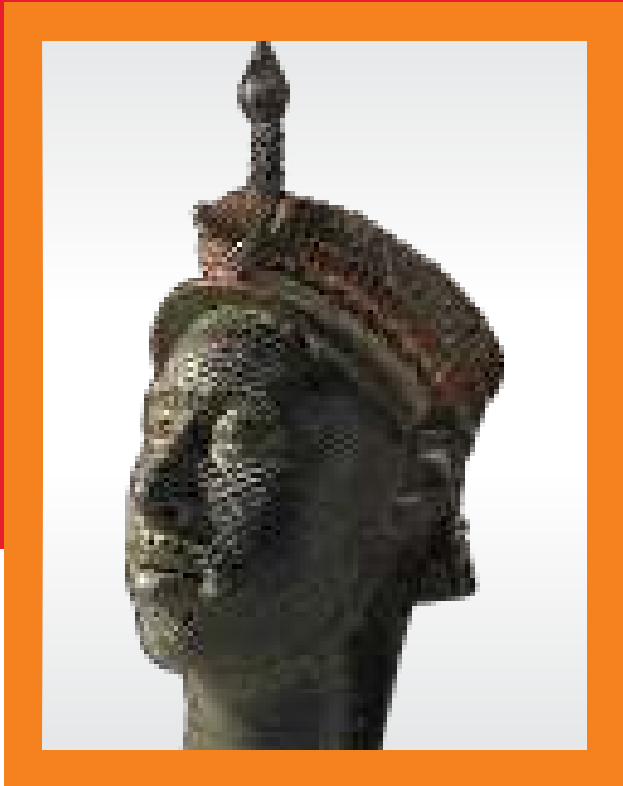


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(Rituals, Myths and Festivals in a Changing Context)

SPECIAL ISSUE - VOL. 9 NO. 1, 2018/2019





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## **Introduction: Rituals, Myths and Festivals in a Changing Context**

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## **Ritual Festival, Social Cohesion and Change among Nawuris of Northern Ghana**

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### **On the Strength of Testimonials: Reconstructing D.O. Fagunwa's Agency in the Development of Modern African Literature**

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# INTRODUCTION:

## *Rituals, Myths and Festivals in a Changing Context*

*Abimbola O. Adesoji*

Writings on three related, yet distinct concepts of rituals, myths and festivals continue to draw debate concerning forms and nature. Ritual in the traditional climes consisting strictly of what may appear un-academic, has gained scholarly attention especially through the works of Bell.<sup>1</sup> and among others. These works provide new insights into the dynamics of culture, religion, and personhood, yet expose the complexities inherent in its subjection to systematic enquiries by scholars. While ritual has been approached mainly from the perspective of religion, its history, though written has not been paid more attention, particularly how it evolved and the changes in forms and functions, and the processes it had passed through. Usually associated with the sacred, a term itself much in dispute, ritual also encompasses all repetitive practice and rhythmic actions.<sup>2</sup>

Myths have been subject of interrogation by C.G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell.<sup>3</sup> Their works deal extensively with meanings and functions of myth, especially its social use in understanding societies and its politics. Their explanations that myths provide justifications for human world and help harmonise reality remain fundamental to our experiences of the past and modern times. The role of Myths in building and preserving civilisations, maintaining religious order, answering questions pertaining to life and providing meaning within and beyond cannot be emphasised. The commonality of human experiences is expressed in myths. Myths represent humanity attempt to grasp the world around, search through the ages for truth, meaning and experience of meaning, clues for spiritual potentialities of human life and for significance.<sup>4</sup>

Festival, like myth and ritual, is also connected to the sacred; religious beliefs of a people. At another level, festival allows for much flexibilities and innovations of cultures to adapt to modern realities that appeal to human minds especially when its roles in urban life and its place in development are examined. The role of Festivals in projecting supposed esoteric beliefs and turning it into global consumption through tourism is ever present. The justification to commoditize festivals is increasingly hinged on the necessity to explore it as alternative source of national income. Yet its susceptibility to adaptation as well as its accommodation of new realities presents problems to its authenticity and reliability to create historical narratives. To what degree in the light of the above does festival represent historical narratives or becomes a mechanism for setting agenda for income generation? Festivals serve as means to generate local pride, identity and income.<sup>5</sup> There is no denying the fact that festivals are rooted in historical experience but are increasingly dominated by economic motives as opposed to the historical contexts and perspectives they represented.

Rituals and myths, which traditionally should be in the purview of the sacred are being built and adapted to becoming festivals as many cultures seek to migrate their local beliefs to the realm of the global. It is in the light of the above that the five papers carefully selected for publication in this special edition have explored different dimensions of the theme.

Elizabeth Kyazike explores the management of the Nyero rock art site in Uganda as cultural heritage of ritual concerns. She examines the ritual practices associated with Nyero rock art site, how the ritual practices carried out at the site compromise or promote heritage conservation of the site and assesses how heritage conservation and ritual practices can be reconciled for proper heritage conservation of Nyero and other similar sites. She concludes that ritual practice as part and parcel of heritage actually enhances heritage conservation contrary to the new religious practice associated with Christianity that has infiltrated the site of late.

Using the case study of the Asogli Yam Festival among the Ewe of Ghana,

Samuel Bewiadzi interrogates the place of rituals and festival in re-enacting the history of the people and demonstrating their values and beliefs. These festival and rituals, characterised by prescribed procedures and actions, and meant to give meaning to the cultural, social, political and religious life of the celebrants are better appreciated and understood in the social context of the societies in which they are celebrated, in this case among the Ewe. Thus, in interrogating the rituals associated with the Yam Festival, Bewiadzi brought out its relevance to the socio-economic development of the Asogli community. He concludes that rituals and festivals are important social institutions among the Ewe of Ghana and constitute the foundation upon which the fluid relationship between the living and the supernatural entities is built.

In the context of African perspective on death, Richard Awubomu and Samuel AniegyeNtewusu investigate funeral festivals among the Nawuri of Northern Ghana, bringing out its multifaceted and encompassing nature, as well as the various functions it serves. They also explain the various changes that have taken place given the impact of globalization and social change on funeral rites in Balai particularly. Emphasised in this paper is the usefulness of Kakyutuu in promoting communal integration, strengthening the bond between the traditional princes and chiefs as well as the people and promoting peace and security even as it also brings economic benefits.

Oluranti Edward Ojo and Israel Abayomi Saibu investigate the religious functions of traditional markets in Lagos. With a focus on Oju-Olobun and Agbalata markets, they examines the significance of some of the spiritual practices in the markets and the impact of consecrating the markets on the development of Lagos. Pertinent are their findings about the contributions of appeasement of gods to the attainment of bumper sales and economic prosperity, elimination of disasters and calamities, warding off of evils and enhancement of peaceful coexistence of the town. Of particular importance was the emphasis on the enhancement of harmonious living in

Lagos through the celebration of festivals and ceremonies in the traditional markets.

Beyond the criticisms of Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa Literary career and outputs common in previous scholarship, Morufu Omigbule probes into the meta-critical dimension to the study of Fagunwa. In this regard, he made attempt to trace a continuum of Fagunwa's literary genius, literary career and the social and cultural influences the renowned author attracted to himself given his devotion to the business of creative writing. He provides testimonials, meant to validate old claims and open new vistas to demonstrate a relationship between fiction and reality and the consequent literary and historical products. Thus, located within the context of multidisciplinary approach with emphasis on the interplay of cultural and historical studies, the study projects the society from the perspective of Fagunwa's exploits.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Catherine Bell, *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997); Catherine Bell, "Response: Defining the Need for a Definition" in E. Kyriakidis (ed.) *The Archaeology of Rituals* (Los Angeles, CA: The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Publications, 2008), pp. 277-288.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Schechner, "Living a Double Consciousness" in Catherine Bell (ed.) *Teaching Rituals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.14-

<sup>3</sup>Robert Ellwood, *The Politics of Myth: A Study of C.G. Jung, Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Double day, 1991).

<sup>5</sup>Montserrat Crespi-Vallbona and Greg Richards, "The Meaning of Cultural Festivals:" *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 13(1) (2007):103-122.

# The Nyero Rock Art Site in Uganda: Heritage or Ritual Site?

*Elizabeth Kyazike\**

## **Introduction**

Rock art in Uganda, discovered in 1945, belongs to the Late Stone Age (Posnansky & Nelson, 1968) and Holocene while its symbolism is interpreted in light of the later belief systems recorded amongst the historical Pygmy people.<sup>1</sup> The Nyero rock art is attributed to the local Nilotic Teso.<sup>2</sup> Uganda's rock art bears paintings, engravings or drawings that depict naturalistic and humanistic designs of different localities and technologies. Nyero rock art site is part of a trail of rock art sites in Uganda that are located mainly in eastern Uganda some of which include; Kakoro, Komuge, Ngora, Mukongoro, Kapor and Dolwe. The latter is located in Lake Victoria. Nyero rock art site consists of six spaces with the richest caves and panels being Nyero 1, 2 and 3. Nyero 1 has a series of geometric and abstract paintings linked to sacred rituals such as rain-making and fertility. Nyero 2 on the left bears circles and abstract shapes including one described as a canoe and the biggest on the right with concentric circles and canoes too and other various shapes. Nyero 3 rock shelter has concentric circles painted in both red and white pigment on the ceiling. The other three (Nyero 4, Nyero 5 & Nyero 6) sites all bear red geometric motifs.<sup>3</sup> Nyero rock paintings like all the other rock art sites in eastern Uganda have been

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<sup>1</sup>This was according to Jackline Nyiracyiza the senior archaeologist at the Uganda Museum with whom we excavated at Komuge Rock art site with funding from the British Institute in Eastern Africa.

suggested for the nomination dossier to be elevated to the status of World Heritage sites in Uganda as a key heritage resource. While to the department of Museums, Monuments and Antiquities, Nyero rock art site is a National symbol since it appears on the Ugandan one thousand note (Figure 1) and also an international site meriting the world heritage list, to the local Ateso people who inhabit the area, the site is associated with different attributes among which are the rituals. It should be noted that rock art in Uganda is mainly geometric in design and highly associated with rituals, especially for rain making.<sup>4</sup>



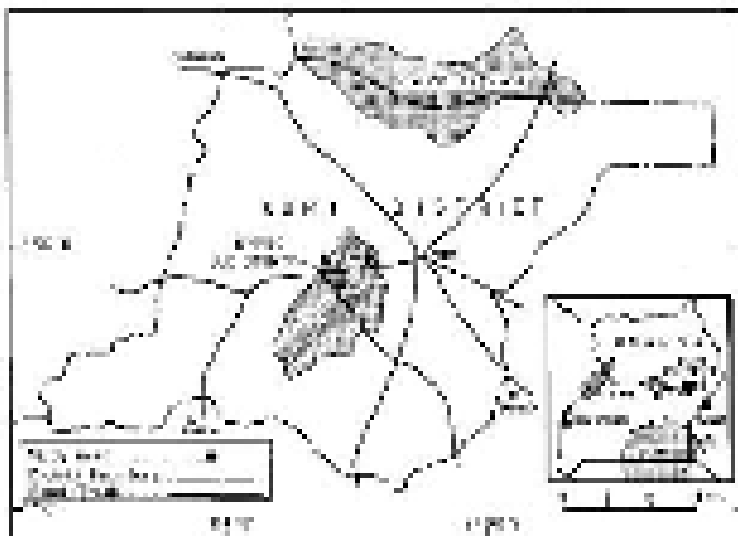
**Figure:** The Ugandan One thousand Shilling Note indicating the concentric circle in Nyero 3.

Nyero is one of the archaeological sites in Uganda and East Africa which has rock art and shelters attributed to the pre-historic age, an ancient art separated by many millennia from the peoples of today.<sup>5</sup> The red and white pigments are separated by 1000 years.<sup>6</sup> Uganda is gifted with 29 rock art sites situated in North eastern (Karamoja area) and eastern parts of the



country<sup>7</sup> among which are the Nyero rock paintings located in Kumi District in Eastern Uganda about 8 kilometres from Kumi town (Figure 2).

Uganda's rock art has been broadly categorized as either naturalistic or geometric.<sup>8</sup> The key geometrics include; concentric circles with radiating lines, dots, U-shapes dotted, straight horizontal and vertical lines with shapes like acacia pod, stretched cow hide, dumb-bell and canoes; while the naturalistic ones include animals, people and trees.<sup>9</sup> The latter are mainly found in North eastern Uganda while the geometrics are common in eastern Uganda where the Nyero rock paintings are situated. The paintings that appear in both red and white are characterized by concentric circles, and shapes resembling vegetables, boats and other stylized forms.<sup>10</sup> The rock art is predominantly geometric, depicted in red and white monochrome or bichrome pigment, and occasionally in orange pigment, a pattern consistent with rock art in the broad geometric rock art belt. The shapes predominantly comprise circular and rectangular shapes, sausage and 'U' shapes, grids, dots and lines.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure:** Map showing the location of the Nyero rock paintings

The Nyero rock paintings appear in six rock shelters, with paintings on the walls and ceilings, in addition to several other rock shelters that have no paintings, but have been used by recent inhabitants as places of spiritual significance. Thus Nyero consists of six sites in total that are Nyero 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 (Figure 3) but the richest caves and panels are those at Nyero 1, 2 and 3.

Generally, the rock art of Nyero has been a subject for debate, especially in regard to its authorship. Being geometric in nature has made it to be regarded as part of a homogenous tradition often depicted in red and white pigment. This design is part of a broad geometric art belt in many parts of East and Central Africa spread across east, central and parts of southern Africa matching the distribution of Late Stone Age hunter-gatherer culture.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure:** Location of the six Nyero rock art sites

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<sup>2</sup>Asiimwe Raymond, Curator at the Uganda Museum and Nyero rock paintings site manager in 2017

The painted and engraved geometric shapes also sometimes referred to as schematic designs dominate the studied and documented painting sites in Uganda.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Coulson and Little<sup>14</sup> suggested that the concentric circles may symbolize the Twa's relationship with the all-providing and protective nature of the forest. This supports Namono's<sup>15</sup> notion that many aspects of rock art traditions in Uganda remain obscure. Nevertheless, the method of application varies from brushwork to finger and application and dubbing, with most of the geometric art being painted in red pigment often applied with the finger and, in some instances, with a brush.<sup>16</sup> The issue of authorship has been nailed by Pecchioni.<sup>17</sup>

Other studies at Nyero have labored to examine the dating of Nyero. Harwick, in 1945, who excavated Nyero 2, Lawrence,<sup>18</sup> Posnansky and Nelson,<sup>19</sup> Nelson,<sup>20</sup> Posnansky<sup>21</sup> and Posnansky and Nelson<sup>22</sup> who re-excavated Nyero, indicated that the occupants of Nyero were Later Stone Age. Nakaweesa made an attempt to examine the interaction between the Later Stone Age and Iron Age at Nyero but with no attempt to examine the rituals at the site. Thus, the intention of this paper was to examine the heritage and ritual issues concerning the Nyero rock paintings that have been neglected at the first rock art site identified in Uganda.<sup>24</sup>

### **Theoretical framework**

A landscape may be cultural if its natural features and community perceptions of the environment and place are considered as such by those who choose to perceive it.<sup>25</sup> Landscapes may become cultural or sacred by virtue of the rituals performed in them. This is because while rock art researchers throughout the world have explicitly or implicitly invoked ritual as an activity associated with the production of rock art the articulation between the structure and composition of rock art assemblages and ritual behaviour remains poorly understood.<sup>26</sup> This raises a key question of whether rock art was produced as part of ritual performance or for ritual activity. Ethnographic studies that associate rock art with ritual activities

have provided researchers with a rich source from which to formulate hypotheses, and may well account for the general acceptance of ritual explanations in this branch of the discipline. But archaeologists have rarely analysed the ethnographies to identify the particular signatures of ritual in rock art. Ethnography has provided stimulus for the formulation of theory associating rock art and ritual, it has also provided ample examples of rock art assemblages produced in secular contexts.

Durkheim is the main theorist with his idea of *communitas*. This suggests that a lot of people see ritual as bringing communities together. And yet at the same time wherever those formalized ritual practices are done, we also have individuals with specialized knowledge of rules and special responsibilities. This is rather different at Nyero being situated in Teso which was a segmentary society where such individuals don't seem to exist, as everything belonged to the community, hence the notion of *communitas*. Ritual is at the heart of all social dynamics because they generate group emotions that are linked to symbols, forming the basis for beliefs, thinking, morality and culture. People use the capacity for thought, beliefs, and strategy to create emotion-generating interactions in the future. This cycle, interaction → emotions → symbols → interaction, forms patterns of interaction over time. These patterns are the most basic structural force that organizes society.<sup>27</sup> The importance of landscape context in the interpretation of hunter-gatherer rock art is also reflected in the location of mythic and historic events, cosmological structures, wisdom teaching and ritual symbolism within specific landscapes.<sup>28</sup> Rock art sites represented human knowledge about the past, and when associated with specific myths the art served to facilitate sacred communications in ritual contexts.<sup>29</sup> Catherine Bell<sup>30</sup> developed a framework for defining relational aspects of ritual and defined rituals as those activities that address the gods and other supernatural forms. Rituals tend to be repetitive and occur at certain occasions. This may imply that the painters might have performed certain activities, hence the paintings being ritually framed from the time of the painting exercise itself.

This paper is thus informed by Rappaport's<sup>31</sup> ethnographic model of seven elements that are: invariance, repetition, linked to special times, locational selectivity employing specialized places, formal or stylized behavior, performance by a ritual actor and audience participation and constant use of canonical messages that are applied to the rock art site of Nyero.

### **Background to the Rock Art Studies in Eastern Uganda**

The history of rock art studies is a journey traced back to the 1670s in the world. Willcox<sup>32</sup> gave an account of this history by giving a detailed background of early notifications of this wonderful aspect. According to Willcox,<sup>33</sup> earlier art is noted with the monster paintings on a cliff (known as the state of Illinois) in 1673 by Jaques Marquette while on his exploration down the Mississippi River. Still in the same American region, other sites were discovered in Massachusetts (North America) in 1680; Arizona in 1711; Pennsylvania in 1749 and Colorado in 1776.<sup>34</sup>

In Africa, though archaeological research on rock art begin in the late 1970s emphasis was on South Africa and the central region of Tanzania.<sup>35,36</sup> The first evidence indicates paintings of animals on the rocks from Mozambique according to the report to the Royal Academy of History in Lisbon while Ensign August Fredrick Beutler observed rock paintings in the valley of the great Fish River in 1752.<sup>37</sup> In 1790, rock art was observed by Jacob Van Reenem near present day Cathcart South-East Cape. The first known observation of rock art by Europeans was reported in North Africa in 1847 where engravings of various animals were noted by army officers on Rocks South of Oran in Algeria. Engravings in Fazan, Libya was discovered by Henrich Barth in 1850.<sup>38</sup> However, all the earlier discoveries do not indicate a component of formal studying of the art but rather a database of these strange features that later became a center of attraction in archaeological investigations. In the context of Africa, Willcox noted that although their copies were not published, in South Africa the recording of rock art began

with Schumacher and Gordon. Additionally, apart from a single drawing of an animal's head in Barrow's *Travels in the interior of South Africa* in the years 1797 and 1798, no copies were published until Sir James Alexander's "A narrative of Exploration among western Africa" in 1837.<sup>39</sup> Another notice is by Alfred Dolman in 1849 while traveling in Kalahari. He noticed rock engravings but these were not mentioned until 1924 when he published sketches as illustrations in his book "In the footsteps of Livingstone."<sup>40</sup> This means that there are many recognizable tremendous works concerning the growth and advances in the study of rock art that may not have been exploited to the fullest.

Narrowing down to Nyero Rock art site, it was first documented in 1913<sup>41,42</sup> but the paintings were noted by Pearson in 1945. Though initially discovered by Harwich in the same year, 1945, it was fully described by J.C.D Lawrence in 1953.<sup>43</sup> Lawrence's research gave a detailed description of the rock paintings particularly in Nyero 2 rock shelter. Lawrence observed the superposition of geometric designs on naturalistic designs and the diversity of colours that were used during painting which were suggestive of the long occupation of Nyero.<sup>44</sup> Further interpretations by Lawrence<sup>45</sup> indicated that colours used are known chronologically in the record. For example, the oldest found was yellow while orange, red, purple, and the latest dirty white were documented in that order. The site was opened up and protected from the Public; in 1966 it became Uganda's first scheduled ancient monument.<sup>46</sup> The government of Uganda later gazetted it in 1972. The site has attracted a number of scholars to re-document it with the recent ones coming from the Trust for African Rock Art (TARA) and Italy (University of Tuscia) in collaboration with the Department of Museums and Monuments (DMM). The collaboration team (TARA) re-documented the rock art of Nyero, Mukongoro and other rock art sites in Eastern Uganda using the photographic method of documentation and describing each site in terms of patterns, shape, rock characteristics, landscape context and cultural framework<sup>47</sup> but not their ritual activities.

