

Eegun Ogun

War Masquerades in Ibadan in the Era of Modernization

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all photos by the author

When I arrived at the home of Chief Ojetunde Akinleye Asoleke at about 8:50 am on June 19, 2007, on the third day of the Egungun festival in Ibadan, Southwestern Nigeria, I was informed that the leader of the masquerade group, Olori Alagbaa¹ had a very pressing emergency. Forty-five minutes before Alapansanpa (Fig. 1) was billed to appear in public, Chief Asoleke had just received a call from the Divisional Police Officer in charge of Mapo and its environs that unless the contractual papers of authorization allowing Alapansanpa to parade around the ancient city were signed, the masquerade would not be allowed to come out. Consequently, I rode on the back of an *okada* (a motorbike taxi), in company of Chief Asoleke, for about a mile to the ancestral home of Alapansanpa in the Kobomoje-Oranyan quarters of the old city. Close to two hundred of the teeming supporters of Alapansanpa, together with a huge contingent of policemen, armed to the teeth, were already anxiously awaiting the appearance of the masquerade, oblivious to the power tussle unfolding at the commencement of this spectacular event.

It was an intensely edgy, utterly nerve-wracking festive atmosphere pervaded with a lot of anxieties. While many people were hanging together in small and large groups on the major street leading into the area, others were engaged in heated arguments and discussion about the expected appearance of their favorite masquerade. There was a lot of hand shaking and back slapping, together with heavy consumption of alcohol, which was invariably accompanied by very loud conversations layered with a curious admixture of the pungent smell of marijuana and tobacco smoke in the air. Tucked somewhere beyond the main building, in between some dilapidated structures, was a very plain, nondescript building serving as the haven (*igbale*) for the famous war-

rior masquerade. There was blood, palm oil, alcoholic beverages, and water sprinkled all over the floor (Fig. 2) at the portal of the building where the masked performer was soon to emerge for its highly anticipated procession around the city. A few feet away, a similar propitiation of oil, blood, liquor, and water annointed an elevated mound upon which the masquerader was to stand while simultaneously invoking the spiritual powers of Esu Laalu, the divinity of the crossroads and messenger of the gods, and Ogun, the deity of war and creativity and patron of hunters, warriors, and all users of iron implements. The invocation equally involves a recitation of the praise poetry (*oriki*) and acknowledgement of the long line of departed ancestors of this highly venerated warrior lineage in Ibadan.

Alapansanpa is one of the highly revered and dreaded masquerades in the city of Ibadan. During the Yoruba civil wars (1793–1893), Alapansanpa and many other senior masquerades, including Oloolu, Abidielege, Agbo Ogede, Atipako (Fig. 3), and Obadimeji (Fig. 4), collectively accompanied Ibadan warriors on their military campaigns, particularly against the Ijebus and the Egbas to the south and their bitterest enemies, the Ijesas and the Ekitis, as well as the Fulani Jihadists stationed at Ilorin to the north (see Johnson 2006). Indeed, Ibadan was initially settled as a military outpost and frontier community from around the 1820s by various warlords fleeing the social crisis arising from the disintegration and dismemberment of Oyo Katunga, the last of the great Yoruba kingdoms. And it was from this location that these warlords began to unleash a reign of terror on other Yoruba communities for the express purpose of slave raiding and the control of the trade routes to the coast (Johnson 2006).

Back to our visit; on reaching the ancestral compound of Ogundeji, the Alagbaa instantly made straight for a crowded room in the *igbale* to meet the masked performer, who would



1 Egungun Ogundeji, a.k.a Alapansanpa, June 19, 2007, Ibadan, Nigeria.

soon be transformed into an otherworldly entity. Surrounded by several attendants in states approaching semi-consciousness or in a trancelike position, a man was lying on the floor. After some heated exchanges between the attendants and the Alagbaa, the masked performer finally appended his signature to the controversial documents, and we immediately left the scene.

