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## DISCOURSE ON *EFE* AND *GELEDE* SPECTACLES IN CONTEMPORARY YORÙBÁ COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** *CONSTANT CELEBRATION OF EFE AND GELEDE FESTIVAL REMINDS AND TEACHES THE YORÙBÁ PEOPLE OF THEIR RICH PAST AND DEEP CONNECTION. THE ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS PACKAGED INTO THE FESTIVAL EXPLAIN THE MAGICO-RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PEOPLE THAT PRACTICE IT AS A FESTIVAL. THE FESTIVAL IS A DEMONSTRATION THAT THE YORÙBÁ PEOPLE DO ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPORTANCE OF FEMALE GENDER. THE BASIS OF THIS FESTIVAL IS PRIMARILY TO PLACATE AND VENERATE WOMANHOOD FOR THE WELL BEING OF THE SOCIETY. IT EQUALLY SHOWED THE PARAMOUNT POSITION THE FEMALE GENDER IS PLACED WITHIN THE SOCIETY. ASIDE THIS, IT SERVES MANY OTHER PURPOSES SUCH AS SOCIAL CONTROL AND MASS MEDIA MECHANISMS AMONG OTHERS. IT IS WORTHY OF NOTE THAT THIS CELEBRATION OF MOTHERHOOD STILL SURVIVES TILL TODAY IN THE FACE OF THE PREVAILING ALL-CONQUERING EUROCENTRIC SOCIAL VALUES. THE CONTINUOUS HOSTING OF THIS FESTIVAL BEYOND AREAS WHERE IT IS TRADITIONALLY KNOWN SPEAKS VOLUME ABOUT ITS RELEVANCE. THE NEED FOR A FULL APPRECIATION OF ITS SOCIAL RELEVANCE AS WELL AS THE FACTORS THAT SUSTAIN EFE AND GELEDE FESTIVAL IN CONTEMPORARY YORÙBÁ COMMUNITIES INFORM CONSTANT CELEBRATION OF EFE AND GELEDE FESTIVAL REMINDS AND THE PRESENT EFFORT. THE STUDY THEREFORE ADOPTED A COMBINATION OF ARCHIVAL AND SURVEY METHODS TO SOURCE FOR DATA TO BUTTRESS ITS FINDINGS. THE SURVEY METHOD RELIED ON QUALITATIVE METHOD WHERE 24 PARTICIPANTS WERE ENGAGED IN INTERACTIVE/INTERVIEW SESSIONS. THE FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY REVEALED THAT EFE AND GELEDE FESTIVAL PROVIDES ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE ACTUALIZATION OF PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS BY SERVING AS AGENT OF SOCIAL CONTROL AND SOCIAL COHESION, EXUDE TOURISTIC VALUES AS WELL AS SOURCE OF HEALING.*

**Keywords:**

*EFE, GELEDE, SPECTACLES, SOCIAL AND SUSTAINING VALUE, YORÙBÁ*



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## INTRODUCTION

Administrators, policymakers and practitioners are increasingly aware of how transforming individual and collective trends of behavior is essential to achieve their goals (Yamin *et al.*, 2019, Mackie, 2016). However, most well-meaning and sophisticated management systems, policies, laws or programmes often fail due to absence of cooperation and participation of the community members (Levine, 2017, Ivankina and Latygovskaya, 2017). This is where introduction and enforcement of social norms come in for systematic behavioural changes, which do not occur spontaneously as policies are established. In spite of this, majority of existing research always center on the influence of cultural values at the expense of appreciating societal norms (Tankard and Paluck, 2016). Social norms as rules and standards that are understood by members of a group, and that guide morally relevant social behaviour are usually employed as way of social sanctions, instead of the force of laws (Yamin *et al.*, 2019, Bicchieri, 2017). Social norms are being sustained and preserved through celebration of festival of arts and culture in African societies (Omotoso and Ogundiran, 2016). Such festivals in Nigeria include the Zangbeto masquerade in Lagos, Agemo, Oloolu Masquerade, Osun Osogbo, Efe and Gelede and so on. The need for better appreciation of the potency of cultural festivals in leadership roles management till contemporary time informs this study that is focusing on Gelede and Efe festival among the Yoruba.

### Gelede in Yoruba Spirituality

Yorùbá communal functioning is structured around their religious concepts and their related ritualistic societies. Yorùbá spiritual devotion is so complex and powerful, that all of their important artworks are dedicated to religious ceremony in one way or another. The *Gelede* society is one of the several societies or ‘*egbe*’ that abound in Yorùbáland. The society function is to keep the peace so to speak between humans and the witches (*aje*) according to Lawal (1996). Yorùbá claim that women possess the secret of life itself with both the powers to bring and remove life in the form of beings into and out of the world. *Gelede* therefore provides forum for celebrating womanhood and appreciating their contribution to societal regulation. In these celebrations, masks known as Great Mothers are extremely revered and display the amount of respect for especially the elderly women and priestesses.

*Gelede*, the masquerade performances of ancestral spirits, provides an outlet in which men play a major role. This celebration honors and serves spiritually powerful the women-elders, ancestors, and deities. Since the principal occupation of Yorùbá women is trading, many *Gelede* masks depict market women. According to Oloronto (2004), the festival has two parts: a night ceremony called the ‘*Efe*’ and the daytime celebration called the ‘*Gelede*’ with different masks worn for each event. In this situation, the masculinity of the *Efe* mask is represented in the flat, vertically striped, and abstracted beard. However, it should be noted that *Gelede* is synonymous with certain sub-ethnic group of Yorùbá which UNESCO (2008) referred to as Yorùbá-Nago community that is found in Ogun State in Nigeria, Benin Republic and Republic of Togo. The festival is highly revered among the people in spite of modernity and existence of two dominant foreign religions (Christianity and Islam). By its entertaining power and the zeal with which people participate freely in the festival according to Encyclopedia Britannica (2008), there is no clear distinction between *ritual* celebration and *social*



recreation. The implication of this is that *Gelede* dance as ritual serves multiple purposes for the people.