Besides emphasis on the rock art, archaeological work has been carried out at the site since it has plenty of lithics and ceramic materials. The first archaeological excavation at Nyero was at Nyero 2<sup>48,48,50</sup> in 1945 done by Harwich. Harwich's excavations did not yield any explanations of the various recovered materials in regard to the relationship between the site and the people that would have indulged in rituals at the site. This then triggered Posnansky to re-examine Nyero site findings at the Cambridge University Museum in 1961 and his findings suggested a long occupation from the Stone Age period. The site was again re-excavated by Posnansky in 1962 to re-examine the shelter.<sup>51,52,53,54</sup> In 1967, Nelson made a detailed study of the lithics at Nyero in comparison with two other sites in Uganda, one of which was Kansyore Island and came up with a Later Stone Age lithics scheme for Uganda while Nakaweesa examined the Later Stone Age – Iron Age transition at Nyero.<sup>55</sup> These studies reveal that almost nothing was done as regards rituals at the Nyero rock art site.

From 2008 and 2009, the Department of Museums and Monuments made a first survey of archaeological sites in Eastern Uganda. It was from this survey that the department sought advice from Trust for African Rock Art (TARA) on rock art conservation, especially on Nyero, which is currently protected as a national Heritage site and also on the tentative list of the UNESCO world heritage list. TARA and the Department of Museums and Monuments made a new survey of sites and other associated sites near Nyero in September 2009. This resulted in a plan made by both parties devise means of conserving the rare heritage of the region for future generations. The planned activities included sensitizing the neighbouring communities through media, meetings and exhibitions, establishing management plans for the sites, improving on infrastructure, and creating a tourism product with the aim of improving the sites' status and nominating them on the world heritage list.

TARA also came in after the Italian University of Tuscia in collaboration with the Department of Museums and Monuments signed a memorandum

to do a joint interdisciplinary research on rock art in the region. The research involved documentation of all rock art sites in the region and at the end, a map was created showing all the sites to help in the Tourism trail. It is noted from past studies at Nyero<sup>56,57,58,59</sup> that, some of the aspects described at Nyero include the acacia pod, canoes, paddlers and concentric circle designs, as well as the 'U' designs. These are geometrics commonly designed in white, sometimes orange, brown and red which are also known across the Ugandan border, especially in the Northern half of the Central Plateau of Tanzania particularly Kondoa and Singida.<sup>60</sup>

Since antiquities legislation in Uganda is governed by the Historical Monuments Act of 1967 and the Uganda Museums Authority Bill<sup>61</sup> and enshrined in the 1995 constitution of the Republic of Uganda under National Objectives and directives principles of state policy (xxv) its our obligation to preserve and protect Uganda's heritage. In an attempt to accomplish this, Nyero rock painting sites were added to UNESCO world heritage tentative list on 10th September, 1977 in the cultural category. Since it has never been confirmed as a world heritage site, this study is an important attempt to continue documenting the heritage potential and ritual practices of the site.

## **Methodology**

The study utilized ethnographic inquiries and desk top survey. This involved the interpretations of the designs and motifs of the art; the relationship between the material culture remains that were excavated and studied by scholars like Nakaweesa.<sup>62</sup> This is because an ethnographic inquiry allows the researcher to study the lifestyles and belief systems of modern societies in reconstructing the past life ways.<sup>63</sup>

It was also our interest to find out through this method whether there are some local interpretations of the site covered by past scholars in the area. Now that we had some knowledge about the site after traversing the text



available, physical visits to the area were made. This was part of the Makerere University first year field visits and second year internships for Makerere University. In the field un-systematic archaeological survey was undertaken due to the topography of the area. It should be noted that the primary survey involved examining both actual sites and unknown data depositories which were recovered and recorded in due course to increase the data base from which further investigations can be done in the future. During survey, emphasis was put on the rich caves and panels of Nyero I, Nyero 2 and Nyero 3 that are also easily accessible.

In order to get firsthand information from the people who live around the site, interactive interviews with the community were conducted and it was fruitful to use this method. Inquiries were made from the community members about the site and how they feel about the site in regard to their cultural history, how they relate to the paintings, drawings and the engravings found on the panels and the site in general. Recording was done through writing and photography. This also entailed the use of participant observation or interactive ethnoarchaeology, to have a better understanding of the ritual activities associated with the site.

### **Rituals associated with the Nyero Rock Paintings Sites**

The Nyero rock paintings appear in six places herein referred to as sites numbered from 1-6 and the various spots are associated with certain rituals.

Nyero 1 contains a series of geometric and abstract paintings and is linked to sacred rituals such as rainmaking and fertility. On a low overhanging rock hanging above three supporting rocks are six sets of concentric circles in white, together with paintings in the shape of 'acacia pods'. An artificial wall has been constructed at the front for conservation purposes. However,

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<sup>3r</sup>This is according to Mr. Ogwapit Moses who states that people usually perform rituals of rain making at the site though as a Christian he does not believe these work.

changes in the natural flow of water from the hillside above have caused mould to grow on the western side and on the floor against the front wall (Figure 4).

## Nyero 2

Nyero 2 is the richest site with paintings characterized with one large 'acacia pod' design that has been called a canoe.<sup>64</sup> The south-eastern side of the shelter has a narrow passage between the boulders leading to a small, dark shelter with a small cavity known as a 'pocket'<sup>65</sup> (Figure 5).



**Figure 4:** Nyero 1 White paintings and the artificial wall at the entrance

Members of the local community still follow a tradition of placing their sacrificial monies in this 'pocket' either before or after receiving help from ancestral spirits. A frieze of zebras at Nyero 2<sup>66</sup> fragments of red lines and white concentric circles<sup>67</sup> are all evident. It is believed by the community that at Nyero 2, barren women who seek to conceive touch the surfaces on which the images are painted and leave monetary tokens for the spirits in

anticipated appreciation of success. It should be noted that touching the paintings is detrimental to conservation of rock art. This clearly shows the conflict between rituals and heritage conservation at Nyero rock site 2.



**Figure 5:** Nyero 2 paintings

### **Nyero 3**

Nyero 3 is a cave site characterized with concentric circles inside that represents the sun while the patterns between the wavy lines represent the moon. The painting at Nyero 3 is also a representation of religious faith in the sun-god.<sup>68,69</sup> The paintings are white concentric circles; the outer circles are surrounded by double curved designs, between which are double lines divided into smaller compartments (Figure 6). This is superimposed over a similar design in much fainter red repeated in three other groups in the white design. This design was adopted by the Department of Museums and Monument as its logo, while the bank of Uganda adopted it on the one thousand shilling note (Figure 1) as a mechanism of celebrating and promoting rock art cultural heritage. Nyero 3 is used as a prayer mountain where people (Christians) each month visit, while fasting and praying. There is evidence of grafting in white chalk possibly from the children in the

nearby secondary school which poses a threat to the management of the site. The paintings appear on the ceiling meaning that for one to see them he/she must crawl inside. Nyero 3 is a centre for fertility where barren couples usually go and spend nights in anticipation of the intervention of the gods so that they can conceive.



**Figure 6:** Nyero 3 painting

### **Nyero 4, 5 and 6**

Nyero 4, just like Nyero 5 and 6, has red geometric motifs. Nyero 4 is a small shelter on the south-western side of the hill where there are a few traces of red finger-painted concentric circles, with two conical shapes and lines. Nyero 5 is situated on the western side of the hill with a red geometric motif composed of a combination of circular and linear shapes made with both a brush and a finger. Nyero 6 is found high on top of the hill with traces of red pigment forming two finger-painted outlines of small oval shapes and a slanting L-shape as well as an outlined cross with a small circle below. The painted surface is exfoliating and is open to the rain and morning sun. These

three sites (Nyero 4, 5 and 6) are also spaces of ritual activities where people go to consult the gods to solve their day to day problems.<sup>70</sup>

## **Discussion of the Findings**

The key debate in this discussion is to establish if the ritual activities at Nyero rock paintings enhance or diminish heritage conservation and then how we can have a better interplay between heritage conservation and ritual activities. Nyero rock paintings, like other hunter-gatherer geometric rock art sites in eastern Uganda, represent an extensive collection of rock art shelters with the largest geometric finger-painted shapes that bear at least an exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition(s) that started over four millennia ago, in connection with fertility and strength. It is observed that the spirits are still in contact with the present generations living around the sites. This is why the sun-moon-like drawings found at Nyero 3 is celebrated as the sun god, an indicator that gods are important to them. The sites attract different functions and therefore their perception by the local communities, who most frequently associate them with cultural tourism has been a problem to the conservation efforts of Nyero heritage. Having turned the area close to Nyero 3 as a prayer place where people gather at certain times of the year, has led to littering of the site, thus compromising the heritage conservation efforts.

It should be noted that the ritual activities at the site have tremendously reduced since the 1970s. The issue of fertility is conceived in two ways. There are those who go to the site so that they can conceive and there are those who have kids of the same sex and want to get children of another sex. This is done mainly at Nyero 3 where couples usually go. They enter the cave, offer money and chicken, which is slaughtered at the site, to give blood

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<sup>4</sup>This is as stated by Ms. Anguo Rose who was a Masters Student in the Islamic University in Uganda working the institution of the emorimor (kingship)

to the spirits. These rituals are usually done in the late evenings and the couples usually have sex at the place.

Nyero 2 is another centre of ritual activities, especially at the small pouch which is called an offertory place. There is a particular person in the community who directs the rituals at this place. The prominent man, possessed with the spirits calls upon the spirits in the cave to train the new spirit mediums at the site. The people offering the sacrifice usually come with chicken; they pluck off all the feathers; stuff them in the pouch, and then let the chicken go.

Another common ritual activity involves rain making. In case of a dry spell, elders come together to agree on the day to carry out the function of rain making. Then an elderly woman who has reached the stage of menopause is given a basket to go around the community collecting all sorts of food that they will take to Nyero 3. The community then gathers to sing and dance in the compound close to Nyero 3 since Nyero 3 is a small shelter.

Of late, even Christianity has infiltrated the site close to Nyero 3. At the beginning of a New Year, people usually go to fast and pray at the site. They put on a special attire of shoes made from car tyres (*tangira*), white tunic (*kanzu*) and use tobacco. The leader who hails from Manafwa which is in Mbale district claimed that he was directed by God to come and pray and it is God who instructs him on the days to stay at the place. In such prayers, the people believe they get blessings. It should be noted that even traditional people visit Nyero sites for blessings. As a result, in 1996, a church was set up opposite the site by Koreans. In 1999, a lady came in from Soroti claiming God had directed her to organize a convention at the site. Since then, multitudes of people came in to pray from 11th -17th December, 2016. The meetings usually involve fasting, praying, preaching and healing especially at Nyero 3. Another pastor from Mbale has been frequenting the site every Saturday, claiming that this is the only place where he can communicate with God one on one! Then one wonders how the Christian rituals and traditional rituals can be reconciled with heritage conservation.

This clearly shows that rituals are not necessarily peculiar to traditional religions per se.

The findings also revealed that the site was also used for defence purposes during periods of insurgence from 1987-1993. The site, especially Nyero 2, was used as rebel hideout. Historically, it was believed that while here, the senior commanders and may be all the fighters would change into trees and were not spotted by the enemies. The site was used by two groups of rebels starting with Alice Lakwena who was a spirit medium leading a rebel group of the Holy Spirit Movement that fought the Museveni government. The second rebel group to use the site was the Uganda People's Army, a rebel group recruited primarily in Teso and became so active between 1987 and 1992 led by Peter Otai. The site has several trees and plants used as medicinal plants and a number of them are used for house construction. The Teso rocks like those of Nyero rock art site are very good for construction of roads. This attracts quarrying though it is reported to have decreased by the site manager.

Though the question of authorship of Nyero rock art remains open for more investigations, its social functions and importance to the current people ought to be addressed by examining the ritual activities at the site. This is because none of the works in the area shows the connection of the current inhabitants with the making of the art. However, past engagements within the area indicate an attribution of the art to Twa people<sup>71</sup> that inhabited the area a millennia ago; currently we see different peoples in the area. Borrowing from other regions of sub-Saharan Africa, for example in South Africa the San and Bushman are acknowledged as the authors<sup>72</sup> of the rock art, just like the paintings of the Usandawe in Tanzania were associated with the local population.

Nyero as a site, apart from the rock art, has got several components that are equally important to the living community. A number of identical caves at

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<sup>5</sup>Wonen personal communication

the site are believed to have been the earlier dwellings of the ancestors of the living community, an identity that attracts a lot to them. It should be noted that caves have been paramount in the study of human past in the last two decades, especially with regard to rock art studies.<sup>73</sup>

Nyero rock paintings are on a hill that has generally a mixture of grassland and some shrubs that in some areas are thicker than other areas. Some of the vegetation cover includes what is locally termed as *obuyuukiyyuuki* by central people, castor trees known as *epopong* in Ateso language, *Malera* and *Etekwa* which treats malaria. Nyero harbors medicinal plants that are used by the community. This, therefore, shows that the site has medicinal value and herbal medicine should be treated with care as it can enhance the heritage potential of the site since heritage has become an important concept in Uganda's economy.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, this can lead to destruction of the site as people try to pick the herbs.

## Conclusion

The findings revealed that, to the current inhabitants, the sun-moon like drawings are celebrated as the sun god, an indicator that gods are important to them. However, paintings that appeared like the sun and centipedes (Nyero 3) to the Venda were representations of a receptacle for the collection of honey and this serves as a warning to the easy interpretation for indications of symbolism (Seligman 1961). The Nyero sites attract different functions and therefore their perception by the local communities, who most frequently associate them with rituals, is one of the problems to the conservation efforts of the heritage site. This, therefore, implies that a clear grasp of the local interpretation is crucial in heritage preservation efforts even at an international level. It was pertinent to examine the relationship between the rock paintings, the site and entire landscape. The study showed that social customs and conventions of the people are associated with the art. This is because an image is a visual symbol, which



without its historical and cultural context can be misattributed and misapplied.<sup>75</sup>

The paintings themselves symbolised the beliefs of the people. This is because, visions of the other world painted on cave walls constantly reminded people, perhaps more vividly than verbal descriptions, of the nature of the spiritual world.<sup>76</sup> There is need to work with the people of the area to manage the site because they have special ties with the site than getting conservators from Kampala who hail from different regions. These people can play a key role in the administration of cultural heritage legislation, especially as regards the rock art. They have an intimate relationship with the landscape and ancestral association with the paintings.<sup>77</sup> Nyero rock art site with legacies of prehistoric cultures is threatened by the effects of nature and human activities like vandalism in the form of graffiti and quarrying, though to a very small extent, when compared to other rock art sites in eastern Uganda. Oil spilling at Nyero 1 is also associated with rituals reveals the connection with the hunter gatherer belief systems by the current generation. All in all, it is clear that ritual activities, if not well managed, are detrimental to heritage conservation efforts; while at the same time, may enhance proper heritage management as people revere the site.

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# The Place of Rituals and Festivals among the Ewe of Ghana: A Case Study of the Asogli Yam Festival of the Volta Region

*Samuel Bewiadzi*

## **Introduction**

Festivals and rituals are closely knit together in the socio-political life of the people of Ho-Asogli. There are rituals that are performed for community deities (gods), stools of various chiefs, ancestors and other supernatural entities. However, much more elaborate rituals characterize the celebration of yam festival. The Yam festival is an annual celebration in honour of the gods and ancestors for granting farmers bumper harvest. For this reason, certain rituals are performed during the entire period of the festival. These rituals constitute the pivot and fulcrum around which the entire festival revolves. As Adjaye noted, rituals are institutions and activities that lend themselves to multi-vocality. During the enactment of the ritual process, multiple dimensions of social life and values emerge. Therefore, greater recognition is given to the individualizing elements of the ritual process which enable actors to locate themselves in history, grasp the actions' meaning and enter into reflexive engagements with the unfolding activity<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the rituals performed during the Asogli Yam festival have several dimensions embedded in the socio-economic history of the people and the success of the festival depends on the involvement of key participants and stakeholders of the state. Interestingly, not much research has been conducted into the Asogli Yam festival. Hence, there is very little literature on the history of the festival, the rituals that are performed during the celebration as well as the socio-economic benefits that it brings to the

people. It is on this note that the study focuses on the place of rituals and festivals among the people of Ho-Asogli in order to fill this gap.

In the quest to conduct this research, the qualitative design was used. The reason for this methodology was to allow the research evolve in a natural setting. The second reason was to get more detailed and in-depth information about the phenomenon under study, which might not be possible with quantitative approach. Instruments such as interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and participant observation were used in the data collection process. The sample frame included chiefs, queen-mothers, priests, linguists, the asafo (warriors) and ordinary citizens of the community. In all, thirty (30) informants were interviewed. These samples were recruited using the purposive sampling and accidental sampling techniques. Out of the thirty (30) informants, five (5) were divisional chiefs of the Asogli State Council; three (3) queen-mothers; fifteen (15) members of the asafo (warriors) ; five (5) citizens and two (2) officials of the Asogli State Council. The reason for this distribution was to ensure that samples were representative in nature so that findings will reflect the views of all the key participants of the festival. It is also argued that all these categories of people have adequate information to help respond to the research questions and objectives of this paper. The next session focuses on a brief history of the people of Ho-Asogli.

### **A Brief History of the People of Ho-Asogli**

The Ho-Asogli State<sup>2</sup> is one of the most prominent Ewe states in the Volta Region with a rich history, tradition and culture. Other states include Anlo in the south, Akpini (Kpando), and Gbi (Hohoe and Peki), in the north. The people of Ho-Asogli, like most Ewe-speaking people, trace their origin from Ethiopia. They migrated with other Ewes from their origin to Oyo, in Yoruba land in Nigeria, through Ketu in Dahomey (now Benin) before settling at Notsie in the present day Republic of Togo in about the twelve



century. Oral tradition has it that the Ewe in their settlement at Ketu and Notsie lived in walled cities called “*Agbome*”<sup>3</sup> The Asogli, like all Ewes while in Notsie were ruled by a tyrant, Fia Agorkorli. Fia Agorkorli's rule could be traced in all historical records of Ewes and the escape from Notsie.

The Asogli, under the leadership of Togbe Kakla, broke through a portion of the fortified wall for all Ewes to escape. Togbe Kakla used the “*Gligbayi*” (liberation dagger) to break through a portion of the fortified wall which had been softened through a planned and persistent splashing of water on the said spot by most residents who abhorred the rule of Fia Agorkorli. The people who were escaping walked backward out of the walled city. This gave an impression that people were entering the city; by the time the king's soldiers detected the deception, most Ewes had escaped to freedom. It is said that the Liberation Dagger “*Gligbayi*” has become a sacred relic of the Ewes and it is in the custody of the people of Ho-Asogli.

Amenumey argued that Ewe traditions recall a migration from the east, more precisely Ketu (also called Amedzofe or Mawufe), a town in modern Dahomey. Within the wall of Ketu lived, besides the Ewe fore-bearers, the Yoruba ancestors of the present Aja, Fon, Ada and Ga. Amenumey continues that during the migration from Notsie, the people split into three broad groups. One went to settle in the northern part of the new home in the upland and valley region. It founded the towns of Hohoe, Matse, Peki, Kpando, Awudome, Alavanyo, Kpalime, Agu, Ve, Kpedze and Wodze. The Second group founded settlements of Ho, Akovia, Takla, Kpenoe, Hodzo, Klevi, Sokode, Abutia and Adaklu.<sup>5</sup> Gavua noted that results of preliminary research undertaken by students of archaeology suggested that by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the different Northern Ewe groups were settled in small autonomous and relatively peaceful communities in their present territory. The departure of the Ewe groups from Notsie and the process of migration and relocation was not sudden. It took many years for the migrants to settle briefly at a number of places before finally arriving at their present homelands. Many of their towns began as camps founded by

renowned hunters, while others were established by farmers who had sought and found arable lands.<sup>6</sup>

Togbe Kakla, upon migrating from Notsie, led his people and broke away from the larger Ewe group to settle at *Kormedzrale* or *Dzamekpo* (about three kilometers east of Bankoe which is the paramountcy of Ho). At this settlement, the people engaged in subsistence farming and hunting. Togbe Kakla had three sons and a daughter; these were Akoe, Letsu, Asor and Esa. As Kormedzrale lands became too small to sustain the increasing population and to contain any meaningful economic activity and expansion, there was the need for further migration.<sup>7</sup> Coupled with this, the people were being harassed by their neighbouring communities. In effect, they had to migrate further. Upon the advice of an old man called Letsa, the descendants of Akoe and Letsu separated and retreated to found Akoefe and Kpenoe and later Takla towns. The descendants of Asor forged ahead to settle at the present day Ho after a brief sojourn at Hofedo (about 1 kilometer east of Bankoe). The only daughter of Togbe Kakla, Esa migrated further and settled at present day Saviefe located at north of Ho. At their final settlements, they continued to farm and hunt as their main source of livelihood. Today, Akoefe, Kpenoe, Takla and Ho towns constitute the Asogli State of which Ho is the center even though the three divisions have their paramountcies. As farmers, yam festival was instituted as their annual festival.<sup>8</sup>

Yam is called “te” in Ewe. The word “ete” literally means “swollen”. Oral tradition has it that a hunter on his normal hunting expedition discovered the crop in the forest. It was during the famine period but instead of taking this newly discovered tuber home, he decided to hide it in the soil for use some other time. When he later went back for it, to his dismay, the tuber had germinated and grown bigger. This was how the cultivation of yam started. The celebration of yam festival by the Asogli was brought down from Notsie in the Republic of Togo where it is still cultivated.

