

Culture and Aesthetic Sensibilities of Ekiti People Through the Iconology of Epa Headrests

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ABSTRACT: *Art is usually a means of documenting peoples' tastes, thoughts, and attitudes, which depend on their philosophies, past experiences, and current happenings within the society. In the same vein, the forms on Epa masks showcase the background culture of Ekiti people, as well as their worldview in relation to rewards for pragmatism, through the celebration of influential personalities. Therefore, this paper looks at the variations of forms on Epa mask headrests, aiming to extract its producers' philosophies, aesthetic sensibilities, and core values, for a better understanding of both the images and the background culture. It concludes by highlighting many early customs showcased in Epa headrests that are no longer practiced in the communities today, eroded by acculturation and the introduction of new ways of life.*

KEYWORDS: *Aesthetics, Culture, Ekiti people, Epa, Iconology*

INTRODUCTION

Epa masks are found mainly among the Ekiti and Igbomina people of the North-Eastern part of Yorubaland, in the Southern western Nigeria. *Epa* related masks are also found in neighbouring areas, such as Ijumuland, in Kogi-State, as well as part of Ilesa, Okuku, and Osogbo in Osun-State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies abound on *Epa* masquerades; Clarke (1944), Carrol (1967), Bascom (1969), Heyden (1977), Rea (2019) and Aina (2003) covered the masquerades ceremony, focusing on specific towns in the area. Carrol (1967) concentrated on the festival in Oye-Ekiti, while Aina (2003)

focused on Ilemisin in the Ekiti area of Kwara State. Thompson (1971), Durden, D. (1973), and Visiona (2001) all feature a mask each as part of a discourse on Yoruba Art. Ojo (1978), Abejide (1984), and Fagg *et al.* (1989) discuss the significance and symbolism of the mask in addition to featuring the religious aspect. However, Ojo (1978) worked in Ayetoro-Ekiti, Igbara-odo, and Ido-Ekiti axis, Abejide (1984) covers Egbeoba comprising the North-eastern part of Ekiti, while Fagg *et al.* (1989) showcase images from Efon, Osi, Odo-Owa and Oye-Ekiti, However, they are all, limited to specific locations, as their focus is different from this study, which is concerned with the extraction of common aesthetics value of the Ekiti people, both in Kwara State and those domiciled in Ekiti-State. Furthermore, this study is interested in extracting pointers to the culture of the people in comparison with modern stances.

Statement of the Problem: Many aspects of the culture are becoming obscure yet undocumented. Hence, there is interest in extracting the culture, philosophy, and nuances of the Ekiti people, showcased in the headrests. The paper tries to avoid the familiar images that appear to be recycled in the theses on *Epa masks* but explores the images of headrests that were long carted away from the land where possible.

Aim of the Study: It aims to document the extracted aspect of the culture, highlighting the out-modelled aspects in relation to the modern realities in the area.

Scope of the Study: This study covers the geographical area of Ekiti, both in the Ekiti and Kwara states. However, it uses only the masks with unique features; twenty-three pictures are generated.

Methodology: The study employs primary sources, but since many of the *Epa* headdresses are no longer in their primary locations, the research augments with secondary sources, such as books, theses, journals, and the internet, as supplements to acquire images for analysis and to enable generic images of aspects of the culture. The images used were purposively generated to extract only prototypes with ideal features.

EKITI MASKING TRADITIONS

There are numerous masquerades in Ekiti (with or without headrests). The names of these masquerades vary in different towns. However, the common name for masquerades in Ekitiland is *egigun*, (which is also commonly *eegun* or *egungun* in other parts of Yorubaland). Ojo (1991:44) identifies two major types of masquerades in Ekiti; the entertaining masquerades and elder or serious masquerades (*agba egigun*). Prominent among the entertaining masquerades in Ekiti are *aborogi*, *agbe*, *Ede*, *Ladoko*, (with pot-shaped helmet masks), and *Ele* (consisting of helmets with elongated opened jaws revealing rows of long intersecting sharp teeth like the Senufo fire spitter masks). These are found in several Ekiti towns, although several others have divergent names and structures in different Ekiti communities. Many of these wears either helmets or face masks on the

fresh new shoot of palm frond (*morio, or mariwo*), white fabric (*aso ala*), or strands of assorted fabrics (*aso alarabara*), while some are with stretched materials as head cover, with die-cut holes for eyes and mouth. An example is *egigun alayegbe* in Ikole-Ekiti, whose name means masquerade with strands of apparel embellished with mirror pieces. However, *Owi* masquerade is made with only raffia without masks in all places where they are found.

