egungun Onigabon*)

approached the front door, he turned his back to the entrance and slowly moved inside, a ritual behavior indicating that the masquerader was entering a spiritual space where the emblems of the deceased are kept. Ten to fifteen minutes later he (*Egungun Onigabon*) surfaced at the dance arena with the bundle of *Aso-Ipo*, which he carefully laid beside the deceased's grave (*Ojū Orori*).

During this time, which was apparently the climax and end of the late Chief Olugbami's funeral rites, all the music and dance ceased, while silence dominated ritual space, and all the participants-spectators awaited the drama that was about to be performed by *Egungun Onigabon*. First, he (*Egungun Onigabon*) moved some three steps away from the bundle of clothes. Next, he walked toward it (bundle of *Asø Ipo*) and touched it three times with his left foot, both symbolic behaviors and actions associated with spiritual forces. *Egungun Onigabon* next leaned on the bundle of *Asø Ipo* with both hands and carried it away. As he (the masquerader) carried the bundle of *Aso-Ipo* (Figure 4.9), so also the participants-spectators shouted: *Baba lo!* ('Literally, 'father is gone'), an allusion that the *Egungun* had taken the deceased away. I was inquisitive to know as to where the *Egungun Onigabon* carried the bundle of *Asø Ipo*. So, with due respect, I inquired from an old man standing beside me: '*Eyin-Agba* (elder and knowledgeable one); please to where is the *Egungun* carrying the bundle of *Asø Ipo*?' He replied, "*Egungun Onigabon* has taken the dead (deceased) away with him into the realm of spiritual forces."

An Analysis

As confirmed by Chief S. A. Olugbami (son of the late Chief Olugbami and secretary of Ijumu traditional council), all the ritual segments of *Ogalata*, *Oro-Imole* (one and two), and *Oro-Egungun*, which proceeded *Oro-Ikaso* (fully examined above), could best be described as ‘preparatory rites’. In other words, the rituals are performed with the strong belief that they will prepare the late Chief Olugbami spiritually, for transition from his position as a dead human being in the secular world to the status of an ancestor or living-dead in the invisible realm of spiritual forces. Conversely, *Oro-Ikaso* that followed incorporates all the final rites that are believed to change the status of the deceased Chief from the dead (*Oku*) to spirit being. In other words, *Oro-Ikaso* is a liminal phase during which the dead is leaving one state, realm, or domain (visible world) and entering the other (invisible world).

These transitional phases are parallel to Arnold van Gennep’s theory of the rite of passage (*Rites de Passage*),¹⁷³ in which he distinguished three phases—separation, transition or liminal, and incorporation or reaggregation.¹⁷⁴ Victor Turner, applying the theory to his study of symbolic genres, described ‘separation’ as a clearly demarcated sacred space and time from profane or secular space and time characterized by symbolic behavior, “which represents the detachment of the ritual subjects (novices, candidates, neophytes or “initiands”) from their previous social statuses.”¹⁷⁵ He analyzed ‘transition’ or ‘liminal’ as an intervening phase, when the ritual subjects enter into a social status that

¹⁷³ Arnold van Gennep, *Rites de Passage* (1908), cited in *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. 27 June 2005. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?tocId=9058649>. I also consulted Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982), 24.

¹⁷⁴ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 24.

¹⁷⁵ Turner, 24.

“has few of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states.”¹⁷⁶ He viewed the ‘incorporation’ or ‘reaggregation’ phase as characterizing “symbolic phenomena and actions which represent the return of the subjects to their new, relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society.”¹⁷⁷

Of all the preparatory rites that accompanied the late Chief Olugbami’s *Ikaro* second funeral ceremony, *Oro-Ogalata*, especially the display of the red caps (*Odi*) on top of the deceased’s house roof, exemplified Gennep’s ‘separation’ phase. Throughout the Ijumu communities as in other Oo kun Yoruba towns and villages, one who wears the red cap is recognized as a community chief (Figure 5.1). But as soon as the cap is displayed on top of the house roof of the wearer instead of his head, the symbolic action or behavior detaches him (‘ritual subject’, to use Turner’s words) from his previous status as a living *Olorota* (community high Chief). In other words, from the time his cap is exhibited without his knowledge, his new position changes in time and space from being an active community or earthly high Chief to being a citizen in the world of spiritual forces (*Ara Orun*).

Similarly, the last two ‘transition’ or ‘liminal’ and ‘incorporation’ or ‘reaggregation’ phases of van Gennep’s *Rites de Passage*, as applied to Turner’s study, can likewise be applied to *Oro-Ikaso*, the last segment of the second burial ceremony of the late Chief Olugbami. The invocation rite, in which the lead ritual performer (*Baba-Awo*) touched the bundle of *Asø Ipo* three times with his horsetail whisk (*Iru/Irukere*) and the concluding ritual drama by *Egungun Onigabon*, could be conveniently situated under the

¹⁷⁶ Turner, 24.

¹⁷⁷ Turner, 24.

rubric of van Gennep's liminal or transition phase. More vivid evidence attesting to the dead passing a sort of status-crisis or 'social limbo' (to use Turner's words) included the participants' statements, referring to *Aso Ipo* as *Baba* (father). In other words, they made ambiguous the new status of the deceased by presenting the bundle of *Aso Ipo* not only as if the dead had transformed into it, but also as if he was right there in a human form, witnessing the funeral rites.

I provide two of the statements made by the participants-spectators that illustrate the deceased's new ambiguous status. The first has to do with the song led by the lead ritual performer (*Baba-Awo*): '*Babai r'Egbe*' ('father is going for good into the world of spiritual forces') and chorused by the rest of the participants, as if they (singers) saw the deceased walking away into the world of the spirits. The second has to do with the announcement made by *Baba-Awo*, in which he figuratively put words into the deceased's mouth: '*Baba nko loni! Ibaba ma nko lonii! O'i Oniba je n'wo, Omo re agbaa*' ('The late father is announcing today, that if you owed him any unpaid loan, you need to come out now and pay it to his children').

Van Gennep's third and last phase of rites of passage, 'reaggregation' or 'incorporation', as applied by Turner, could similarly be matched with the late Chief Olugbami's second burial rites, especially with the moment immediately after the masquerader (*Egungun Onigabon*) carried the *Aso-Ipo* and began to take it away. In other words, the incorporation or reaggregation phase began immediately after the masquerader completed his drama and lifted up the bundle of *Aso-Ipo* and began to move away. The moment that generated the participants-spectators' comment: *Baba lo!* ('Father has

gone'), was marked with the passage of the bundle of *Asø Ipo* (that has been spiritually transformed to the deceased's spirit), from the earthly space (beside the grave) to the masquerade's abode in the forests (*Igbo-Eegun*). This transition from the world of the living into the world of the spirit beings aptly corresponds with Turner's observation:

The passage from one social status to another is often accompanied by a parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to another. This may take the form of a mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold which separates two distinct areas, one associated with the subject's pre-ritual or preliminal status, and the other with his post-ritual or postliminal status.¹⁷⁸

Similarly, using the *connective theory*, the final disappearance of both the masquerade (*Onigabon*) and the dead (by way of the bundle of *Asø Ipo* that embodies his spirit), from the earthly space beside the deceased's grave, symbolized the connection, reconnection, or relocation of the two spirit beings (masquerade and the spirit of the dead) to their spiritual abode in the forest.

Iyah-Gbedde *Oro-Epa* (*Epa* Ritual Festival)

In Iyah-Gbedde northern Ijumuland (Maps 1.4 and 1.5), there is a particular time of the year set aside for the annual ritual festival for the *Epa* divinity called *Egungun Epa*, who like other Ijumu as well as other Ookun Yoruba spirit beings, inhabits the natural environment, in the forests. The festival (*Odun*) that is performed by members of the *Epa* society is known as *Oro-Epa* (ritual festival for *Epa* masquerade divinity).

The *Oro-Epa* used to be held during Easter time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, when the Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Cross.

¹⁷⁸ Turner, 25.

Nowadays, the ritual festival is held a few days prior to, or after the Easter celebrations, depending on which of the two ('prior to' or 'after' the Easter ritual), is approved by the Yoruba *Ifa* divinity of divination and wisdom. The change in time was in reaction to several pleas, which the *Epa* devotees received from their Christian counterparts, who complained that they always record a very low turnout of attendants in their Churches on the Good Friday and Easter Sunday because of the *Oro-Epa* that is held at the same time. Their appeal was that if the *Oro-Epa* could be held before or after the Easter time, such modification would give the Church members who must partake in the *Oro-Epa* the opportunity to do so without affecting their attendance in the Church on the Good Friday and Easter Sunday services.

Another modification in *Oro-Epa* is that the ritual festival could now be held more than one time in a year, which was as it was not the case in the past, when it used to be held only once annually. This development was necessitated by the researchers' regular demand for *Epa* spectacles outside the usual time of the festival—a few days before or after the Easter celebration. The change, according to Chief S. A. Jemirin, leader of the *Epa* society and *Obaro*¹⁷⁹ of Iyah-Gbedde, was born out of the kind, accommodative, and flexible attributes of *Orisa-Epa* (*Epa* divinity). He (Chief Jemirin) explained further on the nature of the divinity's kind gestures:

Orisa Epa listens to people's pleas and considers them favorably, as you too can see how the divinity allowed the Christians to observe their Easter rites without the interference of *Oro-Epa*. Likewise, he has given us the permission to perform the *Oro-Epa* as many times as the researchers' desire, in as much as they are able to fulfill all the financial responsibility.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ "*Obaro*" is a high Chieftain title (*Orota*) that is next in rank to the community king (*Olu* of Iyah-Gbedde).

¹⁸⁰ Chief S. A. Jemirin (*Obaro* of Iyah-Gbede and leader of *Epa* society), interview by Olawole Famule,

Apparently I was one of the researchers that benefited from *Orisa-Epa's* flexibility, since I arrived there on July 15th, 2004 to observe the *Oro-Epa*, not knowing that the *Epa* society had performed the ritual festival three months prior to that time. However, it is difficult for me to know the other researchers who were favored by the divinity, since none of them have published anything on the *Epa* masquerade of Iyah-Gbedde. Nonetheless, I was assured that if I could pay for all the ceremonial or ritualistic items needed for the *Oro-Epa* (ritual festival for the *Epa* divinity) and following an approval from the *Epa* divinity, the *Epa* society members would perform the festival for me.

One interesting thing about this development is that irrespective of how many times the *Oro-Epa* is performed within the year, the ritual procedures and phases remain the same. This is as a result of the sanctions imposed by the *Epa* society, forbidding any individual or group of individuals who belong to the *Epa* lineage to perform the *Oro-Epa* as a play (without the accompanied ritual sacrifices) or for the sake of extorting money from researchers or scholars. Besides, the society members strongly adhere to the pact and the accompanying warning that was supposedly given them by *Orisa-Epa* that stipulated that whenever the ritual festival is held, all the required sacrifices must be offered to *Orisa-Epa*. It is held that whoever turned deaf ears to this warning and went ahead to the *Epa* grove and performed the festival would be stung to death by bees.

On July 16, 2004, I gave the executive members of the *Epa* society my word that I would be fully responsible for all the financial implications of *Oro-Epa*. In other words, I agreed to provide all the money needed to buy all the ritual items required to make the

festival come to reality, which included a male dog (*Ako-Aja*) and twenty-one kola nuts (*Okanlelogun Obi*). Others are twenty one (21) pieces of bitter kola (*Okanlelogun Orogbo*), twenty one (21) pieces of alligator pepper (*Okanlelogun Ataare*), and three pots of palm wine (*Emu Ope*). [Note: one pot contained approximately twenty five (25) liters]. The odd numbers that characterized the items, like in other Ijumu communities, have certain spiritual implications: they belong to the realm of spiritual forces. In the evening of the same day that I agreed to be financially responsible for the *Oro-Epa*, *Obaigbo* (literally ‘the king of the forests’) chief priest of the *Epa* divinity proceeded on the most crucial preliminary aspect of the festival called *Idifa Oro Epa* (divination rite for the *Epa* festival). I present the divination rite as follows.

Idifa/Idafa (Divination)

On July 16, 2004, at around 10:00 p.m. the *Epa* chief priest (*Obaigbo*), in the person of Olusegun Igunnu, left for the *Orisa-Epa* grove for the whole night, where he approached and propitiated the divinity with the ritual sacrifices of mud-fish (*Eja-Aro*), a large bush snail (*Igbin*), and palm oil (*Epo-Pupa*). The sacrificial items are believed to contain certain spiritual forces that soothe not only the *Epa* divinity (*Orisa-Epa*), but all of the Yoruba spirit beings. Thus, in ritual circles or gatherings, the items are often referred to as *Nnkan Ero* (items of pacifier or propitiation), as they are used for bridging the gap between the divine (in the realm of the spirits) and the earthly (in the realm of the living). By extension, *Nnkan Ero* enhances a flow or smooth communication between the divinities and human beings.

Next, he embarked on the divination ritual, his primary objective for leaving the town for the shrine of the *Epa* divinity that is located in the forest of the *Epa* divinity (*Igbo-Epa*), about five miles away from the city of Iyah-Gbedde. This kind of divination is quite different, both in purpose and method, from the usual divination practices by the *Ifa* priests or diviners (*Olifa/Abalao/Awo*) already examined in chapter three. The purpose is to seek permission from *Orisa-Epa* to hold the *Oro-Epa* (ritual festival for *Epa* divinity) that has been tentatively slated for July 30th through to August 1, 2004. I say tentative because the performance of the festival is not confirmed until it is formally approved by the *Epa* divinity. Usually, a four-lobe kola nut (*Obi-Alawemerin*) is used for this kind of divination activity that is called *Ibo* ('to draw' or 'to cast lots'). Whenever the four lobes of kola nut are cast, a positive or 'yes' answer to the request(s) from the respective divinity is determined when two of the four lobes have their faces turned up and the remaining two have theirs turned upside down, facing the ground. Any combination(s) outside of the above combination is/are taken as a negative or 'no' answer from the spirit being(s). I was told that if *Orisa-Epa* declined the request, the *Oro-Epa* would be postponed indefinitely. Therefore, I was all the night on my knees, praying that the divinity would give a favorable reply to the request.

The following morning on July 17th, the *Obaigbo* chief priest of *Epa* returned from the *Epa* grove with the good news that the *Orisa-Epa* had accepted that they perform the *Oro-Epa* (ritual festival for *Epa* divinity) starting on July 30 and ending on August 1, 2004. Usually, *Oro-Epa* is a two day ritual festival incorporating three phases, *Ipajaguru* (literally 'the killing of the dog'), *Isunde* (literally 'the night vigil'), and *Iran-Epa* ('the

Epa spectacle’), of which the first two are not opened to the general public. As a matter of fact, no one except the members of the *Epa* society is allowed to partake in, or observe the *Isunde* and or *Ipajaguru*. Thus, both are performed at night, when the uninitiated persons (males and females) are expected to already be inside their homes sleeping. Preceded by the three phases (of *Oro-Epa*) are a preparatory rite or activity called *Itun-Igbo-Epa-Se* (literally ‘the cleaning of the *Epa* grove’) presented as follows. [The presentation is followed by a critical examination and analysis of the three phases of the *Oro-Epa* proper (listed above).]

***Itun-Igbo-Epa-Se*(Setting the *Epa* Grove)**

Itun-Igbo-Epa-Se means the general cleaning and ‘putting in place’ of the *Epa* grove (*Igbo-Epa*). This includes but is not limited to the clearing of the bush around the *Igbo-Epa* and marking certain spaces or spots in the grove with palm fronds (*Moriwo/Mariwo*). Some young men of the *Epa* society carried out the activities on July 30, 2004, two days prior to the performance of *Epa* spectacle (*Iran-Epa*). The *Epa* grove comprises the shrine of the *Epa* divinity (*Ojubo Orisa-Epa*), as well as the theater center of the *Epa* spectacle called *Ala*. The former (*Ojubo Orisa-Epa*) is a small mud house concealed by a thick forest, inside of which the emblems of *Epa* divinity (*Orisa-Epa*), such as the *Epa* masquerade costumes, are kept and worshipped. The former (*Ala*) accommodates the performers of the *Epa* spectacle that include the *Epa* masquerades (*Egungun-Epa*), *Epa* singers (*Olorin-Epa*), and *Epa* drummers (*Onilu-Epa*), as well as the spectators (*Oluworan*) (Figure 5.2).

The workers (certain young men of the *Epa* society) began the rite of *Itun-Igbo-Epa-Se* with the clearing of the footpath leading to the grove. Next, they tied across the grove's entrance some palm fronds (Figure 5.3). The palm fronds, in this context, have two important implications. First, they indicate to the passersby that the footpath leads to the *Epa* grove and that no intruder is allowed to go beyond the palm fronds. Two, they (the palm fronds) operate as a device for the spiritual cleansing of the performers and spectators of the *Epa* spectacle (*Iran-Epa*), as it is very important that whoever is entering the grove, like other Yoruba divinities' ritual spaces, must do so with spiritually pure body and soul. The rules for purity include but are not limited to refraining from sexual intercourse immediately before entering the grove, and not carrying into it (the grove) any dangerous charm(s), as these amount to disrespecting or denigrating the *Epa* divinity (*Orisa-Epa*). Thus, at the instance(s) of any disobedience to these taboos, it is strongly believed that the palm fronds, underneath which all the performers and spectators of the *Epa* spectacle must pass, have the spiritual forces capable of cleansing their body impurities.

Finally, the workers did the clearing of the bush around the *Ala* theater center of the *Epa* spectacle, which is located at the interior of the grove. Very conspicuous at the *Ala* is a big and tall silk cotton tree (*Igi-Ègungun*) believed to embody the *Epa* divinity (*Orisa-Epa*) (Figure 5.4). The tree also served as a shade to the *Ala* space, protecting the performers and spectators of the *Epa* spectacle from the direct rays of the sun.

