**INTRODUCTION**

Culture is defined as a way of life. Culture is distinct, dynamic and unique. Culture, in anthropology, the patterns of behavior and thinking that people living in social groups learn, create, and share. Culture distinguishes one human group from others. It also distinguishes humans from other animals. A people’s culture includes their beliefs, rules of behavior, language, rituals, art, technology, styles of dress, ways of producing and cooking food, religion, and political and economic systems. The Nigerian cultural beliefs are the symbols of identity of the country since her independence, and this has greatly contributed to her magnificent popularity in the continent and tremendously given her the name “*Giant of Africa”.* Nigeria is a country rich in petroleum as the major source of revenue but the contribution of the Nigerian custom in tourism cannot be taken for granted. Many Nigerian customs today have turned to both national and international tourist centre fetching the country huge amount of revenues. Some of the tourist attractions includes Obudu hills, Osun festival, Egungun festival, Argungu fishing festival, e.t.c.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The *Egungun* is an important aspect of the Yoruba culture. The Yoruba are people living primarily in southwest Nigeria and eastern Benin who speak Yoruba, a Niger-Congo language. The Yoruba are predominantly town dwellers who practice hoe agriculture and are well known as traders and for their crafts. Yoruba artists have produced masterpieces of woodcarving and bronze casting, some of which date from as early as the 13th century. The Yoruba religion is animistic and numerous gods are worshiped.

By the 17th century the Yoruba had succeeded in establishing a strong and flourishing state, the kingdom of Oyo, in the region between Dahomey and the Niger River. Oyo disintegrated into numerous petty kingdoms during the first half of the 19th century

The Yorubas believe in the spirit of their ancestors and one major way they believe that they communicate with them is through the egunguns. One of the major festivals that fosters unity amonst the Yoruba is the *Egungun* festival. Yorubas regardless of their cultural and religious affiliations are always egarer to celebrate eguns as they are reffered to. The egunguns are said to come from the heavens hence the term “*ara orun”.* This is why they are revered and greatly respected. As supernatural beings, it belived that they come with blessings and goodwill for the inhabitants of the earth.

Ibadan is the state capital of Oyo State, Nigeria. With a population of over 3 million, it is the most populous city in the state, and the third most populous city in Nigeria, after Lagos and Kano; it is the country's largest city by geographical area. At the time Nigeria's independence in 1960, Ibadan was the largest and most populous city in the country, and the second most populous in Africa after Cairo .

Ibadan came into existence in 1829, during a period of turmoil that characterized Yorubaland at the time. It was in this period that many old Yoruba cities such as old Oyo (*Oyo ile),* Ijaye and Owu disappeared, and newer ones such as Abeokuta, new Oyo (*Oyo atiba*) and Ibadan sprang up to replace them. According to local historians, Lagelu founded the city, and was initially intended to be a war camp for warriors coming from Oyo, Ife and Ijebu. As a forest site containing several ranges of hills, varying in elevation from 160 to 275 metres, the location of the camp offered strategic defence opportunities. Moreover, its location at the fringe of the forest (from which the city got its name) promoted its emergence as a marketing centre for traders and goods from both the forest and grassland areas.

Ibadan is located in south-western Nigeria, 128 km inland northeast of Lagos and 530 km southwest of Abuja, the federal capital, and is a prominent transit point between the coastal region and the areas in the hinterland of the country. Ibadan had been the centre of administration of the old Western Region since the days of the British colonial rule, and parts of the city's ancient protective walls still stand to this day. The principal inhabitants of the city are the Yorubas, as well as various communities from other parts of the country.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are many books, journal articles, magazines and texts in electronic and printed medium on Yoruba masking tradition. These include Pemberton and Lawal who discuss a masquerade type among the Egbado, a Yoruba subgroup in Southwestern Nigeria. Okeji discusses Yoruba Egúngún costume, performances and rituals. In the same vein, Adepegba writes on classification of Yoruba Egúngún genre while Olupona, Awolalu, Babayemi and Laura comment on traditional Yoruba *Egúngún* festivals while Aremu writes on colour symbolism in Yoruba *Egúngún* costume, Makinde writes on the reconstruction of *Ajomogbodo* (*Egúngún agba)* costume genre of Yoruba *Egúngún.*