Nonetheless, the most spectacular and prominent of the masking traditions in Ekiti is the *Epa*, an elder masquerade consisting mainly of carved headrests, with a wide variation of forms and the skillfulness of the symbolic images that surpass the other Yoruba masks and masquerades (even *Gelede*), in massiveness of forms in a single superstructure. The masks are also dressed in palm fronds, white cloths, or multi-colored dresses and are worn during the masking festivals. *Epa* masquerade festivals and rituals are celebrated annually around the harvest period all over Ekiti and Igbomina, marking the end of the farming session and commemorating the eating of the new yams.

Elder masquerades are believed to be symbolic images of the spirits of visiting ancestors cum departed heroic ancestors from heaven (*ara orun kin kin*), hence a means of making perceptible the invisible ancestors (Leuzinger, 1972, Ladislas (1982:45). These elder masquerades make appearances prior necessary sacrifices and rituals, funerals of dignitaries, as well as the ground finales of annual festivals when ancestors are believed to unite with the living. During this time, people usually direct petitions to the spirits (*umole*), personified as *egigun*. *Epa* is foremost among the elder masquerades throughout Ekiti communities.

Historical Background of *Epa* Mask: *Epa* was said to be a great male carver who was deified after his death, Clarke (1944:94), Bascom (1969:95). This carver was believed to be the progenitor of *Epa* carvers, as *Epa* style of carving large massive forms in tiers is believed to be his style (Abejide, 1968). *Elefon Erekojeju* on the other hand is alleged to be a deified warrior from Ile-Ife, who was the founding father of the land (Fabunmi 1969:9). *Epa, Aguru, Eguru* and *Elefon* are being classified as a type, generalised as *Epa* (Abejide, 1984:21). Aina (2003:35) however opines that the root of of *Epa* is among the Tapa of Nupeland. Communities.

Structural Characteristics of *Epa* Masks Forms: *Epa* masks combine two or three parts: the helmet, the platform, and the superstructure. The pot-shaped structure, which is the helmet (*ikoko*), is the lower part of the mask worn on the head to hide the wearer, allowingng him to see through the rectangular or oval opening, which looks like the mouth. They usually have protruding eyes, some in a diamond shape, sometimes further highlighted with lines or white colour to accentuate the eyes. The helmet is often double (Janus) faced and is most often followed by the third and the upper part, which is the flat platform that divides the helmet from the superstructure. Images on the masks vary from a single form to a multiple figure in two or three layers.

TYOLOGY OF AND ANALYSIS OF IMAGES ON *EPA* HEADRESSES

Images on *Epa* superstructures are usually based on themes of everyday happenings in society and things connected with the people's belief system. At the same time, the annual *Epa* festivals celebrate essential social roles in the towns where they are. Consequently, the superstructures celebrate the central figures they surmount, which form the themes of the headrest and the names given to the masquerades.

***Epa* Masks Celebrating Men**

The celebrated men are male leaders with privileged aesthetic roles in the community. Headrests in this category are discussed below:

