

# INDIGENOUS CULTURES AND ORAL PERFORMANCE FOR NATIONAL REBIRTH

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**ABSTRACT:** *Culture is one of the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum and is inextricably linked to indigenous peoples' identity, their traditional knowledge, their experiences with the natural environment and hence their territorial and cultural rights. Cultural practices, traditions and values of indigenous peoples – as long as they are in line with human rights principles – can play a critical and positive role in advancing and promoting gender equality and human rights. It has been widely acknowledged as a key element to be taken into account in order to achieve the development goals set by the international community. Indigenous cultures are threatened with extinction. The importance of land and territories to indigenous cultural identity cannot be stressed enough. 90 per cent of all languages will disappear within 100 years. It is usually estimated that there are between 6,000 and 7,000 oral languages in the world today. Most of these languages are spoken by very few people, while a handful of them are spoken by an overwhelming majority of the world. About 97 per cent of the world's population speaks 4 per cent of its languages, while only 3 per cent speaks 96 per cent of them. A great majority of these languages are spoken by indigenous peoples, and many (if not most) of them are in danger of becoming extinct. Roughly 90 per cent of all existing languages may become extinct within the next 100 years. This paper therefore looked into the culture from the screen of the Nigerian major tribes- Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba; the shift in the indigenous practices and the danger inherent in it and possibilities of making a U-turn from the foreign domination to the national rebirth of togetherness, participatory oral performance, security of economy, societal norms, live and properties and securing of national recognition and identity.*

**Key Words:** Indigenous culture, communication, national rebirth, methods and application.

## Introduction

Nigeria is composite of multi ethnic peoples of different languages and cultures depicting from native mentalities and customs to showcase different lifestyles. The disparity, each of the groups tries to showcase in their cultures is a cause to the contravention among the citizens; this nation has been facing for years in social, economic, religious and educational aspects and has been a hindrance to the firm unity of this nation. Ethnically, Nigeria has majorly been known for three groups namely; Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo under which numerous tribes and languages exist. Perhaps, Nigeria is an emblem of fortifiable cultures in giving a rebirth to the nationwide. Indigenous cultures ought to be applicably enough as paraphernalia to gain a rebirth being precedent and preeminent.

Customs of Nigeria are only concise, authoritative and up to- date discussion of Nigerian culture that introduces to a Western audience the complexity of society and the emerging lifestyles among the various peoples. Students and other interested readers will learn about all major aspects of Nigerian cultures and customs, including the land, people and brief historical overview; religion and world view; literature and media; art and architecture/housing; cuisine and traditional dress, gender, marriage; and family; social customs and lifestyles, and music and dance. Nigerians are proud of their diverse culture comprising more than 250 ethnic groups. Important changes in their economy and political system are helping them cope with challenges in the modern world, culture and customs of Nigeria illuminates a dynamic society-how Nigerians today live, work, worship, interact and express themselves. (Nwanegbo et al 2014; Imam et al 2014) (Toyin Falola, 1995 - 2002).

However, the linkage between culture and development established by scholars asserts that culture cannot be ignored in a discourse of a rebirth as actually called for cultural retention or such evidence of the survival of a nation. Thus the history of early Arabic culture and literature has a very tangible contribution depicting the significance of culture and communication which might happen to the spirit and tool applicable for a rebirth and emancipation. The Arabian culture of unity by the act of preparing foods and calling numerous peoples to eat, an addictive habit of them generally accepted a significant part of their cultures rendered as the definition of the early Arabic culture and customs; 'Sunhu -t-toham wa da'wah

ilayhi'(preparation of food and inviting people to it). Torfat Ibn Habd said: "Nahnu fil mushtaat nadhu jafalah La tara-l-Ahdiba fina yantaqir", meaning: 'we are in a big occasion inviting different peoples to eat, never you the food provider segregates'. The mechanism used to unite themselves was the aspect of giving foods to each other and had been the means of boasting among them .This rather causes positive envyousness in taking their cultures and literatures to the awareness of the entire world (Halliru, 2013).

### **Nigerian Indigenous Cultures: Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa in National Rebirth**

#### **Igbo Cultures**

Igbo people as one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa with about 15million are living in Nigeria and another ten million living outside. Dozens of dialects could be considered in the Igbo group because Igbo land is an aggregation of self-contained towns and villages, separated from each other by dense bush, which would have been correct to speak of Igbo as a single people. Although their customs and languages were clearly related, each group could have been considered a distinct society encompassing perhaps twenty or more villages. Igbo people realize that what they thought were distinct languages were different dialects of the same culture and sociopolitical organization. In that sense, the concept of a common Igbo identity is a product of the twentieth century.