Unlike the other masquerade groups that had previously visited the home of the Alagbaa to sign the contractual papers of authorization in readiness for their public appearance and procession, members of the Alapansanpa group had not done that. This complex interchange mirrors in remarkable manner the dynamics of power between several contending forces in modern Yoruba society. In one breath, it appears that a progressive, peace-loving, and educated leader of the masquerade group, whose father was a member of the Nigeria Police, had deliberately created this bureaucratic bottleneck as a means of curtail-

ing the activities of some recalcitrant supporters of the Egungun cult. Some of the overzealous supporters of the warrior masquerades often hijack their public appearances as an opportunity to rehash old animosities by unleashing a reign of terror on defenseless and vulnerable members of the public, especially people with divergent or contrary political opinion from theirs. Others merely seize the opportunity to pick the pockets of unsuspecting or careless onlookers at the spectacular events. On this day, the council of masked performers, in collaboration with the police, had reached an agreement to imprison, for a period of six months, any erring member of their group who contravened the laws. Nobody in the entourage of the masquerade could brandish any weapons, including cudgels, knives, cutlasses, and guns. Additionally, any member of the public who sought to restrict the activities or disrobe a masked performer would similarly be sent to prison. In a remarkable twist of irony, the same apparatus of the state previously derided and ridiculed by the Egungun cult is now enthusiastically embraced while curtailing excessive use of brute force wielded by the leaders of some of the Egungun groups. The agreement went a long way in restraining the entourage, although ultimately a few errant members were arrested and subsequently thrown in jail. The present arrange-



2 Sprinkle of blood at the portal of the building, June 20, 2007, Ibadan, Nigeria.

ment demonstrates ways in which collaboration between agents of the State, represented by the police, and the old, typified by the Egungun cult, fosters peaceful coexistence and cooperation in modern Yoruba society.

My goal in this essay is, first, to demonstrate ways in which masquerading is used as a weapon of social control through military aggression and conventional warfare. In spite of its hallowed connection to ancestral veneration, Egungun masquerading was an important cultural phenomenon purposefully deployed by the Oyo-Yoruba for the prosecution of the wars of the nineteenth century. Secondly, I intend to critically examine the costumes of the masked performers and argue that those costumes constitute explicit sources of spiritual powers specifically devised as military armors for the physical and psychological protection of their users. In this way, I hope to add to the growing body of literature on a tiny but neglected aspect of Yoruba visual culture, hitherto unexamined in the annals of Yoruba social and cultural history.

THE MYSTERY OF AGAN

By reenacting some of these rituals, particularly during the public procession and performances of Egungun, we are instantly reminded of the myth of origin at the staging of the first masquerade performance, when Agan, the embodiment of the material remains of the deceased ancestor, was mysteriously brought back from the bush into the human community for remembrance and celebrations. Despite some of the changes precipitated in recent times by radical, overzealous strains of Islamic fundamentalists and the equally passionate brands of fervent Christian Evangelism within Yoruba social and religious landscape, there is a continuous and sustained interest in the annual rituals of Egungun celebrations in many Yoruba communities.

Conceptualized as a mysterious cloth used in retrieving the relics of the famed monkey Ero,² as contained in Odu Owonrin Isanyin in the Ifa divination corpus as well as in Oriki Igbori,³ Agan is usually symbolized as a piece of cloth, often placed on

the sacred altar of Egungun, or simply as part of the panoply of materials attached to the mobile sculpture—a tradition which continues in several Yoruba communities today. These relics are not just considered sacred but are indeed terrifying. Consequently, they cannot be casually encountered, apprehended, or disentangled, hence the divination poetry:

Do-not-confront-my-gaze
 No one beholds the face of Orombo
 On the day Agan emerges at midday
 A mysterious tornado will rage toppling trees upon trees
 And palm trees will continue to fall upon one another
 Dense forests will be set ablaze even to their very roots
 And the savannah fields will burn down completely
 Ifa divination was made for Mafojukanmi, Do-not-confront-my-gaze,
 Also known as Agan.⁴

Based on the divination text cited above, it is quite clear that there was mayhem at the appearance and public procession of the first masquerade performance, to the extent that trees were

falling upon trees and there was a tornado as part of the constellation of mysterious climatic events in the environment. Therefore, the warrior masquerades' intention of creating an atmosphere of fear and trepidation is very much consistent with the tradition of Egungun festival and celebrations. If the legend recounted in this divination text is not sufficient, let us examine a more recent popular song chanted by the followers and admirers of Alapansanpa:

Alapansanpa 'o dele Olubadan, Ibadan o f'araro ...
 There is no respite in Ibadan, if Alapansanpa refuses to visit Olubadan (the ruler) ...