***Epa* depicting kings, leaders or holders of authority (*epa alase*):** Some celebrated men in *Epa* masks are powerful kings whose reigns were peaceful. An example is *Baba Osi* (founding father of Osi) and *Epa Orangun*. *Orangun* are names given to a group of *Epa* masks characterized by many figures arranged in tiers on a platform. This type can be found in Igogo, Ishan, and Erinmope-Ekiti. Masks celebrating rulers are usually depicted as equestrian figures either holding the reign of their horses and horse whisks or staffs of office (*opa ase*). They are typically surrounded by a group of subjects, such as flutists, *dundun* drummers, and female dancers. The drummers and flutists symbolize people who chant the praises of the kings and announce their presence in real life. Correspondingly, the women dancers both entertain and chant the king's praises. The drummers and flutists thus emulate the importance of musicians in Yoruba culture, which is entertainment and communication, just as the palace musicians chant the praises of kings in real life, entertaining them and communicating the arrival of visitors, among other happenings in the palace. The hand fan held 1b is to honour the main figure. There are however some headrests with the main figures accompanied by soldiers with dane guns (*ibon*). Also, typical to this group of *Epa* mask is the covering of their heads with umbrella. 1c however, showcases another type of crown that resembles the beaded crown of resent kings.



Plate 1a, Source: Cleveland museum of African Art



Plate 1b, Source: Abejide (1984)



Plate 1c, Source: Quintessence

Plates 1a and b: *Epa* masks depicting kings, leaders, or holders of authority

Depictions of warriors (*epa alase, ologun, jagunjagun or ajagunla*): Since the names given to masks are often reflective of their functions, masks depicting warriors are usually given names like *Alase* (commander), *Ologun* (fighter / warrior), *Jagunjagun* (soldier), or *Ajagunla* (one who is victorious in war). They, in some places, still bear *Orangun* (ruler or leader), as many Ekiti towns were asserted to have been established by migrating warrior chiefs (Abejide, 1984), mainly from Ile-Ife. They are esteemed and deified because of their fortitude, proven courage, integrity, and political powers. The majority of the depictions of warriors are also equestrian figures like the kings, mostly with swords (*ida*, Plate 6a), or bows and arrows (*ofa*), and sometimes with just symbols of authority (*opa ase*, Plate 2b), when the one who leads is the king. Swords (*ida Ogun*), according to Williams, (1974:88-89), and Thompson, (1971:80), signifies the spiritual presence of the god of iron. Place 6c additionally holds a horn, which is the container of magical preparations or contents of spiritual power (*ase*).

Some figures are depicted wearing small gourds (*ado*), typical of powerful men in the culture. Such charms or magical preparations are essential to herbalists and warriors, as they are believed to be capable of rendering enemies useless, deflecting spears and arrows (*okigbe*), preventing the penetration of bullets (*ayeta* or making warriors invisible (*egbe*). Amulets and magical preparations forming impenetrable substances attached to warriors are shown in the carvings. The *oluode* is also depicted holding a staff topped by a cluster of bells, which equally symbolizes the presence of a deity and denotes a magical staff, which is a source of power. It is noteworthy that the depiction of images sitting on stools like play 6f below are related to equestrian figures, as it is also a reserve of influential people, particularly when standing subjects surround the figure. People of lower ranks are made to stand as a sign of respect when in the presence of their superiors in terms of age or social status. This figure is also accompanied by a retinue of flutists, horn players, men carrying gourds of his medicines, and people with sacrificial animals (in appreciation of the victory and peace).

The unique feature of the equestrian form in plate 6c (from Oye-Ekiti, is the depiction of a shield with blood and heads of four enemies, signifying the dexterity of the warrior and the clan as the victorious ones that severed many heads in battles (*iran ira ko ni pani isogun*). The four heads there are proof of his bravery. Drewal (1989:194) further reveals that displaying the four heads on the shield signifies experience in waging wars. Plate 6c equally wears a special gear on his head, in a style typical of traditional hunters. Similarly, noteworthy is the hairstyle worn by the warrior in plates 6a and b, consisting of thick hair parked to the back of the head in a long strand of the plait and with a tug/bond at the center; it is a hairstyle with a spiritual undertone, typical of powerful men, as it is seen as a source of power. The hairdo in Plate 6c is another style with a magical connotation when worn by men. Plate 6e, on the other hand, showcases a modern military man as a chief security agent.

The masks celebrating warriors are often depicted surrounded by spear bearers, minstrels with flutes, *dundun* drums, pot drums and (*ulu-ukoko*) common in Ekiti. It also shows female dancers and jubilating women (who may be queens or enslaved people/palace attendants), representing the people who usher in victorious warriors on such occasions. Their entourage are most times accompanied by women pounding with mortar and pestle, signifying the preparation of pounded yam (*iyam*), which is the staple food of the Ekiti people and the usual food for celebrating victorious and joyous occasions.