Igbo people, in their origin, believe in prayer and sacrifice as their creation myth relates that in the beginning of the surface of the earth which was covered by water and no humans lived on it, Then one day, Chukwu (God) created the first human family composed of Eze Nri, his wife , his son, and his daughters. Eze Nri and his family stood on the top of an anthill and had nowhere to go because the land was submerged. They were also hungry. Chuwku looked down and took pity on their condition. He gave Eze Nri a piece of yam and said 'Take this, it is edible" Eze Nri and his family ate the yam and found it was good. The following morning, they were hungry again and Eze Nri prayed to God for more yams. Chukwu listened attentively and then gave him some yam seeds, saying 'plant these and you will have an abundance of yams".

Eze Nri accepted the yam seeds with gratitude. He looked around him and said to Chukwu, "But the land is covered with water" Chukwu instructed him to ask for Awka blacksmiths, who came with their bellows and blew until the land was dry. Chukwu then asked Eze Nri to sacrifice his first son and his first daughter and plant the yam seeds in their graves. Eze Nri obeyed. Shortly afterward, yam and coco yam tendrils sprouted from his children graves. Eventually, Eze Nri harvested yams and cocoyams and shared them among the Igbo people (Chinua Achebe, 1996).

#### **Democracy System of Igbo People**

The Igbo communities were known as extremely democratic, but they had no centralized government. Igbo subscribed to the principle of direct participation in government. Their entire social and political structure revolved around the idea of cross-cutting ties. The five most important cross-cutting institutions were the cultists of elders, age- group, councils of chiefs, women sorority and secret societies. Without them, the Igbo society would be starved of its essence and would disintegrate (Toyin Falola, 1995-2002).

#### **Occupational Engagement of Igbo people**

Igbo people have smelted and forged iron for centuries and their oral traditions are rich with accounts of iron working and use. The wide spread use of iron tools enabled the Igbo people to make better use of the forest. With iron tools they grew yams, cocoyam, bananas and plantains. Iron tools also helped them to cut down fruits from the tall palm trees and process them into edible and medicinal oil. The Igbo agricultural system was based on shifting cultivation, a type of rotating cultivation where the same fields were planted for several years in succession and then were left fallow to regain their fertility (Njoku, 2007).

#### **Youth hood and acquisition of Titles in Igbo land**

Most Igbo men eagerly sought admission into the council of chiefs, but not all could succeed. Every Igbo man began his life as an apprentice. A young boy accompanied his father or uncle to the farm and rendered as much as assistance as he could. As he grew older he learned that marriage, wealth, and acquisition of titles enabled individuals to advance socially. Until a man was initiated into certain tittles, he could not dress in certain ways, or wear hat of certain colours, or shake hands in certain ways, or take a piece of cola nut before other people. Like an Igbo man, every Igbo woman began her life as an apprentice, from a very young age a girl assisted her mother at home, on the farm, or in the market place. As she grew older she learned from experience that herd work, marriage and membership of certain association enabled women to advance socially. One of the most important women associations was omu (the Omu society) headed by female functionary, known as Omu (Toyin Falola, 1995-2002).

### **Igbo Marriage Customs**

The Igbo regarded marriage as the cornerstone of their whole social structure. Discussions leading to marriage were taken seriously, and they involved not just the immediate families of the bride and groom but also their entire lineages. Igbo people also realize that monogamy is a sure avenue to poverty, most husbands practiced polygamy. If a man failed to act promptly to increase the size of his households, his wife might bring additional wives to him. Having several women in a household enhanced not only a man status but also the prestige of the first wife. As the head woman of the household, she shares every title that the man might acquire. She personally involved, except in emergencies. Junior wives enjoyed the security and prosperity that large household provides (Njoku, Raphael Chijioke, November 2007).

### **Homicide**

Spilling the blood of a townsman or townswoman was a serious offence against the earth goddess. However, criminal justice system varied, especially in regard to how law breaks were punished. For example, whereas Igbo groups would hang a murderer, in certain towns a husband who killed his wife was hanged while in some towns a woman who killed her co-wife was not hanged, because both women belonged to the same man (Njoku, 2007).