This is clearly one example of the numerous provocative songs that followers of the masquerade sang as they paraded round the ancient city walls. The significant import of the song lies in the belief that, if the masquerade in reality refuses to pay homage to the reigning monarch, the ruler might not live to see another festival event. Therefore, all masquerades (both the serious

3 Egungun Atipako, June 20, 2007, Ibadan, Nigeria.





4 Egungun Obadimeji, June 19, 2007, Ibadan, Nigeria.

and the less serious) made it a point of duty to visit the ancestral homes of all the major functionaries of the king, including the High Chiefs, as well as other prominent citizens of Ibadan. While doing this, they simultaneously paid respects to their leader, the Olori Alagbaa, and his retinue, usually present at the homes of these traditional chiefs whenever the maskers made their rounds. They also visit the homes of prominent political leaders and public functionaries, including the State Governor, Chief Christopher Alao-Akala (2006–2011) who, during the last festival, sent his deputy Alhaji Taofeek Arapaja, an indigene of the city, to receive them at the gate to the State House (Fig. 5). In this way, both the sacred and secular sources of power are openly acknowledged, while Egungun, as the earthly messengers of the departed, offered prayers for health, long life, and prosperity. Each individual so honored also reciprocated with money, cloth, liquor and other valuable gifts.

In order to come to a better understanding of the role and significant position of Egungun in Yoruba social institutions, it might be necessary to take a cursory glance at the rich repertoire of extant literature on the cultural phenomenon, written by both indigenous and foreign scholars. Early European explorers, including Hugh Clapperton (1829) and two brothers who were

members of his expedition, John and Richard Lander (1830; see also Hallet 1965), visited Old Oyo at the zenith of its power and provided intriguing eye witness accounts of masquerade performances staged in their honor. A.B. Ellis (1894) soon followed with a more insightful commentary of the continuity of masquerade performances by recently liberated enslaved Yoruba war captives residing in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Samuel Johnson, one of the earliest Oyo-Yoruba Christian converts and an indigenous scholar of Yoruba history and culture, provided a more detailed taxonomy of the origin, role, and significance of Egungun in his authoritative text of 1921, *The History of the Yorubas* (Johnson 2006). Written from a biased Christian perspective, Johnson's commentaries were slightly disparaging, hardly ever disguising his disdain for the cultural tradition. Nonetheless, his account is full of insightful information on the origin and some of the social practices connected to the fascinating tradition. In his attempt to trace the origin of Egungun to the Nupe, Johnson succeeded in refuting S.F. Nadel's (1942) claim, while validating the oral evidence of a Yoruba origin for *gugu* among the Gbe-

degi, a Yoruba immigrant community among the Nupe (Johnson 2006). Pierre Verger's (1954) exposition of Egungun amongst the Fon of the Republic of Benin and within the Afro-Brazilian communities of Bahia in Brazil demonstrates the remarkable ways in which the cultural tradition continues to survive way beyond its West African homeland, particularly into the Western Hemisphere as an enduring symbol of its diasporic transformation. In like manner, Juan and Deoscoredes Dos Santos (1981) amplified Verger's pioneering work in Brazil. Other notable scholars who have also written extensively on several aspects of the cultural traditions, while enriching our knowledge include Ulli Beier (1956), Oludare Olajubu and J.R.O. Ojo (1977), Joel Adedeji (1972), Henry Drewal (1978, 1979, 2011) and Margaret Drewal (1992; see also Drewal and Drewal 1978), John Nunley (1981), Norma Wolff (1982), Marilynn Houlberg (1978), Cornelius Adepegba (1984, 1990), S.O. Babayemi (1980), P.S.O. Aremu (1991), R.O. Rom Kalilu (1991, 1993), Tirimisiyu Oladimeji (1992), and Abdul Rasheed NaAllah (1996), among others.

5 Visit to the Government State House to meet the Deputy Governor, Alhaji Taofeek Arapaja, June 21, 2007, Ibadan, Nigeria.

CLASSIFICATIONS, COSTUMES, AND OBJECTS

Let us begin by examining Egungun classifications. There are several categories and types of Egungun and these include: warrior masquerades (Eegun Ogun)—the focus of this essay, whose most prominent examples from Ibadan are Atipako, Alapansanpa (a.k.a. Eegun Ogundeji), Oloolu, Iponriku, Abidi Elege, and Obadimeji; hunters' masquerade (Eegun Ode or Layewu); ritual masters/medical types (Eegun Alagbo/Eegun Eletutu); trickster masquerade—Tombolo (Eegun Onidan); and entertainer/dance masquerades (Eegun Onijo or Alarinjo). These categorizations are not necessarily based on any hierarchical structure of the Egungun; rather, they are informed more by a random selection of some of the Egungun ensembles that I encountered in the course of my research activities in Ibadan between June 2007 and June 2010. Not necessarily in any particular order of seniority, my selection was based more on the type, form, color, and significant import of the maskers. What follows is a list of the warrior masquerade costume I hope to analyze.