With every nook and cranny of the grove put in place, all was set for the subsequent phases of the *Epa* ritual festival (*Oro-Epa*) that included *Ipajaguri* (sacrifices to the *Epa*

divinity), *Isunde* (*Epa* night vigil), and *Iran-Epa* (*Epa* spectacle), examined as follows in that order.

***Ipajaguru* (Dog Sacrifice)**

The final preparatory rite, which took place on July 31, 2004, between 9:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. at the shrine of *Orisa-Epa* located inside the *Epa* grove, is known as *Ipajaguru* (literally, ‘killing of the dog’). The term (*Ipajaguru*) evidently originated from the principal sacrificial item, a male dog (*Ako-Aja*) that was offered as a ritual sacrifice to the *Orisa-Epa* (*Epa* divinity) during the rite (of *Ipajaguru*). Other ritual items that were offered to the divinity along with the dog included kola nut (*Obi*), alligator pepper (*Ataare*), bitter kola (*Orogbo*), and palm wine (*Emu-Ope*). The attendees included the executive members of the *Epa* society, Chief Jemirin (the overall leader), *Iye Eleushu* (the female leader), and *Obaigbo* (the chief priest) and two or three young men of the society, who slaughtered the dog and prepared the meat.

The sacrificial items have some spiritual implications. First, it is held that the *Orisa-Epa* particularly likes to eat dog meat. Thus, by giving him (*Orisa-Epa*) what he enjoys, it is believed that he will reciprocate with spiritual blessing and protection of the devotees and or presenters of the sacrifice. It is important to note that the ritual sacrifice of dogs is not peculiar only to *Orisa-Epa* in Iyah-Gbedde. William Fagg observed the dogs being sacrificed to *Oloko* (leopard), an *Epa* masquerade headdress in Ekiti, sometime around 1950.¹⁸¹ It could also be noted that dogs are the principal sacrificial animals of *Ogun*, the

¹⁸¹ William Fagg, De l’art des Yoruba, *L’art negre, presence africaine* 10-11 (1951): 103-135.

Yoruba god of iron and war. John Rowland Ojo has argued that the *Oloko* (*Epa* masquerade) as a metaphor for warrior¹⁸² and dogs as the sacrificial animals of *Ogun* confirm the interrelationship of *Epa* and *Ogun*.¹⁸³ More importantly that dogs are the sacrificial animals of *Orisa-Epa* in both Iyah-Gbedde Ijumu and Ekiti (Ijumu's immediate western Yoruba neighbor) clearly suggests a historical connection.

The kola nut offering (at the rite of *Ipajaguru* stated above) is believed to prevent imminent death of the community youths (*Iku-Odo*), while the alligator pepper is generally thought of as being capable of enhancing peace, love, and harmony in the Yoruba communities. Thus, the affirmative prayer: *Nire-nire laa s'oro ataare* ('we speak of the alligator pepper in connection with peace and harmony'). The bitter kola, on the other hand, is held as containing the spiritual force that could promote or enhance longevity of human life. Thus, the saying/prayer: *Orogbo nii gbo ni s'aye* ('the bitter kola promotes long life and prosperity').

These spiritual connections of the sacrificial items of *Orisa-Epa* also illustrate the Yoruba's belief in the spiritual powers, forces, or energies (*Ase*) inherent in the words (*Oro*) which they verbalize. The Yoruba strongly hold that the linguistic or literal meanings of the names of sacrificial items or objects operate as prayers or petition requests. Thus, by making ritual offerings or sacrifices of such items or objects, it is believed that their names will give the spirit being to whom they are offered a clue as to what exactly the supplicant(s) want(s) or need(s). The following examples drawn from

¹⁸² Ojo J.R.O., "Headdress: Warrior (*EPA OLOGUN*)," *For Spirits and Kings: African Art from the Paul and Ruth Tishman Collection*. Ed. Susan Vogel (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1981), 117.

¹⁸³ Ojo J.R.O., "The Symbolism and Significance of Epa-Type Masquerade Headpieces," *MAN: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (New Series) 13, no. 3 (1978): 468.

the ritualistic items of *Orisa-Epa* (mentioned earlier) better illustrate my point. *Obi* (kola nut) has two syllables (*o + bi*), in which the first (*O*) means ‘to’ or ‘agent of’, and the second/last (*bi*) means ‘push away’, ‘avoid’, or ‘plead against’. Thus, *Obi* as a name linguistically or literally means ‘to plead against or put away imminent catastrophes’, such as the death of the community youths. *Ataare* (alligator pepper) on the other hand, comprises three syllables (*a + taa + re*), all literally mean ‘good luck’, ‘good fortune’, ‘good life’ and other positive wishes (*Ire*), such as prayers for peace, love, and harmony in the community. Finally, *Orogbo* (bitter kola) has three syllables (*o + ro + gbo*), all linguistically or literally meaning ‘to preserve’, ‘to make long’, or ‘to prolong’, such as longevity of the human life.

***Isunde* (Night Vigil)**

Literally meaning ‘the night vigil’, the rite of *Isunde* commenced at around 1:00 a.m. on August 1, 2004, immediately after the completion of the rite of *Ipajaguru* (examined above). Thus, the attendees included the same set of people that participated in the rite of *Ipajaguru*. The rite commenced when some *Epa* masquerades ‘came out’ (appeared) from the *Epa* grove and proceeded to the city of Iyah-Gbedde, where they paraded every nook and cranny of the streets, making necessary ritual sacrifices.

The rite lasted till around four o’clock in the morning, when the participants dispersed to their respective homes. I was informed that the significance of the rite of *Isunde* included the ritual chasing away from the community, all impending catastrophes that

may include but are not limited to recurrent death of the townspeople, especially the young ones, antisocial activities of the evil spirits, droughts, and floods, among others.

Iran Epa (Epa Spectacle)

Iran Epa (Epa spectacle) is usually believed to be a dance performance context of the *Epa* masquerades (*Egungun-Epa*). In contrast, as it applied to the *Epa* festival in Iyah-Gbedde, the term incorporated all the performance contexts at *Ala*, the central space of the *Epa* grove (*Igbo-Epa*) where the *Iran-Epa* was held (Figure 5.3). Specifically, the *Epa* spectacle included the dance performances of the *Egungun-Epa*, the rhythms or music supplied by the drummers (*Onilu*), and the array of songs sung by the singers (*Olorin/Akorin*), as well as the ovations from the spectators (*Oluworan*) each time they were impressed with the dance performance of a given *Epa* masquerader.

Likewise, there is the usual belief that the *Epa* spectacle (*Iran-Epa*) connects only with spirituality, aiming toward propitiating the *Epa* spirit being (*Orisa-Epa*). Nothing could be more inaccurate, as the rite is also clearly a reenactment of the aspect of Yoruba culture that places in high esteem the concept of *Ibowo f'agba* ('respect for the elders' or 'honor to the elders'). In other words, *Epa* spectacle is a forum where the individuals' hierarchies, statuses, or positions, that are culturally constructed, are displayed. Thus, by extension, what are being displayed at *Ala* (the theater center of the *Epa* spectacle) are not just the activities or performances of the masqueraders, drummers, and singers, but most importantly, the performers' and spectators' statuses as dictated by the community's traditions or norms.

I present and analyze, the *Epa* spectacle (*Iran-Epa*) that I observed at Iyah-Gbedde on August 1, 2004. The information illustrates the Yoruba artistic response to spirituality, as well as how the concepts of *Ibowo f' agba* ('honor to the elders') are highly esteemed in the Yoruba cultural practices (spiritual and secular alike).

Located at the eastern zone of the *Ala* theater center of the *Epa* spectacle, a big, tall silk cotton tree (*Igi-Ègungun*), around which some palm fronds were tied (Figure 5.4), served as a crucial index for dividing the *Ala* space among the *Epa* divinity, performers of *Iran-Epa*, and spectators. Being the central focus, the *Epa* divinity (*Orisa-Epa*), who is emblemized with the palm fronds, spiritually occupied the foot of the *Egungun* tree, where he (the divinity) could catch at a glance every move or dance step of the *Egungun - Epa*, who performed directly in front of the tree.

Sitting right at the foot of the tree (the abode of *Orisa-Epa* during *Iran-Epa*), were the drummers (*Onilu*), who played the *Ekú* drum set that produced the favorite music of *Orisa-Epa* (Figure 5.5). The *Ekú* drum set comprised three drums played by a group of three drummers. The biggest in the set is known as *Iya-Ekú* (literally, 'mother of *Ekú*'), the lead drum that produced the bass and most overpowering pitch. The drum (*Iya-Ekú*) is a round pot-shaped clay drum with stretched goatskin (Figure 5.6). Marsha Vander Heyden had observed this kind (of clay drum) being played at the *Elefon (Epa)* festival at Iloro-Ekiti in 1970.¹⁸⁴ Heyden also indicated that the same type of clay drum, reported by Kenneth Crosthwaite Murray, who called it *Agbe*, was played at the *Epa* festival at Omu-

¹⁸⁴ Marsha V. Heyden, "The Epa Mask and Ceremony," *African Arts* x, no. 2 (1977): 19.

Aran in 1931.¹⁸⁵ Thus, irrespective of the different names they bear (*Iya-Eku* or *Agbe*), the similarity clearly suggests that the clay drums are essentially associated with *Orisa-Epa* in the same way as the *Agba* and *Agere* drums are associated with *Ogboni*, goddess of the earth (*Ile*) and *Ogun*, god of iron and war respectively. It also proposes the possibility of a historical connection of the *Epa* festivals in Iyah-Gbedde in Ijumuland and Omu-Aran in Igbominaland (located at the immediate northwest of Ijumu).

Standing at both left and right sides of the tree were the masqueraders' attendants or pathfinders (*Atokun Egungun-Epa*) and singers (*Olorin/Akorin-Epa*) respectively. The masqueraders' attendants, whose ages are between twenty and fifty years old, were males by gender, in contrast to the singers, who consisted of both males and females within the age brackets of approximately between twenty to forty years old. The masqueraders' lead attendant (*Olori-Atokun Egungun-Epa*) carried in his left hand and supported by his left shoulder, the principal emblem of *Orisa-Epa* that is called by the name *Orisa* ('divinity'), an indication that it (the emblem) is not only a principal symbol of *Orisa-Epa*, it is *Orisa-Epa* (Figure 5.7). The *Atokun Egungun-Epa* (masquerades' attendants) performed two important functions. First, they were responsible for tying the *Epa* masquerade costumes around the body of the masquerader/masker of *Egungun-Epa*. This activity of fixing the costumes on the body of the *Epa* masquerader(s), which must be done inside the *Epa* shrine that is usually concealed by a thick forest, is known as *Didi Egungun-Epa*. Second, the attendants also led the masqueraders into the dancespace at the *Ala* and escorted them back to the shrine at the end of the *Epa* spectacle (*Iran-Epa*). Most importantly, the

¹⁸⁵ Heyden, 19.

Olori-Atokun Egungun-Epa (lead masquerades' attendant) was to signal to each masquerader to wind up his dance performance, some few minutes before the end of time given to him, usually between ten to fifteen minutes, during which duration he was expected to have shown all his best dance steps.

The first *Egungun-Epa* that opened the dance arena (that is, danced first) was *Akorowo* (Figure 5.8). The masquerade is one of the three owned by *Idilee Jemirin* (Jemirin family/lineage), who brought the *Epa* ritual festival (*Oro-Epa*) to Iyah-Gbedde. The other two are *Aro* (literally, 'the one that lasts long' or 'the aged one') and *Olomoyoyo* ('the owner or controller of many children'). As their names suggest, *Aras* believed to be the head or most senior of all the *Egungun-Epa* in Iyah-Gbedde while *Olomoyoyo*, who is recognized as a cheerful giver of children to barren women, is regarded as the second most senior of all the *Egungun Epa*. Because they are owned by the family that introduced the *Oro-Epa* in Iyah-Gbedde, *Akorowo* and *Arare* given the honor to dance/appear first and last at the dance space respectively. Thus, by implication, the *Idilee Jemirin* declared opens the dance space/floor (through *Akorowo*) and closes the *Iran-Epa* (*Epa* spectacle) (through *Arø*). Immediately after the attendants led *Akorowo* to the dance space, the masquerader (*Akorowo*) approached the tree (that embodied *Orisa-Epa*), paused before it, and touched it three times, paying homage to the divinity. He (*Akorowo*) next moved toward the community *Oba* (King), His Royal Highness *Oba* Gideon Olorunmola Esemikose, and bowed his head, also indicative of paying homage, but this time to the king, who is traditionally regarded as second in command to the divinities (*Alase Ekeji-Orisa*). In response, the King shook his white horsetail whisk

(*Irukere-Oba*), an indication that the King was returning the masquerade's salutation and as well as approving that *Akorowo* may begin to dance. These actions were followed by a similar sign which the masquerade gave to chief Jemirin, acknowledging him as the leader of the *Epa* society and as well as an elder from the family founder of the *Epa* ritual festival. At the end of these preliminaries, *Akorowo* signaled to the drummers to supply the rhythms of the *Ekú* drum set, as the masquerade emerged into vigorous choreographic displays that included jumping, arms twisting and whirling, standing on one leg waving the other in all directions, and many more (Figure 5.9).

As soon as *Akorowo* finished his dance performance and was led back to the forest where the shrine of *Orisa-Epa* is located, the singers (*Olorin*) took over the dance space, engaging in energetic dance performances, singing various *Epa* songs, as well as clapping their hands, making deafening sounds. I refer to the songs as '*Epa* songs' because each of them, in one way or the other, associates with *Oro-Epa*, acknowledging or confirming all the members of the *Epa* society as proud and ardent followers of *Epa* divinity. The following three songs corroborate my point:

1. *Oludarin: Tani so mariwo o?*
Olugbe: Ai so mariwo o
Oludarin: Emi so mariwo o
Olugbe: Ai so mariwo o
Oludarin: Iwo so mariwo o?
Olugbe: Ai so mariwo o
Oludarin: Eyin so mariwo o?
Olugbe: Ai so mariwo o
Oludarin: Gbogbo wa so mariwo o?
Olugbe: Ai so mariwo o

[Lead singer: Who tied the palm fronds around the masquerade's body?

Chorus: We all tied the palm fronds around the masquerade's body.

Lead singer: I tied the palm fronds.

Chorus: We all tied the palm fronds.
 Lead singer: Did you tie the palm fronds?
 Chorus: We all tied the palm fronds.
 Lead singer: Did all of you tie the palm fronds?
 Chorus: We all tied the palm fronds.
 Lead singer: Did all of us tie the palm fronds?
 Chorus: We all tied the palm fronds.]

2. *Oludarin: Emire kii so mariwo emire kii s'Epa*
Olugbe: Emire kii so mariwo emire kii s'Epa.
Oludirin: Emire ko nimariwo emire ko l'Epa
Olugbe: Emire ko nimariwo emire ko l'Epa.
Oludarin: Ajoji wo horo nhan iwon ni wii pa'ni
Olugbe: Ajoji wo horo nhan iwon ni wii pa'ni.
Oludarin: Dede won wo horo nhan iwon ni wii pa'ni
Olugbe: Dede won wo horo nhan iwon ni wii pa'ni.

[Lead singer: You and I both tie the palm fronds and celebrate the *Epa* festival.
 Chorus: You and I both tie the palm fronds and celebrate the *Epa* festival.
 Lead singer: You and I both own the palm fronds as well as the *Epa* masquerade.
 Chorus: You and I both own the palm fronds as well as the *Epa* masquerade.
 Lead singer: The outsiders to whom you tell your secrets are the one who backbite and expose you.
 Chorus: The outsiders to whom you tell your secrets are the one who backbite and expose you.
 Lead singer: I said the outsiders to whom you tell your secrets are the one who backbite and expose you.
 Chorus: The outsiders to whom you tell your secrets are the one who backbite and expose you.
 Lead singer: To whom you reveal your secrets backbite and expose you.
 Chorus: All those that you reveal your secrets to are the one who backbite and expose you.]

3. *Oludarin: Onibai s'Epa njewo*
Olugbe: Gbagbara kai la'gi alaja gbagbara
Oludarin: Oniba l'Epa ko jewo
Olugbe: Gbagbara kai la'gi alaja gbagbara
Oludarin: Koseni ma ni Galili
Olugbe: Galili tiwa kee yi.

[Lead singer: Confess with your words and actions if you are an *Epa* devotee or follower.
 Chorus: You need confess with your words and actions, as we made open both hands whenever we split or cut firewood.]

Lead singer: Confess with your words and actions if you are the owner of the *Epa* masquerade.

Chorus: You need confess with your words and actions, as we made open both hands whenever we split or cut firewood.

Lead singer: No one is without a Galilee. (Note: This refers to the Golgotha (in Galilee) where Jesus Christ was taken for crucifixion).

Chorus: This is (the *Ala* dance arena) our own Galilee.]

The next *Egungun-Epa* that appeared at the dance space was *Ate*, which literally means ‘display’. In rank, he was the most junior *Egungun-Epa* (Figure 6.1). This accounted for why he was allowed to dance after the dance space has been consecrated or ritually made safe and declared open by an elder and experienced *Akorowo*. The masquerade (*Ate*), like *Akorowo*, has no carved headpiece (Figure 6.1), thus invalidating John Rowland Ojo’s overstatement about the *Epa* masquerade costumes: “While carved headpieces are optional in *Egungun*, they form an indispensable part of ...*Epa* masquerade costumes.”¹⁸⁶ The masquerade first observed some preliminaries similar to *Akorowo*’s, such as paying homage to *Orisa-Epa* (via the *Egungun* tree), to the community *Oba* (king), and lastly to chief Jemirin before commencing his dance performance that was also as rigorous as that of *Akorowo* (Figure 6.2).