Yam cultivation in the past was a very tedious work and history attests to the fact that those days, some people who ventured into it did not live to enjoy the fruits of their labour. It was and still a labour intensive, energy sapping and quite hazardous, hence the proverb: *“Ne wonye eteti tsogbe wo dua ete la, ne eghor ma kpor etsroa ha adu o.”*<sup>9</sup> Literally, this means that if it were during the preparation of yam stake that yam is eaten, a goat would never taste the peel. Diligence was therefore required and the permission and guidance of the gods of the land and the ancestors was sought during the entire period from planting through harvesting. The importance attached to the role of the supernatural in the successful cultivation of yam was the foundation of the celebration of yam festival where the gods and ancestors are honoured and served with the first harvest of the yam through an elaborate ritual called 'dzawuwu' (serving the gods). The next session focuses on the literature.

### **Literature: Rituals and Festivals in the Ghanaian Social Context**

Festivals form an integral component of the culture of the people of Ghana. Almost every Ghanaian society has its festival and as a result hardly a month passes without the celebration of a festival in one part of the country or other.<sup>10</sup> Odotei further argued that festivals have acquired traditional importance for community development of consciousness and pride and that most festivals in Ghana are traditional in the sense that they are rooted in the worldview and belief systems of the people.<sup>11</sup> Gbadegbe is of the view that in Ghana, festivals are manifestations of the practices and beliefs of a people. They are promoters of culture and builders of one's identity. They serve as a means of commemorating and remembering important events in the history of a people. He concluded that Ghanaian festivals help in uniting the people in expressing confidence in themselves and loyalty to their leaders.<sup>12</sup> However, Odotei and Gbadegbe failed to point out the various practices and beliefs that manifest in specific festivals in Ghana and how

these beliefs unite the people. This is a gap that this paper will critically fill by interrogating some rituals that are performed in the Asogli Yam festival.



**Fig. 1.0:** A goat being slaughtered during the ritual by the asafa (warriors).



**Fig. 1.1:** Priests and warriors (Blabu) of Asogli state during Nublaba ceremony at Akoefe.

Nketia observed that festivals in Ghana are multi-dimensional. The religious, political, social and artistic are combined into a unique performance. He continued that every festival has a focus around which its

activities are organized but the spiritual element is a binding factor, for, in the worldview and belief system of Ghanaians, every activity has its source and is sustained by the spiritual world through the gods and ancestors.<sup>13</sup> Indeed Nketia highlights an important element in Ghanaian festivals which has to do with the religious, spiritual and belief systems. All these constitute an important segment of festivals as festivals are deeply connected to spiritual and religious activities. However, he also fails to discuss important rituals that are performed in specific festivals that are celebrated in Ghana. In effect, this paper tends to fill this gap by focusing on rituals that are performed in the Asogli Yam festival.

Carola maintained the view that the celebrations of traditional festivals in Ghana are prehistoric and that agreement exists that the most ancient traditional festivals were associated with planting and harvest time or with honouring the ancestors.<sup>14</sup> This clearly shows that festivals have religious dimension which allows for the ancestors to be acknowledged. Folklorists believe that the first festival arose because of the anxieties of early people who did not understand the forces of nature and wish to placate them.<sup>15</sup> Clarke-Ekong stated that traditional festivals are performed to observe certain rituals and/or a type of event that communicates important cultural themes, often through the use of special forms of language, music, and dance. She further argued that Ghanaian festivals both secular and ritual are becoming pan African events during which enterprising and competitive activities are performed.<sup>16</sup> Bronye in the same vein argued that festivals provided the opportunity for elders to pass on folk knowledge and the meaning of tribal lore to younger generations. These celebrations are diverse and characterized by different ethnic groups across the country. The significance of festivals therefore ranges from religious and historical to agricultural in nature.<sup>17</sup> Carola, Pra, Clarke-Ekong and Bronye pointed out some critical issues relating to festivals. While Carola maintained that festivals are avenues for ancestors to be honoured, Pra, Clarke-Ekong and Bronye argued that festivals have religious dimensions. However, these scholars did not highlight specific religious activities that are associated

with festivals. For instance, Clarke-Ekong only explained that festivals have ritual dimensions in which other relative activities are performed. Similarly, Bronye also highlighted that festivals have religious, historical and agricultural foundations. Obviously, these scholars failed to state specific rituals and the specific festivals in which they are performed. This is the lacuna in their research which this paper fills by interrogating the various rituals that are performed in the Asogli Yam festival. It is believed that this research will corroborate the assertions made by these scholars about the religious significance of festivals in Ghana.

Anyagre asserted that festivals are collective rituals of both religious and historical importance characterized by such activities as the pouring of libation, sacrifices to the gods, washing and cleansing of ancestral stools and shrines, mourning the dead, feasting, drumming and general merry-making, depending on the circumstances surrounding a particular celebration or festival.<sup>18</sup> Amoako-Attah in the same vein observed that during the celebration of Odwira Festival of the people of Akwapim in the Eastern Region of Ghana, special rituals are performed on each day. The first day is set aside for clearing the path leading to the royal mausoleum. Other rituals include sacrifices carried out by the state executioners in the royal mausoleum, mourning of the dead, ban on noise making, preparation of the sacred feast at the shrine called 'Nsorem' as well as cleansing and purification of black stools.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, Kofi Dorvlo also identified certain rituals that are performed during the Hogbetsotso festival of the Anlo-Ewe of Ghana. According to him, Hogbetsotso, a migration festival of the Anlo-Ewe people is celebrated every year as the re-enactment of the migration of the Ewe ancestors from present day Togo to Ghana. To him, the Ewe believe that rituals wash away the ill-feeling and negative thoughts capable of destroying the harmony of the state. He identified rituals such as *Dordede* (the physical removal of dirt in the community); *Afekporkeplor* (mental cleansing), *Nugbidodo* (act of purification to reconcile people), *Tsifofodi* (libation) and *Abadodo* (a ritual to

remember the departed souls of the community). He noted that in these rituals, the ancestors and gods are invoked to protect and reconcile the people. The ancestors are also expected to give guidance and support for the years ahead.<sup>20</sup>

The literature above clearly highlights the religious significance of festivals in Ghana. However, Amoako-Attah's brief discussion on the rituals embedded in the Odwira Festivals of the Akwapim people is not enough to fully understand the significance of rituals as a religious activity in Ghanaian festivals. Similarly, Kofi Dorvlo's discussion on the rituals involved in the celebration of the Hogbetsotso festival of the Anlo Ewe of Southern Volta is also brief. While this paper acknowledges the contribution of Amoako-Attah and Dorvlo for interrogating specific rituals in two Ghanaian festivals, there is still much to be done. It is on this basis that this paper argues that these scholars have limited their research to specific communities, eliminating the Ho-Asogli Yam Festival from their work, hence the need to fill this gap. The significance of this paper and its contribution stemmed from the fact that it adds a new dimension to the literature on rituals and festivals, highlighting the various rituals that are performed during the celebration of the Asogli Yam Festival of the people of Ho-Asogli.

## **The Rituals Associated With The Asogli Yam Festival:**

### **A Phenomenological Analysis**

The celebration of the Asogli Yam Festival cannot be complete without rituals. Such rituals provide a sense of cohesiveness between the living, the supernatural entities such as gods and the ancestors. Let us analyze the various rituals that are associated with the festival through a phenomenological approach.



**Fig. 1.2:** Teyuyru ritual on going at the Ho Central Market



**Fig. 1.3:** Dzawuwu ritual being performed by a priest.

### **Vovlowo fe Nkeke (all Souls Day)**

This ritual is all souls day and it precedes all the other rituals. It is the feeding of the departed souls through which the blessing and guidance is solicited for the years ahead. The ritual is performed on a Sunday morning at the forecourt of the Agboghomefia's<sup>21</sup> palace at Ho Bankoe. First, libation is poured by the *Gbedodala* (the custodian for state rituals) to invoke the spirit of the departed after which various sacrifices are performed. The



participants include chiefs, priests, the warriors (*asafo*), queen-mothers, the gong-gong beater (town crier), clan heads, and family heads. The importance of this ritual is that, ancestors are invoked to join the living to celebrate the festival and also protect, guard and guide them throughout the entire process of the celebration. The ancestors are also called upon to shower their blessings on the people so that there will be peace, unity and development in the state.



**Fig. 1.4:** Agbogbomefia Togbe Afede XIV (middle) sitting in state during yam festival (2017)

Items used include: calabash containing *dzatsi/ewortsi* (solution of corn powder), palm wine, schnapps, sacrificial animals such as goat and fowl. The sacrifices are performed amidst various prayers, incantations, drumming and dancing. The role of the gong-gong beater is significant as it is the sound of the gong-gong that sends the messages to the gods and ancestors. It is believed that without the sound of the gong-gong, the prayers offered cannot reach the ancestors and gods of the land.

### **Nublaba (preparation/tying of holy herbs)**

It is a ritual performed at Akoefe-Avenui, one of the Asogli towns, to cleanse the state after feeding the departed souls. All chiefs and their elders

are brought together to go through the cleansing rituals performed with powerful holy herbs by traditional priests of the Asogli State. Customarily, this ritual takes place on a Thursday morning that precedes a market day under a big tree in Akoefe-Avenui. This day must be *Asitoegbe*, the last day in the cycle of the four-day week.

The main functionaries in this ritual are the *Blabu*, custodians of the land, a privileged group whose main duty is to protect the interest of the paramount stool in particular and the community in general by acting as watchdogs. Membership is therefore drawn from various stool lineages and is hereditary. Before the ritual, gong-gong is beaten to inform the people that no woman should be seen outside during performance.

This is because some aspects of the ritual are performed naked. The concluding rituals are characterized by incantations, sounding of gong-gong and drumming. The holy herbs are significant because, they have the potency to ward off evil spirits. The traditional priests therefore pour water on the remaining herbs in a large calabash, placing them at vantage points in the community. The highly charged bundles of the holy herbs are distributed to various stool homes, which they keep at the entrances of their house to ward off evil forces.

### **Teyuyru (hailing of the new yam)**

This ritual follows Nublaba and it is mainly led by priests and warriors of the state. This ritual signals the official lifting of the ban on entry of the New Yam into the towns and villages of the Asogli State. It is a period during which the new yam is brought into all towns and communities and hailed amidst drumming and dancing by both the old and young through the principal streets of Ho. The ritual begins in the shrine of *Hosi* (Ho market goddess) where prayers and libation are performed to solicit the protection, guidance and direction throughout the hailing of the new yam.

The significance of the ritual is that, it allows the farmers to bring their new yams from the farm to their homes since the ban has been lifted. In

contemporary times, the ritual is marked by joy and happiness which are displayed in various forms. The celebrants are seen clad in all sorts of funny clothing such as tattered clothes, women dressing like men; and men dressing like women; all to express their joy and happiness. The procession ends at Ahoe/Heve where celebrants are met by all chiefs of Ho seated in state.

### **Dzawuwu (serving the gods/ancestors with the new yam)**

This is the ritual of serving the gods and ancestors with the first yam meal called '*bakebake*' before the living would have a taste of it. This is done in all stool homes, shrines and individual homes. Even as the ban is lifted on the new yam, no one is supposed to eat it until the gods and ancestors eat first. The importance of this ritual is that, since the gods and ancestors have granted bumper harvest, they must have the first share of the yam. Failure to adhere strictly to this ritual could bring serious calamities and problems to the community. Hence, every citizen of the community, be it farmers, traders, market women and children are duly informed about the relevance of this ritual in order to avert any serious problems from the gods and ancestors.

### **Tedudu (feasting/eating of the new yam)**

This is the final ritual of the festival. During this period, every home enjoys the new yam. People prepare meals with the new yam. Families and kinsmen come together to enjoy themselves. People move from house to house to eat from neighbours and relatives. This ritual strengthens the bond of unity, solidarity and social cohesion among families and clans in the state. Fufu is the major food that is cooked during the festival. Chiefs and other royals from other neighbouring states and communities are invited to participate in the feasting to demonstrate unity and solidarity within the Ewe fraternity. For example, chiefs and royals from Anlo and Aflao in the south as well as Avatime, Tokokoe, Tanyigbe, Shia and Nyive among others

in the north participate in this important ritual to promote unity and solidarity among the Ewe communities.

### **The Grand Durbar**

The entire celebration is crowned with a grand durbar of chiefs and people of the Asogli State. Agboghomefia, the Paramount chiefs of Akoefe, Kpenoe and Takla, together with the sub-chiefs, participate in the grand durbar. The chiefs dress in their best regalia and process through the principal streets of the town amidst drumming and dancing. The various chiefs and their subjects converge at the palace of the Agboghomefia in Ho Bankoe where the procession starts. Before the procession, prayer and libation is said by the custodian of rituals and the various appellations of the chiefs are played on the talking drum. The procession is characterized by drumming and dancing and interesting display of paraphernalia which includes the various stool properties including stools, decorated sandals, staffs, wooden guns, knives, swords, beads, state umbrellas, the effigy of the Hosi (market god), among others. Other important valuables such as expensive beads, traditional lamps, incense, neatly packed bundles of women's clothing and other items are arranged in brass pans known as *Nutsor* and carried by young women from various royal homes.

The procession is led by the gong-gong beater, followed by the elders of the state dressed in *Adewu* (war attire), the horn blowers, linguists, state sword bearers and stool carriers of various local items including jewellery and other props. They are followed by the sub-chiefs and the Agboghomefia in that order. The Agboghomefia is followed by the Asafo (warriors) amidst music and dance. In the course of the procession, other divisional chiefs from Dome, Ahoe, Heve and Hliha join in as well as other paramount chiefs and divisional chiefs of Akoefe, Kpenoe, Takla.

The Agboghomefia sits in state where people pay homage to him and the sub-chiefs renew their allegiance to the Agboghome Stool. Other chiefs from other traditional areas are invited to participate in the grand durbar.

On that day, various activities take place and important government functionaries are invited to grace the occasion. The chiefs and people of Notsie (Togo), the ancestral homeland of the Ewe people, always participate in the festival. The significance of this participation is to ignite the spirit of unity, solidarity and oneness between the people of Notsie and Asogli. It also help to recognize their ancestral homeland, the peoplehood of the Ewe fraternity in Ghana and their genealogical as well as historical connections with the Ewe community in Togo.

### **The Place of Festivals in the Socio-economic Development of the Ho-Asogli State**

The role of traditional festivals in community development cannot be overemphasized. Traditional festivals play important roles in contemporary development. Traditional authorities use this platform to give account of their actions in relation to development activities and also to make a passionate appeal for and on behalf of the community to governments, non-governmental organizations and politicians on development policies that bothers them. The general outcomes for both traditional and contemporary roles are to enhance and initiate community development programmes<sup>22</sup>. Thus, let us explore the relevance of Asogli Yam Festival to the socio-economic development of the Asogli State.

Findings from the field indicate that the first and foremost benefit of the Asogli Yam festival lies in the fact that it informs a sense of peoplehood among the practitioners. The festival promotes a sense of belonging among the various actors such as chiefs, priests, warriors and the general citizenry. This sense of peoplehood is what motivates them to actively participate in all the rituals associated with the festival. It gives them identity, pride and a state of being recognized as a member of the Asogli fraternity. This feeling of belonging encourages indigenes from far and near to participate actively in the festival to promote community development.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, data gathered from the field also revealed that the annual celebration of the Yam Festival has contributed tremendously to development in the Asogli community. Economically, it has contributed to promotion of tourism in the Ho Municipality.<sup>24</sup> During the celebration, tourists from Europe, Asia and America visit the town to witness the festival. This has led to revenue generation as they visit important historic sites such as the German Mission Station in Ho, Galenkui Mountain and Adaklu mountains. In addition, it increases economic activities of the community. The hospitality industry – hotels, guest-houses, restaurants are highly patronized by strangers and visitors. It also increases profit made by small-scale businesses such as food vendors, transport operators and petty traders. The festival therefore attracts foreign exchange for the municipality since many tourists flock the area. Indeed, Kate Gyasi in her study of the Kwahu Easter Festival argues that the festival has taken a national and international dimension due to the tourist activities such as paragliding which was introduced into the festival not long ago. She discovered that socio-economic benefits such as employment and income generation are associated with the festival.<sup>25</sup> This phenomenon replicates itself in the Asogli Yam Festival.

In addition, interactions with informants on the field revealed that individual families make money from the sale of yams. During this period, the demand for yam is higher. Over two thousand tubers of yam are sold by farmers for consumption during the festival. Some of the tubers are sold directly to consumers while others are sold to retailers and wholesalers. During this period, yam is sold almost everywhere in the town. It is sold in the market, at homes, on the street through hawking and even from house to house. These activities increase the income level of individual families.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, funds are raised for development projects in the state. For instance, the celebration of the annual yam festival has contributed to the establishment of Asogli Education Fund and Asogli Medical Aid Fund. These funds have contributed to social interventions and human capacity

development initiatives for the benefit of the people. In an interview session with one of my informants, this was what he said:

“The annual yam festival has contributed tremendously to the development of the state as the state gets a lot of support from government and the corporate world. Sponsorship packages from state institutions, banks and other business entities have helped us generate funds to initiate some development projects in the community. A good example is the construction of the new palace and the Philip Akpo Memorial R.C. School building.”<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the festival also serves as a moment for family gathering and stock taking especially for the indigenes where activities planned for the past year are evaluated and assessed. During this period, people return home to strengthen their family ties and reinforce the customs and values of the community. This contributes to social cohesion, peace and unity in the state.<sup>28</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Festivals constitute an important social institution among the people of Ho-Asogli. It is meant to preserve and maintain culture, recount history, remember, honour and give thanks to supernatural entities. In achieving successful festivals, rituals are performed to invoke the spirits of the ancestors and gods to participate actively in the festival. Among the Asogli, rituals such as *Vovlowo fe Nkeke*, *Nublable*, *Dzawuwu*, *Teyuyru* and *Tedudu* are the foundation upon which the success of the festival is constructed. These rituals are strictly observed in order to receive the blessing and protection of the supernatural forces. Interestingly, the festival also contributes to the socio-economic development of the community. In the first place, it promotes a sense of peoplehood. It creates the sense of awareness and belongingness among the people which motivates them to participate actively in the rituals and the festival to make it a success. Secondly, the festival promotes tourism which leads to the generation of foreign exchange

and revenue; it also boosts trade and businesses. In addition, individuals and families engage in petty trade to increase their income levels. Furthermore, the state uses this platform to raise funds to initiate development projects that will benefit the generality of the population, especially children and the aged. It is therefore argued that the success of the Asogli Yam Festival is dependent on the rituals that are performed. Consequently, the successful observance of these rituals lays the foundation for a fluid relationship between the chiefs, the people and the supernatural entities (gods and ancestors) as well as promoting community development.

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### Endnotes

1. Adjaye Joseph. "Rituals, Postmodernity and Development" *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series*, No. 6, (2002): 1-15
2. In Ghana, traditional chiefdoms which have very complex political structures and ruled by powerful chiefs are described as States. This is a type of state where there is a powerful chief who rules over subordinate chiefs that control their autonomous communities but have common history. The Ho-Asogli State is one of such states which is made up of four chiefdoms, Ho, Akoefe, Takla and Kpenoe. All these four traditional areas are autonomous but fall under the bigger umbrella of the Agboghomefia Togbe Afede XIV, the President of the Asogli State Council. Other important Ewe States include Akpini State, Anlo State, and Gbi State.
3. Spieth Jacob *The Ewe People: A Study of the Ewe People in German Togo, 1854-1914*. Berlin, Dietrich Reimer (Ernst Vohsen), 1906, p. 1
4. Gligbayi (Liberation Dagger) according to oral traditions of the Asogli people was used to break through the fortified walls of Notsie for all Ewes to escape from the tyranny of Fia Agorkoli. This dagger has become a sacred relic of the Asogli people and it is in the custody of the Agboghomefia.
5. Amenumey Edem Divine. *The Ewe in Pre-Colonial Times*. Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd, 1986, p. 1
6. Gavua Kodzo. "Introduction" in *A Handbook of Eweland. Volume II: The Northern Ewes in Ghana*. Edited by Gavua Kodzo, 1-15, Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2000.



7. Interview with Mama Agblatsu III, Afetor Nyornufia of Ho Bankoe; 6 September 2017
8. Interview with Alexander Tseh, a Clan Linguist of Honuviwofe, Ho Bankoe, 4 September 2017
9. Bewiadzi Samuel. *Ho-Asogli: A Socio-Political History*, Unpublished undergraduate Dissertation presented to the Department of African Studies, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, 2010, p. 40
10. Odotei Irene. "Festivals in Ghana: Continuity, Transformation and Politicization of Tradition" *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series*, No. 6, (2002): 17-34
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12. Gbadegbe Richard Selase. "The Socio-Economic Benefits derived from Festivals: A Case Study of Asogli Yam Festival in Ghana". *Journal of Arts, Science and Commerce*, Vol. (4), 4. (2013): 64-72.
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15. Pra Kwesi. *Social Studies*. Takoradi, Harp Consult Publication, 2004, p. 15
16. Clarke-Ekong F. Sheilah. "Traditional Festivals in the Political Economy: The Case of Contemporary Ghana", *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 12, 2, (1997): 49–60
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18. Anyagre Seidu. *Social Studies for Senior High School*. Accra: Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 13
19. Amoako-Attah Fosu. *Festivals in Ghana*, Kumasi, Amok Publication, 2001, p. 15
20. Dorvlo Kofi. "From Restitution to Redistribution of Ewe Heritage: Challenges and Prospects" in *Searching for Sharing: Heritage and Multimedia in Africa*. Edited by Merolla Daniella and Turin Mark, 61-80. Cambridge, Open Book Publishers, 2017.
21. Agbogbomefia is the title of the Paramount Chief of Ho. His Stool name is Togbe Afede XIV. He is the President of the Asogli State Council, President of the Asogli Traditional Council, former President of the Volta Regional House of Chiefs and

Currently the President of the Ghana National House of Chiefs.