Generally, Egungun costumes are an embodiment and visual articulation of power. Each group strives to demonstrate, through its performance and display, the beauty, power, and prestige of their families, because the costumes are in and of themselves expressive of capabilities and potentials to make



things happen. In that respect, Egungun costumes are a fascinating assemblage and blending together of disparate objects, including cloth and empowering substances carefully and deliberately selected for the express purpose of creating an embodiment of condensed and articulated sources of power. Typically, the costumes of the otherworldly performer are festooned with a wide-ranging assortment of objects, including animal bones; herbal and medicinal concoctions encased in leather, cloth, or gourd; animal horns and hides; cowrie shells and feathers; wooden and metal figurines; and objects or attachments like bells and earthenware, among other magical substances.

Egungun costumes are also multisensorial. To encounter one is to experience a powerful kinetic sculpture that is alive and throbbing with the supernatural life force and power of the departed ancestor. Oozing with fetid layers and an admixture of sweat, blood, liquor, and empowering substances, the costume cannot be discussed in its totality without dwelling a little on the overwhelming smell that assails the nostrils during any close encounter. And there is yet another intangible dimension that cannot be visually apprehended, and this resides at the level of the supernatural. Virtually all the costumes are activated by the power of the spoken word, bringing them to life and turning them into an embodiment of power through which the spirits make manifest their powers while appearing in the realm of the living.

Of the ritualized objects on the power objects, we have bones, both human and animal; horns (*iwoo*); rattles (*seere*); gourds (*ado*); amulets (*tiira*) encased in leather or cloth; metal and wooden sculptures, such as figurines and masks (*ere*); thrones and stools of the gods (*apoti/oota/apere*); gongs and bells (*agogo/aja*); dance wands (*ose*); whips (*atori*); wooden clubs (*apola igi* or *kumoo*); daggers (*obe*); cutlasses (*ada*); axes (*aake*); Dane guns⁵ (*ibon*); as well as the costume carriers (*aru eku/areku*).

ALAPANSANPA, A.K.A. EEGUN OGUNDEJI

Now, let us proceed by examining specific costumes, beginning with Alapansanpa. Despite the fame, notoriety, and legendary antics that the name of this important masquerade evokes in the minds of its admirers, friends, and foes alike in Ibadan, Alapansanpa's costume appears somewhat pedestrian and seemingly nonthreatening. The masquerade's costume is clearly devoid of any imposing or awe-inspiring wooden superstructure. Covered from head to toe in cloth, the costume is primarily made up of an intriguing array of choice, exotic fabrics ranging from machine-spun imported velvet to the highly coveted handwoven *aso ofi*.

The choice of velvet (*aran*; *mosaaji*) as a highly celebrated and exotic product goes back several generations, to the founding of Ibadan, particularly during the garrison era when Iba Oluyole reigned supreme in the cosmopolitan city. Legend has it that Iba Oluyole banned his subjects' use of the fabric by placing an exclusive monopoly on its purchase and use. His initial excuse was that the fabric was an expensive imported commodity. But later he liberalized its use by granting some of his High Chiefs limited access, allowing them to use it only for caps (*fila*). It is against this background that one can better appreciate the way in which the fabric continues to be used and celebrated in contemporary Yoruba society not merely as a status symbol but also as an index of luxury

truly fitting for the worship of the departed ancestors and their earthly representative, the Yoruba ruler (*oba*).

The headpiece in the costume of Alapansanpa (Fig. 1) is at best a huge, conical hat. Made almost entirely of cloth, with three triangular flaps positioned in front and on its edges, the head-dress is not particularly arresting. Below the flaps, netted fabric in crocheted bands of black and white covers the face of this otherworldly visitor. Over the netting are a few attachments of power objects like cowrie shells, miniature gourds, and a few leather encased amulets. And at the back of the head, maroon velvet with vertical bands of black prominently covers the entire length of the head down to the nape. The rest of the costume is constructed of very bold red and black floral-patterned velvet, some made in the typical striplike fashion to echo the bustle of the gathering of head ties (*oja*), clearly a testament to the first costume created by Eesa Ogbin ara Ogbojo in collaboration with Erubami Abimbowo.⁶ Further down and around the chest region, we have two inverted conical objects, embellished in orange, yellow, white, and green beads. The beads are carefully arranged in a continuous repetition of the dominant triangles. The hands of the masquerade are completely covered in white gloves, with a five-prong leather whip held in his right hand. Underneath the velvet cape is a huge belted band of a wide-ranging assortment of *oja* in handwoven *aso ofi* fabrics on the masked performer's waist. And some of the *ofi* fabrics are in striking colors of orange, crimson red, royal blue, fluorescent green, and the highly regarded light tan known locally as *sanyan*. Below this is a trouser or pant in black and white *aso ofi*. The costume is finally complete with a pair of black canvas shoes.