Ori-Igi (literally ‘the one with a wooden headpiece’), that is distinguished with a carved headpiece on top of which is a superstructure figure of a man identified as a warrior (*Ologun*), danced after the *Ate*’s dance performance (Figure 6.3). With his indispensable position as a warrior, whom the history of the land supported as being among the lead warriors who finally defeated the Nupe invaders, who had repeatedly captured and sold many of the Ijumu people as slaves, *Ori-Igi* is hailed as a powerful

¹⁸⁶ Ojo, “The symbolism and significance of Epa-type masquerade headpieces,” 456.

masquerade (*Egungun-Alagbara*). Thus, his appearance at the dance space immediately after *Ate*, a junior masquerade, had danced underscored his position as a senior masquerade (*Agba Egungun-Epa*).

Olomoyoyo ('the controller or owner of many children') took over the dance floor from *Ori-Igi* after the former had completed his dance show (Figure 6.4). As his name implies, *Olomoyoyo*, whose carved helmet headpiece is surmounted by many human figures believed to be some of the masquerade's children, is proclaimed as a spiritually powerful and philanthropic *Egungun-Epa* that cheerfully blesses women with many children. This divine and benevolent attribute best explains why barren women habitually give *Olomoyoyo* the gifts of money and other precious items with the strong belief that the masquerade will make them become fertile and raise many children.

Apa, who is regarded as the wife of the most senior *Aró* ('the aged one'), appeared at the *Ala* scene immediately after *Olomoyoyo* had brought to an end his own dance performance (Figures 6.5i and ii). In contrast to the carved helmet headpieces of *Ori-Igi* and *Olomoyoyo*, *Apa* is distinguished with a face mask with a superstructure of two human figures, a male and female identified as *Eji-Wapo* ('the two together'), and a pair of deerskin fans (*Abebe*), which the masquerade held in both hands (Figure 6.6).

Referring to *Apa* as *Aro*'s wife does not suggest that the former is in real life the spouse of the latter; rather, the reason is that *Apa*'s appearance at any dance arena heralds the coming of *Aró* to the scene. It is therefore not surprising that the emergence of *Apa* at any rite of *Iran-Epa* (*Epa* spectacle) always lifts up all the spectators' spirit or hope that *Aro* is certainly on his way from the forest of *Egungun* to the dance scene. On the

contrary, on that fateful day (August 1, 2004), the spectators' hope was shattered when *Aro* did not surface at the end of the dance performance of *Apa*. I was later told by chief Jemirin (leader of *Epa* society) that the elderly man that has been ritually trained to don the costumes of *Aro* felt sick and could not attend the rite of *Iran-Epa*. He explained further that they would have found a replacement but they were restricted by the fact that it takes many years to complete all the required spiritual training as a masker or masquerader of *Aro*“ *Aro*'s costumes are not just what any spiritually uninformed man (*Ologberi*) can don,” Chief Jemirin emphasized. He (chief Jemirin), however, showed to me the principal costume of *Aro*, an apparently very old sacred red hand-woven cloth (*Aso-Ipo*), which he brought out from inside an inner room of his house, where it has been carefully concealed (Figure 1.1).

Soon after *Apa* had completed his dance and was led back by his followers to the forest of masquerade (*Igbo-Egungun*), all the spectators, drummers, and singers became fully aware that *Aro* was not forthcoming into the dance space. As a result, it was taken that the rite of *Iran-Epa* (*Epa* spectacle) for that season had concluded. Thus, everybody, except the senior members of the *Epa* society that included the executive members and masqueraders (maskers) of the senior *Egungun-Epa*, as well as the community *Oba* (king) and his high chiefs (*Olorota*), began to disperse from the grove.

As I was uncertain of where to go or what to do next, chief Jemirin (leader of the *Epa* society) approached me and said that the *Iran-Epa* was concluded, meaning that I should follow the spectators' lead by leaving the *Epa* grove at once. He informed me that at the end of each *Iran-Epa*, the society's senior members and the community king together

with his *Olorota* (high chiefs) meet to discuss what the masqueraders or maskers saw, in form of predictions, foretelling, or forecasts, at the time they were inside the *Epa* masquerade costumes. He called this meeting *Ikede* (important announcements).

Usually, according to chief Jemirin, the masqueraders are supposed to have transformed to spirit entities while inside the masquerade costumes, giving them the spiritual powers to have seen and clearly understood all that would have remained forever unknown to the townspeople. The examples may include but are not limited to imminent catastrophes, such as famine, drought, and perennial death of the community youths, among others. The more important masqueraders, at the time they were operating as *Epa* masquerades at the *Ala* dance space, also ought to have known or learnt what to do, in the form of ritual sacrifice(s) to *Orisa-Epa* (*Epa* divinity), to control or avert the impending problem(s). In this way, it could be argued that the overall spiritual essence of *Oro-Epa* (ritual festival for *Epa* divinity) in Iyàh Gbede is to identify, interpret, and deal constructively with the mysteries that are beyond human reasoning. The senior masquerades are so spiritually powerful to the extent that they could clearly perceive and understand what is/are to happen five years in the future.

It can be summed up that the performances of the singers, who confessed *Orisa-Epa* as their divinity and savior, the drummers, who played the rhythms of *Orisa-Epa*, and more importantly, the dynamic choreographic displays by the *Egungun-Epa* were not merely for the enjoyment of the spectators. Rather, they were principally meant to propitiate the *Epa* spirit being, who was expected to reciprocate by transforming the masqueraders to spirit entities, leading them into the spiritual realm, where they could be

spiritually regenerated and to figuratively have access to the face of god. In other words, the *Oro-Epa* (ritual festival for *Orisa-Epa*) is to the members of the *Epa* society as the Friday and Sunday services are to the Muslims and Christians, respectively.

Looking at the *Iran-Epa* from the standpoint of the *connective theory*, at the end of the dance ritual, the final disappearance of the *Epa* masquerades into their sacred forest, from where they emerged at the beginning of the ritual, signified their connection, reconnection, or relocation to their spiritual abode.

I return now to the secular aspect, how *Iran-Epa* (the *Epa* spectacle) operated as an illuminator of the Yoruba concept of *Ibowo f'agba* ('respect for the elders' or 'honor to the elders'). I begin with the etymological analysis of the word *Agba*. It operates as a short form of *Agba-lagba*, *Arugbo*, or *Ogbo-logbo* ('the aged one(s)' 'the old one(s)', or simply 'the elder(s)'). That is, the words *Agba* (as in *Agba-lagba*) and *Gbo* (as in *Ogbo*) both linguistically mean 'old age'.

Traditionally, the Yoruba often associate 'old age' with wisdom, knowledge, experience, and more importantly, with spirituality. Thus every *Agba-lagba* (man or woman) is strongly believed to be spiritually blessed or powerful. By extension, any word that he or she speaks is believed to come directly from the realm of spiritual forces. It is therefore not surprising that the Yoruba strongly believe in the saying, *Oro ti Arugbo/Agba ba wi/so, Ara-Orun lo soo* ('that which is said by an aged or old one should be taken seriously, as the word is exclusively verbalized by the ancestor or spirit being'). In other words, the words of the elders operate as a spiritual force, power, or energy (*Ase*) based on the fact that the old ones are either about to become ancestors, as they are

metaphorically approaching their graves, or actually ancestors, inasmuch as they were dead already. This belief also originated the Yoruba sayings, *Oro Agba bi ko se lowuro, a se lojo ale* ('the words or predictions of the elders always become a reality') and *Oro Agba bi ko t'Egun a t'Eekoro* ('every word of the elders is insightful').

Therefore, based on the above discussed spiritual allusions of the elders, the Yoruba usually give due regard or honor (*Iba*) to the elders, especially whenever they (the Yoruba) want to embark on any ritual ceremony or activity. Overwhelming examples abound in the rite of the *Epa* spectacle (*Oro-Epa*) (examined above). First, it illuminated how the late Jemirin, the founder of the *Oro-Epa* (ritual festival for the *Epa* divinity), was given that great honor when *Akorowo* and *Ará* (both *Epa* masquerades owned by him) opened and closed the dance floor respectively. Second, it illustrated how each of the *Egungun-Epa* paid homage to the *Orisa-Epa* (*Epa* divinity) via the *Egungun* tree that embodied the divinity. Third and last, the rite exemplified how each of the *Epa* masquerades also paid homage to the community ruler (The *Oluof* *Iyah* *Gbedde*), as well as to the *Epa* society leader (Chief Jemirin) before commencing the dance ritual.

However, it is very necessary to note that not all the Yoruba elders are accorded honor or respect. The reason is not difficult to discern. Generally speaking, every elder has some role to play in society, the most important of which is to set a good example for the young ones to follow. In other words, every elder is culturally charged to be a role model to the youths. Failure to meet these expectations usually results in withdrawing the 'elderliness' or privileges associated with the elders and replacing them with disgrace or denigration. Thus, the supportive Yoruba philosophical saying, *Agba to j'ajee weyin, yio*

nikan gbe'gba re dele koko ('the elder who failed to share his/her food with the young ones should be left to carry home all by himself/herself, his or her luggage'). What this proverb is underscoring is that the elders should not take advantages of the younger ones. In other words, a respectable elder is the one who cheerfully reciprocates every service rendered him/her by the younger one(s), even without been told.

CHAPTER VI

THE IJUMU NORTHEASTERN-YORUBA EGUNGUN II:

ICONOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter is concerned with iconographical interpretations of the Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun* masquerades. The principal theoretical approach used in the chapter is an indigenously derived conceptual framework that I entitle *connective theory* (already fully delineated in chapter one, under the subheading, ‘theory and methodology’). With the application of this theory, the chapter illuminates how the masquerade costumes (*Ekú-Egungun*) operate as a reliable form of historical documentation of the Ijumu-Yoruba cultural practices, especially their spiritual belief system as it relates to the *Egungun*. I begin the discussion by tracing the origin of the *Ekú-Egungun* in Yorubaland from the oral historical perspective. I then fully analyze the iconography¹⁸⁷ of the Ijumu masquerades costumes, paying critical attention to their relationship with those found among the other Yoruba subgroups in southwestern Nigeria, as well as among the non-Yoruba Ijumu neighbors, such as the Ebirá, Igala, and northern Edo peoples.

¹⁸⁷ “Iconography” is generally the study of the meanings of images. The term, as analyzed by Erwin Panofsky, associates with sign or semiotics theory. However, as used in the context of this chapter/dissertation, iconography is the study of the meanings of all the constituent elements or materials composition of the *Ekú-Egungun* among the Ijumu-Yoruba people.

The word *Ekú*, which means ‘the realm of the dead, of the spirit being(s), or of the spirit forces’, has its root in the *Odu-Ifa*¹⁸⁸ (*Ifa* divination verse/chapter), *Odu Oworin-Se* (*Oworin-Ose*):

Aruku
Aruku,
Arukuwoja-mata.
Oku taa gbe roja ti ko ta,
La gbe so sigbo.
Oun la tun gbe wale,
Taa daso bo,
*Taa n pe leegun.*¹⁸⁹

[My translation:

Aruku (the corpse carrier or one-who carried the corpse).
 He carried the corpse to the market but was unable to sell it.
 The corpse was then thrown into the bush.
 The same corpse was later wrapped in a shroud and taken home and
 became what we now call (recognize as) the masquerade.]

The *Odu-Ifa* explained how *Oworin*’s child threw his corpse into the bush instead of giving him a befitting burial. The child grew up and was faced with the problem of impotence, which prevented him from impregnating his wife. At the counsel of the *Ifa* divination priest (diviner), he was told that the source of his problem was his father’s corpse that he thrown into the bush. He was then advised to look for the corpse (remains) and take it home for a befitting burial rite. Responding to the advice, he located the corpse, wrapped it with the shroud (*Ekú-Egungun*), and took it home and made an elaborate burial ceremony, a ritual that enabled him to become fertile and have children.

¹⁸⁸ “*Odu-Ifa*” can be described as the Yoruba *Ifa* divination verses/chapters that operate as a reliable form of oral historical data of the ancient Yoruba peoples’ cultural past, such as the ways they lived their lives, the problems that confronted them, and what they did to avert the situations. There are sixteen main verses/chapters (*Oju-Odu*) of the *Odu-Ifa* and two hundred and forty minor verses/chapters called *Omo-Odu*.

¹⁸⁹ Adedeji, 71.

The key idea in this oral literary corpus is that what is to this day known as *Ekú* (masquerade costume) actually embodied the spirit of the dead or the dead by way of its corpse. It is therefore not surprising that the maskers or masqueraders (human beings that don or wear the masquerade costumes) are called *AREKU*, which from the linguistic standpoint (as earlier discussed in chapter three), is comprised of three separate words: *A+RU+EKU*. 'A' literally means 'those who' or 'one-who'. 'RU' means 'carry', 'wear', or 'don', while 'EKU' means 'masquerade costume(s)', which by extension, represents or is named after the shroud that was used to carry the corpse of *Oworin* from the bush down to the town/home for proper burial at the instruction of the *Ifa* priest/diviner. In other words, *Ekú-Egungun* has an eschatological, and by implication, spiritual allusion. In most of the Yoruba communities till this day, such as Iyamoye in Ijumuland, the diviner(s) must be consulted prior to the performance of the ritual festival for/of *Egungun* (*Odu-Egungun*). The principal reason for doing so is to seek permission from the *Ifa* divination divinity to bring the spirit of *Egungun* into the town via the masquerade costumes (*Ekú-Egungun*), in the same way as *Oworin* child sought counsel from the diviner in *Odu Oworin-Se* (stated above).

Typology and Constituent Elements of *Ekú-Egungun* (Masquerade Costumes)

The Ijumu masquerade costumes (*Ekú-Egungun*) exhibit two important attributes that distinguish them from those found among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. In contrast to those found among other Yoruba subgroups in Southwestern Nigeria that are essentially of cloth costumes, most Ijumu *Ekú-Egungun* (masquerade costumes) are made

of a composite of cloth costumes and split raffia fibers (*Iko*) or palm fronds (*Mariwo*). Specifically, of all the three Ijumu communities of Iyamoye, Ekinrin-Adde, and Iyah-Gbedde, where the masquerading traditions are still prominent, as well as Egbeda-Egga, where the practice is taking its last breath, only the *Ekú-Egungun* in Iyamoye are essentially cloth costumes. The other communities' *Ekú-Egungun* are a composite of cloth costumes and other human-made and natural objects. Examples include carved headpieces, bird feathers, palm fronds or sago-palm fibers, and iron gongs, among others. While the *Ekú-Egungun* among other Yoruba subgroups are fashioned to cover the entire body of the maskers, thus completely concealing the maskers' or masqueraders' human personalities, masquerade costumes in Ijumuland often leave uncovered some parts of the masqueraders' body, especially the arms and legs. The *Egungun-Epa* (*Epa* masquerades) in Iyah-Gbedde are a good example (Figure 5.9).

In a related development, John Picton has found most of the masqueraders of Akoko-Edo, the non-Yoruba Ijumu Southern neighbors, leave free and visible their legs and arms. He (Picton) thought that the masquerader's intention "does not seem to be the denial of human agency in the manifestation of metaphysical entities, but rather the hiding away of the individual as part of the process of his removal from one social category to another."¹⁹⁰ This theory also applies to the *Epa* masqueraders (of Iyah-Gbedde Ijumu), because they do not seem to conceal their individuals' personalities in any way. For instance, while inside the costumes, they still left on their body the pants and shirts that they wore from their homes down to the venue of the performance (*Ala*). In effect,

¹⁹⁰ Picton, "On Artifact and Identity at the Niger-Benue Confluence," *African Arts* xxiv, no. 3 (1991): 42-43.

most of the spectators (males and females) vividly recognized the impersonators of the masquerades by their human dress underneath the masquerade costumes, even to the extent of knowing them (the maskers) by their first names. Moreover, that the Ijumu masqueraders do not hide their human identity may best explain why the Ijumu and other Ookun-Yoruba people in the western bank of the Niger-Benue confluence region, unlike their Yoruba counterparts in Southwestern Nigeria, do not refer to *Egungun* as *Ara Orun* ('dwellers/citizens of the heaven').

Before I move on to the main subject of this chapter (iconographical analysis of the Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun*), it is important to briefly examine the major attribute of *Ekun-Egungun* peculiar to the *Egungun* among the Yoruba subgroups of southwestern Nigeria. Research has shown that many Yoruba *Egungun* in Southwestern Nigeria, in contrast to their counterparts in Ijumu Northeastern-Yorubaland, have attached to the top or back of their heads a ruff of white hairs or furs (*Ror*). For instance, in her study of the *Egungun* masquerades of the Remo-Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria, Marilyn Hammersley Houlberg observed the ruff of white hair or fur being attached to the top of the heads of some of the community *Egungun* called *Alubata* (literally 'the *bata* drummer or player').¹⁹¹ She described the forest-dwelling monkeys from which the furs/ruff of white hairs are obtained as predominantly associated with *Egungun* in most parts of the Yorubaland.¹⁹² Indeed, my recent field investigation, on which this dissertation is based, clearly shows that this attribute is uncharacteristic of the Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun*.

¹⁹¹ Houlberg, 20.

¹⁹² Houlberg, 22.