Egungun is otherwise known as the masked ancestors of the Yoruba kingdom which assures the people tha invoke the spirit of the ancestors is called “*Alapini”.* The festival is celebrated annually in the Yoruba kingdom, in almost all the towns and cities and this has tremendously contribute positively to the Nigerian economy, and. The study of *egunguns* is a form of understanding indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is home-grown knowledge that enables communities to make sense of who they are and to interact with their environment in ways that sustain life. It is knowledge that arises from life experience and which is passed down from generation to generation through words of mouth in the form of folklore, idioms, proverbs, songs, rite of passage and rituals. It equally covers the broad spectrum of life and therefore there are different types of indigenous knowledge ranging from people’s beliefs, medicine, arts and

craft etc.

Local and indigenous knowledge refers to the understanding, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings for rural and indigenous peoples, local knowledge inform decision making about fundamental aspect of day – to – day life. This knowledge is integral to a cultural complex that also encompasses language.

Indigenous knowledge is based on, and is deeply embedded in local experience and historic reality and is therefore unique to that specific culture; it also plays an important role in defining the identity of the community. It therefore represents all the skills and innovation of a people and embodies the collective wisdom and resourcefulness of the community.

Indigenous knowledge is still among indigenous (local) communities in many part of Africa. This knowledge has made it possible for the indigenous communities to live in harmony with their environment for generation on how to sustainable utilize their natural resources using a variety of innovation to deal with environmental conservation and natural management. This knowledge, in line with African tradition has been handed down orally from generation to generation.

Documented literature on indigenous knowledge is limited in Africa. This knowledge is usually passed from generation to generation through traditional socialization processes by elders of indigenous communities. The reliability of this mode of information transfer is under threat in these modern times mainly due to the influx of western culture, high levels of intention between different communities, as well as the passing on of the custodians of this knowledge.

**METHODOLOGY**

The first methodology adopted for this work is oral discussions among Yoruba speakers which is about the masquerade in Ibadan. This methodology is considered as a practical and better means of collecting data as it is assumed that such propositions would be more valid and reliable as they form the basis for the day-to-day conversations among those who use the Yoruba language. The data is therefore gathered from the exchanges among the Yoruba speakers, and are based on egungun i.e. masquerade in Yoruba culture. Content analysis will also be employed to carry out this work, also this work will be done through historic analysis. The works of writers will be accessed. Furthermore works of contemporary news articles will be used. Documents will also be gotten from the internet.

**PERSONALITIES**

*Egungun* festival is part of the Yoruba religious system sometimes referred to as *“orisa”. Egungun* is celebrated in festivals and the rituals through the custom or masquerade. An elder from the *egungun* family called “*Alagbaa”* sometimes presides over the ancestral rites, but egungun priests are the ones in charge of invoking the spirit of the Ancestor and bringing them out. The invocation is done when the egungun worshippers dance, drums, and possessed by the ancestral spirits, that they beat everybody they see with their Whips. They believe using the Whip against people could help to clean the community from wickedness. After this, the egungun priest advice, warn and pray for their spectators, and people give them money which evidently results to the priests becoming richer.

Masquerades literarily and ordinarily depict grotesque figures that should be feared, but in our clime, the Yoruba race in particular, they represent a bevy of beauty and colorful costumes. Through drumming and dance, it is believed that these robed performers get possessed by the spirits of the ancestors, as manifested as a single entity. Their festivals are usually a huge destination for tourists and locals alike. As a matter of fact, some people travel home from far and near to behold the spectacle presented by the masquerades.

However, their essence is believed to be more than the colours and glamour, singing and dancing. It is also believed that they spiritually clean the community. They also expose the strengths and weaknesses of the community to encourage behavior more befitting of their descendants. Ibadan, with no fewer than 100 masquerades being ‘worshipped’ by devotees so to speak, the head of the Egungun clan in the city: Chief Soladoye Fadeyi, lends more voice to the essence of these masquerades.

