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Eradication of Oloku Cultural Festival of Okuku, Osun State of Nigeria: A Field Investigating into the Circumstances

By Bayo Okunlola

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The impact is felt mostly in the once cherished cultural festivals of which Oloku festival of Okuku, Osun State of Nigeria is inclusive.

Relying on the eye-witness account of Ulli Beier of 1956 and other available literatures on the festival, this researcher was at Okuku in 1992 to capture the event for his Master's Degree Dissertation in the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, but unfortunately, the festival was abrogated two years after. Therefore, this field investigation intends to find out the circumstances or factors surrounding this act.

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ERADICATIONOFOLOKUCULTURALFESTIVALOFOKUKUOSUNSTATEOFNIGERIAAFIELDINVESTIGATINGINTOTHECIRCUMSTANCES

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Fortunately, the then oba who led the rituals then is still alive to give reasons for the action which solely revolves around his new religious faith as well as other factors.

Thereafter, an extension of investigation was made to three other neighbouring communities (Inisa, Iragbiji and Osogbo) where the festivals are still surviving despite some challenges.

The king and cultural custodians were interviewed in all these communities.

Conclusively, valuable suggestions are thereafter offered to protect Yoruba cultural life from the impending extinction.

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I. Introduction

Cultural festivals are celebrated at different times in Africa for various purposes. It attracts people within and outside the community. It is a form of rejuvenation where both visual arts and performing arts come to play during the festivals. Price (1975) described how carved figures are carried swinging and swinging in cultural festival procession and wooden masks came alive in the dance, the mask move as the dance moves to the music of instruments and singers. Cultural festivals are celebrated to appease the deities of the land for the well-being of individuals and the community at large, while some are to mark occasions such as marriage, child naming, chieftaincy, some cultural festivals are tied to season such as new yam festival in the Eastern part of Nigeria and fishing festival in the Northern part of Nigeria. Cultural festivals preserve and promote cultural heritage and provide entertainment. Not these alone, it also serves as inspiration for younger generation who would inherit and also transmit to their children. Most of the cultural festivals in Yorubal and are mostly of ancestral worship tied to different heros of each community, example of such are Lisabi being worshipped at Olumo rock, Ajagunla of Ila Orangun, Moremi of Ile-ife, Osun Osogbo in honour of Olutimehin the founder, to mention but few.

Some festivals are universal in Yorubal and because they are carried out in almost all Yoruba city states. Among these are Sango festival, Egungun festival and Oro festival.

Okuku, the headquarters of Odootin local government of Osun state Nigeria was famous for the annual celebration of Olooku cultural festivals in the mid-sixties. The celebration reached its peak during the reign of Oba Oyinlola the predecessor of the current king, Oba Oyebode Oluronke. (plate1) This researcher was at okuku in 1992 to report the festival during his post graduate programme at the Institute of African studies university of Ibadan and captured the whole essence relying on the works of that German linguist and researcher to Yoruba cultural festivals, Ulli Beier. Unfortunately, the festival was abolished two years after.

II. Significance of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the various circumstances surrounding the abolishment of Olooku festival and from the findings; suggestions would be generated to protect this valuable aspect of Yoruba culture from impending extinction as there are similar reports in other Yoruba major cities As important as cultural festival is, its gradual extinction has called little or no attention if cultural scholars. This is evident in the fewness of works on cultural issues or perhaps, the cultural festivals in Yorubal and.

Long before now, Price (1975) has lamented "that today in the country of West Africa many old customs and beliefs have died away." Oyelola (2001) however noted that Nigeria was one of the countries with great cultural awareness as stimulated by the hosting of Festac 77, the second Africa festival of arts and culture which brought together Africans and people of African descends from all over the world.

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The earliest known indigenous scholarly works on Yoruba nation was that of Johnson (1921). His focus was however on inter-tribal wars and kingship, devoid of culture or cultural festivals.

