

Edi Festival In Ipetumodu: A Consequent Emotion and Socio-Religious Phenomenon

Prof. Aremu, P. Sholademi Olabisi Ph.D

*Department of Fine and Applied Arts
Obafemi Awoowo University
Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Email: psoaremu@yahoo.com*

Akintonde Akintunde Moses Ph.D.

*Department of Industrial Design
Ladoke Akintola University
Ogbomoso, Nigeria
Email- tundeakin.tonde@yahoo.com*

Ijisakin Olaolu Yemi

*Department of Fine and Applied Arts
Obafemi Awolowo University
Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Email= ijisakinoyo@yahoo.com*

Doi:10.5901/jesr.2012.v2n2.383

Abstract: *This paper is based on existing literature and field investigation into the Yoruba socio-religious festival. Investigation, observation, and oral interviews were carried out to authenticate the existing oral history of the people in Ipetumodu. Notable people and the custodians of the shrine involved in Edi festival were interviewed during and after the festival. The art objects and artifacts were identified. These artifacts (Opa, the iron rods representing Moremi and her only son Oluorogbo) are very crucial as they must be pacified and worshipped annually or occasionally to appease the deity – Moremi. Elaborate rites are therefore to be performed as to infuse spiritual power into them before and after use. Edi originated from Ile-Ife, the ancestral home of the Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria. Therefore, the study of Edi is of historical significance, and could be referred to as one of the hegemonic festivals in which the rulership of a community periodically projects himself before the citizenry and endeavour to demonstrate the power, greatness and sanctity of the regime. Edi festival could therefore be referred to as Moremi festival because the festival involves her worship. Her activities and importance in the realm of things in Ile-Ife brought about Edi festival to the town of Ipetumodu not far from Ile-Ife but of Oyo extraction.*

Keywords: *Edi festival, socio-religious, Opa, Moremi, deity, celebrations, rituals.*

1. Introduction

Ipetumodu is the headquarters of Ife North Local Government area of Osun State in South West Nigeria. It is about twelve kilometers from Ile-Ife, and bounded in the North by Ede Local Government area, in the South-West by Ayedade Local Government area, in the South by Ife-South and in the East by Ife central local Government area. The people of Ipetumodu are of Oyo extraction, and speak Oyo dialect. But various oral traditions of origin seem to suggest various stages of emigration to the town. One of such claims contemponeity with Ile-Ife, while another supports the Oyo Yoruba particularly from Ogbomoso. Ogbomoso town is presently in Oyo State of Nigeria. However, they all agree that the founder of Ipetumodu was Akalako whose descendants are the ruling house.

Ipetumodu, better referred to as Ipetu (an abbreviation) is noted for pottery, which served and still serving its people and its neighbours. Their pottery works are found in Ile-Ife, Okeigbo, Ifewara, Ifetedo all of which are very close to Ife culturally. Among the people of Ipetu, as in other Yoruba towns such as Oshogbo, Ogbomoso, Ikire, Shaki, Iseyin e.t.c., god the creator of heaven and earth is conceived of as a distant, relatively unapproachable deity (Mbiti, 1992). He is deemed to be the last resort, the last court of appeal, he further adds (Ibid). As in many ethnic groups in black African countries, men and women have their own presiding spirits and guilds guided by particular gods and goddesses, of such are *Sango*, god of thunder; *Saponna* god of small-pox; *Obatala*, the arch divinity who was said to be present when God created the whole universe, etc (Personal communication).

During worship, the various spirits and deities being worshipped are appeased to appropriately to enable the adherents receive favours according to individual demands. The grooves in the town of Ipetumodu, the societies and their religious paraphernalia are clear testimonies to their link with their gods and goddesses and most especially to *Moremi*, an important figure in the oral historical handouts of the Ipetu people. In working with the spirit forces, according to Mbiti, (1992), it is important to observe certain controls or restrictions inform of taboos. These taboos are very relevant and crucial in that they are to ensure the ritual cleanliness before the spirits are approached (personal communication). Most of these spirits, gods and goddesses are satisfied in terms of festivals to harness their spiritual power so as to purify and cleanse the town of Ipetu, and its inhabitants of malevolent forces.

