

Oduduwa: Through the Eyes of a Wood Carver

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ABSTRACT

History is the chronological and integrated account of relationship between man, event, person, time and places. The Yoruba history has long been at the mercy of the West due to the disinterest of the Yoruba people in the preservation and propagation of their Tradition, Culture and Religion. This has led to the publication of volumes of misinterpretations, flawed and shallow analysis of Yoruba religion for which the Yoruba could only be grateful. Oduduwa is one of the most important Yoruba Progenitor in the history of the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria. He was a powerful leader under whom the nucleus of the Yoruba race migrated into this land from their original home in Ile-Ife. He was a man of great leadership skills, understanding and repute. He is one of the most discussed Yoruba Deity with different point of view because various scholars have not come to a conclusion of who he was. Unfortunately, from our oral Yoruba traditional history there is no descriptive analysis of how Oduduwa looked like but, however, a sculptor in person of Lamidi Fakeye, a traditional wood carver, carried out a commissioned work of Oduduwa in wood carving, describing what he looks like through a story which surrounds the creation of the world. The paper intends to discuss the life of Oduduwa and a conceptual analysis of the wood carving executed in his form. The background data for this paper came largely from textbooks, articles, field work, documentation, archival records, and observation of physical artefacts.

Keyword; Oduduwa, Yoruba, Traditional Religion, Carving, Wood Carving, Lamidi Fakeye

INTRODUCTION

Despite the conflicting and contradictory ideas surrounding *Oduduwa* in the beliefs, arts and existing oral literatures of the Yoruba people, which should be the direct sources of what the authors document as books, there is that innate, yet nostalgic link between this invisible ancestors and existing Yoruba People in their diversities (Mike, 2005). The Yoruba race has been described as a primitive race due the fact that they have no archival record of their events, compelling everyone to rely rather on oral history.

(Mike, 2005) observed that, oral history is prone to embellishment and distortions such that each ethnic group in a race has a way of polishing its history to depict heroism and playing down drastically its failures, vices and the dark sides of its existence. Due to the fact that the entire Yoruba race does not have a glance idea of how *Oduduwa* was, they now use *Ori Olokun* as a replica image for *Oduduwa* (Idowu, 1973). The Yoruba past knowledge must best obtained from myths, folk-tales, legends, folktales, praise-songs and etc. which the memory has increasingly forgotten and left behind by the new generations.

Although there are various versions and adaptation of the Yoruba story of creation, a center point is that they all refer to '*Oduduwa*' as the founder, ancestor or rather an important agent in the mystery of creation of(in) the Yoruba race. Though *Oduduwa* is widely accepted as the ancestor of the Yoruba race. The word *Oduduwa* (*Odu ti oda iwa*) signifies the "Great one who creates existence" (Fabunmi, 1985). According to Oligbinde (2013), he stated that whatever is seen as a very large pot or a container is referred to as *Odu*: the

term implies, “the great container, the author of existence”. It is said in Yoruba oral tradition that when *Oduduwa* descended from heaven to earth he landed in *Ile-Ife* where he became the fathers of the Yoruba’s. Though there have always been many sides to the history of the cradle of the Yoruba’s (Dayo, 2008).

Yoruba art is spiritually inspired art (Dayo, 2008). Carvers are the main core of the Yoruba art, which is why a lot of spiritual objects are made of wood, iron and brass. Most of the deities in Yoruba land are deified as art objects, which are usually made of brass, wood, or iron. These icons have spiritual affinity with the original deity and also have peculiar features which make them identifiable with other deities (Ayo, 2008). Although not all deities are represented as art object, the latter serves as substantiated faith for the Yoruba people.

For the Yoruba people, sculpture has always been their successful means of communication with the divine and as well as a viable means of expressing thoughts and opinions in symbolic forms without the use of speech or writing not just between themselves but between the past and now and now and future. Sculptural objects produced by individual Yoruba artists serves as the evidence of their connection or rather relationship with the divine or rather supernatural force in which the artist or the carver is the most important persona and without him communication is not possible.

Many notable traditional artists have in one way or the other represented this deity *Oduduwa* in various forms and media. One of them is Lamidi Fakeye, a traditional wood carver who have through the ages executed many traditional wood carvings and taught wood carving as well. One of his notable works which is *Oduduwa* will be critically studied in this paper and analysed.

TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Traditional religion among the Yoruba People is a complex whole, which means that the Yoruba people believe in God but with various means to its end. Religion describes the system in which the conventional African man always preside over his connection with the environment and with peers. (Mike, 2012) documented that the African traditional religion has suffered immeasurable damage from abolitionists and propagators of foreign religions in African nation. Yoruba elites who inherited foreign religions also join hands with abolitionists of African religion who believe that Africans are ignorant of God and therefore need foreign missionaries to teach them about God so as to bring them out of demon worship.