*Gelede* is an organized ritual involving drumming, dancing and singing and it is intended to celebrate the essence of female in many of its manifestations. It consists of two masked dancers (male and female), a guide, four to six drummers and a participatory audience. The importance attached to *Gelede* affair informs the accompanied seriousness and the commitment being put into the preparation ahead of its celebration across communities annually. The preparation is always adapted to lifestyle of the people who believe in this traditional carnival. For instance, the *Gelede* dancers are usually well-trained. In the words of Oloronto (2004), a *Gelede* dancer is a person who has spent many years, from an early age, in the apprenticeship of an experienced dancer and choreographer. He must understand, for example, the tones of drums and how to interpret them accurately with dancing gesticulations. Physical and psychological endowments also form parts of the criteria needed for effective outings of a *Gelede* dancer. The combination of the foregoing forms the needed ingredients for better performance; strict adherence to these qualifications possibly explains successive positive outing, which thus earn the *Gelede* the title of *ultimate spectacle*. Oloronto (2004) noted that a *Gelede* dancer must before any performance be physically strong, psychologically conditioned, professionally rehearsed, and generously predisposed to making sacrifices and incantations to the spirits of Mothers (*Iya-mi-Osoronga*).

### **The beginning and the uniqueness of *Efe* and *Gelede* as social Ceremony**

Among the Yorùbá, it is difficult to separate the religious from the social and the aesthetic because the arts are so integrated into daily life. These could serve as inkling to their practices of incorporating leisure and relaxation activities into whatever situation they found themselves; whether it is in their place of work, worships, or others (Adesina, 2020, Olatunji and Koeneane, 2016). Elaborate dimension of Yorùbá artistic life is always brought to the fore for full appreciation of all during festivals. Such festivals that usually occur at regulated interval are public in nature, participatory in ethos, complex in structure, and multiple in voice, scene, and purpose. The *Gelede* festival exemplifies this fact through a complex interplay of these elements. It is a popular festival held several times a year involving the arts, colorful masks, striking headdresses, and music to promote diplomacy and social connections during the end of dry seasons or time of need, with a specific focus on celebrating the role of women in their culture (Drewal and Drewal, 1983).

The festival was founded among southwestern Yorùbá people celebrating womanhood and mothers. *Gelede* is primarily concerned with the promotion of social harmony and the health and wellbeing of the community. As a performance, *Gelede* is a public spectacle combining colorful masks and headdresses, costumes, oratory and dance in order to amuse, educate, and inspire to worship. The elaborately carved wooden headdresses take the form of human heads supporting wooden platters upon which array of sculptural metaphors project the ideals of the *Gelede* society. These ideals are simultaneously expressed in songs and satirical theatrics (Idowu and Oriola, 2021, De Aquilar, 1997, Lawal, 1996).

*Gelede* has a storybook origin that involves the transformation of matriarchal society into a patriarchal society and targeted to reach out and soothe the anger of mythical mothers and ancestral spirits. It is believed that Yorùbá women possess the secret of life itself with an intimate connection to almost being godlike. The origin of *Gelede* is made clearer through the teaching of *Ifa* religion and its system of divination. As a religious practice, *Ifá* has verses of the literary corpus known as *Odu Ifá* totaling 256 (Abimbola, 1976). Each of these verses equally has a number of poems called ‘*ese Ifá*’. An ‘*ese Ifá*’ explains the origins of *Gelede* as beginning with Yemoja, the Mother of all the *orisa* and all living things. Yemoja could not have children and consulted an *Ifá* oracle, who advised her to offer

sacrifices and to dance with wooden images on her head and metal anklets on her feet. After performing this ritual, she became pregnant. Her first child was a boy, nicknamed ‘*Efe*’ (the humorist); the *Efe* mask emphasizes song and jests because of the personality of its namesake. Yemoja's second child was a girl, nicknamed ‘*Gelede*’ because she was obese like her mother. Also like her mother, *Gelede* loved dancing. After their marriages, neither *Gelede* nor *Efe*'s partner could have children. The Ifá oracle suggested they try the same ritual that had worked for their mother. No sooner than *Efe* and *Gelede* performed these rituals (dancing with wooden images on their heads and metal anklets on their feet), they started having children (Wikipedia, 2021). These rituals developed into the *Gelede* masked dance and were perpetuated by the descendants of *Efe* and *Gelede* (Lawal, 1996).

*Gelede* therefore serves to promote social control, educate people and encourage proper codes of conduct according to Yorùbá cultural mores. This celebration is specifically tied to rituals pertaining to the great mother earth, serving to protect and honor women within the community as treasured for their talents and community healing powers. This tribute aims at paying homage to elderly women's power of protecting fertility and community wellbeing as well as those who are responsible for human barrenness and death. The celebration often takes place in the spring, when the rain comes, to ensure a fertile land for the community and a superior harvesting season. At times, *Gelede* ritual holds in Yorùbá land to help bring wellness to the community in time of need most especially if the community encounters an epidemic or drought (UNESCO, 2006).

### **The *Efe* and *Gelede* Spectacles**

Although *Gelede* ceremony may be staged at any time of the year (to better the lot of an individual, to cleanse the society of pestilence, to induce rain, to enrich human fertility, to enlist the support of supernatural forces and the ‘powerful mothers’ in wartime, and to honor the dead), the most elaborate performance occurs during the annual festival. Once the exact dates of the festival are fixed, usually through divination, the *Iyalase* notifies the head of the community and the important chiefs. Messages then go out to all members of the *Gelede* society outside the town or working far away to return home for the celebration.

