Article

Ará Òrun Kìn-in Kin-in: Òyó-Yòrùbá Egúngún Masquerade in Communion and Maintenance of Ontological Balance †

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† Ará Òrun Kìn-in Kin-in literally translates to ‘unpretentiously a resident of heaven’ or ‘truly a native of heaven’.

Received: 15 November 2018; Accepted: 29 January 2019; Published: 5 February 2019

Abstract: The belief that there is life after death and that the spirits of the deceased are directly involved in the daily affairs of the living are strong among the Òyó-Yòrùbá people of south-western Nigeria. These beliefs are evident in their egúngún culture, a decidedly Yòrùbá masking culture in which the spirits of long-dead ancestors are believed to manifest in bodily form as egúngún, in re-visitations to the people they once knew and community they once lived in. The present study explores the connexion processes through which egúngún Mowuru and Jeđù have engaged in establishing and maintaining contact between the living and the dead in the Òyó community. In this ethnographic study, two egúngún personages (eléégún) who have been directly involved in actual masking of egúngún were interrogated about their first-hand experiences. Fifteen other worshipers and stakeholders of egúngún were also interviewed. It was observed that the art and performances that institute contact by human with the spirits of the egúngún share basic worship principles as found in other religions. Such principles include regular worship, invocations, sacrificing of materials and spilling of blood to the spirit of Jeđù and Mowuru to ensure communication and provoke ontological balance between the two worlds.

Keywords: egúngún; Òyó; alálè; life-after-death; Yòrùbá; Ará Òrun Kìn-in kin-in

1. Introduction

Ení bá fi ojú àná woòkú
Ebora a bó láso

Meaning:

Whoever envisions the dead as if they were the living
Such a person will be stripped naked (mesmerised) by a super human force

The above aphorism is a laconic saying among the Yòrùbá that reflects their core belief and worldview about the transformational powers of death (ìkù). ‘Death’ is a transition from the present life to the afterlife, a simple continuation of life here. However, during this transformation, the dead person is believed to possess superhuman powers, capable of affecting, positively or negatively, people who are still alive. The powers attributed to the dead among the Yòrùbá people of southwestern Nigeria are akin to those of deities. Indeed, there are instances¹ in Yòrùbá history where dead ancestors

¹ Alaafin Sango was said to be a one-time King of Òyó who was apotheosized to a deity.
have been transformed to deities and included in the Yoruba pantheon through the process of apotheosis. Owing to this belief, when an important and aged leader or personage in a family (ìdílè) or community (ìwùjọ/ìlọtọ) dies, rather than consider that the person has been totally annihilated by death, he or she is believed to have moved from our realm of existence to a higher one. He or she is said to have joined the ancestors in the other world. Here, ancestors refer to dead relations which by inference and membership of the same community are linked to the very founders (alálè), rulers and eminent personages of the family or the community to which the dead person belonged while alive. The long dead ancestors, some of whom may be remembered faintly or not at all, are called the baba nlá (our fore fathers). Although alálè literally translates to ‘the owners of the land’, it may also mean ‘those who belong to the ground’ or ‘those who have been committed to the ground’. However, in its usage, alálè refers to the original founders and successive leaders of a community since its inception. Such ancestors are believed to continue their existence in the ‘other world’ (spiritual world), and they hold the responsibility of watching over members of the community which they founded, fostering the continued existence of their community based on the very principles of its founding. By virtue of their transition to the next world, they are believed to have been transformed into abara mèjì or ebora, thus possessing super human powers to ensure the continuous communal existence in the world of the living. For this reason, it is common among the Òyó-Yorùbá people, when a person dies to hear them exclaim:

Ó ti lo sibi ǎgbà nírè
Ógba ẹkuru je ọsọọ ẹbora
Ó di ẹseudé jelé-jelé
Ó di ọgùntán ẹtàn jetàn
Óti di ẹbora tị nje lègbèè ogiri

Meaning:

He/She has gone to where the aged go (not admitting annihilation)
He/She has eaten bean-cake from a spiritual being
He has become a goat that eats around the homestead
He has become like the sheep, roam about
He/She has been transformed into a spirit being, loitering around and hunting for food around his homestead.

Baba Awo Ojebode⁵ points out that the frequent mention of the dead loitering around his homestead in Òyó community is borne out of the conviction that the spirit of a deceased ancestor loiters around its people, watching over them. An expansion of this belief is that the spirit of the dead can directly influence the affairs of the living (Morton-Williams 1960). Since these spirits are capable of being benevolent or malevolent to the living, they are venerated in order to keep them at peace with the living. Venerating the spirits of the dead is of utmost importance among the Yorùbá people of Òyó and, indeed, many African communities.

According to Baba Awo Agboola Famoriyo,⁶ there have been instances where Ifá devotees or worshippers of other Yorùbá religion deities, on consultation with Ifá, were asked to make sacrifices to their dead ancestors in order to gain their blessings and get things going right. Another instance cited by Ojebode is that when family issues get incredibly controversial, the physical manifestation

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² This can be interpreted to mean the founders of the community, the owners of the land (literal) or the living dead.
³ Baba Awo Famoriyo points out that abara mèjì implies the powers of a man or woman to operate in both the spiritual and physical world. The phrase itself literally translates to ‘one with two bodies’.
⁴ Ebora is a strong spiritual being with superhuman powers. There are good and bad ebora.
⁵ (Ojebode 2018). Baba Awo Ojebode is an Ifá diviner and an egunjún devotee at Isale-Òyó.
⁶ (Agbola Famoriyo 2018). Baba Awo Famoriyo of Ile Odo Oje, Isale-Òyó is an Ifá priest at Òyó.
(egungun) of particular ancestors who are considered knowledgeable about the issues in question are sought. These examples indicate that there is regular communion with the spirit of the dead among the Yorùbá. It is evident from such cases that the veneration of dead ancestors is common to all traditional Yorùbá people, immaterial of other deities they worship or religious belief they hold. The belief in life after death and veneration of dead ancestors are part and parcel of the people.

