

Traditional Religious Festivals and Modernity: A Case Study of Female-Oriented Cults Annual Festivals in Ijebuland of South Western Nigeria

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Abstract

Festivals are celebrations of important events in every human society which bring together people from all walks of life. In Ijebuland, traditional festivals are observed by the adherents of the traditional religion to mark important social and cultural events in the lives of the people and these are culminated in series of performances, entertainments, rites and rituals. Through these festivals, the values and beliefs of the people are demonstrated, they give meaning to the social, political and religious life of the people celebrating them. They are vital mainsprings in the traditional education and the remit of the people's culture. However, generally speaking some festivals are no longer celebrated to bring out the values in them. It is obvious that the practice of traditional religion is declining rapidly particularly in the area of worship and cultic activities. There is a preponderance of female oriented cults in Ijebuland in which women occupy important and significant positions. During various cultic activities and celebration, women participate fully, and at times, they are the sole officiates. Though some of these festivals are no longer celebrated with all pomp and pageantry with the advent of Christianity and Islam in Ijebuland, like in other places. Yet, there is persistence in the observances of some certain festivals in spite of social change brought about by the foreign religions and modernity. This paper, therefore, argues that despite the incursion of foreign religions, science and technology, there are still some adherents who through persistence and resilience have to continue till today the celebration of traditional festivals. The paper will further enlighten non-adherents concerning the worship of divinities and veneration of ancestors through festivals and other cultic rituals vis-à-vis social and cultural values inherent in such celebrations. The female-oriented cults in Ijebuland are discussed as a case study.

Keywords: *Traditional Religious Festival, Modernity, Female Oriented Cults, Ijebuland*

1. Introduction

One of the abiding features of traditional religion is the annual festival of divinities and the veneration of ancestors. Each divinity in *Ijebuland* has his or her annual festivals, which may be seen as the birthday or the occasion of some event in his or her mythology. Most feasts are observed to mark important religious and social activities in the lives of the people and these culminate in various performances, entertainment, merry-making, rites and ceremonies. The indigenous festivals, like other festivals in other religions, have their origins/sources passed down from generation to generation orally and expressed through myths and stories. These various festivals have their *raison d'etre* as well as their position in the traditional calendar of the people, this calendar is usually kept by dedicated priestesses who are both young and old. Only one month in the year is free from the celebration of festival in *Ijebuland*. This month was set aside for mourning by the *Awujale* (the paramount ruler of *Ijebuland*) and his chiefs. This month is called *Okudu* (June). Awolalu and Dopamu, (2005, p.153) state categorically that:

Most festivals are associated with specific divinities, spirits or ancestors and they are, therefore, religious in outlook. Among the Yoruba, 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 festival it means an "annual festival". This means that major festivals among the Yoruba come up every season or year.

Ìjèbùland as in other towns and villages that make up *Yorubaland*, has something to celebrate in the form of a festival. Festivals are observed by adherents of the indigenous religion in *Ìjèbùland*. It is a common feature of the *Ìjèbù* society. It has to do with personal and communal ritual, and it is also the most joyful and the most important social and religious activities among the people. The chief purpose of festival is to be in the right relationship with divine powers; to attain what the Ancient Romans called the *pax deorum* – the favour of the divinities. During these festivals, women are always deeply involved. In every week and every month, some groups of women are somewhere in *Ìjèbùland* celebrating. The festival is an all round activity full of various ritual ceremonies, which oscillate life and give colour, sounds and full meaning to it. As observed by Nirmal, (1976, p. 79).

Feasts and festivals are an important aspect of any religion. They serve a two fold purpose of keeping religion alive and affirming some religious or theological truth connected with them...almost invariably all festivals are celebrations of some important religious principle of theological truth.

In corroborating these views Ogunba, (1987, p. 88) opines further that:

Festival rites are important for several reasons: first, they are the chief media of the religious expression of the people. Secondly the institution of the festival is in itself a giant cultural establishment which can accommodate virtually every experience of the community and mould it into its own special idiom. In practice, therefore, the festival often achieves more than mere religious expression and has material that can be an important source for the reconstruction of Yoruba history once the idiom is understood.

