



AN ANALYTICAL INQUIRY INTO ORIGIN OF OGBOMOSO LOMOLEHIN MASQUERADE AND ITS ESSENCE

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Abstract

This paper consciously investigates the origin of Lomolehin masquerade, one of the elder masquerades in Ogbomoso town of Oyo State, Nigeria. This is as a result of struggles to address the dearth of information on

Keywords: *Inquiry, Lomolehin masquerade, Origin, Ogbomoso, Essence*

individual traditional masquerades, especially among the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria, as against the general

INTRODUCTION

In the Yoruba's philosophy about death, it is believed that when a person dies, such becomes a divinity to be worshipped on bent knees. This idea then becomes a significant premise on which the Yoruba's belief in ancestral worship is anchored. Beier in Adegbola (1998), further affirms the Yoruba's belief in 'spiritism.' Hence, the worship of the ancestors is based on a firm belief that the 'spirit' of a human being never dies but continues to influence the life of the community from another sphere, after it has left the physical body. One of the unique ways through which the ancestors are believed to communicate with the

study of masquerade justification of this Ogbomoso over a traditional aspects, such paper. A qualitative century ago from as religious, social, method of research with elsewhere, and its actual cultural and political, historical approach was, ancestral linkage has which have been therefore, adopted to been lost to time due to repeatedly studied. Each analyze and discuss the lack of historical traditional masquerade, obtained data from both records. Thus, the paper however, is believed to the primary and recommends that, in the have its own specific secondary sources, masquerade attributes and essence employing a purposive scholarship, efforts that distinguishes it sampling technique. The should be intensified by from others, yet it has paper briefly x-rays the scholars to study other been given scant or no origin of masquerades in specific traditional attention, most times, in Yoruba land and later masquerades to increase literature. Makinde expounds the essence of the knowledge of the (2005) and Omipidan Lomolehin masquerade. general public on them (2017) are among the Finding reveals and and their essence for very few authors that concludes that cultural continuity and ever pin-pointed their Lomolehin masquerade posterity, other cultural masquerade studies to is not indigenous, but a festivals of importance the specific/individual war masquerade that inclusive.. ones, hence, the was brought into

living, therefore, is their manifestation on earth in the form of costumed figures, known as *Egungun* (masquerades) in the Yoruba language.

Like many other Yoruba sub-groups, Ogbomoso people also have a masquerade tradition, which they refer to as *Odun Egungun* (Masquerade Festival). This *Egungun* festival succeeds that of *Oro* festival and is usually celebrated annually in the month of August before the new yam harvests (Jekayinfa, 2014). These masquerades appear in various costumes, which are sewn to cover their entire bodies during annual festivals or whenever traditional needs arise. Typical examples of elder masquerades in Ogbomoso include *Lomolehin* (the focus of this paper), *Ajomogbodo*, *Olukotun*, *Danafojura*, *Babalugbon*, *Lobanika*, *Awodagbese*, *Baale-Oya*, *Obadimeji*, among several others. *Lomolehin*, which literally means “having possession of large followers or the one with many children,” is a masquerade that belongs to

Olugbade Ajigbotifa's compound, *Oke-Ajawa*, *Idi-gba* of Ogbomoso. Though, *Lomolehin* poses certain aesthetics that are symbolic, as well as essential to its existence and popularity among the people, but its real origin still remains a mystery. It is in this regard that the *Lomolehin* masquerade of Ogbomoso in Oyo State constitutes a spirit, worthy of interrogation to examine its origin and essence.

Sequel to the nature of this paper, the writers find the qualitative mode of research appropriate in order to be able to investigate deeply the circumstances that surround the genesis of *Lomolehin* masquerade in Ogbomoso. Baumgartner, Strong and Hensley in Bondzie (2014) assert that qualitative research generally includes research methods that rely heavily upon extensive observations and in-depth interviews that result in non-numerical data. Hence, the historical approach was further found fit for use to analyze and discuss the obtained data, using a purposive sampling technique to exclude people who do not fit into this particular profile of interviewees.