African traditional religion breathes every element of African culture through its elementary elements and exhibits apresiding characteristics, to such an extent that one may say that African civilization is a sacreden lightenment. It allows individual, through the worship of the ancestors, to ancestors, to transcend his physical condition and be part of society. In other words: through the worship of the ancestors, the individual moves towards his ancestors, takes an interest in them and is part of them. He therefore traces back the line of his ancestry and thus rediscovers himself and establishes his own place in the vital process of the group and thereby rediscovers himself as a “being-with-the-others”.

Religion as a way of life, religion all through the moments of the African’s life, which accompanies the African at their different stages in life, at different activities, when man sets on an expedition, when he dies only to be reborn, traditional religion is, as a doctrine, man’s ways of determining balance within himself, with the environment and with the world at large. (Kukah,2007), observes that, today, because of the nature of our historical experiences as Africans, we have come to see both religion and culture as concepts or ideas that are distinct and in direct opposition to one another.

SCHOLAR’S VIEW ON ODUDUWA AND MISCONCEPTIONS

The origin of *Oduduwa* has become an imitable speculation. Several scholars have written on *Oduduwa*

with different view point. Among them are Bishop Ajayi Crowther, Rev. Samuel Johnson, Professor Adebowale Atanda, Venerable Archdeacon J. Olumide Lucas, Lt. Col. A.B. Ellis, Rev. (Dr). Stephen Farrow.

- Rev. Samuel Johnson explains that *Oduduwa* was a crown Prince from Mecca who was found guilty of idolatry and was expelled from mecca who later settled at Ile-Ife.
- Bishop Ajayi Crowther in his expository described *Oduduwa*, as a female goddess.
- Professor Adebowale Atanda noted that *Oduduwa* migrated from the areas of Niger, and he did not come from Nigeria but rather came to wrestle power from *Obatala*
- Venerable Archdeacon J. Olumide Lucas views *Oduduwa* as an Egyptian goddess whose history is unknown.
- Lt. Col. A.B. Ellis avers that *Oduduwa* is a female and is the spouse of *Obatala*. *Oduduwa* act for the world while *Obatala* represent the sky-god.
- Rev. (Dr). Stephen Farrow discusses that *Oduduwa* is part of the four effigy planted at the four quarters of the earth alongside, *Sango*, *Ifa* and *Obatala*.
- According to a myth, *Oduduwa* was described as a blind woman. When the world began, she and her husband *Obatala* were quieted in a dimness in a huge space because the world was formless, enclosed in a calabash, *Obatala* having the superior hand and *Oduduwa* at the receiving end.

Most people believe that *Oduduwa* is *Ifa*, likewise some believe *Oduduwa* is *Obatala*, some also refer to *Oduduwa* as *Olodumare*. *Oduduwa* is not *Olodumare* (almighty God) rather, *Ifa* is the word of *Olodumare*. *Ifa* is the wisdom of God which guides our day to day activities. Ayo (2008) emphasized that *ifa* contains the plan for the earth; from the tiny ant to the vast firmament. He has a plan for all the things and controls them. There is only one God, who is not completely known because no one has seen Him physically. He has carved a niche for himself, he sees all that will happen and that will still happen. The entire traditional way of life is referred to as *Ifa* (Deidre, 2017). The *Orisa*'s (deities) known as *Irunmole* and *Ifa* are all part of a whole, they each have individual tasks just as our eyes, ears and mouth perform different functions within our bodies. They are agents of God and assist God. *Orisa*'s are believed to be our long dead blood ancestors, defied ancestors. They are also the forces of the universe. Deidre (2017), emphasized that *orisa*'s are deified ancestors, they are men and women who have walked the earth and their lives have impacted mankind in a positive way.

MEANINGS OF ORISAS/ DEITIES AND THEIR DUTIES

Dayo (2008) stated that, among the traditional Yoruba's, different family and compounds worships different *Orisa*'s. each family and compound has its lineage *Orisa*. The Yoruba's believe that there are intermediaries between the humans and the almighty God (Olu, 1975). Intermediary gods like, *sango*, *obatala*, *olokun*, *olosa*, *ogun*, *yemoja* and so on. They are heavenly beings, with spiritual energies and having an aspect or messengers of God. *Orisa*'s also known as *irunmole*'s all have their separate groups of worshippers (Ifayemi, 1989). Each has, also, a separate house of worship or shrine, grove etc. The following are list of *orisa*'s and their identity;

- ***Olodumare*** – also known as the supreme God, He is the supreme energy of the universe. He is referred to as *Orisa Oke* He is the Almighty and the creator of everything. He is the maker of the heaven and earth and He has no shrine. All the deities act on his behalf on earth.
- ***Obatala***– also known as the *Orisanla* of whiteness. He was the one *Olodumare* assigns the creation of the universe and humanity to. He was the *Orisa* of purity and clarity. he is the responsible for the creation of the human body and the entire organs.
- ***OrisaOko***– the deity in charge of agriculture and harvest.