He said in the early years of Ibadan when the whole place was in disarray, scattered by war, crisis everywhere and nothing was working well in the land, “our forefathers consulted the oracle and the oracle said Ibadan will become famous and great only if the families can start worshipping masquerades. So that was how they started it at Ile-Lapapo at Ita Baale and each families in Ibadan contributed clothe for the outing of the first masquerade”

According to Fadeyi, there are over 100 masquerades in Ibadan and all the families rooted in Ibadan have a link with these masquerades one way or another. Giving a brief background of the masquerades, Fadeyi said the first masquerade in the land was named *Labala* and it came out over 120 years ago. His coming, he said brought peace, progress, prosperity and goodwill to Ibadanland. And whenever that masquerade comes out, he said, no other masquerade or any other person crosses his path.

He listed the other masquerades including *Alagangan, Alapasapa, Ogundeji, Oloolu, Olunlade*, *Atipako, Abidi-Elege, Godogodo, Ferebiekun, Anikulapo, Lobanika, Telebiitan, Gbebolaja* among others.

These masquerades have different family backgrounds, costumes, rituals and taboos and they are celebrated during different festivals and days.

There are two types of festivals in Yoruba land: o*jo ose* (holy day) and *odun* (annual festival). *Ojo ose* (holy sacred day) are the days designated to worship some minor divinities; these are often referred to as minor festivals. There are minor festival days of some divinities called *Ojó òsè* (holy or sacred day). They are often at five-day, seven days: seventeen-days or twenty-one day interval depending on the divinity. The *ojó òsè* (sacred days) of *Òrìsà-nlá* (the archdivinity) for example is a five-day interval whereas the divinity called *Bùrúkù* (anti-wickedness divinity) in Abeokuta has its sacred days on the seventeenth day, this is called *òsè bùrúkù* (The sacred day of buruku). The other type of festival is called *odún* (annual festival). *Ojo ose* is used to worship some divinities like *orisa- nla* (arch-divinity), while *odun* is a major festival which is celebrated annually like *Egúngún* (masquerade), *oro* (cult of the departed spirit),and *odun isu* (yam festival). Odún is used to express both the seasonal cycle and annual festivals. In this sense, odún is both “year” and “festival”. Again, major festivals come up every season or year and it varies from town to town. This explains why Yoruba people pray at festival that *À-sèyí-sà módún* (just as we celebrate this festival, we will celebrate another year) or *À-se-se-tún-se, bí a bá sèyí tán, a* *ó tún se èmí sí* (An endless celebration through repeated celebrations, when we celebrate this to the end, we will again celebrate others in addition). This *odún* (festival) is described as à se-se-tún se (that which is done repeatedly) providing opportunity for *otùn* (newness, renewal). Among the Yoruba, each divinity has an annual festival associated with him or her. Unlike *ojó òsè* (sacred day) which involves a group of worshippers, the *odún* (festival) is usually the concern of the whole community and the head of the community. Hence, the Yoruba say*: Gbogbo odún ni* *odún oba* (Every festival is the concern of the king). At this juncture, we shall note that not all traditional festivals are universally celebrated by the Yoruba since not all divinities are universally worshipped by them. Consequently, the other festivals that are commonly celebrated throughout Yoruba land are *Oro* (in honour of the departed spirits) and *Egúngún* (an ancestral cult). Indeed, the *Egúngún* is almost omnipresent in Yoruba land. In all cases, the universal belief in the existence and power of the prominent divinities and the ancestral spirits makes people everywhere worship them for protection, prevention, purification or for anticipated rewards or blessings.

It is common knowledge that among the Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria, they always find reasons (protection, healing, blessing, joy, etc.) to celebrate a festival. Everywhere in Yoruba land, each community, town or village has something to celebrate in the form of a festival. However, we cannot have a thorough grasp of this phenomenon without adequate reference to Yoruba religions. According to Makinde, feasts and festivals are an important aspect of any religion. They serve a twofold purpose of keeping religion alive and affirming some religious or theological truth connected with them… almost invariably all festivals are celebrations of some important religious principles of theological truth.

