

EXPLORING THE HISTORICISM AND THEATRICAL AESTHETICS IN ÈYÒ MASQUERADE FESTIVAL

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ABSTRACT

The “AdámùÒrìṣà” festival also known as Èyò masquerade festival, has been acknowledged since time immemorial as a unique religious festival celebrated among the citizens of Lagos State, South-west Nigeria by many scholars, historians and anthropologists. During the festival, the final funeral rites of kings, chiefs and some notable citizens who had made positive contributions to the state were also commemorated. In view of this, this paper adopted historical and descriptive methods through primary and secondary data drawn from interviews with Èyò custodians, library and internet materials to examine the history as well as ritualistic and theatrical constituents of the masquerade performance. It discovered that despite its spiritual and religious significances, its popularity had increased in leaps and bounds over the years in a cosmopolitan setting because of the artistic and aesthetic appeal it has on the ever increasing spectators due to its theatrical attributes. This way, the Èyò masquerade festival has become one of the platforms that showcased the rich cultural heritage of Nigerians in general and Lagos State in particular. The paper concludes that the Èyò masquerade festival is serving very useful religious, cultural, entertainment and economic purposes and should therefore be expanded and promoted to further boost cultural rejuvenation and tourism among others.

Keywords: Historicism, Theatrical, Aesthetics, Èyò, Festival, Masquerade

INTRODUCTION

Festivals are part and parcel of human existence and celebrated for many reasons. This is because over the years they have become indigenous cultural institutions with which a people spontaneously respond to their religious inclinations and belief system within the society as perceived in initiation ceremonies, ancestral worship, coronation and marriage rites, harvest seasons and so on. Interestingly, these communal fraternities are usually achieved by coordinating virtually all the art forms in the society together into a logical whole so as to fulfil the purpose of the festival. As such they are conceived as instruments of socialization, community participation, cultural identity and togetherness. To this end, Festivals in Africa have become cultural platforms entrenched in the cosmology of African worldview and traditional concept of theatre where the experiences of the participants are expressed and shared through the fusion of songs, mime, acrobatics, puppetry, myths, legends, masquerading, rituals, dances, among others, (Ogunba, 1978) in a colourful, splendid, and exhilarating theatrical displays of pageantry.

Unfortunately, the history of most African festivals is shrouded in mystery and obscurity as a result of almost total absence of a written culture in pre-colonial African societies. The Èyò Adámù-òrìṣà play also known as Èyò festival is not an exception. However, without the historical knowledge of a festival, its significance may forever remain elusive (Osanyin, 2004). This is also in tune with Herder’s philosophical submission on the

theory of historicism that all knowledge and cognition are historically conditioned because each historical period and culture contains unique value systems that must be understood in order to make authentic interpretation of the past (New World Encyclopedia, 2018). According to (Sanni, 2012) the highlighted festival has spanned three centuries, traditionally, it is celebrated by Lagos Islanders of Ìsàlẹ̀-Èkó in South-west Nigeria during the final burial rites of kings, chiefs and notable Lagos citizens who had made meaningful contributions to the society. This unique and important religious festival is said to bring departed souls closer to their living relatives in accordance with the Yorùbá belief that masquerades are “citizens of heaven”, (*Ará Ọ̀run*) who are links between the living and the dead. However, it is not an annual event with a specific date. In fact, in contemporary Lagos, the Èyò masquerade festival is performed on important occasions like the Nigerian Independence Day, coronation ceremonies, and burial rites among others. To this end, (Onítìlọ, 2012) articulated that the festival is a ritual-based performance accompanied with dance, drama, music and technical aesthetics such as colourful costumes, properties etc. In view of this observation, this study adopted historical and descriptive methods of research in exploring the history and theatrical aesthetics of Èyò masquerade festival of Lagos, in South west Nigeria and data drawn from interviews with Èyò custodians as well as library and internet sources were employed to foreground the study.