- **Orunmila**– he is the deity believed to have witnessed the creation of the earth, that is why he was called *Eleriipin*.
- **Ifa-ifa** is the wisdom Deity. It is the mouth piece of God. He represents wisdom, understanding and knowledge. He is known as the divinity of foresight.
- **Oya**– she represents the deity for the wind. She is the wife of *Sango*.
- **Yemoja**– she is the mother of the universe. She is referred to as the goddess of the sea. The name means “mother of all the fish”.
- **Osumare**– the one who has multicoloured skin known as rainbow
- **AyanAgalu**– the deity in control of drum on earth
- **Sango**– he is the deity in charge of fire, thunder and lightning.
- **OrisaOke 2**-he is the custodian of all the communities. He is the spirit of the hills, mountains, towns and basically the environment where human resides.
- **Osun**– she is the divinity of river and compassionate in nature.
- **Ogun**– also known as the god of iron, creativity and precision. He is known as the pioneering deity.
- **Iyami**– they are referred to as witches.
- **Egbe**– they are referred to as our individual heavenly mates.
- **Osoosi**– scout and hunters for the *Orisa*. He is also good at administration works.
- **Osanyin**– he is the custodian and protector of the forest. He is in charge of herbs and medicines
- **Ibeji**– the deity in charge of twins.
- **Olokun**– he is the guardian of the deep ocean (seas).
- **Obaluaye**– he represent the Orisa of the air and of healing.
- **Ancestor**– they are referred to our blood relatives who are dead.
- **Onitase**– he ruled the *Oketase* where *Orunmila* lived and made his home.
- **Odu**– *Odu* was the wife of
- **Aje**– is the feminine energy of wealth.
- **Iro**– is the spirit of the ancestors associated with Oni of Ile-Ife.
- **Onile**– the one that keeps the house.
- **Sanpona**– the deity who is in charge of small pox.
- **Oluorogbo**– another incarnation of Obatala.
- **Esu**– the deity in charge of authority, discipline and orderliness.

There are 401 Irunmole’s, some say 601 or 801. Irunmole’s are spirit being of heaven that came to see the wellbeing of the earth. They are referred to as the messengers of God Almighty. They are also referred to as Orisa. However, Orisa are those that had good imprints on humans, when on earth. Orisa’s still manifest till date. Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria, Gandhi of India, Martin Luther King of America can all be referred to as Orisa’s.

ODUDUWA

The name *Oduduwa* is divided into two forms, *Odu* means the “supreme head”, chief or one who bears the scepter. The second part of the name is a contraction of either *dawa* which means “self-existent or existing by oneself” or ‘*tiodaiwa*’ means “created being”. The full name when combined together means “the chief who is self-existent or the chief created being”. According to many scholars, the name is never attributed to God, although it is strongly suggestive of His attributes.

Today, there are three current versions of the traditional history of the reputed patriarch of the Yoruba race, who is called *Oodua*(*Ife* dialect for *Oduduwa*).

The first and the most popular among the people of *Ife*, is the mythical version that *Oduduwa* descended with a large chain from Heaven, commanded by *Olodumare*, the Controller of Heaven, to create the world.

Water dominated the surface of the earth, and a five-fingered leg fowl was accompanied by Him of the heavens with powerful sand under the supervisor of a priest, whose subject was *Ojumu*. The sand was poured by *Ojumu* while the five-fingered fowl spread it all across the surface of the earth. By the might and stature of *Olodumare*, dry land becomes visible, and *Oduduwa*, together with the well-respected sixteen elders their subordinates drop down by the use of chain at Moore quarter”.

The second is the more recent version that *Oduduwa* migrated to *Ile-Ife*, either from Mecca, Egypt, or Upper Nubia and came to settle at *Ile-Ife* which took a long journey from the North to the South. That’s explains why there are many Yoruba speaking tribe along the routecoming from southern parts of Nigeria going to *Ilorin*, *Gara*, *Tapa*, *Nupe*, *Beriberi*, as far as *Bornu* Empire and so on (Dayo, 2008) Some says he was sent out of Mecca by his brothers because he practiced paganism.

The last, but not the least, of the three theories, is that *Oduduwa* arrived neither from the West nor from the East, but that he was accounted to have been one of the prominent people who lived before the torrent, himself along with his companions and their households, subsided on a dry ground by the use of a chain like rope from their house boat, which berthed on *Oke-Ora* (*Oramfe’s* hill) between *Ile-Ife* and *Itangunmodi* on the *Ife-Ilesha* road, from where they came to Moore quarter in *Ile-Ife*. And this is the reason why *Oduduwa* and all the people who were saved from the deluge were known to the ancient *Ife* men as *Ooyei*.e. *awonti o ye*– “those who were saved” (Fabunmi, 1985). The sites where many of them descended and lived became the ancient shrines of the Yoruba’s.

Finally, this day, none of the unsophisticated traditional historians of *Ife* give any credence whatsoever to the second version of *Oduduwa* history as recounted above. They are still quite firm and unshaken in them believe that *Ile-Ife* is the cradle of the world, and that *Oduduwa* only descended at *Ile-Ife*. These elders, in particular Chief *Obadio*, the *Onisoro* or traditional keeper of *Oduduwashrine*, persist in saying “*Oduduwa ro ni o*”- “*Oduduwa* only descended from above”. “*Ro*” in *Ife* dialect means “*So*”-to descend.

