

REGBE-REGBE: MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACT OF CLOTH AND COLOUR IN OJUDE-ObA FESTIVAL

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ABSTRACT

Ojude Oba festival is celebrated annually in Ijebu-Ode, a Yoruba town in Southwestern Nigeria. The festival, which has its roots in the entrance of Islamic religion into the town, is celebrated two days after the Muslim Eid-el-Kabir festival, known as Ileya, among the people. The Ojude Oba, which began over a hundred years ago, has since become a display of culture, cohesion, healthy rivalry, wealth, opulence and development with a dynamic touch of modernity for Ijebus at home, and in diaspora. The cynosure of Ojude Oba still remains the glamour, glitz and opulence demonstrated by the usage of textiles in the dressing and display by the participants at this festival. Textiles are maximally employed to identify the different groups as they flock together in a parade one after the other to pay homage to the *Awujale*, king of Ijebu Ode. Ojude Oba brings colorfully-dressed people from all works of life together in the age grade system, regberegbe. This most striking feature of Ojude Oba festival however remains unstudied. This paper, an art historical study, focuses on the origin of Ojude Oba, in context of the people's dynamic political and socio-cultural life. Through participatory observation, audio-visual recordings and the few available sparse literature materials, the impact of textile and color in this annual grand festival is put to the fore.

KEYWORDS: *Regbe – Regbe*, Age - Grade, Ojude – Oba, Ijebu – Ode, Cloth and Color

INTRODUCTION

Ojude-Oba festival is celebrated by all sons and daughters of Ijebu Ode and their friends and associates annually. Ijebu Ode town in Southwestern Nigeria is located on the coordinates of $6^{\circ}49'15''N$ and $3^{\circ}55'15''E$. The town covers an area of 194km^2 (74sqm) and is regarded as the capital of many other Ijebu towns with Ijebu dialect, a variant of Yoruba language as their common feature (Wikipedia).

In 1900, Ijebu Ode as a town had a population of 20,000 which was about 10% of the entire population of Ijebu land, constituting 5% of the Yoruba race and 0.63% of Nigerian population by 1952 (Ayandele, 1992; 5, 198, ix). The 2006 census, however, put the people's population at 154,032 and 222,653 in 2007.

The town is close to the A121 Highway and is 110km by road northeast of Lagos and within 100km of the Atlantic Ocean with a warm tropical climate (Wikipedia). This geographical location of the Ijebus was put to the utmost advantage as they appropriated maximum economic opportunity to themselves and ensured that no other ethnic group infiltrated their enclave to trade. They travelled far and near trading in palm oil, cocoa, cotton, goats, sheep from Ibadan and Ilorin, Aso-Oke from Iseyin and farina from Kano. Palm kernel and timber was the greatest economic asset of Ijebuland throughout the 19th century to the present century.

They took foodstuff to Ile-Ife, where they bought commodities such as palm oil, gari, kolanut and coconut to sell in Ilorin where they bought goats, pigeons, fowls, turkey, beans and onions. They traded in virtually everything and, according to Ayandele (1992:199), "the Ijebus are known to have traded and bought produce farther from home and to a far greater extent than any other Yorba tribe." They were able to divert to Ijebuland at huge profits what they have not produced within their enclave. They also had total control over goods brought in by Europeans such as salt, plates, dishes, clothes, calabashes and factory hanging in exchange for slaves from the many wars ravaged the Oyo Yoruba towns, which was their most precious and chief commodity.

Their astuteness in trading earned them the name, "the Jews of Nigeria" and there is the general belief that an Ijebu is expected to "know the value of money and possess the attribute of a trader by the age of twelve." (Ayandele, 1992:99).

They were shrewd traders and ensured complete monopoly of all trades. While they travelled far and near to trade, they prevented any trader from entering their enclave to trade. An Ibadan man who ventured to carry passengers to Ijebu land had his lorry burnt down in 1951 (Ayandele, 1992, 204)

To further ensure internal cohesion, economic lead and trade monopoly, trade associations and unions such as Aso-oke Traders Guild, Ijebu Native Women Traders Guild, Ejinrin Farina Association, Gaari Traders Association and so on, were put in place with very stringent policies that disallowed any stranger from foraying into the town.