22. Bronye, op cit., p. 32
23. Focus Group Discussion (FDG) held with some elders of Akoefe Gadza and Achat; 15 September 2017. Akoefe is regarded as the oldest of all the Asogli towns as it was founded by the oldest son of Togbe Kakla named Akoe. Akoefe therefore is regarded as the father of all the Asogli towns.
24. Ho is the regional capital of the Volta Region. It is also the capital of the Municipality which is made up of five Zonal Councils namely: Ho, Sokode, Dutasor, Norvisi and Hokpeta. These Zonal Councils are further divided into Electoral Areas with the Assembly Member representing in the Assembly as a lower level legislator. In all, there are 29 Electoral Areas within the Ho Municipality with Ho as the center.
25. Gyasi Kate. "A Study of Kwahu Easter Festival as a Tourism Hallmark Event." Unpublished Master of Philosophy Thesis presented to the School of Graduate Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 2013, p. iv
26. Focus Group Discussion with market women in the Ho Central and Ahoe Markets, 13 September 2017
27. Interview with Mr. Elvis Nyaku (Senyo), Ho-Bankoe, 9 September 2017
28. Interview with Asafo Tsiami Tseh, Ho Bankoe, 13 September 2017

# Ritual Festival, Social Cohesion and Change among Nawuris of Northern Ghana

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## Introduction

Funeral festival, known to Nawuris as *Kakyutuu* or *Kilagbesi*<sup>1</sup> is a ritual festival which constitutes an integral part of Nawuris. It is meant to commemorate the dead. The festival takes place at least every two or three years in the month of April. Good days for the ritual festival are determined by the elders who have knowledge about the traditional calendar. Rituals constitute an integral part of festivals. Different opinions have been given concerning the definition of rituals. Lukes suggests that ritual is a 'rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance.'<sup>2</sup>

Among the Nawuris as weeks draw close, the Kakyutuu ritual becomes a subject of discussion by men, women, and children. During this ritual, *wurukos* are installed to 'continue' the roles of their dead relatives. Relevant in this ritual is also the preparation of guinea corn into "pito" (beer), a pot (*kolo*) of which is prepared for each dead member of the community. Aside the ritualistic significance, this article illustrates that Nawuri's rituals create peaceful atmosphere for mutual interaction of all members of the community, and it is through the performance of those rituals that the Nawuris of Balai (re)connect their relationships, both with the living and the dead. Although the capital of Nawuris is Balai,<sup>3</sup> little is known about their socio-religious life which is the thrust of this paper. This paper

examines the Kakyutuu festival as a means of social cohesion among the Nawuris of Balai. It investigates the impact of social change on Nawuri practices. Here, the impact of Western cultures (Education and Christianity) on the kakyutuu rituals – are discussed. Despite the influence of Western cultures, the ritual continues to play relevant social, religious and political roles in Balai. Aside serving as a source of the Balai unity, we demonstrate that, like the rituals associated with birth, puberty and marriage, Kakyutuu is a mandatory ritual relating to death that necessitates outstanding ritual performance.

### **An Overview of the Study Area**

The capital of the Nawuri state, Balai<sup>4</sup> lies on the geographical coordinates of 8° 33' 36''N and 0° 4' 30''E. In terms of distance, Balai is three kilometres west of the district capital of Kpandai, sixty-seven kilometres east of Salaga, the capital of the East Gonja district and thirteen kilometres north of Wulensi, the capital of the Nanumba South District, all of which are located in Northern Ghana. The Balai people are Nawuris, who are descendants of the Guan cradle. They are linguistically classified under the Volta-Comoe sub-group of Kwa languages.<sup>5</sup> The Nawuri dialect spoken in Balai is mutually intelligible with Gonja as a result of intermarriages, trade, and shared culture such as funerals.

Agriculture, which has replaced hunting, is the main occupation among Nawuris employing about 90% of its labour force. The sector consists of crop farmers, fishermen, and livestock farmers. Backyard gardening is mainly practised by the women. Thus, crops such as pepper, garden eggs, melon and tomatoes are largely farmed by the women. Most of these women belong to the Okule cult.<sup>6</sup> They worship the Ogyoligya deity and its associated spirits such as Kyankpana (male) and ɔlikyɛ (female). The reason Okule cult women engage in backyard gardening is attributed to the spontaneous nature of the cult's activities since the spirits in the cult visit

them unexpectedly. Most Nawuri, Konkomba and other farmers in the neighbourhood of Balai and Kpandai usually approach the cult women for ritual water to boost harvest.<sup>7</sup>

An important feature of Nawuris which is topical to this discussion is their religious life. Nawuris, like other societies of Africa, believe in the existence of the Supreme Being whom they refer to as 'Ebuare' or 'Ibuare.' Their belief in the Supreme Being is reflected in names and in daily conversations. For instance, Nawuri names such as 'Boaresa' (God's gift), 'Boarekyor' (God is great), 'Boarenyi' (God knows) all point to their belief in God's existence. It is a general belief among Nawuris that the 'Agbiri' (also called Idakpa among some Nawuris) are the intermediaries between the Supreme Being and humans and so function as children of the Supreme Being. Other cults in the community of Balai include the Gbandaw and Siga cults respectively for the Balai and Kabisu clans.

Gbandaw is a yearly ritual that is performed before new yams are eaten or harvested. Gbandaw in Nawuri means 'uncleanliness'. As a result, the rite is performed to cleanse the whole land of its dirt. Sexual intercourse in the bush, incest, adultery, abortion, suicide, murder, death by drowning, among others, are regarded as 'dirt' that call for the performance of the ritual.<sup>8</sup> People who harvest their yams before the rituals are heavily punished.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Gbandaw, Siga is a hunter's cult. The cult is meant to prevent hunters from any hurt and to cleanse those who have killed some 'dangerous' wild animals and are traumatised by their spirits. It is also to ensure ritual cleansing of warriors and to make them spiritually powerful to withstand the enemy's bullets.<sup>10</sup>

### **Theoretical Background**

This work relies on structural functionalism. Functionalism emerged to address the deficiencies of the evolutionary and diffusion theories in their attempt to explain human behaviour.<sup>11</sup> As one of the oldest theoretical

undertones sociology, the functional theory places emphasis on scientific method of the study of the social world, equal in manner to the study of the physical world. Functionalists therefore see the world as real. By functional theory, society is an organism, a system of parts, all of which serve a function together for the overall effectiveness and efficiency of society. Festival and ceremonies constitute an important part for the functioning of society. According to Bentina,<sup>12</sup> ceremonies are an integral part of the African society, explaining that man is a social being and is therefore engaged in activities throughout the entire year. The traditional ceremonies are firmly rooted such that failure to perform the rituals or ceremonies might invite certain misfortunes which would not be in the interest of the general society.<sup>13</sup> Festivals are cultural systems which function for the integration and solidarity of society.<sup>14</sup> This theoretical foundation takes up this study as it asserts that through ritual festival, Nawuris are united in performance, not merely to seek blessings or protection, but to request the continuity of the society from the ancestors.

## **Literature Review**

Ejizu defines festival as any special occasion, observance or celebration which may be religious or secular in nature and which is generally marked by merry-making and performance of music.<sup>15</sup> According to Onwubike, festivals can usually be said to be a good measure of the intensity of the religious consciousness and cultural wealth of the people.<sup>16</sup> Following the above assertions, Bentina sees festival as a celebration, a feast, a season of musical or other performance which involves joyfulness and merry making.<sup>17</sup> Awolalu and Dopamu assert that festivals are associated with specific divinities, for instance the Yoruba annual festivals, Odún, thus granting them a religious outlook.<sup>18</sup> Though the divinities play key roles in festivals, this paper reveals that the Kakyutuu festival revolves around the departed members of the society.

Festivals in Africa are seasonal and elaborate ceremonies might, in some

situations, involve entire communities that rely on traditional values to sustain the people's interest.<sup>19</sup> Ceremonies provide the ability for different groups to acknowledge the blessings of the Supreme Being and the lesser deities and ancestral spirits for granting the living with abundant life, plentiful harvest and the gift of children in the society. For Clarke-Ekong, festivals can be categorised into: a. harvest festivals that include collective sacrifice and supplication, b. commemorative festivals that are meant to give honour to the dead, deities and the ancestors; and c. festivals for the deities celebrated in honour of specific tutelary spirits or deities.

Focussing on rituals, Kottak noted that rituals are formal, stylised, repetitive and stereotyped. Rituals are often performed at certain sacred spaces and at times that are set. Rituals include *liturgical orders* – that is the sequencing of words and actions, which often brings it close to plays. Nonetheless, the marked differences, notes Kottak, is that *plays* have audience – not participants. Ritual performers make up congregations *in earnest*. They carry information about the participants and their traditions and these are often repeated year after year, and generation after generation.<sup>20</sup> Considered in this context, one can therefore talk about 'ritual festival' as they occur at specific period in the life of people and the society at large.

The notion that festivals serve as a binding force for people of different cultural backgrounds cannot be underestimated. In his *Ritual Festivals and Social Cohesion in the Hinterland of the Gold Coast*, Fortes argued that festivals serve as a mechanism for social cohesion. He pointed out that the *Boyaraam* festival of the Hill Tallis appeared to be homologous with the *Gingaung* and *Daa* of Baari, and for Chiefs, Tendanas, and elders, the fathers of the community, the ritual is the dominant theme.<sup>21</sup> For members of these societies, the festivals serve as important impetus for social reunion in which family and agnatic connections receive special emphasis. It is important to note that the performance of the festivals bind together the Namoos and the Tallis of Northern Ghana. He further pointed out that although in the past both the Tallis and Namoos existed quite separately, with each devising its

technique to ritually protect itself towards the years ahead, these dichotomies and polarities could not last long because of the celebrations of common festivals. Though every Talli ceremonial activity expresses the exclusiveness of the group performing it, during these festivals, the expression of difference and polarity between the Tallis and Namoos have a political validity as its performance is premised on reciprocity.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, between the Tallis and the Namoos is a magical cooperation and safeguarding of the land. Similarly, Odotei wrote that during festivals, gift-giving takes place among kin groups, chiefs and other leaders of the community, friends and others.<sup>23</sup> This important exchange brought about as a result of festivals, coupled with the home-coming of community members lead to socialisation and the celebration of family reunions. Indeed, the observations made by Fortes and Odotei about the socially integrative nature of festivals is reflected in the Nawuri people of Balai, as different clans, with their unique historical narratives, traditions, and patterns of settlements, join in union during and after the performance of the Kakyutuu rituals.

### **Funerals among Nawuris**

Once the Kakyutuu festival is tied with funerals, a brief discussion on the subject will help situate the festival in a context. From the perspective of the Africans, death constitutes an unavoidable aspect of human life. As defined by King,<sup>24</sup> death is a natural transition from the visible to the invisible or spiritual ontology where the spirit, the essence of the person, is not destroyed but moves to live in the ancestral world. Death is seen as the transition from an earthly life to that of the supernatural, yet, the attitude towards it is ambivalent. Although death is viewed as the end of life, rituals performed by the living emphasize the unbroken relationship between the living members of the family and the dead.<sup>25</sup> The relationship is often expressed in reciprocal exchanges. The members of the family are required to keep the balance by performing certain mandatory rituals and ensuring



the dead is given a befitting burial. The departed on the other hand is expected to cater for the needs of the members of the family. Funeral rites or ceremonies are a measure of the deceased person's social position and lifetime achievements, and this may pull together a thousand people.<sup>26</sup>

The protocol of funeral announcement is important among Nawuris. The community first informs the elders anytime someone dies. However, when the earth priests of Kankpe<sup>27</sup> and Nana Esuli have not yet eaten their food the funeral announcement is suspended until they do so, a reason we shall assign later. One often hears the firing of musketry three times for a departed male – and four for a female which is accompanied by wailing by both men and women as a means to announce to the public about the death of a member of the community. With contact with Europeans, modern guns are also used to announce death, except for children. For hunters, brave warriors and other notable members of the society (such as chiefs and heads of clans), burial is followed by firing of musketry. Here, all the members of the community would assemble their guns at the road side where they are shot in an orderly sequence to salute them. Apart from its ritualistic significance, the firing of musketry at the road side portrays the military prowess of members of the society and scares their rivals.

The greatest prohibition relating to funerals in the community of Balai are perhaps those tied with priesthood. Both the Esuliwia (land priest) and the Kankpe priests are not supposed to see or come in contact with corpses. Again, until the corpse is buried, the two priests are prohibited from eating food that contains pepper. It is believed that any of the priests who defy this custom would be punished greatly by his deity. To avoid a breach, the relatives of the deceased would speed up the activities preceding the burial ceremony. Having given a broader overview of the Nawuri people, it is relevant to discuss the preparation of the local beer (pito) which sets the tone for the celebration of the Kakyutuu festival.

### **The Preparation of the Pito Drink**

Pito is the common drink among Nawuris that is prepared by women. As part of the preparation towards the festival, daughters-in-law are given guinea corn to prepare the ritual drink (pito), usually seven days or earlier before the rituals take place. Male chief mourners (*Liiwura*) also contract women to prepare pito towards the Kakyutuu rituals. While the pito drink of the male chief mourners is consumed at wake keeping, that of daughters-in-law is reserved for the final Kakyutuu rites; the reasons we shall highlight later. The Kakyutuu rituals present a unique situation in which the drink becomes free booty for each and every member of the village, including visitors. It is abhorred for any woman to sell the drink during the ritual. It is believed that individuals who sell the drink will suffer spiritual sanctions.

### **The Installation of the Wuruko**

Among Nawuris in general, there are elaborate rituals concerning what we may liken to the 'heir' in each household of the dead. Usually, the elderly children (male and female) of the deceased "take on" the roles of the father/mother. The installed children are herein referred to as the "Wuruko" – a Nawuri term which relates to the Dagomba title "Gborn Lana" ("skin owner"). The ceremony extends to those who died without children but have reached the stage of grandparenthood. In the past, the first male and female son/daughter are eligible for installation as the *Wurukos*, and this title does not restrict them only to their fathers, but also to their mothers. The reason for the installation of both sexes as *Wurukos* is expressed in the Nawuri belief in marriage or 'dualness' of life, to remind the surviving spouse of the continual intimate relationship with the deceased partner. The ritual generally opens with a gunshot that calls all members of the community into a state of mourning as if a 'fresh' funeral has been announced. The Wurukos are installed thereafter (see photograph 1).



**Figure 1:** Newly installed Wurukos sitting on the traditional mat.  
(Photograph taken by Achor Burukum, Institute of African Studies,  
University of Ghana, Legon. 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2014).

Wurukos are installed a day to the performance of the Kakyutuu ritual itself, and for each deceased, two *wurukos* (both male and female) are installed. The balance of power in the settlement is played out during the installation of Wurukos. For instance, if the deceased hails from Akosi, Kabisu and Chaaga, the Wurukos are installed by an elderly person or a representative from the Balai clan. On the contrary, if the deceased hails from Balai, the Wuruko is installed by an elderly person or a representative from the three clans. Boys, as in the installation of chiefs, are lowered on the local mat (*kigyaandi*) three times, as they do to chiefs, and four times for females.

Wurukos are bathed by the *Akyibilisa*, old women of the village folk, a day after their installation where they are finally reincorporated into the society. While the bath is specifically reserved for the old women, any member of the village is qualified to participate in shaving the Wurukos.

Wurukos (whether males or females) are usually clad in white pieces of

cloth, what the Nawuris refer to as *kikyebifufuli*, from their neck covering one shoulder to their knee level. The *kikyebifufuli* is the customary piece of cloth for burial among Nawuris. *Wurukos* could move freely in town and watch the night dances with no restriction. They could also sleep with their partners, except to have sexual intercourse with them since sexual intercourse with partners desecrates the ritual process. Their foods must be kept clean and void of poison.



Figure 2: Children and the adults seated behind them during the Kakyutuu rituals. (Photograph taken by Richard Awubomu, April, 2014)

For instance, if a housefly should fall into their food, they would be forbidden to eat it and immediately new food would be prepared for them. Most often, *egushi* soup, one of the favourite Nawuri soups, is prepared for the *wurukos* after their installation since they are envisioned as the “fathers” or “mothers” of their respective families. It is a common belief among Nawuri people that any dead person is a chief in his/her own right, and therefore to act in place of a dead person, the individual is accorded due

respect. Wurukos are installed only once in their life time, granting the opportunity to the rest to duly undergo the installation rites. The following day, the most important activity – the actual Kakyutuu ritual – is carried out.

### **The Final day of the Kakyutuu Ritual**

Feasts and festivals are relevant part of festivals. In Kakyutuu, guinea corn and fowls constitute the major items. Pito is prepared from guinea corn and Tuon Zafi (T.Z) in Hausa, and is ritual food for the deities. The T.Z is served in a calabash. Gourds and calabashes denote the spirits of the departed; hence ritual food/water is served in them. The soup is mainly made up of light dry okro and groundnuts. For every dead person of the community, a fowl is slaughtered. The fowl remains 'whole' which symbolically represent the unbroken unity between the living and the dead (see figure 2). The 'full' fowl is cooked and put on the millet (T.Z) in the calabash. The arena which is determined by the first person to have died has no connection with age, which helps in the chronological account of deaths occurring in a season. At one time it could be the Balai side, and at another, Akosi or Kabisu.

For convenience, we have used Kabisu to include Akosi and Kasta. Akosi and Kasta share the same compound with Kabisu due to their common geographical location. Although the Chaaga people are located within the Kabisu clan, they are certainly a small and distinct clan headed by *KabunƊ Ebilisa*, the lineage head. The Balai clan which lies across the road often has a separate location for hosting the Kakyutuu rituals. This separation in the ritual space is due to the establishment of the Kpandai-Salaga/Kpembe road which divided Balai – the Balai clan on the one hand and on the other hand the Kabisu, Akosi, Kasta, Chaaga, Chintimai and Wurai clans.<sup>28</sup>

Most studies focusing on indigenous religion in Ghana have viewed priests as the sole ritual actors mediating between the human and the spirit beings.<sup>29</sup> In Nawuriland, the Kakyutuu rituals are normally conducted under *ebilisa* (an elderly person) who is acquainted with the traditions of the village. The *ebilisa* selects boys and the adults (who would sit behind the boys) to sit on

the mat. Here that the interaction between the various clans is, again, played out. For instance, if the deceased hails from the Kabisu clan, a boy from the Balai clan is selected to sit on the mat. On the other hand, if the deceased hails from the Balai clan, a child from Kabisu is selected to sit on the mat. Girls are often not selected for this part of the ritual because of the fear of menstrual blood, as this could desecrate the ritual space. Further, there is competition over food, and girls or women are often considered weak for the task. 'Beatings' and escaping of boys with the meat also characterise this stage of the ritual. As indicated, adults, like children equally play an important role in the rituals associated with Kakyutuu. Based on the number of dead persons, equal number of adults is selected to sit behind the children. Unlike the children who are selected from different clans rather than the deceased's, the adults sitting behind the children are selected from the deceased's lineage or clan.

When members of the clans have gathered, the ceremony opens with a libation and a short prayer where the name of *Ebuaré* (the Supreme Being) is mentioned first, then the ritual expert proceeds to the one who died first. It is also worth indicating that the eldest man to preside over the rituals depends on the compound where the activity takes place. Thus, if the ritual space is the Balai side, then the ritual expert is selected from the Akosi/Kabisu/Chaaga/Kasta clans. However, if the ritual compound belongs to the latter clans, then an elderly man from, and usually a representative of, the Balai clan presides over the Kakyutuu rituals. The ritual compound, as noted previously, is determined by the first person to have died in the season. The elder, while standing in front of the food prepared for the dead person, mentions first his/her name and then offers a short prayer which is said aloud. For instance:

[Name of deceased 3x for male and 4x for female] ndiga fiba  
korli fu nkyu fuuli aan, kani bawa funyi ana, kani bawa fusi ana,  
fiba korli nkyufuli nimu, ka fi taa naa tu fusi ana.

Translation: Today, please come for the white water [pito]; so  
they did to your mothers, so also they did to your fathers. It is as

a result of this that we invoke you to come for the white water  
and duly present it to your fathers.

After the prayer, a small quantity of the food prepared for the deceased is poured onto the palms of the child which is required to pour first on the ground. This symbolises that the deceased is served first. The child is again given some of the *pito* which she receives in her palms and then pours on the ground. This stage deserves an interpretation; Nawuris believe that the spirit beings and ancestors are the caretakers of their lives. Thus, the need to serve them with abundant food and drink first, is mandatory. The child then washes his hands and consumes the ritual food.