Alapansanpa is hardly ever without some drama whenever it makes its yearly appearance in the city of Ibadan. It was widely reported in the local newspapers in June 2009 that a woman had sued the masquerade, alleging that she had lost some of her personal property, including a stethoscope, a cell phone, and the sum of 8,650 *naira* (approximately US\$54), as well as suffered severe damage to her automobile, by either Alapansanpa or hoodlums who followed the masquerade around during its outing. The otherworldly visitor was allegedly arraigned and subsequently granted bail by the Chief Magistrate's court on a three-count charge of assault, stealing, and willful damage to property. The entire fiasco was treated as a huge travesty, greatly derided and ridiculed, because no reasonable person could evidently prosecute such a faceless, ubiquitous entity in a court of law.

ATIPAKO

Towering to a height of about 8 feet, Egungun Atipako (Fig. 3), another warrior masquerade, has a set of densely figured sculptures displayed at the summit of the ensemble. Here, three generic busts in wood are placed on a circular tray. The most distinctive is the one to the viewer's right, with clearly articulated features, while the other two are indistinct and blurry, barely showing the head with very prominent eyes and mouth and not much else. That the distinctive features of the human face are blurry on the sculpture is a testament to the fact that the objects have repeatedly been the focus of religious worship in the form of ritual offerings and spiritual cleansing rendered to the spirit of

the departed. These figures are securely held in place by strings attaching them to a red burlaplike fabric on the display tray. Surrounding the fabric on the edge of the tray is a single-tier string of cowrie shells. Below this is a netted fabric through which the masked performer can see.

Strings of cowries are suspended in equidistant positions from the top of the netting, dangling in four rolls on the rectangular facial netting. Like the netting, the cowrie shells have accumulated a thinly translucent, dark brown veneer of ritual offerings over the years. As the masker moves, the cowrie shells sway along with him from side to side in a rhythmic flow, echoing the dance of the otherworldly performer. Additional power ornaments include six leather pouches that are further encased in two horizontal rows of amuletic cowrie shell decorations. In between the long string of cowries, two small gourds with cowries on them are suspended. One tiny gourd with cowrie shells is also placed on the two sides of the netting. The ubiquitous power comb (*ooya*), including an animal skull, possibly that of a monkey (Atari Alakedun), festooned with cowrie shells dangles in the middle of this visually enervating arrangement.

Finally, the entire mobile altar on the head of the masquerade is covered with a predominantly red handwoven *aso ofi* fabric, which is meant to protect and conceal the sculptures from prying eyes. As if to break the monotony of the *aso ofi* fabrics' maroon color, blue and gold lines are deliberately interspersed in the patterned design. There is also a layer of crimson red *aso ofi* covering the masquerade's head. A further element in the fabric is the overwhelming presence of carefully arranged golden lines in the composition. This creates immediately recognizable visual attention and delight. The same material is used in a tightly woven band around the waist or midsection of the masquerade ensemble. In the masked performer's right hand, there is a bell or rattle made with three folded sheets of metal within which are suspended three long rods that make jingling sounds when the otherworldly performer shakes them. Below all of these is another visually captivating arrangement in the costume's lower tunic: a very bright orange, handwoven *aso ofi*, interspersed with silver, yellow, and green lines. Further below are boots made in yellow, brown, and golden *aso ofi*.

Because Atipako is arguably the most senior Egungun in Ibadan, it has the additional prestige of not only foretelling the future but also performing the annual ritual of sacrificing a dog at the palace of the Olubadan, the ruler. Here the ritual is expected



to be accomplished with a deftly delivered stroke using only a tiny ritualized broomstick. If the dog does not die after one stroke, this might portend a grievous consequence not only for the peace and prosperity of the city, but also for the ruler, who might not survive to see another festival event. If, for some inexplicable reason, the masquerade refuses to visit the home of the Olubadan, it is proverbially believed that the ruler would not survive the year.