Religious celebrations and secular festivals are hardly distinguished in the life of the people. Although festival has religious significance, the *Ìjèbù* do not distinguish between the worship of deities and essential social celebrations. According to them, rituals are constant factors of life. The gods and goddesses in *Ìjèbùland* have festivals associated with them and these are observed by their votaries. Apart from making people happy, the festivals serve some other purposes. They are occasions for moral sanctions against social and traditional authorities. These festivals were celebrated to commemorate specific occasions in *Ìjèbù* history and, consequently, each of them were celebrated at the same period throughout *Ìjèbùland* up till today. They are also catalysts for peace and unity among the people.

The Area called Ìjèbùland and Female-Oriented Cults:

The study centres around female-oriented cults and ritual practices in Ijebuland. It covers essentially women's religious activities in the area of ritual observances and practices in Ijebuland. The Ijebu people occupy six local governments areas in Ogun State, namely. Ijebu-Ode, Ijebu-North, Ijebu-North East, Ijebu-East, Odogbolu, and Ijebu waterside. The towns under these local government areas come under the over-lordship of Awujale (the paramount ruler of Ijebuland and Ijebu-Ode is the capital city of Ijebuland).

The female oriented cults are cults which pay reverential homage to a Divine Being(s). It is not a secret cult but a religious cult in which women in large numbers come together to worship, reverence, care and adore the divinities and the ancestors. In these female-oriented cults, women are the sole officiating minister. They have the responsibility of performing roles like the ones traditionally and culturally assigned to men. From the various activities performed by women in these cults, we see that they are not relegated to the background and are not really barred by custom and tradition from occupying certain positions. Just like we have male-oriented cults like *Agemo* cult likewise we have female-oriented cults like *Iyemoji* (*Ìlónè*), *Iyemule* (*Ìjèbù-Òde*) and *Imalè* cults in *Ìjèbù-Igbó*.

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In these cults women play leadership position and there are still many adherents who are totally dedicated to these various divinities and the veneration of the ancestors. In these cults group, God is accorded regular direct and indirect worship at conventional periodic intervals and the calendar is usually kept by young and old dedicated priestesses. With these various female-oriented cult in Ijebuland. We see that women are consider central to the spiritual quest of the communities.

Purpose and Periods of Festivals in the Female-Oriented Cults

In *Ìjèbùland*, festivals are re-current religious drama which feature at regular intervals among the people. According to Opoku, (1990, p. 71)

Festivals are rituals which recur at regular intervals and which have as their purpose the expression of beliefs held by a particular community. There is also the conscious expectation that certain very specific ends will come about as a result of the performance of the festivals and the performance is motivated by the desire to gain some form of satisfaction and is expected to be effected. Festivals take place at special times set aside by a community in order to commemorate some events of historical, cultural or religious significance and by the performance of certain rituals; such events are re-enacted, giving both individuals and their communities a sense for meaning and cohesiveness.

Festivals are held in memory of the divinities to re-enact important events of the past. Oduyoye, (1983, p. 150) points out that:

...their significance lies in the fact that they illustrate among other things, historical events, coming of age, harvesting of crops and appeasement to various gods for protection against enemies, evil or epidemic disease.

A careful study of the festivals of divinities (*Imalè*) among the female-oriented cults reveals that the performance of festival has some important spiritual values. The primary objective phenomenon of festival, is to celebrate, appreciate, entertain and show indebtedness to the divinity for the past blessing as well as protection in the coming year. Annual festival of divinities in *Ìjèbùland* is usually an affair that concerns the whole community of worshippers. It is often elaborate and usually lasts either fourteen or twenty-one days. Nowadays, the festivals have been reduced in scope and most of them now last between seven and fourteen days. Most festivals for the *Imalè* in *Ìjèbùland* are celebrated annually. They are fixed in accordance with the age-old traditional practice of calculating the sacred calendars.