It has already been pointed out that behind each child sits an adult, demonstrating the readiness of the dead (represented by the adult) to defend the living (the child). While eating, the adult hits and tickles the child seated before him while saying “*dzi buri ka fu wi kunun*” which translates as “eat the T.Z and eat the meat.” As far as the rituals are concerned, this represents the joking relationship as both the adult and the child come from different clans. The tickling which is meant to discomfort the child while eating grants the opportunity to the adult to have access to some of the food and chicken. Finally, the child escapes with part of the chicken leaving the remaining in the calabash. Some children sometimes would escape with the whole chicken (see figure 3 below) especially when the person seated behind him 'beats' and tickles him to extreme. Generally, the ritual enhances sharing among the living, and even with the dead.

While the child escapes with the chicken, the rest of the children would pursue him for a share of it and this promotes sharing among children. This is repeated until the last deceased person is reached. The *ebilisa* would then announce to the *abilisa* (plural) the end of the rite and there the spectators would rush for the remaining food and drink. Excess food is left on the ground for the spirits. The next day is the performance of the *Saaru* dance, during which, as indicated earlier, the *pito* drink is free for everyone. Aspects of the ritual festival corroborate Onwubike's assertion that feasts

are the outward manifestation of religion in every culture and they regularly embody sacrifice as a critical part of the ritual.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 3:** A participant escaping with a full chicken. *Photograph taken by Richard Awubomu during the Kakyutuu ritual of Balai (10<sup>th</sup> April, 2014).*



**Figure 4:** A cross-section of the *Asaa* (daughters-in-law) that brewed pito for the Kakyutuu rituals held in Balai. *Photograph taken by Richard Awubomu, 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2017.*



### **The Saaru Dance and the Pito Drink**

Ritual and dance are the two components of every festival; the former usually esoteric, and the latter public, though exclusive.<sup>31</sup> During the ritual festival, the Saaru dance is performed a day after the ritual food has been eaten. The dance is performed for departed members who have reached the marital stage. We have briefly highlighted the role of daughters-in-law as far as the ritual is concerned. The dance reflects the sad relationship between fathers-/mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. This is captured in the *saaru* song: *misa wu emankala, misa wu, misa wu yorliyor misa wu*, to wit: "My father or mother-in-law is dead without saying goodbye to me, my father-in-law is dead with pity." The dance emanates from a daughter-in-law who starved to death the father-/mother-in-law (See daughters-in-law in figure 4). To plead for pardon and announce to everyone, the pacification ritual is the distribution of some twenty bowls of guinea corn which is prepared into pito and the ritual food.

The daughters-in-law are those qualified to brew the pito for the *saaru* dance. The burial clothes are distributed to these women on the death of their father-in-law. The pieces of the burial cloth, referred to in Nawuri as the *kikyebifufuli* (white cloth), are provided by the sons-in-law on the death of their father-in-law. In antiquity, as now, the brothers of the daughter-in-law were responsible for gathering firewood for the preparation of the pito drink. The daughters-in-law gather at the compound pito pots in a descending order in which the deaths occurred in that season. These pots are filled with the pito drink. At an open compound, a ululation (*kakyilele*) accompanied with appellations is given by the women when the drink fills the pot to the brim and outpours. The appellation which comes after the overflow of the drink denotes the ability of the family of the dead to feed the deceased (with excess) regardless of his/her absence. As a prelude to the *saaru* dance, the souls of the dead are pacified through libation. The drink used for the libation on each of the graves is respectively fetched from the pots of pito gathered at the compound. Here, again, the alternate roles between the clans is played out in the ritual performance between the ritual

experts of the Akosi, Kabisu, Kasta and Chaaga clans on the one hand, and Balai on the other hand. Thus, a ritualist from Balai performs libation on the grave of the deceased of the four clans and vice-versa. Having seen the rituals performed by the Akosi, Kabisu, Balai, kasta and Chaaga clans, it is imperative to also examine those of Wurai and Chintimai clans.

### **Kilagbesi: The Wurai and Chintimai Kakyutuu**

The rituals relating to *Kakyutuu* are not only restricted to the Balai, Kabisu, Akosi, kasta and Chaaga clans. The Chintimai and Wurai clans also perform the Kakyutuu rituals known to them as *Kilagbesi* – during which, drumming, dancing and the slaughtering of fowls are carried out.<sup>32</sup> Kilagbesi is a Gonja funeral ritual that has been incorporated into Balai. The Gonja dialect remains central in the performance of the Kilagbesi ritual. Sacrifice during Kilagbesi comprises the following items: maize and groundnuts (normally prepared into a ritual food), goats and fowls. Several fowls that eluded our count were slaughtered during the Kilagbesi ritual.<sup>33</sup> Some of these fowls were a replacement of the pito drink. This applies when children of the deceased are unable to prepare the pito drink towards the ritual. The massive slaughtering of fowls is captured in the following recital: “[X], since I have lost you, what else shall I use fowls for?” This short incantation illustrates how vital life is to the Wurai and Chintimai people.

The incantation does not only represent the worthlessness of life, but also reflects the unbreakable relationship between the dead and the living. To keep the departed in constant memory therefore requires the performance of goats and fowls. Finally, all the heads of the fowls are stuck on a stick, representing the unity that must prevail among the members of the clans on the one hand, and the dead on the other hand (see photograph below). Besides, the two woven rings from spear grass, according to their belief, represents the endlessness of the life of, and the continual relationship between the living and the dead. In the end, all the heads of the fowls are put on a stick and stuck on the local (thatch) roof for feasting by the departed.

As indicated already, the Kilagbesi dance is performed predominantly by the women of the Wurai and Chintimai clans although the men can also join in the dance. Two slit drums and two drummers are needed. Women dance by twisting their waists. While the dance is owned by the Wurai and Chintimai people, during its performance women from other clans may join. Amidst the dance, rituals take place. It is within the ritual performance that the joking relationship between the Wurai and Chintimai clans is seen. For instance, if the deceased hails from the Chintimai clan, the clan is customarily mandated to kill a goat for the performance of the ritual. Here, the Wurai people would steal the slaughtered goat and when caught are “beaten” accordingly.<sup>34</sup> The Wurai and Chintimai clans have strong relations with the Gonja people, hence their joking relationship in the Kilagbesi ritual.



**Figure 5:** Some heads of fowls stuck on the traditional roofing during the Kilagbesi ritual. Photograph taken by Nkimidong Kinyinkide (field assistant), Balai, 1/6/2016

Although both the Chintimai and Wurai clans conduct the annual funeral rites together, the latter is responsible for mortuary (burial) rituals. It is important to highlight that the Wurai rights over mortuary rites relates to 'good' deaths. When a member of the community dies of witchcraft, such

deaths are regarded as 'bad', bringing them under the domain of the Kankpe priest, as he is responsible for warding off evil spirits. For such 'abnormal' deaths therefore, the Akosi/Kabisu people are responsible for burial rites, and the property of the deceased is claimed by the priest of Kankpe. One could argue, again that the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' deaths in the community and the respective burial rites by different clans creates unity, as the clans could not bury their dead members, but the responsibility of the other.

### **Globalisation and its Influence on Kakyutuu**

By definition, the term globalisation is used to include a series of processes, which include diffusion and acculturation, working to promote change in the world in which nations and people are interlinked and interdependent.<sup>35</sup> With globalisation, local people have to cope with certain 'forces' by larger systems. Indeed, Western influence, specifically Christianity, western education, and modern technology have very much impacted on traditional events. It is opined that traditions are at danger and being lost as they are threatened by external forces. Expressed in the most recent installation, the majority of the elderly sons of the deceased have refused to take part on the grounds of their affiliation to Christianity. Some young ones, somewhat related to the deceased have, however, accepted and stood-in for the installation rites. This substitution of kin for the ritual shows the urgency of the Kakyutuu rite. It also demonstrates the individuals' strong ties with the extended family system.

While certain aspects of the tradition remain sufficiently consistent over time to give people a sense of continuity, it is also obvious that other paths of the traditions changed in structure, details, and interpretation and such changes are not always fully recognized.<sup>36</sup> We associate this change to globalisation. Globally, education has been successful in its creation of schools and admission processes in a variety of socio-economic situations.<sup>37</sup>

As a result of formal education among Nawuris, students, like Christians, have equally refused to participate in the ritual as they are engaged in studies – or their level of education would permit them to do so. A great difference exists between the 'educated and the 'uneducated' in Ghanaian societies.<sup>38</sup> While the uneducated could not occupy certain offices in the government sector and remain as farmers or labourers, the educated on the other hand could rise to become affluent members of the society. Similarly, those in school wanted to marry women who have received formal education. This narrative was justified in our field research. It was asserted that rituals have only been left to people who have not had the privilege of western education. Properly explained, and as noted by Goody, there seem to be some feelings of superiority on the part of the educated and some jealousy or resentment on the part of the uneducated. Christianity and western education have therefore remained the leading threats that have continued to undermine the relevance of the event, particularly among the Nawuris of Balai, and Nawuris in general. No matter what the circumstance might be, there seem to be a division of labour for the exhibition of the rituals. While the educated are required to pay their contributions to be used in purchasing the items needed for the rites (the uneducated still contribute immensely though), those who have not received formal education help in the execution of the rituals.

Societies are subject to change and the case of Nawuris of Balai is not exception. Technology brings continuity of culture to halt, notes Bormann.<sup>39</sup> An important innovation explaining the changing dynamics of Nawuri customs is the use of plastic materials (comprising gallons of different sizes) in the event following the shortage of gourds in the village of Balai. The shortage is as a result of the increasing commercialisation of yam and other related crops that have diverted the attention of farmers from the cultivation of gourds. In the absence of the (substantive) local mats (*kigyaandi*), plastic mats are substituted for the installation of the *wurukos*, since the rituals are executed in the different households of the deceased persons. Whereas gallons have replaced gourds as a result of a shift to yam

production, the use of plastic mats is as a result of the decline in the market value for local mats. However, some Nawuris still prefer local mats to plastic mats arguing that the latter renders sleep uncomfortable due to heat, hence, people's preference for, and continual use of local mats.

### **The Significance of the Kakyutuu Ritual among Nawuris**

Turner's concept of liminality enhances our understanding of Nawuri religiosity. Developing more deeply the ideologies espoused by Arnold van Gennep,<sup>40</sup> Turner argues that during rituals of transition, individuals become disassociated from formalized social structure, so that during the liminal period, the liminar becomes ambiguous – neither between nor betwixt – with no allegiance to the two abounding spaces.<sup>41</sup> From this thinking, we understand the relevance of the ritual performed for the dead since the Nawuris belief have the potential to grant the dead a calm resting place in the underworld, separating them from the rest of the living.<sup>42</sup> Till the performance of the festival, it is believed that the souls of the dead are in limbo; neither with the living nor the dead. In return, the ancestors defend and deliver guidance to those in the material realm and therefore are highly respected, venerated and very important to the community of the living. Failures to perform the ritual, therefore, not only invite untold dangers on the society but deny the entire society of the reciprocal support from the dead. It is in this fear of untold catastrophe and denial of blessing and protection from the ancestors when the society fails to perform the ritual, that the festival finds relevance. This latter analogy justifies the functionalist theory, as the dead are regarded as an important facet of the society and are therefore expected to play key functions, not only in the lives of individuals or their respective families, but towards the sustenance of the society.

Funeral rituals also grant the opportunity for Nawuris to reconnect their relationship with the living dead. The occasion allows members to freely ask for pardon of sins, blessings (such as children, fertility, bountiful harvest)

and good health for the living members of the society. This supports the view of Baloyi<sup>43</sup> that rituals are forms of expressions and connections performed by individuals, groups of people or communities in communication with the living, dead and the Supreme Being.

The religious nature of the ceremony must however not blind us of its socially integrative functions. Rituals retain social cohesion as members of an African society feel their unity and perceive their common interests in symbols which give their society cohesion and persistence.<sup>44</sup> Nketia notes that possession rituals in southern Ghana are social dramas.<sup>45</sup> It accords legitimacy and authority to the proclamations of priests,<sup>46,47</sup> and presents the prospects for social gathering as much as they are driven by aesthetic interests in music and dance.<sup>48,49,50</sup> Though Nketia's assertion relates to possession rituals, it finds relevance to the Kakyutuu rituals. Rituals are multi-faceted and encompass many functions, both on the level of the individual and for groups or societies practicing them.<sup>51</sup> In Balai, recognition is given to the different ethnic groups that participate in the festival. Such neighbours that attend the festival are given a pot of pito.

Funerals in general involve the entire community that come together at these events to perform appropriate rites that strengthen pre-existing bond between the living and the dead.<sup>52</sup> Apart from its religious significance, socially, the festival unites all the members of Balai, including the Wurai and Chintimai clans. The indulgence of the rest of the clans in Balai is created before the ceremony takes place. Thus, the social structure of the Nawuris of Balai is reflected in their ritualistic and religious lives as the heads of clans participate in the rituals and reaffirm their solidarity (see Figure 6). This ritual is often carried out during the dry season when there is no much work to be done on the farms. Historically, each of the clans differs, yet, during the performance of the rituals, all the members are represented.

The rite is mandatory and no one, regardless of the divisions among the clans involved, could opt out of it. Most scholars see rituals as rule-governed, that is, they are being patterned and usually include normative

pressure on its participants.<sup>53</sup> It is this normative pressure that pulls all the members of the community to worship. Customarily, elderly members from each clan, especially those for whom the rituals are relevant, (i.e. Balai, Akosi, Kasta, Chaaga and Kabisu), are to be seated before the rituals begin. Before the commencement of the rituals, there is usually an interactive session by the elders, trying to iron out petty issues before the execution of the rituals, and this demonstrates their oneness. The Wurai and Chintimai clans (who perform the Kilagbesi ritual) could observe the Kakyutuu rites but do not actively participate in it.



**Figure 6:** Some elders of the various clans present at the ceremony. Second (from right) is the Esuliwia, the owner of land, of Balai. Photograph taken by Richard Awubomu. 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2014.

While Durkheim<sup>54</sup> indicates that religion is abandoning its cognitive role to science, he, nonetheless accepts that rituals play an important role in recreating and strengthening social integration and communality. There is visiting and counter visiting, especially by affinal and cognatic relatives after the performance of the rite and everyone congratulates his or her neighbour on their ability to perform the rites, sending the dead to a peaceful rest.



Besides, it is during festivals that lineage members; both affinal and consanguineal as well as friends come together to eat and drink and make merry.<sup>55</sup> The fear is that when the ritual is not performed, the dead might visit the society with some misfortunes such as floods, ill-health, poor harvest among others that can adversely affect the advancement of the society. Its performance, therefore, grants the society a new lease of life. The elders invoke the dead for blessings and supports in diverse forms.

The Kakyutuu rituals also impact greatly on the Balai political organisation. We noted previously the alternate roles between the elders of the Balai clan on the one hand and on the other hand Kabisu, Akosi, and Chaaga in the rituals of Kakyutuu. These alternate roles are expressed in the installation of the Kankpe priests, Nana Esuli priests, and the chiefs. Chieftaincy and the Kankpe priesthood are found among the Akosi, Kabisu and Kasta clans. While the elders of the Balai clan – the land owners – install the Kankpe priests and chiefs, those of Akosi, Kabisu and Kasta clans are responsible for installing the *Nana Esuli* (Land) priests of the Balai clan.<sup>56</sup> This balance of power reduces chieftaincy disputes in the community as they are guided by rituals, a breach of which has adverse effects on the society. For instance, although there is a chieftaincy problem in Balai, the rituals still bind the various clans such as Kabisu, Chintimai, Wurai Balai clans together and no clan could refuse participation.

Economically, Nawuri in the diaspora pay some amounts for the organisation of the rituals which contribute to foreign exchange earnings. Besides, the ritual festival boosts the traditional tourism potential in the area. For instance, 'foreigners' who take part in the festival also visit the various shrines in the Nawuri communities thereby generating revenue for the Nawuri state.

## **Conclusion**

The Kakyutuu rituals among the Nawuris of Balai enhance a communal integration. Individuals fear supernatural sanctions and would therefore

respond urgently to ritual performance. These rituals stress the bond between the Nawuri people of Balai, and through them that they develop contact with the supernatural beings on which they believe and feel they are dependent. Focussing on Kakyutuu, we argued in this paper that the Balai Nawuri unity (with the living and the dead) is partly the product of the existing rituals carried out at regular intervals, and at particular seasons. Rituals play many relevant social, economic, and political roles in the lives of peoples around the world.<sup>57</sup> In as much as the ritual is essential in granting a resting place for the dead, it creates social integration through the Kakyutuu festival. On the political front, the ritual strengthens the bond between the traditional priests and the chiefs. Further interactions within members of the village are carried out during drumming and dancing which occupy an important place in Nawuri rituals.

Social cohesion does not only pertain to different societies, but embraces diverse clans within societies that have, somehow, unique histories and other forms of worship. These periodic events cement pre-existing relationships through the performance of annual rituals. As pointed out, the performance of the festival also has implication for peace and security, as no clan or groups of people could refuse participation in the performance of the rituals. Such rituals have the tendency to over-ride tensions between individuals or clans in the community. The paper has also realised the economic potentials of the funeral festivals in the Nawuri area. Every society is undergoing change and the case of Kakyutuu is no exception. Globalisation is the main agent that greatly impacts on Nawuri tradition. While school children and the well educated in the society are reluctant in participating, some Christians also refuse involvement in the rituals. Social change is also witnessed in the use of items such as foreign materials namely: gallons, bowls and modern guns in the exhibition of the rituals.

## Endnotes

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# Sacredness and Religious Functions of Traditional Markets in Lagos: The Case of Oju-Olobun and Agbalata- Badagry Markets

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## Introduction

Scholars have expressed different views on the concept and meaning of market. Indeed, it means different things to different scholars. Hodder and Ukwu<sup>1</sup> defined market as “an authorized public concourse of buyers and sellers of commodities meeting at a place more or less strictly limited or defined, at an appointed time.” Hopkins<sup>2</sup> considered market as “the volume and value of goods and services transacted, which determine the extent of the market in quantitative terms.” Falola<sup>3</sup> described market as “a demarcated site where traders and consumers meet to exchange products. He also identified roadside markets, mobile markets (hawking) and street markets. In the same vein, Ajetunmobi<sup>4</sup> opined that “market is as old as civilization and that the early people developed the idea of marketing through barter economy, otherwise known as trade by barter.”

Lagos markets have been the main source of revenue right from time immemorial and its beginning was dated back to the existence of man in the region. Market in Lagos, just like in every Yoruba community, was an open space where physical business transactions took place. Each community determined the patterns, organisation, administration and security of its market space. In pre-colonial Lagos, market was regarded as sacred and as such, the whole community carefully protected it. Without the market, life could hardly exist because its functions went beyond economy. It also provided non-economic functions such as political (serves as the centre of

judicial activities, the extension of political control of the ruling king), social (serves as the network of communications and as a barometer of the town where values, means of information, public shows, sports, dances and music, language diffusion, courier services, fashion display, cultural harmonisation and social interaction occur), cultural (serves as the centre for ceremonies, inter cultural meeting place) and religious activities (where festivals, sacrifices and rituals were made).

Markets also represented the image of the community and demonstrated how wealthy and significant the community was. It was a place where people met to exchange information with relatives, friends and strangers; it was a meeting place for suitors, where love relationships were established. Some of these markets operated on daily or periodic basis. They could also operate for a whole day, half-day or in the evening (*Oja-ale*). Business on a full day began as early as 6.00am and closed by 6.00pm, while that of night began around 6.00pm and closed by 11.00pm. The major pre-colonial markets were located in public squares adjacent to the palaces or community centers.<sup>5</sup> Few were at the borders of the town.

The traditional market was administered by *Ìyálójà* (female market chieftain) and monitored closely by the king or *Báálè* (Chief) from his palace. This could be understood because, the market was one of the major sources of revenue for the kingdom. The *Ìyálójà* was responsible for the collection of fines and levies, settlement of disputes between or among traders and sellers, as well as maintenance of peace and order in the market. The market executives were assisted by community leaders, local police drawn from the age-groups and the masquerades.

In some Yoruba communities, a particular market often referred to as *Ojà-Oba* was commonly attended by members of the royal family. The princes, princesses and the *Olorì* – the wives of the *Oba*, specifically patronised the market for security reasons and as a mark of dignity as well as symbol of class. The traders in *Ojà-Oba* market accorded the royal family members with utmost respect each time they visited the market to buy goods and



foodstuffs. In fact, in pre-colonial times, the success of a market determined the success of the kingdom.<sup>6</sup> Except on a few occasions, most of the business transactions in Yorubaland took place in the markets because that was the official place for exchanging goods and agricultural products among people.

It was an abomination (*èèwò*) to attack a market during wars, not only because it was the economic life-wire of the community but also because some important deities in the community were worshipped in it. The market provided an avenue for the destitute, the physically challenged and entertainers made money. Indeed, harmless women and innocent children constituted the dominant groups in the markets. This further explains why the market was heavily protected from external invasion. The security was a communal responsibility where everybody watched over the market directly or indirectly. Besides the communal efforts, each market executive made adequate provision for security agents called *Olóde* (night guards) to always guard the markets, day and night. Important information and messages from the King or *Baale* were equally disseminated to the people through the market by the use of town criers.