Besides the ritual sacrifice of a dog, another important highlight of the visit of Atipako to the palace of Olubadan is the prayer annually recited for the continuous peace and progress of the cosmopolitan city. Atipako greets the Olubadan and his chiefs chanting the following prayers:



7 Attendant of Egungun Ogundeji, Alapansanpa, June, 19, 2007, Ibadan, Nigeria.

The worries of old are gone
 Only peace remains
 My Lord, the ruler of Ibadan
 All eyes look up to thee
 For the welfare of Ibadan
 And all her son and daughters
 I salute the chief of the army
 I salute the Iyalode, head of the women's group
 I salute the chief of farmers
 I salute the chief of the weaver's guild.⁷

Continuing, the otherworldly performer chants:

My Lord, the ruler of Ibadan,
 May the spirit of Kudeti River shower favors on you;
 May the spirit of Gege River always prosper you;
 And may the spirit of the mighty oceans also look upon you with favor.
 My lord, we demand that they should kill it; and they killed it;
 We asked: "what is it you kill?"
 They said, "Tis the Bush Rat"
 That knows how to escape all dangers;
 So may you escape Death.
 May Misfortune come not near,
 May Disease never weary you.
 And may Famine never you know.
 My lord, the ruler of Ibadan,
 May Good Fortune always smile on you (Morgan 1985:35–36).⁸

OBADIMEJI

Immediately noticeable on the costume of Egungun Obadimeji (Fig. 4) is its overabundant use of brightly colored sequins in silver, gold, and blue on its red cape—a predilection which underscores one of the many accolades of its patron and leader *asoleke* ("one who is adorned in beads"). Underneath the cape is yet another costume that fits tightly on the body of the masked performer, predominantly white with the addition of blue patterned designs in sequins. On top of these is a curious arrangement of brightly colored machine-spun fabrics cluttered together as sashes (*oja*) on the waist of the otherworldly performer. At the summit of the cape is a brightly colored helmet mask in red and black—red for the skin tones and black for the hair. The superstructure is neither particularly robust nor inspiring in its delineation of forms. The facial features are not particularly refined. What is instantly noticeable is the lineage markings inscribed on the face of the sculpture, in addition to the herringbone-patterned arrangement of hair, both augmented with darkened color in their crevices. Further compromising the aesthetic integrity of the work is the almost grotesque manner in which the carver delineated the form and, in particular, the positioning of the eyes and ears. The ears were created as convex arches set far at the back of the head, while the eyes are two concentric circles of white randomly positioned on top of the forehead. Clearly this is, at best, the work of a less-skillful carver.

Given the position of the Alagbaa in the hierarchy of the Egungun cult in Ibadan, one could partly understand why there was a need for the masker to be arrayed in brightly colored, somewhat trendy fabric, even if modestly cheap—a tendency to demonstrate a penchant and affinity for modernization, panache, coolness, and style.

OLOOLU

Oloolu's costume (Fig. 6), like those worn by other attendants in the entourage of most Egungun (Figs. 7–8), has an intriguing array of empowering substances, including metal, leather, cowries, animal bones, and human skull, that transform them into armor. Additionally, these packets of *oogun* can be harmful, even lethal to non-initiates, and downright detrimental to the overall wellbeing and fertility of women. Certain elements of the costume are indeed condensed sites of power; merely touching or brushing against them could render one impotent. Further, the charms (*awure*) encased in the amuletic packets serve as containers for magical substances and power objects that are capable of inducing financial success, among many other potentials. Given such condensed articulation of powers, women in particular are confined to their domestic spaces and markets remained closed within the cosmopolitan city at the public appearance of Oloolu. Only men can go about their normal activities without fear of molestation and reprisals.

AYELABOLA

The quintessential troubadour-magician, dancer, and performer, Ayelabola (Fig. 9) is the epitome and live wire of entertainment during the annual festival in honor of the ancestors. There are about six performers in the entire ensemble, and each of them is extremely athletic and skillful in somersaulting and