Edi festival is one of those festivals used in Ipetuodu for preventive, curative, protective and productive purposes. This is made possible in part by the art and artifacts used in the proclamation during the festivities. Artistic displays carry the sacred power to bring spiritual things into existence, and festival is a fundamental concept of life-force that exists in many forms and manifestations and in varying amounts at the foundation of Yoruba philosophy and social organization. Dopamu (2004) confirms that festivals are institutionalized aspects of people's culture. He further adds that they are aspects of social relationship which continue from time to time to play important roles in the society. Asare Poku in Dopamu (2004) defines festivals as rituals which recur at regular intervals and which have as their purpose the expression of beliefs held by a particular community.

The great deities of the town such as *Obatala*, *Oluorogbo Ilase*, *Olokun*, *Ogun*, *Moremi* and others are still being worshipped in festivals. Among such festivals are Olokun and Edi the last of which is held annually to commemorate a courageous woman called Moremi. Moremi was a very beautiful woman, supposedly the wife of King Oranmiyan, who was later inherited by *Alayemore* when he succeeded to the throne after Oranmiya's death (Fabunmi, 1969). Moremi was a great patriot who put her life on line to save the people of Ile-Ife (the place where Edi festival originated) from the incessant raids of an outside group, the "Igbos".

Early in the history of Ile-Ife the *Igbos* used to frighten its people in the dress of knitted raffia palm threads that covered their heads, faces and feet to give them the appearance of spirits. Accordingly to Ife oral history, it was customarily necessary for the Igbo to visit *Ojafe*, a market in Ile-Ife, annually for the worshipping of their deities known as *Aje*, *Kori*, *Esa-Oja*, in the dead of the night (Personal communication). This night ceremony is called *Pokulere* and is annually observed on the third day after *Ekuru-Itapa* ceremony. The Igbos yearly visit to Ile-Ife was not to capture the Ife people as accepted by uninformed historians. They only planned to organize themselves into ever growing community with the intention of avenging themselves on the Ife people who used to spy on them during their night ceremony (Pokulere). The Igbo warriors in raffia dresses were called Oluware. One of such people deeply concerned was *Moremi*, a native of Offa. She then allowed herself to be captured by the Igbo and taken as a war booty to Igbo homestead. The king of the Igbos married her being very beautiful. It was here that she discovered the secret behind the Igbo's annual success in war against her people. She then left the Igbo palace. Because of her promise she made to the spirit of *Esinminrin* stream in Ile-Ife that if she was successful in her bid, she would sacrifice whatever would first come out of her house to embrace her on her return from the Igboland. Unfortunately, her only son Ela/Oluorogbo was the one to meet and embrace her. Her son was sacrificed to the spirit of *Esinminrin*

stream. Because of this gallant behaviour, she has since then been referred to as Yeye Aiye Gbogbo – The Mother of all universe. It was this concept that the people of Ipetumodu took to their town, and Moremi was and still being worshipped in festival called *Edi*, as it was in Ife, its birth place. The study of *Edi* is therefore of historical significance. Festivals in Ogunba (1991)'s submission stand out as sources of Yoruba cultural history.

2. Background to *Edi* Festival in Ipetumodu

According to the introduction, the traditional origin of *Edi* festival in Ipetumodu can always be traced to Ile-Ife, the cradle of the Yoruba race. The history of the origin is almost lost to legend and myths. According to Apetu of Ipetumodu (the traditional king of the town), Moremi was a woman of great beauty and courage, a great warrior and a heroine of Offa origin (Personal communication) who sacrificed her only son to *Esinminrin* stream. Thus the origin of *Edi* festival in commemoration of *Moremi* in Ile-Ife and its environs, the concept that spread to Ipetumodu (her northern neighbour), Ifewara, Ifetedo, and Okeigbo. It is one of the most important events in these towns. In Ipetumodu it is usually led by the king and his chief-priest – The Apena of Ipetumodu. *Edi* festival in Ipetumodu is an annual event which brings sons and daughters together in joyous reunion.

3. Fixing the Date

Dopamu (2004) submits that throughout the world, there are occasions when people come together to celebrate important events in their lives. The celebration of such events, he further adds is known as festival and it is usually the concern of the whole community (Ibid).

