

# JOURNAL OF BLACK CULTURE AND INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

Volume 4, 2018 and Volume 5, 2019

ISSN: 2488-9121





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**A Publication of the Centre for Black Culture and International  
Understanding, Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria in collaboration  
with the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan,  
Ibadan, Nigeria**

***Journal of Black Culture and International Understanding (ISSN: 2488-9121); Volume 4, 2018 and Volume 5, 2019*** is published by the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding, Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria in collaboration with the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

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Published in Nigeria by Noirledge Publishing for  
Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding,  
Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria

**Noirledge Publishing**

Suite 223, Ogun-Osun River Basin Development Authority,

Adjacent Palms Shopping Mall, Ring-Road, Ibadan

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Cover Image: *Esu shrine in Ede, 1958* by Ulli Beier

Cover Design: Servio Gbadamosi/Noirledge Studios

Design and Typesetting: Olayibowale Sonuga/Noirledge Studios

Printed and bound in Nigeria by Noirledge Limited

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**ISSN: 2488-9121**

**Volume 4, 2018 and Volume 5, 2019**

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**Publisher:** *Journal of Black Culture and International Understanding* (ISSN: 2488-9121), is published by the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding, Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria in collaboration with the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

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Journal of Black Culture and International Understanding adopts APA as style while privileging its own peculiar house style, which is illustrated below for contributors:

In-text citation with page number: (Haynes 2010: 105)

In-text citation with year only: (Onikoyi 2013)

In-text citation with author first: According to Haynes (2015: 105)

In-text citation with author first without page number: Scholars like Haynes (2010) and Onikoyi (2015)

In-text citation of two authors: Layiwola and Pogoson (2017: 45)

In-text citation of three or more authors: (Adepegba et al 2008: 28)

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### Three Authors or More:

Burridge, A. et al. (2017) Polymorphic Borders. *Territory, Politics, Governance* 5.3, 239-251.

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Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2008). Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for 'Other Worlds'. *Progress in Human Geography* 32. 5, 613-632.  
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### 3.

## **Culture, Festival and History: *Sogidi* Lake in Awe Town, Oyo (Southwest Nigeria)**

**Akanbi Oladayo Bode**

### **Abstract**

One of the beauties of Yoruba culture and, perhaps, Africa in general, is its resilient ability to sustain cultural practices in the face of contradistinction to Western culture. The African continent, to a great extent, represents a unique cultural area with distinct yet similar institutions and value systems. As closely knit as they may look, and despite transcending the immediate environment, African cultures have largely retained their distinct cultural uniqueness. In Awe town, Oyo (Southwest Nigeria), the *Sogidi* Lake, with all the mysteries surrounding it, is a remarkable cultural heritage/site among the people and has attracted so much significance and reverence with other groups. This study considers the cultural heritage and festivals used in commemoration of *Sogidi* Lake in Awe town over time in order to underscore its relevance and resilience in an age of untamed globalisation.

**Keywords:** Culture, Festival, Awe Town, Globalisation, *Sogidi* Lake, Yoruba Culture, Oyo

### **Introduction**

Primordial cultures in Nigeria remain firmly rooted in such a rich heritage, despite being subjected to changes and re-modifications in modern experiences. Within these experiences, such cultures are conditioned to co-exist and thrive, while not losing their essence and functions which have survived through the years. Indeed, primordial societies in Nigeria, like many others across the world, have had to contend with the imposition of western cultures. The carefully orchestrated and domineering influence of western culture beginning with the 1500 European expansion not only

threatened the existence or survival of non-western and especially African cultures but also smeared and distorted them in a rather negative way. Early European writers propagated the idea of a dark and stagnant culture which, in their flawed judgement, lacked progress.

However, early African scholars, on their part, produced works that have been instrumental in changing and correcting these sterile conceptions and impressions of African culture. By every standard, they demonstrated the uniqueness of African culture and its peculiar origins. These scholarly and illuminating efforts have unveiled and demonstrated, among other things, its resilience and adaptive capacities through the years. In a way, the once smeared and jaundiced impressions about Africa began to change. More so, Africa, through time, was not a continent that stood by to watch other civilisations progress, but was a major player and still a force in world development, thus, raising the stake of African culture among the world's greatest civilisations.

Culture in the Nigerian setting, as well as any part of the world, is an embodiment of society's institutions, values, norms, ideas, ethos, festivals, science and skills. Put differently, culture epitomises technology, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of individual members of the society as these elements survive from one generation to another. As an integral periodic celebration/activity within the African setting, festivals have, in particular, helped to prove the presence of this survival. In a very special and entertaining way, festivals have enhanced the resilience of culture and have equally served as an effective instrument of socialising young people within a society.

The idea of culture is in its holistic form, ingrained in the material and economic foundations or pillars that hold a society together. These foundations uniquely form and fashion every element within the society namely; science and technology and the behaviour and psychological make-up of individuals at any given period in history. Suffice to add that culture remarkably reflects the level of development attained in a society in any particular historical epoch. In a sense, there is an interconnectedness or a nexus when the historical experiences, events, ideas and the culture of a society are discussed. This study attempts an examination of the historical experiences of Awe, a Yoruba town in Oyo State, southwest Nigeria, regarding its socio-cultural development, particularly as it relates to the festivities around the *Sogidi Lake*.