Majority of foreign researchers also eluded cultural festival in their works. For example Mellor (1938) wrote on just an aspect of culture on the beaded crown of Remo community in the present Ogun State, Farris (1971) also followed the suit in his Black gods and kings.

Throwel (1960) in her own case was greatly influenced by her specialization as a designer. The symbolic meaning of the iconographic motifs in African designs on beaded crown was the central message of her study without reference to its involvements in cultural festivals.

Ibadan recent Yoruba scholarly works of Oba Akinyele (2015), Oba Ogundipe (1986) and Oyebiyi (2016) who are indigenes and past rulers of Ibadan failed to discuss the popular Oke Ibadan cultural festivals, Succession, Coronation and Rulership in Ibadan were the central focus of their works.

Same with Sotunde (2012) an Egba man who could not reflect the acclaimed Olumo cultural festivals in Egbaland.

Adelakun (2002) wrote on cultural festivals in general, he did not focus on those peculiar to a particular community but the festivals like Sango, Ogun and Egungun were briefly discussed without noting the contemporary situation.

However Ulli Beier (Plate2) in his eye witness account of the Olooku festival in Nigeria Magazine (1956) gave the essence and details of Olooku festival but unfortunately before leaving the shores of Nigeria and his subsequent death on 3rd of April 2011, Olooku has been abrogated without his research on the circumstances surrounding the saga.

Therefore this study becomes imperative as the findings and suggestions would go a long way in the survival of yet-to-die cultural festivals in yorubaland. Aside from extending the frontier of knowledge on culture in general and cultural festivals in particular, the findings could be a great assistance to policy makers on culture and indicator for future researchers on cultural festivals and other related concepts.

III. Scope of the Study

Four neighboring community were visited, they are Okuku, Inisa, Iragbiji, and Osogbo, all in Osun central senatorial district. Though the focus was on Okuku where Olooku festival is celebrated and later abolished, the three other neighboring communities, Inisa, Iragbiji and Osogbo were also visited to know how they are able to retain their cultural festivals. Community leaders like the Oba's and the custodians of culture were also interviewed

The Olooku Festival: An Eye-Witness Account

Below is the eye-witness account of this researcher in 1992 relying as the account of Ulli Beier of 1956. Like other community festivals Yoruba towns, the festival is carried out once in a year According to Baba Aganju 69, Olooku was an usurper of the kingship of Okuku. He became the ruler of the community after the fall of Kookin, the early settlement of the present site of Okuku.

Oral tradition has it that Olooku crept into the town one day when Olokuku the ruler of the town was not around, where he came from was not known but made a bargain with with the priest that he would make him his second in rank if he could support him to usurp the thrown from the ruler.

On the return of Olokuku, he was engaged in an open physical combat where he was defeated and forced to leave the town for the forest. He was forbidden to enter the town and to make evil against the town, with rituals to curb his powers

But the Aworo of Okuku (plate3) did not see Olooku, his historical mentor as an usurper but a deity who has been helping the community to conquer war after his defeat. According to him, his ancestral mentor did not even die like other Yoruba deities but he entered ground in the forest at the site where he is worshipped yearly.

Aworo and his followers regard Olooku basically as an ancestral deity while Olokuku and the rest of the town regard him as usurper. The festival in honour of him is celebrated for seven days.

The significance of the festival seems to be four-folds; to celebrate new yam, to worship the mysterious deity, to celebrate the confrontation and to worship beaded crowns.

The programmes of events are as follows:

Day I -Aworos challenge for a duel with Olokuku

Day 2 - A mock wrestling between Olokuku and Aworo at the market place

Day 3 - Aworo's sacrifice to Olooku

Day 4 - Olokuku's sacrifice to Olooku

Day 5 - Display of crown at the palace and the procession of beaded crowns

to the Olokuku's mother's abode

Day 6 - Iyalode (woman chief) leads women to the groove to worship Olooku

Day 7 - The final day when the Oba sacrifices to the crowns in his palace.