So averse were the Ijebus to strangers and so protective of their economic superiority that Captain John Adam, an 18th century slaver who visited Yoruba land, is credited to have remarked that it was very difficult for visitors to pass through Ijebu Ode, and that it was proverbial that if a stranger entered Ijebu Ode in the morning, he would be sacrificed by evening (Ominikitibi, 2014).

Ijebu Ode comprises of Iwade, Ijasi and Porogun with Ijebu Ode regarded as the capital of Ijebu land. The Ijebus within these three locations saw themselves as superior to other Ijebus and thus refer to themselves as "super Ijebus". Other neighbouring Ijebu towns such as Odo Agameji, Ogbo, Ososa, Imomo, Imawen, Odo Ogbun Apa (Mesan), Okelamuren, Abapawa, Erunwon, Apunren, Isonyin, Imon, Oke-Eri, Imgbon, Ijebu Isiwo, Ode Lemu, Odo-Arawa, idowa, Iworo, Ala, Atiba and Ibefun, amongst others, were regarded as '*egure*', meaning "this way to," which derogatorily means "bush dwellers," a word used as designation for Ijebus outside Ijebu Ode (Wikipedia, Ayandele, 1992).

Also, while they were averse to fellow Yorubas, they considered the Whiteman as a "worst stranger" and for this reason; they staved off their entry into their land, an action that had the adverse effect of them not imbibing western education early.

However, after their defeat in the Imagbon war of 1892 and the entrance of the British into their enclave, they embraced Christianity and western education with such voracity that they soon overtook the Egbas who had embraced education 50 years before them. And by 1930, Ijebus could be found in every work of life and in every field of human endeavours in a scale beyond proportion when compared to other Yoruba tribes.

In addition, the people had in place the age grade system, *Regbe-Regbe* whereby indigenes born within the same period of three years interval form themselves into age grades to ensure the unity and development of their land. With this primordial age grade system in place, unity, cohesion, hard work is ensured with the people jealously protecting what is

theirs. This system is still very evident even in the present time and in the way the Ijebu celebrate annually, a festival known as Ojude - Oba

ORIGIN OF IJEBU ODE

Like many other African ethnic groups, with no written records, the origin of the Ijebus is hazy, and the precise date of their settlement in their present location is based on multifarious oral traditions and accounts. For instance, the ruling families of Ijebu Ode, Ode Omi and Shagamu claim a link to Oduduwa the acclaimed progenitor of the Yoruba race in Ile-Ife who travelled far and wide to establish dynasties all over Yoruba land. This assertion was still upheld till August 30, 1917, and it was the account of origin related by octogenarian Awujale Ademolu, on 30th August, 1917 (Ayandele, 1992:29).

The other accounts according to Johnson (1921:18) in his book written in 1897 but published in 1921, records that the Ijebus had servile origin and that their ancestors were the victims offered in sacrifice to the god of the ocean by the Oba of Benin kingdom.

In a second account, Obanta, the progenitor of Ijebus was recorded to have been a victim of a sacrifice made by the Olowu of Owu. But unexpectedly, Obanta instead of dieing, survived the sacrifice, and went ahead to establish the Ijebu kingdom.

To refute this servile origin, the Ijebus have been linked to the biblical Jebusite and Noah, hence the name Omoluwabi which could be broken down to *omo-olu-iwa-bi*, literally meaning “the child/children born of olu-iwa. This claim in Oduwobi’s (2006) views, is a mere refutation and a distortion of historical facts in a quest for local pride, aimed at making the Awujale superior to the *Ooni* (king) of Ife who was considered the *primus inter pares* by the British rulers as this name, Omoluwabi, according to him, was absent in the first local historical tradition reported in 1906.

In yet another account, Ijebu is said to have migrated to their present territory from a region of Sudan known as Owodaiye Kingdom of Ethiopia (Oduwobi, 2006:151). Owodaiye, which has been corrupted to Waddai, as a kingdom, ended due to Arab supremacy in the Middle East and the Sudan where Owodaiye was located. Evidences used in support of this Sudanese origin are the three national vertical facial tribal marks on both cheeks borne by the Ijebu and also found on the Sudanese. Secondly, dialectical similarities between Ijebu dialect and original South Sudanese languages with names such as Esiwu, Saba, Meleka (corruption of Menelik), being synonymous, and finally the presence of a musical flute used formerly in the coronation of *Awujales* that is still extant in Ethiopia and Southern Sudan.