Awe, it must be noted, is situated approximately on latitude 7° 42'N and longitude 4° E. It is bounded in the north by the Oyo-Ogbomoso road; to the east by the Oba Hills; to the west and south by the road from Awe through Akinmorin to Alayin-Oke and by a line from Eleranko on the east to Alayin-Oke on the southwest corner, respectively. With an area of approximately 422 square kilometres, Awe town remains the most significant settlement in Aweland (*Egbe Omo Ibile Awe*, 1982).

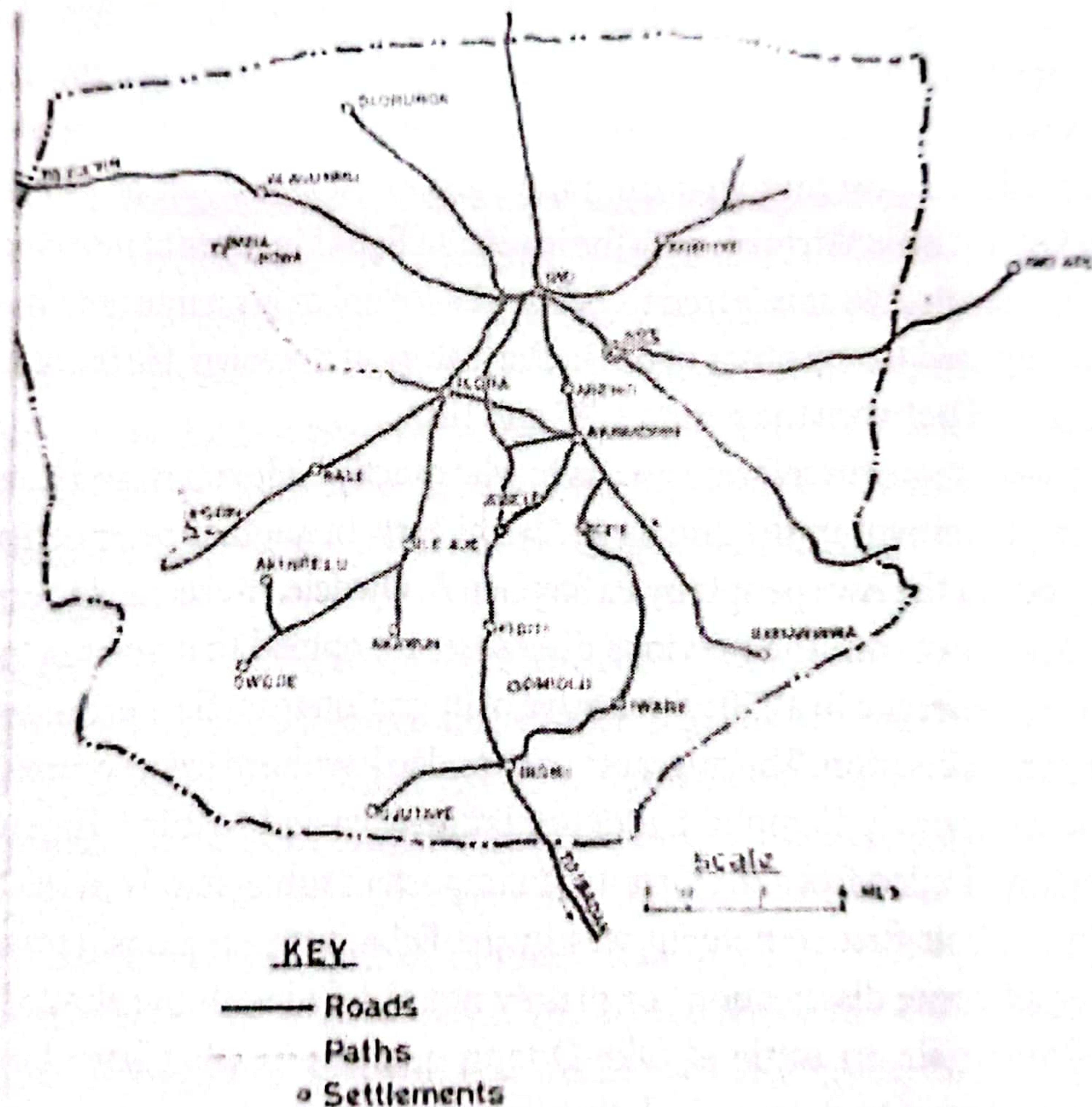
Awe town is strategically located close to other prominent towns in Yorubaland. The town is about thirty-five miles north of Ibadan which, since the colonial period, operated as the capital of states located in Western Nigeria. It is about two miles from Oyo Alaafin. Precisely, Awe town is about 2.5 kilometres east of Oyo, 30 kilometres west of Iwo, 50 kilometres north of Ibadan and 55 kilometres south of Ogbomosho. In addition, it is part of the Afijio Local Government Council of present-day Oyo State. Awe town is believed to have emerged around 1750 while another record put the date at 1781; but the fact remains that Awe town is renowned for surviving all attempted conquests and avoiding displacement on account of any war throughout its known history. Thus, its location has been stable, quiet and serene with attendant development in the indigenous political and economic spheres. Nonetheless, the conquest and eventual collapse of the Oyo Empire during the early decades of the nineteenth century had a great impact on Yorubaland in general, and more importantly, Awe. This development occasioned a situation that significantly shaped the course of Awe's history.