There are several mythological narratives on the origin of egungun among the Yorùbá. Bascom (1944) recorded one of such oral tradition. According to him, long ago, Ikú and his followers regularly invaded ojú Òìí (Ife market) at Òìí-Ìfẹ, and each time they came, they killed many people. The people sought the help of Oni Lafogido, the then king of Ìfẹ, but he could not help. Finally, one Amáiyegun promised to help the people. Amáiyegun made a colorful costume for himself that fully covered his body such that no part was exposed, thereby disguising him. When he wore the costume, he could no longer be recognized. And when he stretched out his leg, the people sang ẹwa ẹsẹ ẹwọ ẹbẹtẹ ẹbẹtẹ (come and see the beautiful leg of a masquerade) and, on stretching out his hands, they sang ẹwọ ẹwọ ẹwọ ẹbẹtẹ (come and see the beautiful hand of a masquerade). On the next market day, Amáiyegun and his followers, dressed in similar costumes, attacked Ikú. The fact that Ikú and his messengers could no longer recognize their attackers caused Amáiyegun to disarm them and drive them away. This account, according to Bascom, is man’s attempt to overcome death.

Lawal (1977) submitted that the egungun culture of the Yorùbá is a way to harness the power of departed souls for the benefit of the living. For this reason, shrines are built for the departed where they are venerated. In such altars, sculptures are placed to house the souls of the dead. Lawal linked the Yorùbá belief in the independent existence of the soul to their other belief in surrogate twin figures. He stated that the spirit of a dead twin can be invoked into the surrogate and is kept there in order that the spirit will not torment the living twin. He opined that the soul of the dead would imperceptibly inhabit the sculpture, receiving sacrifices and blessing the living. The egungun mask is, therefore, a medium through which the souls of departed ancestors return to earth in physical forms to inquire about the welfare of their living descendants.

This robust Yorùbá belief in life after death is most evident in the Yorùbá egungun (ará órun) culture, a decidedly Yorùbá masking culture in which the spirits of long-dead ancestors manifest in bodily forms in visitations to the people they once knew and the community they once lived in while alive. Oladimeji (2001) points out that among the Yoruba, the union between the living and the dead is indissoluble. This belief and spiritual experience are also succinctly worded by Morton-Williams (1960):

The corollary of acknowledging the spirits of the dead is that the living do not become free of their influence. Their own freedom of action is constricted by the sanctions commanded by the watchful ancestors. But the dead are set at a distance and their power circumscribed by a series of rites.

It is important to note here that there is more than one type of masking culture among the Yorùbá. However, because all Yorùbá masking types are called egungun, there is a need for clarification. The egungun culture referred to in this study is the ancestral egungun. Ancestral egungun is a Yorùbá masking culture performed to honor the dead and serves as the physical appearance of dead ancestors. This is the same type of egungun defined by Babatunde Lawal as the ‘living dead’ (Lawal 1977); by Henry Drewal (Drewal 1978) as the egungun associated with the Òyó-Yorùbá in honoring dead ancestors and also distinguished by Famule (2017) as one that “emblemizes the spirit of the dead (aged) man, who is believed to have transformed into an ancestor.” In a study carried out by Abokede (2001), he observes that an egungun may not necessarily be representative of a particular spirit but the collective reincarnated forces of ancestors within a Yoruba community.

The present study is on the egungun masking culture of two family compounds (idilé or aṣọ idé) in Òyó town. The study was carried out between July and December 2018. In the ensuing discussions, the research will at different times employ the words ‘the dead’ and ‘ancestors’ interchangeably to refer to the spirit of the dead as manifested in egungun.

The study looks into the practice of egungun masking culture in Òyó. Òyó is a central and foundational Yorùbá community. It boasts a sizeable number of ardent egungun worshipers.
The present Òyó community (Figure 1) is a resettlement town of Old Òyó, an ancient Yorùbá kingdom that was initially situated up north in present Kwara State in Nigeria. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, Old Òyó wielded the most powerful military and political power of all Yorùbá kingdoms (Akinjogbin 1976). It conquered territories in Dahomey (now Benin Republic) and established Yorùbá communities as far away as Togo (Akande 2015). At the decline of its power in the 19th century, it was sacked from its original location by the Fulani jihadists by the third decade of the century (Ibiyoye 2012). The Fulani jihadist were fundamentalist Islamic Fulani warriors led by Uthman dan Fodio, attacking communities and enforcing Islam on conquered territories in the northern parts of Nigeria and Cameroun in the early 19th century. After sacking Old Òyó, the inhabitants with their king (Alaafin Atiba) had to take refuge in their present location, previously called Ágó Òjá or Ágó d’Ôyó. The presence of the people from Old Òyó has since over shadowed that of the autochthons. Altogether, they have formed a robust Yorùbá community, which in the present time is called Òyó, in line with the name of Old Òyó. Old Òyó itself was said to be established by Oranmiyan, a prince of Ilé-Ife (Babayemi 1979). Oranmiyan was the son of Odudua, the mythical progenitor of all Yorùbá people. The town according to Alaafin Lamidi Adegemepo III, the present ruler of Òyó, is the home of the most quintessential and preserved Yorùbá traditions, as brought down from Old Òyó by Alaafin Atiba, the king at the time of its relocation. The present study therefore exemplifies a typical example of eginjúin practice among the Òyó-Yorùbá people.

