



The beauties of EYO FESTIVAL

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The distinct way of life of a people, define its culture and tradition, an unspoken or unwritten guide for people to identify such group with. A period when what is beyond the ordinary is celebrated with the scenic frills, and thrills of glamorous funfair making corporate brand participant the envy of competition.

This evolution is the timeless essence of an existence strong enough to provoke remarkable global interest and fellowship, draw people from far and near to a melting point of leisure seen with the finest presentation of a race's cultural heritage. It was indeed a tourist delight as well as money spinner for the organizers in Lagos State. A renaissance of a people's true way of being. The undoubted pride of Lagos. Eyo Festival. The Adamuorisha play was certainly, a heritage for Lagos State.

Eko or the city of Lagos and the home of Eyo, the economic capital of Nigeria, reputed for more traditional or cultural mosaic which include Elegba, Ota and olokun among others was a beehive recently.

Primordially the Eyo or Adamuorisha play is shrouded in Lagos oral traditions centred on Olori Olugbani, Oba Ado's wife and Ejilu and Malaki her kinsmen who brought two Eyo Orishas:

Oniko and Ologede respectively from Ibe fun in the Ijebu waterside and enriches same with the Awo Opa from Oyo to honour Olugbani on her death as a royal personage.

However, traditional account from Awe Adimu, according to Chief T. A. Ibikunle, the Akinshiku of Lagos, the deity called Adimu Orisa incorporating Adimu, Orisha-Oko and today reticent Ogunran came as gifts from Benin to Oba Ashipa. Initially kept at Ike-Ipa near Glover Road waterfront, Ikoyi, where play watched by the royal house and nobles were held forth-nightly. From Oke-Ipa, the deities were relocated to Ita-Ado, Iduritafa, Isale-Eko, Lagos Island under the custodian of Ejilu. Thus, Ejilu and Malaki are known to have brought the Adimu deity and therefore, Eyo to Lagos. And ever since then the story of Lagos has changed.

Priding itself as centre of excellence with an unequal aquatic splendour, culture tradition and socio-religious grandeur of impeccable worship. Lagos has a retinue of celebration by a people of diverse assemblage, speaking one language in one voice and one song in a season of one play.

The Igbe song, the traditional music of the queens of the royal households, has become, perhaps, the theme song for the memorial ceremonial revival of a unique cultural essence, Eyo. Chief Aziz B. Akilagun II, the Onilegbale of Lagos, in "The Truth about Eyo Masquerade", an article published in the Lagos News, December 19, 1986, stated this.

"The Eyo play and not Orisha (Adimu Oniko, Ologede and Alaketepupa or Laba) were brought to Lagos from Ibe fun in about 1750 by Ejilu and Malaki, the two male cousins to Olori Olugbani, the wife of Oba Ado and mother of Erelu Kuti of Lagos... Ejilu and Malaki... came from Ibe fun in search of Olugbani who was said to have died before they arrived Lagos.

Fortunately, they met Olugbani's daughter, Erelu Kuti, and her two children who were on separate throne. (Ologunkutere as Oba of Lagos and Sokun as Ogbon Iduntafa)...

On arrival, the two men introduced themselves to Erelu Kuti and told them their mission (to locate Olugbani).. They did not stay long when they learnt of Olugbani's death but left for Ibe fun to perform funeral rites (Eyo) of Olori Olugbani".

However, history has shown that Ejilu and Malaki are two key personalities in the introduction of Eyo to Lagos having decided to permanently reside in Lagos. Significantly, Olori Olugbani gave birth to her children Ologun Kutere and Sokun when the Eyo play was first held. Thus, the potency to attract favour and secure protection from the Almighty is strongly represented in Eyo.

As there may be other accounts, prominently the colourful and exciting Eyo play is linked with the funeral obsequies of Olori Olugbani performed in Lagos by her kinsmen with the beautiful play whose cult originated from Benin.

The traditional relationship of Oba Liken of Ibe fun and the people of Lagos and Ibiyeroye marriage may explain the notion that Eyo was introduced to Lagos from Ibe fun. Chief Tajudeen Gbadesere revealed that, "the variant of Eyo staged was in the night entailing three consecutive outings in a performance where the use of Aropale and other paraphernalia were absent.

Nevertheless, the place of Malaki and Ejilu in the historical origin of the fanciful Eyo play is brought out forcefully in a praise song rendered as:

*Malaki nsaye
Nsaye Ejilu say a to...
Ofi akala mode, mesi kole
Olomu kole wa me Eyo
Omowewe abese loni Eko
Edi orikoda si irele (Chief Adisa Jinadu,
1986)*

Again, Ejilu and Malaki are credited for their role in the Awo Opa religion and culture especially, in the Adamuorisha in Lagos. No wonder the saying: "Mole Ejilu, Mole Malaki".