### **Awe in History**

The emergence of Awe town is one that has generated a lot of engaging questions which, no doubt, has become points of debate for scholars of Yoruba history. To begin with, a perspective on the origin of the Awe people by the late Rev. D.A. Olaopa contend that the present location today owes its origin to a certain group of migrants in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Led by an individual called Ladun,<sup>1</sup> this group was said to have journeyed all the way from Ile-Ife to settle in one of the 153 towns in the then Egba kingdom. Indeed, A.K. Ajisafe (1924) in his classic work on Egbaland, seemed to validate this position when he stated that Awe, Ilora, Fiditi and Akinmorin were some of the Egba Gbagura towns in the Egba forest. Accordingly, this meant that these towns had been established right from the time the founders of Egba

kingdom migrated from Ile-Ife. The Egba were said to have migrated and penetrated the Egba forest in three different successive waves at about the thirteenth or fourteenth century (Biobaku, 1975). The largest of the waves which settled towards the north was the Egba Agura. This is said to consist of 144 towns (Biobaku, 1975; Ajisafe, 1924). It has been noted that out of the 144 towns, 72 owed their allegiance to the Agura in his own capital at Iddo and 72 others to the Onilugun of Iluugun, another section of the area. In the course of time, however, the Agura became dominant over most of the area.

**Fig. 1: A map of Awe and its environs**



**Source: Author**

Considering the positions of Olaopa and Ajisafe, if at all their positions were given any form of credibility, that Awe, Fiditi, Ilora, and Akinmorin were part of some of the celebrated Egba Agura towns and that they were fortuitous to have escaped invasion during the Yoruba warfare of the early nineteenth century, then it is probable that the people of Awe have an

unbroken link with Ile-Ife. The escape from invasion, according to Chief A. J. Olatunji, is attributed to their capitulation to the overlordship of the Alaafin at the period. Moreover, the link to Ile-Ife would equally substantiate the fact that the people of Awe would have been at their present site since the Egba moved from Ile-Ife to the Egba forest in about the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

An engagement with the people of this area presents even more interesting information about the origin. Of course, there is a semblance of agreement among them that their origin could be traced to one of the many towns that were then located in the Egba forest. Hence, a significant part of the Egba Agura stock disputed their Ile-Ife origins. A number of them hold to the position that the people of Awe came to their present location from Egba Agura under the leadership of a certain hunter by the name Ladokun. He was said to have migrated from the Egba forest as a result of a dispute which led to a little skirmish with the leaders of Egba kingdom at the time. In most instances, Awe is referred to as "Awe Ladokun" as his name now looms large compared to any other figure in the history of the town. He is noted to have reigned between the period 1781 and 1811.

The question, therefore, arises as to who exactly Ladokun is, and how he became prominent in the annals of Awe history. In another perspective of the history of the Awe people by Pa Stephen A. Ojedele,<sup>2</sup> he seemed to create some harmony with the previous discourse. He opined that what is today Awe town emerged in 1750 with a wave of migration from Ile-Ife, the cradle of Yoruba civilisation. The migrants were said to have been led by prominent Ife princes namely Ilemolu, Ladokun, Ikumawoyi and Mafle.<sup>3</sup> They were said to have hailed from the Orunto, an important ruling family in Ile-Ife at the time. Their first settlement was in the Egba Agura regions. However, because of some disaffection<sup>4</sup> or plainly not satisfied with the abode, they moved on again to settle at Oke-Odofin quarters in what later became known as Awe. On their arrival, they found peace and tranquillity under a certain tree known as *Igi Aruwewe* (also known as *Igi Asasa*).<sup>5</sup> It was further noted that within the short time of the people's settlement in this site, neighbouring settlements like Akinmorin, Jobele and Ilora would ask to know their destination as they passed through and their response would usually be in reference to the Aruwewe tree. Thus, the name of the town became known as 'Awe.'

The prominence of Ladokun here was said to have been established when Ilemolu, who was the eldest and hailed from the Ileye part of the town, bequeathed to his younger ones namely Ladokun and Mofile, the leadership of the entire town. It is argued that the willingness of Ilemolu to do this was borne out of his incapacitation to lead. Other positions cited his becoming too old to hold the reins of power in the land. Importantly, however, was the fact that his decision initiated the beginning of the two ruling houses proceeding from the lines of Ladokun and Mofile, as could be observed today. Ikumawoyi who hailed from the Onsa area of the town, being the youngest, was to become the second in command to the Alaawe. Ilemolu was moreover noted to have made a binding rule that at the passing of a ruling Alaawe, the Ikumawoyi should produce an individual who would take the reins of power until another heir emerges from the two ruling families. It was also instituted as a royal decree and practice that whenever an heir is to be crowned, he must spend some time in Ilemolu's house of Ileye family for about seven days while some sacrificial practices are carried out with the help of the Chief Priest of the land. At the expiration of this length of days, the heir apparent proceeds to the palace where he is officially enthroned. It was pointed out that after the experience at Ilemolu's house, it becomes sacrilegious for the crowned king to visit Ilemolu's house again during his reign.