The practice of eginjúin culture is quite strong among Òyó-Yorùbá people, especially the community in Òyó town, who interact with their ancestors with the utmost respect. Indeed, some Yorùbá ancestors have been deified through the process of apotheosis. Such ancestors include Sango (the thunder god), who is said to have once lived as a powerful man in Òyó. Mythology has it that after his death, he was deified and worshipped by his followers.

This study probes into the arts of two ancestral eginjúin in Òyó, namely eginjúin Mowuru of Oja Akesan and eginjúin Jénjú of Apinni. The research which employs the ethnographic research design, identifies and analyzes specific artistic paraphernalia and performative acts of the eginjúin that are considered links, insinuating the genealogical connection between the living and the dead. The purpose of the present study is to trace the founding of Old Òyó to a prince of Ilé-Ife. Oral tradition traces the founding of Old Òyó to a prince of Ilé-Ife.

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7 Variously called Òyó-Ile, Katunga, Òyó Ègbó and Òyó-Alaafin.
8 Alaafin Lamidi Adeyemi III. 2018. Address at the congregation of Òyó eginjúin masquerades at his palace on the 28 July 2018.
9 Òyó-Yorùbá people refers to Yorùbá communities that trace their ancestry to Old Òyó and by extension, Ìlẹ-Ìfẹ. Oral tradition traces the founding of Old Òyó to a prince of Ilé-Ife.
10 Alapini, the overall leader of all eginjúin owners and chiefs in Òyó. Directly under the Alapini in hierarchy is the Alagbaa.
11 Òyó-Mesi is the executive council of the Alaafin of Òyó. Presently, the council has eight members out of which the Alapini is a key member. The Alapini is also a member of the king-makers’ council.
12 Babalawo is an Ìfá priest and diviner.
Oyo. Mr. Salawu Ibrahim, also a lecturer at Emmanuel Alayande College of Education and personal assistant to the Alaafin of Oyo helped in booking an appointment with the Alaafin. Toyese Oyee, as he is popularly called, at some points helped to man the video camera, especially on occasions when the researcher was busy photographing, writing or interviewing. Yemi Adebomi, a private freelance editor and language expert in Ibadan transcribed the voice interviews. It is important to mention that all the respondents, including the Alapini and Alaafin, consented to the publication of the information elicited in this research.

2. Ownership and Ancestral Spirit of Egúngún Jeńjú and Mowuru

Egúngún Jeńjú (see Figure 1) belongs to the Alapini family. The family compound is where the highest ranking egúngún chief is selected in Òyó. Indeed, the name Alapini is the title of the highest egúngún chief. The Alapini is the head of all egúngún and is in charge of all egúngún activities in the whole of Òyó town. The position of the Alapini is considered very important, so much so that the Alapini is a principal member of the Òyó-Mesi, the executive council of the Alaafin of Òyó. Egúngún Jeńjú is a representative of the ancestors of the Alapini, and because of the position of the Alapini as the leader of all things egúngún and as the owner of egúngún Jeńjú, Jeńjú is undoubtedly a quintessential egúngún in its paraphernalia and performance.

![Figure 1. Egúngún Jeńjú during the 2018 annual egúngún festival, Òyó. Source: Photograph by author.](image)

Jeńjú is said to be the head of all other egúngún in Òyó. According to the Alapini, Alhaji Sheu Rashid Ademola, the worship of Jeńjú has been an age-long tradition, and the forebears of the people in present-day Òyó brought it down from Old Òyó, their initial settlement. He narrated that when the

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13 (Adeyemi 2018).
14 (Abimbola 2018).
people migrated from Old Òyó to their present location, Jenjú did not follow them but Jenjú suddenly emerged from nowhere after the people had settled down.

According to Alhaji Sheu Ademola, when Jenjú emerged at Òyó, Ifá oracular consultation was made and the spirit of the egúngún, through Ifá, demanded to live at Oke-Ogbo, located at Oke-Logun, Apara. A point to note here is that Jenjú is not domiciled in the family compound of the Alapini to which it belongs. A place was built for it at Oke-Logun, Apara (see Figure 2), where its regalia and other paraphernalia of worship are kept. This location is also where it is venerated.

Figure 2. Map of Oyo Central District Showing Jenju (Alapini) and Mowuru (Ona-Efa) Family Compounds. Source: Ismail Hamzat, Cartography Section, Department of Geography, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Although at the outset of this research, the Alapini, Alhaji Sheu Rashid Ademola, who is also the person in charge of worship of Jenjú, claimed that Jenjú is owned by the Alaafin and that he was just put in charge to care for it. In a later interview, Sarafa Ajakaiye claimed that it is only Mowuru that is directly owned by the Alaafin. This contradiction was cleared in a focused group discussion with the Alaafin. In the presence of Alhaji Sheu Ademola and Safara Ajakaiye, the Alaafin made it clear that Jenjú belongs to the Alapini family and that Alhaji Sheu Ademola’s initial claim was borne out of the reason that it is the tradition of the Alaafin to supply material needs for the worship of Jenjú.