Corroborating Houlberg's view that monkey furs form an indispensable part of some masquerade costumes of the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, John and Margaret Drewal have reported that they found a parallel at Egbado-Yoruba (Southwestern Nigeria) among the costumes of certain *Egungun* called *alabala*. They asserted that the turf of wool yarn attached to the top of every (*Egungun*) *alabala* costume in Egbado bears affinity with "the topknot of fur on the monkey's crown."¹⁹³

Typology of Ijumu *Ekú-Egungun* (Masquerade Costumes)

With reference to the two processes of 'putting' the *Ekú-Egungun* on the body of the maskers or masqueraders, the Ijumu *Ekú-Egungun* could be categorized into two: *Ekú-Gbigbe* (literally 'the carrying of masquerade costumes') and *Ekú-Didi* (literally, 'the tying up of masquerade costumes'). In practice, the former exemplifies the masquerade costumes which the masker/masquerader (*Areku*)¹⁹⁴ wears, dons, or 'puts on' to cover his entire body. All the constituent elements of the masquerade costumes, which include but are not limited to long pants (*Reke*), long sleeved shirts (*Itele*), hand and leg gloves (*Ibowo ati Ibose*), and headpiece(s), of every *Egungun* of this category (of *Ekú-Gbigbe*), are sewn together as one unit. By so doing, all the masker/masquerader needs to do to become a masquerade (*Egungun*) is to 'wear' or 'don' the already-made-one unit's masquerade costumes. *Egungun* Ekinrin Adde ad to some extent, *Egungun* Iyamoye fit into this category (Figures 6.7 and 6.8). I use the words 'to some extent' with regard to

¹⁹³ Drewal and Drewal, 30.

¹⁹⁴ "Masker/masquerader (*Areku*) is the man who impersonates the *Egungun* spirit being by covering his entire or most parts of his body with masquerade costumes (*Ekú-Egungun*). In particular, his entire face must be completely covered so that his human identity or personally will become concealed or lost. He is referred to *Egungun* (masquerade) as soon as he concealed his body with the masquerade costumes.

Egungun Iyamoye for the singular reason that certain parts of the costumes called *Egba-Ese* ('the leg bands') are not originally sewn together with the costumes; rather, they are tied to the masker's legs after he has worn/donned the costumes (Figure 6.8).

Conversely, regarding *Ekú-Didi*, each of the constituent elements of the masquerade costumes, such as cloth, metal anklets, headpiece(s), and brass bell(s), among others, is assembled on the masker's body one after the other by way of tying and/or knotting. In *Egungun* circles, this process is known as 'tie and knot' of masquerade (*Egungun-Tita*). Every *Egungun-Epa* of Iyah-Gbedde belongs to this category (of *Ekú-Didi*) (Figures 1.2, 6.1, 6.4, 6.5i, and 8.5). Babatunde Lawal has observed the costumes of *Gelede* (another category of Yoruba masking tradition prevalent among certain Yoruba subgroups in southwestern Nigeria) being assembled on the body of the maskers using the tie and knot technique.¹⁹⁵ The similarity notwithstanding, the two Yoruba masking traditions (*Gelede* and *Epa*) are spiritually unrelated. For instance, while the *Gelede* ritual pacifies the great mothers (witches), so that they could use their spiritual powers to benefit humankind, among others, *Epa* ritual tradition (*Oro-Epa*), as noted in Chapter five, placates the forest-dwelling *Epa* spirit being to make him ward off any imminent catastrophes in the community.

Constituent Elements of Ijumu Masquerade Costumes (*Ekú-Egungun*)

The constituent elements of the Ijumu masquerade costumes in each of the two categories (*Ekú-Gbigbe* and *Ekú-Didi*) include but are not limited to *Aso Pupa* (red cloth, especially

¹⁹⁵ Babatunde Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1996), 163.

the type called *Asø Ipo* (Figure 6.9), *Abebe* (fans), *Arø* (metal anklets), *Egba-Ese* (ankle bands), and *Iru-Efon* (buffalo tails). Others are *Mariwo/Moriwo* (palm fronds or young palm leaves) or *Iko* (raffia fibers and/or young raffia palm leaves), *Iye* (an assemblage of bird feathers), *Agogo* (iron gongs), *Saworo-Ide* (brass bells), and *Ere* (carved headpieces/masks).

Specifically, Iyamoye masquerades are distinguished by the following costume elements: industrial-type red cloth (*Asø Pupa*), legs bands (*Egba-Ese*), and/or hand fan(s) (*Abebe*) and an assemblage of bird feathers (*Iye*) (Figures 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5). On the other hand, Ekinrin-Adde masquerades are characterized by the following costume elements: *Aso-Ipo* (traditional hand-woven red sacred cloth), raffia fibers (often dyed in red color), and or hand fan(s) (Figures 2.6, 2.7, and 3.7). Conversely, the costumes of every *Egungun-Epa* in Iyah-gbedde feature an assemblage of palm fronds (*Mariwo/Moriwo*), *Aso-Ipo* (traditional hand-woven red sacred cloths), and iron gongs (*Agogo*). Others are buffalo tails (*Iru-Efon*), brass bells (*Saworo-Ide*), metal anklets (*Arø*), headpieces (carved headpieces/masks or assemblages of bird feathers), and/or hand fans (Figures 1.2, 6.1, 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5i).

As noted in Chapter one (under ‘theory and methodology’), every constituent element of masquerade costumes of Ijumu *Egungun*, as well as of *Egungun* from other Yoruba subgroups in southwestern Nigeria, has certain symbolism. I analyze, as follows, the symbolism of the masquerade costumes (*Ekú-Egungun*) found among the Ijumu *Egungun* of Iyamoye, Ekinrin-Adde, and Iyah-Gbedde.

Red Cloth (*Aso-Pupa*)

I treat first the red cloth costume of *Egungun* because it appears on all the Ijumu masquerades, irrespective of the Ijumu community from which each of the *Egungun* comes, in contrast to some other constituent elements of the costumes that are unique to some *Egungun* in a given community. In other words, by tradition red cloths form an indispensable part of every masquerade's costumes in Ijumuland, as exemplified by all the *Egungun* in Iyamoye, Ekinrin-Adde, Iyah-Gbedde, and even in Egbeda-Egga where the costumes have been disposed of in the forest (Figures 1.2, 1.5, 2.3, 2.6, 7.1, and 7.2). The action, as earlier noted, is in connection with the new faith of some of the custodians of the masquerade costumes who strongly hold that all traces of *Egungun* in the community must be wiped out, as the tradition is idolatry.

As aptly observed by Henry Drewal and John Mason (1998), the Yoruba understanding of color is different from the Western thought of it "as light consisting of three variable properties: hue, value, and intensity."¹⁹⁶ Because quite a large number of readers who have access to this dissertation are presumably non-Yoruba natives, it becomes imperative to open the discussion with an overview of Yoruba color theories as they relate to the red cloth costume of Ijumu *Egungun*.

The Yoruba word for color is *Awo*. Basically, the Yoruba group *Awo* (colors) into three based on their temperatures or temperaments: blue or black (*Awo-Dudu*), white (*Awo-Funfun*), and red (*Awo-Pupa/Pipon*). Categorized under the rubric of blue or black color (*Awo-Dudu*) are colors of dark shades such as black, blue, dark brown, purple

¹⁹⁶ Henry J. Drewal John Mason, *Beads Body and Soul: Art and Light in the Yoruba Universe* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998), 18.

indigo, green, and dark gray, among others. Belonging to the white color group (*Awo-Funfun*) are white, light gray, pale gray, and silver, among others, while the red color group (*Awo-Pupa/Pipon*) is characterized by warm (*Lo wooro*) and/or hot (*Gbona/Gbigbona*) temperature. The examples include red, orange, pink, deep yellow, yellow, brick red, and so on.

At the primary level of Yoruba divinity or spirit being (because the colors, in terms of their temperatures, bear affinities with the temperaments of the divinities), at least one color is associated with a divinity whose attitude is related to that of the given color. The following examples illustrate this point. *Obatala* (divine god and second in command to the Supreme Being) is believed to be a pure, holy, and impartial divinity. Thus, he is associated with white color (*Awo-Funfun*). *Yemoja* (goddess of the river) is believed to be a cool and calm goddess who blesses her devotees with wealth, good health, many children, and so on. Hence, she is associated with blue, indigo, and purple colors of *Awo-Dudu*. Conversely, hot temperamental divinities include *Sango* (god of thunder and lightening) and *Ogun* (god of iron and war), among others. They are associated with red (hot) color red (*Awo-Gbigbona*). Conversely, there are some divinities or spirit beings that sandwich between cool and hot temperaments (*Kogbona-Kotutu*). At times their devotees may provoke them and get away with it, provided these divinities are in a cool mood at the time of the occurrence, such as when a given devotee offers an inadequate sacrifice to his/her (family) spirit being. At other times, the devotees may offend them and be severely punished. Thus, with respect to their cool-hot attitudes, these gods are associated with all colors—white, red, blue, green, orange, and so on. *Egungun*, the

subject of this dissertation, is a typical example. Thus, it becomes clear that red color of the cloth costume of *Egungun* masquerades illustrates the hot or dangerous aspect of the *Egungun* spirit being(s). In other words, the red cloth, which forms an indispensable part of Ijumu masquerade costumes, operates as spiritual energies or powers that are capable of dealing ruthlessly with whoever breaks the societal laws/norms.

To have a comprehensive understanding of the spiritual implications of red cloth and its association with Ijumu masquerade costumes, it becomes vital to examine its root in *Ifa* literary corpus (*Odu-Ifa*). This is necessary for the singular reason that the literary corpus operates as a fountain of knowledge of all the Yoruba traditional beliefs and practices, epistemologies, worldviews, and history. This point has been corroborated by Wande Abimbola, a native scholar of Yoruba oral literature and titled holder in the Yoruba society of *Ifa* diviners (*Babalawo*):

The wisdom and understanding of *Ifa* is believed to cover not only the past, but also the present and the future. By consulting *Ifa*, the Yoruba find meaning and purpose in the past, the present, and future...In traditional Yoruba society, the Yoruba consult *Ifa* before they do anything important. At the birth of a new child, *Ifa* is usually consulted to find out what would be the fortunes and problems of the new child on earth...In sickness, in contemplating a journey, in considering the choice of a life partner and at any other important turn in their lives, the Yoruba usually consult *Ifa* for guidance and advice.¹⁹⁷

Two important verses (three and four) in *the Ifa* corpus (*Odu Oyeku-Meji*), deal with the spiritual etymology of *Aso-pupa* (the red cloth):

1. *Odu Oyeku-Meji (Ese-Eketa)*:
Iwo Oye
Emi Oye
Oye meji li o d'Ifa f' Olofin

¹⁹⁷ Wande Abimbola, *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press Nigeria, 1976), 10.

Won ni:
Meji a se'tan ninu awon omo re ti o maabi
Sugbon kioma binu nitoripe won a ri're.
Won niki o wa ru'bo
Aso Keleku, Ki awon omo na maafi bo'ra
*O gbo o ru.*¹⁹⁸

[My translation:

You and I are *Oye*;

Just as the two *Oye* cast the *Ifa* for *Olofin*.

They told *Olofin* that two of his future children would have cricket-legs, but that he should not let the situation bother him, as the children will be successful in life.

The two *Oye* (diviners) next asked him to make a ritual offering of a red cloth (*keleku*).

He followed the advice by making the ritual sacrifice and everything was well with him and the future children.]

What is of primary significance in the *Odu Oyeku-Meji*, verse three (translated above), is the spirituality of the red cloth. As reflected in the verse, the red cloth is believed to protect the future children of *Olofin* from the activities of the evildoers (especially the witches), who are thought of as using their spiritual powers to change one's destiny from good to bad. The Yoruba strongly hold that it is one thing to be born with a good destiny (*Ipin-Rere*) but it is another thing to keep it, as the destiny changers (witches and sorcerers) are all around in the invisible realm, working against human fortunes. Thus, in Yoruba traditional society, when a child was born, the parents consult the diviner not only to find out the nature of the new baby's destiny (*Esentaye*), but more importantly, to know the necessary ritual sacrifice(s) to perform in order to spiritually protect the child from evil eyes. Such is the sacrificial item of the red cloth (*keleku*) that was prescribed to *Olofin*. Even though the diviners were certain that the two children are destined to be

¹⁹⁸ Afolabi A. Epege and Philip J. Neimark, *The Sacred Ifa Oracle* (New-York: A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 8.

successful in life, they still advised their father to offer a ritual sacrifice (of red cloth), the purpose of which was to protect the children against the malicious activities of the evildoers. On the other hand, from the literary point of view, *keleku* means ‘he/she cannot die’—an affirmative statement that if *Olofin* could offer the prescribed sacrificial item (red cloth), neither of the two children would die young.

It is therefore not surprising that the red cloth costume of the Ijumu *Egungun* is strongly believed to be a ritual that is capable of protecting the devotees and townspeople as a whole against any imminent catastrophes. This belief is further confirmed in the way every *Asò Ipo* (‘red sacred traditional hand-woven cloth’) of *Egungun-Epa* (masquerades) in Iyah-Gbedde is always in the custody of the eldest male member of each of the *Egungun* clans/lineage (Figure 1.1). Thought of as the ‘soul or ancestral power’ of the family, the *Aso -Ipo* are entrusted to him because, as the oldest member of the family (old age is analogous to wisdom in Yoruba culture), he has the unparalleled wisdom to jealously guard and keep the material(s) in a safe place. Other attestation to the spiritual supremacy of the red cloth costume of *Egungun* is illustrated in the way the old and raggedy ones are never discarded or removed from the body of the masquerade costumes (*Ekú-Egungun*). According to Chief Jemirin (leader of the *Epa* masquerades society), the older (usually judged by the degree of how ‘badly’ they worn out) the red cloth costumes of the *Egungun*, the more spiritually powerful they are believed to have become (Figure 6.9). The Chief’s information was confirmed by Chief S. A. Olugbami of Ekinrin-Adde who stressed that the costumes of *Egungun* Adde, of which the *Aso-Ipo* form an indispensable part, are passed from one generation to the next as no new

masquerade costumes must be made, even when the old ones become worn-out. He added that the ancient people who constructed the costumes had infused them with certain spiritual powers that remain in them permanently.

2. *Odu Oyeku-Meji (Ese Ekerin):*
Opa gbongbo nii siwaju agbon'nini,
Atelese mejeeji a jija du ona gborogan-gborogan,
Apasa ab'enu bombo.
A d'Ifa fun erunlelogojo aso a bu fun keleku.
Nwon ni ki arunlelogojo aso ru'bo ki keleku naa r'ubo
Ki won ki o ma baa ri iku ajoku.
Erunlelogojo aso ko ru'bo, sugbon keleku ni'kan ni o ru'bo.
Ko lojo ko losu ni oluwa awon aso wonyi ku,
Awon ara ile si pe gbogbo won pe ki nwon maa mu'ra lati ba
olowo won lo si orun;
Nwon ko gbogbo awon aso wonyi ka'le, nwon si mu keleku naa pelu won
Sugbon Esu da'hun o ni:
O Soko! Awon eniyan ni: Gbon-in!
O ni: Kele ru o,
Kele tu,
Afinju aso kii y'orun.
Nigba ti Esu wi bayi tan ni awon eniyan mu keleku kuro ni aarin awon aso
ti won maa fi sin Oku;
Lati igba naa ni a ko ti gbodo fi aso ti o ba ni pupa tabi ti o ba je aso pupa sin
oku...Ifa ni ki eni ti a da Ifa yi fun ki o ru'bo ki o ma baa ri iku ajoku.¹⁹⁹

[My translation:

Walker get rids of the dews on a bushy footpath with the plum wooden staff.

Both of the two soles of the feet walk simultaneously on the footpath.

The loom's beater is characterized with its peculiar big (protruding) head.

It casts for one hundred and sixty-five different color clothes (weavers), as well as for *Keleku* ('the red cloth').

¹⁹⁹ William Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men In West Africa* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1969), 238-240. I need to inform the reader that I edited the old Yoruba orthographies as well as the spelling mistakes of the author (William Bascom) in this quotation. The examples include 'eniyan' instead of the old spelling, 'enia' and 'erunlelogojo' (165) instead of the author's incorrect spelling, 'erunlojo'. I also worked on his incorrect translation of some words or phrases in the quote, such as 'apasa a b'enu bombo' ('the loom's rod/beater with its peculiar big or protruding head') instead of the author's incorrect or meaningless interpretation: "sword of loom it bear-mouth dull." The reason for the mistakes is understandable—the author evidently has little or no knowledge at all, of the Yoruba language.

The diviners asked all the one hundred and sixty-five (weavers of) different color clothes, as well as (the weaver of) *keleku* red cloth to offer certain ritual sacrifices so that they will not all die young.

All the one hundred and sixty-five different color cloths, except *Keleku* ('the red cloth'), refused to make the ritual offering.

Not sooner than later, the master (lead weaver) of these different color clothes died. Thus, all of them were told to be preparing to accompany the dead to the grave/world of the spirits.

The deceased's family members then laid on the floor all of the one hundred and sixty five different color clothes, as well as *Keleku* red cloth, in preparation to use them to bury the dead.

But *Esu* (the unpredictable divinity) said: fellow gentlemen and women!

All that were there answered him: speak on! (Continue your speech).

He (*Esu*) commented: *Kele* ('the red cloth') offered the prescribed ritual sacrifice; It is spiritually well with *Kele*. Thus, a famous and spiritually powerful must not accompany the dead to the grave/world of the spirits.

As soon as *Esu* completed his speech, the funeral ritual participants took *keleku* ('the red cloth') out of the array of the clothes of different colors that were to be used to bury the corpse.

Since then on, it is forbidden burying the corpse with a red cloth or any cloth that has any red in it.

Ifa divinity asked whosoever this divination (*Oyeku-Meji*, verse four) is subsequently cast for to always offer a certain ritual sacrifice so that he/she will not die suddenly. *Ifa* asked the head of the family from which the person whom the divination verse is cast to as well, make a certain ritual sacrifice to avoid been killed that year].

This verse four of *Odu Ifa (Oyeku-Meji)*, like the third verse (illustration 1 above),

underscores the spiritual allusion of red cloth as well as the origin of its spiritual power.