Fundamental to this study is the place of *Sogidi* Lake which is no less an important factor to Ladokun and any other migrant in Awe. Accounts have it that after Ladokun, a hunter, led his people to settle under the *Aruwewe* tree, he hung his hunting bag, bow and arrows and other weapons of war. He then instructed those that accompanied him to embark on a mission to locate a water source. This, in essence, was in an effort to perfect their settlement under the *Aruwewe* tree. The search lasted for a while until the search party stumbled on a monkey which they attempted to kill. In their endeavour, a member of the search party missed a few steps and fell into a pool of water. This accidental discovery brought a lot of joy and excitement to the search party that they forgot they wanted to kill a monkey. Some accounts disagree with the pool of water thesis and stated that it was just a hole with water in it. Upon a closer examination, it was suggested to be a well.<sup>6</sup>

Another version of the story by Pa Ojedele actually mentioned the fact that when Ilemolu and his co-sojourners arrived at the Awe site, they were

thirsty, hence their search for water. In this attempt, they sighted monkeys on the trees which they made effort to kill. Having gotten a clear shot, a different person sighted a pool of water under the tree; as such they immediately halted the kill because they believed the monkey aided their search. The search party in their excitement further looked around and discovered some cherry fruits which they consumed. In response to the good taste from the cherry, they exclaimed, *esogidi!* (good fruit). After their discovery, *esogidi* became *Sogidi*. It is argued that this 'well-like body of water' is what transformed to the *Sogidi* Lake today. Since its discovery, therefore, the lake has become not just a source of water for the people's daily needs but an embodiment of spiritual essence for the town.

Under Ladokun, Awe was said to have expanded. The expansion, however, came at the cost to neighbouring communities and chief among them was Laro, a community which was at the time located between the present site of Akinmorin and Awe. Tradition has it that the community was a large one, with a significant population but for some reasons which at the beginning was not entirely clear, divided into two distinct groups. Eventually, the people of Laro had an internal conflict born out of the ownership of *elede* (pigs) later tagged the *elede* war. As a result of the division which was further exacerbated by the *elede* war, a large percentage of the Laro was said to have united with Awe under Ladokun who rose to the occasion and initiated a peace process which earned him the admiration of the people. He instructed that the people should have their pigs branded to prevent further trouble.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, many more persons declared their allegiance to Ladokun who had shown himself to be brave and was loved by the people.

The movement of Alaafin Atiba to New Oyo, which emerged at the collapse of Old Oyo, later significantly altered the course of development in Awe history in the nineteenth century. With the settlement of the Alaafin at the new Oyo location, Awe's pre-eminence became threatened and compromised greatly. Traditions common to Awe people claim that the ambitious effort of Alaafin Atiba to expand his small territory which he had been graciously given led to the gradual attraction of neighbouring inhabitants to the new city. Indeed, this aspect of Awe history has been one of the most controversial, considering the fact that Oyo town has significantly overshadowed her. Be that as it may, it is not the subject of this study, this section only attempts an ethno-genesis of Awe.

### **Inaugurating the Awe Festivals**

What has today become the biggest event in Awe town, that is the Awe festival, precisely began in 1987. But it was a process that started long before the period and was borne out of the desire to seek an alternate but effective means of bringing about community development. Awe people living in the diaspora still expressed an amiable affinity with their home country as is the case in other African societies. This had helped to bring about continued interactions for the development of the land. This is not just limited to a group of professionals but cuts across various people from different disciplines or professions. Obiechina (1975) comment on the middle-class' strong links with their home country thus;

Every among middle-class, professional, university-educated West Africans who have been most intensively subjected to western acculturation a large body of traditional thinking still exists... the average town dwellers in West Africa... is still a peasant at heart, with a thin layer of modern sophisticated concealing the deep centred traditional beliefs and feelings.

One could readily argue that the above has been a strong factor and drive for the different associations or 'Egbe' in and out of the town. Associations are very important elements in the life of any African society. These associations cut across every sphere of their life. They are formed for the purpose of promoting healthy relationships, companionships and co-operation in the fulfilment of their societal obligations. Looking at the importance of associational life in Yorubaland, N.A. Fadipe (1970) argued that;

...the tendency to form association and corporation is very strong among the Yoruba. To a large extent, it derives from the organization of the people into compounds. They are formed for the purpose of promoting a common interest in the fields of politics, economics, religion, recreation and enjoyment. One interesting results of this tradition of association is that wherever there is an appreciable community of Yoruba, either outside Yorubaland or even only outside their own

particular communities, an association will spring up completely with officers. This organization will certainly have judicial functions and will have its survival and mutual help features strongly developed.

For the Awe people in the diaspora or rather outside of Aweland, the formation of associations gave them a sense of "attachment to their root." It equally elicits deep and lasting commitments from their members to the cultures and values of their home country. From the early periods of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Awe, there existed a good number of associations or groups that were mainly meant to provide essential social services for the community. Today, among other associations in the land and abroad, the *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe* has remained the most prominent.