Plate 2a, Source: Cleveland museum of African Art.



Plate 2b: Brooklyn Museum.



Plate 2c, Source: Drewal, et. al. (1989).



Plate 2d, Source: Abejide (1984).

Plates 2 a-d: Variations of masks celebrating warriors

***Epa* depicting herbalists or priest (*ao / awo / onisegun*):** Herbalists or priests are essential members of society, as they are believed to be spiritually powerful with the ability to command things into existence. They are also regarded as the preternatural leaders of the society, whom the people depend upon for healing and spiritual guidance for the wellbeing of their communities. Fagg *et al.* (1989:197) assert that masquerades representing warriors are usually accompanied by those depicting herbal priests during *Epa* festivals, creating a sense of ritual order. They are often accompanied by women carrying children, suggesting the powers of the *Osanyin* priest to assist in giving birth, and women with sacrificial animals signifying appreciation.

***Epa* Celebrating *Oloko*, (Farmer controller of the farm):** In Otun and Erinmope-Ekiti, this class of *Epa* masks celebrating hardworking and successful farmers (*Epa oloko*) are found. *Oloko* refers to a group of masquerades with headrests honouring farmers and hunters. Plate 3 is a chief holding a giant plantain (*ogede*), showing the bountiful harvest of farm produce. There are also caryatid figures holding sacrificial animals, which signifies homage to gods.



Plate 3: *Epa* Celebrating Farmers, Picton (1994).

***Epa oloko* masks depicting animals:** There are numerous *oloko* masks with animals as the sole figures on *Epa* masks' superstructures. Some of the animals depicted on these masks are in the hunting group, while others are sacrificial animals.

***Oloko* masks portraying hunting animals:** There are several images of *Epa*, including the image of leopards (*Ekun*) or lions (*kiniun*) capturing their prey (Plates 4a and b). These animals are esteemed because of their associated symbolic importance, leading to the allegorical association of people and human aspirations with the characteristics of these animals. Consequently, people often commonly symbolically refer to themselves as progenies, leopards, or lions, meaning they are 'descendants of the valiant and people. This is because the animals are associated with greatness and gallantry. The leopard is known to be agile, swift, courageous, and ferocious. Their portrayer, according to Shelton 1997:124, signifies warfare; likewise, Fagg *et al.* (*ibid*, 95), on the other hand, enlightens that *Oloko* capturing animals is metaphorical of their founder / chief warrior defeating enemies at the war front. Plate 4c, conversely, showcases a dog with a hen on his back and its puppy standing beside it, clutching a kid with its mouth, while plate 4d depicts *Epa* with the representation of cock (*akuko*) mounting an antelope (*igala*); this is however merely a social commentary, as chicken cannot hunt an antelope.



Plate 4a, Source: Preston (1991).



Plate 4b: Source: Seattle Art Museum.



Plate 4c, Mask with dog and prey (www.apulsafricanart.com).



Plate 4d, Source: Abejide (1984)

Plates 4 a-c: *Epa* headrests showing animals in action (hunting), Plate 4d: *Epa* with cock and antelope

Oloko masks portraying sacrificial animals: Some *Epa* masks depict sacrificial animals in their superstructures; such images include ram (*agbo*, plate 5a), *Epa* with dog (*aja*, plate 5b), hare (*ehoro*, Plate 5c), pangolin or ant eater (*akika*,). All the representations of sacrificial animals signify homage to the gods. Plate 5d, however, portrays a tortoise (*ijapa* or *olobaun*) in three tiers. The usage of tortoise is probably due to its association with wisdom and cunningness in Ekiti mythological and oral literature.