Being a sacred cloth that is dangerous to the dead, capable of denying his/her spirit's entry into the realm of spiritual forces, it was clearly advised by *Ifa* divinity (as contained in my translation above) that it (any cloth of red color) must not be used for burial purpose(s). From the narrative/translation, the source of the red cloth's spiritual power is also very clear—the weaver of the (red) cloth obeyed the sacred words of *Ifa* divination divinity by offering the necessary sacrifice. In return, in spiritual realm the divinity reciprocated the red cloth by imbuing it with the sacred power that made it to be the most

spiritually important of all clothes. This lesson, among others, teaches the Yoruba to see the diviners' predictions as well as the associated prescriptive sacrifices as coming directly from the mouth of *Ifa* divinity. Thus, they habitually obey by fulfilling every sacrificial obligation, with the strong belief that ritual sacrifices in general are a means of consolidating and/or protecting one with spiritual energies. Thus, the Yoruba saying: *Riru ebo nii gbe'ni; airu ebo kii gbeniyan* ('the end result is always promising for the one who offers the prescribed ritual sacrifice but miserable for the one who refuses').

Headpieces

My recent field research in the Ijumu communities of Iyamoye, Ekinrin-Adde, and Iyah-Gbedde, on which this dissertation is based, has shown that there are two types of masquerade headpieces within the three communities. They (the headpieces) include *Ere* and *Iye*. *Ere* means 'carved headpieces/masks', while *Iye* means 'an assemblage of bird feathers.

Of all the masquerades in the three Ijumu communities, it is only in Iyah-Gbedde where some *Epa* masquerades (*Egungun-Epa*) used the *Ere* (carved headpieces/masks) (Figures 7.3, 7.4, and 7.5). Conversely, *Iye* (assemblage of bird feathers) appeared on one *Egungun* masquerade in Iyamoye called *Ogelese* (Figure 7.6) and on two in Iyah-Gbedde by the names *Akorowo* and *Ate* (Figures 7.7 and 7.8). Neither of the two types of headpieces (*Ere* and *Iye*) appeared on the Ekinrin-Adde masquerades.

Another Ijumu community where masquerade carved headpieces/masks (*Ere*) were used is Egbeda-Egga. I used the past tense ('were') because *Egungun* tradition in this

community has recently been suspended, while many of the masquerade costumes, of which the *Ere* (carved headpieces/masks) were predominant, have been trashed into the bush (Figures 7.9 and 8.1). The reason (as earlier noted) was that the destroyers of the costumes, on becoming born-again Christians, thought that the masquerade tradition was idolatry.

I begin the analysis of Ijumu masquerade headpieces with the first type, *Ere* (carved headpieces/masks), followed by the second type, *Iye* (assemblage of bird feathers). Generally speaking, every Yoruba masquerade (in Ijumu or elsewhere) that has carved headpiece(s)/mask(s) (*Ere*) is referred to as *Eegun-Elere* (literally, ‘masquerades with carved images’) or *Eegun-Eleru* (literally, ‘masquerades with heavy loads’). Both terms are used interchangeably.

Three out of the five *Epa* masquerades whose dance performance contexts (at Iyah-Gbedde) I observed, have carved headpieces/masks (*Ere*), while the other two have their headpieces made of assemblages of bird feathers (*Iye*). The three that have carved headpieces/masks are *Apa*, *Ori-Igi*, and *Olomoyoyo* (Figures 7.3, 7.4, and 7.5). However, while *Ori-Igi* and *Olomoyoyo* have helmet carved headpieces/masks, covering their entire heads, *Apa*’s carved headpiece/mask is a facemask, covering only the face (Figure 7.3). All the three carved headpieces/masks (*Ere*) are painted in red, black, and white colors, and have superstructures of human figures.

In his work entitled, *The symbolism and significance of Epa-type masquerade headpieces* (1978), John Rowland Ojo observed that “the names of the headpieces, as well as the names of individual masqueraders are based on the sculptural motifs on the

superstructures of the headpieces.”²⁰⁰ While this rule works well for *Olomoyoyo*, one of the three *Epa* masquerades of Iyah-Gbedde that have the carved headpieces, it is not applicable to the other two, *Apa* and *Ori-Igi*. As earlier noted, *Olomoyoyo* (‘owner of many children’ or ‘controller of many children’) has the carved headpiece that is surmounted by human figures of a mother with her children. Thus, the name of the masquerade corresponds with the sculptural images on the superstructures of his headpiece/mask. The other two masquerades’ names, *Apa* and *Ori-Igi*, which literally mean ‘extravagance’ and ‘the one whose head is made of wood’ respectively, do not correspond with the motifs on their respective headpieces (Figures 7.3 and 7.4). However, as observed as follows, the motifs on the superstructures of each of the three headpieces/masks suggest the spiritual and/or secular attributes of each of the *Epa* masquerades that have them.

Starting with *Olomoyoyo* (Figure 7.5), the central figure has been identified as a mother by Chief Jemirin, whose family owns the headpiece/masquerade (note: when the headpiece is in use, it is called masquerade, while it is referred to as mask/headpiece when not in use). The figure has on her head a head wrap (*Gele*) made of a special hand-woven cloth called *Kijipa*. In Yoruba culture, *Kijipa* that is often used for carrying babies on the back is associated with fertility. Pieces of red cloths and threads are attached around the superstructures. Red color, as earlier noted, is associated with spiritual powers/forces. In this case, the red color of the cloths and threads is believed to protect the children, as well as their mother from evil eyes (malicious activities of the witches).

²⁰⁰ Ojo J.R.O., “The Symbolism and Significance of Epa-Type Masquerade Headpieces,” 455.

Like the two other *Epa* carved headpieces, the mask is painted in red, white, and black colors. The colors are supposed to enhance the surface quality/beauty of the mask, as masks/sculpted images (*Ere*) are synonymous with beauty. This point is illustrated in the Yoruba complimentary statement: *O lewa bi Ere* ('she is as beautiful as a sculpted image).

The mother with children motif of the superstructures on the carved headpiece/mask of the masquerade (*Olomoyoyo*) is associated with fertility. Chief Jemirin (the owner of the masquerade) has confirmed this allusion, when he declared that *Olomoyoyo* (masquerade) is celebrated for blessing with children, every barren woman that approaches him. He stressed that every barren woman who petitions *Olomoyoyo* for children usually has her request answered within one year.

The next in the group is *Apa*, a facemask (Figure 7.3). The carved headpiece is surmounted by two human figures: a male and female called *Ejiwapo* ('two heads are better than one' or 'all two together'). They illustrate male-female indispensability to one another, a pointer that *Epa* rituals (*Oro-Epa*) are performed or celebrated by both males and females in Iyah-Gbedde. The female figure (on the right) associates with *Eleusu*, the female leader of *Epa* society, while the male figure (on the left) connects with *Obaigbo* (literally, 'king of the forest'), the society's chief priest. Both figures carry in their hand the characteristic emblem of *Obaigbo* and *Eleusu*'s spiritual position—a fan (*Abebe*). Literally, *Abebe* means 'we beg for a favor' or 'we plead for a positive consideration'. While the figure that represents *Obaigbo* carries the fan in his right hand, an allusion of

masculinity, the one that signifies *Eleusu* carries the fan in her left hand, an allusion of femininity.

A critical observation of the masquerade (*Apa*), who has the facemask that is surmounted by the superstructures, reveals that he (*Apa* masquerade) carries in both hands a pair of *Abebe* made of deer skin (*Awo-Agbonrin*) (Figures 6.5i and 6.6). The Yoruba conceptualize *Agbonrin* (deer) as sacred animals. They hold the belief that witches (*Aje*) could transform from human beings to spirit entities or from secular/visible to spiritual/invisible realm, using the deer as a medium. It is said that when the witches transform to deer, they besiege the farmlands of their ‘human’ enemies and eat/destroy all the crops and vegetables. However, as wild animals, deer belong to the bush. Thus, they are naturally expected to feed on wild fruits and leaves of the forest, not human food. Therefore, by eating/destroying the farmers’ crops and/or vegetables, they have crossed their boundary from animals’ space to humans’ realm, an allusion of liminality/spirituality.

From this perspective, it could be argued that the pair of *Abebe* (made of deerskin) carried by *Apa* (masquerade) (Figures 6.5i and 6.6), as well as those held by the human figures on the superstructures of the *Apa* mask (Figure 7.3), have some spiritual implication. They operate as a form of ritual petition or request for favors from *Orisa-Epa* (*Epa* spirit being). That *Obaigbo* (*Epa* chief priest) and *Eleusu* (female leader of the society) are in charge of presentation of sacrifices to the *Epa* divinity in his shrine best explains why both the male and female human figures on the superstructures of the *Apa* mask carry *Abebe*, the emblem of their role (Figure 7.3). Babatunde Lawal corroborates

this point when he aptly points out the symbolic meanings of *Abebe*: “the fan (*Abebe*) has a dual symbolism. At the primary level of divinity and leadership, it signifies the powers to cool tension, solve problems, or provide relief. At another level, it connotes humility and supplication.”²⁰¹ That *Abebe* (fan) characteristically operates as a form of ritual sacrifice believed to pacify, propitiate, or appease the *Egungun* spirit beings or divinities (*Orisa/Ebora*) best explains why at least one *Egungun* from every Ijumu community where the tradition is still prevalent carries it (*Abebe*) in his hand(s) (Figures 1.3, 6.6, and 8.2).

The last *Epa* carved headpiece/mask in the group is *Ori-Igi*. A sculptural motif of a man that carries a gun in his right hand and a wooden staff in his left hand surmounts the mask (Figure 7.4). He wears a blouse that looks like *Gberi-Ode* (hunter’s garment), while on his head is a tray-like cap (*Akete*). Pieces of red cloths attach around the cap’s rim. A deer or antelope horn containing magical medicines (*Afose*) hangs on his neck. *Afose* means spiritual energies/forces that make the bearer’s wish/wishes come to pass. The motifs illustrate the characteristic emblems of Yoruba hunters (*Olode*) or warriors (*Ologun/Jagunjagun*); thus, the superstructure could be identified as a Yoruba hunter or warrior. The *Epa* chief priest (*Obaigbo*), who is the custodian of the mask/masquerade, informed me that it could be called either of the two (hunter or warrior). He pointed out that the Ijumu as well as other OoKun Yoruba communities’ hunters were the same group of people who enlisted as warriors and finally defeated the Nupe invaders-warriors in the 1890s, thereby securing independence for their people. Thus, looking at it from this

²⁰¹ Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 189.

angle, it becomes apparent that the superstructure on *Ori-Igi* (mask) also operates as an historical document of the Nupe invasions of Ijumuland and how the Ijumu people resisted the invasions.

Based on the fact that they use iron weapons such as guns and charms/medicines such as *Afose* (both illustrated in *Ori-Igi* mask), Yoruba hunters/warriors are associated with *Ogun*, the divinity of iron and war and *Osanyin*, the charm/medicine spirit being. By implication, the association best explains why the *Epa* rituals, especially the dance performance contexts, in which the *Epa* masquerade (*Ori-Igi*) participated, were in honor of *Epa* divinity (*Orisa-Epa*) as well as *Ogun*, *Osanyin*, and even the deceased warriors, who fought and secured independence for the Ijumu people.

Theology of the Carved Headpieces/Masks

In his study entitled *Yoruba Masks: Notes on the masks of the North-East Yoruba Country* (1956), Father Kevin Carroll raised two intriguing questions necessary to be answered by every Yoruba art scholar whose research is related to sculpted (molded, carved, or cast) headpieces/masks:

Are (Yoruba masks) idols, fetish, ancestor spirit, or totemic emblems?
Are they the actual seat(s) of supernatural forces or deities, or do they merely symbolize or represent them?²⁰²

John Pemberton III (1978), Marilyn Hammersley Houlberg (1978), and Rom Kalilu (1991), among others, have partly or wholly responded to the questions based on the individual's observation(s) at the respective Yoruba community or communities on which

²⁰² Father Kevin Carroll, "Yoruba Masks: Notes on the masks of the North-East Yoruba Country," *Odu: Journal of Yoruba and Related Studies* 3 (1956): 9.

the individual's research focuses. Pemberton III in his study of the Igbomina-Yoruba masquerades, discovered that not all *Egungun paaka* have carved headpieces. This observation made him assert that "carvings have nothing to do with the power of a masquerade but at best reflect the pride and affluence of the owner and the lineage to which it belongs."²⁰³ In her research on masquerades of the Remo-Yoruba in southwestern Nigeria, Houlberg found no masquerade using carved headpieces/masks in the community. Thus she declared that "one can assume that *Egungun* masquerades (in Remo-Yoruba) are confined to the medium of cloth by choice."²⁰⁴ Similarly, Kalilu's work that concentrated on some *Egungun* masquerades of Ogbomoso and Awe (both in Oyo-Yorubaland in Southwestern Nigeria) showed that the masquerade carved headpieces/masks used in the two communities are neither representations of gods or spirits nor objects of worship. Thus, he believed that the "sculptures are not all that important in *Egungun* costume."²⁰⁵

Regarding the theology of the Ijumu carved headpieces of *Epa* masquerades of Iyah-Gbedde, being a part of the masquerade costumes that often receive sacrifices at the *Epa* shrine, *Epa* carved headpieces/masks (*Ere Egungun-Epa*), like other constituent elements of masquerade costumes (*Ekun-Egungun*), could be viewed as sacred objects. More so that they partake in the power of *Epa* divinity or spirit being (*Orisa-Epa*) which they primarily indicate. However, they do not represent *Orisa-Epa*. That the carved headpieces/masks do not form an indispensable part of Ijumu masquerade costumes justifies why in the whole of the three communities where *Egungun* traditions are still

²⁰³ Pemberton III, "Egungun Masquerades of the Igbomina Yoruba," 42-43.

²⁰⁴ Houlberg, 20.

²⁰⁵ Rom Kalilu, "The role of sculpture in Yoruba Egungun," *Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 1 (1991), 22.

prevalent, it is only at Iyah-Gbedde where carved headpieces form part of some *Epa* masquerade costumes.

Headpiece: An Assemblage of Bird Feathers

As mentioned earlier, one *Egungun* called *Ogelese* from Iyamoye and two from Iyah-Gbedde by the names *Akorowo* and *Ate*, have the headpieces made of assemblages of bird feathers (Figures 7.6, 7.7, and 7.8). It is important to note that the feathers used for making or constructing the Ijumu masquerade headpieces are obtained from not just any forest birds. Rather, the makers of the headpieces obtain the feathers from the birds that characteristically feed on farm products like ripened plantains/bananas (*Ogede pipon/pupa*), yam seeds (*Ebu-Isu*), corn seeds (*Agbado gbigbe*), red peppers (*Ata pipon/pupa*), and ripened palm fruits (*Eyin pipon*), among others.

Specifically, the headpiece of *Ogelese* masquerade is made of the feathers of the *Atioro* bird (*Eye Atioro*). This bird that is distinguished by its peculiar large, long beak feeds on ripened plantains/bananas, red peppers, and ripened palm fruits. The headpiece of *Akorowo* is made of the feather of wild guinea fowl (*Eye-Etu*). The bird characteristically feeds on the corn seeds, which it digs out from the soil. Conversely, the headpiece of *Ate* is made of the feathers of *Aparo* birds (*Eye-Aparo*). These birds that usually feed on yam seeds dig out the seeds from inside the ridges (*Ebe*). Thus, the Yoruba saying: *Ori ebe isu ni Aparo nku le* ('*Aparo* birds usually die on top of the yam ridge'). That is, if you want to catch or kill *Aparo* birds, just set your trap on top of the yam ridge on the farm).

The choice for the masquerade headpieces made of the feathers of the above-mentioned birds as an indispensable part of the costumes of *Ogelese*, *Akorowo*, and *Ate* masquerades, like the choice for the *Abebe* (fans) made of deerskin, is spiritually motivated. In fact, both have the same spiritual allusion, as the birds, like the deer, cross the boundary from their forest abode to human space, which by implication, illustrates the transformation of masquerader-human agency from the secular to the spiritual realm. Known as the post-liminal stage, this phase explains the point at which the masquerader (the man inside the masquerade costumes) loses all his human identity, personality, or agency and assumes that of the *Egungun* spirit being. That he is no more his physical self underscores why instead of calling the masquerader by his personal name, he is referred to as *Eboror Orisa* (spirit being/divinity). In other words, he (the masker/masquerader) has crossed his boundary from the world of the living to that of spiritual forces, just like the birds crossed their space and moved to the human space, where they fed on the farm products. Looked at from this perspective, it becomes clear that the inclusion of the assemblages of bird feathers into the masquerade costumes of *Ogelese*, *Akorowo*, and *Ate* is an artistic device for making the invisible masquerade spirit beings become visible. Thus the *Egungun* devotees/adherents are afforded the opportunity to physically encounter and commune with *Orisa/Ebora Egungun* (masquerade spirit beings).

Young Palm Fronds (*Moriwo/Mariwo*)

Ogun (the god of iron and war) connects with the young palm fronds (*Monriwo/Mariwo*), as he was acclaimed as the first spirit being to use them in the form of attire. Thus, in

ritual circles, the young palm fronds are referred to *Asò Ogun* ('*Ogun's* attire' or *Ogun's* clothe'). Similarly, young palm fronds form an indispensable part of the ritual items of *Orisa-Epa* (*Epa* spirit being), thus, further underscoring the interconnection of the two spirit beings (*Ogun* and *Orisa-Epa*).

Young palm fronds are tied across the main entrance of the *Epa* grove (Figure 5.3) and around the *Ègungun* tree (Figure 5.4) located at *Ala, Epa* masquerades' dancing arena—the symbolism of which has been noted. More importantly, young palm fronds form an indispensable part of *Epa* masquerade costumes (Figures 1.2, 6.1, 6.4, and 6.5i and ii). What are the symbolic implications of the young palm fronds that render them so important to the *Epa* masquerades' costumes? The answers to this question can be sought first within the physical attributes of the young palm fronds and second, in the literary corpus of *Ifa*, and by extension, of oral history. I examine as follows, the two sources one after the other.