The afternoon after *Efe* night is reserved for the performance of an elaborate series of *Gelede* maskers whose images and actions embellish and intensify reality to create exaggerated visions of maleness and femaleness and specific social groups and roles. The maskers, all males, impersonate both men and women. The first to appear are the youngest dancers, enthusiastically encouraged by friends and relatives who gather around them as they attempt their first steps to the intricate, changing rhythms of the drummers. Their dance instructors in the *Gelede* society follow closely, giving advice and encouragement during the performance.

The ceremony usually takes place at night on a public square and the dancers prepare in a nearby house. The singers and the drummers are the first to appear. They are accompanied by an orchestra and followed by the masked dancers wearing splendid costumes. The lead singer-dancer wears a wooden mask that covers most of his head, with only a slight opening in his face to allow him to see. His costume is made up of layers of psychedelic fabrics making him appear to be larger than life. There is a great deal of preparatory craftwork involved, especially mask carving and costume making. The performances convey an oral heritage that blends epic and lyric verses, which employ a good deal of irony and mockery, supported by satirical masks. Figures of animals are often used, such as the serpent, a symbol of power, or the bird, the messenger of the ‘mothers’. The community is divided into groups of men and women led by a male and a female head. It is the only known masked society, which is also governed by women. Although the *Gelede* has nowadays adapted to a more patriarchal society, the oral heritage and dances can be considered as a testimony of the former matriarchal order (UNESCO, 2006).

*Efe* is a Yorùbá concept that could be translated to ‘joking’ still the seriousness that characterizes its preparation, the thought-provoking poetry, mythical masks and the philosophical contexts of its history according to Oloronto (2004) contradict such a simplicity meaning. The meaning of *Efe* in another context was translated to mean ‘to spread’, ‘to proclaim’ or ‘to make known’. As dusk approaches after a dazzling array of masqueraders imaging countless aspects of Yorùbá life and thought, a final masker, one that synthesizes goddess, ancestress, and priestess—appears to conclude and bless the *Gelede* spectacle. Her white ensemble glowing in the growing darkness, *Iya Odua* (Mother Odua) moves with measured stride toward the marketplace accompanied by her priestess, her attire mirroring that of the masker visually to unite spiritual and earthly realms (Adejumo, 2013, Adegbola, 2007, Oloronto, 2004). *Iya Odua*’s slow, stately tread conveys her age, wisdom, and sacred power. Her whiteness symbolizes her cool, covert demeanor and her post-menopausal purity for she is the creative, protective, nurturing mother of the gathered crowd, her offspring. *Iya Odua*’s appearance assures the community that the lavish spectacle has pleased and placated her, and that the mothers will use their power and influence for the benefit of all. Performance of *Efe and Gelede* is usually purposive. The purpose therefore determines its other aspects, such as the types of song and dances to take place. The following positions by Oloronto (2004) reinforce this fact:

...the performance is held to affirm unity and cooperation in the community to entertain, to ward off natural disasters, to bring a cure to epidemics, and to solve some individual problems. Furthermore, whenever there was discord among individuals or groups, the *Ifa* would commission a performance to reassure people of their obligation to preserve unity and goodwill towards one another. In a performance based on such a purpose, songs might satirize or praise individuals who have kept the faith or broken the boundaries of common sense and the community’s ethical norms. Another incident that might call for a performance might be a natural event such as famine or drought. A performance based on this occasion would focus on propitiating God to send rain. In line with this, the performance itself becomes a form of sacrifice to the spirits of ‘the living dead’ or supernatural powers. Yet another occasion might be to ward off an epidemic such as smallpox, measles, and infant mortality or work-related accident.

### **Intricacy and Processes in *Efe* and *Gelede* Performance**

*Efe* performance takes place at two locations. The first is the procession and the main arena. The tradition is for the singer-dancer to make all the sacrifices and rituals at *Efe* shrine. The singer-dancer begins his performance from the front of his house, singing, and dancing from there into the main street and all the way to the dancing arena, located usually at the edge of the city. In some cases, this procession may be just one mile; in another, it may be up to ten miles depending on the size of the city, location of the lead singer-dancer’s house, the main street and the *Efe* arena. The procession usually begins about 9 pm and may not end until about midnight. This procession has two important effects on the performance and there is no age limit to who could attend this all-night performance. First, the procession attracts spectators who may not have known of the performance. Second, the *Oro-Efe* announces many new songs at certain locations on the process route. At such a location, the procession stops while the lead singer-dancer sings a solo, to be followed along supporting singers and drummers. As he sings and dances, he waves his *Irukere* (a long hairy rope made out of horse tail) at members of the audience, raising their enthusiasm to participate as well as the intensity of their excitement.



The lyrics of *Efe*'s songs may have some significance for some people who live by the procession route. For example, if someone along the procession route had died, there might be a memorial song for the deceased, especially if the person had held an important post in the city. Most songs may be sympathetic or may be pure satire against social failings of a group of people or an individual. Such persons may be satirized by name or by series of suggestive images and metaphors that clearly reveal their identities to the audience. Satirical songs are intended for moralistic purposes, only on rare occasions are they meant to hurt their subjects. The lead singer-dancer first sings a song and is then followed by the supporting singers who sing the same song repeatedly until the lead singer-dancer is ready to announce a new song or repeat a song. As soon as he has finished introducing the song, the drummers and the supporting singers join him, followed by the audience who now sing and dance, the repetition of a particular song helps the public to memorize the lyrics,

The second part of the *Efe* performance takes place in the dancing arena, a fixed location at the centre or the edge of the city; it is equipped with an enclosure (*Igbo-Efe*) through which the singer-dancer exits during intermissions. Immediately before the entrance is *Oro-Efe*'s dancing spot of about eighteen feet in diameter. Beyond that lies an open space that may extend as far as a quarter of a mile. Oloronto (2004) noted that the dance arena is set up in such a way that the *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ* dancer often faces the drummer, as he tries to interpret the tones of the drums with his dance movements. This is where members of the audience do their own dancing. During a performance, it is difficult sometimes to notice the difference between those who are dancing and those who are watching, for while some people may not get the chance to be close to the dancing area, they still dance wherever they are, for they can still hear the drums. The performance continues until about six o'clock in the morning when the *Oro-Efe* sings the last song.