LAGOS AND THE ORIGIN OF ÈYÒ MASQUERADE FESTIVAL

Lagos, traditionally known as Èkó, derived from *Oko*, a Yorùbá word is said to be originally inhabited by an Àwòrì Yorùbá man named Chief Ọlọ́fìn. He settled at Iddo Island with his thirty two children, who later settled in other parts of Lagos such as Ìdúmòtà, Tolo wharf, Ìkòyí, Iru and Ìgàlédúngàrà̀n which remains the official residence of any properly chosen Ọba (King) of Lagos. (Ajetunmobi, 2003). Another account stated that the first settler in Lagos was a hunter from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ named Ọ̀gúnfúnminírè (the god of iron has given me luck) who settled in Isheri and lived to a ripe old age. (Onítìlọ, 2012).

There are several versions of the origin of the Èyò festival. Some versions traced its origin to Ibòfun-Ìjẹ̀bù, others claimed that it is from Benin or Ọyó but it is generally agreed that the Èyò masquerade was brought into Lagos from another part of Yorùbá land. (Ọsanyìn, 1978) adduced that the masquerade play was moved to Lagos Island on the orders of Ọba Ológun Kútéré (1776-1806) and Ọ̀rìṣàOko or *AdámúỌ̀rìṣà* inside his palace in Ìdúnmòjògún also known as Ìta Adó, where it remains till date. The masquerade festival is deeply rooted in Yorùbá traditional religion and was known to have been performed for the first time at Ọ̀kẹ̀lpa, (the cult centre or lodge), Lagos in the 18th century specifically in 1854 in honour of late Ọba Akintóyè and was thereafter adopted as the traditional play of Lagos. (Onítìlọ, 2012).

Essentially, the Èyò masquerade guild admits tall people, hence its description as Agogoro Èyò; the tall Èyò like a spirit being visiting the earth for a purpose. The Èyò speaks in a ventriloquial voice, suggestive of its spirituality. When greeted, it replies thus:

Mo yòfún ẹ, Mo yòfúnra mi, meaning; I rejoice for you and I rejoice with myself. This response shows the masquerade rejoicing with the person greeting it for witnessing the celebration as well as its own joy at taking the hallowed responsibility of cleansing.

(Aderibigbe, 1975) classified Èyò masquerades into two groups, Èyò Ọ̀rìṣà (Èyò deities) and Èyò Iga (Royal Èyò). Èyò Ọ̀rìṣàs consist of five different types in order of prominence as follows:

Adímú àti Ògúnrán (male and female), Èyò Òrìsà Àdímú
Okólábà Èkùn (Alákètè pupa) also Èyò Làbà
Oníkò (Raffia), Èyò Òrìsà Oníkò
Ológèdè (Banana), Èyò Òrìsà Ológèdè
Àgéré (Stilt), èlégba òpópó

The above list shows that there are only five Èyò Òrìsàs (senior dieties) in Èyò masquerade festival. It should be noted that these five Èyò Òrìsàs are the major players in the Èyò masquerade festival because they are superior in hierarchy to the Èyò Iga masquerades (Royal Èyòs), due to some important spiritual and secular roles and functions they perform within the festival while the Èyò Igas who are representatives of the royal lineages are just to complement them by adding colour, glamour and value to the successful realization of the festival. (Ojo, 2017) Further highlighted that one of the criteria that the royal Èyò masquerades must fulfill before participating in the festival include paying enrollment fees to the royal house of the colour of regalia they wear during the festival. The royal Èyòs are sometimes fifty in number or more. They include; Akintóyè, Elétú-Òdibò, Kòsókó, Onilégbalè, Elétú-Ìwásè, Olórogún, Arómirè, Olótò, Ògúnmádé, Olùmègbón, Obaníkòró, Onisemo, Bájùayé, Àsoogbón, Shassi, Súenu, Àjànàkú, Jákándè, Sàbà, Oshòdi, Onisòwò, Mòdilé, Onírù, Òjorá, Onítàná, Elétú-Ìjèbú, Onilégbélé, Èlégùshì, Olùwá, Ètì, Apèná, Àjàún, Táíwò, Sógúnró, to mention a few.