16 (Adeyemi 2018). Focused group discussion with the Alaafin, the Alapini, Alhaji Sheu Ademola, Safara Ajakaiye, Ibrahim Salawu, Baba Awo Morakinyo, Oba Edu, with the Ona-Efa, Tajudeen Barika.
Alhaji Sheu Ademola’s claim was just to honor Alaafin. The Alaafin did not deny the direct ownership of Mowuru.

An important point that is worthy of note is that indigenes of Òyó are not allowed to mask as Jeñjú. A few days to the outing of Jeñjú, the Alapini and members of his compound would search for a stranger from another town, to wear the ékú. Invariably, almost at every outing, different persons are sought to mask. Such persons are paid money and materials in exchange for their services. Having established the ownership, custodian, domain, and masker of Jeñjú, we shall proceed to check the same with Mowuru.

Egúngún Mowuru (Figure 3) is domiciled at the Ona-Efa compound (Figure 2). Ona-Efa compound is located directly opposite the palace of Alaafin of Òyó. The egúngún Mowuru and its paraphernalia are in the custody of Chief Ona-Efa, Mr. Tajudeen Barika. According to Sarafa Ajakaye, the Ona-Efa family comprises the domestic servants of the Alaafin. However, a key informant revealed to the researcher that the ancestry of the Ona-Efa family, in ancient times, from the outset were slaves of the Alaafin; although this was long before modernity. The title Ona-Efa is given to the head of the compound, which refers to the slaves of the Alaafin. The presence of egúngún Mowuru in this family compound is, therefore, a mandate from the Alaafin. Chief Tajudeen Barika, the present Ona-Efa, being the head of the Alaafin’s domestic servants17, is directly in charge.

Figure 3. Egúngún Mowuru during the 2018 annual egúngún festival, Òyó. Source: Photograph by author.

It is usually assumed that the spirit of an egúngún is that of the ancestors of the family or compound to which it belongs. However, egúngún Mowuru is neither the ancestor of the Ona-Efa family, where it is domiciled, nor that of the Alaafin, the owner and worshipper. Egúngún Mowuru is the spirit of a long-dead ancestor of great warriors of Òyó. According to Sarafa Ajakaye, the spirit of Mowuru was invoked by the current Alaafin at a point in time as a result of a consultation with Ifá. He narrated

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17 The Ona-Efa compound has been in existence since ancient times, and the family compound has come to be known all over Oyo. The title of the family head, Ona-Efa, has also been retained to the present time. Unlike in the past, members of the compound now mix freely with members of the public without being stigmatized as slaves.
the time in the history of the reigning Alaafin when he was faced with many political and spiritual enemies. The Alaafin consulted the Ifá oracle to find solutions to these problems. It was as a result of this consultation that Ifá recommended that the Alaafin should invoke and venerate the spirit of Mowuru. Mowuru was a renowned warrior of Old-Ôyó; he was renowned for his many fights and victories for Old Ôyó. His power for victories was therefore summoned and harnessed into the present egúngún Mowuru so that the Alaafin could overcome his challenges and enemies. The enemies of Alaafin, according to Sarafa Ajakaye, are those who oppose the personality of the Alaafin and those who are against the progress and wellbeing of the people of Ôyó.

From the above narrative, it is essential to note that the ancestral spirit in an egúngún may not necessarily be that of any of the direct ancestors of the owner or worshippers. Also observed is that the special abilities or supernatural powers of a human being while alive can be summoned and reanimated after they are dead, as observed in the case of Mowuru. It is possible to invoke the spirits of the dead to harness and put to work the special abilities they had when they were alive.

A case of an ancestral spirit in egúngún unrelated to its worshippers was narrated by Madam Niniola Abake Akande.\(^{18}\) She told of a particular egúngún in Ede, an ancient satellite town of Ôyó. It was said that two young children went to the farm and on their way back home, they picked up two carved wooden dolls. They played with the dolls and took them home. When their parent found the dolls with them, they were made to return them to where they found them. Unfortunately, however, the dolls mysteriously kept returning and reappearing in their house, even before the children got back home from where they went to dispose of them. An Ifá priest was, therefore, consulted to unravel the mystery behind the enigmatic return of the dolls. The result of the divination was that the dolls were possessed by spirits who wished to be venerated and that the family had no choice other than to accept the dolls as objects of worship. The dolls were therefore sewn to an èkú and were annually venerated as egúngún. The family of the children was consequently mandated by Ifá to venerate these ‘unknown’ ancestors who came in the form of egúngún. It was said that up to the present time, the egúngún is still being worshipped. One of the praise songs for the egúngún runs thus:

\[\text{Oríṣà tó tiín ègún waj'oba l’Ede}\]

Meaning:

A spirit that came from the shrubs to become an object of worship in Ede

From the above, it is a ‘given’ that the egúngún may not necessarily represent the ancestors of the owner. Another intriguing fact about Mowuru is that the person that masks as egúngún Mowuru is not from the family compound of Ona-Efa, where the egúngún is domiciled nor from the family of Alaafin, its owner. Instead, a young man from neither family wears the èkú. In such an instance, Mowuru, as an egúngún, is owned by the Alaafin, cared for by Alhaji Tajudeen Barika, of Ona-Efa compound and masked by a member of the Alagbure family; it can thus be said that egúngún Mowuru is indeed a community egúngún.