### **Hausa Cultures**

The Hausa culture and environment is basically on Islamic setting, though a very small percentage of Hausa could be found in Maguzawa, 20 million Hausa- speakers live in northern Nigeria (Ogundiran, 2012). The Hausa community and its culture are said to be complex in nature possessing different aspects of life that are on the extremeness: whether in urban and rural setting, agriculture and highly specialized craft production etc. The Hausa land has been a melting pot of commercial activities civilization as a cosmopolitan centre for a long time; where the Hausa traders would travel all over the place from north to east and also West Africa, and also on pilgrimage sojourn to Mecca. However, Islam is the creed of the Hausas, which has made the connection with the Arabs in Islamic matters and religious activities closer (Gandu, 2016; Ologunwa, 2014). Their major occupations remain trading, agriculture and small-scale commerce (Osemeke & Osemeke, 2017). The introduction of Islam into Hausa land has really influenced their materials and non-material culture in terms of family matters, clothing, arts architecture, housing, and human habitation, occupation and tradecrafts (Samuel, 2000).

Seclusion of adult females is strictly practiced as a cultural norm and most of the Hausa communities are based on a patriarchal setting that bears a deep rooted male characterized head of family affairs, where the men carry most burden in taking care of the family's financial, feeding security, health, and also educational needs which was being imposed on them by Islamic right (Zakaria, 2001). Also the Hausa community is really an encouraging ground for the women to be actively engaged economically in their homes (Zakaria, 2001). However, despite their adherence to seclusion norms. Hausa women, especially in Kano sometimes conduct international business transaction.

### **Religion and Belief**

Prior to British colonial era in Nigeria in the late eighteen, the Arabic have had their base in the northern region of Nigeria through the sub- Saharan trade which paved way for them to settle in the region as the suitable ground to propagate the Islamic religion (Osemeke, 2017).

### **Political System**

It was said to be that the Hausa people of the north valued ruling or occupying prestigious political position as the climax of their social status, while, relegating economically or entrepreneurial derived achievement to a level before that. Yes due to the preponderance of culture of Petron-client relationship within the Hausa community, hence achieving progress in business was dependent upon patronage to people in power rather than entrepreneurship (Warren & Samuels, 1976).

### **Yoruba Culture**

Yoruba culture consists of cultural philosophy, religion and folktales. They are embodied in Ifa divination, and are known as the tripartite Book of Enlightenment in Yorubaland and in its diaspora. Yoruba cultural thought is a witness of two epochs. The first epoch is a history of cosmogony and cosmology. This is also an epoch-making history in the oral culture during which time Oduduwa was the king, the Bringer of Light, pioneer of Yoruba folk philosophy, and a prominent diviner. He pondered the visible and invisible worlds, reminiscing about cosmogony, cosmology, and the mythological creatures in the visible and invisible worlds. His time favored the artist-philosophers who produced magnificent naturalistic artworks of civilization during the pre-dynastic period in Yoruba land (Oyèláràn & Olásopé , 2018)

The second epoch is the epoch of metaphysical discourse, and the birth of modern artist-philosophy. This commenced in the 19th century in terms of the academic prowess of Bishop [Samuel Ajayi Crowther](#) (1807–1891). Although religion is often first in Yoruba culture, nonetheless, it is the philosophy –

the thought of man – that actually leads spiritual consciousness (Ori) to the creation and the practice of religion. Thus, it is believed that thought (philosophy) is an antecedent to religion. Values such as respect, peaceful co-existence, loyalty and freedom of speech are both upheld and highly valued in Yoruba culture. Societies that are considered secret societies often strictly guard and encourage the observance of moral values. Today, the academic and nonacademic communities are becoming more interested in Yoruba culture. More research is being carried out on Yoruba cultural thought as more books are being written on the subject (*Jacob, Oluwatayo & Adeuyan, 2011*).

One of the largest groups of Nigeria are the Yoruba, some millions of them live in Nigeria, part of Benin and Togo. Most of their residencies in Nigeria are the tropical forests and in the Western High Plains, which covered with Savannah parkland and grasslan (Falola, Heaton & Matthew, 2008).

