

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MYTH, RITUAL AND POLITICS IN OLOJO
FESTIVAL IN ILE-IFE UNDER OBA ADESOJI ADEREMI AND OBA
OKUNADE SIJUWADE**

BY

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SIJUWADE

YEAR: 2015

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(M.A.) in Religious Studies under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to His Imperial Majesty Oba Ooni Okunade Sijuwade Olubuse II, and all Ife indigenes at home and in the Diaspora.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	i
Authorisation	ii
Certification	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Table of Contents	vii
List of Plates	ix
Abstract	x

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1	Background to the Study	1
1.2	Statement of Research Problem	2
1.3	Objectives of the Study	3
1.4	Scope of the Study	3
1.5	Justification of the Study	4
1.6	Significance of the Study	4
1.7	Research Methodology	5



CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Introduction	6
2.2	Kingship Institution in Yorubaland	7
2.3	Religious Traditions in Yorubaland	9
2.3.1	Yoruba Indigenous Religion	9
2.3.2	Islam	11
2.3.3	Christianity	12
2.4	Festivals and Celebrations in Yoruba Community	14
2.5	Kingship and Traditional Institution in Ile-Ife	17
2.6	Religious Life in Ile-Ife	18
2.6.1	Indigenous Traditions and Festivals	19
2.6.2	Christianity	21
2.6.3	Islam	24

CHAPTER THREE: OLOJO MYTH AND RITUAL ACTIVITIES

3.1	Introduction	27
3.2	Myths of Olojo	27
3.3	Olojo Festival in Space and Time	28
3.4	Olojo Ritual Performances	29
3.4.1	Ritual Specialists	31
3.4.2	Ritual Symbols and Elements	31
3.4.3	Ritual Process	32
3.4.4	Songs of Olojo Festival	45

CHAPTER FOUR: OLOJO FESTIVAL CELEBRATIONS UNDER OBA ADESOJI

ADEREMI AND OBA OKUNADE SIJUWADE OLUBUSE II

4.1	Introduction	48
4.2	A Short History of Adesoji Aderemi	48
4.3	Aderemi's Influences on Olojo Festival	51
4.4	Olojo, Aderemi and the Ife People	55
4.5	A Short History of Okunade Sijuwade Olubuse II	56
4.6	Sijuwade's Influences on Olojo Festival	59
4.7	Olojo, Sijuwade and the Ife People	62

CHAPTER FIVE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF OLOJO FESTIVAL UNDER

TWO REGIMES

5.1	Introduction	65
5.2	Ritual Space	65
5.3	Ritual Time	66
5.4	Ritual Specialists	67
5.5	Ideology of Kingship	68
5.6	Politics of Power	70
5.7	Economy of Olojo Festival	73
5.8	Olojo in the International and Global Age	74

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

6.1	Summary	76
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6.2	Conclusion	76
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	79
	Appendix	87

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LIST OF PLATES

Plate: 3.1: Picture showing women from various Ogun devotees' families sweeping	30
Plate:3.2: Picture showing entrance of Ogun main shrine at Enúwá Square	32
Plate:3.3: Picture showing the dog tied for Olojo sacrifice.	33
Plate 3.4: Picture showing the immolated dog hung to the tree	34
Plate 3.5: Picture showing ritual dog tied on Ògún shrine <i>Ògún ìta.</i> (Ogun exterior)	35
Plate 3.6: Picture showing the offering of snail slime (<i>èrò</i>)	36
Plate 3.7: Picture showing the <i>ẹ̀lẹ̀sìnjé</i> (medicine men) in Olojo festival	37
Plate 3.8: Picture showing the Lókolóko (palace guards)	38
Plate 3.9: Lókolóko carrying sacrifice to Òkè-Mògún shrine	39
Plate 3.10: Picture of the Member of National Hunters Association	40
Plate 3.11: The Banner of National Hunters Association during Olojo festival	40
Plate 3.12 : Picture of Ooni Sijuwade in Arè crown to Òkè-Mògún	41
Plate 3.13: Picture showing <i>Omidàn</i> with pigeon, awaiting Ooni in Arè crown	42
Plate 3.14: Picture showing <i>Ajé</i> shrine at <i>Ojà Ifè</i>	44
Plate 4.1: Picture showing ritual process during Edi festival	62
Plate 4.2: Picture showing the Banner of Hon. Olaiya Chairman Ife Central L.G.A	63

Plate 4.3: Picture showing the Banner of Omisore Youth Support Forum (OYSF)

64

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ABSTRACT

The study identified and discussed the mythic narratives and ritual performances in Olojo festival in Ile-Ife. It compared the performance of the festival during the reigns of Oba Adesoji Aderemi (1930-1980) and Oba Okunade Sijuwade Olubuse, (1981 till date). It investigated and assessed the implications of local, national and international politics on kingship institution of Ile-Ife. This was with a view to comparing the similarities and differences in the ritual performance of Olojo festival under the two selected Oba.

The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source comprised participant-observation, structured interviews, archival materials, festival magazines and brochures as well as documentaries. The participant-observation was done during Olojo festival. In-depth interviews were conducted with five ritual priests who were connected with the performance of Olojo festival, five traditional chiefs, and 20 randomly selected participants of Olojo festival. The secondary source included books, journal articles and the Internet. The data collected were analysed and interpreted using a combination of historical, phenomenological and comparative approaches.

