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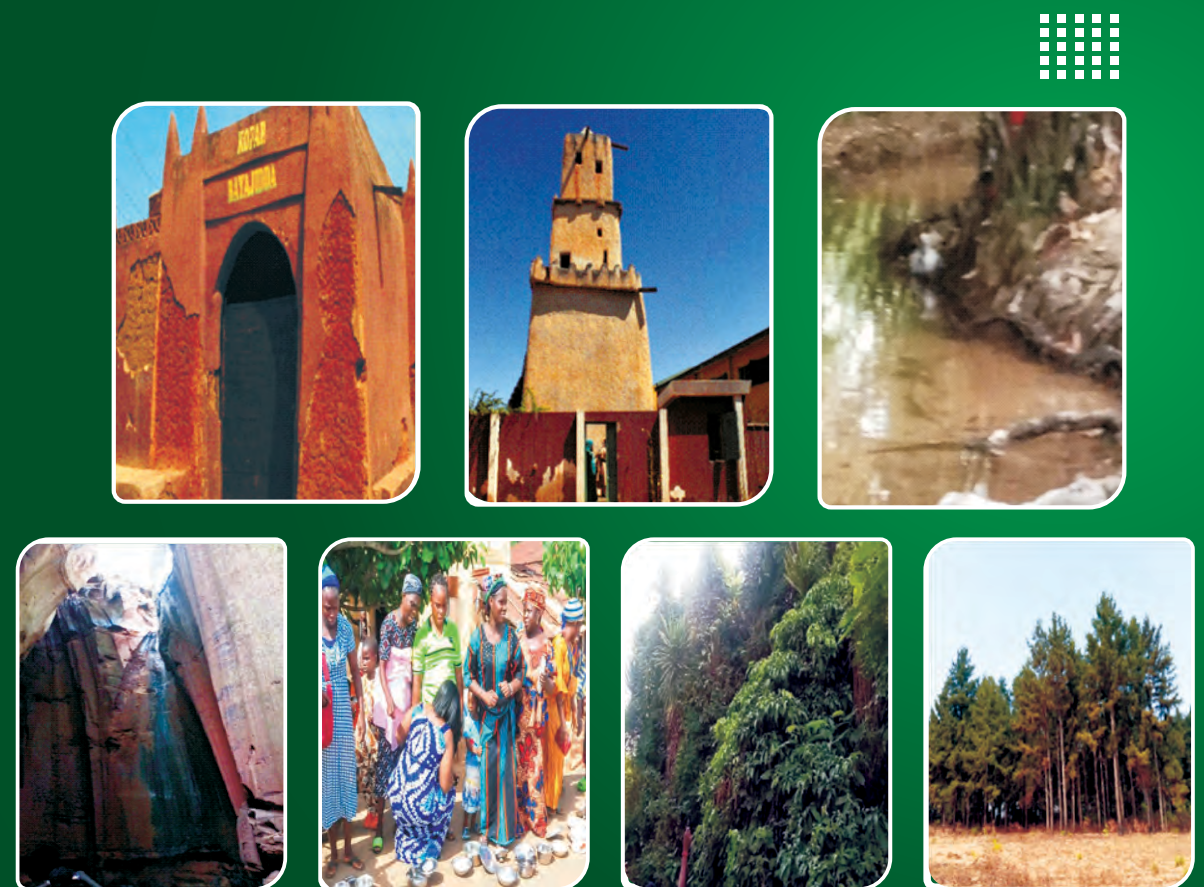
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Photographs copiously displayed in the book are to aid readers' emotional connection or reconnection to the stories.