According to oral tradition history of the Yoruba’s, *Oduduwa* commanded the Mother Earth to swallow him up and he assumed into the Heavens and he left a statue-like figure called *Irin*. When *Oduduwa* is in voked there are heavy downpour even during the dry season. He is also capable of inducing financial openings and blessings. Olignide (2013) writes that, *Oduduwa* was succeeded by his grandson Oranyan. Oranyan was described to be a very fearless and strong Prince, and of an unconquerable courage. He was also known to be the originator of the *Esos* clan.

COLOUR SYMBOLISM

Oduduwa is often associated with white which symbolizes purity. It implies holiness and sacredness. Purity on the other hand connotes inward and outward purity (Sheba, 2003). It implies purity in words and deeds. It also connotes purity that calls personal cleanliness, living and mind. The worshippers of *Oduduwa* always appears in white to show a form of sanctified life.

Oduduwa lived in *Igboidio* where only the priest of *Oduduwa* can go in to perform rituals. In *Ile-Ife*, *Oduduwa’s* shrine has no female priestess or devotees. They are all male. The name of the highest chief of *Oduduwa* is *Obadio* who is only permitted by tradition to enter into the enclosure housing *Oduduwa* shrine to perform ritual during the festival or in case of an emergency in Yoruba land. When the *Obadio* dies the second in command takes over as the high priest. The *Oduduwa* shrine is out of bound to all including the kings. *Oduduwa* has a close resemblance to *Obatala* with regard to attributes and preferences. White is the favourite colour at his shrine.

ODUDUWA’S CHILDREN

(Fabunmi, 1985) in his own study, discusses that, according to traditional oral history, *Oduduwa*, being a

polygamist had many children, male and female. But remoteness of time, which always casts a veil of obscurity over unwritten happenings of long, past ages, makes it impossible to know the names of all the children of *Oduduwa* except a few who were so outstanding that they cannot be easily forgotten. It is said

- The *Oduduwa*'s first daughter was the mother of *Olowu, Asunkungbade*, who founded the *Owu*
- That towards the end of his reign *Oduduwa* became blind and suffered the loss of four powerful sons, is: *Esidale; Obameri; Okanbi* (alias *Idekosero-aake*) and *Ogun*.
- That two of *Oduduwa*'s sons went abroad to fetch the sea-water with which his blindness was cured. They are *OwaAjibogun*, who founded the *Ojsha* Kingdom and *Aremitan* who later became the Oba of *Idanre*.
- That when, before his death, *Ogun* was acting as Regent for his blind father, he (*Ogun*) founded the town of *Shaki*.
- That on the demise of *Oduduwa*, his eldest living son, by name *Obalufon Ogbogborin*, succeeded him. And when the latter died, his own son, *Obalufon Alaiyemore*, succeeded him, while *Oranmiyan, Oduduwa* youngest son was away on sojourn, but on hearing this news, *Oranmiyan* quickly returned to *Ile-Ife* and drove *Obalufon Alaiyemore* from the throne. *Oranmiyan* then became the *Ooni* and *Alaiyemore* fled from the town to found a town now known as *Efon Alaaye* in *Ekiti*.

ODUDUWA AND THE CREATION OF THE WORLD

Ifayemi (1989) in his discussion stated that, according to the Yoruba oral mythology, it has it that after creating the cosmic ocean preceding the formation of the earth, *Olodumare* sent *Obatala* with the cosmic sand, a three-toed cock (some say five-toed) and a chameleon to go and develop the earth crust.

On the way after a long and tiring journey, *Obatala* came across a keg of undiluted, foaming palm wine and settled down to do justice to his thirst. The tasty palm-wine got to his head and he became intoxicated. Soon he slept off. Sensing that something had gone wrong when there was no feedback from *Obatala*, *Olodumare* summoned *Oduduwa* to go and investigate. Before embarking on the journey *Oduduwa* convinced *Olodumare* to give him a chain to aid him when performing the assignment which was granted. On reaching the spot where *Obatala* slept off, *Oduduwa* left him in peace and took over the three cosmic materials for the earth creation.

After a tortuous journey to the destined spot and hanging on the chain over the flood he poured the sand on the space after which he commanded the cock to descend and spread sand which it did satisfactorily. The chameleon descended next and walking on the newly created earth told *Oduduwa* that it was solid and could contain his weight. Thus *Oduduwa* descended and walked on the surface of the earth.

Meanwhile, *Obatala* woke up and discovered that *Oduduwa* had completed his assignment. But instead of *Olodumare* getting angry with him, He ordered *Obatala* to continue with his journey to the earth kingdom and use the new earth crust to mould man. He did as he was instructed and so he was known as.

Oba t' o se fintoju, t' osehotoenu, orogbenuineda which means "the king who fashioned the eyes and created the round mouth, the word that is active in man". *Oduduwa* too is described as *Oba aftewonros'Ife, onilegbeeji, amujinikutuf'omi* which means "the king who descended on a chain to *Ile-Ife*, whose land is naturally fertilized, one who is akin to the earth ware, that bathes every morning in the fresh spring water".

