

# **EGUNGUN TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL AND VIOLENCE IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA**

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## Abstract

*Egungun festival is one of the most widely celebrated traditional religious festivals among the Yoruba of South-West Nigeria. However, contrary to what obtained in the past, this annually celebrated festival is increasingly becoming synonymous with violence. On this basis, this paper examined some factors promoting the outbreak of violence during Egungun festival celebration in South-West Nigeria, and their attendant socio-religious implications. The Social Disorganisation Theory was adopted as theoretical framework. The convenience, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed for the selection of 43 respondents. Data were collected through in-depth interview and key informant interview methods. Findings revealed that different overt and covert factors are responsible for the recurring outbreak of violence during Egungun festival celebration in South-West Nigeria. A concerted effort on the part of relevant stakeholders is advocated as an important means for addressing the problem.*

**Keywords:** Egungun festival, Traditional religion, Violence, Yoruba, South-West Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

Since antiquity, religion has always been one of the dominant elements of culture in every human society. Indeed, evidence of religious practice has been traced to the Stone Age during the time of the Neanderthal man. In Africa, religion as a fundamental aspect of peoples' culture permeates every aspect of life (Mbiti, 1975; Idowu, 1996). Indeed, festivals are among the essential liturgical components of all religions. In the cosmological system of the Yoruba of southwestern part of Nigeria, festivity is an integral aspect of religious practices (Idowu, 1996).

Egungun festival is an important religious festival that is annually celebrated to reverence the spirit of the ancestors in among the people. The word 'Egungun' is often used to describe all masked figures found among the Yoruba of Nigeria (Adedeji, 1969; Oke, 2007). It is an ancestral cult showcasing the belief of the Yoruba in the life after death (Aremu, Banjo, and Olanipekun, 2012). To Idowu (1996), Egungun is a means of demonstrating, in concrete terms, that the Yoruba believe that those who had departed this world continue to exist elsewhere, and are actively in touch with their people who are still living. Hence, they are called *Ara Orun*— 'the citizens of heaven' (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979; Campbell, 2015).

The period of Egungun festival is considered sacred, with adherents of this traditional religion usually coming together annually, from far and near, to celebrate, renew commitment, and pay homage to the spirit of the living dead (Babayemi, 1980; Loko, 2014). The festival is essentially organised collectively, and generally holds between the months of May and July in most communities. Typically, it is celebrated for a period of either 7, 14, 17 or 21 days in places like Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ife, Oyo, Osogbo, Ondo, Owo, Lagos, amongst others (Babayemi, 1980; Romkalilu, 1993; Loko, 2014).

As recent as the mid-1990s, Egungun traditional festival occupied an important position among the Yoruba to the extent that a significant number of them participated actively in it. According to Aremu, Banjo, and Olanipekun (2012), Egungun was held in high esteem by its devotees who believed that their mythical strength is based on the laws of cosmic order which is very difficult for human to comprehend. Furthermore, Aremu, Banjo, and Olanipekun (2012) opine that it is the belief of every traditional Yoruba man that human society is maintained by spiritual forces and mystical power of the ancestors which can be potentially used for curative, protective, productive, and preventive purposes. Campbell (2015) and Babayemi (1980) assert that Egunguns not only bless, protect and lead their communities in war, but also occasionally do warn and punish their earthly relatives. Apart from these, Egunguns collectively protect

their communities against evil spirits, epidemic, famine, barrenness, persistent sickness, poverty, witchcraft, and evil doers (Babayemi, 1980; Aremu, Banjo, and Olanipekun, 2012).

Although the Egungun festival, like all other traditional religious festivals has a legal status in Oyo State and other states in South-West Nigeria, its celebration is fast becoming synonymous with violence. The current situation shows that this important traditional religious festival is frequently marred by violent conflicts which often result in the destruction of lives and property (Minchakpu, 2004; Adeniyi, 2008; Adelusi and Ogunesan, 2012; Adediran, 2013; Bamgbola, 2013; Okwuofu, 2013; Ogunmola, 2016; Adebayo, 2017; Ogundele, 2017; Agha, 2018).