3. Connection through Constant Invocations, Sacrifices and Communal Worships of Jeńjù and Mowuru

According to the Alapini, Alhaji Chief Sheu Rasheed Ademola, two regular worships and sacrifices are made to the spirit of Jeńjù. The first is an every-5-day worship. On each occasion, Alhaji Ademola and two or more of his family members go to the igbállè\(^{19}\) and make propitiations in materials and edibles to Jeńjù. The materials offered include kola-nut, bean cake, dry gin, and at least one hen is killed. After the offerings, prayers are said to the spirit of Jeńjù. The monthly propitiation, however, involves

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\(^{18}\) Madam Niniola Abake Akande. Madam Niniola, the mother of the present researcher (aged 75) 2003.

\(^{19}\) Igbállè is the place where egúngún paraphernalia are kept, and it is from this location that the masquerader emerges on the occasions of its public outings.
a larger group from the family; the worship involves every available member of the Alapini family. During the worship, kola-nuts are cast\(^{20}\) to inquire from the spirit of \(\text{Je} \, \text{njù} \) what would be required for the month’s worship. After the inquiry, provisions are made for the demands of \(\text{Je} \, \text{njù} \), and the requirements are carried out. More often, these are in the forms of materials and edibles. The materials and edibles are sacrificed with, at least, a goat killed alongside many hens. After sacrifices and worship, there is usually eating and merriment in honour of and felicitation with the spirit of the ancestors.

The regular veneration of \(\text{eg"ungin} \) Mowuru is slightly different from that of \(\text{Je} \, \text{njù} \). Mowuru is venerated every 15 days with gin, hen, goat and moin-moin.\(^{21}\) On the occasion of veneration, the spirit of Mowuru is invoked, and prayers are made to it for peace in the land of Òyò and, specifically, for Alaafin Oba Lamidi Adeyemi III to overcome all his challenges, and evil curses are said against all political enemies of the Alaafin. The warrior spirit of Mowuru is invoked to fight and kill such people. Occasionally, during the \(\text{aorun} \)\(^{22}\) (every 5 days) divination sessions for the Alaafin, there could be specific instruction by the Ifá priest that Mowuru should be venerated. Such worship does not necessarily have to tally with the usual 15-day worship. According to Sarafa Ajakaye,\(^{23}\) one of the primary custodians of Mowuru, “I could be called upon, three times in 1 week to make sacrifices to the spirit of Mowuru; as many times as required”. Ajakaye pointed out that there are occasions when the Alaafin will be visited in a dream by some ancestors and may be commanded to carry out certain sacrifices for them—perhaps to spiritually attract victory for him in particular areas or on some issues. In the instance of such dreams, Mowuru will be venerated and sacrificed to.

It is important to note that at the outset of adoption of an ancestor for worship, the spirit of such an ancestor is invoked with the use of voice and incantations. Alhaji Sheu Ademola pointed out that voicing out the name of the spirits from time to time and making supplications to them is a significant aspect of worship. After invoking the spirit of the ancestor, it is then venerated with materials, edibles and, importantly, blood. The spirit is afterward charged with the responsibilities of guiding and protecting the people. To maintain the established relationship, however, continual veneration and prayers to the spirit and communal worship, such as the annual festivals, are compulsory. For instance, Alhaji Sheu Ademola pointed out that to sustain the presence of the invoked spirit of \(\text{Je} \, \text{njù} \) and, consequently, its potency, it is critical to make blood sacrifices of hens and goats as ingredients for worship.

4. Connexion Through Annual Festival Appearances and Communion of \(\text{Je} \, \text{njù} \) and Mowuru

As observed above, there could be reasons, ranging from oracular consultations to demand by the spirit of the \(\text{eg"ungin} \) itself, to organise periodic communal worship. However, the annual \(\text{eg"ungin} \) festival is a fixed affair. During the festival, the \(\text{eg"ungin} \) will make a public appearance all over town, enjoying communal worship and re-association between the ancestors (the dead) and the people (the living). The annual \(\text{eg"ungin} \) festival in Òyò usually falls within the month of August every year. The occasion is typically colorful for the entire people of Òyò, who often look forward to this festive period (see Figure 4). The period is marked by the physical appearances of the various \(\text{eg"ungin} \) from different family compounds. This event, apart from being a religious one, also adds social and recreational allure. Visitors to the palace square, where the \(\text{eg"ungin} \) converge for performances, are usually on the lookout for which \(\text{eg"ungin} \) will dance best. At the visit of the researcher to the last

\(^{20}\) Kola-nut casting is a way of making inquiries from \(\text{eg"ungin} \), deities and superhuman forces when a choice or decision is to be made. The process involves the casting of two or four halves of a kola-nut in the process of inquiry. The positions assumed by the kola-nut pieces will determine if the statement posed is affirmative or negative. Whichever is the result, further interrogations to decide further actions are made using the same method.

\(^{21}\) A particular Yorùbá food produced with beans. Other ingredients in its recipe include palm oil, salt, seasoning, onions, and pepper.

\(^{22}\) Every 5 days, the Ifá babalawos converges to make divinations for the Alaafin. On such occasions, there could be reasons for the diviners to ask the Alaafin to venerate certain ancestors.