There are various festivals in *Ìjèbùland*, which include the royal festival which centres on the ruler of the community, the *Agemo* festival (a male-oriented cults), festival of purification and women's festival (a female-oriented cults) which are: *Òdùduwà*, *Ògùnbéjù*, *Olúweri*, *Sénmújà*, *Iyemulè*, *Iyemojí* and *Imalè* festivals. Various dates are fixed for the festivals and there is no clash in the dates. The last week in December to January ending is usually fixed for *Iyemulè* festival, while the month of March is fixed for *Iyemojí* festival. The annual festivals in *Ìjèbù-Igbo* and environs are tied to specific seasons like the beginning of the raining season and the beginning of the dry season, that is, sometimes in April and November. The beginning of the festival is tied to a popular market day of the town, and ends on another market day. This is because the divinities are expected to gather at the market place and bless the people before finally returning to their abode. *Ìjèbù* traditional festivals feature many songs, dances and instrumental renditions that are transmitted from one generation to another through various performances year-in-year-out. Through them we are able to learn about *Ìjèbù* traditions.

Different rituals are performed during the festival. These rituals are called “*aito*” which is the *Ijebu* dialect word for *etutu* in standard Yoruba language. According to Ogunba, (1967, p. 165) they are:

..those rites which show the most obvious and intimate link between festivals and the religions thinking and practice of the people. The *Ijebu* people call these rites “*àitò*”.

Among the people of *Ìjèbùland*, festivals are used to propitiate the object of worship, a sort of communion between the divinities and the worshippers. It is seen as a time for renewal of covenant, vows and relationship. The worship during the annual festival is more elaborate than the daily or weekly ones. How elaborate a festival is celebrated depends on the financial position of the entire community on the one hand and the chief priestess on the other hand. Though it is compulsory that the annual festival be observed, if anything bad happens in the cult, it may be postponed or just observed casually. The annual festival brings all the members together and many sacrifices which may range from individual to family and community levels are performed. Members redeem vows and bring offerings in kind and cash to the divinities.

The festivals are used to purify the devotees and votaries. They pay homage to the chief priestess, renew their loyalty to the divinity and the various cults. They also use the annual festival to make offerings to the ancestors who had been in the past connected with the worship of divinity and are in a way still in communication and communion with the living. This is because “there is no separate annual festival for the ancestors where they have been deified”. Festivals are used among other reasons to celebrate or renew the fertility of the people, the fields and the rivers. Here we need to note that before the eating and selling of the new yam in any *Ìjèbù* market, the people must have performed the annual *Agemo* festival. The *Agemo* cult must have offered sacrifices of the new yam to the supernatural forces and the ancestral spirits before the entire *Ìjèbù* traditional community could eat or sell the new yam or even have any contact with the new yam. As opines by Mbiti, (1969, p. 137-140)

Through festival the life of the community is renewed. People are entertained and their tensions find an outlet. Festivals also bring together the people as a group, thus strengthening their unity and cohesion. Religious and social values are repeated and renewed through communal festivals. Artistic talents are utilised to the full, in form of art, music, drama and oral communication. People seize such occasions to solicit blessings from God or the departed, and there is a general feeling that the visible and the invisible worlds co-exist for the benefit of man who are at their center... festival are religious ways of implementing the values and beliefs of society. Without them African life would be dull...Human life needs some relevant rituals and festival to give it both solemnity and laughter.

These various festivals are of special importance in the collective life of the *Ìjèbù* community. It is for the benefit and good of all as a whole because people in the society are not alone but as a being-in-relation. Festivals through its corporate rituals help to create peace and harmony in the society, to prevent war and other social disorder. During these various festivals, they offer collective prayer for the peace of all and sundry.