Young or new palm fronds (*Moriwo/Mariwo*) emerge from the center of the oil palm treetop and are surrounded by the old fronds called *Ogomo* or *Imo*. While the new shoots stand erect, pointing to the sky, the old ones fall down at the sides, thus making it appear as if the former are longer than the latter. In terms of their color, the young palm leaves are pale gray (very close to white), while the old ones are green. The texture of the young palm fronds is soft, smooth, and flexible, in contrast to the hard, rough, and stiff thorny-stems of the more mature foliage. From the Yoruba epistemological and metaphysical standpoints, all these physical attributes have spiritual implications that necessitate their inclusion into the body of *Epa* masquerade costumes.

First at epistemological level, Yoruba believe that which is in the midst of some other things and much higher than what surrounded it is more spiritually powerful. Second, Yoruba strongly hold the conviction that someone is not physically and spiritually safe if the enemies who equip themselves with various dangerous weapons surround him/her. Looking at the unhealthy atmosphere surrounding them within these epistemological contexts, it goes beyond human understanding as to how the young palm fronds not only survive these dangerous situations, but go on to surpass the old palm fronds. Thus, the saying which illustrates the Yoruba astonishment as to the mysterious nature of young palm fronds: *Ninu igbago ni mo riwo tin s'eso* ('surrounded by many sharp thorny parts of the old palm fronds, the young fronds still look very beautiful').

In Yoruba color theories, white or a white related color, such as gray, silver, or chrome, represents *Etutu* (peace, soothe, or calm generating spiritual energy'). These allusions justify the reason for regarding the white color as a form of propitiatory sacrifice. That white color has this propensity is also confirmed in the Yoruba propitiatory incantation: *Ko bao ko tuo; nitori pe ero pese ni ti omi Igbin* ('may it soothe you and be well with you; for soothing is that of the white fluid inside the bush snail').

Finally, at a metaphysical level, Yoruba hold the belief that spiritual powers or attributes in some sacred plants and animals can be transferred to human beings if certain spiritual conditions, such as the denial of oneself from worldly enjoyments are met. That which is sacred in the nature can be manipulated to benefit humans if the manipulator of nature pays in spiritual terms, through self-denials, for what he/she manipulates.

Thus in many spiritual ways, the Yoruba manipulate the young palm fronds to benefit them. For instance, the unparalleled spiritual forces contained in the palm fronds are often used to destroy, subdue, or counteract the negative forces of the evil doers, such as the witches and/or sorcerers. For example, when the *Epa* masquerades appear at the *Epa* grove in their gorgeous costumes, these attires, especially the young palm leaves, signify spiritual energies, which render the evil doers spiritually impotent.

The young palm fronds are lauded in the following *Odu-Ifa* (*Ifa* divination verses/chapter) from *Odu Oyeku-Meji* and *Eji-Ogbe*.

1. *Odu Oyeku-Meji*:
Eesin gbona l'ewe tutu l'egbo
Li o difa fun marunlelogojo igi oko
Ope ati Ayinre li (ni) o ru:
Oromodie (Oromodiye) ninu won
Nitorinaa (Nitori naa) bi iji ba nja
Ogo mariwo (monriwo) an:
*Oun sebo Oyekese.*²⁰⁶

[My translation:

The leaf of *Eesin* plant is unfriendly to the human skin (as it scorches hard the skin); in contrast, its root is benevolence to human beings (as it can be used to prepare constipation relief medicine).

It divined for sixteen hundred, sixty-five (165) forest trees

Ifa asked each of them to offer ritual sacrifice of a chick (baby chicken)

Only the palm tree and the *Ayinre* tree did

For this reason, if a tornado or whirled wind rages,
the young palm fronds would declare:

I have offered the required ritual sacrifice that would make me escape every
imminent danger.]

The key idea in this *Odu-Ifa* is the acquisition of the spiritual power/energy that made the young palm fronds able to escape any imminent catastrophes, such as tornadoes and

²⁰⁶ Afolabi A. Epega and Philip J. Neimark, *The Sacred Ifa Oracle* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 7.

floods because of the spiritual power/force/energy received from the Supreme Being. Thus, when the *Epa* masquerades appear at the *Epa* grove, their appearance operates as a ritual sacrifice to *Epa* spirit beings.

The importance of the young palm fronds (that are conspicuously displayed on the body of every *Epa* masquerade) as spiritual energies for averting any imminent catastrophes in the community of Iyah-Gbedde is further evident in the following song sung at the end of the *ritual* ceremony:

*Iyah se tire ayo kebe.
O ma koni in maa ko'Fa*

[Iyah-Gbedde (community) has performed the required rituals; thus, gallantly escaped from any imminent catastrophes. It is now left for other communities to make ritual sacrifice to escape danger(s).]

2. *Odu Eji-Egbe:*

*Orunmila ni o di iherehere,
Mo ni iherehere ni a nje ori eku,
Iherehere ni a nje ori eja*

...

*Orunmila ni ki a won-on ni ibu ki a won-on ni iro,
Gbogborogbo ni owo yoo ju ori,
Gbogborogbo ni monriwo ope yoo ju ogomo.²⁰⁷*

[My translation:

*Orunmila said it is gradual,
I said it is gradually that we eat the head of the rat,
It is gradually that we eat the head of the fish.*

... ..

Orunmila then declared:

*Whichever way or direction we put them side by side, horizontally or vertically,
The hand attains much higher than the head: likewise the young palm fronds top
the old palm fronds.]*

²⁰⁷ Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men*, 140.

By implication, this *Ifa* divination verse confirmed that the young palm fronds have spiritual powers or energies that are used for gaining victory over enemies, such as witches, whom the *Epa* devotees suspect as the primary source of community disasters.

Ankle Bands, Metal Anklets, Iron Gongs, and Brass Bells

Ankle bands (*Egba-Ese*), metal anklets (*Arò*), iron gong (*Akogo*), and brass bells (*Saworo-Ide*), unlike among the Ekinrin Adde *Egungun Ina-Oko* and *Onigabon*, form an important part of Iyamoye and Iyah-Gbedde *Egungun* masquerade costumes (Figures 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6, and 8.7). This is not to say that every *Egungun* in the two communities has as part of his costumes all these elements. To be specific, metal anklets, iron gongs, and brass bells are used by the *Epa* masquerades of Iyah-Gbedde, while ankle bands (made of young sago palm leaves and seeds) are associated with the Iyamoye masquerades.

These costume elements are linked for two reasons. First, they perform similar practical functions, in that the melodious jingling sounds they produce as the masquerades engage in dance performances complement the music of the *Ibembe* and *Ekú* drum sets that are associated with the Iyamoye and Iyah-Gbedde masquerades, respectively.

Second, all the costume elements have similar spiritual implications. My informants from both communities described them as instruments for invoking the *Egungun* spirit beings (*Orisa Epa* in Iyah-Gbedde and *Okese-Wiliwili* or *Koto-Yoroyoro* in Iyamoye) to which the rituals of *Egungun* are dedicated. They claimed that the jingling operates as an invocation that enables the *Egungun* spirit beings appear spiritually (not physically) to the

devotees. Thus, by extension, the jingling operates as a link between the visible (humans-devotees) and the invisible (*Epa* spirit being). At another level they (the jingles) invite the spirit of *Egungun* into the masquerade costumes. At this point which Arnold van Gennep has termed ‘reincorporation’,²⁰⁸ every ‘human’ attribute in the masquerader is gone or dead; thus, he is addressed as *Eboror Orisa* (divinity/spirit being).

The jingling of the costume elements is believed to be dangerous to the witches and sorcerers. Chief Jemirin of Iyah-Gbedde informed me that the witches fear the jingling sound of the costume elements as it renders them spiritually impotent. It is not an overstatement to conclude that the costume elements are capable of warding off the malevolent activities of the antisocial elements in the community.

Buffalo Tails (*Iru-Efon*)

Another important part of masquerade costumes is a pair of buffalo tails attached to the *Epa* masquerades’ hips. In fact, every *Epa* masquerade has a pair (Figure 8.5).

Unlike the other components made of animals and birds which have spiritual allusions, I was informed by the leader of *Epa* society that the buffalo tails have no spiritual implications that he knew. The buffalo tails merely enhance the physical appearance of the masquerades and complement their vigorous dance performances as they repeatedly swing their buttocks sideways (Figure 8.5). He noted that buffalo is one of the most common animals in Ijumuland, making the tails easily available.

²⁰⁸ “rite of passage,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from Encyclopedia Britannica Online. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?tocid=9058649> [Accessed June 27, 2005].

CHAPTER VII

THE IJUMU NORTHEASTERN-YORUBA EGUNGUN III:

AESTHETIC IMPLICATIONS

A vast majority of publications on African art focus exclusively on the religious significance at the detriment of other aspects such as the psychological and philosophical. As a result, the authors of these publications distorted information and misrepresented the works. Other scholars identify neglected aspects of African art, but hold misleading views. Ulli Beier, a German Yoruba art connoisseur, best exemplifies this group of scholars.

Because he has resided in Yorubaland for over twelve years, Ulli Beier thought that he knew much, if not all, about Yoruba art and culture as reflected in his statements about Yoruba aesthetics:

I have never heard a spontaneous discussion on the form, proportion or expression of a piece of sculpture—although I have lived twelve years in Yoruba country and have moved a great deal among priests and worshippers in shrines full of religious carvings.²⁰⁹

By implication, Beier's view is that the Yoruba have no aesthetic cognition based on the fact that he did not see the Yoruba priests and worshippers critique the religious art in the houses of their God. There are at least two apparent factors leading to Beier's misconception about Yoruba aesthetics. One, he did not acknowledge the fact that Yoruba shrines, the examples of where he saw those 'religious carvings', are not

²⁰⁹ Ulli Beier, *African Mud Sculpture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) (Quoted in Robert F. Thompson, "Yoruba Artistic Criticism," *The Traditional Artist in African Societies* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973), 21.

museums and/or galleries where people go to appraise works of art. Rather, the Yoruba shrines are houses of God where the Yoruba observe their religious faiths, while the sculptures kept inside the shrines, as rightly observed by Beier, are ‘religious carvings’, not museums objects. Robert Farris Thompson has aptly corroborated this analogy when he responded to Beier’s view about the ‘religious carvings’ with the following question: “do Roman Catholics analyze the merits of cathedral images when at worship?”²¹⁰

The second factor leading to Beier’s misconception of Yoruba aesthetics has to do with his implied definition of Yoruba art as anything that looks sculptural. Thus, by extension, he thought that any Yoruba form of art, such as drumming, dancing, singing, body adornment, and so on, is not art. This chapter concerned with the aesthetic implications of the Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun* has paid attention not only to the *Egungun* masquerades, but as well to the performance contexts, drummers, singers, and more importantly, the aftermath of the ritual/festival. That is, attention has been paid to the intrinsic worth or functional merit of the whole.

It is important to provide the reader with a brief overview of Yoruba’s aesthetic concepts as a foundation for understanding psychological and/or philosophical aspects of the art.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* describes aesthetics (also spelled esthetics) as “the philosophical study of beauty and taste.”²¹¹ It is implied in this description that aesthetics is culturally determined. That is, what is beautiful in one culture may not be deemed so in

²¹⁰ Robert Farris Thompson, “Yoruba Artistic Criticism,” in *The Traditional Artist in African Societies*, edited by Warren L. d’Azevedo, (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973), 21.

²¹¹ “aesthetics,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* from *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*: <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?tocid=9106009>

another. Among the Yoruba as a whole, what is deemed beautiful is that which elicits attraction (*Lewa/Fanimora*). Because physical attraction in humans fades due to old age or in human-made objects from excessive use, the Yoruba do not rely only on the surface quality or outward appearance of humans or objects, such as *Asø Ipo* (the Ijumu sacred hand-woven red cloth). Thus, what is beautiful must be beautiful outwardly and inwardly (*Tinu-Teyin*). Babatunde Lawal has provided detailed information on these two important attributes of the Yoruba aesthetics when he wrote:

To the Yoruba *ewa* (beauty) has two realities, the outer (*ewa ode*) and the inner (*ewa inu*). *Ewa ode* has to do with the surface quality of things or outward appearance in general. *Ewa inu* on the other hand refers to the intrinsic worth of things. In man *ewa inu* is frequently implied in the word *iwa*, or character, while in objects it is implied in the word *wiwuloor* functional utility.”²¹²

The Yoruba measure the outward beauty in man or woman using a paradigm called *Iwontunwonsi* (‘moderation’). For instance, a woman can be fat and still deemed outwardly beautiful if she is not too fat. Thus the Yoruba saying: *Kii se eewo ni k’eti o tobi, sugbon eniti etii re bati gun koja orii re ti di eleti ehoru* (‘it is not unusual if one’s ears are relatively large; but when the ears grow taller than the head, they are no less than rabbit ears’). What is implied in this saying is that immoderation is not beautiful/good, or immoderation is bad. Other examples related to outward appearance are ‘not too dark’, ‘not too short’, ‘not too tall’, and ‘not too thin’. In activities such as carving of images, speaking/talking, and eating, this principle of moderation also applies. For instance, if a carver does not know when to stop working on a piece, the critic will condemn his immoderateness and warn: *Agbeju nii kan’mu ere* (‘you will soon carve away the image’s

²¹² Lawal, “Some Aspects of Yoruba Aesthetics,” *The Journal of Aesthetics (London)* 3, no. 15 (1974): 239.

nose' or 'you will soon destroy the beauty of the carving'). Likewise when someone is too quiet, he/she is labeled *Osonu* ('dangerous person' or 'slow poison') and if on the other hand he/she talks too much, he/she is labeled *Alaroye* or *Eye-Ega* ('a talkative' or 'a garrulous').

Another important attribute of aesthetics that is related to this chapter is *Iwulo* ('usefulness or functional utility'). To the Yoruba an outwardly beautiful lady who has a bad character is deemed ugly. Thus, the saying: *Omodara f'iwa b'ewa je* ('she spoilt her beauty with her bad character'). Conversely, her male counterpart who has similar (bad) character is referred to as *Omolasan* ('a good for nothing guy').

In art objects, such as shrine images, if they do not meet the spiritual need(s) of the owner(s), they will be discarded or given away to children as toys. Thus, the saying: *Orisa ti ko baa gbe'ni, eyin aaro nii gbe* ('if the spirit being to whom a religious sculpture, such as a wooden image, is dedicated does not favor or benefit the devotee, the carving will be used to make fire for cooking'). Other aspects of Yoruba aesthetics abound, but they are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

In a reversal of African art appreciation in the Western museums and galleries, an undistorted understanding can be achieved when the appreciator, spectator, or critic observes its actual cultural context(s). With regard to Ijumu *Egungun* ritual festivals, aesthetic admirations are not limited to the *Egungun* and their costumes. Neither is it restricted to their dance performances. Rather, every activity performed by each of the participants in the festival has its own aesthetics.

Aesthetics of *Egungun* (*Ewa Egungun*)

Ijumu *Egungun* operates at two levels: masqueraders/maskers and *Egungun* spirit beings.

The first level manifests as masqueraders who honor the spirit beings called *Ebora* ('terrestrial/nature spirit beings') and at times called *Orisa* (note: *Orisa* is the same as *Ebora* in Ijumaland). At this level, masqueraders essentially honor spirit beings with dance performances. Such dancing activities operate as a ritual sacrifice (*Etutu*) as well as a spectacle (*Iran*).

At the second level, *Egungun* operates as spirit beings (*Ebora/Orisa*). However, they do not engage in any dance performance. Rather, they sit down or stand up listening to the prayer requests of devotees, who must bow their heads or be on their knees. Thus, an *Egungun* can operate as a masquerade (spirit being) and as a masquerader, but he (*Egungun*) cannot operate as both at the same time. This may sound confusing, but it is not to the devotees, as the terms 'masquerade(s)' and 'masquerader(s)' are Western inventions/conventions.

Because the masquerade costumes which conceal or 'kill' the human personality of the masqueraders/maskers are the same that make visible the invisible *Egungun* spirit beings, they (the costumes) are regarded as sacred items or emblems of *Egungun* spirit beings. Thus, no devotees, spectators, and/or critics dare critique the aesthetics merits of *Egungun* imageries or costumes. In fact, in Ijumaland, as elsewhere, it is forbidden to point one's fingers at *Egungun*, much less talk of evaluating their aesthetics. In contrast, because the masqueraders/maskers when honoring the *Egungun* spirit beings also

entertain the spectators and/or critics at the same time, their dance performances can be critiqued.

At the level of masqueraders/maskers, each *Egungun* is associated with the owner(s) or family/clan/lineage where he belongs. Thus, he (the masquerader) has to display accomplished dance steps/skills so as not to bring shame on his family/clan/lineage (*Idile*). This is reflected in the Yoruba saying: *Bi Egungun eni ba joo re, ori a ya'ni* ('if a given masquerade dances impressively, the owner(s) will feel very proud/happy'). By implication, if on the other hand a given masquerade does not dance well, his owner(s) will be ashamed. This illustrates where and when the critics and/or spectators have the opportunity to analyze aesthetic merit.

What constitutes an embarrassing dance performance or an impressive one? Generally speaking, the tones or sounds of Yoruba drumming or drumbeats operate as a verbal language. They are messages that are expected to be discerned and acted upon by the masquerader. For instance, the lead drummer, through the drumbeats, may tell the masquerader: *B'oba sepe emi niwoni nba f'apa jo; b'oba sepe emi niwon nba f'ese jo; b'oba sepe emi niwoni nba fi gbogbo ara gbon-ri-ri-ri-ri-ri-ri*. That is, 'if I were you I would dance with my hands; if I were you I would dance with my legs; if I were you I would shake my entire body continuously'. If the poor masquerader cannot decode the message, he may be doing something else, such as jumping, swinging his buttock, or whirling in the air. Whenever this happens, in order not to embarrass the masquerader or owner(s) openly, the Ijumu critics do not criticize verbally. Rather, they use body gestures, such as covering their face with the left hand palm; closing one eye (especially

the left one); shaking the head repeatedly (from the left to right direction), and so on. The musicians too, through their drumbeats, call the dancer names, such as *Ikun-ko-leti* (literally, ‘squirrels have no ears’), an allusion that the *Egungun* is deaf and foolish.