An Upshot of Origin of Masquerade in Yoruba Land

The origin of *Egungun* in Yoruba land is equally surrounded with varied myths, oral narratives and written accounts that are completely dissimilar. These occurrences, therefore, make it difficult to ascertain where, when and how masquerading began precisely (Adeyemo, 2019). For example, Olajubu and Ojo in Adolphsen (2012), among several other authors with different views, expound that, when informants are asked about the origin of *Egungun*, some would profess ignorance, others would narrate 'stories of origin,' others, especially cult members, would refuse to divulge what they regard as cult secrets, and others informants would even say 'it is our fathers' tradition, we inherited it, and no one knows how it began.'

By and large, though the real origin of how the masquerade tradition came into Yoruba land is yet to be clearly defined owing to divergent views on myths, theories and oral traditions, which make a consensus on the issue difficult. Nonetheless, this paper has thrown its strength on the oral history and documentation that traced Nupe land, as the potential origin of masquerade tradition, from where it diffused to other places in Yoruba land. This position is a sequel to certain observations and convictions within the reviewed literature in Ekpo (1977), Na'Allah (1996), Adegbola (1998) and Awofeso (2013).

The Origin of *Lomolehin* Masquerade

Lomolehin masquerade of Ogbomoso land is one of the most senior masquerades with a cylindrical built costume and a carved headgear, in an anthropomorphic form, known as *Ere Eegun*. Based on oral narratives by Pa. Ezekiel Moronfade Adedeji, its origin is shrouded in mystery. It was Pa. Olaniyi Akano-Aro of Olugbade Ajigbotifa's compound, whose uncle happened to be a warrior that found a folded garment hidden in a dirty dark woollen-sack under a tree at the war front many years ago, which later turned out to be a masquerade costume (see plate I). This occurred when Pa. Olaniyi Akano-Aro's uncle and other colleagues over-powered their enemies during the said war, and the latter retreated and surrendered. They captured some of their warriors, as prisoners of war, and came back home with other material spoils of war.



Plate I: *The Original Lomolehin Masquerade costume that was brought home from the war front, hung in a secluded room during 2017 Festival. Photograph by Peter Adeyemo.*

Many years later after the war was over, strange events began to unfold within the family circle, which were hitherto unknown to the family members in the compound. Young children were dying in quick successions of terrible diseases, that defied treatments, and a plague of barrenness also suddenly became conspicuous among the married couples. These mysterious situations became severe that the elders had to meet in order to brainstorm over the situation, and after their deliberations, had to quickly come to the conclusion that the *Ifa* oracle (the Yoruba god of divination and wisdom) should be consulted, to find lasting solutions to the

raging disasters. It was at this point they were made to understand that, the garment that Pa. Olaniyi Akan-Aro's uncle, who by then was late, brought home from the war front, was not an ordinary one. It was a costume of a powerful masquerade, and because the spirit behind that garment had not been appeased for a long time, as the original owners used to do, the spirit inherent in the masquerade costume was displeased and hence, the cause of the prevailing misfortunes that the family was experiencing. They were made to understand that, the happenings at hand, were just tips of the iceberg, and if they were not careful and lucky to procure a way out in time, that might be the end of the family, as they were practically heading for extinction.

Fortunately, *Babalawo*, the custodian of *Ifa* oracle, as further reported by Pa. Adedeji and affirmed by *Alaagba* Tunji Olojede, eventually proffered conditional solutions to the elders. The *Babalawo* asked them to make great sacrifices, to appease the spirit of the costume immediately, and subsequently, would begin to wear the costume to honour the spirit annually, so as to continue to protect their young ones and ensure prompt fertility. Until these are done and adhered to, normalcy might be a mirage to the family. The elders unanimously agreed to enquire further from the *Ifa* oracle about what name the spirit in the costume would be called. They were told "*Olomo-lehin*" which literally translates as "the one with many children or large followers." It was from there that "*Lomolehin*" was derived as a short-form of *Olomo-lehin*.