The *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe* was founded in 1912 as a cultural association with the primary mission of preserving and strengthening the indigenous institutions of Awe namely the Oba (Barkan, McNulty and Ayeni, 1991). It equally saddled itself with the responsibility of raising the productivity of rural residents. As a result, the body established the Awe Development Corporation (ADC) in 1982 and was charged with the responsibility of explicitly promoting productive enterprises in Aweland. Considering the task before the ADC, it featured reputed professionals who could bring their goals to reality. These people were appointed by the *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe*. It is not a voluntary association which all indigenes of Awe, regardless of age, social status or gender, can be a part. Apart from the Chairman and Treasurer of *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe* who hold parallel positions within the ADC, other members of the committee who could either be a local or non-resident community member are appointed for their knowledge and skills at promoting productive activities (Barkan, McNulty and Ayeni, 1991).

Before the establishment of the ADC, the *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe* had been the association directly leading and directing development in Awe. This was due to the widespread support it had enjoyed and still enjoys from the community. As far back as the 1940s, efforts at initiating development in the land had been vigorously pursued. For instance, infrastructural development began with the opening of the first secondary school in Awe in 1954.

It is apt to point out here that the basic policy of the ADC is majorly determined by a Central Planning Committee (CPC) which meets quarterly. At their meeting, they review the activities of the corporation and equally set the agenda of activities for the next quarter. All appointments made to the ADC are mainly handled by the CPC. Over the years, CPC has been the heart of the ADC. This body has paraded groups of professionals including individuals holding high positions at different times in the federal government. Some others have served as advisors to the government and major international organisations. This group of professionals have primarily been responsible for the formation of the corporation as a separate entity devoted to the development of Awe. The group had played a major role in establishing important linkages between Awe and other organisations in Nigeria, as well as linkages to international agencies including, for instance, the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF). Its members were also responsible for drafting the "opticom plan", a blueprint for the development of Awe (Barkan, McNulty and Ayeni, 1991). In the words of A.L Mabogunje (2011), the opticom strategy was inaugurated in 1982 on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe*. The association was, therefore, planning to mark the occasion with the launching of a major fund for building a town hall.

According to Barkan, McNulty and Ayeni, the formation of the ADC was not because of any conflict between the generation of urban professionals bent on accelerating development back in their home country and the leaders of *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe*. Rather, the ADC was established as a "development agency" to facilitate the management and financing of development activities in Awe; make the town more attractive to international support; and facilitate the implementation of different types of developmental efforts, including those which raise the productivity of rural residents. Hence, the corporation repeatedly emphasised its close relationship with the *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe's* sons and daughters who reside outside the town, stressing that they have a duty to maintain ties with their place of origin, importantly, by supporting the *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe* and the opticom plan. For most sons and daughters outside Awe, lending support means making a financial contribution. Those who periodically return for meetings of the corporation and the *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe*, do so for fraternal reasons as much as to assist Awe development.

The culminating effect of the effort by the associations over the years led to the commencement of the annual Awe Day celebration. Spearheaded by the likes of Oloye T.B. Adisa (the first chairman of Awe Day celebrations), J. Aboyade and B. Olaopa, the purpose of the Awe Day celebration at the time was to create an avenue for the indigenes to consummate developmental efforts in the town. Hence, by November 17, 1987, the first edition of the festival was held. It was an opportunity for Awe indigenes in the diaspora to visit home. The *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe* had over the years established development corporations in an attempt to extend its organisation down to the grassroots. The festival, no doubt, helped to bring about the opportunity to have those at the grassroots interact with those in the diaspora.

It is vital to point out here that, like many other African towns, religion is very central to the activities of the people of Awe. Awe people worshipped many deities as found in Yorubaland prominently during the nineteenth century. On the one hand, religion and politics could hardly be separated. As a consequence, the influence of religion on politics was of a great measure and this made the chiefs both leaders in secular and religious matters. On the other hand, individual families could be seen having erected one statue or another to which they performed an obligation of worship in reference. This is done by means of sacrifice and utterance of incantations passed down from one generation to another. On these bases, religious festivals which were accompanied by the customary feasting and dancing were invariably highly esteemed and welcomed as they were used to mark the passage of time. In some views, they were regarded, to all intent and purposes, as the end of the year in a traditional calendar. Most of the activities and practices during this period are oftentimes shrouded in mysteries only known by initiated members of such families. Festivals notable among the Awe people include *Oro, Egungun, Ifa, Sango* and *Orisa Rowu* festivals. There were other festivals that were associated with professional craft groups. For instance, the blacksmiths, the soap makers (popular with Awe people), dressmakers, and so on, have days set aside for them to celebrate their associations. On such days, a dance procession is staged with the observance of a courtesy visit to the house of notable personalities in their profession and then to the Alaawe's palace. In as much as some of these festivities are still kept and performed, the *Sogidi*, and by extension the Awe Day, now occupies a central place in recognition and prestige for the town.

