

*Preservation and Conservation of Grooves and Sacred Trees;
A Form of Cultural Heritage in Selected Towns in Lagos State, Nigeria*

Oluwakemi Taiwo Olabode, Michael Otedola College of Primary Education, Nigeria

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Abstract

Traditionally, the South Western (Yoruba) people appreciate and hold their traditional heritage in high esteem. In an attempt to keep it, efforts are made to protect it through taboos, signs and symbols to scarce people either from entering it incessantly to break the rules that guides it or destroy some of the artifacts or materials sacred to their use. However the development to upgrade villages to town and towns to cities threatened their existence especially the grooves, sacred trees and place of meeting or worship. In this regard I intend to evaluate how these cultural heritage are being preserved or retain in the selected towns, how does modernization or social development affect their preservation?, Is there any benefit or disadvantage to their preservation or total eradication? It's social implications in day to day activities will also be examined. In order to achieve this, I will interview those who are benefiting from its preservation i.e. the worshipers, custodians and the members of the community where this can be found. The latter will be divided into two groups; adults and the youths. I also intend to visit some of the existing ones to access their sustainnancy in the nearest future.

Keywords: Preservation, Conservation, Heritage, Grooves, Sacred Trees and Culture

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Introduction

The quest for serving/worshipping God and probably finding answers to some problems beyond human understanding leads man to seek for an intermediary. The gods in Yoruba beliefs acts as intermediary between them, hence any object that looks abnormal are worship in appreciation to God. As an unquestionable God, he made things the way it pleases Him, therefore any strange things or human are seen as exceptional things that needs to be worship or adore.

Not all the trees are sacred, what makes a tree sacred might be it's form or probably a human being turned to a tree or river, for instance a palm tree with two heads or tree with strange shape is likely to be worship. As reiterated by Arpita and Bharucha (2014) many traditional societies all over the world reverse and worship nature and consider certain plants and animals as sacred.

Indigenous African Religion is difficult to typify but some of their shared features are as follows;

- Myths about a rupture that once occurred between the creation deity and human.
- A pantheon that includes a high god and many secondary supernatural ranging from powerful gods to lesser spirits.
- Elaborate initiation rituals.
- Rituals including animal sacrifices and other offerings, meals and dance.
- Altars within shrine as focal places where humans and deities meet.
- Close links with healing (Barbara, 2011:304).

History of Lagos and Epe

Lagos is one of the largest cities in Nigeria, fondly called "Eko" by residents, located at 6°34'60"N, 3°19'59"E along the West Africa Coast and was formally known as the capital city of Nigeria since the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914. Lagos remains the economic capital of the country as it conveys a distinctive pattern in the history of growth and development of urban areas in Nigeria (Ajayi 2017; Olabode 2018).

There are twenty (20) Local governments in Lagos state, two of the Local governments. Epe and Eredo was selected for this research because of his proximity, also Eredo was carved out of Epe Local government. It is located on the north side Lekki Lagoon. Epe is a town and also a port, Lagos state, south western Nigeria it lies on the North bank of the coaster Lagos Lagoon and has road connection to Ikorodu and Ijebu-ode. A traditional settlement of the Ijebu people (a sub group) it was established by the mid 18 century as the chief port. It later served as the refuge for the forces of Kosoko, the Yoruba king ousted from Lagos. Modern Epe is the collecting point for the Export of fish, cassava, maize, vegetables etc ([www.Ilove Lagos. Com.ng](http://www.IloveLagos.Com.ng)).

Although 80% of Epe people claimed to be Muslim but this did not affect their religion affinity with traditional religion. Jimoh (2016) admits that the relationship between adherents of Islam and those of other religion especially the traditional religion worshippers were not eventless.

In Eredo, there is a grove called Sungbo walls which is being taking care by a Caretaker, whose dedication and personal devotion have kept the walls open and accessible. Because there was virtually no support from any quarters in maintaining the walls, some years now the wall have deteriorated (yourstrully-uche.blog sport.Com>2016/02)

Sacred Trees and Grooves in Yoruba Land

Traditional Knowledge has been used for centuries by indigenous Local communities to manage natural resources under Local Laws, custom and traditions. Arpita and Bharucha (2014)

There are shrines for divinities in grooves of trees and others near lakes, streams and rivers e.g. Akoko tree is sacred to Ogun and Osun is worshipped on a river bank shrines for Oro are found in grooves, and the Ifa initiation ceremony takes place in a thick forest. Ogun and Esu shrines are located outside the house. Their shrines are found at cross roads, by roadsides in open places in a village or city, outside the entrance to a house. (Beier, 1957; Simpson, 1994)

Idowu (1963) in Simpson(1994) emphasizes that "the Yorubas do not build sacred houses in which worshippers congregate. The congregations assembles in the open air in front of the temple or shrine at a shrine, the devotees gives the divinity his dues, and in turn he bestows his blessing on them.