### **Multipurpose Values in *Efe* and *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ* Spectacles**

The Yorùbá of Southwest Nigeria who adhere to indigenous religion perform *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ* masquerades in order to assuage women and female ancestors by appearing in front of the community (Kimberly, 2013). During the ceremony, women, some of whom possess strong and potentially destructive powers are praised for holding powerful secrets and providing life to the entire community. Participants therefore spend days without sleep and exert maximum energy to publicly demonstrate their devotion and gratitude in order to please these women (Drewal and Drewal, 1983). *Efe/Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ* spectacles also serve as media for informing, educating, entertaining people and inspire worship as well as the channel of voicing out public opinion. As a result of this, it can be conveniently stressed that *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ/Efe* tradition performs the role of the mass media through through the combination of art and ritual dance (Adegbola, 2007). This act of informing and educating the public according to Olabimtan (1981) comes in when the *Efe* masker uses his poetic songs to remind people of their responsibility to conform to the wishes of their society. He stressed further that the messages of *Efe* are always credible since the composition is based on veritable and dependable sources in the community. The task of entertaining is achieved through acts of singing, dancing and drumming.

The *Efe/Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ* poet also takes up the task of defending the cause of justice of any member of the society (Adejumo, 2013, Olabintan, 1981). Attainment of these goals by *Efe* maskers in the words of Adejumo (2013) rests on two main factors, such as, the attachment of the poet to the *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ* cult which itself has a strong like with the cult of *Aje* (witches) on one part. The other factor is the freedom enjoyed by the poet to express publicly what could not be said directly to a man's face. Using gender approach, Ibitokun (1993) and Babatunde (1988) illustrates the values of *Efe/Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ* spectacles as channel of restoring male-female balance. Babatunde (1988) discussed and analysed the Yorùbá myths of this carnival-like activities in order to bring out the prominent and potent roles of women in the face of male weakness. Talking from dramatic art/sociological perspectives, Ibitokun (1993)



further revealed that *Gelede* carnival serves as means of breaking unwarranted male dominance in the society. The submission of Adegbola (2007) was from gender and socialization angles. He posited that women have a lot to benefit in view of their significance as custodians and propagators of oral genres as well as their centrality in *Gelede* traditions. The benefits herein centre on the usefulness of the ritual and secular agendas contained in the *Gelede* songs as medium for the education of the younger ones. Olabimtan (1981) reported that the Efe-*Gelede* poets of Egbado Ketu in Southwest Nigeria were known for songs that were sharply critical of individuals and rulers who were perceived to be against the common interests of the society, no matter how powerful these individuals and rulers were.

*Efe/Gelede* ceremony has equally being linked to health. The issue here is that the *Gelede* society's role is to protect the community against the *aje*'s devastation hence the categorization of the ceremony as medicinal in nature. Lawal (1996) links art and healing in Yorùbáland; according to him art plays significant roles in promoting spiritual wellness and social harmony within the community. It is through this that *Gelede* ceremony with its numerous artworks and activities non-aggressively promote social harmony. The regular participation in this ceremony within the community equally illustrates the necessity of fellowship and commitment to human survival. In this way, *Gelede* serves as a medicine used to heal the entire community.

#### **Functions of Masks as symbols and tools in use during *Efe/Gelede* ceremony**

The Yorùbá people used the double-faced Mask in performances of the *Gelede* Society. Masks as symbols are utilized during the *Efe/Gelede* ceremony to represent divine visitations from the super-sensible world for the realization of the purpose (wish) of every participant in the festival. For instance, the *Efe* mask performed at the first night of the *Gelede* festival incorporates a carved blade motif. Some believe the blade is an aesthetic elaboration; on the other hand, Drewal and Drewal (1983) were of the view that it is a medicinal camwood blade. The images in the masks are diverse and encompassing. While the maskers are male, the masks depict both females and males, either generalized or in more specific representations of a wide variety of female and male roles. The *Gelede* masks are based in a variety of themes. As the Yorùbá markets are controlled by women, many *Gelede* headdresses depict women's heads carrying the goods they sell in the marketplace. This is done to honour the women's economic powers and contributions.

Many *Gelede* masks depict animals that serve as metaphors for human actions and attributes as well as illustrations of popular proverbs and songs that often accompany the mask's appearance. Animals in devouring motifs are an important means of conveying the concept of competing forces in social as well as spiritual realms. Studies (Adegbola, 2007; Olabimtan, 1972) further stressed that the masks worn during *Gelede* ceremony include puppet masks. According to them, the intricately curved animal masks that remind the audience of the dangers of ignoring social position and natural order in the world. Animals in some *Gelede* masks may be used for satiric purposes to criticize antisocial actions or attributes. Porcupines, because of their voracious appetites and slow, sluggish movement, are sometimes a metaphor for gluttonous or selfish persons. A *Gelede* mask that incorporates the snake symbolizes the female ancestors. Members of the Yorùbá *Efe/Gelede* society use the masks like this one to honor them. This mask is usually worn during the annual festival, during funeral ceremonies, during ceremonies following disasters, and during certain other social events. In these ceremonies and events, the society asks its female ancestors to use their powers for good rather than for harm.