### **Sogidi and Awe Day Festival**

The Awe Day celebration which was inaugurated in 1987 is marked on the third week of November every year. It is usually a weeklong celebration that attracts Awe indigenes home and abroad, as well as lovers of tourism, and specifically, foreigners have continued to be part of the festivity. During the celebration, the people of Awe would display, in full glamour, the richness of their cultural heritages to the admiration of indigenes abroad and, of course, foreigners. The week-long programme has, indeed, changed over the years with varieties of the event added by the year with the further opening up of the town. At the early stage of its inauguration, not many events were included in the festivity. However, with time, an event such as an inter-religious service, which is hosted by the Alaawe of Awe town, is held. The programme brings together all people from different faiths within the town. At the programme, which is meant to usher in the celebratory mood of the people, prayers are offered to commit the town into the hands of the Divine. This is usually followed by a community health talk and health outreach. Often times, people within the town are exposed to many health challenges and are equally given the opportunity of meeting with medical health professionals who are sons and daughters of the town and have been invited by the Awe Day Organising Committee.

Another event that has been made so popular among the people during the celebration is the *Ayo* game competition. Being an indigenous game, it draws many experts in the game to compete favourably for Alaawe's top prize. The games are usually followed in the week-long fiesta by the Awe cultural dance competition which invariably brings together all the dance groups within the town to equally compete for the Alaawe's most creative dance group prize. To bring the best and encourage the young individuals in primary schools, a Mathematics competition is organised where all pupils within the town are given the privilege to compete auspiciously. The secondary schools are equally not left out of the competition. For their category, a football competition is organised and all the schools within the town are given fair opportunity to compete. At the end of the different stages, the school which comes out tops is given a trophy and other prizes. The school holds on to the trophy until the following year where they would be expected to defend their title as the champions of all secondary schools in Awe town. The excitement in the mind of the young individuals within the community usually is indescribable, as they all participate with so much

enthusiasm and brilliance. The Awe Day committee also ensures that the young individuals enjoy support and encouragement. As a result, career counselling sessions are part of the week-long activities. This is mostly undertaken by outstanding Awe professionals who had made remarkable impacts in their chosen field of study or practice. According to some members of the Awe Day planning committee, the efforts at this level have greatly yielded positive results which have in turn engendered the development of the town over the years.

In addition to the foregoing events, prayers and thanksgiving programmes are organised at selected mosques and churches during the week. Both Islam and Christian faithful gather at their respective worship centres to make prayers of appreciation for yet another year's event. Of course, these are held on the different days set aside for worship for both faiths. On the Friday of the week of festivities, at about 7 p.m., there is usually a candlelight procession. Everyone present in the town is to be part of this procession which usually commences right at the palace of the Alaawe, and then proceeds around the major routes within the town. Processions have become a hallmark of many festivities in Africa with very great significance, depicting a historic occurrence or occasion. The historic significance makes it imperative for the people to commemorate it as doing so enables a reminiscing of the moment. However, in this case, the Awe people observed this candlelight procession as a way of commemorating the official flag-off of the carnival in the town. Usually, a procession of this nature features a ritualised order which depicts charisma, order and status (Ebersole, 1989). It is, nonetheless, interesting to note that for the Awe people, as much as the charisma and order is observed in the procession and the activities of the night, there is no special reference to status because everyone is meant to join in and enjoy the moment. Moreover, as it would be noted shortly, the procession to the *Sogidi* Lake is somewhat different and with a lot more glamour.

As performed and adhered to over the years, the candlelight procession ends up at the Boosa Square,<sup>8</sup> where the people converge for the *Okudie* night also known as the chicken night. At this point, the Boosa Square would be a beehive of activities that would last until very late at night but chief among them is usually what this paper has described as the 'joy auction.' Music and other activities are performed as notable personalities of the town would step out to bid for chicken and chicken parts. This activity

brings about a lot of excitement as the people happily offer huge amounts of money for whole chickens and even pieces of it. At the end of the night festivities, the money becomes a part of what is spent on developmental projects within the town. It should be noted that apart from this effort, another effort is made to officially welcome the donation of funds for a town-wide project which is usually hoped to be commissioned in the following year's festivity.

At the peak of the festivities, there is always official commissioning of a landmark project in the town that would have been funded based on the funds raised in the previous festivity. It is noteworthy that over the years, the *Egbe Omo Ibile Awe* had embarked on several renovations and extensions of the king's palace, and the building of a multipurpose recreational park which includes a security house, lawn tennis court, car parks with adequate reinforcement, generator and generator house, administrative office and swimming pool, in recent years (*24th Awe Day Celebration Programme, 2010*).<sup>9</sup> These are outcomes of the Awe Day celebrations which has, indeed, become a uniting factor for the people. Joseph Abiola Ojeyomi, the Chairman, Awe Day Directorate 2010, described the event as "an annual festival that mobilises the entire community to exploit the legacy of communal spirit."

Communal spirit is thus exhibited in a form and fashion that is correspondingly common to many Yoruba cultures and traditions, at the *Iwure*<sup>10</sup> at *Sogidi Lake*, which is a high point of the Awe Day festivities. The importance attached to *Sogidi Lake* could be observed in a stanza of the traditional song dedicated in praise of Awe town rendered thus;

*Sogidi odo to ko gbe ri  
Iyanu lo je fun wa  
Omi mimo Alalubosa nda wa lorun  
Odo Agbara, Odo Oje, Asaba  
N'ilu dan ilu lafinjo to tun l'ewa.*<sup>11</sup>

Paraphrasing its meaning, the stanza starts with a eulogy about *Sogidi Lake* as a body of water that never dries regardless of the season. The second line states that it is this mystery that leaves the people awestruck. The eulogy continues by stating that it is holy water pouring directly from the heavens. It is a powerful water-body which in no way compares to any other. The lake has been described as an embodiment of the spiritual essence of the town. It

was noted that though the site on which the lake is located has been forested with some fearful feeling when going there at awkward times in the presence of no other person, this has changed remarkably with houses springing up around its vicinity.