Plate 5a, Ram
Source: Abejide (1984)

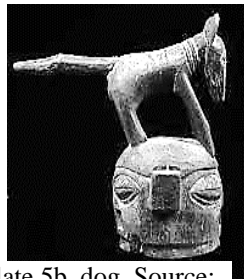


Plate 5b, dog, Source:
Aina, 2003



Plate 5c, Hare,
Source: Aina
(2003)



Plate 5d, Tortoise,
Source: Abejide (1984)

Plates 5a- d Portrayers sacrificial Animals

***Epa* Headrests Celebrating Women**

The women celebrated in *Epa* masks are princesses, regents/female rulers, priestesses, virgins (sacrifice bearers), Queens (*Olori*), or Queen mothers (*Eye Oba*).

***Epa* representing women chief (eyerangun):** Plate 6 depicts a woman leader (*Eyerangun*) holding a symbol of authority like *Orangun*, the male counterpart. This is a celebration of regents cum female rulers, Queens (*Olori*), or Queen Mothers (*Eye Oba*). There is a mask named *Eyelase* (mother who possesses power) and *Eyeloja* (owner or chief of the market), symbolizing leader of the market women and traders. Although the mask's name on plate 6b is unknown, the iconic marginal horn and the upturned child she is holding point to her being a witch or ritualistic woman. Ekiti people, however, believe that witches do not openly or physically kill their children. Images in plate 6c is depicted kneeling, holding effigies.



Plate 6a, Source:
Drewal, *et. al.* (1989)



Plate 6b, Source:
Barakat Gallery



Plate 6c, Source:
Abejide (1984)

Plate 6a-c: *Epa* representing women leaders

Mother of multiple children (*Olomoyeye*): This category includes masquerades celebrating fertile women (*Eye omo* or *abiyamo*). *Olomoyeye* is a portrayal of a woman with many children on her knees, a child strapped to her back and numerous children around her, symbolising fertility and mothers love for children, which is affirmed as one of the attributes of *Epadeity* (Abejide 1984). Traditionally, every woman aspires to procreate after marriage. Having multiple children is seen as a blessing from God, while barrenness is seen as a misfortune. Plate 7 showcases a mother with a baby strapped to her back. She has a calabash in her right hand and a cock in her left hand. The figure represents someone who has lived to see generations of her grandchildren. The cock she is holding signifies the bird for sacrifice (probably in appreciation of her status), while the bowl in her right hand contains herbal medicines or kola nuts. According to Abejide Emmanuel (oral communication), bowls in Ekiti Yoruba iconography contain hidden power (*ase*) and are thought of as possessing powers similar to those of women, associated with reproduction and the ability to influence or settle the fertility of others.

There are also *Epa* masks with major forms accompanied by images depicting women nursing children: kneeling (i.e., women breastfeeding), force-feeding babies, bathing babies, and with children strapped to their backs. The posture of kneeling (*ikunle*) signifies giving birth; it also connotes humility and homage to the gods. Breastfeeding (*ifomoloyan*), force-feeding (*omo jijo*), bathing babies (*awemo* or *omo wiwe*), and images of women with children strapped to their backs all indicate fertility of the body, hence procreation.



Plate 7, Celebration of fertile woman, Source: Abejide (1984)

Epa Masquerades Celebrating Mothers of Twins (Eye eji or Iya ibeji): Among the Ekiti-Yoruba, twins (*ibeji*), are regarded as special children and are the pride of all mothers because, apart from the luck of having two babies at once, their births are believed to bring good fortune to their parents and the family at large, which is the basis for the excerpt '*ode le alakisa, so le alakisa di ti olugba aso*: (meaning: one who visits the paupers enrich them, transforming them to owners of multiple clothes). There are copious representations of the twins' mothers, depicted kneeling, standing, or sitting. Their commonest depiction of women is as full-breasted women with erect breasts and pointed nipples, holding their twins to their sides in a typical way of showing off children (Plates 8a and b). Each of the twins in plate 8b is holding their mother's breasts with one hand and a bowl in another. The bowls they hold are reminiscent of the alms and offerings people give to the twins because they believe in their capability of enabling the gift of children like themselves. At the base are figures standing and kneeling, as well as women presenting offerings to the gods and making supplications to the gods to enable procreation or fertility.



Plate 8a Source: Shelton, (1998).