\(^{23}\) Sarafa Ajakaiye is one of the main custodians of Mowuru; he is also a babalawo (Ifá priest).
egúngún festival (August 2018), there were discussions about which egúngún danced best and had the most impressive regalia the previous year. Indeed, a much more modern perception of the outing festival of the egúngún is more like a party. The indigenes of Òyó, home and abroad, converge for merriment. The period provides them with the opportunity to discuss matters that concern individual persons and the development of the Òyó community as a whole. The festival also attracts tourists, locals and foreigners, who wish to study the festival for reasons of research. The Alaafin, in his opening remarks to the 2018 egúngún Annual Festival,24 pointed out that the coming together of Òyó people to re-associate with the spirits of their ancestors on an annual basis had been the reason for the peace and tranquility in the town, and that the spirits draw people from far and near to bless them.

The preparations for the annual public appearance, re-association and communal worship of the spirits of Jerijú and Mowuru are germane to the establishment of a connection between the world of the living and that of the dead. Some activities carried out for the worship of the two egúngún are quite similar. However, we shall discuss that of Jerijú first and then go on to discuss the peculiarities of Mowuru.

The very first preparation for Jerijú’s outing is the scouting for the person who will mask. The person that will wear the eku of Jerijú must be a stranger from another town. On a yearly basis, different persons have had to mask as Jerijú. On locating a person, several sacrifices are made for his physical and spiritual protection. This masker will be paid with money and cloth for the job to be done.

After locating the masker, the next activity involves consultations with the spirits of the ancestors to know the procedures required for the year’s celebration. In the process, the spirit of Jerijú is invoked through chanting, incantations, and pouring of libations with gin. A male goat is killed at the front of Ile-Ogbo,25 and the masker will step on the blood of the goat and drink it. The masker will then be allowed into the ìgbàlè, where he will stand on the stone of Jerijú and say prayers for the king and people of the town. Afterward, he wears the eku and moves out of the ìgbàlè wearing the full regalia of Jerijú.

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24 His Imperial Majesty, Oba Lamidi Adeyemi III. 2018. Speech at the opening of the 2018 Egúngún Annual Festival, Òyó.
25 Ile-Ogbo is the place where Jerijú is kept. It is its own ìgbàlè.
Jẹ̀njugù. At this point, the behaviour of the man is said to change because the spirit of Jẹ̀njugù would have engulfed him, and he would have become the actual Jẹ̀njugù. Chanters will start to sing praises of Jẹ̀njugù:

\textit{Je ń'gbo}, \textit{Je ń'jù}
\textit{Oko Ájé}
\textit{Oko Osó}
\textit{Oko Emèrè}
\textit{Oba gbogbo Egúngùn}

Meaning:

The one that can dominate in the jungle and the savanna
Tormentor of witches
Tormentor of wizard
Tormentor of Emere
The king of all egúngùn

After all the sacrifices and prayers are done, the masquerade then proceeds to dance around the town. The palace of the Alaafin is the point where all the egúngùn converge. At the entrance of the palace, another goat is killed for Jẹ̀njugù. The masker egúngùn will step on the blood and utter connecting prayers for the people, the town, and the king of Òyó. It then enters the palace square for the year’s performances, celebration and most importantly, communion.

The initial preparations for the public appearance of and communion of Mowuru with the people is an elaborate one; this is because, Mowuru as a masquerade, is unique. Because of its peculiarities discussed above, the preparations for its public appearance are intricate. By virtue of the position of the Mowuru to the Alaafin, being the Alaafin’s personal egúngùn, Mowuru will pay a courtesy visit to the Alaafin on the òlògbò day.\footnote{Ôlògbò day is the very first day of the egúngùn festival in Òyó.} On its visit, it will inform the Alaafin of the day of its outing and make known the sacrificial materials it desires. Mowuru will then pray for the Alaafin and then return to its îgbàlè.

On the chosen day of its public outing, invocations and sacrifices are made to the spirit of Mowuru. The procedures of invocation and sacrifices are quite similar to that of Jẹ̀njugù as described above. In the process of its outing, some gesticulations and performances are symbolic and are relevant to the thrust of this study. Once Mowuru steps out of the îgbàlè, the first action it takes is visiting the gravesides of the several Ona-Efa chiefs lined in front of the îgbàlè. At the sides of each grave, Mowuru performs incantations and chanting.

When the egúngùn\footnote{Name withheld, because traditionally, it is unethical in Yorùbá land for people to know the identity of persons behind the masks.} was interviewed, he recounted that he was invoking the spirits of dead ancestors in general through the spirits of the Ona-Efa in the graves. He pointed out that this action was an invitation to the long-dead ancestors to converge for worship and communion with the people of Òyó. He mentioned that in addition to inviting the ancestors, the egúngùn was also praying to the dead to take away to the other world every enemy of Òyó people and that of the Alaafin.