Indeed, this situation has degenerated to such an extent that the once highly revered Egungun deities' representatives are now frequently arrested and locked-up by the Police as a result of their alleged involvement in social mayhem and public disturbances. For instance, on October 6, 2018, a masquerade, during a traditional outing, was reported to have stabbed a man to death at Oke-Aro Area, Akure over his (the stabbed man) refusal to give him (the masquerade) money (Johnson, 2018). Similarly, on January 27, 2013, the Ogun State Police Command arrested a masquerade (Egungun) and three of his pathfinders for allegedly killing an Islamic cleric at the Ijaiye area of Abeokuta (Kayode-Adedeji, 2013; Daily Independent, 2013). Also, on June 17, 2013, a popular market in the city of Ibadan, Agbeni Market, was shut down as a result of the murder of a member of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), allegedly perpetrated by an Egungun and some of its followers (Leadership, 2013). Indeed, the continual outbreak of violence during Egungun festival celebration is aggravating the problem of religious conflicts which is pervasive in Nigeria (Ovienloba, 2011; Ayantayo, 2009). Against this background, this paper examined factors promoting violence during Egungun festival in South-West Nigeria, and the attendant socio-religious implications.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Social Disorganisation Theory (SDT) was adopted as the theoretical anchorage for this study. This theory was developed by Shaw and McKay in 1942 as extant records show. As a theoretical approach to the study of crime, SDT has its roots in the process of social change. It essentially views rapid social change as damaging the organised society's web of normative social controls; and thus, results in social disorganisation in which normative consensus is replaced by normative dissensus. According to the basic logic of disorganisation theory, social disorganisation is likely to be followed by personal disorganisation (Pfohl, 1994). A breakdown in the normative control increases the likelihood that

individuals will experience a similar breakdown in moral constraints in the everyday behaviour because social disorganisation has disrupted socialisation, the process through which one generation of people passes its beliefs, values, and normative constraints to another. Thus, the power of traditional beliefs, values and norms is dissipated by a disorganised moral climate in which “anything goes”.

At the individual level, this means that many people will fail to develop the self-censoring conscience which is said to regulate peoples’ behaviours in a well-organised society (Pfohl, 1994). Therefore, normative competition, conflicts, or dissensus are a key characteristic of social disorganisation, and one of the by-products of disorganisation is increase in deviant behaviour which is a natural by-product of rapid social change. High rates of non-conformity occur when too much change in too short a time disrupts the normative order of a society (Pfohl, 1994). Thus, the frequent outbreak of violence during annual Egungun festival celebration in south-western Nigeria is a reflection of the effects of social change on this important traditional religious practice.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research was exploratory and cross-sectional in design. Ibadan city in south-western Nigeria was the study area. The choice of Ibadan was informed by the series of Egungun festival-related violence that were recorded in the city in recent times (Adebayo, 2013; Adesuyi, 2013; Adelusi and Ogunesan, 2012). Data were principally generated through the combination of in-depth interview and key-informant interview methods. Specifically, 40 in-depth interviews were conducted with market women, taxi-drivers and commercial motorcyclists who had witnessed Egungun festival-related violence.

The selection of these categories of people was informed by the fact that they were among the set of people that had first-hand information on the incidence of violence during Egungun festival celebrations in the city. By virtue of their vocations which are street-based, they were considered to be better positioned to have witnessed Egungun festival related-violence. Furthermore, the selection process was systematically done. It was only the people who had witnessed and/or experienced Egungun festival related-violence that were targeted. Individuals who did not meet this major criterion were excluded from participating in the study. Generally, conscious efforts were made to select respondents from different age categories (18years and above) and vocations (market women, taxi-drivers and commercial motorcyclists). In addition, three key informants who were active participants of Egungun traditional festival were purposively chosen for the study. All the interviews were conducted in the

Yoruba language. This step was considered necessary to allow for easy communication and exchange of information between the researchers and the respondents.