Plate 8b, Source: Judith Livingston

Plates 8a and b: Variations of mother of their twins

Epa showcasing twins (eji / omo meji or ibeji): Just like the mothers of their twins, (*ibeji*) themselves are believed to be special children, and deities themselves are honored to ensure their benevolence. The form on the mask in plate 9 differs from other portrayals, as it depicts a set of standing matured twins with full pointed breasts, beautified with earrings, bracelets, waist beads, and special elaborate coiffures. They are surrounded by standing and kneeling figures either praying or paying homage. It also displays the belief that twins are special children who are gods themselves, who can influence children's giving to the barren.



Plate 9, Mask depicting twins,
Source: Bascom (1973).

Epa Showcasing Female Offering or Sacrifice Bearers

Portrayers of female kneeling caryatid image, signifying sacrifice bearers is a rare and variant type in *Epa* masquerades iconography. The headrest in plate 10 was found in the African studies of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Female sacrifice bearers are usually virgins and spiritually pure ladies, celebrated not just for their roles in taking away the burden and spiritual filth in the community but also for sacrificing themselves for the wellbeing of the people, hence the pride of many parents. A cortege of minstrels accompanies the sacrifice bearer. Aina (2003:66), however, showcases another *Epa* with a kneeling female figure from Obbo-Aiyegunle, holding a big covered calabash with both hands, which he also identified as (*Epa arugba*). It is worth noting that this *Epa* has no helmet, only the platform and superstructure.

The kneeling posture (*ikunle*) of these images is usually done in the culture as a sign of respect or humility to elders or the superior; therefore, kneeling on the pedestal in this headrest implies paying homage to the gods in order to propitiate them. The kneeling position also denotes the act of childbearing or labour. The highlight on the breasts further suggests fertility, which is one of the reasons for the sacrifices to remove barrenness. However, its load on her head is the burden or ill fortune of the community, which is being carried away. Furthermore, the mask has a deep shadow, which gives the impression of looking down, a sign of respect for the gods. Abejide

(1968:21) documents a similar image in the palace of Owa of Odo-Ayedun Ekiti, depicting a naked woman with a container on her head representing one of the wives of Owa. It is affirmed that the carrier, in this case, is usually the youngest queen, who used to carry Owa's offering of kola nuts to the shrine of Orisa-nla in closed calabash. The carved image is held to be used now rather than disrobing queens in the modern era. The nudity of the image, however, signifies purity and perfection.



Plate 10, *Epa* Headrest depicting sacrifice bearer, Source: Institute of African Studies, O.A.U., Ile-Ife

DISCUSSION: SYMBOLISM OF THE GENERAL EMBLEMATIC FORMS IN *EPA* MASKS

Apart from the analyzed points, there are some aesthetic features that are common to many of the masks. Among this is the speckling of the figures with white and the helmet's dual face orientation.

The spotting in white: This white spots on some of the mask and headrests according to Durden (1973:38, 42) is means of adaptability and for optical illusion or transformation, while Abejide, (1984:46) opines that the speckling in white is rooted in the maxim which says that the application of white powder (*efun*) cannot be associated with sadness, while the colour also further mystifies the masks.

The janus faces: The dual / janus faces of the masks symbolize the residing spirits capability to see happenings here and in the unseen world beyond (*ariwa rehin*), seeing both the front and the back, while the wide protruding eyes denote the all-seeing. The encircling of the eyes and mouth further denote belief in the clairvoyance of the gods and power command things into being (*ase* or *awise*). The bulging of the eye also further connotes extraordinary ability to see into spiritual realm. Fagg, *et. al*, (1982:126) additionally suggested that its reminiscence the bulge during trances.

Depiction of Breasts: Nearly all the women both featuring as main figures and in supporting roles are depicted with full firm erect breasts and pointed nipples. The firm erect breasts of the women symbolize purity; while full breast symbolizes fertility, and the power of procreation or life giving. Conversely, the few with flat or dropping breasts connote agedness and such women's experience, having nursed many children.