More so, the fence<sup>12</sup> and the artistic design on it beautify the environment and make it rather inviting. It is instructive to point out that on the fence are several artworks with interesting significance to the water and Awe town.<sup>13</sup> On the fence are artistic works depicting the hunters whose efforts were attributed to the discovery of the lake, the cherry fruits trees which inspired the name for the lake, and a tree depicting the *Igi Aruwewe*. There are also an artistic design called *Iya Mopo*,<sup>14</sup> showcasing Awe town's trademark in the production of black soap also known as *ose abuwe*. Along with this is the *Ilu gbedu*, a drum which has been known with the Awe people since ancient times, the *konga* drum popular with the Osarowu family lineage, tubers of cassava signifying agriculture and lastly, the *Oyilaluba* which is the chief masquerade of the town. In addition, there are concrete moulded benches for tourists to sit and enjoy the seemingly cool and cosy atmosphere which undeniably has been designed by the combination of the lake itself and the palm trees, shielding one effectively from the shade of the sun.

The festivity around the *Sogidi* Lake often would start from the Alaawe's palace on the last day, most certainly a Saturday, with what could be described as a long and grand procession. An adherent described it as the mother of all the events among the varieties that would have been lined up for the Awe Day festivity. Beginning from the early hours of that day, even well before the procession, the lake would have been entertaining guests from all walks of life and from places within and outside. The purpose of some of these people at the lake is usually to have an early encounter, offer their prayers and fetch a good measure of the water. Meanwhile, many others would come around to get the stage ready for the big event which would be staged with a lot of pomp and pageantry.

The Alaawe's palace where the procession would commence would that morning be agog with varieties of music and dance by different traditional performers. At an appointed time, the procession is set in motion with the traditional performers leading the pack right in the front with excited and amazing traditional song styles and accompanied by beautiful dance moves. Prominent among this group is the *Bata* dance troops.<sup>15</sup> They are closely

followed by other groups, but of great interest is a group depicting everything western. In other words, the displays and performances put up by this group are typical of what could be observed in the Caribbean or even in modern carnivals in the big cities like Calabar and Lagos today. They were identified as the Fanti group who over the years, especially in recent times, have added even more colour to the festivity. It was suggested that one of the impacts of the globe on the festivity in Awe town has been the performance of this group and several others. In addition to their very energetic dance moves are the different animal mascots also moving in every direction/space possible to the sound of music from the band performing for them with a standard set, comprising of woodwind instruments and different sizes of drums.

Another notable group among the procession which has been an integral part of it since the inception of the festival are the *Egungun* (masquerades). *Oyilaluba* is usually seen behind as other masquerades lead on. Each of them dances jubilantly under their colourful and at some other times, scary-looking *Ekú* (the costume for the masquerades), to the unique tunes that particularly distinguish them from one another. They are usually followed by the *Olode* (a pack of hunters). They are unmistakable with their leather wears and straps, the tip of their cap dangling in every direction and accompanied by occasional gunshots into the air. They are known to shoot into the sky intermittently throughout the *Iwure* at the *Sogidi Lake*. The traditional adherents are usually next in line to the *Olode*. This includes the priests and priestess of the *Sogidi Lake*, often in their complete white traditional fabric. Another noticeable feature about them over the years is their neatly plated hair-do, which is usually the "all back" style common with them and the *suku*, a lot common among the female folks. The *Alaawe* along with his chiefs and other dignitaries come closely behind. It is essential to point out here that as the procession progresses indigenes from their different homes that are yet to get to the *Sogidi Lake* come out with great excitement to join in, particularly to welcome the *Alaawe* and his chiefs. For tourists and other visitors to the town at such a time like this, it is usually a marvel and a sight to behold. Unlike other festivities elsewhere, it is rather instructive to note that both indigenes and visitors closely have the privilege of partaking in the occasion at the *Sogidi Lake*.



Source: Author

At their arrival at the *Sogidi* Lake, a great number of people would have gathered. As they all approach the lakeside, everyone is expected to remove his/her footwear. It is a clear sign of reverence to the spirit being or goddess who is supposedly the inhabitant of the lake. As much as the *Sogidi* Lake has proven over the years to be a cultural site, it has an undeniable projection of mystery which people have only attempted to unravel but still eludes them. The custodian of the lake hinted that the mystery of the lake has been baffling. The water, he noted, has very great healing virtues, and over and over again, the goddess of the lake has enhanced the fertility of barren women. He further described the goddess as being half-human and half-fish (from the waist down), hence a mermaid.<sup>16</sup> As such, no one is allowed to fish in the lake while the fishes may grow old and die but the fact remains that they are not meant for human consumption. Based on the mysteries which surround the lake itself, special care and caution are observed on this festive day at the lake. Before this, therefore, the traditional *Ifa* priest would have consulted on what would be required for sacrifice and where the sacrifice should be made. Once the directives are issued, each of the four quarters that make up the town would be expected to jointly, in relatively equal measure, provide the required articles for the sacrifice. Depending on the instructions on where the sacrifice should be made, the priests are

usually discreet with it. It was noted that what is often required include a black cow with no blemish, a sizeable number of four-lobed kola nuts as well as dry pepper and a number of white clothes. All these have become traditional requisites for the ritual activities around the lake and have been sustained with due diligence.