This claim of Sudanese ancestral home of the Ijebu was presented in 1937 by Oba Awujale Daniel Adesanya and has become the most favoured by educated Ijebu since then (Ayandele, 1992:29).

Whatever may be the origin of Ijebu Ode, Pereira (146-1533), a Portuguese captain, explorer, soldier and cartographer gave a strong evidence of the existence of the town dating back to the 16th century when he wrote “twelve or thirteen leagues up this river (i.e. Lagos lagoon) is a very large city called Geebu, surrounded by a moat. The ruler of this country in our time is called Agusale (i.e. Awujale) and the trade is mainly slaves..., but there is some ivory.” (Pereira, 1937:123).

GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Politically, the monarchical system with a divine king known as Oba (elected from designated and recognized royal families), exists in most Yoruba sub-ethnic groups. However, among the Egba and Ijebu, there is another form of government and social organization whereby, though the king known as the *Oba* is selected, the real political, judicial and legislative power rest with a council of notable elders, the *Osugbos*, who are the equivalent of *Ogboni* cult found all over Yorubaland (Olorode and Olusanya, 1974). The king in Ijebu ode is known as *Awujale*. Apart from the *Osugbo*, there were also the *Ilamuren*, and the *Pampa*. In addition to these three, is the religious institution of the *Agemo*, through which the *Awujale* merely provide spiritual oversight to other towns under his district. Through this spiritual insulation and their devotion to their gods, the Ijebus were able to obey and serve their king to a man. (Ayandele, 1992:4).

The *Awujale* also had no priestly roles as this belongs to the *Odis* who are the special and personal priest of the *Awujale*, and were also in charge of all deities and who oversee all rituals. The *Awujale* therefore reigned more than he ruled as he was a symbol of authority, but never a tool of its execution.

The reigning *Awujale*, Oba Sikiru Kayode Adetona, Ogbagba II, popularly referred to with reverence as “*Orisa Ijebu*” (the god of Ijebu), by his subjects (Nwokolo, 2014) is the 57th *Awujale* on Ijebu-Ode throne. He was coronated on April 2, 1960. Before him in descending order were Obanta, Monigbuwa, Obaguru, Obanla, Lofin, Pasa, Ganju, Tolumogoye Olotuyese, Agunwaja, Jadiara, Mase, Sapooku, Afolajoye Omila, Ajana, Mekun, Gbogidi, Oregeje, Oluyoruwa, Olope, Ayora, Rubakoye, Sopennuwa, Orodudujoye, Boyejo, Moyegeso, Oniyewe, Atewogbuwa, Gbellegbuwa I, Fusengbuwa, Setejoye, Fugbajoye, Anikilaya, Fidipote, Adesimbo Tuwase, Adeleke, Ogbagba Fusigboye, Ademolu Fesogboye, Adekoya Eleruja Adenuga 1, Ogunnaike, Fibiwiga (Obanta Newsday, 2014).

The *Ilamurens* were the kings advisers in court. They were the courtiers and aristocrats of Ijebu polity, the executive council of advisers to the Oba on state matters.

The *Osugbo*, on their part, wielded legislative and judicial powers with all the *Ilamuren* automatically being members. They were the lawmakers, judges or dispensers of justice. The *Osugbo* was the centripetal hub for the main arms of government as the heads of other groups; the *Odis*, *Pampa* and *Lamuren* were automatic members. The *Osugbo* was the democratic institution and was found in all Ijebu towns but with Ijebu Ode as the headquarters.

The *Pampas* on the other part were in charge of commercial issues. The senior members of the group were also members of the *Osugbo*. The *Pampas* decide on markets, collected tolls and fix the prices. With the many zealous and aggressive trade unions put in place, the economy was running smoothly.

With this complex form of traditional government of the *Awujale*, *Ilamuren*, *Osugbo* and *Pampa* and *Odi* in place, Ijebu land ran smoothly politically, economically and spiritually. Socially, at the apogee of the dynamic development, wealth and peace in Ijebuland in the 19th century, the primordial age grade system was systematically and efficiently organized to what today is known as *Regbe-regbe*, one of the major attractions and cynosure of the annual, Ojude-Oba festival.