During the ritual,Olokuku talked to his predecessors at the tombs located around the palace where they sacrifice snails, pigeons, chameleon and two goats. (Plate4) This is accompanied by prayers and praise songs which brings the celebration to an end.

The above programme is believed to have positive impact on the society but its unfortunate that the

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festival is no more alive despite the positive inputs to the community.

a) The Demise of Olooku Festivals

In my recent interview with the current Oba who was the same person that played major role in 1992, Oba Oyeronke stated about four reasons that led to the abolishment, these are;

- Problem of Succession
- Religion factor
- Land dispute on Olooku shrine and
- Thunder storm on Olooku tree

b) Succession Problem

According to him, the first problem started in 1995 after the demise of Aworo Onifa. None of the children was ready to take over as tradition required. Their religion faith (both Islam and Christianity) was used as an excuse. This problem of replacement kicked off the gradual abolition. This was followed by the death Eesorum whom all the children have converted to Islam even during his life time and therefore refused to take over after his death.

Another stalwart in Olooku festival is the Araba Awo also died the following year without any replacement.It was this same year that he also became a born again Christian a new faith that forbids sacrifices. Stretching further, the Oba also gave two other important factors on the issue. He said the Olooku tree in Olooku forest was struck by thunder and burnt down few years after and that the Olooku groove became controversial as there are two families claiming the ownership of the land which eventually resulted into legal matter. With all these factors, Olooku festivals of okuku was laid to rest.

c) Survival of the Festival At Inisa, Iragbiji And Osogbo

Rebirth of Otin festival of Inisa was not an easy task after some years of the abolition. Oba Joseph Oladunjoye Fasikun (plate5) the present Olunisa ascended the throne of his fore-fathers in 1978 and celebrated Otin festival just for two years (1978/1979) before he abolished it owing to his Christian religion beliefs. Though, from Ifa traditional religions background, his new Christian faith does not support the continuity of Otin festivals and as such decided to abstain. He suppose to perform the role of touching the votary maid three times and say 'Igbaalo, Igba abo layo. (Calabash will go well and come back well). But since he has a role to play in the festival, the worshippers had no option than to discontinue.

Years after, there was this young man named Okikiola Lawal (plate6) from Okunoye Royal family who felt there is the need for the continuity of the festival especially when he read in the media that Otin belongs to Ikirun. According to him, he was been fascinated with the celebration since his childhood days, stretches its values to individual and the Inisa community at large, he said as a prince, his royal blood pressed him to meet with the Olunisa, Oba Fasikun in 2012 to dialogue on the need for the revival of the festival.

After much persuasion, Oba permitted him to go ahead on the annual celebration and also allowed him to renovate all the abandoned shrines in Inisa. So far, five Otin festivals have been celebrated with pump and pageantry, thus sustaining the annual Otin cultural festivals in Inisa (plate7).

d) Iragbiji

Similar to that is the Ori-Oke Iragbiji festival of Iragbiji but slightly different from Inisa. According to Chief Muraiana Oyelami (plate8) who is the Eesa of Iragbiji and one of the foremost Nigerian contemporary artists, agreement was reached at the selection and enthronement of the present Aragbiji of Iragbiji Oba Rasheed Ayotunde Olabomi (plate9) that he will respect and preserve Iragbiji culture and cultural issues including Oke-Iragbiji; he has since been participating fully in the festival. (Plate10)

e) Osogbo

Osun Osogbo festival has assumes a global status since it has been taken over by UNESCO in 2005 through the efforts of Ulli-Beier and Sussane Wenger. With this, its continuity has gone beyond the level of an individual or the king. According to High chief Gabriel Oparantithe Ajaguna of Osogbo and the custodian of Osogbo culture (plate11) the festival has also faced a religious attack in 1974/75 during the reign of Oba Adenle when one Islamic sheriff movement rose against the festival and threaten to seize the calabash on the festival day. Horse riders and police services were therefore hired to protect the votary maid (ArugbaOsun) (plate12)from the fanatical Muslim community. Till date the finance of the festival has been fully supported by UNESCO and Companies like Breweries and Tobacco companies.