True to the *Ifa* oracle's sayings, according to Pa. Adedeji and confirmed by Moses Adedeji, no sooner the instructions given by the oracle were obeyed, than the awry events came to a sudden halt. Children were not mysteriously dying again, and the women began to conceive pregnancies as desired. Since then, this has become a yearly culture to members of *Olugbade Ajigbotifa* compound, to join others during the annual masquerade festival in Ogbomoso to celebrate *Lomolehin* masquerade. This account of *Lomolehin's* origin corroborates with that of *Okenigbegbe* masquerade in Iragbiji, Osun State as reviewed in the literature and *Oloolu* masquerade, the most dreaded masquerade in Ibadan. The history of *Oloolu* masquerade for instance, according to Omipidan (2017) has it that, a brave warrior named Ayorinde Aje who fought battles alongside Oderinola, Ogunmola, Ogbori-efon and other Ibadan warriors, went to war in Ogbagi, a town in Akoko in Ondo State. During the war, it is recalled that no one was able to face the powerful war masquerade of the town, which was *Oloolu*. It was only Ayorinde Aje who

could challenge and eventually defeated the masquerade. He then took the *Oloolu* bearer and his wife captive and led them to Ibadan. On their way, the wife of the bearer refused to continue the journey, possibly because of tiredness, and so in annoyance, Ayorinde Aje beheaded her and fastened the head to the outfit of *Oloolu*. The conspicuous human skull on *Oloolu* costume today is said to be the very head of the beheaded woman. This was how *Oloolu* masquerade began in Ibadan and the reason why women are forbidden to see *Oloolu* masquerade. Could there be any link between *Lomolehin* and *Oloolu*? This is because it was gathered, that *Oloolu* masquerade's wearer sometimes visits Ogbomoso during masquerade festival to celebrate with *Lomolehin* masquerade and vice versa, as narrated by Pa. Adedeji.

However, Pa. Akano-Aro, being the eldest and the one who knew how this costume was brought home, became the first chosen masquerader to wear the costume (the old one in plate I), in celebration and honour of *Lomolehin* masquerade, and this he did for several years until he became unfit physically, due to old age. In order to forestall a repeat of their former dreaded experiences, it is recalled by Moses Adedeji that, the elderly man, Pa. Akano-Aro, after due consultation with *Ifa*, chose Ezekiel Moronfade Adedeji, his nephew, who as at then, was living in Ibadan, from where he came home every year to join the celebration of *Lomolehin* during masquerade festival. Although his selection as the next wearer of *Lomolehin* costume, as reported by Adekunle Moronfade, did not go down well with some members of the family, who felt there were other better-qualified persons, who were homegrown and based than Adedeji. Hence, it marked the beginning of a series of terrible conspiracies that later birthed another round of colossal losses to the family at large.

A few years later, these disgruntled elements within the family, conspired against the candidacy of Moronfade Adedeji, as the sole wearer of *Lomolehin* costume, and so, summoned the courage to confront the old Pa. Akano-Aro, that they have another person who could as well wear the costume effectively and even perform better than Adedeji. Though, the person they had in mind was not a member of the family. The octogenarian Akano-Aro strictly warned them against such move, that no one that is not a member of the family dares put on the sacred costume, and even as a family member, one must be chosen appropriately to qualify. They afterwards feigned an acceptance that year, but not long after (barely five years later), Pa. Akano-Aro transited (died) to be

with his ancestors on 4th of April, 1987. These same people came up again before the commencement of the next masquerade festival that, there was another person who would wear the costume. Pa. Moronfade Adedeji, the god-approved masquerader of *Lomolehin*, declined and sternly resisted this proposal, but was also faced with stiff resistance and the disagreement degenerated into a serious face-off in the family.

Consequently, Pa. Adedeji succumbed to his troublesome brothers and their evil desires to sabotage the tradition, and that year's celebration, for them, became turbulent, obstructed and deadly. The unimaginable and unexpected happened. The hired man of the conspirators to wear the *Lomolehin* costume was Kuriri by name. He was not even an indigene of Ogbomoso as narrated by Moses Adedeji. He disclosed that, during the outing for the public performance, Kuriri, the strange masquerader, kept groaning of tiredness, dizziness and the load on him, but since it is a taboo in Yoruba land for any elder masquerade to fall in the public, they (conspiratorial brothers) stage-managed the whole drama for the masquerader to stay on for sometimes and returned back home earlier than *Lomolehin* masquerade used to. Subsequently, Kuriri, the hired masquerader of *Lomolehin*, as disclosed by Moses Adedeji, never saw the following day alive. He died of a mysterious plague over the night.