The word *Regbe - Regbe* is Ijebu dialectical version of what the Oyos would call *legbe-legbe*, meaning age grade by age grade. Egbe in Yoruba socio-cultural setting connotes age mate or people within the same age bracket. In a culture where regard is placed on age and seniority, it is considered the height of insult to disrespect anyone who is above one's

age bracket.

The organization and emergence of the *regbe-regbe* is reflective of the increase in the numerical strength of the Ijebu, exposure to western education, prosperity and peace in the land. By 1970s, the *regbe-regbes* had become a force to reckon with, the *vox populi* with their decisions on the affair of Ijebuland prevailing over the traditional *Osugbo, Ilamuren* and *Pampa*.

According to Price (1932);

“This society (*Regbe-Regbe*) is composed of all natives of Ijebu Ode.

The Oba and his chiefs derive their title from it. It supervises the

work of the remaining four societies and has power to alter their

decision. All important matters come before the *Regbe-regbe* and the opinions of members, men, women and young people are consulted.

The decision of the majority is final.”

Price goes further to say,

“The way they organize and constitute their country is such, apart from its advantages, as to place power and control in the hands of the stronger section in the State so that in most cases for the past twenty or thirty years, young men have been masters of the situation. The rulers had to act at the bidding of the younger ones, thus weakening the moral courage of the elders.”

The *Regbe-Regbe* constitutes the democratic arm of the quadripartite powers of the *Awujale, Ilamuren, Pampas* and *Regbe-Regbe* in this unique triumvirate institution of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy. Theirs is the combination of birth, ability, wealth in a self-regulating mechanism.

The *Regbe-Regbe*, according to *Awujale*, Oba S.K. Adetona, “is a systematic welder of people and talents, an organ of growth and development. It is also a democratic contribution of peace to the Ijebuland and its administration. Draw all the *Regbe-Regbe* together, and then you have one indissoluble community with the *Awujale* as the centripetal force. The voice of the *Awujale* is thus the collective voice of all the *Regbe-Regbes*. The collective spirit of which is evident in Ojude Oba festival.”

ISLAM IN IJEBU ODE

Festivals are a common feature of the social cultural life of the Yoruba. They are usually celebrated as re-enactment of spiritual, historical or political events that happen in the life of a people in time past. Their re-enactment therefore, is the people’s way of preserving their past, celebrating the present and projecting into the future.

The many historical accounts of Ojude Oba trace its origin to the introduction of Islam into Ijebu Ode. According to Botu (1937), Islam was introduced into Ijebu Ode in 1897 during the reign of *Awujale Afidipote*, through an Ilorin slave servant, Ali, of the merchant *Tubogun* of *Porogun* ward of Ijebu Ode. Ali, who later adopted his master’s name to become *Ali Tubogun* was allowed freedom of worship as required by his Islamic faith.

Ayandele (1992:38) further record that Islam had begun to be patronized at such an alarming statistical success over Christianity that Bishop Herbert Tugwell, out of shock in 1910, was quoted to have written that, “Muslim adherents had become so predominant as to overshadow the presence of the Christians.”

Another historical account has it that a trader, Ali Akanyiode of Gbogunga in Isale Iwade area of Ijebu Ode during one of his trading expeditions, came in contact with some Ilorin Muslims who introduced him to Islam. He, on his return to Ijebu Ode, decided to know more about the religion from the slave servant, Ali Tubogun who had been known to imbibe the religion earlier, and together with their friends started a congregational prayer to the chagrin of the traditional *Odis*.

Knowing the consequences of the *Odis* anger, Ali Akanyiode was said to have fled the town before the *Odis* could deal with him. Six years later, he returned to Ijebu Ode on hearing the news of the enthronement of a new *Awujale* who was more liberal to the Islamic religion (Abdul, 1967).

As the need arose for a place for the ever-increasing congregation, *Awujale* Tunwase (1886-1898) granted their request for Eid prayer ground by giving them a piece of land on the eastern outskirts of the town where the first Eid was celebrated with pomp and pageantry with Akanyiode and his muslim fellows riding on horses (Botu, 1957).

As the number of the Muslim faithful grew, another request was made to the *Awujale* for a central piece of land for the observation of Friday congregational prayer. This request was granted and this gave birth to the Etitale Central Mosque. In appreciation, representative of the Muslims thronged the *Awujale's* palace to show their gratitude for his support and for allowing them freedom of worship.