The purposive sampling technique was adopted for the selection of six different locations that had over time consistently witnessed the outbreak of violence during Egungun festival celebration in the city of Ibadan. The selected areas were Oja-Oba, Beere, Mapo, Agbeni, Poopo-Yemooja and Fooko. Similarly, convenience and snowball sampling techniques were employed for the selection of the respondents. At the analysis stage, all the data were first transcribed, and then translated to the English language. Thereafter, manual content analysis involving careful transcription and detailed description of tape-recorded data and field-notes was done to explore and interpret the emerging patterns that emanated from the data. Furthermore, ethnographic summaries were employed to enhance data interpretation through verbatim quotation of some important responses that emanated in the course of the interviews. All the responses elicited were merged and compared to draw out and create a clear picture of the emerging themes in the findings.

The international standard ethics for social research was strictly adhered to in this study. The consents of the respondents were sought and obtained before their participation. The objectives of the study were carefully explained to them. Furthermore, respondents were also informed of their rights to voluntary participation, as well as their rights to withdraw participation from the study at any time they deemed necessary.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, the emerging themes from the generated data are carefully discussed and interpreted based on the objectives of the study.

### ***Factors Promoting Violence during Egungun Festival***

The prevailing situation during Egungun festival in most communities in South-West Nigeria since late 1990s shows that the celebration is often marred by series of violent conflicts that are rapidly overshadowing its religious and cultural significance (Adediran, 2013; Bamgbola, 2013; Ogunmola, 2016; Adebayo, 2017; Ogundele, 2017; Agha, 2018; Johnson, 2018). Hence, the root causes of violence during Egungun festival celebration were investigated. Findings revealed that respondents attributed the outbreak of violence during the festival to four major factors.

One of the major factors mentioned by nearly all the interviewees and the key informants is the problem of undue rivalry and supremacy battle between some Egungun traditional festival practicing families. The respondents indicated that contrary to what obtained in the past when all the Egungun traditional festival practicing households in every community hierarchically organised themselves based on their level of communal importance and the magical power wielded, the contemporary youth participants in Egungun festivals are not reckoning with this laid down tradition, and often do not accord those above them in mystical and supernatural powers due respect. Hence, it is the non-conforming attitude of some of the youth adherents that is generating violence in some instances. A typical response that was given by most of the respondents was adequately captured in a statement made by one of the key informants, who said:

Today, it is the younger generation that is responsible for it (violence). In the days of our forefathers, different Egungun households understood the hierarchical order of all Egungun lineages. It was done in such a way that honour was given to whom it was due. For instance, Egungun Aatipaako will never bow to any other Egungun in Ibadan land. Rather, every other Egungun in this city (Ibadan) is expected to respect it. However, this widely recognised arrangement has changed. Modernisation has rubbed-off negatively on this tradition (KII/Male/Adherent of Egungun Traditional Religion/65years/Fooko Area/Ibadan).

In the words of another respondent:

Every year, it (violence) usually happens that way each time rival Egunguns meet on the road during their annual outings. At times, when the Egunguns themselves do not wish to clash, their pathfinders following them from one part of the city to the other usually have a way of fomenting trouble (IDI/Male/Taxi Driver/43years/Oja-Oba Market/Ibadan).

The above narratives indicate that the occurrence of violence during Egungun festival is closely associated with some of the youth participants whose actions and inactions constantly challenge some of the hallowed norms of this traditional festival. Equally, it is important to point out that though youths have always been among the major actors during Egungun festival, the current crop of youths participants have largely lost sight of its religious and cultural significance as a result of rapid social change, arising from modernisation and urbanisation, that is being experienced in many communities in Nigeria.