PREPARATION FOR ÈYÒ FESTIVAL

Spiritual Process

In the religious and spiritual process of the festival certain preparations have to be made before indigenous festival begins. Hence, in the spiritual preparatory stage of the festival careful and conscientious consultations are made with elders of *Awé Adímú* council (Èyò supreme council) by the families of the dead Lagos citizens who must have been an initiate of the Èyò cult and known to be a notable or highly respected personality in the Lagos society before their demise on whether or not to perform the Èyò masquerade festival in their honour, when an agreement is reached, the cult members and the family of the deceased will proceed with their arrangement by meeting with the king of Lagos who is the chief host to seek his permission whether to perform the Èyò rite on the deceased. Once the permission is granted, Ifa oracle consultation is made through the *Akínsíkù* of Lagos (the head of all Èyò masquerades) to know the date and the time to fix for the festival as well as the rituals and sacrificial items called *Ìkàró* to be imbued into the requirements of the overall festival for the actualization of a peaceful and successful festival (Quadri & Esegwu, 2013).

From then on, the ritualistic activities of the festival take precedence. As such, series of prodigious rituals and the initiation of new members in to the Èyò cult are done by Adímú council before the start of the festival in secret away from the glare of the public. These rituals are prescribed formal behaviour for the occasion since they are subsumed in the mystical belief and cultural practices of the Èyò cult which honours and emphasises the significance and benefits of Èyò festival for the blessings of the of the indigenes of Lagos. To buttress this point. Chief Kàkàwá Abíódún, the head of Oduba chieftaincy family of Lagos, in an interview with the researchers on April 12, 2019 mentioned that among the prominent rituals done a week before the festival day that announces the beginning of the festival is Òpámbata week spiritual procession. In this arrangement, the staff bearer of each Èyò group

starting with Èyò Adimú to Èyò Agere go about the streets of Lagos from Sunday to Thursday in their heirachical order carrying the Òpá staff (Èyò staff of authority) with them while visiting important personalities and informing them about the coming festival. He also stressed that the construction of *Agódo shrine* with raffia (*Iko*) by Èyò Òkólàbà èkùn around 8pm and 9pm on the eve of the festival and the inspection of the sacred structure first by Èyò Adímú before the other senior masquerades on the same day are equally very significant rites because they provide the right sanctuary for the Èyò òrìsàs spiritual activities. According to him, the Èyò Oníkò symbolic purification ritual between midnight and dawn inside the *Agódo*, *Ojúyèwá*, *Onímòlé*, *Ojúólókun* streets is also sacred because the circuitous dance with his raffia skirt called *Gbale* symbolizes broom that sweeps away the filth and ills of the society and prepare the ground for a successful outing. He further states that Èyò Òlógèdè propitious ritual at the dawn of the same day bestow peace, harmony and prosperity on the indigenes of Lagos. He clarifies that Èyò Adimú's visit to *Ìmòkun* (a sacred room where the archetypal corpse representing the deceased being honoured is lying in state) around 2am on the eve of the festival to commemorate with the families of the deceased and performed a rite of passage ritual for the purgation of his soul is also very sacrosant in rules of engagements of the festival. And that the dismantling of the *Agódo shrine* by Èyò Adimú in the evening of the festival day equally connotes the end of the festival. Also, for spiritual santity all members of the public who are the spectators are expected to remove their caps, shoes, glasses, umbrellas, head ties and so on. There should also be no riding of bicycle or motorcycle, no plaiting of suku hair styles by women and no smoking of any kind during the festival. (Awofeso, 2017).

Socialization Process

Besides, the religious and spiritual preparation of the festival, the socialization and entertainment aspects of the festival are also given priority attention in advance in order to educate and entertain the spectators and also encourage community interaction and cultural identity. In this way, (Awofeso, 2017) explains that Lagos indigenes, textile sellers, food vendors, hoteliers, fashion designers, craft-men and tourists also plan their economic and social strategies ahead of the festival in order to reap the benefits of their participation. The week before the Èyò festival grand finale, individuals and families from various compounds on Lagos Island are caught up with the preparation excitement. Through this approach, various participating Èyò groups engage the services of professional craft men from the community to make or remodel their costume designs amplified in masque dramaturge that reflect their ancestral lineage to the audience in an aesthetically pleasing manner so as to entertain them and communicate the rich indigenous culture of Lagos to them. Apart from that, important musical ensemble such as drums, gong, and theme songs of the festival are harnessed and rehearsed to synchronise their rhythm to ensure an hitch free musical experience. Beyond that, essential hand properties such as Òpámbàtà are also created, bought or revamped out of the existing stock in preparation for the grand occasion.