Various sculptures on display during the ceremony, while serving as means for 'total' healing equally corroborated the observation of Wolff (2000) on the use of anthropomorphic images in Yorùbá healing, which can be produced from wood, bone, ivory, or molded from clay. These figures vary visually based on their particular ethnic style and evoke emotions from the person using them. The



implication of this is that power sculpture is created to garner the support of supernatural beings to aid in the social health of a community. The practice further shows that medicinal figures are produced and viewed as art as well as serving as practical medicine in Yorùbáland. In line with this, Wolff further demonstrated that African sculpture serves two purposes of power and display. Displayed objects, which have various symbolic meanings, are made visible to the public in a religious or political context in order to enhance the prestige of the owner and to display the owners.

### **Female Power's nexus in *Gelede* Spectacle**

Membership in the *Gelede* society is open to everyone since its main function is to foster social harmony. However, because *Gelede* celebrates motherhood in particular, and because participation in performances is believed to make a woman more fertile, women tend to outnumber men in the membership (Ibitokun, 1993). From temporal angle, women roles in the society are very significant. Both men and women enjoy level-plain ground to operate in all sphere of human endeavour for sustainable living.

Countless women by the opportunity this practice present have achieved remarkable breakthrough, which earn them recognition and improved social status within the society. In the spirit of this, Drewal (1992) reported that these women are economically independent of their husbands and have the potential to earn even more money than the husband (Drewal, 1992). A woman's status therefore derives largely from her reputation in trading, her craftsmanship, and her wealth, rather than her husband's importance. The implication of this is that Yorùbá still allow leeway in terms of male-female relationship in spite of patriarchal family system prevailing among them.

Such outlook was equally brought to bear on *Gelede* spectacle as a festival that celebrates the women in the society. Researchers (Ibitokun, 1993; Drewal and Drewal, 1983; Lawal, 1978) equally stressed further on the fundamental purpose of *Gelede* spectacle as efforts towards paying tribute to and therefore derive benefits from female mystic power. The Yorùbá personify nature through *Iya Nla* (the Great Mother). During *Gelede* ceremonies, the *Gelede* mask performs to curry favor with *Iya Nla* and her earthly disciples, the 'powerful mothers', and teaches the community through entertainment about the virtues and responsibilities of sociality and good citizenry. Often identified as the first female in the Yorùbá Universe, *Iya Nla* remains an enigma. This is because she is Mother Nature, the Mother of All, and the Mother of Mothers, epitomizing the maternal principle in the Yorùbá cosmos.

The social agenda of the *Gelede* society is largely based on the Yorùbá maxim that human life is '*eso l'aye*' (fragile), and should be lived 'with caution and prudence'. The role of the Society, therefore, is to ensure that everyone should be considerate to everyone else that one should be diplomatic, law-abiding, respectful, and avoid the use of force in resolving disagreements. Furthermore, *Gelede* reminds all that (within the context of the Yorùbá patrilineal social structure) it is important to maintain good relations between men and women through advocating a particular (and pronounced) respect for motherhood. The baseline of the philosophy of *Gelede* as society is the dependence on the female as mother for the preservation of humanity; and the belief that motherhood embodies special powers that can be used for good or evil - the kind of evil connected to witchcraft. Aware of the dangers that witches (*aje*), and other antisocial elements pose to the harmony of the community, the Society actively decries all manner of social evil by subjecting it to public ridicule during the *Gelede* festival (Kimberly, 2013, Lawal, 1996).

*Gelede*, serving as ceremonial healing, protects societies from the potentially fatal effects of *aje*, women who transform into cats or birds at night and ravage the city. This ceremony's effectiveness depends on its visual availability. *Gelede* society thus employs aesthetics to neutralize evil and stimulate warm affection at the same time. Efficacy of appeasement made through individual ceremonies, performed by families experiencing difficult health or economic troubles depends on their



level of elaboration. The implication of this is that an intricate ceremony is more likely to appease the Mothers and ease the family's misfortunes. Communal *Gelede* ceremonies, which are more common, also rely on intricate displays to ancestors and Mothers in order to benefit from the women's ability to heal. Often these communal ceremonies are held to give thanks to *Iya Nla*, and they rely on the participation of all community members to appease her (Kimberly, 2013). In the course of getting this 'utmost' feminist power and supports, the practice is for the dancer to place his mask in the *Gelede* shrine which holds the Mother Mask a few days before the *Gelede* performance in order to activate it with the spirits of the Mothers. When he wears the mask, the audience does not recognize him as an individual but as the spirit of 'the living dead'. His voice, movements, and what he says represent the will of the spirits. The mask bears all kinds of figures of female attributes, sometimes in an exaggerated form (Oloronto, 2004).

The Yorùbá believed that these women controlled female fertility. If the masquerade pleased the older women, they could ensure that the village's young women had numerous healthy babies. Unfortunately, women's studies have largely ignored the active role of women in the traditional rebuke-to cleanse rituals. Rather, they have been preoccupied by the victim figure of women in traditional African societies. Women are prominent composers among *Gelede* groups in Oke-Ogun, Ibarapa and Yewa in South-West Nigeria, who in attacking evil and tyranny are just as bold and blunt as men. Among Ifa worshippers, on the first day of initiation of men, women gather around the grove in an air of freedom to sing songs otherwise considered abominable and vulgar. This, too, is part of the cleansing exercise.