On the contrary, a good or skillful *Egungun* dancer will do exactly what the drummer(s) ask(s) of him and even add some *Jara* (‘extra credit dance steps’). Such a terrific dancer is accorded loud ovations from the spectators, such as *Kokoro* (literally, ‘an insect’) and *Obibo* (‘cotton spinning tool’), both euphemisms of a great and skillful dancer. Similarly, the critics around, if they are titleholders or chiefs (*Oloye*), shake their horsetail whisks (emblem of their titles) and others nod their heads and/or shake both fists (*Osusu*) if they are not titleholders.²¹³

That masqueraders must do whatever it takes to impress the critics (*Amewa*) and/or spectators and bring respect/honor (*Iyi*) for their family owners does not mean that they (the masqueraders) should overdo the dance performance. In fact, a skillful *Egungun* dancer is the one who knows when to stop the dance, that is, when the ovation is loudest. In other words, he dances moderately. The reason is that for those costumes which are assembled onto the body through the technique of ‘tie and knot’, excessive or immoderate dancing will cause the costumes to fall apart and expose his concealed, human identity. The Yoruba proverb for such an immoderation is: *Ijo ajoju nii mu ki oluworan ri oko eegun* (‘when a given masquerader danced immoderately or excessively, his penis becomes opened or exposed to the public’).

²¹³ Titleholders (*Oloye*) include every Yoruba community king and his chiefs. However, Ijumu women do not hold chieftaincy titles. Thus they do not hold horsetail whisks. An exemption, however, is when a woman holds a religious leadership position, such as *Eleusu* (female leader of the *Egungun Epa* society in Iyah-Gbedde) and *Iye-Mole* (leader of *Imole* females’ religious groups all over Ijumu communities).

Among the Iyah-Gbedde *Epa* society members, the falling apart of masquerader's costumes as a result of immoderate dance performance is a grievous offence, which warrants heavy fines. Usually, the affected masquerader will be banned from the *Epa* grove or dance arena (*Ala*) for a time period of two years. In addition, he must pay the fine of twenty pieces of bitter kola (*Ogun-Orogbo*), twenty pieces of kola nuts (*Ogun Obi-Abata*), twenty pieces of alligator pepper (*Ogun Ataare*), two pots of palm wine (a pot contained approximately twenty five liters of palm wine), and a male dog (*Ako-Ajakan*). I was informed by Chief Jemirin (leader of the *Epa* masquerade society) that the fines will be offered as ritual sacrifices (*Ebo-Etutu*) to the *Epa* spirit being so as to ward off the bad omens which may follow for exposing the secret of *Epa* to the non-initiates.

Aesthetics of Drumming/Drumbeats (*Ewa Ilu*)

It is not only the dance performances that are critiqued, as the same go for the drumming or drumbeats. At Iyah-Gbedde, the drummers ideally play seven rhythms for each masquerader, while five and three are played at Ekinrin-Adde and Iyamoye respectively.

The critics use the same body gestures (shaking of horsetail whisks, nodding of head, and so on) to reward the drummers when they play all the rhythms correctly. However, when a rhythm is not played correctly or when the rhythm that should be played first or last does not follow suit, the critics make such negative body gestures as shaking of heads, beating of lap, or kicking the ground with the right foot.

Aesthetics of Songs (*Ewa Orin*)

I observed that it is only at Iyah-Gbedde where songs form an indispensable part of *Epa* spectacle (*Iran-Epa*). The singers (*Olorin/Akorin*) sang immediately after each masquerader completed his dance performance. The singers stopped singing when the next *Egungun* appeared on the dancing floor/arena.

I also noticed that the critics gave the singers similar approving body gestures whenever they sang impressively. Each time a good singer appeared at the grove, he/she was accorded with a loud ovation: *Awoko tide oo!* ('The parrot has arrived'). Parrot is an allusion to a great singer. Thus, by saying *awoko tide*, they meant that the great singer has arrived.

Aesthetics of Masquerade Ritual Festivals (*Ewa Oro/Odun Egungun*)

That the outward appearance is one of the two realities of Yoruba philosophy of the beautiful (aesthetics), the second, as it relates to Ijumu *Egungun*, has to do with the functional utility of *Egungun* rituals/festivals. However, ideally, the Ijumu people do not assess the value(s) of any *Egungun* ritual/festival until long after it has been performed, between three and eleven months.

If good things, such as abundant harvests, absences of premature deaths of community youths, and absences of catastrophes like floods, droughts, and tornadoes happen within eleven months following the performance, the festival will be described as beautiful or great. For instance, the devotees and the townspeople alike use such words: *Odun/Oro Egungun esi dun gan-an ni* ('last year's *Egungun* festival was so great or beautiful'). On the other hand, if some bad omens befall the community, the inhabitants' comments

include: *Ki Olorun maje ki a ri iru odun esi mo; nitori pe o buru ju* ('may God let us not witness the likes of the last year ritual festival, as it was too ugly/bad'). However, all my informants from the Ijumu communities of Iyamoye and Iyah-Gbedde, which celebrate annually or more than one time annually, informed me, no catastrophe has ever occurred following the performance of *Odun-Egungun*. In the words of Chief Oludoyi Omole of Iyah-Gbedde:

*Etutu ni Oro-Epa je ni Iyah-Gbedde. Ti abati se Oro-Epa tan
Laburu kankan kii yasi sakaani Ilu Iyah-Gbedde. Nse ni Ile maa nroju,
Ti ona si ntoro. Ako ni Orisa miran n'Ile yi ju Epa lo.*²¹⁴

[Epa masquerades festival operates as a ritual sacrifice in Iyah-Gbedde. As soon as the ritual sacrifice is offered to Epa spirit beings, no bad omens ever happened in the community. Everywhere in the community is always peaceful and pleasant, feeling with high spirits. For these reason, we do not have any other god in the community of Iyah-Gbedde than Epa spirit being.]

What is implied in the Chief's testimony is that the entertainment aspect of *Epa* spectacle is not the 'real beauty' (aesthetics) of *Epa* masquerades ritual festivals. Rather, its actual beauty has to do with how efficacious the ritual sacrifices are, that is, in terms of how the rituals are able to meet the performers' (devotees') spiritual needs.

Even though it does not operate as a festival in the Ijumu community of Ekinrin-Adde, the functional utility of *Egungun* ritual is not different: the performers strongly hold that one of the two main reasons for performing second burial rituals for deceased community Chiefs, in which the appearance of *Egungun* is inevitable, is to prevent *Iku-Akufa Ijoye* ('the recurrent death of community Chiefs'). The other reason is to pave the way for the

²¹⁴ Chief Oludoyi Omole of Iyah-Gbedde, interview by Olawole Famule, 27 July 2004.

deceased's spirit to relocate successfully into the world of spirit forces, where he becomes an ancestor to his living children.

That the actual 'beauty' (aesthetics) of *Egungun* masquerades ritual/festival in Ijumuland, as it is in other parts of Yorubaland, is apparent in the words of Chief Aodu Ibitye, who is the custodian of *Egungun Obanjã* and *Ehigba* of Aaye clan/quarters in Iyamoye: *Ni Ilu Iyamoye, nse ni a maa nfi Odun-Eegun be awon Orisa-Eegun ki laburu ma baa wo Ilu wa* ('In Iyamoye, we perform the annual festival for masquerade spirit beings so that no bad things shall happen in our community'). This signification has been implicitly corroborated by G. J. A. Ojo's view as to the humans' basic reason for worship:

The reason why all human beings worship is basically the same: Fraser defined religion as 'a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man, which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life'. This definition shows clearly that an unsophisticated reason for worship is to enable man to cope with the intransigencies of the natural environment and its effects on human activities. It also connotes the 'what' of worship, that is, the 'powers superior to man'.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Afolabi G.J. Ojo, *Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis* (Nigeria and London: University of Ife and University of London Press Ltd., 1966), 158-159.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This last chapter of the dissertation is concerned with two aspects: critical perspectives on Ijumu-Yoruba *Egungun* within the larger context of the tradition among the entire Yoruba peoples of Nigeria, and the present state of *Egungun* as a form of traditional religion in Ijumu Northeastern-Yorubaland. In other words, the second aspect highlights critical issues affecting the *Egungun* tradition in Ijumaland in the present day, as well as indicates the relevance of this dissertation to arresting the problems.

Red cloth costume of *Egungun*: In contrast with its optional use among the Yoruba *Egungun* in Southwestern Nigeria, red cloth forms an indispensable part of Ijumu masquerade costumes. Given that the color red, at the level of divinity, to the Yoruba is an allusion to danger, ferocity, dread, and terror, among others, the Ijumu *Egungun* societies illustrate the dangerous or hot temperamental aspect of *Egungun* spirit beings by making the use of red cloth. Conversely, their Yoruba counterparts in Southwestern Nigeria do not often emphasize this aspect of *Egungun*, as most of their masquerade cloth costumes incorporate nearly all colors. The question now remains: given that the Ijumu people belong to the Yoruba culture group, why is it that red cloth indispensable? The answer is implied in the popular saying: ‘show me your friend(s) and I will know the type of person you are’. To the non-Yoruba Ijumu neighbors of the Niger-Benue confluence region, from whom the Ijumu-Yoruba apparently adopted the tradition, red is an allusion to both spiritual and physical power, wealth, prestige, success, and authority, among

others as shown in Akintoye (1969), Picton (1980), Miachi (1988), and Akinwumi (2003).²¹⁶

That the Ijumu-Yoruba *Egungun* religion's practitioners emphasize the hot temperamental aspect of *Egungun* spirit beings is also implicit in the Ijumu-Yoruba interpretation of *Egungun* as *Oloogun* and/or *Alagbara*. The former means 'the owner of dangerous charms' or 'the controller of magical medicines', while the latter, which literally means 'the powerful one', is also a euphemism for 'the controllers of dangerous charms or magical medicines'. Thus, relying on their enormous spiritual powers/forces, the Ijumu *Egungun* are charged with carrying out the punishments of individuals confirmed to be witches, sorcerers, thieves, terrorists, and other antisocial elements. For instance, at Iyah-Gbedde, if a catastrophe occurred and someone is confirmed (through *Ifa* divination) as responsible, *Egungun Epa* will invite him/her to their shrine at the *Epa* grove, where they will command him/her to 'leave' the town, a euphemism for death by suicide. In other words, such masquerades' commanding words are not ordinary, but rather, sacred words called *Ohun*, *Aasan*, or *Ayajo*. The *Egungun Epa* source of spiritual power, like other Ijumu *Egungun*, is clear. The sacred hand-woven red cloth (*Asø Ipo*) operates as a very powerful spiritual energy, power, or agency. Thus, unlike some Yoruba *Egungun* in Southwestern Nigeria, such as *Egungun Onijo* ('the masquerader

²¹⁶ Red cloths as allusions to both spiritual and physical power, wealth, prestige, and authority have been shown in S. A. Akintoye, "The North-eastern Yoruba Districts and the Benin Kingdom," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* iv, no. 4 (1969): 539-553; John Picton, "Women's Weaving: the Manufacture and Use of Textiles Among the Igbira People of Nigeria," *Textile Art*, 11 (1980): 63-88; Thomas A. Miachi, "The Political Process in Igala Kingdom," *West African Journal of Archaeology*, supplement to vol. 18 (1988): 157-179, and Tunde M. Akinwumi, "Ifa and the Northern Factor in Okun-Yoruba's Choice of Red Burial Cloth Tradition," *Northeast Yorubaland: Studies in the History and Culture of A Frontier Zone* (ed. Ayodeji Olumide, Z. O. Apata, and Olayemi Akinwumi) (Ibadan Nigeria: Rex Charles Publication in association with Connel Publications, 2003), 85-104.

who dances’) that appear in public with little or no *Oogun* (charms/magical medicines), every Ijumu *Egungun* appears with full spiritual currents generated in the sacred red cloth.

***Egungun* Masquerade Chieftaincy Titles and Titleholders:** The executive council of *Egungun* society in Ijumuland is not a formal institution. In fact, compared to what operates among societies in Oyo, Ogbomoso, Ibadan, Ede, Ikirun, Iragbiji, Okeigbo, Ila-Orangun, and Iseyin, Ijumu chieftaincy council is nonexistent. For instance, at Oyo, where most of the *Egungun* traditions are believed to have originated and Awe, Iseyin, and Ogbomoso, there is a formal executive council. Members include the titleholders *Alapinni*, *Alagbaa*, *Iyamode/Iyaagan*, *Eesorun*, *Ologbin*, *Ologbojo*, and *Aare-Oje*, among others. In contrast, with the exemption of Iyah-Gbedde where there are two *Egungun Epa* titleholders, *Obaigbo* (literally, ‘king of the forests’) who is the *Epa* Chief priest and *Eleusu*, the only female member allowed to enter the shrine of *Epa* spirit being, there are no *Egungun* titleholders in Ijumuland. Chief Otitonaye Meseru (the *Eleti* of Ekinrin in Ekinrin-Adde and oldest man in the community), who is a strong member of *Egungun* society in Ekinrin-Adde, confirmed that there are no chieftaincy titles or titleholders of *Egungun* in Ijumuland.

The implication of this difference between the Oyo/Oyo inspired *Egungun* and Ijumu *Egungun* traditions is significant. While the Oyo oral tradition claimed that Yoruba *Egungun* as well as the *Egungun* chieftaincy titles, especially *Alapinni*, originated in Nupe (Oyo-Yoruba northern non-Yoruba neighbors), the Ijumu oral traditions did not support the claim. For instance, the following Ijumu-Yoruba *Egungun* praise names

(*Oriki*) origins well illustrated the origins of the tradition: *Oke-Sewiliwili* ('the spirit being that appears on top of the hill/mountain'); *Ina-Oko* ('the spirit of the forests that glows like wildfire'); *Oni-Awaye-Aba* ('the one that has been dwelling on the earth before any man or woman was born'), among others. The implication of these oral praise poems is that the Ijumu *Egungun*, as also confirmed by the communities' *Egungun* devotees and supported by the Ijumu *Egungun* imageries that bear no affinity with the Oyo ones, did not originate in Oyo.

Masquerade Costumes and *Egungun* Masquerade Origin Myths: There are various local myths among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria that illustrate *Ijimere* (colobus monkey) who has a ruff of white hairs or furs (*Rorṣ*) attached on top of the costumes of many of their *Egungun*, as the first *Egungun*. On the contrary, the Ijumu *Egungun* practitioners do not incorporate any white turf of hairs or furs into their masquerade costumes. Thus, by extension, they do not recognize such *Egungun* origin myths. As noted earlier, the Ijumu *Egungun* devotees hold that their *Egungun* originated and dwell in the natural environments, such as hills/mountains, forests, trees, and so on. Research has shown that the Ebira southeastern neighbors of Ijumu people, who strongly hold that spirits animate many natural objects, such as big trees, share a similar belief: "before cutting a tree, or taking bark or leaves for fetishes or medicine, an Igbira (Ebira) will propitiate the tree spirit."²¹⁷ Given the interculturalism existing between the two groups, this similar belief that spirits or spirit beings occupy natural environments may suggest possible historical connections.

²¹⁷ Paula Brown, "The Igbira," *West Africa: Ethnographic Survey of Africa* (ed. Daryll Ford) Part X (London: International African Institute, 1955), 70

***Egungun* Masquerades as Embodiments of Spirits of the Dead (*Ara-Orun*):** The Ijumu, unlike their southwestern counterparts, do not conceptualize masquerades as representing the spirits of the dead ancestors (*Ara-Orun*), which literally means ‘dwellers in the heaven’ or ‘heaven’s residents’). That the Ijumu *Egungun* honors the spirits of the dead cannot be contested. *Egungun Onigabon* and *Ina-Okò* of Adde in Ekinrin-Adde, whose appearance at burial ceremonies of community leaders and *Egungun* devotees, illustrates the fact. Yet, their appearance does not make them become *Ara Orun* (‘ancestral spirits’) or their representatives. Chief Jemirin of Iyah-Gbedde informed me that it is not only the *Epa* spirit being that the *Epa* masqueraders honor with dance activities during *Iran-Epa* (*Epa* spectacles). They also honor the culture heroes, who delivered the community from the perennial raids by the Nupe slave raiders between the 1830s and 1897. The implication of Chief Jemirin’s information is that the *Egungun Epa* masqueraders commemorate the dead heroes for sacrificing their lives for others, not that they (*Egungun Epa*) impersonate or represent the spirits of the community’s dead gallant soldiers.

The main reason for the Ijumu-Yoruba people not recognizing their *Egungun* as *Ara Orun* (literally, ‘residents in the heaven’), based on the information that I obtained from Elder Ayinmode Onimodamori (of Egbedda-Egga), is logical/philosophical. When I asked his opinion about *Egungun* as *Ara Orun*, he replied: *Se iwo ri eni to lo s’orun to tun pada wasi aye ri?* (‘Do you know of any man or woman that went to heaven (died) and came back to earth?’). I replied, no and added that I strongly believe that a dead grandfather and grandmother could come back to the earth through the birth of their

grandson and granddaughter respectively, if we look at it from the Yoruba concept of 'life after death' (*Aseyinwaye*). He said he believes in the concept, but that my illustration is not relevant to the issue of *Ara Orun* versus *Egungun*. Thus, the next question remains as to why the Ijumu people's conception of *Egungun* does not match that of other Yoruba. Could their non-Yoruba Niger-Benue confluence neighbors such as the Ebira, their immediate southeastern neighbors, have influenced them? The researches by John Picton²¹⁸ and Onukaba Adinoyi-Ojo,²¹⁹ which clearly showed that many of the Ebira masquerades (*Ekú*) have some eschatological allusion, have ruled out this possibility. The field investigation for the present work has also shown that other Yoruba-speaking people of the Niger-Benue confluence region, the Owe/Bunu, Oworo, Iyagba (Yagba), and Ikiri Ookun Yoruba group, like their Ijumu relatives, do not subscribe to the view that *Egungun* are *Ara-Orun*. I hope that future research into this aspect of Yoruba cultural diversity will solve this riddle.