Till date both the worshipper of *Oduduwa* and *Obatala* wears white robes in their respective shrines.

ILE-IFE

According to Ayo (2008) in his discussion stated that, one day some asked *Oduduwa*, what about the thing

you dropped inside the ocean; that made us have this solid Earth beneath our feet? He answered, it makes the earth to widen and solidify; *Ile n fe*. This is how the name *Ile-Ife*, came out and remains till today. *Ile-Ife* is a town in Osun State Nigeria located in the Southwestern part. According to the oral tradition among the Yoruba's, *Ile-Ife* was the source of the Yoruba people. It was where the land spread to other places.

Ile-Ife means “the land that continues to spread”. According Yoruba oral literature, *Ile-Ife* was the point where the heaven meets the earth. It was the place where the sun rose and the days of life began. *Ile-Ife* is said to house the 401 Deities (Orisa) that descended upon the earth. The Yoruba's believe they are the children of *Oduduwa's* and were created by *Obatala*. *Ile-Ife* according to the beliefs of the Yoruba, is the earthly origin and fountain of all; it is also the earthly end to which all must return in order to be told what to do next.

Fabunmu (1985) opines that, when Frobenius, the German explorer, visited Yoruba land, he was so impressed by the cult of the goddess and the whole set-up of Yoruba religion that he concluded that *Ile-Ife* was the “lost Atlantis” rediscovered and that the Yoruba were the progeny of that legendary kingdom. *Oduduwa* the first person to enter the earth automatically became the king to rule over the all the others. Also because it is difficult for ordinary citizens of *Ile-Ife* to see him, one of titles became the *Olofin* the king that cannot be seen easily (Ayo, 2008). Despite all the odds, *Ile-Ife* still continues to maintain its integrity as the cradle of the Yoruba race and Yoruba religion. (Samson 2001) recalled that, it was the center for Yoruba art during the early years. The capital of the kingdom then was *Ile-Ife*. The *Basorun* of this reign was *Olorunfun-mi*.

One of the monumental things in *Ile-Ife* is the *Oranmiyan* staff which belongs to the youngest school of *Oduduwa*. According to oral literature, he grew up to become a giant and a strong man. He also rose to become a very powerful giant and a great warrior. The city of Benin was said to have been founded by one of the eldest children of *Oduduwa*, *Olu Ibinni* or *Osa Ibinni*. Abati (2016) observes that, the Yoruba people who are currently about 27.675 million inhabit a large part of Southwestern Nigeria (Nigeria census, 2006) including Kwara and Kogi States. Their culture and tradition spread across the western borders of Nigeria to the, Ghana, Togo, Republic of Benin and across the Atlantic Ocean, Brazil, Cuba etc.

YORUBA TRADITIONAL WOOD CARVING

The Yoruba art is one of the most respected art across the globe. Everywhere in the world, there are traces of Yoruba religion, culture and art among the people. Throughout the world carvings are mostly used to portray the traditions and culture of a particular people. Through the carved piece, stories can be deduced to give the full detail about the nature of their belief. Several pieces had been carved by Yoruba sculptors due to the fact that trees are in larger number in the southwestern region of Nigeria.

The use of woods like *iroko*, *omo*, *ire*, *ona*, *igiosun* (camwood) etc which are often found in the Southwestern region of Nigeria, is a key reason why carving is a common means of artistic expression related to the Yoruba's of southwestern Nigeria. The Yoruba carver illustrates not just his skill but also his ideals and idea of the world which is also evident in his mannerism of proportions of the figure which are predetermined. The posture of the carvings and the geometrical forms all expresses the culture and the appreciation of beauty in traditional art forms which are an integral aspect of Yoruba wood carving.

Representations of human forms like head, breast, navel, hair style, male organ are deliberately done for directional emphasis. The head is usually larger than normal because Yoruba wood carvings are symbolic. The proportions enlarged as replica of the person's *ori*in destiny connoting; *ori la ko da, ka to daeni* which means “head we first creates before the body”. The destiny according to Yoruba tradition, meaning whatever man will become in life is determined by the head, and without head there is no life; *tikobas'ori, a ba mu ejod'igi*

(Adepegba, 1995:48) noted that various studies on the sculpture are not limited to the forms and contents. The carver artist has been studied in varying details in different societies. Wood carving in Yoruba land are invariably hereditary in some areas, while apprentices also are allowed to have a proper training on the processes that wood passes before the work of art is executed. There are different types of wood used in carving which are very significant to the tradition of the society. Lightwood and hardwood are used depending on the functionality of the piece.

Most Yoruba traditional masks are carved with lightwood while the door panels and post are carved with hardwood due to the weight it carries. The tools used by traditional Yoruba carvers are few with different sizes while some related to those used by Western carvers. Axe and machetes are the first tool used in cutting and to create the first impression as surface carving. Followed by adzes which can also be used to create the forms by chipping off the surface portions of the wood. Chisels are in different sizes like gouge used to create hollows and to detail the surface parts of the sculpture, while knives are to do the finishing and intricate designs the most detailing aspect of the wood carving.