acrobatic displays. Their costumes are quite unlike the others discussed here. Although some of them are constructed with indigenous *aso ofi*, others are made of very light, industrially manufactured fabrics in bright primary colors of red, blue, and yellow, as well as white and black. All their costumes fit snugly to the body. In addition, the costumes lack wooden superstructures or amuletic attachments. Although the costume covers the performer's identity from head to toe, it merely has some kind of very thin netting for ventilation and for the performer to see through. What is particularly revealing here is that the netting separating the viewer from the masker does not in any way completely obscure the identity of the otherworldly performer. One can almost instantly recognize the person behind the costume. Perhaps this intriguing dimension, which facilitates almost an instant recognition of the subject behind the mask, was meant to create a certain degree of ambiguity, believability, friendship, amusement, and social interaction in a celebration that seemingly alienates some members of society while performing in honor of the ancestors. The color arrangements are not organized in any particular orientation. The color palette consists of yellow, red, blue, and black. The different colored fabrics are arranged vertically in a seemingly haphazard manner without regard to any grand aesthetic principle other than a proclivity for the polyrhythmic. It appears that the overarching desire here was to create something strikingly recognizable for the performers, although one also notices that the fabrics have been deliberately cut in a vertical orientation, apparently in conformity with the striplike pattern of *aso ofi*. On the other hand, a few of the maskers wearing costumes made with *aso ofi* fabrics appear in a palette of subtle red with very thin horizontal lines of gray.

CONCLUSIONS

In an almost absurdist drama of incredible proportions, Alapansanpa, one of the most ambivalent masquerades in Ibadan, is revered on one level as the symbol of its most illustrious and checkered history as the home of the great warriors of the nineteenth century but, perhaps more potently, is the greatly despised image of hooliganism, disorderliness, and strife that its followers are quick to exploit for terrorizing people with divergent political persuasions as well as for monetary exploitation and material gains. That same masquerade was recently subjected to ridicule and ignominy following an altercation during one of its public procession around the ancient city on June 17, 2009. I quote the newspaper report:

A popular Ibadan masquerade, Alapansanpa, yesterday appeared before an Ibadan Chief Magistrate's Court on a three count-charge of assault, stealing and willful damage to property.

The Police Prosecutor, Sgt. Ade Adebuseyi, alleged that the masquerade and others now at large, committed the crime on June 16 at Kosodo-Eleta area of Ibadan during the ongoing masquerade festival. Adebuseyi told Chief Magistrate Olubunmi Ajadi that the masquerade assaulted one Mrs. Opeyemi Olosun by hitting her with an iron bar and caused her bodily harm. The prosecutor also alleged that the masquerade stole from her a stethoscope valued at N12,000, her handset (mobile phone), valued at N4,500 and N8,650 cash. He added that the masquerade also damaged three vehicles—a Mitsubishi Lancer car, a Nissan Sunny car and a Mitsubishi Gal-

lant car—by breaking their windscreens. Adebuseyi also alleged that the masquerade and his accomplices stole one Nokia handset (mobile phone) valued at N10,000, property of one Mr. Oladipupo Awokoya. The masquerade later pleaded not guilty to the charges. Mrs. Ajadi granted him bail for N100,000 with two sureties and adjourned the case till July 24 for mention.⁹

The story concluded with a report from the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), stating that the masquerader was later sent to the Agodi Prisons, as it could not meet bail. This is an absurdity of immense proportions. Imagine a most revered symbol of the ancestors being trampled in dirt. An otherworld entity completely derobed and demystified. It was a similar incident of derobing a masked performer in the market square that led to the sacking of the first settlement of Ibadan during the era of Lagelu.¹⁰ That history appears to be completely lost on the present crop of criminals intent on perpetrating this sacrilege against the sacred tenets of Yoruba beliefs and cultural traditions.

Two years after the Alapansanpa imbroglio, another illustrious masquerade in Ibadan, Oloolu, was equally subjected to the same kind of indignity in the hands of fanatical Muslim youths.¹¹

8 Egungun attendant with powerful costume, June 18, 2007, Ibadan, Nigeria.



They had been waiting for an opportunity to challenge the masquerade's power and authority, with particular regard to the curfew usually imposed on women at its public appearance and procession around the city. Whenever Oloolu appeared in public, women were often restricted to their domestic spaces. They could not move around or engage in any commercial or social activity outside of their immediate domestic spaces. But pandemonium ensued in July 2012, when Oloolu attempted to pay traditional homage to a very prominent indigene and patron in the Popo Yemoja neighborhood in the course of its public procession. An eight-day public prayer event (*fidau*) being organized in honor of a recently deceased Muslim cleric in the area was turned into an excuse to challenge Oloolu's power and authority. Rather than restrict women to their domestic quarters, organizers of the event attempted to bribe the masquerade and its handlers to make a detour instead of visiting their neighborhood. The intransigence of the masquerade and his entourage

resulted in a bloody fracas, where both the masquerader and its lead were viciously attacked and wounded, sustaining life-threatening injuries. The result was some two days of mayhem in the old city leading to impassioned, vicious fights, looting, and wanton destruction of life and property. Armed policemen were called in to maintain some order. A few of the more recalcitrant individuals, including the masked performer, were arrested and summarily arraigned before the court of law for breach of peace and hooliganism. The head of the masquerade group, Chief Alagbaa, Ojetunde Akinleye Asoleke, subsequently launched a formal protest while appealing to the traditional ruler, His Royal Majesty Oba Samuel Odulana Odugbade of Ibadanland, to intercede in the disgraceful imbroglio.