In recent time, there a lots of sacred houses where people assembles for their meeting, there can be open processions round the town or certain designated places for cleansing of the town and rituals. Although most of the sacred trees are found in the open places closed to a major road.

All religion has mythologies and doctrines that provide for continuity in their beliefs and practices. Yet no religion is frozen and unchanging (Miller, 2011:305) He went further to supports that Religious beliefs are enacted in rituals that are periodic and non-periodic. Some common rituals worldwide are life-cycle rites, pilgrimage, rituals of inversion and sacrifice.

Preservation of Sacred Trees and Grooves as a Cultural Heritage

Preservation has been defined by Eluyemi, (2002: 2) as the promotion of cultural property whether of concrete or non-concrete nature past or present, written or unwritten /oral. He further posits that preservation involves the identification, documentation (appropriate registration) and proper storage of cultural objects whether in private hands or in museums. The preservation of Nigeria cultural heritages is arguably threatened by human activities, natural forces, biological and chemical agents among others (Ogundele, 2014; Okpoko, 2012). However, the little successes made over the years in the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritages has been attributed to conscious systematic and scientific efforts and researches connoted by professionals in the disciplines of archaeology, cultural anthropology, linguistic, ethnography, museum studies etc among other cultural resource managers (Ogundele, 2014; Onwuka, 2002; Andat, Okpoko and Folorunso, 1993; Okpokp,2011).

Preservation is very vital because of its capacity to promote the past ways of life that are useful to contemporary societies. (Fasuyi, 1973).

Arguably, the past is essentially the key to the present and platform into the future. This generational pattern of preserving Nigerian cultural heritages was completely or partially truncated in most parts of Nigeria due to unsolicited incursion of colonialism.

An understanding of the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritages can be best be described in three dimensions namely the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial. Nigerian cultural heritages during the pre- colonial era were preserved in royal places of tribal kingdoms and empires by kings, heads of families and kindred, deity priests in charge of shrines and groves among others. (Fasuyi, 1973).

Colonialism, thus earned the influence of traditional rulers and their role in preserving Nigerian cultural heritages.

These grooves are a rich source of fruit bearing trees and small water bodies and act as habitat for several birds and reptiles. Resource extraction in the Grooves is limited by a variety of rules to placate the deity. Cultural and biological diversity is even today relevant as a tool for natural conservation. In the villages in with grooves are protected regionally relevant folk knowledge supports traditional conservation practices.

Local people have evolved their own traditional rules and management based on ancient practices which led to conservation and maintaince of the grooves as relatively intact patches of forests as a by-products of their religious sentiments. During the last two decade farmers have sold large pieces of land to speculators for urbanization. This is due to the enormous rise in the price of land. This change has triggered several socio economic and cultural aspects in the region of a consequent loss of protective sentiments for the sacred grooves.

Efforts at preserving cultural heritage have gained new momentum throughout the world. Protecting cultural heritage in both economical and historical. This submission could not be used for the preservation of Grooves and sacred trees in Epe and Eredo local governments area. This is because no one except the worshippers and their leaders have access to the sacred place.

Heritages are cherished characteristic features of a society passed down for generation to generation through conscious preservation. Heritages refer to the riches of extinct and extant societies which are of historic, recreational and economic importance preserved and handed over from one generation to another.

Heritages could be categorized into two, based on their sources namely; ecological/natural heritages and cultural heritages. Ecological or natural heritages emanate from nature and environment. Ecological heritages can be defined as the relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas which it's wild plants (flora) and animals (fauna) and it's geomorphic features(caves, rivers, lakes, hills, mountains etc.

Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group

or society that are inherited from past generations maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generation. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/cultural-heritage>).

Cultural heritages evolve from man's ingenious activities, preserved and transmitted through oral traditions or in written concrete forms across generations of human societies (Onyima,2016;274).

Cultural heritages can be defined as the sum total of the people's cherished arts, customs, festivals, sacred or worship sites, norms, values, ideologies, dress and dress patterns, traditions monuments and architectures, technology and technological sites and other artifacts are cherished and conserved for their historical, political, educational, recreational and religious significance among others (Onyima 2016;275).

Colonialism ushered in an era of unrestricted negative human activities such as looting, vandalism, thefts, unscientific excavation of grave goods, iconoclasm, wars, illicit, trafficking of cultural objects among others.

In Post colonial period, the creation of National Commission for Museums Monuments to replace the Nigerian Antiquity Service with her headquarters in Abuja while national museum is in Onikan, Lagos State (Aremu, 2008). There are also private museums in Anambra, Jos, Esie Kwara state etc.

Methodology

According to Odukomaiya, (2002) sampling is taking of any small portion of the total population that is representing the complete population.

The population for this study is drawn from two (2) local government area of Lagos state out of 20 local government. 200 respondents were selected and sampled.