### **Religion and Belief**

Traditional **Yoruba beliefs** hold that all people experience Ayanmo, which is destiny or fate In the **Yoruba religion belief** system, live and death is an ongoing cycle of existence in various bodies, in Ayé—the physical realm—as the spirit gradually moves towards transcendence. In addition to being a spiritual state, Oladumare is the name of the divine, supreme being who is the creator of all things. Olodumare, also known as Olorun, is an all-powerful figure, and isn't limited by gender constraints. Usually the pronoun "they" is used when describing Olodumare, who doesn't typically meddle in the everyday affairs of mortals. If someone wishes to communicate with Olodumare, they do so by asking the *orishas* to intercede on their behalf. (Fandrich & Ina, 2007).

Yoruba are inclined spiritually by worshiping numerous deities called Orisa, and they are between 400 and 600 Yoruba gods. They believe that some gods existed before the creation of the earth and others are heroes or heroines from the past that became gods after their deaths. Other gods are even natural in the objects in their environment such as hills, rivers etc. for whom they rendered servitudes connected to many sacred rituals, although, colonialism later influenced most of them to convert into Christianity and Islam. (Abimbola & Kola, 2005).

### **Works and Occupation**

The Yoruba have traditionally been among the most skilled and productive craftsmen of Africa. Major occupation of Yoruba is farming, planting of yams, cassava, corn and cocoa. Other men work as specialized tradesmen or craftsmen while some add farming works with hunting, fishing. However, a woman's position in society is mostly determined by her own work not by her husband's position. In Yoruba culture many objects are placed in the shrine to honour the gods and ancestors, there are beautiful sculptures that have been made with wood and brass. Other important art forms are masks, pottery, weaving, and beadworks, and working with metals. Yoruba are also known for drumming and traditional music(*Jacob Oluwatayo Adeuyan 12 October 2011*).

### **Marriage Affairs**

The Yoruba culture of western Nigeria is full of folklore, color, and pageantry. People are easy-going, friendly, very cosmopolitan, and contemporary, inventing clever ways to combine old traditions with more modern themes. Having the advantage of being exposed to western ideas, Yoruba people integrate modern customs into their traditional marriage ceremonies. The Yoruba traditional marriage ceremony, though a serious affair, is full of playfulness, rich contemporary Nigerian music, graceful colors, and sumptuous meals. Weddings are occasions to show best outfits, handbags, jewelry, and even dancing styles. The traditional wedding is an occasion to alleviate the drudgery of normal life and are greatly anticipated by friends and well wishers (Marc Schiltz, 2002).

Yoruba extra ordinarily care for women most especially spinsters among them. It is a taboo also known as abomination in Yoruba community to see a maid lost her hymen before marriage, that's to say, virginity was specially celebrated and also attaches more dignity to the family whose daughter had not been deflowered before marriage (Akintoye, 2010).

### **Application of Oral Performance In Indigenous Culture**

African oral forms cannot be adequately interpreted and understood from the swinging chair in academic offices or university classroom. Rather interpretation and understanding can take place only through direct participation and performance. This is characterized by participatory performance.

Most researchers of African oral literary performance experience interpretation difficulties in their fieldwork because the analytical frameworks they deploy do not belong to "world" of the oral performances. Understanding orawork depends on appreciation of the totality of their historical essence (Ogunjimi & Na'Allah, 2005).

It is an interesting scene that despite the vibrancy and variation in practice of oral performance throughout Africa, scholars of oral tradition, especially Western scholars and teachers of oral literature in African Universities insist on imposing foreign criteria on traditional African performances. Instead of giving chance for oral forms to speak with their own voices (Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah, 1997).

Interactions are used every day in our world and their mastery is an important skill and inevitable to all nativists of a particular culture and tradition. Had it permitted for every indigene to speak with his mother tongue or language of nativism it would have been very okay for everyone to share his or her experience, opinion and take to any issue arises and that can help in the rebirth of every nation. Interactions as memorized phrases or routines that people use and allow them to play a part in the development of their communities and nation at large; it is the ability to develop interest in contributions and communicate their needs and desires.

### **Low Oral Performance**

The Lingua Franca of every nation has a higher stand on its language of nativism and rendered them passive. It is however removing those who are unable to communicate with it useless, who cannot dabble into the affairs of the general community and nation. It also hinders their abilities to showcase the beauty of their various indigenous languages and customs that can assist in a rebirth of a particular nation if applicable. It also bridges up discrimination among the people of societies and calls for injustice. However, this calls for the need of people to fight for their rights which will bring peace.