FUNCTIONS OF ÈYÒ ÒRÌSÀ

As stated earlier, the Èyò Òrìsà masquerades perform different spiritual and secular functions within the festival with regard to their hierarchical position and the responsibilities attached to them. To this end, the leader of the pack is Adímú Òrìsà; the traditional supreme head and,

the strongest and most revered of all the Èyò deities due to the enormous powers they possess as second to the gods as reflected in their praise panegyric and the significant functions they perform within the festival. (Aromashodu, 2017). In (Oladipupo, 2012) opinion, these set of masquerades are traditionally the pacesetters that herald the commencement of Èyò festival.

Apart from the above function, Èyò Adimú òrìṣà also give instruction to other Èyò groups on the organizational structure of the festival and at the same time lead the festival spiritual procession called Òpá, a week before the festival in order of precedence and on the day of the festival from the Agódo to Táfáwá Báléwà Square, where the grand finale of the festival usually takes place. Symbolically, the aforementioned processional arrangement is sacrosanct to the Èyò cult, (Kàkàwá, 2019) in the same interview asserted that, it is a taboo for any other Èyò masquerade to start the procession rite of Òpámbàtà week without Èyò Adímú masquerades playing the lead role. Apart from that, it is equally customary for the king of Lagos to work harmoniously with the Awé Adímú council (the Supreme head of Èyò masquerade cult from the lineage of Èyò Adímú) before granting the participation right of royal Èyò masquerade to any royal lineage or prominent persons he deems fit for the position because Awé Adímú cult is the custodian of Ìkàró Òpá Èyò (the sacred Èyò staff of authority). Beyond that role, Èyò Adimú also observes a special rite of passage which involves the carrying of appeasement sacrifice on behalf of the departed souls in atonement of their transgressions while on earth to their ancestral spirits on the eve of the Adimú Òrìṣà play day, since it is the belief that life does not end in the physical world but continues in the metaphysical after death in order to give form and meaning to human events.

Next in the roll of Èyò Òrìṣàs is Alákètè Pupa also known as Okólàbà Èkùn who can be likened to the Police or the Security officer of the of Èyò masquerade cult. (Aromashodu, 2019) expatiates that they are the second in command to Èyò Adámú Òrìṣà in Èyò hierarchical order, and take orders directly from Adámú Òrìṣà to coordinate, monitor, and checkmate the activities of other Èyò groups. By this, they are programmed within the festival to maintain law and order and enforce maximum commitment and discipline among all Èyò groups for a successful Èyò outing. Moreso, they are also incharge of the construction of Agódo; a sacred spiritual enclave usually aesthetically designed with raffia on the eve of Adámú Òrìṣà play to accommodate paraphernalia of the Èyò Òrìṣàs such as drums and also as a platform for their sacred dance performance, in order to ensure their successful outing, while Èyò Adímú are designated to dismantle the Agódo in the evening of festival to mark the end of the festival as earlier mentioned.

Èyò Oníkò is another principal masquerade who performs the traditional symbolic cleansing rituals in the festival between the midnight and dawn of the grand finale day at about 1a.m in order to purify the land of evil spirits of the past year and prepare the community spiritually for the new- year which usually starts at the dawn of Adámú Òrìṣà performance day. Importantly, this articulated rite is always followed immediately by the spiritual fortification rituals of Èyò Ológèdè at the dawn of the same day in order to entrench and consolidate the cleansing propitiation made earlier by Èyò Oníkò so as to ensure that peace, tranquillity, security, safety, and progress are ascertained before, during, and after the festival by Lagosians, their well-wishers, and the Nigerian society at large (Aromashodu, 2019).