The English saying that, "after a storm, the sea is in agitation," finds expression among the *Lomolehin* masquerade's family members the following year. Pa. Adedeji, on a deep reflection of what had previously happened, openly declined wearing the costume further, and thus told his conspirators in the family meeting, before the commencement of the next festival, to look for who would be wearing the costume. The fear of the unknown gripped everybody, including Pa. Adedeji, and so, *Lomolehin* masquerade was not celebrated that year, and this then marked the beginning of untold woes in the family. All the conspirators had the first shares. They began to lose their children to death one after the other again, as a result of the sudden outbreak of a mysterious disease. Moses Adedeji and Adekunle Moronfade further confirmed that barrenness and poverty resurfaced with unbearable pains to the family. Not long after, barely some years later, Pa. Adedeji's first son too, suddenly became struck with a terrible ailment that defied treatments. He, in a hurry, consulted the *Ifa* oracle, and he was told to rescind his decision in earnest if he did not want to lose his son. He consented, but still expressed fear to wear

the *Lomolehin* costume, and asked if there was a way out. Fortunately, an answer came his way to, as a matter of urgency, sew another costume, as an alternative for the *Lomolehin*'s original costume, and invoke its spirit into the new one, which he did without delay (plate II a&b).



(a.)



(b.)

Plate II: a. The new *Lomolehin* Masquerade costume hung in a secluded room (served as a grove), and (b.) the same worn by the masquerader during 2017 Festival. Photograph by Peter Adeyemo.

Having produced the new costume, the former one was said to have been first kept inside spiritual dyed-water, *omi aro*, and later hung in a secluded room permanently, from where the wearer of the new costume must annually pay obeisance and homage, before proceeding for public performance (plate III). This occurrence has made everyone in the family to learn in a very hard way, never to attempt again to profane the sacredness of *Lomolehin* masquerade. The old and original *Lomolehin* costume after its replacement with the new one henceforth, as narrated by Moses Adedeji, became forbidden to be taken out for public view, except by the legitimate family members or on a special

arrangement by the masquerade's custodians. However, the reason for this was not disclosed.



Plate III: *The Masquerader, Idowu Adedeji paying the annual obeisance and homage to the old Lomolehin's costume, before proceeding for public performance during 2017 Festival. Photograph by Peter Adeyemo.*

In view of the preceding accounts, therefore, Pa. Adedeji had since then, kept wearing this new *Lomolehin* costume until about four years ago, when he, too, became weak on health ground, and also did as his late uncle, Pa. Akano-Aro, the first masquerader, by asking his own second son, Idowu Adedeji, to begin to wear the costume of *Lomolehin* as the next masquerader, as chosen by the *Ifa* Oracle. Pa. Adedeji (plate IV) also joined his ancestors on the 4th of April, 2017, at 12 noon. His transition was spiritually symbolic as he died the same hour, date and month; the first masquerader died, which was at 12 pm of 4th April, 1987. This, according to Adekunle Moronfade, affirmed that his selection as a masquerader of *Lomolehin* was not ordinary, but gods-ordained.



Plate IV: Late Pa. Ezekiel Moronfade Adedeji, with his son, Idowu Adedeji, in the costume of Lomolehin during 2016 Festival. Photograph by Peter Adeyemo.