So, the emergent Adimu deity held in enthralling awe by all, depicted Shodipe (2001) as:

"Woven in this cultural eloquence the deity (Adimu) and its train swept through the lanes and corridors of Idunganran (Palace of the Oba of Lagos) in exuberant cadence wheeling to the royal court to wake the Oba of Lagos - to deliver tidings from the ancestral medium. Upon royal command, the Orisha Oruko hurried to the shrine of Orisha Adimu, the leader, the undisputed King of all Lagos deities and Leader of Eyo Adimu. It was the wake of dawn. At the heralding entrance of the purifying deity the spiritual enclave of Orisha Adimu lighted in jubilating ecstasy as the primeval royal drum called Igbe (only beaten on important occasions) throbbed loud and long rising in undulating crescendo and pacing up in enthralling rhythmical flourish amid the bewitching chanting of ancient women praising the residing deity (Adimu)

On February 20, 1854, on the beautiful Island of Lagos, the Adamu Orisha play was inaugurated during the royal passage rites of Oba Akitoye performed in his honour by Oba Dosumu. This regal and noble performance was led by Sir Christopher A Sapara-Williams, CMG, a Lagos Creole, Knight of the British Empire and Nigeria's first indigenous Lawyer.

Before Oke-ipa was the venue for the play watched by the Oba and others. And in 1852 the play berthed in prominent Lagos Island and has since remained there.

The name Adimu, means 'one with blocked nasal passage' while Adamu refer to 'Obstructed nose'. Adimu speaks while Adamu does not but relates through the aide-de-camp, the Laba, bearer of the bag of mystical powers. Others are distinct by name and characteristics but collectively identified as Adamu Orisha, a defiant and fierce deity that stood Akimbo in the middle of the road conferring favours on whomsoever it pleases and admonition on those who transgress its rule.

There is no regularity as to the periods and number of performances but it is manifest that performances of the Adamu-Orisha play since then have not been infrequent. For instance, two performances took place in 1984, the first (in memory of Ajalegbe Aina) took place on March 20, 1894 and the second, (in honor of Tokosi) took place on June 10, 1895. Two performances were also recorded for each year in the following two years as well as in 1898 and 1957. Three performances each were recorded for 1899, 1903 and 1907, whilst four performances occurred during 1904 and 1909. Records show that there were six performances in 1906, the highest in a year so far in the history of the Eyo festival in Lagos.

In 1982, a performance took place in connection with the celebrations marking 350 years of Obaship in Lagos. In February 1985, when the then Nigerian Military Head of State, Major General Muhammadu Buhari was visiting Lagos State officially, a performance was locally staged in his honour at the Onikan Stadium, Lagos. Furthermore, on October 12, 1985, a performance was staged as part of the funeral obsequies of the mother of the Alaiyeluwa, the Oba of Lagos-Olori (Mrs) E. Omolara Adetola Oyekan.

In 1987, two performances came in quick succession. First, on April 17, 1987, Eyo was staged in connection with the commissioning of the Eyo Cenotaph, Idumota, Lagos, and dedicated to the memory of Pa Salisu Ibikunle, a one time Chief Akinsiku of Lagos. Secondly, on May 30, 1987, a performance was sponsored by the Lagos State Government in connection with the 20th anniversary of the creation of the State and as such, it was used to honour heroes of Lagos State (Rear Admiral Shamusideen Adekunle Lawal, Rev. Akin Adesola, A.B. Johnson, and Pa Yekini Adewunmi Adeniran Dosunmu) Since then, several Eyo performances have been held the last being in 2003 in honour of Oba Adeyinka Oyekan II, CFR, Oba of Lagos. Thus, from 1854 to the present about 80 Eyo celebrations have been held in honour of departed Lagos Obas, Chiefs and eminent Lagosians as well as in commemoration of important historical milestones.

The Adamu Orisa or its personification, the Eyo, is one of the age-long religious practices devised to purify the Lagos community after the passage of the Oba, Chiefs or prominent citizens of Lagos. Hence, it is the pride of the Oba, Chiefs and People of Lagos not only because of its traditional importance as a kind of ancestral worship in which the dead are believed to be able to influence the affairs of this world from a higher, though, invisible sphere' but also, because of its perceived ability to intercede in resolving a particular problem or suing for public good.

Thus, the Adamuorisha, in the form of the Eyo (masquerades), can be said to be a way by which Lagosians resorted to their ancestors represented by the royalty and also, as an acknowledgement of worthy contributions by Lagosians. Little wonder therefore, that the Eyo is staged as one of the ceremonies connected with the funeral obsequies of a deceased Oba, Chief or

eminent person and was until recently, a condition precedent to the performance of the 'Iwuye' (coronation) ceremony of the Oba of Lagos or Lagos traditional Chiefs.