Although at this juncture, it is worthy of attention to indicate that, no special spiritual obligation is associated with the role of Èyò Àgéré who is the last on the ladder of Èyò Òrìṣà hierarchy owing to the fact their roles are largely predicated on socialization and entertainment agenda unlike other Èyò Òrìṣàs who perform other significant spiritual

obligations within the festival aside their socialization attributes. Thus, beyond the general resplendent outlook of all Èyò Òrìsàs on Adámú Òrìsà play day, the highlighted Èyò Àgéré secular and entertainment functions are more pronounced in the artistic cum aesthetic appeal of their flamboyant costumes and their spectacular stilted walking sticks dance movements which is different from others because they always give entertainment of highest level to the spectators and onlookers (Agbabiaka, 2016).

THEATRICAL AESTHETICS IN ÈYÒ FESTIVAL PERFORMANCE

The Èyò masquerade festival is rooted in some theatrical aesthetics that add value, meaning and colour to the overall success of the festival. These theatrical aesthetics are seen in the artistic and technical components of theatre imbued into the performance to enhance audience perception and understanding of the festival. They involve everything the performers need to attain the artistic standard deemed proper before the performance starts to what they need to support the required amount of spectacle during performance. Pertinent among them is costume, properties, songs, instrumentation, dances, stage, among others. In this paper these theatrical aesthetics will be discussed in the following order:

Costume

The Èyò masquerades are the major performers in Adámú Òrìsà play. To this extent, they are characterized by colourful and attractive costumes worn by all the categories of Èyò masquerades mentioned earlier, in order to successfully portray their characterization to the audience. In view of this, most of their costumes follow a uniform design, although they have other distinguishing icons that separate them as perceived in colour, style and texture of their costumes. According to (Aderibigbe, 1975), their regalias' colour and style symbolize the purity associated with the sanctity of the illustrious son or daughter that recently passed away. (Onítìlò, 2010) informed that the costume or regalia of Èyò are divided into five categories which include: Agbádá (white gown), the main outfit of the Èyò masquerade. It is a flowing white gown that covers the masquerade from his head to his feet including the hand so that any part of his body wouldn't be revealed. It is the flowing gown that is used to sweep evil out of Lagos and purify the land. Àrópalè: (long white- wrapper), is the long white wrapper tied around the waist of the Èyòs down to their feet to cover their body frame. The Èlèyà funfun also known as the Ìbòjú is also an important part of the masquerade's costume. It is a unique face veil with sight lines that covers the faces of the masquerades to conceal the identity of the masquerades during their parades in the festival, in line with the belief that they are ancestral spirits.

Àkètè or Aga (hat) is another significant accessory of the Èyò masquerade costumes that add beauty, value and meaning to the totality of their regalia. It is a costume insignia with varied distinctive qualities tied to the tradition of the festival as reflected in the design and colour of the àkètè worn by the Èyò groups. For instance, a black and white akete is used to represent Adímú Òrìsà; the highest ranking Èyò, while the red akete with white ribbons typifies Èyò Alákètè Pupa. At the same time, Èyò Oníkò is known for yellow hat with black ribbons; and the Èyò Qlógèdè is synonymous with green hat with yellow ribbons. Similarly, the Agéré is usually identified with purple hat with purple ribbons. However, it is worthy of note that, apart from the similarity in hat, the costume of Àgéré is usually different from other Èyò Orisas due to its spectacular appearance. This is because Èyò Agere's costume is

normally found in a multi-coloured Ankara gown with long raffia skirt and stilted wooden legs, unlike the white flowing gowns and wrappers of others.