Egunguns in Ibadan are hierarchically organised, with Aatipaako being the most senior because it possesses spiritual power for foretelling the future, and it is also the only Egungun that is charged with the responsibility of performing annual ritual of beheading the sacrificial dog at the palace of the king (Olubadan). Thus, any form of disrespect to this Egungun would be considered an affront, and is most likely to be met with serious hostility. This finding validates a proposition of social disorganisation theory which posts that a breakdown in normative control increases the likelihood that individuals will experience a similar breakdown in moral constraints in the everyday behaviour because social disorganisation has disrupted socialisation, the process through which one generation of people passes its beliefs, values and normative constraints to another. Jenkins (2002) also asserts that religion-related issues have the capacity to promote undue rivalry and competition among adherents.

Retaliation/crime perpetration is another factor identified by the respondents as usually leading to the outbreak of violence whenever Egungun festival is being celebrated. It was clearly pointed out by many of the respondents that the fact that a considerable number of people usually follow some influential and prominent Egunguns around town during their outings often provides some of their followers the opportunity for engaging in violent confrontations, retaliations, and crime perpetration. An interviewee observed thus:

Although it (Egungun festival) is still peaceful in some rural communities, in some urban centres like Ibadan and Abeokuta, the celebration is often hijacked by hoodlums who act as pathfinders for the Egunguns. They often seize the opportunity to retaliate or settle scores with people with whom they have had some form of disagreements. Sometimes, the opportunity is also used by touts to burgle stores or engage in petty stealing (IDI/Female/Market Woman/43years/Fooko Area/Ibadan).

Another respondent observed in the same vein:

At times, some frivolous issues such as wife/girlfriend snatching, football club rivalry, beer parlour disagreements are sometimes settled with violence during Egungun festival celebration. It seems that the excessive smoking and alcohol consumption that some of the participants usually engage-in often propel them to exhibit some forms of unruly behavior

which usually lead to outbreak of violence (IDI/Male/Commercial Motorcyclist/37years/Agbeni Market/Ibadan).

These findings reveal that violence during Egungun festival celebration is sometimes caused by some people who have no serious connection to any of the Egungun traditional religion practicing families. Rather, they are only exploiting the festive period to unleash terror on their perceived enemies. Also, criminals at times do capitalise on the prevailing social condition during the festive period to engage in petty-stealing and shop-looting. In addition, some of the recorded acts of aggression during the festival could be the attendant effects of excessive use of hard-drugs, especially marijuana, and the uncontrolled consumption of some locally brewed-gin by some of the participants/celebrants. Today, it is a well-established fact that Egungun festival is being widely associated with violence and reprisal attacks (Adesuyi, 2013; Ogunesan, 2013). This situation is also clearly reflected in a popular slogan “Odun Esan” which literally means ‘the festival of revenge’ (in which the unleashing of terror on adversary is deemed normal), that is fast gaining acceptance among the youth adherents of this traditional festival (Adebayo 2013; Okwuofu; 2013).

This outcome demonstrates the relevance of social disorganisation theory which posits that normative competition, conflicts, and/or dissensus are a key characteristic of social disorganisation which is a natural by-product of rapid social change. Also, this finding is similar to the observation of Campbell (2015) that it is a usual occurrence for some overzealous supporters of Egungun to capitalise on their public appearance to rehash old animosities and unleash terror on one another and members of the public. Equally, George and Amusan (2011) contend that the instrumentality of religion has been frequently misused in different quarters in Nigeria.

Furthermore, political manipulation in the quest for power is also recognised to be a contributing factor to the outbreak of violence during Egungun festival celebration in South-West Nigeria. A key informant and the majority of the interviewees made mention of the fact that it is a common phenomenon in the South-West for some political party faithful to use the period of Egungun festival to unleash violent assaults on supporters of rival political parties. A respondent had this to say:

You see, most of these politicians are selfish. At times, they use the Egunguns and their pathfinders for their own political gain. It is a common occurrence for sponsored political thugs to unleash terror on their perceived political opponents under the guise of celebrating

Egungun festival (IDI/Female/Market Woman/50years/Beere Area/Ibadan).