Meanwhile, looking at the old rested costume critically, one could see a significant difference with little similarities between it and the new one, in terms of the headpiece, fabric materials and colours. The dark brown headpiece is quite different from the new one structurally, stylistically and size-wise. It is bigger than the size of the new one, stylized in a manner that reminisces *Epa* mask and depicted with a plaited head that characterizes the appearance of *Sango*, the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning. The old costume comprised majorly of locally made Yoruba woven material, *Kijipa*, patterned with blue colour lines on a milky-white background and the few strips of lappets on it are produced with variegated old African prints (*Ankara*) mixed with few stripped *Kijipa*. The woven net beneath the

headpiece where the masquerader sees, is longer in size, thicker in texture and designed with thick blue horizontal lines on a white background. Outwardly, the costume has a cylindrical form too, but slimmer than the new one and also have some of the magical items on it that appear similar to the new one. According to Idowu Adedeji, some of these magical items on the rested costume were removed in order to re-fortify the new costume by his father, Pa. Ezekiel Moronfade Adedeji.

It is imperative to state at this juncture that, all over the Yoruba land, there is a general belief that masquerades (*Egungun*) represent the costumed spirits of the ancestors, who come from heaven periodically to visit, interact and bless their living descendants (Aremu, 1991). However, it is discovered that not all the Yoruba masquerades are actually direct ancestors in the land. Some are brought from war fronts, as war masquerades, and linked to certain ancestral spirits of the town, where the war took place, but to others, their histories may be obscured. For example, Famule (2005) asserts that “some *egungun* in the past had led the communities in wars, such as in Oyo, where *Jenju* and *Lagbookun* led the Oyo warriors in wars.” Also, a critical look at the genesis of masquerades in Nupe land, from where this paper believes masquerading emerged from, was to frighten their women and children, and particularly their neighbouring ethnic groups into submission. These appear like war masquerades too. There are also others, as learnt by Isiaka Ojerinde, that are personally created and named by their indigenous founders, based on various reasons, but not without due consultations with the supervising chiefs and priests in charge of masquerade cults. A good example of such is *Aribidara* masquerade in Ogbomoso as reported by Adepoju (2006).

In another probing dimension that unsettles these writers is the observation of Kalilu (1984), that “because of the rite and the fact that, *Egungun* masquerades participate in community festivals in which ancestors are worshipped, they have been linked with ancestral worship.” This means that *Egungun* masquerades might not really be any known ancestor, but perhaps a tribal entity that enhances the social life of the community at the regular intervals. Be that as it may, since it is noted that masquerades get involved during the celebration of the ancestral worship, they are then concluded to be the ancestors. To give credence to the foregoing, *Egungun Elewe* of Igbomina in northeastern Yoruba land, as also observed by Babalola (1998), is not considered an ancestor, but rather stands as a carrier of messages of prayers,

wishes and thanksgiving from the living to the ancestors. Could this be the reason why Baiyelo (2006) asserts that “*Egungun* is a subtle reference to the undifferentiated agent of the ancestors, who comes home from the dead and is popularly referred to as *Ara Orun*?” Contrarily, Oladimeji (1992), in between the two preceding opinions, holds that “*Egungun* may not necessarily be a particular spirit of an individual in the family or community, but in most cases, the collective reincarnated spirits of ancestors. Consequently, it becomes a consecrated festive reunion of the living and the dead.” These temporary visits, according to the author, eventually turned out to be annual festivals in most Yoruba societies. The date though varies from one place to the other but mostly coincides with yam harvesting periods. It is instructive, however, to note that the Yoruba do not celebrate yam festival like the Igbo. All of these put together were among the reasons for the controversy and questions of how, where, when among the scholars about the origin of masquerade in the Yoruba land. Nonetheless, sequel to the preceding narratives, *Lomolehin*'s origin in Ogbomoso belongs to this category, as its ancestral linkage/identity cannot be perfectly established. This is because the costume was taken from the war front and its true owner could actually not be recollected due to the absence of historical documentation over the years. Howbeit, its form and, most notably, benevolence to the people of Ogbomoso since its emergence, when properly appeased and honoured, cannot be overemphasized. These traits are what evoke *Lomolehin* masquerade's appeal and, as a result, endears it to the people.