Coiffure: All the women that feature in *Epa* iconology is depicted with elaborate and sophisticated coiffures. The elderly porter quoted in Bascom (1973:131), identifies the coiffure style in plates 6a as *onidodo*, which is affirmed as the hair styles of virgins or youths (*irun wundia*), while the commonest coiffure on the images (Plate 7) is identified by Abejide 1968 as (*irun agogo*) which some people call *aaro meta* (Trinity), affirmed to be traditional bridal hair styles and coiffure for the queens (*olori / ayaba*). The other prominent hairdo on the figures woven to form three lumps is identified as *adiseyin eleko* (Plate 6c). It is equally observed that special luxurious styles befitting the high standing special grade of women are used for the main figures, while the common hair styles such as *koroba eyemogbeseti*, *suku*, *kolese*, *ipako elede*, *patewo* or *panumo* are used for the supporting images. Oyelola (1994) claim that these queenly coiffures are still worn by some priestess, who she said are known as *iyawo orisa* (wives of gods). Nevertheless, the heap up coiffure on Olojufoforo and *Okotorajo* (Plates 4 and 10c) is obscure. However, they all show the sophistication and fashion consciousness within the culture.

Documentation of culture: The forms on *Epa* headrests are records of the cultural heritage of the people. For instance, just as many Yoruba sub-groups are identified by their distinctive cicatrization, the Ekiti indigenous marks of identification, comprising of three vertical marks (*pele meta*) on each cheek, are incorporated into some of the main figures on the headrests (Plate 7) and on some masks (Plate 1a). Contrariwise, the Ekiti people of the present day do not have tribal marks, as it is now antiquated. Many people do not even know that tribal marks ever existed in the culture, as the generation of people who had it are almost gone.

Records the evolution of culture: They also illustrate the transition of the culture. An example is the depiction of warriors, which show progressions from fighting with incantations and magical preparations in horns and small gourds, to the use of daggers / sword, bows and arrows, and finally guns. Similarly, the dresses on the images show transition from nudity, semi-nudity, to the use of full coverage.

Display of aesthetic values: Both the forms embellishing the headrests and the appellations given the masks are reflecting the aesthetics value of the people, such as hard work, ambition for leadership or chieftaincy, aspiration to live to old age, being victorious and successful, humility, courageousness, and virginity (celebrated by *Epa olomoge* in Ayedun-Kwara, Aina, op. cit.41). Equally valued is marriage as well as being fashionable and elegant. They also show the peoples value for children through different portrayals of motherhood such as children breastfeeding, children held to their mother's sides or with children strapped to the back. This also mirrors way

of nurturing children within the culture. Correspondingly, the forms on the headrests reveals that having twins is seen as a divine favour and an enviable feat, while both the twins' children and their mothers are seen as special. In the same vein, having multiple children is an exceptional grace bestowed by God. The festival equally displays the peoples' value for peace and peaceful co-existence, prosperity and aspiration for bountiful harvest, as well as fertility of their animals. The lesson from the jani orientation is that is good to have foresight and see beyond one's realm.

Sources of philosophical values: They reveal the philosophical values within the culture. For example, the appellations of some *Epa* masks such as *omo bomi* (children are ones covering), *eni omo sin lo bimo* (only those who are buried by their offsprings actually have children), *inu ju la o* (it is impossible view what is inside people) *ipin ni ja du* (destiny requires no struggle). The *Epa* ibeji is also hinged on the belief in their capability to transform the parents' fortune.

Proportion of the head: Peculiar to nearly all the images is proportion of one-third head to the body. This is based on the philosophical belief in the head as the source of power and essence of the personality.

Implication to Research and Practice

Ekiti people like many Africans are experiencing drastic cultural changes imposed by colonialism and imported religions. Consequently, many aspects of the culture presented in *Epa* images are already obscure, while some are now completely eroded. In this category are the earlier discussed queenly ceremonial coiffures which are no more in existence today. Although some people still leave their hair plaited and uncovered, many wear headties nowadays. People without head ties now often have permed wavy hairdo, curl low cut, or multiple braids that fall on shoulders or some even extending beyond the buttocks. There also changes in the dress culture, as there are now also ladies in *hijab* and different types of hats, which are both dictates of new religions. Likewise, the era of topless wrappers gave way to wrappers with tops (*iro*, and *buba*, *iborun*), and now assorted dresses such as *boubou* gowns, skirts and blouses, body hugging dresses or skintight trousers.