Ijumu Northeastern-Yoruba *Egungun* Today

The Ijumu-Yoruba culture is not static. However, the negative effect of its evolution of *Egungun* traditions is heartbreaking. Out of about fifty communities, where *Egungun* tradition used to be the most popular ritual, only the three communities of Iyamoye, Ekinrin-Adde, and Iyah-Gbedde still practice the tradition.

Two factors are responsible for the severe decay. One is external and the other, internal. The former has to do with the influence of Islam and Christianity which

²¹⁸ Picton, "Masks and the Ebira," *African Arts* Winter (1974): 38-41.

²¹⁹ Adinoyi-Ojo, xxx.

appeared simultaneously in the region immediately after the end of the perennial inter-groups wars in the region in 1898.

This influence of Islam and Christianity can best be illustrated by two instances that recently occurred at Ayegunle and Egbedda in Egbeda-Egga. In Ayegunle, the tradition flourished until the Muslims' population grew rapidly to about eighty percent (80%) of the community and the Royal Highness of the town converted to Islam in the early 1980s. Before the minority *Egungun* devotees knew what was happening, the Muslim majority voted the tradition illegal in the community. I was informed that around 1990, an occasion warranted inviting an *Egungun* from another community. On his appearance, the angry Muslims rose and brutally attacked the *Egungun*. Since then, there has been no further attempt to resuscitate the tradition.

The Egbedda instance began around January 2004 when members of the society converted to Christianity. Three months later, after they become fully convinced that masquerade tradition is idolatry, they collected the community's masquerade costumes (*Ekú-Egungun*) and trashed them into the forests. The *Egungun* tradition was promptly suspended.

Internal Factors: one of the main internal factors responsible for the unhealthy state of *Egungun* tradition in Ijumuland today is 'the use of *Egungun* to carry out ulterior motives'. I single out this factor because it is indeed the most serious one (internal or external) that has led to the extinction of *Egungun* tradition. In fact, the death of the tradition (of *Egungun*) in every three out of five communities has been associated with it.

I illustrate this point with the two most recent examples: Iyara and Egga's (in Egbeda-Egga) instances.

Because of the divine attribute of *Egungun*, Yoruba tradition supports that whatever an *Egungun* does, good or bad, must not be questioned or challenged by anyone. The following Yoruba incantation that is believed to be capable of generating a spiritual energy that could make a judge pardon someone who committed a crime, confirms this statement:

*B'Egungun se'bi bo se'pa,
Ona igbale la fi nji.
B'Oro se'bi bo se'pa,
Ona igbale la fi nji.*

[Whatsoever evil a masquerader perpetrates is overlooked because of the *Egungun* grove/shrine (abode of *Egungun* spirit being) from where he emerges. Whatever crime a masquerader commits is pardoned him for the fact that he comes from the dwelling place of *Egungun* spirit being.]

Acting under the disguise of this divine directive, some individuals in the Ijumu communities of Iyara and Egga used some masqueraders to commit the following crimes that led to the indefinite suspensions of *Egungun* ritual practice in the two communities. In the year 2001, some local politicians at Iyara town used the fearsome *Egungun* called *Omo-Elepo* (literally, 'the child of the palm oil seller') to terrorize their political opponents. The case was brought before the community's traditional leader (*Oluyara*) who, after considering the gravity of the case, suspended indefinitely the *Egungun* tradition in the community. The *Egga* instance occurred in the year 2003. It was early in the morning on that fateful day, the community's market women were busy setting up their wares in their shops when some *Egungun* and their followers emerged from

nowhere and scared away the women from their shops and looted all the groceries in the shops. The incident was reported to the community Royal Highness who at once suspended indefinitely the Egga *Egungun* tradition.

Based on this array of problems confronting the Ijumu-Yoruba *Egungun*, one does not need to train as a diviner or spiritualist to foretell that the future of this aspect of the group's culture is bleak. Having identified the problems confronting the *Egungun* as well as the responsible factors; the next step is to point out the relevance of my dissertation to arresting the situation.

This dissertation has built on the existing body of knowledge on the Yoruba concept of spirituality and draws attention to the neglected Ijumu *Egungun*. I strongly believe that the fear that this Ijumu tradition will soon disappear has been prevented because the information contained here will survive. This dissertation will operate as a reliable cultural data bank, where the Ijumu future generations in particular, as well as other peoples, non-Westerners and Westerners, could go.

APPENDIX A: ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1.1: Chief Jemirin (of Iyah-Gbedde) showing the author his family *Asò Ipo* sacred hand-woven cloth that is in his custody. July 2004.
Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 1.2: *Akorowo Epa* masquerade. Incorporated into this masquerade's costumes are *Asø Ipo* sacred hand-woven red cloths, young palm fronds (*Moriwo*), and bird feathers. Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 1.3: An Ekinrin-Adde *Egungun* called *Onigabon*. The *Aso-Ipo* (red cloths) form part of the masquerade's costumes. December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami (the deceased's son).



Figure 1.4: An Iyamoye *Egungun*. The red cloth forms part of this masquerade costumes. However, the cloth costumes are not hand-woven; rather, they are industrial made. July 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 1.5: An Ekinrin-Adde *Egungun*. His costumes are made of raffia fibers (*Iko*) and *Ase Ipo* sacred hand-woven red cloth. December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 1.6: Egbedda-Egga masquerade costumes made of raffia fibers and *Asø Ipo* sacred hand-woven cloth. June 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 1.7: An *Epa* masquerade called *Ate*. His attires incorporate *Asø Ipo* and young palm fronds (*Moriwo/Mariwo*) August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 1.8: Iyamoye *Egungun*. The red cloth forms an indispensable part of his cloth costumes. July 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 1.9: An Ijumu *Egungun* shrine emblems. These sacred items include incised sticks (*Atori*) and a clay vessel. The offering sacrifices are a marched corn meal (*Eko*), kola nut (*Obi-Abata*), and fowl's blood with its feathers. July 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 2.1: The late Elder Obarun. Until his death in late June 2004, the Elder (*Baba*) Obarun was the Aaye clan/lineage *Egungun* leader in Iyamoye Ijumu. July 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 2.2: Chief Aodu Ibitoye (the *Eleti* of Iyamoye). Because his uncle Elder Obarun was very sick at the time, Chief Ibitoye led the Aaye family *Egungun* ritual festival in July 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 2.3: Iyamoye *Egungun* in procession on the seventh and last day of the *Egungun* masquerades festival, July 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 2.4: An Iyamoye *Egungun* masquerade, July 2004.
Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 2.5: Iyamoye *Egungun* masquerades, July 2004.
Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 2.6: *Ina-Oko* (of Ekinrin-Adde) holding in his hands a pair of fans (*Abebe*), December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 2.7: *Onigabon* masquerade. His costumes comprise of the raffia fibers and *Asø Ipo* hand-woven cloths. Ekinrin-Adde, December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 2.8: *Ogalata* display (for the late Chief Olugbami's second burial ceremony (*Oku-Sise*)). Ekinrin-Adde, December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 2.9: A close view of *Ogalata* display. Ekinrin-Adde.
The red cap on the cloth-robe construct is called *Fila-Odi*, December 2000.
Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of
Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 3.1: The carpenter removing the *Aso-Ipo* from the late Chief Olugbami's house roof. Ekinin-Adde, December 2000.
Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 3.2: The *Aso-Ipo* in the hands of the carpenter on the late Chief Olugbami's house roof is called *Abata*. December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 3.3: This bundle of *Asò Ipo* comprises of *Abata*, *Ifale*, *Oja*, and *Ebe*. Ekinrin Adde, December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 3.4: The late Chief Olugbami's title emblems of beads (*Akun*) displayed on top of the stool (*Otitá*). The stool is covered with cloth. Ekinrin-Adde, December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 3.5i: *Iye-Mole* making a ritual offering of kola nut to both *Imole* (Earth Goddess) and to the spirit of the late Chief Olugbami. December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation. Courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 3.5ii: *Iye-Mole* with her *Imole* group members dancing. She is holding in her hand a fan (*Abebe*). December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 3.6: *Ina-Oko* (of Ekinrin-Adde) paying homage to the spirit of the dead. The masquerade is bowing down on top of the deceased's cemented grave. December 2000. Photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 3.7: *Ina-Oko* and *Onigabon* masquerades emerge from the forests of *Egungun*. They are accompanied by a sea of heads. December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 3.8: Ekinrin-Adde *Egungun* Drummers (*Onilu-Egungun*). December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 3.9: *Bata* and *Dundun* drums of the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. Chief Murina Oyelami's Private Museum in Iragbiji, Osun State. June 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 4.1: *Ina-Okò* masquerade (of Ekinrin-Adde) is dancing. The deceased's relatives respond by dancing with the masquerade after rewarding him with the gifts of money. December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 4.2: A ritual sacrifice (*Ebo*) comprises a smoked mud-fish (*Eja-Dudu/Eja Aro*) soaked in palm oil (*Epo-Pupa*), Ekinrin-Adde. December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 4.3: A carpenter detaching the *Ogalata* items on the late Chief Olugbami's house roof. Ekinrin-Adde, December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 4.4: Two men folding the *Aso-Ipo* into one bundle.
Ekinrin Adde, December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video
documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 4.5: The bundle of *Asò Ipo* is carefully laid on the mat. A container containing salt is placed beside it. Ekinrin-Adde, December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 4.6: *Baba-Awo* holding a brown horsetail (*Iru*) in his hand. This emblem distinguishes him as an herbalist (*Ol'Osanyin*). Ekinrin Adde, December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 4.7: *Baba-Awo* and his interpreter (*Ogbufe*). Ekinrin -Adde, December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 4.8: The participants of *Oro-Ikaso* (literally, ‘the ritual of cloth folding’) are moving round the bundle of *Asø Ipo* in a counter-clockwise direction. Ekinrin-Adde, December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 4.9: *Onigabon* is carrying the bundle of *Asø Ipo*. Ekinrin Adde, December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 5.1: Chief Jemirin (of Iyah-Gbedde) wearing on his head *Odi* cap (*Fila-Oye*). The cap distinguishes him as an *Olorota* (Ijumu Community High Chief). Iyah-Gbedde, June 2005. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 5.2: The *Ala* (*Epa* dancing arena) containing the *Egungun Epa*, drummers, singers, and spectators. Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 5.3: Palm fronds (*Moriwo/Mariwo*) tied across the main entrance of the *Epa* grove (*Igbo-Epa*). Chief Jemirin (the *Epa* society leader) raises up the palm fronds so that the King/*Oba* (His Royal Highness *Oluof* *Iyah* -Gbedde) could pass through. August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.

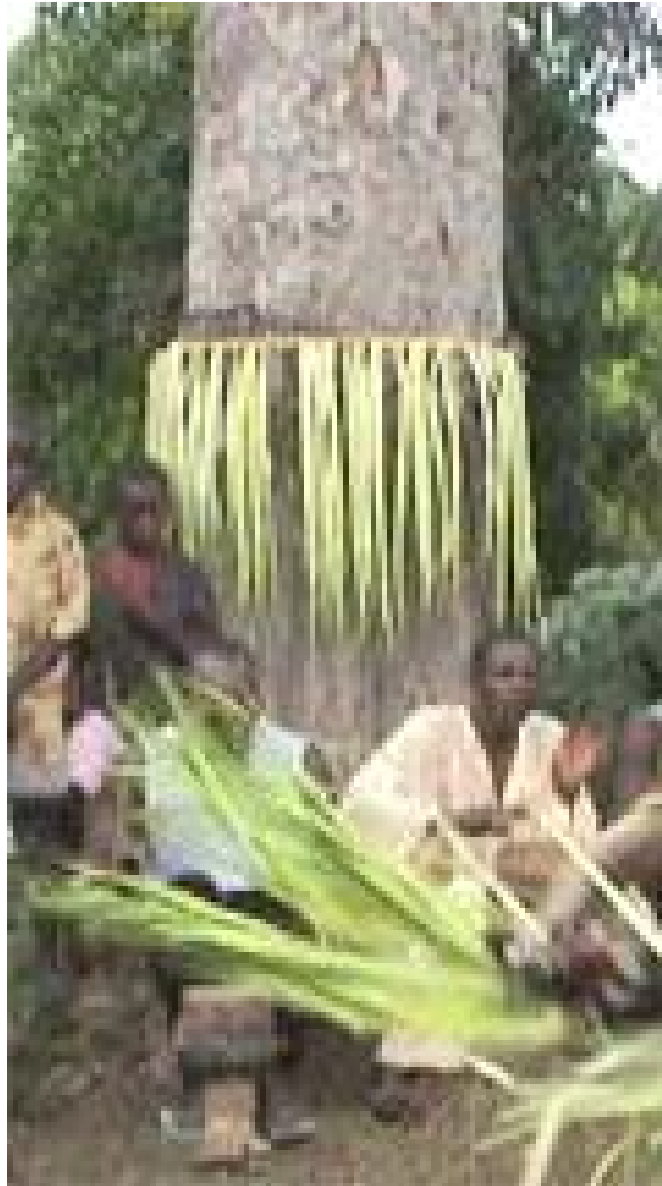


Figure 5.4: This is the stem of the big and tall silk cotton tree (*Igi-Ègungun*) located at *Ala*. Palm fronds are tied around the tree. Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 5.5: The *Epa* Drummers (*Onilu -Epa*). Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 5.6: *Iya-Eku* (literally, ‘the mother of *Ekú*’), a round pot-shaped clay drum with stretched goatskin. It is the lead drum of *Egungun Epa Ekú* drum set. The two others in the set are *Omele Ako* and *Omele Abo*. Iyah-Gbedde, August, 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 5.7: *Olori-Atokun Egungun Epa* (the lead *Epa* masquerades attendant) carrying in his hand, the principal emblem of *Epa* Spirit being. Called *Orisa* (“divinity”), this emblem is made of deer horn and palm fronds. Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 5.8: *Akorowo Epa* masquerade.
Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004.
Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 5.9: *Akorowo* engages in a vigorous dance performance. His legs and arms are uncovered by his costumes. Iyah-Gbedde, August, 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 6.1: This *Epa* masquerade is called by the name *Ate* (literally, 'a display'). Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 6.2: *Ate* is spinning in the air. This unusual choreographic display fetches him (*Ate*) the appellation, *Kokoro* (literally, 'an insect'), an allusion to a great dancer. Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 6.3: An *Egungun Epa* of Iyah-Gbedde called by the name *Ori-Igi* (literally, ‘the carved wooden head’). August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 6.4: An *Epa* masquerade called *Olomoyoyo* ('the owner of many children'). Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 6.5i: An *Egungun Epa* of Iyah-Gbedde called *Apa*. August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 6.5ii: *Apa* engages in a vigorous dance performance. Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 6.6: *Apa* is carrying in his hands a pair of deerskin fans (*Abebe*). Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 6.7: An *Egungun Ekinrin Adde* called *Ina-Oko*. December 2000. Still photograph adapted from video documentation; courtesy of Chief S.A. Olugbami.



Figure 6.8: Iyamoye *Egungun*. July 2004.
Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 6.9: *Aso-Ipo* hand-woven red cloth. This sacred cloth, which forms an essential part of the Iyah-Gbedde *Epa* masquerade costumes, looks very old; yet, it is jealously guarded by its owners (Chief Jemirin's family members). Iyah-Gbedde, June 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 7.1: Masquerade costumes made of *Aso-Ipo*, *Kijipa* hand-woven, and industrial-made cloths and magical medicines (*Oogun*). Egbedde-Egga, June 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 7.2: Egbeda-Egga masquerade costumes made of *Aso Ipo* hand-woven cloth and bird feathers. June 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 7.3: *Apa* carved headpiece/mask.
Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004.
Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 7.4: *Ori-Igi* carved headpiece/mask.
Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004.
Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 7.5: *Olomoyoyo* carved headpiece/mask.
Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004.
Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 7.6: The *Ogelese* masquerade headpiece is made of an assemblage of bird feathers and beak. Iyamoye, July 2004. Photo by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 7.7: The *Akorowo* masquerade headpiece is made of an assemblage of bird feathers. Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 7.8: The *Ate* masquerade headpiece is made of an assemblage of bird feathers. Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 7.9: Masquerade carved headpieces/masks trashed into the forest. Egbeda-Egga, June 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 8.1: Many bags and boxes full of masquerade costumes trashed into the forest. Egbedda-Egga, June 2004.
Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 8.2: *Ogelese* masquerade carries a fan (*Abebe*) in his right hand. Iyamoye, July 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 8.3: Ankle bands of Iyamoye *Egungun* masquerade. July 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 8.4: An ankle band of *Egungun Epa*. Iyah-Gbedde, August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 8.5: An assemblage of iron gongs and buffalo tails attached to the costumes of *Apa* (an *Egungun Epa* of Iyah-Gbedde). August 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 8.6: A brass bell used by *Egungun Epa*. It is owned by Chief Jemirin of Iyah-Gbedde. June 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 8.7: Metal anklets used by *Egungun Epa* .
The anklets are owned by Chief Jemirin, Iyah-Gbedde.
June 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 8.8: The *AKODI AFRIKA* Museum (front view), Iffe Ijumu. Note: *Akodi* is a Yoruba word for 'a big estate' or 'a house with many rooms,' June 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 8.9: The *AKODI AFRIKA* Museum, Iffe Ijumu, June 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.



Figure 9.1: The signboard of the Church Missionary Society, Iffe Ijumu, June 2004. Photograph by Olawole F. Famule.

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