In the past, noted Chief I.O. Bajulaiye, Jiyabi II, the Eletu Odibo of Lagos (1974), 'no Oba or Chief of Lagos was allowed to perform the 'Iwuye' ceremony until he had completed the final funeral rites of his predecessor which included the staging of Adamuorisha Play.' The festival is therefore, of great importance to the Oba and Chiefs of Lagos. Eyo play is perhaps the strongest cultural bond amongst the various indigenes of Eko cutting across class, creed and religion. Indeed, certain traditional belief as are related to ancestral worship, cleansing of the community and supplication to the supreme being for peace and progress are also associated with the Eyo festival. The retention of the play is perhaps the strongest evidence of its importance to the Lagos community and an affirmation of its antiquity in the face of urbanization.

The Yorubas, including the Aworis of Lagos, believe strongly that their deceased ones do



not depart from them and that wherever they may be, they (the ancestors in the form of 'Egungun' that is, masquerades) always visit their progeny and that association between them and the living can be very real. Instructively, the way the Eyo, a variant 'Egungun' communicates with each other and other members of the public in a weird guttural manner suggests that the Eyo represent the dead but had only just returned to earth on a Safari.

Consequently, the Eyo stands out distinctively as a unique epitome of Lagos cultural identity resplendently personified as a motif in several State monuments and institutions including but not limited to the Old Governor's Office (now Deputy Governor's Office) Alausa-Ikeja, Lagos, which was built in the form of the Eyo hat (Aga). Other evidential representations of the Eyo as a symbol of Lagos would be found in the crest of the Lagos State University and the courtyards of Lagos Oba and Chiefs as well as the Lagos House (Governor's Office/Residential). Thus, Eyo stands out as the foremost illustration of Lagos personality hence, it is celebrated with unique style amidst pomp, pageantry and regale ceremonies.

As state-recognised cultural festival of Lagos,

the day of performance of the Eyo Festival or Adamuorisha Play is marked as a day of great communal rejoicing in which the traditional greetings of "Mo yo fun he, Mo yo fun ra mi" translated as "I rejoice with you and I rejoice with myself" pervades the Lagos atmosphere.

There are about 70 Eyo Groups made up of the major cultic (Orisha) groups which are: Adimu, Ikolaba-Ekun (Alaketepupa), Oniko, Ologede and Agere in that order, and the 62 palace (Eyo Iga) groups. This later group, which is led by that (Eyo Omo Oloku) of the Oba of Lagos, includes Eyo Akikoye, Eletu-Odibo Kosoko, Onilegbale, Eletu-Iwase, Olorogun, Aromire, Oloto, Elegushi, Obanikoro, Onisemo, Bajulaiye, Ashogbon, Shaasi, Suenu, Ajanaku, Jakande, Saba, Oshodi, Onisiwo, Oluwa, Onitolo, Modile, Oniru, Ojora, Onitana and Eletu-Ijebu among others.

The paraphernalia of an Eyo consists of the Ape or Aga (hat) which comes in different designs and colours depicting a particular group, the close fitting Agbada (robe), the Aropale (loin-cloth) and the Ibori (veil). He also carries an 'Opambata' (staff), an exquisitely carved and well ornamented raffia palm frond with tiny top and wider base and is sometimes decorated or dotted with raffia leaves. As ritual object, the Opambata is held before the face and wielded as a sign of felicitation to friends and admires or in ventilation of annoyance. More appropriately, it is utilized as a magic wand of prayers for all and sundry. The spectacular flowing robes as well as the loin-cloth of the Eyo, which are dragged about the earth in swift sweeping motion is symbolic in clearing deaths, diseases and generally purifying the environment. No doubt the new and fresh Lagos.

Except the Eyo Omo-Oloku and the Eyo Fancy, the Eyo wears spotless white materials. Attired in these accountments as a white hooded masquerade, the Eyo appears in public speaking in ventriloquism as it pierces through major neighbourhood roads which are blocked to vehicular traffic and business to allow Eyo procession free passage. The most colourful and exciting sight.

Before any person or family can cause an Eyo Play to be staged, such person, body or family must receive the prior consent and authority of the following: (a) The Oba of Lagos; (b) The Council of Adamuorisa; (c) The Elders of Adimu Cult in both sections of Ita-Ado and Abegede and (d) The Chief Akinshiku of Lagos, the Head (Olori) of Eyo. Next are the custodians or leaders of the Awe Adimu-the Ologun-Agan and the Ologun Igbesodi. It is these bodies of traditional authority through the instrumentality of the Akinshiku that are responsible for announcing the festival date as well as organizing and managing the Eyo play.

In all, the beauties of the Eyo, one play, many groups is reminiscent in mystical and traditional socio cultural symbolism a solid base for a monumental tourism exhibit that is attractively unforgettable. The beauties are in the excellence, found in the destination, Lagos.