The questionnaires was divided into two part, the first part is for the 200 respondents which is general, the second part is specifically designed for the priests and the interview was taken orally, recorded and transcribed later.

Discussion

It is undeniable that the worship of the spirit inhabited tree has usually, if not always been limited with and in many cases overshadow by the other cults; that is Sun, moon and stars, sacred springs and stone, holy mountains, and animals of the most diverse kind have all been approached with singular impartiality by primitive man as enshrine or symbolizing a divine principle. But no other forms of pagan ritual can trace or appeal so closely to modern sympathies as the worship of tree.

It had been observed that almost all races at a particular time of their development had regarded the tree as the home, it may be impossible one can haunt, or embodiment of a spiritual essence...it may be impossible to found any country in the world that hardly not approached the tree with reverence or fear because of it spiritual potency.

In the Local context the sacred grooves have ecological values, economic concerns,

societal functions and use of traditional sacred. There are local institutions and rules of behavior towards the sacred site which lead to resources preservation. The Local people have evolved their own traditional rules and management based on ancient practices led to conservation and maintenance of the grooves as relatively intact patches of forests as a by-product of their religious sentiments. The change through enormous rise in the price of land triggered several socio-economic and cultural aspects in the region with a consequent loss of protective sentiments for the sacred grooves.

It is note worthy that most of the observed preservation cannot be effective in Yoruba land, especially the sales of sacred land/Tree or grooves. Despite, the effect of two other religion (Islam and Christianity), the fear to entered or cultivating/building on sacred trees/grooves is high.

However, there are some universal or acceptable way of preserving the sacred places worldwide as observed by Arpita and Bharucha (2014).

- Demarcated by palm fronts by entrance and thick forest.
- Not(always) maintained (emphasis is mine)
- The preservation of grooves is a result of strong ancient beliefs that any damage to the Groove would anger the deity who would take revenge on the intruder who desecrate its integrity.
- Women cannot enter the grooves.

Sacred Trees are mostly affected now because they were located in an open place very close to the major road; I think this one to is due to development because majorly most sacred trees are located in central area of the market or outside the town. However the grooves are always located at the outskirts of the town, no recent relocation of the groove is identified.

Also natural disaster can affect sacred trees especially wind and storms, despite this, both the worshippers and the member either attributes such to the Awesome power of God or that someone or the priest had offended someone whose power is higher, no one believes it's natural.

Like in other culture, it is not a common practice to own a sacred tree or grooves but it is possible to own a shrine.

Ten questionnaires were set for 200 respondents in order to find out their awareness of grooves and sacred trees in writing their community.

Groove in Epe is used as a store house for charms that cannot be kept in the town because it may be harmful.

Also it is for ritual activities during the operation of a dead pregnant woman, or hunch person before their burial, for they will be buried in the grooves.

Although, most trees that are found in the grooves are planted, but there are specific ones like life trees that are panted as poles for the gates where palm fronts are tied to protect intruders from entrance.

Table 4.1.1 Analysis of Age Distribution of Respondents

O b s e r v e d y e a r	F r e q u e n c y	P e r c e n t a g e
1 5 - 2 0	2	1 1 %
2 1 - 3 0	6	3 2 %
3 1 - 4 0	4	2 1 %
4 1 - 5 0	5	2 6 %
5 1 - 6 0	2	1 0 %

4.1.2 Gender Analysis of Respondents

V a r i a b l e	F r e q u e n c y	P e r c e n t a g e
M a l e	1 0	5 0 %
F e m a l e	1 0	5 0 %
T o t a l	2 0	1 0 0 %

4.1.3 Analysis of Religion of the Respondents

R e l i g i o n	F r e q u e n c y	P e r c e n t a g e
C h r i s t i a n	3	1 5 %
M u s l i m	9	4 5 %
T r a d i t i o n a l	4	2 0 %
O t h e r s	2	1 0 %

4.1.4 Analysis of the Educational Qualification of Respondents

Educational Background	F r e q u e n c y	P e r c e n t a g e
S S C E	9	4 5 %
N C E / D I P L O M A	6	3 0 %
H N D / B . S C	3	1 5 %
O T H E R	-	-

4.1.5. Information on longevity of sacred trees and grooves

V a r i a b l e	F r e q u e n c y	P e r c e n t a g e
M a l e	1 0	5 0 %
F e m a l e	1 0	5 0 %
T o t a l	2 0	1 0 0 %

72% of the Respondent agreed that they are of the existence of sacred tree and grooves 26% were between age 50 and above, who confirmed that the grooves and sacred tree can be existence between 50years and above. This indicates the strong believe that they rate of security and preservation in high. It was established that almost all the towns and villages have one or more grooves but sacred trees are not found in all the town, although they may be found in the grooves either by planting it of grow by itself.