Preparation for the Festivals and their Rituals

Immediately the chief priestess fixes the period of the annual festivals and casts the kolanut to verify and confirm the days from the *Imale*, preparations for the festival begins. Since the annual festivals of the divinities are the affair of the whole community, the King is particularly informed and involved. Messages are sent to the various devotees, worshippers, well wishers, including friends and relatives far

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and near. A lot is done to announce the commencements of the festival. Nowadays, the festival is preceded by invitation card in order to give it wide publicity. The shrine arena is cleaned and decorated in readiness for the festival. The various shrines have to be washed and scrubbed including the emblems and symbols of the various gods and goddesses. Likewise, the riverside is cleaned and those that bathe at the riverbank are specially warned to stay away.

Items for rituals are acquired and foodstuffs are purchased before the festival begins. This is known as *Ìwolé Odún* (commencement of the annual festival). This is because the cultic functionaries cannot wear clothes and cannot go out the moment the festival begins. They only tie white wrapper and have no shoes on. All purchases must be done before the commencement of the festival. It is seen as a period in which they prepare special meals for all and sundry. The people of *Ìjèbú* community far and near would come back to their ancestral homes. It is the time the chief priestess receives various visitors and gifts from their friends and also the junior priestesses and votaries (*Omọ Òrisà*). The priestesses use the occasion to acquire, new outfits and new look. During this period, they go about in their best wrapper and spend heavily before and during the festival. They heartily bear the cost because they know; they would be blessed by the divine-beings in return. They plait their hair in a traditional style called *Ejì Òkè*.

Lastly, the people must be ceremonially clean. This is compulsory for the Chief-priestess, all other cultic functionaries and all the worshippers in general. Idowu, (1979, p. 105) stresses the importance of ritual cleanliness thus:

Ritual defilement may be incurred in several ways, depending on what are taboos to the particular divinity who is being worshipped. It is believed, however that cohabitation immediately before worship or when its 'stain' has not been removed by thorough washing, is a thing forbidden by all the divinities... The greatest obstacle to efficacious worship is impurity of heart. Thus moral and ritual and cleanness have from time immemorial been accepted as a pre-requisite of Yoruba worship.

It will suffice to examine the rites which must be performed before the festival day of *Iyemojì* among the women in the female oriented cults. The rite is in form of propitiatory sacrifices, and this is done so as to appeal to the divinity, other spirits and to purify the individuals who would be involved in the festival and the entire community. The Chief priestess or any cultic functionary who is close to the Chief priestess along with the *Olóù Osèré* who is the head of the drummers and the master of ceremony go to the river *Iyemojì's* bank with a he-goat (*Obúko*), pounded yam and delicious stew made with vegetable stew or soup. At the riverbank, the goat will be slaughtered and the blood sprinkled on the water for purification and atonement. The river is avoided for three days by the people of *Ìlónè* and its environs. They will place the head of the animal at the riverbank, while the other parts will be taken home for consumption by all. It is to notify the entire community that the annual festival has begun. The above signifies the beginning of the festival. This is marked by shedding of animal's blood as described above and this is a common phenomenon in traditional African religion as observed by Awolalu and other scholars like Nabofa, (1985, pp. 390-396).

It is a common belief among the adherents of African traditional religion that there is a mysterious power in every blood because of its close connection with the vital life force which permeates all things, both animate and inanimate. This belief gave vent to the idea that when blood is misused it could be dangerous and at the same time efficacious when it is properly and reverently handled...shedding of blood is a common occurrence in traditional Africa. Substitutionary and expiatory sacrificial rites. Such rites are based on the belief that

there is a mystical power in blood which is capable of expiating guilt and impurities from man and his environment.

The whole festival period is segmented to group of days for ritual performance.