Festival date was fixed through Ifa divination; prayers and salutations were said by the Apena of Ipetumodu, and the chosen date by the diviner and the chief priest was rectified by the king, the Oba of Ipetumodu and the heads of the ruling families in a joint meeting. Kolanuts, *Obi abata* were presented in a very special way to the symbol of deity, (Moremi) the iron rod, *opa*. Before the presentation by the chief priest, some prayers, requests of the people were said and directed to the deity, *Moremi, Iya gbogbo aiye*, mother of the whole universe viz:

Moremi, Iya gbogbo aiye
 Fun wa lowo, fun wa l'omo
 Ma se doju tiwa
 Je k'aba oju rere re pade
 Se ona wa ni rere o o o
 Je k'ale s'amodun

Moremi, the mother of the whole universe
 Bless us with riches and children
 Do not put us to shame
 Be merciful unto us
 May our endeavours be acknowledged
 May we live to celebrate next year.

Thereafter, the chief priest spilt the two kolanuts into their separate lobes, he then dipped and washed them in a bowl of clean water. This was for ritual cleansing. The Apena then held the kolanuts between his two palms and then called for the blessing of *Moremi* on the floor of the shrine. The rod, *opa*, the symbol of Moremi is made of iron and about three and a half feet long and covered with elephant skin. It looks like a walking stick, *opa itile*. It has serated marks that look like joints of sugar cane or bamboo stick. The stops are

there to keep the costume made of strips of cloths in place during the annual Edi festival. Rituals were offered to the *opa* before strips of cloth were attached unto it. This was a purification act (Personal communication). All these rituals and other religious acts, according to an informant, were in effect, health rituals since they were aimed at preserving and prolonging human life.

4. Costumes and their attributes

After the preliminary arrangements had been completed, the chief priest made sure that *Moremi* costume and that of her mythical son, *Oluorogbo* were put in order and ready for use during Edi festival. The *Opa* was washed with water and lime water, *omi orombo*, before day break. It was after this exercise that the costumes were attached to iron rods representing Moremi and her son *Oluorogbo*. These costumes were made by the worshippers with the belief that the spirit of Moremi and that of her son live in them.

Moremi costume had headmask at the top of the iron structure (the *opa*). This head mask was made with leather. The head has a triangular-shaped-eyes that looked like Yoruba wooden mask. The headmask was prominent and in itself conveyed to any sensitive viewer the power of the costume. The maker of this costume has technical as well as artistic skills that contribute in a singular way to the making of the headpiece an essential and appropriate focus of the costume. The worshippers regarded the facial features of the costume as keeping watchful eyes over them, which is a guarantee of ancestral protection. Hence, it is morally binding that the devotees should obey all the taboos regarding the upkeep of the costumes and their relevance to Edi festival (Personal communication).

The costume of *Oluorogbo* on the other hand, looks like that of the *eyo* masquerades of Lagos. It has a cap which made it to represent a male figure. The colour red, *pupa* of the costume does not symbolize any religious connotation. It has no religious interpretations in the worship of Moremi. But with other deities in Yorubaland as a whole, colour is significantly associated.

It is true that these costumes were built by the people, and there are important taboos that must be religiously obeyed first and foremost, the costumes must not be washed, (Just like the *egungun* masquerades costumes) because of the spirits and medicines applied to them. They must not be burnt and the carriers must be virgins. They should not be carried by uninitiated persons and palm kernel oil, *adi*, should not be allowed to touch the costumes because *adi* is meant for *esu*, the spirit of confusion. But among other people, *esu* is considered very crucial in that it is the errand runner for all other deities. The carriers of *opa* should not lie to being a virgin, if she does, it is believed that she will be barren for life. When carrying the *opa* during the *edi* festival, she must not fall down. If barren women approach them during *edi* festival and make necessary offering and sacrifice, it is believed that they would be blessed with children, and the children so given are named *Abedide*, children that come with *edi* festival. This is reflected in their song viz:

Alari mo dolomo o o o

Alari mo dolomo o o o

Chorus: Opa jowo fun mi ni temi

Moremi jowo ba mi se temi

Opa jowo fun mi ni emi o o o

Alari (someone's name) I have my own child

Opa (costumed figure of Moremi) please give me my own

Moremi please give me my own child

Opa, please give me my own child

This is repeated as many times as possible during *Edi* outing. Celebration of these festivals can be described as essentially a historical enquiry into the past of the people of Ipetumodu. It is characteristically concerned with socio-religious events.