In the traditional times, sacrifices (including animals and human) and other forms of rituals were carried out before the *Egúngún* makes public appearance. This is to appease witches and witchcraft in the society and to guarantee a successful outing. Incantations and use of magical substances were standards of a powerful *Egúngún* in time past or sometimes the ability to perform magic and humiliate other *Egúngún* masquerade. *Egúngún* and members of his cult make sacrifices and rituals to appease the unseen spirits for acceptance. It is also a common practice for *Egúngún* to secure himself spiritually with many magical substances *(oogun)* and weapons which he could use freely at the opponent during public performances. The above serves as a deterrent to members of the public who are not *Egúngún* cult members and creates fear in their minds. Since the introduction of Islam and Christianity to Yoruba land, the culture of human sacrifice has stopped.

As stated earlier, Several scholars associate *Egúngún* to the Yoruba traditional religion while some see it as spirits of the ancestors who come to bless their living family members through rituals and performance annually. These include Aremu who refers to the *Egúngún* masquerade as the spirits of the deceased ‘*ará òṛ̣ un kinkin’* the dwellers of heaven. Laura, in support of the formal mentions the religious relevance of *Egúngún* to the life of the people; she also explains that *Egúngún* is more than just the dead relatives because they play an active role in the daily life of the living Aremu and Dopamu agree that there are numerous ways by which ancestors communicate with the living. Idowu mentions that; one of the most unique ways to worship ancestors is their manifestation on earth in the form of masked spirits known as *Egúngún.* From the foregoing, one can conclude that, the celebration of the *Egúngún* festival is both religious and social.

Recalling the history and importance of one of the greatest masquerades in Ibadan and Yorubaland as a whole, the head of *Aje* family where the *Oloolu* masquerade originated, Chief Raheem Oyerinde, disclosed that their great forefather, Ayorinde Aje, who was a warrior along with Ogunmola, Ogbori-efon, Ibikunle, Oderinde, Oderinlo went to fight in Ogbagi in Akoko, Ondo State and Oloolu was a great war masquerade in that town and was so powerful such that no one could confront him during the war.

”Nobody could defeat Oloolu during that war but it was our father, Ayorinde Aje that fought him and removed his regalia and costumes, before he was brought to Ibadan as a slave. His eyes caught the Egungun’s outfit and were attracted towards it. But as he moved towards the shrine where the outfit was kept, the war captive warned Aje Ayorinde not to go near it because it could put his life in jeopardy. Hence the name Oloolu, that is, *O-LU-NKAN*, meaning ‘you will put your life in peril. Ayorinde took the advice but ordered his captive to take the outfit along with him back to Ibadan. He also ordered the wife of the captive to accompany her husband to Ibadan. The woman refused. In his annoyance, Ayorinde beheaded her and ordered the captured husband to carry the woman’s head along to Ibadan in addition to the Oloolu outfit. That woman’s head is what is permanently placed on the masquerade. It is the original one. It is because of the head that every woman is barred from setting eyes on the Oloolu. Any woman who sees the real Oloolu – not his pictures – will surely die. It is also true that the first person the Ololu sees on his first day will die. The Olubadan usually warns the populace to take precautions.

During his stay in Ibadan, there was famine, ill-health and crisis in the land and all the elders and chiefs were looking for a way out, that was how Ayorinde Aje suggested that Oloolu should be used to carry the ritual to appease the gods, so immediately he carried the ritual, there was rain and everything got back to normal in Ibadan. Oloolu helped Ibadan to be what it is today. Since then anybody that is the head of the Aje family becomes the custodian of *Oloolu* masquerade.

It must be noted that no other Egungun must be seen on the streets whenever the *Oloolu* is out. That Egungun will certainly perish. Legend has it that during the reign of Olubadan Dada, and Egungun called *Iponri-Iku* tried it. *Iponri-Iku* came out on the same day the *Oloolu* was out. Oloolu then dropped a special cowry on the ground and challenged *Iponri-Iku* to pick it up. *Iponri-Iku* bent down to pick the cowry. He could not. His backbone was broken instantly. *Iponri-Iku* could no longer stand up. His followers had to carry him home. *Iponri-Iku* died on the same day. Since that day, no other *Egungun* has dared to challenge the *Oloolu.*

According to Chief Oyerinde,: any area in Ibadan where the people try to fight the *Oloolu* anytime he is out, such areas will continue to experience bloodshed. *Oloolu* is so great that he gives the barren children, he provides for the needy, he prospers business among other good things he can give to an individual who is ready to serve him”

Of all the egunguns worshipped in Ibadan and probably in all of Yorubaland, none is as dreaded as the *Egungun Oloolu* (Oloolu Masquerade). This cult figure is believed to have immense supernatural powers and one of these is the ability to mysteriously kill the first person man or woman who sets his or her eyes on the Oloolu (in his weird costume which is usually kept inside its own special shrine).