It was this that spurred a warrior Chief Kuku Oduyingbo in the town and later Balogun Kuku to support the congregation monetarily in their desire to build a mosque. Kuku further also embraced Islam openly in 1902, a gesture which because of Kuku's popularity, drew multitudes of notable personalities numbering about 300 to follow suit (Abdul, 1976) including the entire members of two age grades, Egbe Mafowoku (those born between 1845 – 1848) and Egbe Bobajolu (those born between 1849-1852).

Ojude Oba festival got its name from a coinage of two Yoruba words: Ojude, meaning front; and “Oba”, which means king. It is therefore, a festival that takes place in front of the king's palace (Ijebu News Extra, 2013). Oju-Oba, according to Fahm (2015), also means “the kings” forecourt or frontage or “majestic outing.” It is a festival that has been celebrated for over 100 years every two days after the Muslim Eid-el-Kabir festival and therefore has its origin in the entrance of Islam into the town.

ORIGIN OF OJUDE OBA

There are many accounts on the origin of Ojude Oba. One of the accounts is on how Balogun Kuku, a reputable warrior and important personality in Ijebu Ode, on converting to Islam in 1902 want to pay homage to the king in his place with a large entourage of families, friends and well wishers.

A second account attribute the origin of Ojude Oba festival to the visit of Imam Tunwatoba to the 44th *Awujale* of Ijebu, Oba Fidipote (1855-1885) in company of his friends and family members to thank him for the freedom of worship being enjoyed by muslims in the town (Babatunde, 2007).

Another account bases the origin of the festival on *fefetule*, which literally means “charging or scattering the

ground with humour.” This is in connection with Balogun Kuku, who in order to create fun, rode on a well-dressed horse, with many other horse riders known as *elesin*, accompanying him in multitudes. Amidst singing, drumming and sound of gun shots, he led his entourage to the palace to pay the *Awujale* homage and show gratitude for releasing to the Muslims, a parcel of land for the observation of *Eid-el-Kabir*.

What he started with the intention of creating fun with action of mock war, and dancing in a street-like performance to the palace, is what has snowballed into an annual carnival-like event, which is a re-enactment and re-play of the events that happened then (Ijebu News Extra, 2013).

Whatever may be the origin of Ojude Oba festival, two points are notable, that it has its roots in the Islamic religion, and that the personality involved was Balogun Kuku. Ojude Oba festival has continued since then with slight modifications yearly. It has grown to become a unifying force for Ijebu sons and daughters all over the world and ranks amongst the most celebrated festivals in Nigeria due to its pomp and pageantry, glitz and colours. It is now a tryst (fusion) of culture, music, dance and unity (Glo Heritage series, 204).

It is a unique cultural heritage and seemingly the most glamorous cultural and spiritual festival in the country. It is the display of the real cultural symbol of unity of the Ijebu people (Olatunji, 2013). It is a celebration in the display of tradition and culture wrapped in modernization (Olanrewaju, 2010).

The Ojude Oba is unique because of its capacity to attract diverse people irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, status and profession. In recent years, it has developed into a form of social, magnetic force that pulls together the *crème-de-le-crème* of the society.



Plate 1: Mammoth Crowd at Ojude Oba

The Ojude Oba, which used to hold in the palace, had to be relocated to the Dipo Dina International Stadium opposite the Oba’s palace. The 12 billion naira royal pavilion, which is similar to a modern sports arena, was specifically built for the festival. It is an extension of the palace and has the capacity to sit 5,000 guests comfortably (Lanrewaju, 2010). The arena was built through communal efforts by the N2 million naira levy paid by each of the age grade (Lanrewaju, 2010), and also from donations from corporate bodies, who have become sponsors of the annual events. The 2010 Ojude Oba was sponsored by First City Monument Bank (FCMB), Nigerian Breweries Plc, UAC of Nigeria, Fan Milk, Seven Up Bottling Company, Multichoice and Globacom. Globacom, a telecommunication company which was credited with

providing the 650 customized seats on the section occupied by the Awujale and his guests at the Ojude Oba (Lanrewaju, 2010).