#### **Connecting rods between the Past and the Present Relevance of *Efe* and *Gelede* Spectacles**

In the past, all the participants in an *Efe* performance were volunteers, including the singers. Modern organizers of the festival have tried to maintain this tradition to preserve *Efe* history, meaning and integrity. Traditional basis of *Efe* performance was its function as the channel for communicating with the spirits of 'the living dead' and God and to raise the awareness of the community to its religious heritage (Oloronto, 2004). At a simple functionalist level, then, *Gelede* serves to promote social control and educate about and encourage proper codes of conduct according to Yorùbá cultural mores. In contemporary time, *Gelede* festival is still being celebrated among the Yorùbá in the areas like *Ketu* (Republic of Benin), *Yewa* (Ogun State), *Oke-Ogun*, *Ibarapa* (Oyo State) and in areas like *Ikeja*, *Badagry* and *Iwaya*, as well as *Isale Eko*, which is known as the headquarters of adherents of *Gelede* faithful in Lagos State. The spread of this festival to Lagos State that is cosmopolitan in nature speaks volume about the continuous popularity and relevance of this festival. It is therefore pertinent to explore the factors that still make this festival relevant in spite of 'modernization' and 'western civilization' that has permeated every society. As a step towards having in-depth understanding of factors that influence sustenance of this festival, efforts were made to engage 10 Males and 14 Females; 10 out of the female participants were *Gelede* Priestess, the remaining 4 were Community Leaders. Among the male participants, 6 were Stakeholders/organizers of *Gelede* festival while the remaining 4 doubled as community leader as well as part of the organizers of this festival. They were drawn from 5 communities from Ogun, Oyo and Lagos States. The distribution of this was as shown in the table below.



State	Communities	Community/Social Status	Gender Status	Mean Age (years)
Ogun	Sawonjo	2 Community Leader/Organizer	Male	43.5
		4 Priestess	Female	72.8
	Imasai	3 Priestess	Female	76.3
		2 Stakeholder/Organizer	Male	61.5
Oyo	Ijio	2 Community Leader	Female	65.5
		2 Stakeholder/Organizer	Male	88.5
Lagos	Isale-Eko	3 Priestess	Female	74.3
		2 Community Leader/Stakeholder	Male	67.5
	Badagry	2 Community Leader	Female	59.5
		2 Stakeholder/Organizer	Male	57.5

Source: Field Survey, 2020

## METHODOLOGY AND DISCUSSION

Sourcing for information about this festival was done through interview sessions conducted by the researchers under interactive atmosphere with the stakeholders in Gelede ritualistic activities. In view of the smaller nature of participants, content analysis was adopted for the analysis of data collected from the participants. Facts extracted from the information gathered through the interactive sessions shed light into what people may not know except one is privileged to meet people of such importance. For instance, it was revealed that ‘unmet needs’ are increasing in high magnitude on daily basis. The urgency in satisfying these needs keep on pushing people around for workable solutions. The general summary of the information collected showed that the sustaining factors could be anchored on the benefits being derived from this ceremony. The benefits could be classified into four parts, such as Social control, Touristic values, Social cohesion and Medical. The discussion of these are done under the specific classes they are best suited.

### Social Control

Failure of the existing methods of solving societal and personal problems was one of the factors mentioned here. According to one of the participants:

There is general displeasure about unsatisfactory nature of existing means of handling societal and personal problems. You go to church and mosque and discovered that the clergies are always full of stories. One could hardly see or feel the specific turn around that will show that there is divine hand to wipe away one’s sorrow. On daily basis problems keep on piling up. To make the matter worse, most of the leaders of the two dominant religions in the country are always the ‘apostle of discord’. A Muslim is being encouraged not to interact with his kinsmen who are Christians and vice versa. But here, everybody is welcome on board, nobody will even try to lure the other away from his/her faith, it is ‘operation come to us when you feel like’. If you move round to feel the pulse of everybody you are seeing here today about the issue I’m discussing with you, the response is going to be the same (Male/Community Leader/Stakeholder/Isale Eko, Lagos/Aged 69 years).

Annual rate of increment in the number of enthusiasts that shared the doctrine entails in Gelede society enhances the participation. Similarly, this has been making the ceremony a thing of relevance just in similar way it was in the past. For instance, one participant stated:

Gelede festival is helping to foster check on anti-social behaviour in the society. This is done through musical and dancing during *ale efe* (night of comedy) where the participants



will satirically pick on anybody indulging in immoral behaviour by exposing such activities for public awareness. This satirical aspect of the festival has been influencing the festival tremendously in the form of social control mechanism for everybody to conform to the standard laid down in the society (Female/Community Leader/ Priestess/Isale Eko, Lagos State/Aged 55 years).’

A participant narrated her point on social control potential of this festival thus:

*Gelede* Society through its festival and accompanied activities enhances the efficacy of its social control, law enforcement strategies and unraveling of mystery efforts. Since people are always in a hurry to see results, efficacious outcome of *Gelede* on whatever issue it is being deployed have made people to see the need to support and identify with the ceremony. As a result of this, the support and patronage is not limited to festive period alone, people do come from far and near to consult *Gelede* over the bedeviling problems (Female/Market Leader/Badagry, Lagos/Aged 52 years).

### **Touristic values**

As a colourful festival, the *Gelede* festival has what it takes to pull the crowd if given necessary assistance. In spite of absence of tangible assistance from the government, it was shown that the festival still makes humble marks in terms of tourists on visitation during the festival. One of the values derived from this during the festival was stressed as follow:

There is no way you will come here during the festival without getting yourself immersed into the events in *Gelede* festival. It serves as succour in terms of spiritual stability through humorous atmosphere it provides when the celebration is ongoing. It is during this festival that one will see people with pathetic situation, but who have succeeded in triumphing over it and thus radiate with peace and harmonious relationship with other participants. The intoxicating effect of this is always instant hence the eagerness to witness the next edition of the festival by everybody that witnessed the previous ceremony (Female/Priestess/Sawonjo, Ogun State/70 years).