<i>Ìbèrè Odún</i>	-	The beginning/Arrival for the festivals
<i>Ìperan</i>	-	The slaughtering of the ritual animals
<i>Ìta Odún-</i>		The third day celebration
<i>Ìje Kékeré</i>	-	The seventh day celebration
<i>Ìje Nlá</i>	-	The Fourteenth day celebration

The Actual Celebrations and the ritual Practices

Most annual festivals of female-oriented cult last for fourteen days in *Ìjèbùland* except in *Ìjèbù-Igbò* where they last for twenty-one days. This is because twenty-one days are spent for the worship of the god-Sàngó. This means that the Chief priestess of Sàngó must stay for another extra seven days before moving around. The first day is seen as the beginning of the festival, the day set aside for the washing of the emblems of the divinities (*Ojò Ìbèrè Odùn, Ojò Ìserun, Ojò Wíwẹ̀ Òrìsà*). This day is usually on a market day in the town. All the emblems and symbols of the divinities are ritually washed and consecrated with the blood of a goat. The blood is sprinkled on the emblems and its head placed at the altar. The head we should note symbolises “wholeness” and it stands for the entire body. The emblems are arranged and decorated with camwood and white chalk. After this, the divinities are invoked, libation of white gin is poured and where necessary palm oil is used. Hens are also slaughtered. We need to note here that whenever animals are slaughtered for rituals their heads may be placed at the altar or at the river banks or crossroad or buried depending on the dictate of the divinity through casting of *kolanuts* or *Ifa* oracle, other parts of the animals are to be cooked and eaten by all the worshippers. This essentially, is one form of communal with the gods. But during worship that is not as elaborate as the annual festival, when the animals slaughtered are cooked they are shared among the priestesses that are present and each part given to each priestess is known and they are distributed in order of seniority.

Due to its importance to life, blood is associated with a large number of beliefs. One of the basic uses of blood is the fact that it is seen as a symbol for atonement of sin and unity among the divinities and the worshippers. Furthermore, because of the mythic nature of blood and its connection with the life giving nature it is considered to have the power of its originator and it is used for blessing. Life is in the power of the blood, what the divinities “accept and eat” is the life or the essence of the animal sacrifice and the body is left or cooked and consumed by those present at the ritual. With this it shows that the divinities and those present at the rituals are in communion and communication.

Concerning washing and consecration of emblems of divinities Adewale, (1986, p. 30) opines that:

The washing may be done several times to ensure perfect sacredness and to make the emblems a set-apart object. The washing also helps to infuse the emblems with power. All the old emblems have to be washed periodically especially during the annual festival partly to re-consecrate them and partly to revitalize them. The renovation gives a new religious outlook to the promises where the supernatural beings are hosted. Sometimes the shrine is sprinkled with concoction of quicklime to mark it out from the common grounds around.

The day is marked by all sorts of activities: night vigil, singing and chanting of the names of the divinities and for all in the neighbourhood to know that the festival has started. Before the worshipping of the divinities or the veneration of the ancestors, the chief priestess who must be followed by other priestesses and other worshippers must first worship their heads (*Orí*) *Orí laabọ, ká tó bọ Òrìsà* (one’s inner head

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must be worshipped before worshipping the divinities). On the second day, the worshippers make a procession to the river, with the *otún* (a clay pot) and cane (*àtòrì*). The small *otún* pot is used in *Ìjèbú-Igbó* and *Ìlóné* towns, since the priestesses must not carry the pot on their heads because of the type of initiation rites they had undergone, while in *Iyemulè*, it is the big *otún* pot that is used. They can put it on their heads as homage to the divinity.

At the riverside, another sacrifice is performed with a goat. The head of the goat is used for the ceremony, while the remaining part is put in a sack by the *Ojùwá*. As they proceed to the riverside, they will be chanting the following invocation and songs in praise of the divinity:

Leader: *Ese baba yee O*

(Hail the magnificent one)

Response: *Baba yee O*

(The magnificent one, welcome)

The worshippers may also recite the *Oríkì*, the praise songs of the divinity and would take their bath at the riverside, to prepare them for the *otún* dance. The priestesses would also fetch ritual water and put *Wòrò* leaves in it for preservation in the shrine. Other warning invocations when they move in procession from the river or to create awareness that they are around include:

Onà o, t'òrìsà (As many times as possible)

Ore ilee O, ye mi (Alawoye)

Ore ilee o, o maye, yeye boo do, mo wa ri, ró rì sa

Ese bi ra ku, e se bi ra ku, e se

Ore yèyè o

Ore yèyè o

Meaning: The path belongs to the deity

All hail my mother, who heals totally

All hail my mother, my mother

Has returned from the stream/river.