4.1.6 Information about the power of government to relocate a sacred tree or grooves

V a r i a b l e	F r e q u e n c y	P e r c e n t a g e
Y E S	1 4 6	7 3
N O	3 4	1 7
I D O N ' T K N O W	3 0	1 5

Although 73% of respondents agreed that the government has power to relocate a groove or sacred tree, this shows that this set of people are knowledgeable about the Yoruba Culture. Before the colonial rule, it is believed that the land belong to the king (Fadipe,2012:98), due to civilization and western education and social development there was a shift and all lands belong to the government(FGN,1978 &1990).

The power of the government over the grooves and sacred trees is limited, this is evident at the recent ongoing road construction within the two Local governments, while the churches, mosques and houses were pulled down without delay and interference, and the two major sacred trees in each of the Local government were paid for sacrifice before they were pulled down. One out the two was relocated very close to the former site.

4.1.7 Information On Sacrifice And Preparation For Goooves And Sacred Trees

V a r i a b l e	F r e q u e n c y	P e r c e n t a g e
Y E S	1 1 2	5 6 %
N O	5 8	2 9 %
I D O N ' T K N O W	3 0	1 5 %

4.1.7 56% of the Respondent agreed that there must be a sacrifice before a sacred tree or groove is relocated. This was confirmed by the priest that before a sacred tree is cut down for sacrifice he must be prepared to appease the gods that is why the tree cannot be cut down by any ordinary people except the ritualist and natural disaster.

4.1.8. Information about conservation and preservation of Trees and Grooves

V a r i a b l e	F r e q u e n c y	P e r c e n t a g e
Y E S	8 6	4 3 %
N O	5 6	2 8 %
M A Y B E	5 8	2 9 %
I D O N ' T K N O W	-	-

The percentage of 43% of the respondent support the use of local law as a means of preserving the sacred tree and grooves from being encroached by the outsiders while 28% and 29% support the use of Tattoos and symbols or objects like tying of palm fronts, red clothes etc. To sustain place as sacred, another tree may be planted if the being cut down.

4.1.9. Information about the power of community over the grooves

V a r i a b l e	F r e q u e n c y	P e r c e n t a g e
Y e s	1 2 2	6 1
N o	6 2	3 1
I d o n ' t k n o w	1 6	8

61% of the Respondent agreed that the community have power over the grooves and sacred trees. One of the priest interviewed indicated that the sacred trees might be cut down if the community or the chief priest detected that the tree is bewitched or harbors evil spirits that is killing or working against the people of the town.

Conclusion

From the ongoing, it is evident that there are no major ways of preserving the sacred trees or the grooves for either the future use or from being vandalized than the local rules. It is not written but everyone can bold read lines through sign pests and symbol. It is only the stranger from another tribe or country that can go in to the groove or buy it for building or something else. I want to categorically say here that the effect of Christianity, Islam and education has major impact on the preservation and conservation of these grooves and sacred trees.

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Contact email: Kemkem4real@gmail.com

Appendix

Questionnaires on Preservation and Conservation of Grooves and Sacred Trees

Part A

Section A

Instruction: please select (tick) the options appropriate to you

1. Age (a) 15-20 (b) 21-30 (c) 31-40 (d) 41-50 (e) 51-60
2. Sex (a) Male (b) Female
3. Educational Background a) SSCE b) NCE/DIPLOMA c) HND/B.SC d) OTHERS
4. Religion. (a) Christian (b). Muslim (c). Traditional (d). Others

Section B.

1. Do you have any Grooves/Sacred Tree close to you?
(a.) Yes (b.) No (c.) Maybe (d.) Often
2. How many years do you think the Grooves/Sacred Tree have been there?
(a.) Below 5years (b.) 5-20years (c.) 20-50years (d.) Above 50
3. Do you know of any Grooves/Tree being relocated?
(a.) Yes (b.) No (c.) Not know
4. Why was it relocated?
(a.) Road Construction (b.) Town Development (c.) Natural Disaster (d.) Not Know
5. Was there any sacrifice or preparation for it's relocation?
a. Yes b. No c. Not Known
6. How do they preserve the Groove/sacred Tree from being destroyed?
a. Local Law b. Taboos c. Symbol & objects
7. Did the community have power of the Grooves?
a. Yes b. No c. I don't know
8. Do people have access to the Grooves?
a. Yes b. No c. I don't know
9. Is there any benefit for keeping the Grooves?

a. Yes b. No c. I don't know

10. Do Government have power to relocate any Grooves/Sacred trees?

a. Yes b. No c. I don't know

Part B

1. Do you know of grooves being relocated?

If yes, where and Why?

2. Where was it before?

3. Was there any sacrifice or preparation for its relocation?

4. Is there any conservative/preservative methods for the grooves around you? If yes, what are they?

5. What are the effect of relocating the grooves?