5. Festival Proper

The entire *edi* festival, traditionally takes seven days in Ipetumodu, and on the decided day, the king, oba, the Apetu of Ipetu and his chiefs and other worshippers gathered at the palace ground as early as eight o'clock in the morning to usher in the Edi festival. The chief priest who is the sole custodian of the *opa*, removed it from the shrine after an initial brief ritual observance. Lime water, *omi orombo* was used to wash it, this was to prevent it from rusting. Dopamu (2004) submits that no account of any festival can be complete unless it includes references to what it means to the people who celebrate it. Edi festival has a purpose for the people of Ipetumodu, it has actually conserved and sustained Ipetumodu and its society. Through *edi* people express and achieve unity. In this regard therefore festival, is a religious phenomenon. It is functional to social cohesion and solidarity (Durkheim 1915). Mbiti (1992) is also of the opinion that through festivals the life of the community is renewed. People are entertained and their tensions find an outlet, he further adds. In Ipetumodu religious and social values are repeated and renewed through communal festivals such as *edi* festival. *Moremi* festival as *edi* is popularly referred to, functions more on a communal than individual basis because its celebration involves the entire community, and its beliefs are held by the community.

It is sad to note that presently situations have changed, most people went about their daily work without any special interest in the festival, this was brought about because of foreign religions Christianity and Moslem. The first day of the festival according to the traditional history of the people, was the royal display of "brand" by the king, the Apetu of Ipetumodu during which the king took a smouldering firewood for a display en route sectors of the town, dancing and singing as follows.

Agbagba lai se'lu o o o

Kaye ma baje o o o (3ce)

Chorus: Agbagba lai se'lu o o o

Kaye ma baje o o o (3ce)

The town (Ipetumodu) was made of elders

May the world not get bad/spoilt

Chorus: The town (Ipetumodu) was made of elders

May the world not get bad/spoilt.

The song was repeated many times during the parade. Singing and dancing by the king and other worshippers created a joyous and tumultuous impression and provided a fitting climax to the entire festival. Parading of the staffs of *Moremi* and her only son *Oluorogbo* round the town ended the first day of the festival. Pounded yam, *iyam* used to be the favourite food of *Moremi*, because of this reason the whole community prepared her favourite food, *iyam* for public consumption at the market place and the king's palace. During this time, association with team work was necessary as the festival called for collective discharge of duties most especially in the preparation of food. Cooking activities were carried out by different groups in the community. It was discovered that their religious practices such as worship and initiation ceremony to include festival, according to Fortes, (1962) function more on communal than on individual basis. From all indications the Yoruba people generally place a high premium on the spiritual development of every member of the society, probably this is why Edi festival is always taken as an important and crucial aspect of human activities in the town.

On the second day of the festival, the king did not go out to meet the people, but the people went about with their merriment singing and dancing viz:

1. Moremi jowo fun mi l'omo temi

Chorus: Moremi jowo fun mi l'omo mi

Fun mi lomọ mi (2ce)

2. Moremi jowo bami lofo lo

- Chorus: Moremi jowo ba mi lofo lo o o o
Bami lofo lo (2ce)
3. Eni pe n ku sobiya a daa
Chorus: Eni pe n ku sobiya a daa o o o
Eni pe n ku o ni ku re
Eni pe n ku ko ni ku re o o o
1. Moremi please give me my own child
Chorus: Moremi please give me my child
Give me my child (2ce)
2. Moremi please help me drive away poverty
Chorus: Help me to drive poverty away
Drive away poverty (2ce)
3. Anybody who wishes me dead
Will be attacked by guinea worm
Chorus: Anybody who wishes me dead
Will be attacked by guinea worm
Anybody who wishes me dead
Will not die a peaceful death

The ceremony continued like this throughout the period of the festival which was characterized by feasting, merry-making, offering of sacrifices singing and whipping of *Ongo*. *Ongo* whipping was done by young boys in their teens. They were seen at the market place. *Ongo* is carved in soft white wood of various sizes and shapes, painted in different beautiful colours. The bottom of *Ongo* is always round to allow for easy spinning. People gathered to watch young boys demonstrating their skills. *Ongo* tradition has being in existence since the inception of Edi festival in Ipetumodu (personal communication).