In the words of another respondent:

Even some political thugs who have no link with any Egungun traditional religion practicing household do pretend to be members and go as far as wearing Egungun attire and disguise as one during the festival to attack their opponents (KII/Male/Adherent of Egungun Traditional Religion/68years/Poopo-Yemoja Area/Ibadan).

The implication of these findings is that it may be erroneous to conclude that all the cases of violence during Egungun festival in South-West Nigeria have a direct connection to this traditional religious obligation. It was clearly shown from the study that people with ulterior motives, particularly some local politicians are also exploiting the festive period to further their own self-interests. The quest for power and materialism which generally marks the post-colonial Nigeria sets the pace for the negative trend currently being experienced during Egungun festival. In the contemporary time, the celebration of Egungun festival is sometimes systematically used to promote avarice and the egocentric interests of some individuals in their struggle for political power. Social disorganisation theory posits that many people in a disorganised society will fail to develop the self-censoring conscience which are said to regulate peoples' behaviours in a well-organised society. This finding also corroborates the submission of Awoniyi (2013) that religion has become a platform for socio-political articulation as well as a tool for the emergence of cross-cutting cleavages in Nigeria. In addition, Ferme (2001) has similarly established a link between violent historical cum political legacy and production in everyday material culture among the Mende-speaking people of south-eastern Sierra Leone.

Also, some of the respondents cited religious intolerance as another important factor contributing to violence during Egungun festival celebration in South-West Nigeria. Respondents who identified this factor claimed that the long-standing religious intolerance that is usually exhibited by the adherents of modern religions of Christianity and Islam towards practitioners of African Traditional Religion (ATR) equally has a hand in some of the recorded cases of violence during Egungun festival. One of the interviewees described the situation this way:

Sometimes, the provocation of Egungun adherents by believers of other religions (Christians and Muslims) who typically see them as

pagans does result in –violent confrontations whenever the annual Egungun festival is being celebrated in this city (IDI/Male/Taxi Driver/48years/Agbeni Market/Ibadan).

It is clear from this finding that the intolerant disposition of some Christians and Muslims towards the participants/celebrants of Egungun traditional festival occasionally does result in violent clashes during celebrations. This could be as a result of some offensive preaching or the exhibition of some fanatical attitudes by the adherents of other religious faith. Indeed, this situation is not unconnected with the colonial experience of Nigerians and Africans at large which was generally characterised by a systematic labelling and denigration of some African cultural and religious practices by the colonial masters. Indeed, some derogatory terms like animism, fetishism, barbarism, and paganism were among the expressions typically used to negatively qualify some important African traditional cultural practices. More so, the adherents of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria believe that their own religions are superior, and that no other religion is capable of providing salvation (Ubrurhe, 2000; Atoi 2016). Furthermore, Juergensmeyer (2000) has also observed that religion in the past two decades has been at the centre of most violent conflicts around the world. In the same vein, Gofwen (2004) posits that religious intolerance is a major source of religious conflict/violence in all societies existing as long as the history of mankind, and permeating all forms of human civilisations with the attendant destructive tendencies. This result also confirms the submission of social disorganisation theory that normative competition, conflicts, and dissensus are a key characteristic of social disorganisation, and one of the by-products of disorganisation is increase in deviant behaviour which is a natural by-product of rapid social change.

### ***Socio-Religious Implications of Violence Associated with Egungun Festival Celebration***

The effects of violence associated with Egungun festival celebration in South-West Nigeria were investigated to have a comprehensive understanding of its socio-religious implications. The study revealed that the recurring outbreak of violence during Egungun festival generally has two major implications. Apart from the fact that it is impacting negatively on Egungun traditional practices, it equally constitutes a threat to the social wellbeing of the society.

Respondents maintained that the sacredness of Egungun traditional religion is fast disappearing among the people. Most of the interviewees and the key informants maintained that unlike what obtained in the past, the period of Egungun festival is increasingly being seen, today, as a period for the celebration

of violence. This finding was reflected in the submission of one of the interviewees who stated thus:

Egunguns are not commanding much respect today compared to what we had witnessed in the past. The modern day Egunguns are dangerous. They are usually drunk before going out for parade. They are tough people. Today, it is the gun-carrying and machete-wielding Egunguns that we have around (IDI/Male/Taxi Driver/53years/Agbeni Market/Ibadan).