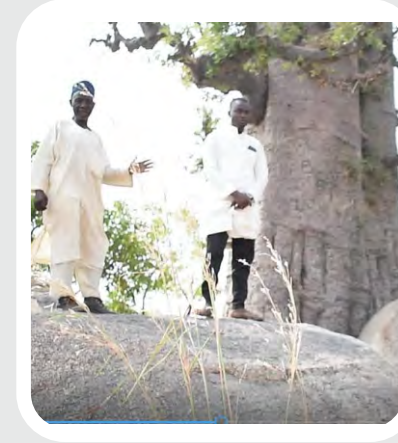
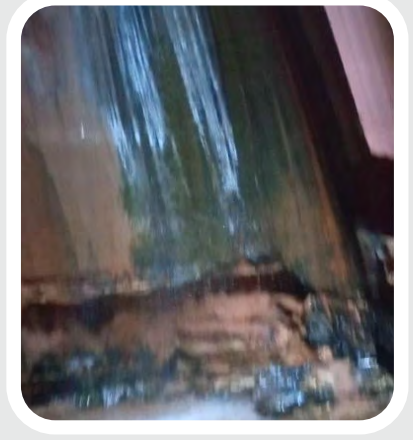
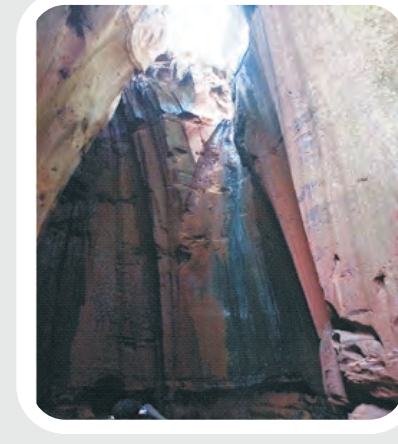
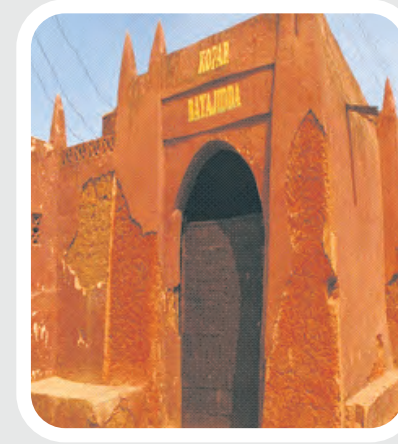
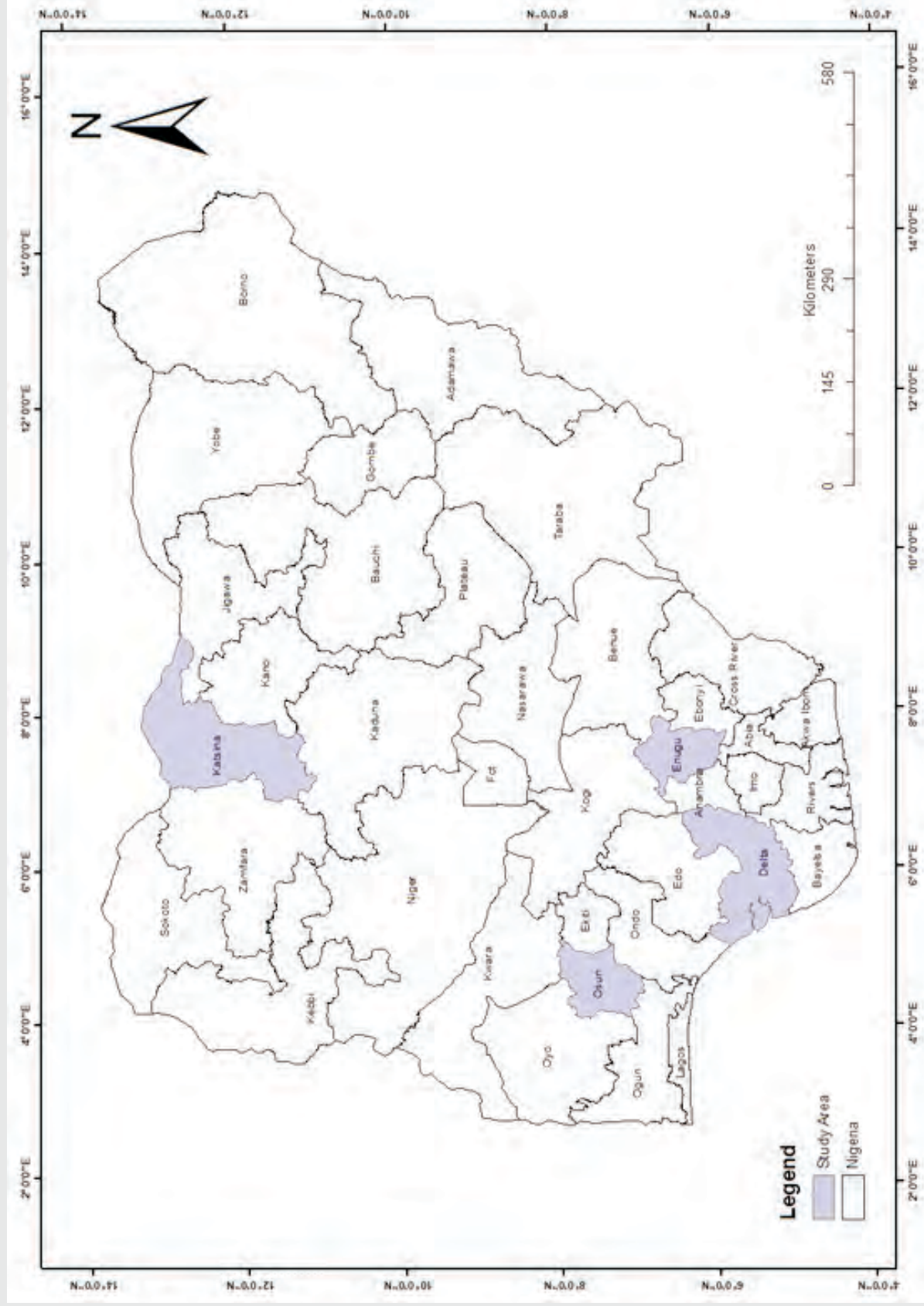