Figure 1: Èyò Adímú



Source: Silvia Dona

Figure 2: Èyò Òkólàbà Èkùn



Source: Silvia Dona

Figure 3: Èyò Qlógèdè



Source: Silvia Dona

Figure 4: Èyò Oníkò



Source: Silvia Dona

Figure 5: Èyò Àgéré

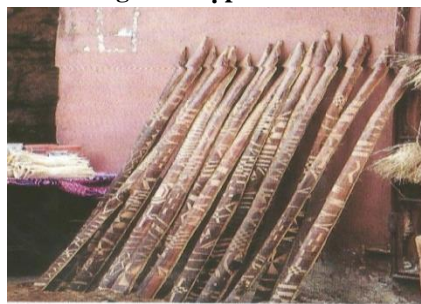


Source: Silvia Dona

Property

Property known as Òpámbàtà, is an important aspect of Èyò masquerade festival that portrays the uniqueness and beauty of the Adamú Òrìṣà play in a scintillating and captivating manner to the audience. The beautiful linear design motifs on the woollen stick called Opambata made from palm tree, beautifies the masquerade costumes and transmit an aesthetic and artistic appeal to the teaming audience at the occasion. Apart from that, Chief Tajudeen Onigemo, the Alagbeji of Lagos and custodian of Èyò Oníkò in an interview in 2003 averred that this staff also serves as a symbol of authority that distinguishes the Èyò groups from one another. It is equally the transmitter of divine sanction because the linear design motifs on them denote the dictions, norms and ideals of the Adímú Òrìṣà play. It is also engaged as the object of prayer and blessings by the Èyòs (Òsanyìn, 2010). The Òpámbàtà wears the material and colour of its deity which denotes the identity of the deity. It is equally used to touch other Òpámbàtà when exchanging pleasantries among the Èyòs, except when they are used to correct other offenders of Èyò norms and traditions.

Figure 6: Ọpámbàtà



Source: Silvia Dona

Songs and Music

Songs and music are equally vital aesthetic components of Èyò masquerade festival. This stretches from the instrumentation to the actual singing and chanting of the songs. Chants and panegyrics embedded in the festival are used to enliven the emotion, sensibility and delight of the audience. This is because, the use of music aid the mood of the festival and also add glamour, dexterity and meaning to the overall aesthetics of Èyò performance. This is amplified in the musical instruments of Idiophone and membraphone family which comprise of Agogo (gong), Dùndún (talking drum) and Gbèdu, Àrìjò and Koranga (seated royal drums) played on the day of the festival as early as 5a.m till evening to awaken and ginger the masquerades consciousness to reality of the day. According to (Fernandez 2013:75), “lyricism, hypnotism, harmony, emotiveness, temporal dynamics, volume dynamics, resonance” and so on are the musical taxonomies employed by Èyò masquerades in their musical composition, renditions and performances, in order to realize the essence of the festival. Example can be seen in the following popular Èyò masquerade song:

Table 1: Èyò Masquerade Song and Translation

Yorùbá Song	Translation
Èyò o, aye’le Èyò (twice)	O Èyò, o Èyò
Èyò baba tàwatín fi gòdùseré (twice)	Our father’s Èyò who is clad in gold
Àwaònísan’ woonibodèódilé	Never should inhabitants be treated like strangers
Call: Kíl’èdúngbé	What was that stolen by the twins
Response: Owóowól’èdúngbé	It was money, money it was
Call: Kíló fi se	What was done with it
Response: Owóowól’èdúngbé	To acquire some clothing
Call: Aṣókí n yen wà	For what purpose
Response: Èyè, èyèd̀ỳinbó	The whitemen’s pleasure
Call: Èdúnjalè (twice)	Indeed the twins have committed an act of theft
Response: Èdúnjalèd̀f̀oruló	And eloped over the night
Call: Eehehalóba (twice)	Oh hail the king
Response: eehehalóba (twice)	Oh hail the king
Call: Ọlóba ñjò aya rẹ̀ ñwòran Àrìjòsebíọba	The king dances while the queen observes
Response: eehehalóba (2ce)	Oh hail the king