### **Indigenous Language versus Oral Performance**

All human being tells stories, and many of their stories are based on their live experiences. The stories we tell, even in the age of ubiquitous textual and digital media speak about us, who we are. Rebirth of a particular nation could be predictable majorly by the application of indigenous languages and oral performance; both could be culminated to the uniqueness of cultural identity, collectivity of ideas, using cultures and nativism, togetherness and inclusiveness, creativity and exhibition(Cariou, 2016).

### **Uniqueness of Cultural Identity**

Intellectual discourse suggests that there is a big crisis of cultural identity and development. This may imply that a previous identity has been lost or alternatively that none has ever existed, but by merging indigenous languages with oral, a nation can gain a unique cultural identity which has many rewards, they provide a set of value upon which to base policies; the nation can represent a difference as the basis for dealing with other nation; and if the identity comes with dignity nation stature gets enhanced. The contrary, a lack of identity is worse; the nation remains a mere geographical expression, opens itself up for more cultural bastardization and expresses its citizens to degradation (Toyin Falola,1995).

### **Using Cultures in Modernization:**

This includes application of existing cultures and customs to coin a modern development and advancement in people standard of living. Nigeria as a nation could gain its rebirth by application of:

- The tactics of trading and transaction in Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo cultural system of economy discussed above;
- The unique definition of early Arabic literature (الأدب العربي) in summoning people for food a panacea to regain unity in the nation;
- Killing is a taboo in all Nigerian indigenous cultures and attracts killing as replication in consequence is applicable to reduce insecurity in the nation;
- Both men and women are meant to work in all Nigeria indigenous cultures promoting gender equality;
- Youths are compulsorily engaged in occupation in all Nigerian indigenous cultures as they are considered successors after their fathers, a mediator of idleness and indolence of youths in the nation;
- Using the Yoruba culture of safeguarding spinsters from losing their virginity as it has been considered as dignity for their families and community at large as an instrument to reduce fornication among youths and for spinster to see their virginity a dignity;
- In all indigenous cultures, youths must learn how to farm from their fathers, being the major occupation of Nigerians in the antiquity, a reflection for government to provide sound education for children and youths of the nation,
- Aaro in Yoruba land was organized to help people of the community; this could be applied in assisting each other in order to propel the spirit of love and unity.

### **Promoting Cultures and Nativism**

This is the ability to practice and apply indigenous cultures in the individual lifestyle, the community and the nation at large. Cultural values can help build a nation in all aspects and facets of life. All the qualities figured out with deep thoughts and researches are enough to gain a rebirth for a nation.

## Togetherness and Inclusiveness

Practice of indigenous cultures could build a hindrance to disunity and one party contribution to the welfare of a particular nation. It is a link that brings peoples of different races to reason together fetching from their different experiences from their various traditions and cultures in contributing to the development and wellbeing of the nation shall be firmly compacted.

## Creativity and Exhibition

By deep practicable reflection to the indigenous cultures, outcome might be many things invented for indigenous and international beneficiaries. This could be done by comparing the past to the present inventing the needful for people in the world of modernization.

## Conclusion

The needs of the societies to progress could be figured out from the indigenous cultures, while oral performance could be the instrument to revive cultural values from being instinct among the national societies. The indigenous cultures which we take for granted today would have been the stuff of fiction of a rebirth in the nation. If the people of antiquity with their primitiveness could manage themselves to gain survival from insecurity, bad economy, anti-social vices, disunity, iniquity, disorderliness in their informal education, bad leadership and administration, women genital cut and high rate of mortality, the contemporary generation could find solution to some challenges facing them and build a reasonable rebirth to the affairs of the nation by giving a tangible significance to indigenous cultures and making them a way of living the modern life of technology. The attainment of coveted and bonafide democracy which is requisite for idyllic life, has remained elusive because of the culture of corruption and political high handedness of various regimes, military and civilian which have culminated into mass poverty and disquietudes of the citizenry. The interventionist role of the indigenous cultures and their practitioners thus becomes imperative to reverse these cheerless trends and restore moral and social order in the nation.

## Recommendation

The following recommendations were made:

1. Government should give an utmost recognition to the indigenous cultures and motivate citizens to practice them.
2. Every citizen should attach importance to the indigenous cultures and make it a way of life.
3. Indigenous cultures should be applied in governmental administration for people to see them as important.
4. Practice of indigenous cultures should show our uniqueness from other tribes in the totality of our daily activities.

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