CLOTH, THE CYNOSURE OF OJUDE OBA FESTIVAL

The major attraction of every annual Ojude Oba is the parade of the different male and female age grades, known as *Regbe-Regbe* and collectively as Wompa (Nairaland, 2016) and also the colorfully decked equestrian figures and banners on display. The *Regbe-Regbe* (age grades) is a long standing institution that have been put in place to unify both males and females of the same age group mainly for the development and progress of Ijebuland and they have grown into tools of societal cohesion and a trigger for the growth of Ijebuland. Presently the number of the age grades is put at over thirty seven different groups.

Nothing puts the attraction of every group to the fore better than the colorfully-dressed members of each age grade appearing all in the same cloth that distinguishes them from the other age grades. Like birds of the same feather, each *Regbe-Regbe* flocks together in a parade that culminates in paying homage to the king, Awujale. Just like in time past, the names of the different *Regbe-Regbes* are centred round the Awujale, a reflection of their loyalty to their king, their father land, their unity and an avenue for pulling together resources for a common goal which is the development of their town.

Also, each of the *Regbe-Regbe* in most cases numbering up to a hundred and more, comprises of all those born within every three years interval. Each age grade draws its name in relation to the *Awujale* and in connection with notable events in the town during the period of their birth. Some names of *Regbe-Regbe* are:

Egbe Abobayo (Those who join the king to rejoice) (1968-1970). **Egbe Arobayo Obinrin. Egbe Bobaniyi** (Join the king in honour). **Egbe Mafowokun** (Never be in dearth of money), The reigning Awujale's group(1932-1934). **Egbe Bobajolu Obinrin** (Original) (join the king to maintain unity among the people or in the town) 1947 – 1949. **Egbe Bobajolu** (join the king to maintain unity among the people or in the town). **Egbe Arobayo Okunrin** (They, who see the king and rejoice).1968 -1970. **Egbe Gbobaniyi Okunrin** (Raise the king in honour), 1971-1973. **Egbe Jagunmolu** (The victorious ones), (1965-1967). **Egbe Obafuwaji** (The king rises with good character). **Egbe Obafuwaji** (The great). **Egbe Obafuwaji (Adedoyin)**. **Egbe Obaleke Okunrin** (The King is triumphant) 1944 – 1946. **Egbe Gbotalaye** (Give the king chance). A popular musician, Salawa Abeni's group. **Egbe Gbobayo** (Raise the king to rejoice). **Egbe Bobakeye Okunrin** (Join the king in splendor (1956-1958). **Egbe Bobakeye Obinrin (Double Toyin)**. **Egbe Bobakeye Obinrin** (Surakat). **Egbe Bobagbimo Okunrin** (Take counsel with the king). **Egbe Bobagbimo Obinrin** (Take counsel with the king) 1953 – 1955. **Egbe Jagunmolu Okunrin**. 1965 – 1967. **Egbe Bobagunte Okunrin** (help the king to the throne) 1959-1961. Formed on 2nd October, 2009; as the 37th *Regbe-Regbe* to be so recognized by Awujale. **Egbe Bobagunte Okunrin** (Asiwaju). **Egbe Bobagunte** (Gold) Obinrin. **Egbe Bobagbuyi Okunrin. Egbe Bobagbuyi Obinrin**. 1941 – 1943. **Egbe Todalase Okunrin** (the king's word is authority or law). **Egbe Todalase Obinrin. Egbe Todalase Obinrin (Obalofin)**. **Egbe Bobayo Obinrin** (rejoice with the king). 1938-1940. **Egbe Bobayo Okunrin 1938 – 1940. Egbe Mayegun Akile** (1974-1976) One of the most recently formed age grade. **Egbe Bobasegun** (Join the king to be victorious) (1929-1931).