In the same vein, gone are the era of beaded crowns with beaded fringes, as modern kings now wear simple cap like crowns with tiny glass or plastic beads. Similarly, the era of horse riding as a sign of honour, affluence or position is long gone, horses are no more used in most communities, not even during festivities, as it is now completely out-of-date.

Regrettably however, *Epa* masking tradition are however going into extinction as the festival is being eradicated in many communities. An example is Ikun-Ekiti, where the priestess got converted to Christianity. The *Epa*-mask from the town now sits in Owo branch of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments. Likewise, masks from many communities have been acquired by museums, galleries and educational institutes across globe. (Abejide, 1994).

It is also disheartening that many of the celebrated master carvers that lunched the zone into prominence world over are long gone without adequate successors nor assurance continuing. This is because of the erosion of the culture of having ‘family trades’ and learning by ascription. Many these talents died as paupers due to lack of patronage. While some of them had to abandon carving for other professions or odd jobs for survival. Agbonbiofe of Efon-Alaaye, though a prolific carver until his death, had none of his children nor any successor in the line, so was Daniel Alagba of Iloro-Ekiti, who did not carve for over thirty years, before he died, as he had no commissions nor apprentices (Abejide, *ibid.*). He was quoted to have expressed his frustration as a carver with the claim that artists are only praised but are never rich (*ibid.*). Similarly, Paul Oladipupo of Idao Ekiti was documented to have abandoned carving to work as a sexton of the Anglican Church Ijero-Ekiti, a post he held until his death in 1983 (*ibid.*). Even the dignifying positions of carvers as respected members of the society in the past is no more, as money is valued more than talents. Only the rich are now respected in the society (*eleo ni lu 'yi*).

Perhaps the most successful of the old generation of carvers was late Lamidi Fakeye, whose success could be attributed to his European patrons, and being gainfully employed as an instructor at the Fine and Applied Arts department of Obafemi Awolowo University, as well as working as artist in resident in some European Universities (Fakeye, Haight, and Curl, 1996). Likewise, even though some of his children could carve, none of them are practicing as tradition carver.

Arising from western education and preferences for the white-collar jobs, skilled traditional carvers are also dwindling. It is saddening that none of the youths interviewed is willing to go into such a wood carving, as it is no more lucrative. Even the western trained sculptors would rather prefer working in stucco cast, metal sculptures or fiber glass which fetch better proceeds. Wood carving is now restricted to menial decorative arts, as even carved doors and furniture are no more the in thing today.

CONCLUSION

The paper has attempted to draw out the aesthetic values and some aspects some of the Indigenous culture of the Ekiti people, which are projected through the *Epa* headrests. The aesthetics of the masks depend on the carvers’ visualization skill, experience, imagination, perception, and discretion, of the carvers, which requires a thorough knowledge of the peoples’ culture, religious beliefs, and philosophies. One could imagine that if *Epa* masks are to be carved today, the study foresees a completely different cultural depiction from the old ones, as artists can only depict what they experienced. This is demonstrated in the depiction of the sacrifice bearer in plate 10, wearing a skirt, and the warrior cum security man in plate 2d, shown in a modern military uniform. In line with the progressions of weapons discussed above, if *Epa* masks are to be carved today, they are likely to portray AK 47 or pistols as the instruments of the warriors, while musical instruments of the accompanying images will be European trumpets, saxophones, guitar, among other modern

instruments. Pieces of jewelry have changed from traditional big beads to ear-dropping long chains or circular metals, while waist beads are now not the same, as women now use tiny plastic or glass beads (*wewe*). Lastly, the rigidity of the image in plate 10 does not go unnoticed, as it shows the effect of eradicating the traditional learning system by ascription and lack of exposure to the master carvers. Hence, the cannon of carvers within the culture is also eroded.

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