To the deity do I pay my homage.

All hail our mother,

All hail our mother.

After returning from the river, the women would wait for their turn to dance their ritual *otún* dance, by standing (*Iyemojì* cult). But for *Iyemulè* and other cults in *Ìjèbú-Igbó* they would be offered seats. They would sit before their turn to dance and people would pay homage to them (without talking), just touching the people's head with the *otún* pot. They would later take their turn in dancing and they may dance in pairs or singly. They must observe the ritual dance before entering the shrine. The dance is usually controlled by the chief priestess. They are expected to dance for twenty to thirty minutes and any priestess who wants to over-stay is tracked inside by the chief priestess. They can be "adorned" with money usually place in a calabash in front of the priestess when dancing or on their body but not on the head. After this they will wine and dine. This ritual dance is very significant because each of the dancers have different roles to play and all these roles come together to tell a story, to celebrate, to uplift and to recognise events that take place in the cultic arena. This *Otun* dances are used to communicate with the spirit world and they were seen as adequate and complete during the various festival. They are performed as a sort of sacrifice to appeal for blessing and to give thanks to the Supreme Being and other spirits who are their object of worship. With these dances we gain a deep knowledge of the way they live, think, act and how they do their things which is part of Ijebu religious ritual or belief.

The third day is known as *Ìta Odùn*. This is the day for the casting of the *kolanut* (*Dída Obi Odùn*). The *kolanut* used must have four lobes-values and it must be intact, that is, its "mouth" must not open. This is because such *kolanut* is believed to have "ears" to carry one's request to the divine-beings. This is the

period when the people present their requests and make supplication to the divinities and later give testimonies for the granting of the past requests to the divinities and in the present of other worshippers.

The seventh day is *Ìje-odún- Ije Kèkerè*. This is the day they fetch the “*Omì àìfò*”-the early morning water before talking and eating. Adewale, (1986, p. 33) observe that:

It is axiomatic that no ritual takes place without water... The drawer, invariably a woman, must not talk to or greet anybody and must not answer any greetings. Hence the water is called “*Omì àìfò*” in Yorùbà, meaning ‘water without talking’. The woman usually dresses in white and holds a traditional bell which she jingles to answer greetings and to save passersby who might take her to be a ghost from embarrassment which for speechlessness and white robes right evokes.

There is no *otùn* dance and merry making on this day.

Closing Rituals

The fourteenth day which is the *Ojó Kerinlàà or Ijerinlé wàà Odún or Ijehlá* is the day for the final and closing rituals. The women will go to the river to fetch water and on coming back, they will dance and there will be a big celebration. This is a sort of closing party (early in the morning at about 5 a.m. There will be an activity called *Wiwá Òrìsà*; this will be performing to the 15th day. This is the period when the women go into trance. Having been possessed by the divinity, they will prophesy to the people. They will be the mouth piece of the divinity. In the morning of the fifteenth day, they will be dressed up, with all the paraphernalia they needed for the closing rituals. They will go into the streets, market places to bless and pray for the people. The people will offer them gifts of money and other valuables. On coming back home, they will wait until the divinity releases them. Thereafter, they can end the festival till another year.

This last aspect of the festival is very important, and it contributes to the edification of the devotee’s belief. Taking of photograph during this period is forbidden because they are not seen as ordinary people any more but as “divinities”. Anything done during this period is not known to them, and they are not reminded of what happened when they were in trance. They are always guided by the priestesses who are not in trance. They quickly track their movement, as they can jump on the housetop, fire or even try to pull down anything within their reach because some could be violent while some are calm.