After the invocation and invitation of the ancestors, an earthen pot is then placed in front of Mowuru, and water is poured continuously into it while people chant:

\textsc{Mowuru Ágbàká oliùjù}
\textsc{Mowuru kò níkà nínú}
\textsc{Ó da omi gbógboná sí ono è lára}
\textsc{Mowuru, órin tomi tomi}
Oranyan, Ìbà re o 
Oba Sàngó, Ìbà re o 
Oba Ajálá, Ìbà re o 
Oba Adéniran, Ìbà re o 
Adeyemi Àtándá, Iku Bábá Yéye, Ìbà re o 
Gbogbo ìyìn Oba Òyó, Ìbà yín 
Ìbà ìyìn ìwín tó te Òyó dò 
Bi Mowuru semáa lo sita lééni 
Gbogbo ohun tó Mowuru ba títe, Ategbé níó 
Gbogbo aburú tó bá bíyí bá Lamídí Àtándá ómò Ibírónké 
Ojó tó omo bááá súyó ló ńbájé 
Kítìwọn ńmáábájéni 
Ojó tó ńgbíń báá tónu bo iyó 
Ojó náá ni y'ókú 
To ripe kíí san ìíénu eésan 
Kítìwó fún òwó 
Kòní san ìíénu ìwọ́n ọ́ta Lamídí Àtándá

Meaning:

Mowuru Agbaku, a king in a foreign land
Mowuru is not wicked
However, it poured hot water on its own child
Mowuru goes about with water
Homage to Oranyan (Alaafin of old)
Homage to Sango (Alaafin of old)
Homage to Ajala (Alaafin of old)
Homage to Adaniran (Alaafin of old)
Homage to Atanda, Iku Baba Yeye (the present Alaafin)
Homage to all the Alaafin of Òyó
Homage to the powers and forces that founded Òyó
As Mowuru is going out today
Whatever Mowuru does today, let all go unquestioned
All the evils that may be aimed at Lamidi Atanda (the present Alaafin) the son of Ibironke
The day that salt gets in contact with water, it dissolves
Let the enemies of the Alaafin be destroyed
The day that the snail gets in contact with salt
The snail will die the same day
Because the chaff of the palm kernel is never of any good use
The broom is never at peace
Let all the enemies of Òyó and Lamidi Atanda never find peace

As the chant is going on, Mowuru will use one of the two kòńkdọ, a one-sided axe in each hand (Figure 5), to break the pot. After that, followers and adherents of Mowuru start to use their feet to march on the broken pot (Figure 6), further breaking it into smaller pieces. This action, according to Tajudeen Barika,28 is symbolic of Mowuru’s victory over the enemies of Òyó and the Alaafin.

28 (Barika 2018).
From that point, Mowuru proceeds to the palace. At the entrance of the palace, before entering it, Mowuru sends a message to the Alaafin, asking for materials and goats to be sacrificed to the ancestors of the Alaafin. After this is done, the masquerade felicitates with the people with dance and jubilations. It is then that it enters the palace.

On entering the palace, Mowuru will first go to see the Alaafin to pray for him. It is important to note that Mowuru addresses the Alaafin by his first name, not adding a title or any form of respect appellation used for a king. According to Ajakaye, the spirit Mowuru is an ancestor and a
contemporary of the great ancestors of the Alaafin; therefore, it cannot show the usual respect bestowed on kings by mere men. After the prayers for the Alaafin, Mowuru joins other egúngún at the palace square for communion, dancing, and felicitation with Òyó people.

5. Connection Through Paraphernalia

Jeńjù is a heavily cladded Òyó egúngún. Its èkú29 is made up of a gamut of cloth hanging from its head pad and flowing down to its legs. The cloths are made up of a variety of materials such as damask, velvet, satin, silk, and others (see Figure 7). Mary Ann, Fitzgerald, Drewal and Okediji (Fitzgerald et al. 1995, p. 54) have equally observed that the costume of egúngún is made of several layers of ‘cloth lappets’ of ‘expensive and prestigious textiles, expressing the wealth and status of a family as well as the power of the ancestors’. Another strong identification feature of Jeńjù is the load of objects (erù ère) (see Figure 8) on its head. It has on its head skulls of monkeys and chimpanzees, on the same flat wood surface are other carved objects that appear like charms and amulets. True, the erù ère makes Jeńjù appear unique; it should be noted that Kalilu (1991) has warned that the images on egúngún are less important to the very essence of the egúngún cult. Ère (mask), he suggests, are reflections of the affluence of the owner of the masquerade. However, in this case, the monkey skulls on Jeńjù are said to be symbolic of the traditional belief that Jeńjù can bring death to a witch or wizard.

![Figure 7. Èkú of egúngún Jeńjù. Source: Photograph by author.](image)

29 Èkú is the total dressing and gears of an Egúngún. The èkú is believed to possess its own powers, such that an ordinary person, not sanctified for the purpose of masking, dares not touch the èkú. It is a charged regalia.
The cloth is, however, enough to hide the identity of the man behind the mask (Figure 9). Around the neck of the
kònkòsò, spreading to the belly button frontal part of the egúngún is a large bib-like cloth decorated with dark blue and gold floral motifs. The bib-like material is taped around the hems with a red lace that has a zig-zag edge. The entire bib-like piece is placed over a larger white cloth that equally spreads from the neck to the lower part of the abdomen. Other materials on the egúngún are large pleats of colorful clothing.

However, there is unique paraphernalia held at all times by Mowuru. The egúngún wears white gloves and holds in its hands two kònkòsò (narrow end, one-sided axes as shown in Figure 5), one in each hand. According to the egúngún, because Mowuru is an egúngún of war, the kònkòsò is an instrument of war, symbolically used to fight the enemies of Alaafin and the people of Òyó. The story is told that the kònkòsò is the war tool favored by the original Mowuru and which the old Oyo warrior used during his many battles. Now that his spirit has engulfed the masker, he is wont to adopt similar behavior. As discussed above, when the egúngún is about to come out for its public appearance, Mowuru uses the kònkòsò to break the pot placed before him at the point of its stepping out of the igbalè. The action is symbolic of victories over the enemies of Alaafin and Òyó as a whole.