The Essence of *Lomolehin* Masquerade

The importance of the inherent nature of *Lomolehin* masquerade cannot really be overstated. Apart from its beautiful appearance through its colourful costume, its essence which impacts positively on the lives of the people is a major significant feature of the masquerade and the rationale behind its large followers during festivals. According to Pa. Ezekiel Moronfade and Adigun Ogunlade, *Lomolehin* masquerade procures solutions to virtually all life predicaments that are brought to it, both physical and spiritual, if only the concerned afflicted will not despise or doubt the capability of the masquerade. *Lomolehin* is reputed for its benevolence and rapport with the people and other elder masquerades in Ogbomoso. These projected intrinsic values, to a large extent, make the masquerade famous in the land.

The essence of *Lomolehin* masquerade is, thus, characterized by, blessing the barren, healing the sick, renewal of drowsy relationships and resolving of disputes, especially among the family members, among others. All of these aforementioned further help in bringing the socio-cultural significance of *Lomolehin* masquerade to the limelight among its counterparts. Mrs. Aderonke Amusan is a typical example among several other barren that have been helped conceived and delivered babies (plate v). Based on her story, she had prayed and did all manners of medical tests and otherwise for over six years, but to no avail until her encounter with the *Lomolehin* masquerade in 2015, which eventually yielded the desired result of a bouncing baby boy, named Ojelade.



Plate V: Mrs. Aderonke Amusan and her baby with the Masquerade during 2017 Festival.

Photograph by Peter Adeyemo.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper concludes that *Lomolehin* masquerade is not indigenous to Ogbomoso land, but a war masquerade that was brought into Ogbomoso over a century ago from elsewhere, and its actual ancestral linkage has been lost to time due to lack of historical records. It was a presumed ancestral spirit of another town in Yoruba land or a masquerade created to bamboozle other people into submission, a reminiscent account of Nupe masquerades' origin in the present-day Niger State, during the era of inter-tribal wars in Nigeria. The paper, therefore, recommends that in the masquerade scholarship, efforts should be intensified by scholars and researchers to study and document other specific or individual traditional masquerades. This is so important to avoid stifling of this cultural heritage but rather to increase the knowledge of the general public on them and their essences for cultural continuity and posterity, other cultural festivals inclusive.

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- Adigun Ogunlade – Male, age: 64 years, Carpenter, member of *Egúngún* cult and custodian of *Lòmólèhìn* masquerade. Olugbade Ajigbotifa's

compound, Oke-Ajawa, Ògbómòṣó. Interviewed on 26/8/2017 during the festival.

Alaagba Túnjì Olojede – Age: 84 years, Blacksmith and custodian of *Lòmólẹ̀hìn* Masquerade, Aged member. Olugbade Ajigbotifa's compound, Oke-Ajawa, Ògbómòṣó. Interviewed on 27/8/2017 at his residence.

Ìdòwú Adédèjì – Male, age: 36 years, Musician and masquerader, *Lòmólẹ̀hìn* masquerade, Olugbade Ajigbotifa's compound, Oke-Ajawa, Ògbómòṣó. Interviewed on 26/8/2016, 27/8/2017 at his residence and through mobile phone on several occasions.

Isiaka Ojerinde – Male, age 54 years, Driver and custodian of *Lòmólẹ̀hìn* masquerade. Olugbade Ajigbotifa's compound, Oke-Ajawa, Ògbómòṣó. Interviewed on 27/8/2017

Moses Adédèjì – Male, age: 55 years, Auto-mobile mechanic and custodian of *Lòmólẹ̀hìn* masquerade. Olugbade Ajigbotifa's compound, Oke-Ajawa, Ògbómòṣó. Interviewed on 26/8/2016 and 27/8/2017 at his residence.

Mrs. Aderonke Amusan – Age: 37 years, Trader and a beneficiary of *Lòmólẹ̀hìn* masquerade's benevolent gestures. Olugusi Agbede's compound, Ijeru-Oja, Ògbómòṣó. Interviewed on 27/8/2017 during the festival.

Pa. Ezekiel Morónfadé Adédèjì – Age: 73 years, traditional herbalist and masquerader, *Lòmólẹ̀hìn* masquerade, Olugbade Ajigbotifa's compound, Oke-Ajawa, Ògbómòṣó. Interviewed on 26/8/2016 at his residence and on phone on 12/2/2017.