For most of the age grades listed above, there are both male and female versions. Where a name that had been earlier chosen by an age grade is adopted by a new group, a distinguishing clause is added to distinguish the two different age grades with similar names e.g Egbe Todalase Obinrin and Egbe Todalase Obinrin (Obalofin). There is also a recycling of the names. For instance Egbe Mafowokun, the name adopted by the reigning Awujale's age grade, that is, those born

from 1932 – 19 34 was originally used by those born between 1845 – 1848. Ojude Oba is a celebration of culture, unity, loyalty to the king, beauty, glamour and fashion as exemplified by the colourful turnout of the *regberegbes*



Plate 2: Egbe Jagunmolu Obinrin (T – Stainless) at 2014 Ojude Oba



Plate 3: Bobakeye (Obinrin) Akile Ijebu (Surakat) At 2014 Ojude Oba



Plate 4: Egbe Tobalase Obinrin (Obalofin) at 2014 Ojude Oba



Plate 5: Egbe Tobalase Obirin (Obalofin) Akile Ijebu (born between 1971 and 1973) at an Event



Plate 6: Egbe Bobakeye (Obinrin) Akile Ijebu (Double Toyin) at 2014 Ojude Oba



Plate 7: Egbe Tobalase (Obinrin) Akile Ijebu at 2014 Ojude Oba Festival



Plate 8: Egbe Obafuwaji (The Great) at 2014 Ojude Oba Festival



Plate 9: Egbe Arobayo (Okunrin) Akile Ijebu at 2014 Ojude Oba



Plate 10: Bobagbimo Obirin Akile Ijebu (1953 – 1955) at 2014 Ojude Oba Festival



Plate 11: Egbe Bobagunte (Gold) Akile Ijebu at 2014 Ojude Oba



Plate 12 (a)



Plate 12(b)



Plate 12(c)

Plates 12(a, b and c): Some Female Regbe – Regbe on Parade at 2015 Ojude – Oba Festival



Plate 13 (a)



Plate 13(b)



Plate 13(c)

Plates 13 (a, b, and c): Some Male *Regbe - Regbe on Parade* at 2015 Ojude – Oba Festival

MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACT OF TEXTILE IN OJUDE OBA

Nothing brings to the fore the presence of these age groups at Ojude Oba as the clothing. Members of each group of *Regbe-Regbe* move together as birds flocking together wearing the same attire even to the minutest detail of their earrings, shoes and other fashion accessories. Each of the group showcases its cultural uniqueness, identity and beauty by wearing the same cloth, the same style and colour in a parade.



Plate 14 (a)



Plate 14 (b)

Plate 14 (a) and (b): Details of the Dress of Some *Regberegbe* at 2014 Ojude Oba

No attire is worn twice by any group for Ojude Oba. For each Ojude Oba, each age grade comes out with another

design to show the improvement in their economic status, identifying themselves and expressing their unity as a group and by extension the beauty of Yoruba attire and their loyalty to the Oba. The festival thus, allows each group through their dress to identify themselves and show off their wealth and prosperity through their choice of cloth (Babatunde, 2007).

The most important aspect of the festival is that the *Awujale* sits on his throne all through the ceremony while the different Ijebu sons and daughters parade to play him homage and give him gifts, while he in return, showers on them his royal blessings. The parade is a sort of power dressing, with different groups displaying their glamour and opulence in a kaleidoscope of colour to show off their wealth, success, cultural heritage and symbol of unity and enterprising spirit of the Ijebu (Olokokolo, 2014).



Plate 15: Regbe-Regbe Paying Homage to Awujale at Ojude Oba

Textile and clothing are indispensable aspect of Ojude Oba festival. Though the different age grades appear in colourful fashionable dresses, the cloth and the fashion display speaks deeper language and send stronger message. According to the reigning Awujale in his biography;

“The *Regbe- Regbe* is more than fashion and social event. It is a systemic welder of people and talents, and administration. The voice of Awujale is thus the collective voice of the *Regbe-Regbe*. It is an opportunity to mingle with other age grades, access the developmental contribution, compete and pay obeisance to the Awujale. It is a cultural pilgrimage, a communal audit of previous year and a renewal for the coming year.”(Obanta Newsday, 46)

Ojude Oba has been likened to a party; “From end to end, the arcade beams in colours of fanciful headgears and shiny laces. The Ojude Oba is, in a manner speaking, the ultimate ‘owanbe’ party in Yoruba land and the high – end traditional fashion on display is perhaps unmatched in quantity and quality at any other event I know in Nigeria” (Adebowale , 2015). It has become the Ijebus National Day, where the people socialize and others join them at a grand party (Awujale).

What outsiders find most striking is the opulence of the dressing at Ojude Oba. To some observers, it seems unnecessarily extravagant. However, there are some principles guiding the uniformity, successful outings and opulence of the *Regbe-Regbe* mode of dressing at each annual festival. An insight into the workings of obtaining this uniformity every year put the Ijebus in the forefront as master strategists.