He further revealed that in time past and presently many politicians seeking elective positions have started coming to seek Oloolu’s assistance for victory at the polls, adding that their wishes are always granted once they can also fulfill their promises.

**REGALIA**

Cloth plays an important role in the world of the Yoruba. Their beliefs equate nakedness with infancy, insanity, or the lack of social responsibility. More elaborate dress reflects social power and prestige. In performances honoring ancestors, exquisite cloth is the major medium for the masker's transformation. An Egungun costume is composed of multiple layers of cloth lappets made from expensive and prestigious textiles, expressing the wealth and status of a family as well as the power of the ancestor. The composition of an Egungun ensemble has several distinctive features.

The *Oloolu* masquerade is an individual masquerade. It has its unique attire which looks like an elongated pyramid made from different pieces of clothes and a net. The most bizarre piece of the *Oloolu* masquerade is that it has the skull of a woman as its crown. As the *Oloolu* dances round the city in its strange rhythm with a female skull dangling on its head, the bearer proudly displays the human bone while accompanying the dreaded cult figure. The bearer of *Oloolu* must not wear shoes nor carry any kind of load on his head.

*Oloolu’s* costume like those worn by other attendants in the entourage of most *Egungun*, has an intriguing array of empowering substances, including metal, leather, cowries, animal bones, and human skull, that transform them into armor. Additionally, these packets of *oogun* can be harmful, even lethal to non-initiates, and downright detrimental to the overall wellbeing and fertility of women. Certain elements of the costume are indeed condensed sites of power; merely touching or brushing against them could render one impotent. Further, the charms *(awure)* encased in the amuletic packets serve as containers for magical substances and power objects that are capable of inducing financial success, among many other potentials. Given such condensed articulation of powers, women in particular are confined to their domestic spaces and markets remained closed within the cosmopolitan city at the public appearance of *Oloolu.* Only men can go about their normal activities without fear of molestation and reprisals.

Also as part of the preparations for whoever will wear the costume as the eggungun, he must not go to bed with any of his wives 30 days before coming out. In fact, a few days before the festival opens, all females must vacate his compound and return after the Oloolu festival is over. Besides, he must not carry a child on his shoulders with his feet slung round his neck.‎

**CELEBRATION**

Oloolu still maintains its prestige and every year around July, its colorful festival is carried out with many Ibadan sons and daughters trooping out for the celebrations. The *Oloolu* is expected to take the ‘sacrifice’ from its ancestral home at *Ode Aje* in the heart of the city by 1 pm to *Idi Ape, Beere, Oja’ba* down to the Olubadan of Ibadan palace before depositing it at *Idi Ape* by midnight.

It is the belief among the locals that without the *Oloolu* carrying this sacrifice every year and depositing it at *Idi Ape* which is of spiritual importance to the city, Ibadan would not know peace and no Olubadan dares toy with this tradition. After the *Oloolu* must have cleansed the land with the sacrifice this month, the other masquerades take the stage one after the other in June before the Oloolu returns in July to close the masquerades’ festival.

**CONCLUSION**

*Egungun* festivals and celebrations are performed, among many other reasons, to demonstrate how the spiritual powers of the departed are harnessed for the continuous revitalization of human society. In addition to rekindling the bond of kinship between members of the same family, *Egungun* celebration is used to reinscribe individual identity within the lineage of a common ancestor and to reenact certain aspects of the history of the Yoruba wars of the nineteenth century. Additionally, the festivals are used to promote the spirit of cooperation while fostering the concepts of tolerance, peace, and unity in a fragile but complicated religious landscape such as Nigeria, with far-reaching resonance even in the African Diaspora.

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