Just as in other Yoruba communities, the markets in Lagos were centres of interaction between Lagosians and hinterland traders as well as venues of traditional festivals such as *Egúngún* and *Èyò* masquerades. They were also centres of sacrifices to deities like *Ògún*, *Aje* and *Sango*. The markets were dominated by women,<sup>7</sup> and prominent features include the sales of foodstuffs and agricultural produce, the use of cowry shells, effective guild activities, rituals, price haggling and hawking. Considering the multi-faceted functions of the traditional markets, they could be described as designated open places where physical buying and selling of goods, services and other important events took place on regular or periodic bases. Indeed, markets were all purpose and holistic in pre-colonial days.

The first market in Lagos could not be easily ascertained but there was evidence that while on transit, at each place the migrants stopped, buying

and selling took place between them and their host communities. However, in Lagos Island, *Ebute-ero* market was assumed to be the first market to be established spontaneously by the early settlers.

### **Conceptual and Historical Issues**

For the purpose of clarity, there is need to understand the two main operative terms used in this study, namely “Lagos commercial activities” and “traditional markets.”

### **Commercial Activities of Lagos**

The economy of Lagos started around Otto and Iddo (in the present-day Lagos Mainland) where Ogunfunminire, the founder and ancestral father of the Awori in Lagos, lived together with the Ijebu settlers and Aina Elewure (an Edo woman), the domesticator of animals in about 1485 A.D. The movement of some of Ogunfunminire children, led by Aromire, to the Island in c.1500 paved the way for the Ijebu to dominate the market economy and they specialised in the sales of food crops such as *gari*, vegetable and smoked fish.<sup>8</sup> Oral tradition<sup>9</sup> claimed that the Ijebu established *Obun-eko* market since they came along with Ogunfunminire to Lagos. This claim was supported by linguistic evidence because the word *Òbùn* is an Ijebu word meaning *market*.

The geographical environment and the nature of coastal Lagos determined her major traditional industry which was fishing and aquatic-related trade. However, fishing in Lagos was also combined with boat construction, mat and basket making, coconut and palm oil production at the sea/lagoon side. In the past, hunting, livestock, salt production were lucrative and attractive businesses in Lagos.

Lagos Island wharfs as well as the riverside were lucrative business sites for neighbouring communities and towns like Ikorodu, Ijebu, Badagry, Epe, and the Egba who incessantly brought goods such as yams, vegetables,

cassava, textiles, wood (for boat making) in exchange for fish, salt and pepper through wharfs like Ebute-ero and Idumagbo. The fishing activities of the early people of Lagos thrived to the extent that Lagos began to export fish to neighbours like Ikorodu. Farm lands were also established in places like the present-day *Oba's* Palace (Iduganran), Ikoyi, Iganmu, Ereko, Itafaji, Idowa Village and Ibeju by the early settlers where pepper, vegetables, coconut, sugar-cane and other agricultural crops were cultivated.<sup>10</sup> Lawal<sup>11</sup> admitted that Lagos was significant for its economic prosperity in pre-colonial time just as it is in contemporary Nigeria. He further stated that the people of Lagos developed an intricate network of market system to promote their trade interests. Some of the notable markets in pre-colonial era include *Ebute-ero*, *Jankara*, *Obun-eko*, and *Ebute Elefun*.<sup>12</sup> Others were *Itafaji*, *Balogun*, *Oju Olobun* and *Ereko*.<sup>13</sup>

Both Lawal and Ajetunmobi asserted that Lagos Island flourished in the production of spices such as pepper (*Iganran*), needed by the Portuguese traders. This confirms that the present *Oba's* palace was formerly a pepper farmland owned by Aromire, the founder of Lagos Island. The name *Iga-Iduganran* is an Awori word meaning pepper house. *Idun* means station/house and *Iganran* means pepper. The flourishing nature of Aromire's pepper farm attracted other farmers to the neighbourhood. This explains why the place is now called *Iga Idunganran* (palace of pepper)<sup>14</sup>. Scholars further stated that the people of Lagos were predominantly fishermen, farmers and traders. This could be explained by the fact that 50% of the area was occupied by water while about 25% was marshy and swampy which encouraged fishing and other water related industries like production of reeds – *ifin* (raffia), *iko* (palm tread), *parapara* used for basket and mats.

In Lagos, markets were considered as an essential part of cultural heritage and part of culture complex. This is because markets were regarded as places where goods and services as well as ideas and knowledge were exchanged. It was a veritable source of cultural diffusion where new norms

and existing cultural values were learnt and sustained. Indeed, market served as one of the institutions that enhanced the continued existence and sustainability of cultural heritage in terms of material, cognitive and normative distribution among the Yoruba. Associated with markets and marketing were also rituals and rites performed by sellers and buyers for success.<sup>15</sup> There were also taboos, traditional festivals, ceremonies associated with markets and marketing. Thus, market served as agent of cultural preservation in pre-colonial Lagos.

Apart from the Ijebu that facilitated the expansion of markets in Lagos, another group was the Egba. Ajetunmobi<sup>16</sup> noted that the marriage between King Akinsemoyin (1704-1749) and an Egba woman from Abeokuta consequently enhanced the already existing relationship between the two communities. The Egba were farmers, weavers and traders; hence, they brought their agricultural products and other items to Lagos for sale. Such articles of trade include fermented melon (*ogiri*), locus bean (*iru*), melon (*egusi*), palm oil, palm kernel oil and kolanut.

Apart from fish, which was the major product in all the markets, agricultural products and other items sold in the markets include yams, cassava, domestic animals, maize, vegetables, house hold equipment, agricultural implements, wares, building materials, food stuff and domestic items. The Awori also got some of their commercial supplies from other interior traders in exchange for their fishes.

### **Traditional Markets in Pre-Colonial Lagos**

In pre-colonial days, the markets in Lagos operated either daily or periodically at intervals of designated days. Some were done in the morning and others at night. On the political scene, the *Ìyálójà* administered the market and the success of a market determined the success of the region. Except on a few occasions, most of the business transactions in Yorubaland took place in the market. The bulk of the traders in the markets were women

and children. Therefore, any attempt to attack the market was a deliberate attempt at holocaust or even genocide. Lai Olurode also confirmed the dominance of women:

Markets are generally under women's control. They formulate, administer rules, regulate and settle all questions on market matters... In the past, each market was presided over by the ruler's wife known as Iyalode (sic) among the Yoruba... The women do not dominate the markets for nothing, they exhibit a lot of zeal in the conduct of trade, constituting themselves into arteries and veins of the distributive system all over the country.<sup>17</sup>

This probably explains why the head of the market in pre-colonial era was always a woman known as *Ìyálójà*. Meanwhile, this assertion of women's dominance should not be exaggerated by scholars since in Yorubaland, there was division of labour among family members, in which men were expected to cultivate and harvest (although his wife or wives may also help), while the wife/wives, and children, especially daughters, were responsible for taking the products to the market for sale.

In the past, moral decadence such as indecent dressing, unacceptable fashion and vulgar languages were condemned in market places. Children could even stone persons who dressed indecently while the adults would scold such a person.<sup>18</sup> Market places were used by teenagers to showcase and display their new clothes, fashion, body scarification, special hairstyle, manicure and pedicure.<sup>19</sup> It could be argued that these actions were necessary so that the traders' make-up and outfit could attract customers and passers-by who consequently patronized their goods. Owing to the fact that a market was essential to the economic development of every society, adequate security was provided for it in the olden days, and it was strategically located around or in the King's palace.

Evidence has shown that markets were vital to the economic, social,

political and cultural milieu of Lagos; they contributed to the material progress of the economy of the society. Markets provided an opportunity for an individual to replace old items at home with new ones. It also contributed to the economy by creating a merchant class which, in turn, was the major source of entrepreneurial and managerial enterprise.

In Lagos, as elsewhere in Yorubaland, there was no fixed price for commodities and services, but both buyers and sellers reached a compromise through bargaining (or haggling). Fadipe captured this view by saying that “both buyers and sellers must be ready to haggle by a process of Dutch auction.”<sup>20</sup> In a similar manner, Hopkins observed that the prices of most goods in local markets were determined mainly by supply and demand, and that the haggling skills of the parties concerned played an important part in deciding the exact price agreed on in any single transaction.<sup>21</sup> With this, it is very clear that in the absence of formal education, the traders were statistically intelligent and mathematically conscious, which enabled them to strike balance for prices of goods.

The authority in the market include the *Oba*, *Ìyálójà*, *Alaga* (market chairman), *Iya egbe oja* (leader of the market association), *Olori egbe* (commodity head), and ethnic group leader.<sup>22</sup> No doubt, the women were in charge of the market management. Although there were no statistics to measure the wealth of traders and volume of trade, the women usually kept their money in a long rope tied around their waists and under wrappers or skirts.

One other remarkable feature of markets in pre-colonial Lagos was *ìpolówó ojà*<sup>23</sup> (public poetic advertisement in market), where the hawkers and traders in stalls attracted the attention of passers-by by publicly advertising what they were selling in a poetic manner. Indeed, a Yoruba statement asserts that *Ìpolówó ojà ni àgúnmu òwò*, meaning, advertisement promotes trade. Some of the poetic advertisements include: *E ra epo e se obé*, meaning come and buy palm oil and cook soup, *Elelo obe de*, or *e ra ata e sebe o* meaning soup ingredient seller has come. Other poetic advertisements were, *ofe ni iresi eran*

*lowo, Langbe jina or ibe oni agbado, E wo oju obe emuyan, E fi akara tukowo, E ra sawa Igboere.*<sup>24</sup> Ajetunmobi<sup>25</sup> explained that one of the methods of advertising fresh or smoked *Sawa* fish was:

*Sawa Igboere re o*

*E ra Sawa Igboere*

*Sawa Oloro re o*

*E ra Sawa Igboere*

Meaning:

This is *Sawa* (Sardinella) of Sere Swamp

Buy *Sawa* (Sardinella) of Sere Swamp

This is fatty *Sawa* (Sardinell)

Buy *Sawa* (Sardinella) of Sere Swamp

This has once again demonstrated that women held the key to the economic doors of pre-colonial Lagos. Olaoba<sup>26</sup> elaborately captures this advertisement strategy in his work.

The traders of the same kind of items were assembled in the same area to enable buyers to identify where to purchase their goods easily in the market. This method consequently led to the formation of commodity associations among the traders.<sup>27</sup> It also enabled effective control and orderliness in the market.<sup>28</sup> Each commodity association had its own officers and leaders. Although Fadipe<sup>29</sup> gave the advantages of these commodity associations, he neglected the shortcomings of these associations. For instance, he did not examine the intra-group conflict issues inherent in the commodity association and the disadvantages of traders selling the same kind of goods in close proximity in the market, which in most cases, led to envy and conflict. In spite of the shortcomings, the commodity association had the

advantage of protecting the interest of its members. It promoted peace, friendliness and development in the market. A foreign observer, Clapperton, on his visit to Oyo in 1826, attested to this.<sup>30</sup>

### **Religious Functions of Markets in Lagos**

Traditional markets, in Lagos Island, were used as a platform of communication between the people and their deities. Indeed, several shrines were built for different gods in the markets where the worshippers of these gods often visited to perform rituals. In case of any calamity in the society, the worshippers consulted and appeased the concerned deity in the market for solution. In a similar manner, rituals and sacrifices were made to appease the gods for bumper harvest and economic prosperity of the coastal region. Just as in other Yoruba communities, the markets in Lagos served as the centres of interaction between Lagosians and hinterland traders as well as venues of traditional festivals such as *Egúngún* and *Èyò* masquerades. The markets were also centres of sacrifices to the deities like *Ògún* (god of iron), *Olokun* (goddess of the sea) and *Aje* (god of wealth or bumper sales). Important carnivals, festivals and intercommunity religious activities that enhanced unity were organized and held at market places. These include initiation of teenagers into adulthood or the celebration of masquerades. At such occasions, masquerades from other localities were invited to showcase their worth.

The event which was usually like a funfair and carnival no doubt integrated the different communities, while the image and interest of the host community was projected. Such festivals include *Káyókáyó*, *Èyò* and *Egúngún*. In fact, the markets remained closed whenever the activities were going on so as to allow full participation of the citizenry. Performance of public rituals that were associated with spiritual cleansing, fertility, bumper harvest and peace in the community were done in these markets.<sup>31</sup> Some of these sacrifices were done for the growth and development of the society



and to avert any likely crisis or natural disaster in the community. The sacrifices were usually placed at the centre of the market or at crossroads in the market.

Sacrifices were also made in the markets for the protection of the society as well as economic development of Lagos. In some cases, oracles were consulted before a particular market could be established. This is to know the economic potential of the proposed market location. Indeed, the name of the market as well as the type of goods to sell were requested from the oracle. This, therefore, confirms a strong connection between the physical and metaphysical.

In a similar manner, there was a popular belief that dead people patronized market at night. Therefore, those who wanted to see their departed loved ones travelled to another market far away from their locality and patronised the night market in search of their dead loved ones. With the arrival of Christianity/Islam, important Christian/Islamic programmes like revival and evangelism also took place in market places across the city.

It is important to note that the coronation of a new king or high chief in some localities in Lagos would not be complete without performing some basic rites in the market. During this period, the market must be closed for certain days. This is necessary for the prosperity, long life and peaceful reign of the king. Even at the demise of the king, the market would also be shut down for some days to enable traditional rituals to take place therein. The market is also believed to be a convergent point where all the departed ancestors and past heroes/heroines meet at night to deliberate on the challenges, progress and prosperity of the city.

Cultural celebration as a tool of interaction were better organised in the market. For instance, many cultural/religious competitions such as traditional wrestling, fashion parade, singing and dancing competition organised in markets facilitated peace and unity in the region. These programmes equally attracted various people from other states not only as

spectators but also as contestants, during which food vendors and other entertainers also took the advantage of the festival to sell and showcase their products, make profits and make friends.

### **The Religious Perspective of *Oju-Olobun* Market**



The Shrine at *Oju-olobun* Market, Lagos Island  
Source: Field survey

*Oju-olobun* market is located at *Isale-eko* area in Lagos Island. Sharing border with the market in the north were *Enu-owa* and *Docemo* streets, in the south was *Ereko* street, to the east were *Idoluwo* and *Iga Iduganran* streets and in the west was *Ereko* street. *Isale-eko* is one of the oldest settlements in Lagos. It was an ancient slum, out of which rose the refreshing site of *Iga-Iduganran* or *Oba's* palace. Located on a small portion of land; about one acre, *Oju-olobun*, one of the ancient markets in Lagos Island with a very old outlook, depicts the antiquity of market institutions in Lagos and Yorubaland in general.

In pre-colonial days, the market was structurally made of wood and bamboo trees and was popular as a fish market. This has been the identity of the market till date. It was formerly a periodic market with a five-day interval, but with the influx of people to Lagos and the high demands of goods, it became necessary for daily activities in the market.<sup>32</sup> The market was also referred to as *Oja Iya Oba* meaning the market of the king's mother. In the past, the king's mother was directly in charge of the market and collected levies from traders periodically. She also approved the appointment of the *Iyaloja* and settled all cases beyond the capability of the *Ìyálójà* .

Just as other traditional markets in Yorubaland, *Oju-olobun* was an open land with trees planted all over to provide shade and seats for the traders. The market was characterised by traders from within and outside. Traders came from Badagry and other neighbouring towns and villages to participate regularly in the market on market days. But the uniqueness of the market lies in the roles it played in the religious life of the people of Lagos Island and more importantly to the residents of *Isale Eko*.<sup>33</sup>

Apart from its economic importance, the spiritual aspect must not be underestimated. There were two trees planted at the entrance of the market and it was assumed that the trees, called *Òbùn trees*, were responsible for the economic prosperity and flourishing business in the market. Indeed, the market got its name from this *Òbùn trees* or *igi-Obun*, since *Obun* is an *Ijebu* word for market, so *Igi-obun* could be described as “market tree.” *Ojú* means eyes but in this context, it could be interpreted as spot or heart. *Oju-olobun* could literally mean the “heart of the market owners.”

Symbolically, the trees were assumed to be male and female. Therefore, as the trees grew and developed in size, so did the trade and traders flourish and prosper. It became a taboo to cut off any leaf or branch of the tree(s), rather, the trees were protected and nurtured to maturity. According to oral source<sup>34</sup> whenever a part of the tree(s) was cut-off there would be serious calamity and retrogression in the market, which consequently led to socio-economic

mishap in the society. To this extent, the priests and traders constantly offered sacrifices and rituals to the spirit of the trees. Apart from daily rituals and sacrifices offered to these trees, they (the trees) were also consecrated and celebrated annually with a lot of fun fair, merriment and entertainment.



The fenced shrine located at the centre of Oju-Olobun market, with the two sacred trees (Male and Female) therein. *Source: Field Survey*

There are different versions explaining the relationship between the sacred trees and the establishment of the market. One version claimed that the trees were already at the spot before the market was established and that it was the presence of the sacred trees that actually attracted the location of the market in the area. The source claimed that after due consultation with the oracle, the chief priest was instructed by the oracle to advise the *Oba* to establish a market around the trees for economic prosperity in his kingdom. Therefore, the market was established close to the trees, hence, it was called *Oju-olobun* (eyes of the owner of the market).<sup>35</sup> Another variant of the tradition claimed that it was *Eletu* Alidosu who planted the trees at the entrance of the market so as to protect the market from external attack, disasters and for economic prosperity.<sup>36</sup>

Another version of the tradition stated that *Oju-olobun* shrine is one of the legacies of Benin invasions. Supporting this view, Ajetunmobi affirmed that the location of the trees was the early camp of the Benin warriors. He further argued that although *Obun* is an Ijebu word for market, this is not an excuse that the Ijebu founded the market, but that the Ijebu traders overwhelmingly populated the market, having been developed by the Benin warriors. The *Obun* trees, which were surrounded by religious belief, were called *Ihwin* in Benin traditions. In fact, the installation of a new *Oba* of Lagos was incomplete without adequate performance of sacred rites with the leaves of *Obun* trees at the palace during which the market was closed until the ceremony was over.<sup>37</sup>

The trees played significant roles in the development of the market as well as the economic prosperity of the town. To this extent, sacrifices were offered to the trees annually and during traditional festivals like *Eyo* and *Gelede*.<sup>38</sup> Some of the objects used in the sacrifice include kolanut, cows, pigeons and bitter kola. *Ifa* oracle equally announced other objects that the *Obun* trees wanted from the people. Songs and dances were displayed during the worship. For instance, songs like *Olobun to gba eran, awo lo fije*, meaning, *Olobun* tree demanded meat as sacrifice but it is the priest that ate it, was rendered during the sacrifices.

Titles such as *Olobun Abiye* were given to the tree, which means *Olobun*, the successful deliverer. This shows that the trees were not only responsible for market prosperity but also for fertility in women and solutions to other societal problems.

In colonial period, the traditional role of the market changed and the spiritual significance of the trees in the market was undermined. In c.1935, the British saw the trees as impediment and obstruction to the free-flow and easy movement of goods and people, so it was cut down to allow for the construction of roads and easy passage of people and goods. Oral tradition indicated that serious epidemics such as small-pox, high fever, tuberculosis, cholera, malaria, dysentery and chicken-pox befell those who took part in

the cutting exercise as well as those who witnessed the cutting. Furthermore, the whole community was besieged by calamity like famine, accidents, environmental or natural disasters, and mysterious deaths.<sup>39</sup>

Hence, on the advice of the king and the chief priest, the British ordered that the same type of trees be replanted on the same spot for normalcy to be restored. As soon as the Eletu-Idesu and other priests replanted the trees, peace was restored and all disasters ceased immediately and *Oju-olobun* market also continued to flourish up till date. The uniqueness of the event was that the trees germinated the same day that they were replanted.<sup>40</sup>

In the 1920s, however, traders from Epe, Ikorodu, Egunland and Ijebu area came to settle around the market and engaged in fishing activities. Apart from fresh and smoked fish which were the main items sold and which popularised the market, other goods sold in the market include goats, domestic animals, water related products, clothing materials, foodstuffs like vegetables, yams, meats and rams. From this period, the trade in fishing became the dominant feature of the market. In c.1930 during the general reconstruction and rehabilitation of markets, the narrow path was expanded and tarred from the entrance of the market to the end, not more than 200 metres in a stretch. The road further improved the standard of the market and made it possible for vehicles to ply.

From around 1960s, residential houses and lock-up shops were built in and around the market thereby making the market to be inconsequential compared to what it used to be in terms of spirituality, size, political relevance, economic influence on the society and socio-cultural importance. In fact, it has been reduced to just a street market without the usual fun fair, that characterised it before and during the colonial days. However, the traditional “Obun” trees still exist in the market and are respected as one of the legacies of traditional markets in Lagos. Currently, *Oju-olobun* is a popular fish market (smoked, fresh and dried) in Lagos Island but the population and size have reduced drastically, due to the encroachment of modernity and foreign goods.