One participant indicated:

The festival is friendly and peaceful. Since peaceful atmosphere is an important ingredient for development of tourism activities, *Gelede* festival has never failed to meet up with this hence its continuous popularity and increase in rate of patronage. There is no single year that people are not invited as well as attracted to this festival by those that participated during previous and penultimate events. Some come out of curiosity and the need for fresh information and confirmation of what they have heard about this festival (Female Community Leader/Ijio, Oyo State/Aged 69 years).

Another participant stated:

This festival serves as the avenue for leisure and recreation. Most often *Efe* aspect of the festival may not attract as many people as expected from outside the community, but people within and outside the community usually participate in *Gelede* aspect of this festival. Everything obtainable in modern day carnival could be seen during this festival. After months of strenuous farm works, trading activities, people see this period as the time to unwind for better productivity (Male Stakeholder/Badagry, Lagos State/Aged 49 years).



Another participant discussed the factors in terms of economic benefits and value added to the event through the participation of members of Oodua People’s Congress (OPC), according to him:

As expected in every crowd pulling festival, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* festival is making its modest contribution towards assisting in boosting of economic activities. Traders from neighbouring communities do come to attend. In this era that members of Oodua People Congress have been identifying with every festival that promotes Yorùbá culture, the presence of OPC members from virtually all over the Southwestern Nigeria is also helping. Though the festival itself is capable of preventing and solving crisis, the presence of OPC members further assure everybody particularly, the participants from outside the community about the relative peaceful nature of this festival (Female/Priestess/Imasai, Ogun State/Aged 80 years).

### Social Cohesion

The submissions revolve around social cohesion among the people within the community. This act or state of uniting human population through regular interaction has been noted as capable of fostering mutual understanding among people. The end result of this is peaceful coexistence for sustainable development. An aged opinion leader within the study setting that equally doubled as participant revealed that:

The festival has been fostering sense of solidarity in terms of making people to see *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* festival as common heritage that need general support. This has enhanced the regular hosting of the event in this community without the outsiders. As a result of this, we are capable of make the occasion memorable; nevertheless, we are grateful to those who still see the need to celebrate with us (Male/Community Leader/Ijio, Oyo State/Aged 95 years).

Another participant submitted that:

Unlike other masquerades, *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* maskers are friendly and don’t harm visitors. The friendliness about other factors has been assisting its regular hosting for more than 200 years ago. I met the festival being celebrated in this community when I was born, it is still being celebrated and I’m very sure that it will linger till eternity (Male Community Leader/Organizer/Sawonjo, Ogun State/Aged 42 years).

Socializing value was narrated thus:

*Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* festival has serious assisted as means of socializing the young ones so that the identity of the group will not be lost. As a social control mechanism, ‘the eyes of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* are everywhere’. Every indigene of the community is being monitored. We have dossiers on everybody, whatever everybody has done over the year will be rewarded (either positively or negatively) during *efe* night. Our people have learnt to behave themselves as a result of this; even if not for themselves but for the name of their families (Female/Priestess/Isale Eko, Lagos State/Aged 75 years).

Contribution from another participant revealed that:

Every community fixes the celebration of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* to coincide with a particular festival in order to encourage people to come home for joint celebration. For instance, there are communities that celebrate theirs during Easter period; it is during Christmas in other communities, while some communities fixed their own to coincide with *Eid-el Kabir* or *Eid-el fitr*. The beauty and unique issue here is that everybody comes home along with their families and friends from their places of work; at that period nobody discriminates



against the other. Everybody sees the occasion as the opportunity to get closer to their kinsmen; an avenue to understand each other better. Peer groups who have lost contact of one another usually use the occasion to reunite. As a result of this, *Gelede* festival has tremendously served as the vehicles through which mutual understanding is achieved in the society and means of resolving misunderstanding within the families (Male/Stakeholder/Organizer/Imasai, Ogun State/Aged 58 years).’

### Healing and Medical Value

The usage of *Efe* and *Gelede* for medical purposes was affirmed by the *Gelede* Priestess. Most of the ailments or ill health being handled through this process cut across the issues like infertility, migraine, misfortune, ailments that defy western medical solution. Insight into this was given by one of the participants in this study revealed thus:

Infertility is a common disease nowadays; of all ailments being handled infertility ranked the highest in terms of frequency. We give thanks to ‘our mothers’ who have never forsaken us. In line with maternal principles of *Gelede* whose goal is to enhance safe delivery, it has been positive outcomes for us all through. The rate of success equally informs the popularity the *Gelede* is receiving among the women who are looking unto God for the fruit of the womb. Don’t forget that the genesis of *Gelede* festival rested on the problem of barrenness or infertility (Female/Priestess/Isale Eko, Lagos State/Aged 75 years).

Another Priestess gave specific instances of their activities as follow:

People do come here even after or before *Gelede* festival for consultations. We have handled several cases; 3 days ago, a Music promoter was here to verify if there is business compatibility between him and 3 artistes he was preparing to promote. Out of the 3 candidates he submitted their names, 2 were discovered to be compatible, while the other was not. That does not mean the hope is lost for the third one, what the person needs is just some ritual-based corrective measures. Since most of these artistes are not always stable with their promoters, the man was not willing to commit anything on such corrective measure (Female/Priestess/Sawonjo, Ogun State/70 years).

The surprising aspect of the information from these Priestesses is their recognition of ethical standard of anonymity. In the words of one of them:

We are more secretive than any other healthcare providers. When we narrate any issue, it is just to buttress point, like the issue of promoters I just mentioned I did not mention the name, the place at all, after all there are several promoters scattered all over Nigeria. If our clients could not vouch for our reliability in terms of keeping their medical fact to our chest, that means we don’t know what we are doing. Ability to maintain confidentiality and anonymity informs continue relevance of this practice and the ever-increasing patronage from the people (Female/Priestess/Sawonjo, Ogun State/70 years).