First and foremost it must be noted that the Ijebu are power dressers and they go to great length in making their social events successful. All groups painstakingly go through their outfits and spend as much as a year to plan and

organize what they would wear for the next Ojude Oba. To maintain uniformity in style, the same tailor is used for all the members of the group. Each member, no matter his or her physical size, pays the same amount for the cloth to be worn at Ojude Oba. No member of a group is permitted as an individual to wear any cloth worn at Ojude Oba to anywhere, unless the whole group agrees to wear same again for such event. Each group holds a monthly meeting, the hosting of which is rotated amongst all members. To ensure their economic standing, a form of dues or thrift is contributed at each meeting, from which individual members in need are granted loans without having to pay any interest, and profits are shared from investments.

During the 2014 Ojude Oba festival, a member of a *regberegbe* in reacting to criticism on the seemingly extravagant annual fashion display had this to say;

“Ijebu people are hardworking people, they work hard to make Ojude Oba a reality and an annual showpiece. Others have tried to emulate this without any luck because they do not know there is a trick to the continued success of the *Regbe- Regbe* appearing at Ojude Oba. As soon as we leave here, from tomorrow, we start preparing for 2015 Ojude Oba by making a thrift. In fact we have an Ileya account in one of the National banks into which individual members save weekly or monthly according to his capacity. And before you know it, what is needed for the next Ojude Oba would have been fully saved. And yearly we all return home from within Nigeria and those in diaspora. It is always a thing of shame or sadness for any family whose child cannot return to take part in Ojude Oba. It is seen as an indication that things are not working for him”

CONCLUSIONS

Ojude Oba has become a forum for healthy competition as awards now are given to the parade of the *regberegbe*. The most important factor used as the gauge is the dressing. And awards are now given annually based on the assessment of the panel of judges constituted for the event.



Plate 16: The Egbe Bobaniyi Obirin Displaying Their N300,000 Prizes ‘Cheque’ for 1st Runner-Up in the Regberegbe Contest

Ojude Oba will not be the same without the parade of the *regberegbe* in their colourful and gorgeous dresses. And the parade will be uninteresting without the colour lent to it by the different uniforms of the groups. The uniform dress

is a social leveler as each age grade is bounded only by age and not status. Composition of each group cuts across all social class which becomes subdued by uniform usage of cloth.

Usage of textiles at Ojude oba is used to express the unity and cohesion among the Ijebus, It serves as an identifying factor for the different groups, it displays the rich Yoruba textile culture, glamour opulence and dress sense, and potrays the wealth, success, and industrious nature of the people.

The colourful parade with different textiles havr becomes a cultural symbol, and a forum for voicing the needs of the people to government at various levels. For instance the 2014 festival was focused towards the demand for an Ijebu State.

Also the display has economic benefit as it has yearly attracted sponsorship from corporate bodies and multinationals who jostle to outdo each other in contributing one thing or the other to the success of the festival and the development of Ijebu land

The annual parade is also attracting international attention, thus boosting tourism and its accruing dividend. Many of the *regberegbe* have gone a step further by opening foreign branches in United Kingdom, United States of America and South Africa.

The *regberegbe* is also becoming cross cultural. Originally, membership was restricted to Ijebu sons and daughters, but this has been extended to spouses of Ijebu indigenes. In fact a group, Egbe Bobagunte (Asiwaju) Okunrin Akile Ijebu (those born between 1959 – 1961), has even gone beyond the shores of Nigeria to confer a Ghanaian; Professor Asabere Ameyaw, the Vice Chancellor, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana with the chieftaincy title of Fimogboye Egbe. Also cultural groups from other town and cities now join in Ojude Oba to display their culture. The age grade system has now developed to the level where interested individuals have to obtain application form before being considered for membership into a group.

Through the use of textile, the *regberegbe* have made Ojude Oba a celebration of culture, healthy rivalry, competition, unity, loyalty, development, religious harmony, social - cultural cohesion, tolerance, beauty, glamour, glitz and fashion.



Plate 27: Eyo Masquerade from Lagos giving a Multi – Cultural Touch to 2015 Ojude – Oba Festival

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