The third, forth, fifth and the sixth day of the festival are referred to as *Ojo Iwode Moremi*, the day when worshippers went round the town visiting chiefs, the king and family members as well as eminent people in the town. The king – The Apetu of Ipetumodu and his chiefs were at the palace ground watching the ceremonies. Moremi represents protective and preventive forces and is therefore very popular among the people, and her festival is celebrated annually in Ipetumodu and other towns such as Ife, Ifewara, Ifetedo, Okeigbo and among a small community in Ayeye area of Ibadan, capital of Oyo state of Nigeria.

The last day of the festival, was the climax, when the king had to assume full spiritual leadership and Moremi's blessings were sought for the entire community. The king appeared in his full regalia with his traditional beaded crown – Ade. The crown is the principal symbol of the king's authority (Sieber and Walker, 1988). The true king in Yorubaland is distinguished by the right to wear beaded crown. During the festival, the Apetu represents the founding father of the town Akalako. Akalako was the founding father of the town. The Apetu represented him by adorning himself with the traditional Are crown passed on to him from Akalako. This crown has sixteen faces organized in a pattern over the entire crown, with a gathering of birds surmounted with a bigger one at the top of the crown. In most instances of Yoruba ritual art, birds, *eije* are references to the mystical power of women, known affectionately as "awon iya, the mother or abusively – the witches (Drewal and Drewal, 1980).

Most kings in Yoruba land rule successfully only with the spiritual support and cooperation of Our Mothers, *awon iya wa* referring to the witches. They are mostly respected as the powerful ones. Prayers were said and directed to *Moremi* in a manner similar to that of children speaking to their parents about themselves and their needs. The people believe that she is merciful and kind, and she is called the merciful one, one that can answer their calls always.

The last day of the festival was full of religious activities as well. The chief priest spilt two kolanuts for spiritual cleansing and purification. He asked the festival to restore peace, happiness and a sense of security here on earth most especially for the people of Ipetumodu. Drums were then beaten at the end of the celebrations to open another year of expectations from Moremi.

6. Conclusion

Edi festival is communal in nature and it is better referred to as hegemonic festival, it therefore contributes largely to the maintenance of continuity and stability of communal beliefs and practices in Ipetumodu. From the above, we have seen that the Edi festival means something significant to the people of Ipetumodu, because it preserves tradition, culture and socio-religion. In like vein, it gives "full and eloquent expressions to religious sentiments and beliefs. Supporting this view, Dopamu (2004) submits that Yoruba festivals will continue to be celebrated and they will continue to express man's relationship to the supernatural and to their fellow human beings.

References

- Dopamu, P.A. (2004). *Traditional Festivals in Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*. Africa World Press Inc. Trenton, NJ; Asmara, Eritrea.
- Drewal, H.J. and Drewal, M.T. (1980). *Composing Time and Space in Yoruba Art*. Paper presented at the Conference on the Relation between Verbal and Visual Arts in Africa. Pennsylvania
- Durkheim, E. (1915). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. London. (English Translation)
- Fabumi M.A. (1969). *Ife Shrines*. Published by the University of Ife Press, Ile-Ife.
- Fortes, M. (1962). *Marriage In Tribal Societies*. Cambridge: CUPs
- Mbiti, J.S. (1992). *Introduction to African Religions*. 2nd edition (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers)
- Ogunba, O. (1999). *Hegemonic Festivals in Yorubaland*. Published by IFE, Annals of the Institute of Cultural Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
- Personal communication with M.S. Orosanya at Ipetumodu (August 27th 2001).
- Personal Communication with Pa Adedire Joseph at Ipetumodu (17th October, 2000).
- Personal Communication with Pa M.S. Orosanya at Ipetu (7th September 2000).
- Personal communication with Apetu of Ipetumodu at Ipetumodu (17th September, 2000).
- Personal Communication with Bolaji Adefioye at Ilare area of Ile-Ife. (October 18th 2000).
- Personal Communication with Pa Samuel Adedire at Ipetumodu (October 18th 2000)
- Sieber, R. and Walker A. (1988). *African Art in the Circle of Life*. Published by Smithsonian Institution. Washington D.C.