Another respondent submitted further:

With the way the present day Egunguns parade themselves around town, I wonder if the festival still holds any religious importance (IDI/Female/Market Woman/36years/Beere Area/Ibadan).

These findings indicate that the cultural and religious significance attached to Egungun festival is waning as a result of the incessant violent conflicts being recorded annually during its celebration. This situation is casting Egungun traditional festival's celebrants/participants and the festival in a bad light in the society. Egungun deities' representatives that were once highly revered in South-West Nigeria are now experiencing public ridicules by being unmasked, beaten, arrested and in some cases, even locked-up in police cells (Minchakpu, 2004; Adelusi and Ogunesan, 2012; Kayode-Adedeji, 2013). Furthermore, this finding supports the assertions of Osemeka (2014) and Lenshie and Akipu (2014) that the frequent outbreak of religious-based violence has significantly diminished the importance of certain religions in Nigeria. According to social disorganisation theory, the power of traditional beliefs, values and norms is dissipated by a disorganised moral climate in which "anything goes".

Some of the respondents also identified periodic proscription of annual Egungun festival celebration by some state governors in South-West Nigeria as another negative implication informed by the violent clashes. A key informant's submission aptly captured the situation this way:

Sadly, some State Governors have started banning some Egunguns from participating in the annual traditional outing during the festival. For instance, some few years ago, Egungun Ogundeji Alapasanpa and Egungun Jalaruru were banned by the Oyo State Government from parading around town because of the violent conflicts that occurred among

some youth participants on the eve of their outings (KII/Male/Adherent of Egungun Traditional Religion/57years/Mapo Area/Ibadan).

From this narrative, it can be deduced that despite the fact that African Traditional Religion is recognised in the Nigerian constitution, some state governors in South-West Nigeria occasionally do proscribe Egungun festival celebration and/or forbid some important Egungun deities' representatives from dancing round town, as is the normal practice, as a proactive measure to forestall a foreseen outbreak of violence. This step has a serious religious implication for the adherents of Egungun traditional religion because the banning of Egungun festival or the denial of some Egungun to partake in the annual traditional outing automatically denies them the opportunity to fulfil an important component of their religious obligations. Campbell (2015) has also submitted that Egungun Alapasanpa is a masquerade that is notorious for orchestrating violence during annual Egungun festival in Ibadan.

Similarly, the respondents stated that the continuous occurrence of violence during Egungun festival is capable of engendering the extinction of this traditional religious practice. The respondents reasoned that in some towns and communities where Egungun traditional religion was previously widely accepted, many people are already losing interest in the annual celebration of the festival. This is captured in the words of one of the interviewees thus:

Their (Egunguns) image has been negatively affected in the eyes of the public because of their persistent violent acts. Egungun festival celebration is now different from the past. Nobody wants to identify with machete-wielding and gun-carrying Egunguns (IDI/Female/Market Woman/47years/Oja-Oba Market/Ibadan).

In the words of another respondent:

The situation has become so bad. Unlike before when people who are genuinely interested in the celebration of Egungun festival usually come from far and near to participate in it. These days, there is usually low turn-out of people during the festival (IDI/Male/Commercial Motorcyclist/53years/Fooko Area/Ibadan).

It can be deduced from these findings that Egungun festival stands the risk of going into extinction if the trend of violent acts being annually recorded during

its celebration is not urgently reversed. Today, other members of the society are staying away from Egunguns and their followers because they believe that taking part in the celebration could expose them to the risk of violent attacks and criminal apprehension. Consequently, the continual association of Egungun festival with violence could lead to the extinction of this vital component of the Yoruba cultural heritage in the nearest future. Consequently, the incoming generation would be deprived of the opportunity to have a feel of their ancestral legacy. Indeed, it is a well acknowledged fact that African indigenous religions and cultural antiquities are inevitable tools and necessary gateways for understanding and appreciating the aesthetic values of nature and Africans' historical antecedents (Ojedokun, 2012; Tasie, 2013). This is particularly true for the Egungun traditional religion. Also, this finding validates a key tenet of social disorganisation theory which opines that the power of traditional beliefs, values and norms is dissipated by a disorganised moral climate in which "anything goes".