Thereafter, they pray and offer sacrifices for protection, that is, *À sè yi sàmódùn* (Just as we celebrate the festival this year, may we celebrate it another year). The *Ìjèbù* people pray joyfully to live to see another year. *À-se-ñ-se tun-se, bí a bá sèyí tán, a ó sèè mí sí, k-ári re nígba mù rèn* (An endless worshipping, may we celebrate this to the end, we will again celebrate others in addition).

We need to note that all other day in between the festival are devoted to rituals, merry-making and consultations by the celebrants who are the chief priestess, other priestesses and worshippers. Those days are, however, not as important as the first, the third, the seventh and the fourteenth day of the festival. From the above, therefore, we can see that festival has its *raison d’etre* as well as its position in the traditional calendar. Okafor and Emeka, (1998, pp. 211-377) explain that:

The whole life of the traditional society is enveloped, guided, governed and demarcated by festival and ceremonies. Many of these are founded on religious and on the need to maintain equilibrium between and among the various inhabitants of the people’s world-humans, spirits, the ancestors, deities and other forces.

The Impact of Modernity on the Traditional Festivals of the Female-Oriented Cults

Ijèbú traditional religion, like other African religion in general, has an exceptionally enduring quality which makes it linger on in the face of all odds. It is also a religion that could not be wished away or swept under the carpet because of its enduring nature. One of the factors responsible for this enduring nature is the annual festival of the divination. Thus Adegbola, (1983, p. 448) reports that:

...African traditional religion was a determined foe that could not be wished away and that a grave error had been committed by missionaries who did not seek to understand this religion before pronouncing its obituary.

Though, through modern education, technological know-how, contact with other world religions, some aspects of the religion have changed, some aspects still survive and some would be changed or transformed to meet the needs of the changing times and generation to come. The future is still very bright for the practising of these various festivals. There is every hope that since life continues, the people shall continue with the celebration of the annual festivals. The adherents are still resilient and will continue with the worship of the divinities in the various cults with the annual festivals. They could not be dissociated from the traditional festivals and its ritual practices into which they were born or make them to revert and backslide from it. They would continue to revive, resuscitate and revitalise it from time to time. The resilience of traditional festivals has often led to the song:

Áwa ó sorò ilè wâ O
Áwa ó sorò ilè wâ O
Ìgbâgbó kò pè, é o
Ìgbâgbó kò pè
Ka wa ma soro O
Áwa ó sorò ilè wâ O

Áwa ó sorò ilè wâ O
Áwa ó sorò ilè wâ O
Imale ko pe, e o
Imale ko pe
Ka wa ma soro
Áwa ó sorò ilè wâ O

Meaning:

We shall perform our traditional rites
We shall perform our traditional rites
Christianity cannot prevent us
Christianity cannot hinder us from performing our traditional rites
We shall perform our traditional

We shall perform our traditional rites
We shall perform our traditional rites
Islam cannot prevent us,
Islam cannot hinder us from performing our traditional rites
We shall perform our traditional rites

It is instructive to note that *Iyemulè* and *Iyemojì* festivals are still being celebrated among the *Ijèbú* people on a yearly basis. The various female-oriented cults in *Ijèbú-Igbó* and its environs still observe the various cultic festivals and rituals in honour of the *Imalè* who give support to the maintenance of peace in their communities. There are various festivals observed by both aged and youngsters in the traditional

society and they are connected with the various customs of their communities. The priestesses and other women in their groups numbering up to twenty, or more, file and march to the river-side to offer sacrifices to the river divinities and other gods in *Ìjèbùland* every now and then. As observed by Awolalu, (1981, p. 10), this is also true of *Ìjèbùland*:

Old people (women) have been dying, and yet the number of divinities has not been reduced. Generations after generations of Africans have passed away and the festivals have not reduced in number; neither has the enthusiasm with which they have been celebrated and are still being celebrated diminished in any way.