Dance

Dance is another significant element of the theatre that is common to Èyò masquerade festival. In fact, the application of dance in the festival does not only give aesthetic and

artistic value of the festival to the participants and onlookers, but also entrenched its motive and significance. The dance typologies in Èyò festival vary from energetic dance to slow and graceful dance movements which (Dosumu, 2006) classified into suspended quality, mid-level movement and downward movements. In her view, the suspended quality dance movements of the Èyò are usually perceived in the hopping and jumping movements of the Èyò, while their mid-level dance movements exhibits the flow of diminutive energy and high level of majestic movements that show the grace and elegance of the dance. On the other hand, the downward dance movement of the masquerades is usually done in squatting position when they descend from upright position rhythmically to squatting position before genuflecting on one leg while striking the Òpámbatà on the floor in a backward and forward movements and reciting the Èyò panegyrics. These highlighted dance typologies captured the acrobatic displays and synchronized processional movements that makes dance a cogent elixir which stimulates audience attention and entrench their interest and participaion in the Èyò masquerade festival performance.

Stage

Simply put, the stage is perceived in the theatrical parlance as a space earmarked for actors performance. To this end. It characterizes the acting space and make strong interpretational statement about actors roles to the audience through creating the right environment and mood for the actors to effectively interpret and succesfully communicate their messagess to their spectators. In view of this analogy, the performance space for the actualization of Èyò masquerade festival can be categorized as sacred and secular.

The sacred stage is what (Onigemo, 2003) refers to as the performance space used for the religious and ritualistic aspects of the festival. This can be visualised in the streets of lagos like Ènúowá, Ìgàidúgànràn, Ìdúmòtà and others used for the Òpámbatà week procession by the Èyò Orisas. Another typical example is the Agódo: a sacred spiritual enclave towering up to 18:22:30 feet tall (Awofeso, 2017) usually aesthetically designed with raffia where the Èyò Òrìsàs exclusively do their spiritual dance on the eve of the grand finale under heavy drumming from their drummers. On the other hand, the secular stage is usually open to all and sundry. It is an arena that accommodates large population of people because of its massive staging area. Before now, the Èyò festival grand finale used to be at Idumota in Lagos Island, but in 2009, Rájí Fasola the then Governor of Lagos state changed the venue to Táfáwà Báléwà Square to accommodate more spectators.

Customarily, on the day of the festival which is usually on a Saturday as early as 5am, all the masquerades costumed in their full regalia proceed from the Agódo at Ènúowá street to the king's palace at Ìgàidúgànràn to pay homage to him before moving in a procession according to their hierarchy across the streets of Lagos Island to Tafawa Balewa Square where their secular performances take place. The square is usually colorfully decorated making the environment very beautiful and conducive for the performance. Aside that, the arena is always filled to capacity with excited spectators, because the spacious staging area provides multiple opportunities for movement composition, floor patterns, character interaction and stage business that enhanced the pantomimic dramatization and dances of the masquerades thereby creating maximum entertainment in the festival that the audience cannot forget in a hurry, leaving amemorable impression in their minds of how history, culture and the arts intermingled to ensure communal unity, cultural renaissance and sustainance.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing historical and theatrical exploration of the celebration of Èyò festival in Lagos South west Nigeria, the study revealed that it is an ancient Yorùbá festival rooted in African traditional religion brought into Lagos from other parts of Yoruba land. In spite of the festival's religious undertone however, Èyò festival has become a viable platform for the representation and projection of the deep cultural history and tradition of Lagos Island people to the world. This is replete in the various spiritual and secular roles that Èyò masquerades perform before, during and after the festival, Some of them range from serving as the link between the living and the dead, to facilitating the spiritual purification of Lagos from evil spirits in order to usher in peace, security and progress to Lagos state and Nigerian nation at large, and at the same time, provide entertainment of highest level to participants and the audience. To this extent, many Lagosians and visitors troupe out to watch and enjoy the cultural displays of their theatrical performances which showcase very rich and proud statements of colour, flamboyance and elegance of Lagos culture through the aesthetics in their costumes, music, dance, and staging structure amongst others. The study concludes that apart from promoting the Nigerian and African cultural identity and religion, Èyò festival also fosters unity and promotes entertainment and economic development among the people. It is hoped that the festival will grow to be a viable source of revenue through the expansion of tourism.

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