(Adepegba, 2007:3) elucidates that, carved images, be it relief or free standing, formed an unbelievably large reservoir of representational symbol of worship and veneration. This has to do a kind of art work that will spore the audience to engage in the right order of worship. Most of the art works are symbolic in nature because, the posture carries weight that will encourage the women that look at the carving “An Evaluation of the Spirit of Intercession” will intensify more on their prayer life to evaluate her by interceding for their homes and the nation at large.

There are several Yoruba carvers that made an indelible mark on wood which cannot be forgotten in the history of Yoruba wood carving; among the renown carvers are Bamidele Are Ogun, Bisi Fakeye, Lamidi Fakeye and the host of others were able to introduce themes from the Bible on the wooden door panels and other free standing carvings of the popular Christian themes commissioned in some churches. Most of the works are stylized in nature to show the richness embedded in Yoruba traditional carvings.

LAMIDI FAKEYE; THE TRADITIONAL YORUBA WOOD CARVER

According to (Akin, 2003), African artists can be divided into three categories according to their modes of training. There are the traditional artists, trained under the apprenticeship system; a situation where each of the Arts was practiced as a family trade and the technique and secrets passed down from the elders to the children. There is also the category trained in workshops run by expatriate artists and African artists. The third group consists of artists trained in western styled art schools; they constitute the largest number of artists working in Africa today and are the most visible. Lamidi Olonade Fakeye consist of the three categories.

Most successful in the attempts to encourage traditional arts and crafts was the workshop set up by the Catholic mission and run by catholic Fathers Kelvin Carroll and O’Mahoney in 1947 in the Northwestern Yoruba town of Oye-Ekiti. The intent was not purely to propagate art; it was to comply with the papal decree that any local traditional that is not against Catholicism should be allowed to continue in indigenous cultures. However, the artists who participated in the experiment was Lamidi Fakeye (Adepegba, 2003).

Lamidi is a name to be reckoned with among the traditional wood carving community. He is an enigma who has done countless carvings around the globe. Olonade means “the carver has come”, made us to know that Lamidi started carving at a tender age of eight. He was both the apprentice of his father and Bamidele Areoogun. He is from a family of wood carvers and he was the fifth generation.

HISTORY OF THE ODUDUWA STATUE

In 1978, Fakeye became an instructor in sculpture, in Obafemi Awolowo University, in Ile-Ife, Osun State,

Nigeria in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, which during his stay, he unveiled the statue of *Oduduwa* erected underneath Amphi Theatre. When professor Abimbola was the Dean of Faculty of Art, he suggested to Professor Wole Soyinka, who was the chairman of the *Oduduwa hall*, the possibility of carving a huge *Oduduwa* statue to be erected underneath the *Oduduwa* hall to honour *Oduduwa*. Professor Soyinka agreed that it was a good idea, he met with Lamidi Fakeye whom he discussed the idea with and he responded positively to the idea.

MAKING OF THE STATUE

Preparation Of The Wood

The process of carving starts with the acquisition of wood perhaps through purchase or felling of tree that will be more resistance to the fungi activities. Wood is a durable material that can last for decades or thousands of years. In the ancient Rome, some of the wood carvings are virtually in their original condition due to some substances used on them to protect them from fungi/bacteria attack them, that is why seasoned wood is far more resistance to decay than wet wood.

After felling, seasoning commences which allow the wood to lose substantial moisture/water content which ordinarily would have ignited bacterial attack. In which it will be lifted few inches from the ground to allow for air passage. The seasoning of wood requires 17 drying process. Wood shape may likely change if care and proper measures are not taken. It can result to deformity such as shrinking, warping, bending and twisting of the wood plank. The processes of seasoning can be by air-drying or kiln- drying to have a good result when processing the wood that is being prepared for carving.

Natural air-drying takes from several weeks to several months to ascertain the dryness of the wood, depending on wood thickness and atmospheric temperature whereas kiln-drying only takes few days because the heat from the kiln will be applied directly on the wood to dry the water content in the wood. The process of seasoning must be properly monitored either air-drying or kiln-drying, it must be carefully stacked to prevent the deformity that may want to occur during the drying process, and the drying needs to be properly controlled with care.

Lamidi got a well-aged *Iroko* tree at Ibadan which was four feet in diameter by thirteen-and-a-half feet in length. The tree was transported by Chief Titilayo and set it behind *Oduduwa* hall. He did not have financial support then to hire assistants to assist him in doing the work, he did not start the project until six years later. Before he embarked on the project he had to research for someone who has vast history of *Oduduwa*. He was assisted by Babalawo Fatogun, who teaches oral literature in Yoruba, in the Department of African languages and literature in Obafemi Awolowo University. Fatogun gave the full idea through *Odu-ifa* explaining the *Oduduwa* in details.

After gathering all the details, he needed to know about *Oduduwa*, he began work on February 1986 on the log of wood. He also got experienced wood carvers who assisted him from *Edein* Osun State and the other from *Ile-Ekiti*. Neither of them knew how to carve figures but they knew how to carve with traditional tools to create bowls and mortars for domestic uses. He only instructed them whenever he needed to.