In spite of the fact that some *Ìjèbù* people identify themselves as Muslims or Christians, some still take active part in the celebration of the traditional festivals. This we can see in the fact that, the festivals have great bearing on the life cycle, ecology and civic calendar of the people, and they are meant to appease or gain favours from the gods and their ancestors. These festivals contain and release a whole world of information which are about cosmology, aesthetics, myths and legends, social organisations, the kinetic, arts and the recreational practices, customs, values and cherished tradition. All these are entailed and writing factors about many of these festivals and their ceremonies, they unlock a great deal of information which they contain and transmit (Okafor & Emeka, 1998). As in the words of Ullier Beler, we need to note that the religion of the *Yoruba* people in which *Ìjèbù* people belong appears to be kept alive by the festivals, its ritual and dogma but also by personalities; the gods and goddesses which are worshipped and the ancestors venerated still exist through its priests and priestesses. As in the words of Ogunba, (1987, pp. 108 – 109), the best and the most significant of the *Yoruba* experiences seen to have been lived through her ceremonies, especially the festivals. The structure of this festival is usually such that it accommodates and integrates subsequent experience which going though time has been able to illuminate the dark past and the present teeming with life.

According to Ogunba, (1987, pp. 108-109) speaking further on the values of ceremonies in *Yorubaland* generally, he is of the view that the richest of all these ceremonies that can yield some source material on *Yoruba* history is the annual festival of the various communities. The institution of the festival is a giant cultural establishment which can accommodate virtually every experience of the community and mould into its own special idiom. These festivals and their various rites are the chief media of the religious expressions of the people and, therefore, they can be source for the reconstruction of *Yoruba* history once the idiom is understood.

2. Conclusion

From all said above, the performance of the festival of the divinities and ancestor should be celebrated more with vigour by the adherents. The *Ijebu* people should continue to do all in their power to keep alive and restore the celebration of the annual festival. The old adherents should continue with the tasks of passing on the cultural values, the religious and behavior patterns down to the younger members so that there would be continuity, conformity with the traditional values as a way of preserving the traditional practices. This is because through these festivals, we are able to preserve various traditions, culture and religion of the people.

The shrines should be opened up to become tourist attractions as in the case of *Osun-Osogbo*, so that it can also generate income for the people and the state in general. Suitable programmes or knowledge of things to know about the various annual festivals should be given to all whenever the need arises. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism should rise up more to its responsibilities to promote and enlighten all more about the religious belief system of our forefathers. There should be more of the Festival of Arts and Culture in Nigeria as we had in 1977 and create new awareness among the people for the need to

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retain essential traditions of their fore bearers as entails in the celebration of annual festivals of the gods and goddesses in the various communities.

There is no gainsaying the fact that modern forces of social change, precisely, western science, technology education and religion are today undermining the effective practice of the indigenous religion of most African communities (Wotogbe-Weneka, (2006). But it should be noted that in this age of modern technology and globalisation, the annual festivals of the female-oriented cults have not fared badly among the *Ìjèbú* people. Though there have been changes in some forms and practices of the annual festivals, the festivals have not been completely extricate by the global trend. Instead, the *Òrìsà* worshippers have availed themselves of the use of the internet as an avenue to promote the influence of annual festivals in the social, religious and cultural life of the people. They use modernised agencies to pass information about the belief and practice pattern of the annual festivals of the people.

All in all, through traditional annual festivals of the divinities and ancestors, the *Ìjèbú* Religion as well as the *Yoruba* Religion has become more dynamic and a living faith which continues to be relevant to the people and to all aspects of their daily living, despite the incursion of Islam, Christianity and western culture. As in the words of Dopamu, (2004, p. 666), festival will continue to be celebrated and continue to express man's relationship with the supernatural and to their fellow human beings. Ijebu festivals will further remind and strengthen the social bonds that bind the members of the community and encourage group solidarity this is as a result of the fact that many of the communities in Ijebuland now tie other important events like development programs, fund raising and awards of traditional chieftaincy titles to the celebration of the festivals.

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