The simplicity and logical approach towards their services was equally buttressed by a participant thus:

From experience over the cases we have handled in the past, there are cases that did not need application of herbs or incantation. Some only need appeasement of the spirits; this may be in the form of taking care of the needy. For better results often handle cases in line with the religious practices of our clients. The reason behind this is that many of the clients wouldn’t have come here if they have options; their seeking for our assistance was borne out of necessity. For this people not to feel bitter in any form and equally to ensure that



they confirm with therapeutic regimen, we do adopt part of the teachings of their religion. For instance, a Muslim may be asked to recite certain verse in the holy book of his faith (Qur'an) or biblical verses for the Christians. This extra effort is based on our quest for and commitment to harmonious relationship within the community. We don't scout for membership, we don't engage in funny activities to get converts; everything we are doing is voluntary, that is, participation is usually borne out of readiness and willingness to partake (Female/Priestess/Isale Eko, Lagos State/Aged 75 years).

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The outcome of this study corroborated the position of Adebayo *et al.* (2016) in a study conducted in Oyo town that cultural festivals go beyond dining and wining; that benefits were accrued by the partakers and the society itself. In reference to *Efe* and *Gelede* festival (which was variously referred to as *spectacles*, *ceremony*, *activities* and *event* in this study), these benefits serve as social and sustaining values on one part. On the other parts, the benefits serve as the connecting rods between the past and the present relevance of *Efe* and *Gelede* Spectacles. In broad terms, *Efe* and *Gelede* spectacles still proved relevant as avenue for keeping people together and by which leadership functions are carried out directly and indirectly. The spectacles remain a potent tool for serving the populace in every ramification, particularly in the area of *social control*, *tourism*, *social cohesion* and *medical*. The adoption of *Gelede* for health purpose affirms its multipurpose relevance. The pattern of cases being handled justify the position of World Health Organisation that health entails physical, social and emotional (mental) well being not just state of infirmity or absence of disease.

The social values of *Efe* and *Gelede* spectacles as demonstrated in the descriptive cases presented during interactive sessions include social cohesion, fostering of social inclusion, community empowerment and capacity building, enhancing confidence, civil pride and creation of an atmosphere of tolerance, broadening opportunities for learning, skills development. For instance, through constant participation and commitment people are becoming more united, so also is the involvement of everybody in one event or the other during the festival. The festival provided opportunities for people to either play the role of participants or spectators/audiences. It is also an avenue for those who feel excluded as a result of one social dilemma or stigma to seek solution through various uses to which the festival is being employed. Economic opportunities the occasion afford the people equally serve as avenue for community empowerment and source of inspiration for others to learn one skill or the other for life course improvement.

The liberty everybody has to express his or her view concerning positive or/and negative events witnessed within the community over the year has led to culture of tolerance. With this custom of laughing over satirical statements expressed through songs during the event, an atmosphere of tolerance was created. This specifically is an added value that makes the spectacle a tourist delight. The economic advantages of *Gelede* festival affirmed the observation of Dümcke and Gnedovsky (2013) that economic and social values of heritage are interrelated. Their position is that economic growth brings prosperity and well-being to a territory, while social harmony (community cohesion, absence of conflicts, tolerance, and so on), which is the basis of social values serve as the prerequisite to economic development. The ability of *Gelede* festival to provide distinctiveness of a place is an advantage both for tourist development and for the well-being of local communities.

The foregoing therefore shows that *Gelede* spectacle has innate quality of providing physiological needs to the people having been successfully applied for the attainment of social control, touristic, social cohesion as well as healing and medical services. This thus demonstrated that there is no extent people could not go in order to experiment with available resources within their environment for sustainable livelihood. The ingenuity of these people thus serve as needed ingredients to



complement Maslow's basic needs (water, air, food, and sleep) for human survival whose beauty may not manifest without effective social control, touristic services, social cohesion as well as healing and medical services.

The continuous turning of attention to traditional issues like *Gelede* spectacle is therefore an indication of failure of existing 'imported' values, which include the medical system, legal system, law enforcement, religious at meeting the yearnings and aspiration of the people. This therefore calls for urgent review of these value systems so that all of them can conveniently complement one another for peaceful coexistence and sustainable development. Inference could be drawn from this to understand similar cultural festivals elsewhere, particularly in Yorùbáland. In conclusion, the findings corroborated the observations made by Olabimtan almost two and half decades ago (1981) that *Efe*'s role as a social crusader remains the same in the contemporary society as it was in the past. That *Efe* and *Gelede* do not only whip up sentiments against social deviants, they also influence public opinions and attitudes towards institutions through the instrumentality of its poetic and rhythmic rendition. The following recommendations were adapted from the suggestions offered by the participants as possible solutions to the problems identified in this work:

- ✚ As culture booster and source of generating fantastic income for the country, the fortune of tourism can be further boosted by giving proper attention to *Efe* and *Gelede* festival. This festival should be given *professional touch* through effective planning and proper execution. However, there should be internal checks and balances that will avert cultural adulteration, extinction and acculturation.
- ✚ There is need for sensitization of the people on the relevance of cultural identity and its sustenance. People should be informed that culture is not a threat to religious belief. Through this, people will develop interest in their cultural environment and interesting aspect of cultural events that are geared towards making life comfortable for the citizenry.
- ✚ The mass media also has lots to do for the promotion of cultural activities, most especially *Efe* and *Gelede* that have been sustained to the present time through unrelenting efforts of the people at the grassroots. This will assist in providing the people more information. Such information will enhance peaceful coexistence and appreciation of others.

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