Equally, respondents opined that Egungun festival-related violence also constitutes threat to the social well-being of the society because it usually creates an atmosphere of chaos and frequently leads to loss of lives and property. Whenever there is an outbreak of violence during Egungun festival, traders usually abandon their wares, scampering for safety; and this often gives louts the opportunity to loot their stores. Apart from the associated economic loss, Egungun festival-related violence frequently results in homicide and grievous body injury. A typical response of the respondents was evident in the submission of one of the interviewees who maintained that:

Most times, violence arising from Egungun festival celebration usually leads to theft, vandalism of cars and even loss of human lives. It has happened here (Ibadan) many times. In fact, the Egunguns we have today are the *world-best* at fomenting trouble (IDI/Female/Market Woman/56years/Mapo Area/Ibadan).

It is clear from this narrative that homicide, theft and destruction of valuables are among the negative consequences of the outbreak of violence during Egungun festival celebration. Also, the description of today's Egungun deities' representatives as being the 'world-best' at unleashing mayhem and at disturbing social order is a very strong indication that the religious significance of Egungun festival has greatly diminished in the Yoruba society. According to social disorganisation theory, a breakdown in the normative control increases the likelihood that individuals will experience a similar breakdown in moral constraints in the everyday behaviour because social disorganisation has

disrupted socialisation, the process through which one generation of people passes its beliefs, values and normative constraints to another. This finding also supports the submission of Awoniyi (2013) that religious conflicts in Nigeria frequently result in the killing of innocent citizens, psychological trauma and wanton destruction of property.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has unravelled some overt and covert factors promoting violence during Egungun festival celebration in South-West Nigeria. It equally examined the socio-religious implications of violence that is increasingly characterising the annual festival. The major factors responsible for the outbreak of violence were identified by the respondents as including: undue rivalry and supremacy battle between some Egungun households, retaliation/crime perpetration, religious intolerance and political manipulation of the festival in the struggle for political power. Also, reduction in the sacred value attached to Egungun festival, occasional proscription of the annual festival by some state governors, possible extinction of this important traditional religious practice, and loss of lives and property were the attendant socio-religious implications of the growing act of violence associated with Egungun festival celebration. In view of these, the following steps are suggested as useful towards curtailing the recurring outbreak of violence during Egungun festival:

First, leaders of Egungun households need to adequately orientate their children and young ones on the sacredness of Egungun festival as a way of ensuring that they come to terms with its religious and cultural significance. Since Egungun festival is a fulfilment of a religious obligation, all rules and regulations guiding its celebration need to be properly observed and respected. This step can go a long way in reducing the undue rivalry and supremacy battle that usually lead to violent confrontations between/among different Egungun traditional religion practicing households. Second, relevant law enforcement agencies, particularly the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), need to be more proactive by collaborating with leaders of Egungun households to put in result-oriented and far-reaching measures specifically geared towards curtailing possible outbreak of violence during annual Egungun festival celebration.

Similarly, leaders of Egungun traditional religion practicing families in violent-prone areas should come up with some effective strategies through which the activities of their supporters and/or pathfinders can be controlled so as to prevent criminally-minded individuals, who may wish to exploit the period of Egungun festival to perpetrate crime from successfully carrying out their bad

intention. In addition, adherents of other religious faiths, particularly, Christianity and Islam should learn to respect and tolerate devotees of the African Traditional Religion (ATR), including adherents of Egungun traditional religion. This step can go a long way in helping to douse the tension that normally characterises the celebration of Egungun festival in South-West Nigeria.

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