More than any other activity, prayers are made at the lake; first in appreciation for the good things the town and its people have enjoyed, then fresh needs, hopes and aspirations of the town and its people are brought as request before the lake. It is usually a participatory experience, as the leading priest brings the request before the goddess. Excitedly, the people chorus affirmations to the prayers until he is done and intermittently, the priest, in the presence of all, chant eulogies to the spirit goddess. After the event at the lake, the procession is gradually dispersed with really loud festivity songs and other side attractions which would have begun in the early hours of that day. At this point, more tourists and spectators would take the time to examine the lake again and equally have the privilege of scooping as much water as they can from the lake, apparently, in an effort to put to test such claims they must have heard about its efficacy.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, an attempt has been made to examine the origin and the development of the Awe Day festival which, among other things, has the *Sogidi Lake* at the core of the festivities. The study appraises the historical perspectives to the origin of the town and ultimately the discovery of the mysterious *Sogidi Lake*. For many years, the lake had been venerated because of the proven goodness it brings to the people. However, it was not until 1987 that Associations of Awe indigenes popularised the activities around the lake by inaugurating the Awe Day festivity. In this attempt, the cultural heritage of the Awe people was showcased and in the course of time, there were other cultural influences on the festivity. In spite of this, while this current work is devoted to justifying the first part, it is important to buttress or explain why the author thinks or believe that the Awe people's culture has not been well promoted or tapped for greater benefits to the town and its people.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>As much as some account believed in the existence and pre-eminence of Ladun, they hold strongly to the fact that he most definitely must have hailed from Ijesha, as against Ile-Ife. Some other account moreover, posited that Ladun only featured in Awe history after he got an invite from Ladokun. But then there are questions as to why he got this invitation. The account noted that he was invited to Awe for maximum protection and possibly in other to make sure that there is maximum co-operation in the area. The question now is; was he to enjoy protection and co-operation or to provide it?

<sup>2</sup>Pa Stephen Adebayo Ojedele is the Chief custodian of the Sogidi Lake and he has served in this capacity for a long time. He is also a foundation member of the group that commenced the celebration of the Awe Day Festival.

<sup>3</sup>Aweland is divided into four prominent quarters namely *Alaawe*, *Oke Bata*, *Oke Baasi* and *Odofin* respectively.

<sup>4</sup>Some other account lay claims to some form of injustice in the land and as such Ilemolu, who was the eldest of the princes, led the others back towards Ile-Ife. However, on this journey back they found the land previously settled by Ladun and made it their own abode encouraged by the idea of starting afresh.

<sup>5</sup>*Igi Aruwewe* which served as the abiding point of the early settlers in Awe still survives till today for visitors and tourists to see. It is now popularly called *Igigi Ogogo*.

<sup>6</sup>The point here is that wells are purposefully dug by people. That would mean that some other people lived here before the arrival of Ladokun and his crew. Another point is could a well have expanded to become a lake over the years given what is found in the location in present time? This lends further credence to the 'pool of water' account.

<sup>7</sup>Such branding was still noticed until the time Captain C.W.A Ross ordered that pigs should no more be reared in the town because of the infection caused by chigoe flea which enters under one's toe nails and results in intense irritation. This was particularly noted under the reign of Baale Oyatolu.

<sup>8</sup>The *Boosa* Square represents or serves as the heart of town where important activities of the town are held. Put differently, it is the centre stage of all community activities in Awe.

<sup>9</sup>24th Awe Day Celebration Programme for 2010.

<sup>10</sup>This is a form of prayer, interceding with the gods of the land for the success and prosperity of its people.

<sup>11</sup>This is a part of the *Orin Ibile* Awe composed by the Late Reverend Dr. Chief J.A. Adegbite.

<sup>12</sup>Though not completed at the moment this research was conducted, it only covers what one could describe as the front view.

<sup>13</sup>The creative works on the fence at the *Sogidi* Lake is attributed to Mr Adelowo Ojeyomi who undertook the task in preparation for the 2015 Awe Day celebrations.

<sup>14</sup>Not much is known of *Iya Mopo*. But she is generally referred to as the forebear of soap makers in the town. Awe has distinguished herself over the years in the art of soap making.

<sup>15</sup>Bata dance is a unique form of Yoruba dance, with its own distinct drum.

<sup>16</sup>Though there are no valid claims of the identity of the spirit goddess of *Sogidi* Lake, the *Iya Onsa* of Awe, Orisabunmi Anike Adesile, who acts as the

intermediary between the people and the spirit goddess of the lake pointed out that she had had an encounter with the goddess while sleeping. On occasion the goddess revealed herself half human and half fish with her hair neatly made in the *suku* style.