The results showed that mythic narratives in Olojo festival in Ile-Ife remained intact without any changes but several changes had happened to the ritual performances during Oba Adesoji Aderemi and Oba Okunade Sijuwade Olubuse II. The study revealed that there were changes included changes in the ritual time, ritual space, ritual specialists and ritual actions. It found out that the factors for these changes involved contestation between Christian and Muslim traditions, as a result of politics, economy, and ritual modernisation. It also revealed that the

involvement of the Ooni in the local, nation and international politics had given space for questioning the religious authority of the traditional kingship institution.

The study concluded that the era of Aderemi witnessed the beginning of changes in the Olojo festival; nonetheless, he remained answerable to his royal rites not allowing the Western culture to override his traditional kingship duty. But the era of Oba Olubuse II represented the global age and using his Western exposure he made the festival a national and international festival. What is clear is that traditional kingship institution has played important role in the continuity and change, survival and decline of Olojo festival in Ile-Ife.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.8 Background to the Study

Various Yorùbá towns host celebrations to offer sacrifices to the deities believed to have powers over natural phenomena including daylight, war, thunder and harvest. The Yorùbá believe in the existence and relevance of deities, which they worship for their intermediary roles. The Yorùbá people have numerous festivals, with different religious affiliations and myths of origin. Festivals have cultural significance that marks some unique turning point in the history of different the societies. Festivals of the deities are celebrated as the re-enactment of time and purpose of the deities and as the bridge between the society and the spiritual world. Festivals serve as a connecting point and the establishment of relationship among the Yorùbá. Simply, it assists in fostering unity in the community.

Special days are set aside by the community to remind the people of the existence of the sacred figures, examine their backgrounds, the people's traditions and beliefs, and call attention to the importance of the rites in establishing public order. Awolalu and Dopamu opined that:

Most festivals are associated with specific divinities, spirits or ancestors and they are therefore religious in outlook. Among the Yorùbá, for example, each divinity has an annual festival associated with him or her and this is called "Odún" (festival). "Odún" also means year, and when

used in relation to festivals it means “annual festival”. This means that major festivals among the Yorùbá come up once every year.¹

Festivals that are celebrated in Ilé-Ifè, a town described by J. K. *Olupona* as the city of 201 gods,² include *Edi* festival, *Qbàtálá* festival, *Qbameri* festival, *Qsàrà* festival, *Qrànmìyàn* festival, and *Qlọjọ*. *Qlọjọ* festival is the most prominent of all the festivals. It demands the participation of a reigning king, the major chiefs in the town and the “*Ìsòrò*” (priests of deities in Ilé-Ifè).

The interest in this study begins with the absence of the *Qoni* in leading the procession to *Òkè-Mògún* the principal and main shrine during the *Qlọjọ* festival from 2009-2013 as one of his spiritual duties. The royal walk involves the *Qoni* of Ifè who leads procession to *Òkè-Mògún* shrine with *Arè* crown and offers prayer on behalf of the people to the deity. Yet, in the absence of the king, doing the most important sacred duty *Qlọjọ* festival continues to create a good relationship among the people. Indeed, it re-enacts the mutuality of the people with the past hero “*Ògún*”, the pathfinder of the society.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

Existing studies on *Qlọjọ* festival focused mainly on the social significance of the festival among the people of Ilé-Ifè community.³ *Olupona* studied *Qlọjọ* festival as a religious

¹ J. O. Awolalu and P. A. Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: Macmillan, 2005) p. 153.

² J. K. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods: Ilé-Ifè in Time, Space and Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 111-223.

³ Ibid.

phenomenon within the social order where it exists.⁴ As a social phenomenon, *Qlojor* festival is the principal or arch sacred rite of unity among the people of Ilé-Ifè. It serves as the converging junction of all the major deities in Ilé-Ifè. *Olajide* studied *Qlojor* festival as a way by which the Ifè “spirit” is renewed and as a symbol of the continuity in the pattern of interaction between the sacred and profane worlds. The studies so far on *Qlojor* festival have neglected some changes in the ritual performance of *Qlojor*, which took place under the regimes of *Oba Adèrèmi* (1930-1980) and *Oba Sijúwadé* (1981-2013). Much of these changes reflect on the pattern of administration of kingship institution in this community under the two selected regimes. In trying to understand the factor necessitating the changes, we seek insight into the dynamics of myths, rituals and politics in the *Qlojor* festival at Ilé-Ifè. This study therefore filled the lacuna created by time and cultural changes.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were three fold. First, the study is to identify and discuss the mythic narratives and ritual performances in *Qlojor* festival in Ilé-Ifè. Second, the study is to compare two modern Oba the performances of the festivals during the regimes of *Oba Adèsojí Adèrèmi* (1930-1980) and *Oba Okùnadé Sijúwadé Olúbùse*, (1981-2013). It is to identify factors that were responsible for the differences and similarities in the celebration of the *Qlojor* festival under the two regimes.

Third, it investigates and assesses the implications of local, national and international politics on Traditional Institution of Ilé-Ifè.

1.4 Scope of the Study

⁴Ibid.

This study focused on Ilé-Ifè, the Yorùbá holy city, also known in their culture as the home of divinity, spirits and the gateway to heaven. The study addressed the dynamics of change in the celebration of *Ọlọjọ* festival, focusing on the ritual space and time under the two epochs: 1930-1980 (50 years) and 1980-2013 (33 years). These two periods revolved around *Oba Adèrèmi Adèsojí* and *Oba Sijúwadé Okúnadé Olúbùsè II* respectively. The two periods focused on the changes in the celebration of *Ọlọjọ* festival.

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