### **The Religious Perspective of Agbalata Market in Badagry**



Herb section in Agbalata-Badagry Market, Lagos. *Source: Field survey*



Gelede Masquerade in display in Agbalata- Badagry market  
*Source: Field Survey*

Agbalata was an ancient market which was founded in c.1500. Agbalata market was initially situated at the site of the historical Agia tree in Badagry,

the place where Christianity was first preached. It has moved to its present site between the palace of Akran of Badagry and Marina Street. Tradition has it that Agbalata is an Ogu word meaning *O gbata* that is, “swamp terrain” or an area that is water logged. Another version, argued that the word *Agbalata* is an Ogu corruption of “*Agba Olota*”, i.e., the place of worship of sea deity. It is from the above religious connotation that the market derived its name *Agbalata* (the deity in a swampy location). According to tradition, the location of the market along the sea routes attracted people from far and near to patronize the market.

The market served as a sacred point of socio-economic interaction. The activities of the *Den Ahigem* (male title chiefs) cannot be overemphasized. They were responsible for maintaining peace, provision of good welfare, settlement of dispute and sanitation of the market. More importantly, it is the duty of *Den Ahigem* to fix regular meetings between Aholu Menu Toyi, the Akran of Badagry, his cabinet members, the traditional diviner (Bokoro) and the traders. The aim of such meetings was to see to the smooth running of the market (Ahi), and safe keeping of its patrons and customers. The meetings also gave room for deliberation on events occurring within the market and within the community generally.

*Agbalata* was patronized by people from various states of Nigeria as well as from neighbouring countries. The market was usually in session every nine days for four days running.<sup>41</sup> The international status of the market would appear to render it an important social phenomenon, the economic characteristics and social attributes of which would immediately present any researcher with potential areas of enquiry.

Apart from its economic function and trading activities, the *Agbalata* market in Badagry was essentially reflective of certain religious orientations that tended to render purely economic explanations inadequate for its systematic understanding. Similarly, the pervasiveness of religion in simple as well as complex societies has been observed by Schneider. According to him, there is need for enquiry into the relationship between religion and



economy. Beyond the question of economic based market mode of communication as well as attested dates of events concerning the Agbalata market, there is need to study the potency of the market as systematically analysed from its latent religious status. The religious functions and attributes of the market are, therefore, bound to be an additional power house of information concerning the history and culture of Badagry.

In colonial and post-colonial periods, Christians and Muslims used to preach their gospel and organise their revivals in the open place in the market. Indeed, herbalists were also in the market and they had stalls. So sick people flocked to the market as they believed they could be cured by the herbalists. The herbalists formed themselves into various market herbalist associations. This body helped in no small way, to fight against the notion of colonial mentality. With the colonial advent, Lagosians discarded their various ways of life like their religion, mode of dressing, traditional medicine and many other things and took to the white man's cultural values. The herbalists however sought to return the people to traditional practices by advocating the potency of traditional medicine over the modern medicine. The religion of various traders from near and far were intermingled and some traders accepted the religion of other members while discarding their own. Various religions such as Christianity, Islam and traditional religion are still being spread and preserved till today in *Agbalata*.

The market has been patronized on daily basis since the 1990s except for the seven days interval for fish sales till date. Indeed, the market took the appearance of funfair or festivals. Many people took advantage of this and used the market place, which has since been converted to daily market, to give out information about their religion, faith and spiritual competence. Even, magicians come to display their skills for patronage. In summary, *Agbalata* market represents an invaluable source of income to the economy of Lagos. In like manner, it has shown to be of immense social, political and spiritual importance to the growth and development of Badagry.

The coming of several people from other areas beyond Yoruba and Egunland enhanced the integration of diverse people with different backgrounds and cultures. The Igbo speaking traders had majority of their members in the market selling second-hand clothes, bags, vegetables and stock fish. They were therefore accustomed to Egun dialect in order to be prosperous in their businesses. Importantly, some of the indigenes learnt other people's way of life in order to gain favour from them in terms of trade. Some Egun women and men even married the Igbos. It is noteworthy that the Hausa and other ethnic groups also married the Egun traders so as to strengthen the commercial relationship and make the intergroup relations resilient. Some of these foreign traders often rose to big and influential positions in Badagry. Some of them became chiefs and landlords as a result of the aforesaid cultural integration that arose from the market.

In terms of religious involvement, it is the *Ne Aghigan* and *De Aghigan* that bear spiritual responsibilities concerning the absolute welfare of the Agbalata market. Very often, meeting is arranged with traditional diviners (Bokoro) for various deliberations. Every year, the oracle has to be consulted concerning the likely progress and possible handicaps that may beset the market (Ahi). Meetings were also held with the incumbent Akran and members of his Cabinet to ensure necessary rituals and prayers are offered for the smooth running of the market (Ahi) and the safe-keeping of its patrons and customers.

Occasionally, rituals (Avoh) are performed in order to discourage and ward off calamities and disasters that could affect the degree of patronage and development of the town. The market (Ahi) runs the risk of losing its essential sellers of the various commodities sold in the market (Ahi). Propitiatory rituals (Avoh) are therefore offered by traditional diviners (Bokoro) that minister to the King (Whemo Aholu) for the purpose of ensuring powerful atmosphere in the various social and economic transactions of traders within the *Agbalata* market environs.

Therefore, the motivating factor behind the ritual (Avoh) observance that is so pervasive among Badagry concerning the Agbalata market, is deeply rooted in the fear of losing what appears to be the highest seat of patronage for them, that is, the Agbalata market. Its survival seems to depend on a constant watch being set over it as well as regular actions concerning the performance of rituals (Avoh) to appease the gods of the land.

Rituals are performed annually as a matter of necessity and also when pestilence or any form of disaster sets in. Weekly Rituals are observed every nine days at the Legba Shrine by the Badagry Roundabout and in various shrines within the community at regular intervals. Such rituals usually coincide with the beginning of each market session. Apart from these fixed rituals, officials of the traditional religious groups like the *Igunuko*, *Oro*, *Egungun*, *Gelede* and the various *Vothun* groups usually set time apart for ritual (Avoh) performances designed for uplifting the market (Ahi) spiritually. General response was recently made along this dimension when the high priestess of Oshun-Iya-Alaro<sup>42</sup> elsewhere in Lagos State predicted the flow of a “Strange” river into the Badagry waters. This incident, she said, would claim lives at its approach. Property would also be lost in the event. The prediction received prompt attention concerning the need to avert the perceived impending destruction. Rituals to avert the possible fulfillment of the prediction were therefore performed by traditional religious leaders as well as Christian and Muslim bodies respectively. The Muslims sacrificed a cow as part of their own measures for propitiation for the promotion of peace and general calm in the *Agbalata* market and in the general Badagry community.

## **Conclusion**

From this study, pre-colonial Lagos market was regarded as sacred and as such, the whole community carefully protected it. However, with the advent of the European culture and modernization, the profanity and desecration

of market sacredness as the centre of commerce, celebration of traditional festival ritual and sacrifices, have become obvious in recent times. It was a taboo 'eewo' in the pre-colonial period to attack the market, but today markets are destroyed, set ablaze with or without impunity either by political agents or individuals as a strategy to take possession of the market. Rituals, sacrifices, religious activities and other traditional practices associated with traditional markets should be preserved and protected because it leads to the peaceful co-existence and progress in the market as well as economic growth in Lagos.

This study therefore, calls for the restoration of some of the traditional practices that have gone into extinction and improve on the existing in market places.

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# On the Strength of Testimonials: Reconstructing D.O. Fagunwa's Agency in the Development of Modern African Literature

*Morufu Bukola Omigbule*

## **Introduction: Need for Testimonials**

First, we should make the claim that D.O. Fagunwa's contributions to the development of modern African literature are enormous. These contributions can be located at some of the major frontiers in the engineering of the modern African literary culture. Specifically, his contributions can be found at frontiers such as creative writing, publishing, and marketing. Perhaps, there were efforts of his that should count in tracing the development of modern African literature while he was an education officer in the Education ministry of the then Western Region, we may never know. Nevertheless, his contributions at the listed frontiers are yet to be deeply appreciated.

To place his contributions in context, we may need to imagine the cultural environment within which creative writing as an enterprise and cultural concern took place then – a time when Thomas Mofolo<sup>1</sup> Fagunwa and Cyprian Ekwensi were dominant literary figures. This point in time was barely eight years after a rather disturbing observation on creative writing in Africa was made by Courtenay Hodgson. In 1930 precisely, Hodgson said of West Africa: “West Africa is too crude, too brutalizing, to nourish the afflatus of a poet or the *scabies scribendi* of the novelist.” Fagunwa's first novel – a rudely surprising bestseller – was published about eight years afterwards. Given the rate at which creative culture suddenly expanded in Nigeria – a very prominent nation in West Africa – Bernth Lindfors made a



very apt inference as a build up to Hodgson's observation about Nigerian literature thus:

[Nigerian literature] rapidly assumed a semblance of a national character, reflecting and projecting an identity pluralistic enough to be called distinctively Nigerian. A vigorous young literary culture was being born.

This was a development that surprised the outside world, for no one, not even outsiders with considerable African experience, expected any kind of literary culture to flourish in an environment that they perceived as so uncompromising.<sup>2</sup>

Fagunwa's contributions to the development of modern African literary enterprise is remarkable and only through accessing rare testimonials to this fact can studies on Fagunwa along this paradigm be enhanced.

Testimonials that witness to Fagunwa's amazing contributions to the modern African literary enterprise, and particularly, the literary development in Nigeria should continue to count seriously in discourses on the modern African literature both at the levels of the continental (Africa) and the national (Nigeria). At least, literary criticism and meta-criticism in literature as well as cultural criticism as a whole have always counted on information accessed through sources considered reliable; such reliable. Sources include close relations, professional associates, confidants, acquaintances, spouses, siblings, children, eyewitnesses, diaries, letters, recommendations, and pictures, amongst others.

Testimonials operate on the same semantic field with words such as references, statements, confirmations, endorsements and recommendations. In other words, testimonials are synonymous with such words as presently listed. Each of these synonyms that operate on the same semantic field –on one hand, and as a bearer of particular meaning(s) on the other hand, combined to serve as signifiers of meanings – when applying the discourse of Fagunwa both as a Nigerian creative writer and, of course, as an African literary icon. Singularly and collectively, the synonyms also

apply in the discourse of Fagunwa's literary productions and involvements.

In a discourse bordering on an author along the foregoing parameters, the autobiography(ies) of the author in question would readily be sought. This may not just be for clarification purposes but for citing instances of critical self-contradiction on the part of the autobiographer, who would double as the subject of the quasi-historical but, all the same, creative reconstruction. Unfortunately, no autobiography of Fagunwa existed; so, how can any exist again? Certainly, his sudden death over five decades ago would never allow that to happen even if a very serious intention on his part to bring it about could be established.<sup>3</sup> One might, therefore, wonder how the frontiers of sociological knowledge on Fagunwa – as an African literary icon and a canon of Nigerian literature – could be further pushed without reinforcement from his autobiography? At least, since we may not want to adopt Williams L. Andrews' rather sweeping definition of autobiography which could make the novels of Fagunwa qualify as autobiographical representations: “fiction of factual representation” (1986: 20); this seeming bewilderment might always impose itself on any critical engagement with all the dimensions of Fagunwa's life as a committed agent in the propagation of African literature. This concern should be seen as of critical importance in the face of Wole Soyinka's conjectures on Fagunwa, existing in Soyinka's published memoir, 'You Must Set Forth at Dawn,' which go somewhat contrary to an account rendered by Fagunwa's own heartthrob Mrs. Elizabeth Fagunwa.<sup>4</sup> While Soyinka would want to subscribe to a rather popular notion that Fagunwa was somewhat a human mystery, Mrs. Fagunwa would just want to argue otherwise.<sup>5</sup> Shall we reproduce Soyinka's exciting reconstruction of the circumstances of Fagunwa's death in some length to reveal the conjectures:

It was while waiting for a pontoon at Lokoja that the doyen of the indigenous language novel – D. O. Fagunwa – would vanish in the most mysterious manner, as mysterious as his novels that formed our fictional sensibilities from childhood and peopled that accommodating world with its strange characters – *Ogboju*

Ode *ninu Igbo* Irunmale, *Igbo Irinkerindo*, etc. [...] So many versions of Fagunwa's death – or disappearance – but all are agreed that he was standing by the River Niger in broad daylight, waiting for the pontoon, like others, to take his motor car across the river. Perhaps he strolled along the embarkment and slipped – here the versions diverge – but he was never seen again, nor was his body ever recovered. *It was as if he had been claimed by one of those very creatures that crowded his imagination and were vividly brought to life in his work, as if one of them had emerged from that naked sunlight, visible to him alone, taken his arm and led him off into the unfathomable habitations of the mind* (Soyinka 2006: 55-56)[Emphasis mine].

Soyinka's adoration of Fagunwa as revealed in the foregoing notwithstanding; for Elizabeth Fagunwa, her husband was an ordinary human doing what many others had done and many are still doing, and which many more will still do within the literary enterprise in general and the African literary domain in particular. However, she would not dispute the fact that her husband's commitment to the African literary enterprise was that of marvelous devotion to duty.<sup>6</sup>

Ironically, while Mrs. Fagunwa had been uncomfortable with Soyinka's well-intended conjecture, the exquisite programme of event held by participants at the Fagunwa colloquium of 2012 in Akure contained a diversion of the narrative which she probably would have found offensive. Here is the account reproduced to an appreciable extent:

Fagunwa, a master of rhetoric and prolific Yoruba literary writer wrote his first book entitled “Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale.” Like his other subsequent books, *Ogboju Ode* is a novel with richly (sic) language that relied mostly on folklore, tradition and idioms, including many supernatural elements. His heroes are usually Yoruba hunters while he explores the divide between the Christian beliefs and traditional religious practices. *And because of his frightening imaginative mind and intense philosophy, Fagunwa was thought to be a spirit or had a direct communication with the spirit world.*[...] While some said

Fagunwa died on 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1963 in a ghastly motor accident, others believe the writer and philosopher died by drowning in the River Niger, Bida, Niger State on 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1963. [Emphasis mine]

Certainly, Madam Fagunwa's worry would not have been necessary suppose the claims and conjectures had been part of Fagunwa's autobiography. This is because we would be dealing with a “self-portrait” that an autobiography is said to be, according to William L. Howarth (1974: 364). What we may have to sieve out of the complications that the narratives of his death present is the fact that certain uniqueness characterised both Fagunwa's existence and exit; the uniqueness characterises his artistry as well. We may go on to infer that his widely circulated novels manifest this uniqueness so much that the novels are interestingly lent to the zoologist evaluation;<sup>7</sup> not only that, we might also join in asking exactly the same way the title of the published lecture of Duro Adeleke does – “*Leyin Itan Aroso D.O. Fagunwa Maraarun, Ewo lo ku?* (What else is Left After the Five Novels of D.O. Fagunwa?)”.

It is obvious that, in a specific sense, Fagunwa Studies as an academic concern might, occasionally if not always, yearn for Fagunwa's autobiography when the need arises for making claims and affirming them with regard to the mentality and critical intentions behind the self-givingness that marks Fagunwa's literary exploits – that is, the selfless temper which he carried into the assignment of fictive composition and the promotion of the literary enterprise through his roles in the African publishing industry. What this means for the business of academic inquiry into the life of Fagunwa and critical valuation of his creative works (particular inquiries that seek to draw a connection between the author and his creative works) is a situation of dire need for autobiographical pronouncements on Fagunwa. This may not necessarily be needed to serve in illuminating discourses on Fagunwa but even to engender critical complications that help to stimulate scholarly interest.

Yet, can one dispute that Fagunwa's literary works have enough autobiographical materials so much that they can be approximated to Fagunwa's autobiographical intentions? The answer to this should be in the affirmative rather than negative because the arguments that pushes for the recognition of the literary value of autobiographical writings equally push for the autobiographical value of works of creative writers. And in arguing this way, the contention that the basic source of supply of materials for factual and fictional writings are human life; and experience cannot be discounted as Oriaku contends:

Since it is life and man's experience that constitute the raw material from which all literature derive, it is often difficult to say where fact ends and fiction begins, where fiction comes into a portrayal of real life situations or where fact is presented as fiction. Even in the so-called "pure" autobiographies it is often difficult to say when and where the writers have consciously distorted the facts to such an extent that we can question the purity of these works (Oriaku 1998: 2).

The implication of Oriaku's contention as presently cited is that Mrs. Fagunwa's disagreement with Soyinka could still have been impossible to address in a specialized autobiography of Fagunwa, should one exist, let alone any other, regardless of the expertise of such a biographer. Therefore, it can only be said that the same source of 'raw material' for factual and fictional writings can only serve in a critical valuation of either the author or her/his creative text(s) or both at once. In the absence of Fagunwa's autobiography, critical valuation such as the present could harness materials from the same basic source of writings in order to critically reconstruct Fagunwa as a star of the African literary enterprise and a major reference in the Nigerian literary history.

### **Sociological Merit and Testimonial From 'Tradition Bearers'**

A discourse of the intersection of the literary output of a creative writer and

historical happenings arising from it or closely connected to it would at least be recognized as a valid academic exercise within the ambits of literary sociology. The sociology of the creative writer and/or that of her/his works cannot be divorced from the interest that historical scholarship should have in literary sociology. On this count, the impact Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa's writing has made, going by sociological measurement of knowledge production within specific social contexts and specific social influences on knowledge, should count as an attractive academic discourse in contemporary literary studies, particularly in Nigeria and, of course, on the whole continent of Africa.

The emergence of Fagunwa as a pioneering African writer took place at a defining point in the history of literary practice in modern Africa. This is because, as of the time of the publication of his groundbreaking Yoruba novel –*Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* – African literary writers in either indigenous language or European languages were yet to gain distinct visibility on the African literary scene. Particularly, the Yoruba section of the African literary scene had not been as prominently introduced as it came to be with Fagunwa's successful publication of his first novel. This is why Ayo Bamgbose is unequivocally of the view that “[b]efore him no other writer has had the same impact on the Yoruba literary scene, nor the same influence on subsequent writers (Bamgbose 1974:1). That the moment was defining should appeal to some interest within African literary historical scholarship, perhaps in a measure similar to how it has engaged the critical attention of African literary studies. Fagunwa's exhibition of interest in creative writing and his daring courage to translate his dream of creative writing into reality were remarkable. The multivalent ways his creative works reflect his personal experiences and the reality of his social environment, and the peculiar way his appearance at the creative furor has laid the foundation and subsequently inspired the formulation of the social mechanism (if not even the origination) of a Yoruba community known as Igbo-Olodumare<sup>8</sup> amount to a continuum of discourse that cannot but border on the discursive interests of literary and historical studies.

At an early stage in his life, Fagunwa developed interest in creative writing. While this early literary inclination is often quickly linked with his western education and the influences some classical literary works have had on him, his exhibition of rare courage remains an outstanding quality of commitment probably better considered as innate. The present researcher had the unusual privilege of accessing some accounts of Fagunwa's early literary inclination from some "bearers" of Fagunwa's oral account. First is the account rendered by the incumbent Ogbolu-Osin of Igbo Olodumare, High Chief Iyiola Oluwayemi, who, according to him, as a little boy was always with his father on a farm very close to a thick forest Fagunwa would always visit for creative tranquility and inspiration. The second account is that rendered by Fagunwa's own confidant and younger associate, the late Pa Fayemi. The two oral "eyewitness" accounts could be conflated into a noteworthy attestation to Fagunwa's rare breed among the partakers of the enterprise called modern African literature. The very useful insights both accounts provide for a deeper understanding of Fagunwa's literary achievement and influence, and the dimensional critical standpoint they stand to lend Fagunwa studies<sup>9</sup> would subsequently make them sub-sectional preoccupations of the present study.

On the whole, Fagunwa's literary exploits which intertwined with his huge investment in the African book culture remain unusual. The rarity of these aspects of his life perhaps accounts for the near "apotheosizing" or rather "deifying" of him. These aspects are of stimulating effect in the discourse of the agency of his work as well as that of his life as a creative writer with commitment. Altogether, the literary value of Fagunwa's life and creative writing is all the more stimulating as historical knowledge about him is widened to accommodate the concealed part of his rarity as an African creative writer.

### **Testimonial: Creative Tranquil and Cost of Daring**

D.O. Fagunwa's artistic commitment and his obsession with appreciation of



nature interconnect. Perhaps when he was at Saint Andrew's College, Oyo or when he had graduated from the college and was a teacher at St Andrew's Practising School, Oyo, where he was in charge of the nursery unit between 1930 and 1939, his obsessive submission to the pull of nature's tranquility began, at least noticeably. This answering-of-a-call-of-nature in a mode similar to that of the English Romantic writer was a stretch of experience that should be seen as bifurcated in certain respects. As the head of a unit in a primary school, Fagunwa would take time out to escape into nature's own recess which a forest somewhere around the location of the school of his first primary assignment could be said to be. That was where Fagunwa would tap into the abundance of nature's tranquility for the invigoration of his creative spirit. As his spirit was reveling in nature's abundant tranquility so were monumental scratches of a highly gifted fictive writer displacing the idleness of the moment with imperialist zest for Fagunwa's creative genius to reign.