A close examination of the èkù after the festival reveals two hidden parcels; one is sealed underneath the èkù, right on top of the head of the egúngún, while the other is underneath the cloth towards the chest. Tajudeen Barika pointed out that the parcels are Ifá literature and ıkìn that instituted the worship of Mowuru. It is also these parcels that serve as a material link of the èkù with the spirit of Mowuru. He explained that there is no amount of reworking and extemporizations on the èkù that has ever affected the parcels. These two items (Figure 10), he said, have been part of the èkù from the very beginning of the adoption of the worship of Mowuru.

Figure 8. Close-up view of the crù èrè (load of images) on the head of Egúngún Jeñjà. Source: Photograph by author.

30 Bin is Ifá divination palm nuts.
The duties of Iya Àgan and Iya Mojè as women leaders in the Òyó community.

Another observation that emerged from the study is that it is usually taken for granted that all women who have attained the age of menopause. At this age, women are said to have become men.

Indeed, women are customarily selected from the family of éléégún. The sewing or restoration of őkú is, as a rule, done inside the ìgbálè, because it is believed that the őkú is one of the secrets of egúngún. Indeed, women are

Photograph by author.

Figure 9. Close-up of Egúngún Mowuru’s Face Veil. Source: Photograph by author.

Figure 10. The circled part shows the hidden Ifá literature and őkín embedded under the őkú. Source: Photograph by author.

The őkú of egúngún is usually sewn by men who are called the Aláàrán. The Aláàrán are customarily selected from the family of eléégún. The sewing or restoration of őkú is, as a rule, done inside the ìgbálè, because it is believed that the őkú is one of the secrets of egúngún. Indeed, women are
forbidden from entering the igbálè, so as not to know the secrets of egúngún. Although women are not involved in the dressing up of egúngún and the putting together of its paraphernalia, they are honored with the egúngún titles of Iya Āgàn and Iya Mojè. These titles can only be bestowed on women who have attained the age of menopause. At this age, women are said to have become men. The duties of Iya Āgàn and Iya Mojè as women leaders in the egúngún entourage are to accompany the egúngún during its outings and to chant and sing praises of the egúngún. A few women are also involved in minor decision making and chores. On no account are women allowed inside the igbálè.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In the process of establishing the performative activities and paraphernalia of connection employed by Egúngún Jeríjú and Mowuru in linking the Òyó community with the spiritual world, some issues emerged.

The performative activities that institute connection and communing with the spirits of the egúngún share basic worship principles as obtained in some other religions. These activities include voicing out invocations, offering of materials, and in the case of egúngún worship, the spilling of blood as a sacrifice to the spirit of Jeríjú and Mowuru; all these are keys to cementing communion. Also, the consistent and constant veneration of the spirits of egúngún Jeríjú and Mowuru from time to time are equally important. At the annual festivals, the spirits of the egúngún are celebrated and made to pray and felicitate with the people of the community. At these festivals, the spiritual powers of the ancestors are harnessed for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the Òyó community. All these and much more, make the egúngún force a compendium of beliefs and actions in harnessing the spiritual powers of the ancestors for the benefit of the living.

Another observation that emerged from the study is that it is usually taken for granted that all egúngún reside in the family compound of their owners, and that the spirit of the egúngún is always that of the ancestor of the worshippers and the family compound where it is domiciled. All these assumptions apply to many egúngún, but in the present research, all have been demonstrated not to be so, at least, not at all times. For instance, Egúngún Mowuru, which is owned by the Alaafin Lamidi Adeyemi III, is placed in the family compound of the Ona-Efà. Though venerated by the Ona-Efà family, the masker of the egúngún is from Ilé-Alagbure. Another case is that of egúngún Jeríjú, the egúngún is domiciled at Oke-Logun, and its mask can only be worn by a total stranger to the community.

All these observations are pointers to the very essence of egúngún as a community religion and a unifying force of the people.

A very fundamental belief on which the worship of egúngún depends on, is the preservation of the lofty ideals upon which the community was founded. It is to conserve peaceful co-existence and communal living as intended by the founders (alálé). As much as these ideals are jealously guarded, undesirable elements cannot but exist within human societies. Such persons are usually potential threats to the tenets of the founding of the community and its communal co-existence. In traditional times, such persons were safely taken care of by the forces of egúngún.

According to Alhaji Sheu Ademola, such persona non grata are eliminated by Jeríjú. He also said that in traditional times, Jeríjú could be unleashed to eliminate a witch or wizard, as indicated in its above praise poem. Alhaji Sheu Ademola observed that the fact that the egúngún can no longer perform such a militant role is an indication of modernity in the worship of egúngún. This assertion is also found in a statement made by Alaafin Oba Lamidi Adeyemi, when he pointed out that the egúngún culture was established for the bonding of communities and to take care of too radically-minded people.

The Alaafin also pointed out that what informed the Yorùbá belief in egúngún is their worldview of ‘duality’. The duality of positive and negative; physical and spiritual. He observed that because a physical world exists, the Yoruba, therefore, believe that a spiritual one also exists. He pointed out that the things that happen in the physical world are predetermined in the spiritual world. For these reasons, the Òyó-Yorùbá people have, in times past, employed egúngún as a medium of positive
communication to affect the supernatural to benefit the physical. By implication, the worship of egúngún by the Yorùbá people is a connecting bridge between two realms of existence, with the aim of maintaining equilibrium and, consequently, ontological balance.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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