IV. Conclusion

The irony of this situation is that the two communities Inisa and Okuku where the festivals had setback are ruled by Christian Oba while Iragbiji and Osogbo who sustained their cultural values have Muslim (even Teblik sect) as Oba, whereas it is often believed that Christianity could tolerate idolism than Islam.

The bible says "remove not the ancient landmark which your forefathers have set" (Proverbs 22:28) If the above verse actually supports upholding tradition, why then could religious faith be used as a weapon against tradition especially when Oba supposed to belong to all forms of religion in his domain?

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One could see that this so called religious excuses account for those of children of the key actors of the festivals on the issue of succession. The so-called thunder-destruction of Olooku tree could equally be traced to religious fanatics who could intentionally destroy the tree to forestall future festivals.

The controversy on ownership of Olooku groove occurred when the contending families on Olooku groove seize the advantage of the abolishment to sell the land as it has become vacant.

Finally it seems the community members in general could not distinguish between culture and religion, hence their religious faith is used as an excuse for their withdrawal from their age long culture.

V. Recommendations

From the circumstances cited on the abolition of Olooku Cultural Festival, the following recommendations are made:

i. Owing to the immeasurable values of cultural festivals, in terms of prayers, for prosperity, healing, fertility and the unity of the community, it should not be allowed to die.
ii. There is the need for public enlightenment in respect of the difference between Religion and culture.
iii. Selection process of Oba in Yoruba communities should be guided by agreement that Cultural values would be protected on ascension. This has greatly helped in maintaining the Ori-oke festival of Iragbiji and Osun osogbo festivals respectively.
iv. Whoever is currently playing active roles in cultural festival should be advised to groom his successor while alive.
v. Government through Ministry of Culture and Tourism should finance cultural festivals so that Oba's financial contributions would not be the basis for the survival of the festival. Osun Osogbo festival is retained largely because of the supports from UNESCO.
vi. Companies, industries and individuals should rise up to defend culture through their financial contribution. The continuity of Otin festival of Inisa is sponsored by an individual.
vii. Lastly, some aspects of Yoruba culture may be modified especially those areas that are against God and humanity. It could be reduced to a social level so that an average religious Oba could easily cooperate and participate.

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Interviews

Chief Oparanti	17th April 2017 (5:30pm)
Aare Okikiola Lawal Agbabiaka	16th April 2017 (1:20pm)
Chief Muraina Oyelami	16th April 2017 (8:30pm)
Oba Oyebode	13th april 2017 (8:30am)
Baba Aganju	14th August 1992 (4pm)
Aworo of Okuku	14th 1992 (2PM)

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PLATES



PLATE1
Oba Oyebode Oluronke
Olokuku of Okuku



PLATE2
Ulli Beier



PLATE 3
Aworo of okuku 1992



PLATE4
Olokuku at the tomb of
his predecessors 1992



PLATE 5
Oba Joseph Oladunjoye Fasikun
Olunisa of Inisa

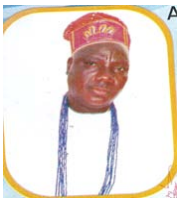

PLATE 6
Okikiola Lawal Agbabiaka Atanda
asoju oba aare ogboni agbaye worldwide



PLATE 7
Otin festival 2015



PLATE 8
Chief Muraina Oyelami
Eesa of Iragbiji



PLATE 9
Oba Rasheed Ayotunde Olabomi
Aragbiji of Iragbiji



PLATE 10
Ori-Oke festival 2011



PLATE 11
High Chief Gabriel Oparanti
Ajaguna of Osogbo



PLATE12
Osun Votary Maid (ARUGBA)

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