He worked round the work for eleven and half-months with the wood lying horizontally on the floor without standing it to know if it was balanced or not and still achieving the desired design. According to (Lamidi, 1966:174), “about a hundred men moved the statue into a truck”.

UNVEILING THE STATUE

After the completion of the *Oduduwa statue*, the statue was unveiled by His Royal Highness, Oba Okunade

Sijuwade Olubuse II, the Ooni of Ife then. Almost all the Oba's from Oyo state and others from the North and Ogun State attended the unveiling as well. The late chief Obafemi Awolowo was also in attendance during the unveiling. The enormous size of the statue and the ingenuity with which Fakeye produced the work culminated to various comments. Such comments included (Willett,1975), that says, artist have tackled sculpture from problem solving perspectives. The interesting forms exhume life; abstracted wood carvings are carefully thought out thus bringing the fragment to form a whole and definite meaning. He goes further to submit that Fakeye "has successfully executed many projects for the university through which he has displayed the modernity of his idea".

Plate 1: Lamidi and standing beside an Iroko log at sawmill at New Airport Road, Ibadan,1981.



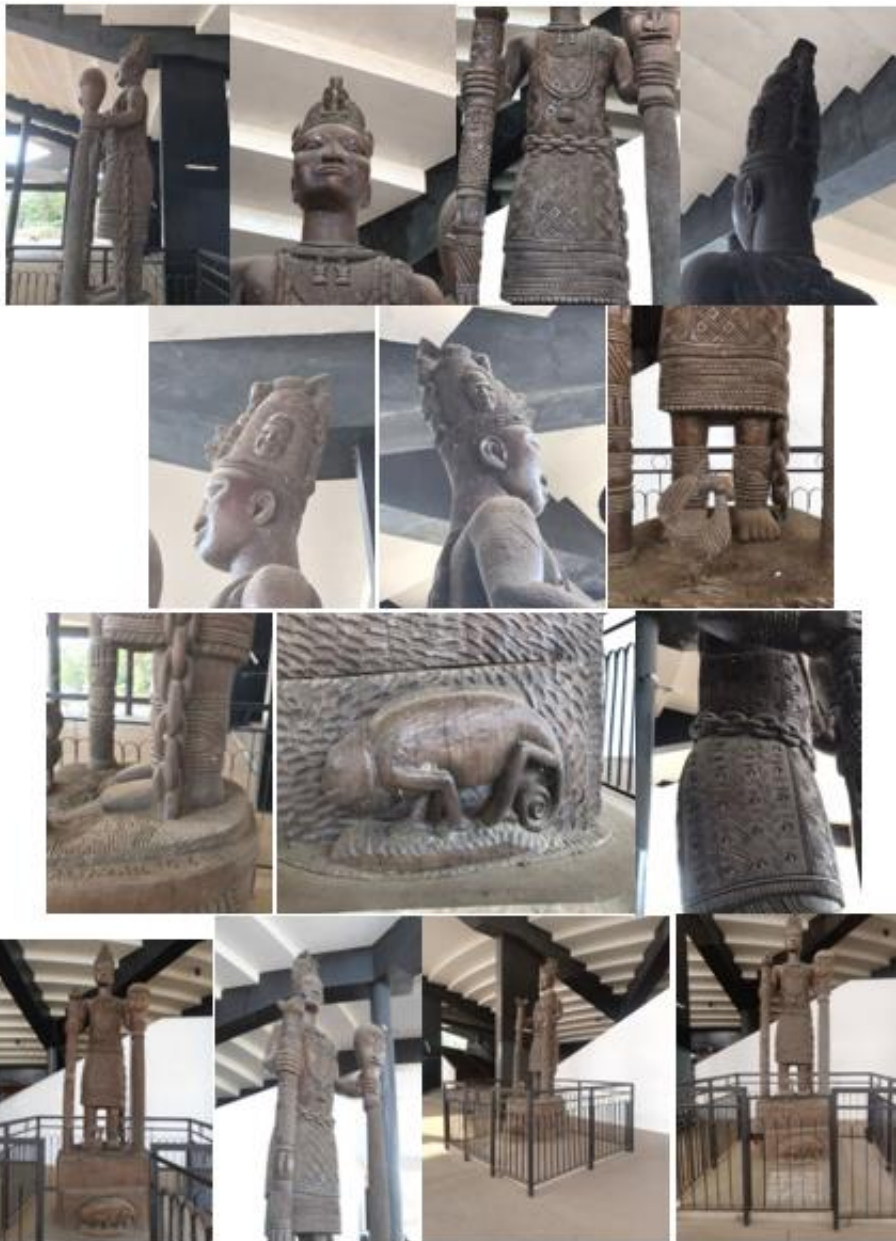
Photographed by: Mutairu Abasin, 1981.

Plate 2: Lamidi and his assistant, working on the Oduduwa statue underneath Oduduwa Hall, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State.



Photographed by: Ayoolua Akeem, 1986

Plate 3: The Oduduwa statue after its completion, erected in front of Oduduwa lecture Theatre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Osun State, Nigeria.