But how can one honestly make sense of the fear and anxiety often associated with the appearance of these warrior masquerades in modern Yoruba society? How does one explain the continuous and sustained interest in the intriguing spectacle of Egungun, particularly in an era of intense modernization and globalization? And how best can we evaluate the attendant conflict which arises at the staging of the yearly festivals? The answers may reside at a cursory level in the contemporary retelling and reconstruction of the historical past. Because quite

9 Egungun Ayelabola, June 18, 2007, Ibadan, Nigeria.



frankly, Egungun pageantry is performed, among many other reasons, to demonstrate how the spiritual powers of the departed are harnessed for the continuous revitalization of human society. In addition to rekindling the bond of kinship between members of the same family, Egungun celebration is used to reinscribe individual identity within the lineage of a common ancestor and to reenact certain aspects of the history of the Yoruba wars of the nineteenth century. Additionally, the festivals are used to pro-

mote the spirit of cooperation while fostering the concepts of tolerance, peace, and unity in a fragile but complicated religious landscape such as Nigeria, with far-reaching resonance even in the African Diaspora.

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Notes

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1 Alagbaa is the title of the head of the masquerade group.

2 Ero is the sacred name of the monkey thought to have raped the woman on the farm, a possible pejorative term or identity of the Nupe foreigner who might have committed the crime. For more on this myth, see Oriki Igbori in Babayemi 1980.

3 For an elaborate text of Oriki Igbori, see Babayemi 1980.

4 *Ma f'aju an mi*
Enikan ko gbodo f'aju kan Orombo
Nijo Agan ba jade osan
Igi a ma wo lu igi, ope a ma wolu ope.
Igbo a ma jona tagbatagba
Odan a si jona teruwa teruwa
A d'ifa fun Mafojukanmi
Tii je Agan (Babayemi 1980; my translation).

5 "Dane guns" were prototypes of the long barreled, Danish-manufactured guns brought to the West African market in the nineteenth century—examples of some of the weapons used during the Yoruba wars of that era.

6 The sash (*oja*) represents the signification of the bond of collaboration between Eesa Ogbin ara Ogbojo and Erubami Abimbowo, Alafin Abiodun's mother in the construction of the first Egungun costume.

7 *Ogbo ti tan;*
Alafia lo ku
Oluwa mi, Oba 'Badan
Gbogbo oju ni nwo o
Fun ire 'Badan
Ati okunrin, tobinrin
Mo ki Balogun 'Badan
Mo ki 'Yalode 'Badan
Mo ki Bale Agbe
Mo ki Bale Ahunso

8 *Oluwa mi Oba 'Badan*
Kudeti yi o gbe o o
Gege-lose yi o gbe o o
Araba meteta okun ni yi o gbe o o
A ni ki a pa a, a pa a,
A ni eran kini?
Nwon ni eran Okete ni.
Iku reketi, iku lo,
Ofo reketi, ofo lo,
Arun reketi, arun lo,

Iyan reketi, iyan lo.
Oluwa mi, Oba 'Badan
Gbogbo ire ni yi o ma se gege re.

9 Aloy Emeka, "Ibadan: Masquerade in Court for Theft." *Nairaland Forum*, June 20, 2009; <http://www.nairaland.com/286891/popular-masquerade-charged-theft#4066113>

10 Lagelu was the legendary founder of the first settlement known as Edan Odan which later became known as Ibadan. He was originally an indigene of Ife and a warrior-hunter who emerged as the leader of the first set of inhabitants that settled in Ibadan, before the settlement was subsequently destroyed arising from an altercation following the public de-robbing of an Egungun masquerade in the market square.

11 Idowu Adelusi and Tunde Ogunesan, "Ibadan Masquerade, Oloolu Attacked, Custodian Killed." *Nigerian Tribune*, July 5, 2012; see also John Thomas Didymus, "Nigeria: Police Arrest Oloolu Masquerade, Spirit of the Ancestors," *Nigerian Tribune*, July 10, 2012; "Oloolu Masquerade: When the Spirit of the Dead Unleashed Terror on the Living," *Nigeria Tribune*, July 8, 2012.

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