In a bit of oral account of Fagunwa's early exhibition of an obsession for creative writing made available to the present researcher by the late Pa Fayemi, a marker of historicity emerges: a very harmless act of creative writing almost turned deadly. Fagunwa, the head teacher, was said to have temporarily endangered his life as he was perceived to be a danger to residents of the area in which his place of work was located. And why was it so? It was because of the high frequency with which Fagunwa escaped into the forest and occasionally came out to buy cooked yam to quench his hunger. Since he was perceived as a danger-in-waiting, the residents around had no option other than to confront him. A gun at the ready was part of the preparation to confront the perceived emerging menace which should be nipped in the bud. Not until Fagunwa revealed his identity as the head teacher in charge of the nursery unit of St Andrew's Primary School in the town and convincingly disclosed his harmless intent to compose a creative piece in the quiet of nature for the benefit of fellow humans was his life spared.<sup>10</sup>



Fagunwa's creative genius appeared forever active even while at home and should be resting or ready for sleep. Fagunwa would rather opt to drive around in Ibadan at night. This nocturnal outing was for no other reason than for creative inspiration, Fagunwa once confessed upon his wife's inquiry. In the characteristic manner of one fully conscious of the limit of human mental retention, no matter how important an idea to remember is, he would quickly scribble ideas that occurred to him on a piece of paper in order not to forget. Apart from driving around town at night, he could choose to visit a cemetery – all for creative inspiration. All these instances of daring courage, as Madam Fagunwa inferred, must have led to the belief held by some that Fagunwa was a member of the cult called the *Ogboni*.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the periods of the manifestation of Fagunwa's spirit of artistic commitment overlapped with his hunting expeditions to a forest which later became known as Igbo Olodumare – a replication of one of the titles of Fagunwa's novels.<sup>12</sup> As gathered from the present Ogbolu-Osin of Igbo-Olodumare – Chief Iyiola Oluwayemi, Fagunwa – was a regular visitor to the thickest and the only dreaded unplumbed part of the farming area, a thick forest somewhat far away from where the late Pa Joshua Oluwayemi, the first Ogbolu-Osin of Igbo Olodumare, would farm. Fagunwa's daring venture into the dreadful part of the farmland was a unique experience for the older Oluwayemi and other farmers who could not but be amazed at Fagunwa's dare devilry. However, more importantly, Fagunwa was, most likely unknowingly, laying the historical foundation of a community, of a people, by way of what arguably was Fagunwa's experience of the artist's natural inclination towards nature's harmony for inspiration in imagining ahead of writing, or even in imagining and writing in one discontinuous process. Added to these was Fagunwa's constant attraction to nature's peeping through the rising towers of modernity that littered emerging cosmopolitan centers like Lagos and those scantily marking out political hot-spots like Ibadan. Taken together, an obsession with nature had developed in him as his artistic commitment grew in leaps and bounds. It cannot be too surprising then that with such a rapidly developing artistic

commitment of his, the unique creative tonic that nature's quietness exclusively offers had to be desperately sought by Fagunwa, even at a cost amounting to a grave danger to his life. Fagunwa's unequalled commitment to creative writing, Pa Fayemi recalled, was such that would make their traveling from Ibadan to Lagos via Sagamu-Ikorodu axis such a prolonged one as Fagunwa would stop intermittently to observe the movements of birds and other animals as well as their shapes and colours, all as part of his stream of creative involvements. It is remarkable, though sad enough that, Fagunwa's unfortunate demise owed to his daring commitment to the promotion of the literary enterprise in Nigeria. He had gone to make contacts on behalf of Heinemann Nigeria as part of business promotion strategies in the Northern part of Nigeria. On his return which turned out to be aborted, he had to tarry a while for the arrival of the ferry that was to take him across River Wuya. One more but that which was to be the final: the urge for unification with nature was probably aroused in him while he anticipated the arrival of the ferry. In response to the urge, Fagunwa's strolling on the embarkment led to the loss of his enviably productive life; he probably miscalculated in his pacing on the bank of the river and drowned in River Wuya.

The foregoing account of Fagunwa's death may face a challenge of oversimplification if the diverse ways in which the narrative of his death is pushed to a conclusion are not critically remarked. From the narrative of Fagunwa's uncommon exploits by the late Ogbolu-Osin, High Chief Oluwayemi, to Soyinka's crafting of a narrative of Fagunwa's terrestrial expiration by way of mysterious disappearance or commonplace death by drowning, the literary legend, Fagunwa, recurs as a subject of critical conjectures. That his novels construct worlds, events and characters that provoke somewhat similar critical conjectures make the study of Fagunwa's life and times an organic piece for a wholesome literary critical study.

### **Testimonial: Heinemann Journal**

Another bit of information to be considered as his personal testimonials is the editorial comment introducing the report of his personal contribution to an edition of the “House Journal” of the Heinemann Group (the international publishing outfit that hired Fagunwa's service after his retirement as education officer in 1961) as the Manager of Heinemann Nigeria. The edition came out in 1963 – the year after Fagunwa was employed as the “Nigeria Manager of Heinemann Educational Books.” The climatic manner in which Fagunwa is painted in the editorial of the edition is as recommending as it is outstanding. The bit may be worth quoting at length in view of the biographical value it carries. Attempting to wet the appetite of readers with what to expect as reports from various Heinemann 'station managers' across the world, the editorial represents Fagunwa as a columnist and lists him alongside other chief agents of the publishing outfit located across the continents of the world. The editorial goes thus in part:

*Prologue* offers you greater joys. We are not contended with such next-door places as Majorca or Amsterdam; we offer you Vancouver, Hong Kong and Ibadan. Bob Southgate rushed across the continent from Toronto to Vancouver seeing cowboys, cows, mounties and mountains, rushing falls and rushing cars and describes it all in a wonderful log on page 22. Having enjoyed that journey ('Will it be Vancouver?' You may ask the wife. 'Shall I ask the Managing Director for a transfer to our Canadian office?') you will perhaps read about the Hong Kong Night Clubs and Schools from Leon Comber, whose vivid descriptions of people and places may make you wonder whether a transfer to S.E. Asia might not be more agreeable, after all. But, just as you are getting used to the idea, you will turn back the pages to Chief Fagunwa, and it will seem incredible that you have not already asked for a transfer to Ibadan” (1963:1).

While Fagunwa's contribution is here presented as the climatic of the editorial, it is interesting and noteworthy that Fagunwa's contribution comes before any other contribution apart from the editorial.

Fagunwa's own contribution is a report on his management of the Nigeria branch of Heinemann. That report obviously is his singular contribution to the Heinemann series. Though short, it is informing enough to stand in for Fagunwa's autobiographical account as a business promoter in the book industry and, indeed, a deserving M.B.E awardee recognised for his "services to literature in 1959" (Fagunwa 1963: 2). Part of Fagunwa's contribution to the edition of the journal is a short biographical piece that runs epigraphically before Fagunwa's enthusiastic managerial report. The report which is written in fine English should have been necessary to reproduce in full if one were to showcase Fagunwa's erudition in the use of English as a testimonial of his deliberate choice of Yoruba for the writing of his novels. Nonetheless, since the present study is more focused on Fagunwa's contribution to the promotion of book culture in Nigeria, the contribution may be accordingly reproduced in part but, all the same, at an appreciable length. Here is Fagunwa's report in his own well-chosen diction:

THE SUCCESS of Heinemann publications lies in the aim on which *Prologue* is based. [...] Nigeria branch opened in January 1962, and there is no doubt that we are already gaining wide popularity and goodwill. Ibadan, which is our Headquarters, has been described as the largest black city in the world. Within the last two decades Ibadan has become the capital of Western Nigeria and a University City. To understand our own problems in Nigeria, one has to understand what Nigeria itself is. Nigeria is a young nation newly formed from a number of heterogenous races. In size, the country is six and a half times the size of England and Wales put together. Western Nigeria consists of many tribes, chief of which is Yoruba.

In the West, there are about two hundred Secondary Grammar Schools, one hundred Teacher Training Colleges and four

hundred Secondary Modern Schools. The number of Primary Schools in Western Nigeria alone is about eight thousand and the total number of the Primary School population in the Region is about one and a half million.

We opened our office with a small staff and our problem was how to get into the heart of the schools. I took charge of Secondary Grammar Schools and Teacher Training Institutions, but as I have said, there are only hundreds of these as against thousands of Elementary Schools. Up till present, I have not visited more than half of the Secondary Grammar Schools and Teacher Training Colleges, despite all the efforts I am making and I cannot leave solely to other publishers the million and a half Elementary School population. I had to employ what I term Advertisement Assistants, whose duty it is to go into the Elementary Schools to advertise Heinemann's publications. I decided to employ ladies, chiefly because I know that men more readily respect ladies than they do men and, what is more, men can be vain before the opposite sex; this vanity could be used for good purposes! My plan works and whereas I have not so far entered the Primary Schools myself, Heinemann's books for elementary schools are receiving attention all the same. This of course is coupled with my own personal contact with education authorities.

Now Secondary Schools and Teacher Training Institutions are scattered all over Nigeria and they must be visited. Experience has shown that one man cannot do more than three schools a day since it takes an average of one hour to finish with a school and one school may be separated from another by a distance of thirty or more miles. What we do first is to notify the Principal of an institution of my impending visit, stating the date but not the time. Then to book accommodation for my stay in the area. This is not very easy. [...](Fagunwa 1963: 3-4).

The only edition of *Prologue* which bears Fagunwa's own report on the Nigeria branch of Heinemann will remain a valuable resource material for further study on Fagunwa and/or Heinemann's role in the history of the Nigerian publishing industry.

### **Testimonial: Account of Fagunwa's Closest Aide**

Having access to the closest aide of the literary icon, Fagunwa, was wholesomely stimulating. And being in the company of this personality of scholarly value on a visit to the surviving wife of the literary icon was a golden opportunity in gaining insights into Fagunwa's life and times. The present scholar, his mentor – Professor 'Segun Adekoya, and Pa Fayemi paid a scheduled visit to Madam Elizabeth Fagunwa in her residence at Oke-Igbo 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013. It was revealing that Madam Fagunwa who had not seen Pa Fayemi for several years quickly became enthusiastic as she sighted Pa Fayemi. Her remark that Pa Fayemi was the one who knew Fagunwa so well was enough confirmation of the close relationship earlier proclaimed in the presence of the present researcher by Pa Fayemi himself approximately a year before the visit to Madam Fagunwa.<sup>13</sup>

Fayemi, like many of his peers in the Yoruba speaking parts of Nigeria, had been nurtured on the novels of Fagunwa. Sometime afterwards he became Fagunwa's aide and confidant. In fact, it was when fate brought the two close to each other as co-workers within the colonial Educational Authority in Ibadan that the foundation of their life-long cordial relationship began. Fayemi was to join Fagunwa immediately after Fagunwa's retirement as the Heinemann Group employed the service of Fagunwa as the head of its Nigeria branch. Since mutual understanding and respect had been existing between the two, Fagunwa secured the consent of Fayemi with ease and both with two other staff – Mr. A. Agbabiaka and Mrs. Ayeni – kickstarted the Nigeria unit of the international publishing outfit. The Heinemann office in Ibadan was an apartment within Fagunwa's personal building. Despite this, the company's business interest was promoted diligently by the team of four until the sudden death of Fagunwa which created a huge gap that had to be hurriedly filled. The sudden demise of Fagunwa necessitated that Fayemi step in as the interim coordinator of the business affairs of the Heinemann unit, perhaps in a haphazard manner that could not have been necessary except in temporarily filling the huge vacuum created by

Fagunwa's death. Fayemi held forth until Peter Ugo took over and successfully managed, for many years, the Nigeria's Heinemann unit using the foundation well laid by Fagunwa.

In gathering important testimonials about Fagunwa and constructing a literary history around the personality of Fagunwa, where could Fayemi be inserted as a significant factor? Specifically, Fayemi would be most appropriately located in the history of Fagunwa's agency in the promotion of the Nigerian literary enterprise via publishing and marketing of literary productions. For approximately a year that the duo was together – that Fagunwa steered the ship of Heinemann Nigeria – the height Fagunwa recorded owed so much to Fayemi's readiness to assist his boss and the unalloyed loyalty the boss enjoys from him. Being the first to be invited by Fagunwa to join Heinemann and the only one among the supporting staff of three under Fagunwa who had had an official relationship with Fagunwa, his history of association with Fagunwa and commitment to his new assignments must have had positive impact on how the two other staff were disposed to their assignments.

Beyond this, Fayemi would qualify as the next after Fagunwa himself in the reading of Fagunwa's last two creative compositions. While Madam Fagunwa could afford not to take an interest in reading Fagunwa's creative pieces while they were together,<sup>14</sup> Pa Fayemi could not have afforded to be so 'lackadaisical.' This is because Fayemi typed *Adiitu Olodumare* – the last published novel of Fagunwa – and '*Ero n la Olodumare*' – the unpublished and the last of Fagunwa's creative compositions. On this count, the magisterial temper with which Fayemi spoke about Fagunwa's creative activities and nature as a writer has justification. When he specifically inquired about the whereabouts of the manuscript of *Ero n la Olodumare* with a sense of nostalgia, his emotion had special significance not just for him but also for validating claims made about Fagunwa based on the information gathered through him. Even if unvoiced, Fayemi's disappointment in seeking re-connection to a work of Fagunwa that bears his own imprint as



one who did its typing must have been huge. Alas, Femi Fagunwa (Fagunwa's first son) had misplaced it, Madam Fagunwa responded to Fayemi's inquiry. Even if missing, perhaps the manuscript is not lost forever: Fayemi disclosed that the last and the only unpublished of Fagunwa's creative compositions was completely typed by him and Fagunwa did serialize it on the radio station of the Western Region of Nigeria before his terrestrial exit. Therefore, all hope is not lost. Combing the archive of the radio station for the recording of the serialization might be the only hope of recovering an oral version of the written text.

## Conclusion

What the foregoing tell about Fagunwa can be approximated in sociological terms, on the one hand, and canonical terms, on the other. Fagunwa's influence derives from his literary exploits which started with his daring courage to write imaginatively. Yet, the same influence impacts the environment that witnessed the cutting of his creative teeth. The book, *Igbo- Olodumare*, has not only seen to the immortalization of its author; it has, indeed, seen to the casting of Fagunwa's literary image as an identity by which a whole community is known today, by which the community will keep projecting itself, and by which the community shall negotiate the course of modernity within which it exists.

On the other hand, Fagunwa's canonical merit is seen to be undeniable. Whereas, many a lasting canon of literature, wherever a literary tradition is recognised, have simply enjoyed the dominant projection of the critical institution housing the critics, the teachers, and the reviewers, Fagunwa's case is different. This is to argue that though the agency of the critical institution is crucial, Fagunwa's presence at the center stage of canon activities can also enjoy constant reminder through his imprint borne by the community that borrowed his name from one of the titles of his novels – *Igbo Olodumare*. Altogether, Fagunwa made history through active investment in the African literary enterprise; at the same time, history will



continue to be made not only through the impact his legendary novels will record but through the logo of the community called Igbo-Olodumare appropriated from Fagunwa's legacy.

Good enough, Fagunwa had published six outstanding novels in Yoruba and those are good enough resource materials for accessing his thoughts and aspirations and critically evaluating them. At the same time, Fagunwa's choice of Yoruba for the composition of the novels inspires curiosity as to why the Yoruba indigenous language was chosen over English in spite of the fact that English was the *lingua franca* and more so that his ability to speak English was not in doubt. Whatever was the motivation behind his choice of Yoruba may be difficult to ascertain since no autobiography of his exists to afford such insights as to determining whether this was a conscious act of commitment as a writer. Nevertheless, even if only by default, Fagunwa's choice of Yoruba speaks for his unequalled commitment against all odds. If this claim of Fagunwa's commitment is upheld, that commitment can be better evaluated using Oyin Ogunba's canvassing for "ethnological literature"<sup>15</sup> as a critical standard:

If literature occupies such an important position in the life of a community, it follows that the more indigenous it is, the better, because it, can then better fulfil its crucial function to that community. If (sic) follows also that no nation can live on alien literature and hope to attain spiritual or psychic fulfillment; indeed, such a nation would be infantile because her ideas, moods and sentiments are bound to be shaped according to the prejudices of other lands. [...] The primary concern of a people is with their own literature in whatever way this is defined (Ogunba 1978: 1).

As the foregoing evaluative standard enunciated by Ogunba stands in favour of Fagunwa's artistic commitment so it stands to be relevant in the reconstruction of Fagunwa's life history bearing in mind the constancy of that life's interpenetration with crucial points in the development of African

literature. This is because Fagunwa's writings in Yoruba – an indigenous African language – has remained a major reference point in the discourse of language promotion through creative writings. Who could say whether Fagunwa sensed the danger that presently alerts many to the possibility of losing the Yoruba language under the condition of our present existence. May be the response is coming too late, even from Professor Oladele Awobuluyi who delivered a heart-rendering lecture under the topic “Yoruba ko Gbodo Ku” (Yoruba must not become extinct). So much credit for Fagunwa's choice of linguistic medium of communication. Yet any evaluative discourse of Fagunwa would benefit a lot if there were to be an existing autobiography of his. In the present situation of eternal absence of the author and the non-existence of his autobiography, gaining insights into the actuality of his life would appear only possible through critical reading and evaluation of whatever is left to consider as his testimonials.

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### Endnotes

1. See Bernth Lindfors' citing of Thomas Mofolo. Bernth Lindfors, *Folklore in Nigerian Literature*. Ibadan: Caltop Publications (Nigeria) Limited, 2002.
2. See BernthLindfors, *Early Nigerian Literature*. Ibadan: Caltop Publications (Nigeria) Limited, 2002.
3. Fagunwa was said to be writing a piece before his death in 1963. It may be modest enough not to totally preempt Fagunwa's actual intention since the manuscript has since not been found.
4. Elizabeth Fagunwa is the surviving wife of the late D.O. Fagunwa. From Fagunwa's passionate mention of her important contributions to his management of the Nigeria Branch of Heinemann, she obviously was the heartthrob of the late literary icon. See D.O. Fagunwa “Heinemann in Nigeria”. *Prologue: The House Journal of the Heinemann Group*. No. 2, Vol. 1. (1963):2-5.
5. In spite of this contradictory temper, Madam Fagunwa subscribed to the

notion that her husband was, indeed, of special breed during an interaction with her in her residence at Oke-Igbo in 2013.

6. The present writer noted Mrs. Fagunwa's objection to Wole Soyinka's report on the late Fagunwa during an interview conducted with her in her residence in Oke-Igbo in 2013. At the interview was Professor Olusegun Adekoya, the theses (M.A and Ph.D) supervisor of the present writer, who equally noted Mrs. Elizabeth Fagunwa's discomfort over Soyinka's conjecture. Mrs. Fagunwa reiterated her claim during the session of the 2013 edition of Fagunwa International Colloquium held in Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria when she alongside her children was accorded the special privilege of giving remarks about their patriarch. The colloquium held under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Education, Ondo State and Fagunwa Study Group between Thursday August 8th and Saturday August 10, 2013. The report on Fagunwa being contradicted by Mrs. Fagunwa appears in Wole Soyinka, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn --Memoirs*. Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2006, pp. 55-56.
7. See Tola Badejo. *The Zoologist in Fagunwa*. A Paper Delivered by Prof. 'Tola Badejo (Vice-Chancellor, Wesley University of Science and Technology, Ondo) at the Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa Memorial Lecture, under the Aegis of D.O. Fagunwa Foundation, held at the Faculty of Arts Lecture Theatre, University of Lagos, on Friday, December 7, 2012.
8. The agrarian community known as Igbo-Olodumare is relatively a newly founded community whose foundation and operative social mechanism owe a lot to Fagunwa's unusual literary exploits and influence.
9. The existence of a scholarly group called Fagunwa Study Group should authorize a notion such as Fagunwa studies.
10. This is on the authority of the Late Pa Fayemi, a closest confidant of Fagunwa
11. Madam Fagunwa nevertheless debunked this claim. Pa Fayemi also attested to the counter-claim that Fagunwa was such a devout Christian that would never use traditional African medicine because of his Christian faith. Pa Fayemi further attested to Fagunwa's exceptional Christian faith by citing the instance of Fagunwa's rejection of invitation to join a cult extended to him by one of his (Fagunwa) close relatives. Further, Fagunwa was confirmed to be an active member of St. James Okebola, Ibadan.
12. Igbo Olodumare exists today as a distinct community in Oke-Igbo Local

Government area of Ondo State with a traditional political administrative structure headed by the Ogboluosin of Igbo Olodumare. The present researcher personally visited the community in a bid to confirm its existence as well as claims bordering on its historical foundation.

13. The present writer finds it noteworthy that Pa Fayemi was specially introduced to a relation of Madam Fagunwa by Madam Fagunwa herself as one who worked with 'Baba Diipo' – Fagunwa. It was a further confirmation of Pa Fayemi's self-report which was quickly confirmed by Madam Fagunwa upon sighting Pa Fayemi during the scheduled visit.
14. Madam Fagunwa made this confession while disclosing that she later realized the awesomeness of her hubby's creative genius.
15. This is meant to suggest a literary practice original to and peculiar to a people with distinct culture, experience and history.

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