Photographed by: Oligbinde Rotimi, 2022

CONCEPTUAL AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE WORK

Analysis Of Form

In any given work of art, it is very important that the forms are according to the lay down rule that guide every work of art. Through the use of principle and element of design the major works are half solved because, the artist can only work on those guidelines to have a good rendition of the wood carving. With the use of element of design forms are to be primarily justified which can be traceable in the *Oduduwa* wood carving.

The over life-sized piece titled *Oduduwa* is an extraordinary yet factual depiction of the common idea of *Oduduwa* among the Yoruba people. The piece is literally a depiction of an important figure on a mission. He is equipped with all he needs to accomplish his mission. The fifteen feet tall image is sculpted standing erect on a semi-circle pedestal on which a fowl and a lizard is depicted standing and lying upon. The figure

standing with its head facing forward suggests focus. The figure is sculpted holding two long staffs on both hands of which one is highly decorated with linear and semi-geometric motifs and a bird sitting on its top. While the other staff on the left hand is carved plain with a rough texture, having a sacred mask face on its top.

The Oduduwa figure is sculpted wearing a small sized Yoruba crown on its head and coral beads around its neck and legs. It also sculpted wearing an attire which looks like an armless man's top (buba) and trouser (sokoto) which are type attire of a Yoruba male. Around his waist is depicted a heavy chain which extends to the floor of the pedestal. The body of the piece is highly decorated with Yoruba geometric motifs and pattern.

The piece in its overall look is naturalistic, it pays attention to necessary details such as the patterns on cloths and stave's, proportion of the animals to human and the natural surface texture of the animals and the human skin.

However, the piece is very evident of the progress of the artist, the exposure and experience he had acquired during this phase of his career when he executed the piece Oduduwa. He was able to balance the usual caricature style of Yoruba carving with the contemporary realism of the time, which resulted in an outstanding success.

The piece in itself is a symbol of strength and balance. In contrast to the usual Yoruba form which usually shows an unbalanced emphasis on the head and some other parts of the body. The piece even though not realism still emphasizes the proportion of forms in relation to Yoruba beliefs and ideas.

Lamidi noted that he used every type of wood of questionable texture. Each of his works is meticulously documented and are well finished to show the hidden grains of the wood. (Oligbinde 2013), observes that, Lamidi is known for his wood carvings that capture the intricacy, determination and restlessness of an individual. The faceless characters tend to be optimistic even as they confront life's reality. Lamidi was an extremely subtle sculptor. His works are solid and structured. The speed with which we are encouraged to read the sculpture is crucial to the way it communicates with us.

Lamidi Fakeye exuberant creativity, permeated with drama, irony and visionary imagination, found its full expressive potential in the medium of his drawing. His figures are portrayed in the intimacy in its environment.

Many scholars have used different adjectives at different times to describe Fakeye's art and his place in the developmental history of African art in general and Nigerian art in particular. (Filani, 2006), describes him as a Neo-traditional carver and a renowned contemporary Yoruba artist. Carey in Fakeye's autobiography introduces him as the significant contemporary artists in the tradition of Yoruba wood carving, while (Onifade, 2007), confirms him as one of the greatest African artists of modern times. All these scholar's submissions attest to the relevance of Fakeye as a force to be reckoned with in African Art, hence the relevance of this project.

According to (Soper, 1978), his works project certain basic characteristics considered traditional such as youthful presentation, directional emphasis, stylization or distorted proportion, boldness of forms and hierarchical representation, they also bear a blend of contemporary traits; they are purely aesthetic and no longer serve traditional functions, either as architectural posts or ritualistic purposes nor does he still use traditional tools. He goes further to say that Fakeye's works can mainly be classified into three categories; freestanding figures, posts and panels. Soper's submissions here are relevant to this study, but his claim that Fakeye no longer use traditional tools seems to be untrue in the sense that both the traditional tools and the imported ones are combined to evolve his works.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

To say that a people do not understand the mystical force behind their being i.e. the existence of their creator, is to also claim that they never knew they had been alive. The African people understand the existence of God, this is a truth which needs not to be proved.

The Yoruba People just like other African people understands the existence of their creator and the supreme being. Their history and experience may not have been documented in a more evidenced form rather than oral literature, but it is surely preserved safely in their arts by the custodians the Yoruba artists. The job of Yoruba artists is beyond the interpretation and expression of ideas, visions and images received by priests and royal leaders, it is also to defend, uphold and affirm the sovereign truth of his people's culture.

This has been exhibited by Lamidi Fakeye throughout his entire career. Through his sculptures he substantiated the true ideas of the Yoruba people. Sculpting Oduduwa image was not just an exhibition of his virtuoso but also a statement which supports and gives credibility to what the true story of the Yoruba origin truly is.

It is no doubt that, Lamidi has brought wood to life through a wide variety of anatomical studies and self-initiated projects that has gained the attention of the public. But also most importantly, we believe that the Yoruba people are the direct descendants of Oduduwa the messenger of Olodumare the supreme being through this piece by Lamidi Fakeye. His works are transfixing tessellation of shapes on wood.

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