NIGERIA'S RICH AND DIVERSE CULTURAL HERITAGE: OUR PRIDE

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CHINWE VERONICA ANUNOBI 
Mistura Kikelomo Abdulazeez



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NIGERIA's RICH AND DIVERSE CULTURAL HERITAGE: OUR PRIDE

A collection of newly documented historical places, monuments and events

Edited by

Chinwe Anunobi and Mistura Abdulazeez



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The project committee would like to thank all those who have contributed to the success of this work. We are most grateful in particular, to the royal fathers and the people of the communities covered; The Emir of Daura, Katsina, Galadima of Durbi Takusheyi, Owalare of Ilare, Oparuku of Umuaja and Onyeisi ala Ozalla. We also thank Dr. Tope Abiola, Mrs. Nkem Agu, Pastor (Mrs.) Carolyn Ndeme, Chief C. Onyema, Abubakar Magaji Fada, Pastor Innocent E. Chikwuka and Alhaji Dennis Efebele Ahmad. Their valuable contributions, support and advice are highly valued.



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Published by

National Library of Nigeria

Sanusi Dantata House,

Plot 274, Central Business District, P.M.B 1, Garki,

Abuja

ISBN: 978-978-797-810-8

Printed by Ebeco Integrated Limited



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National Library of Nigeria, 2023

National Library of Nigeria Cataloguing in Publication Data

NATIONAL Library of Nigeria

Nigeria's rich and diverse cultural heritage: our pride/National Library of Nigeria

- 1. Nigeria – History 2. Nigeria – Manner and custom**
- 3. Nigeria- Guidebook I. Anunobi, Chinwe II. Abdulazeez, Mistura III. Title**

DT 515.57N277

2023

966.9

ISBN: 978-978-797-810-8

AACR2

TABLE OF CONTENT

Foreword	
Acknowledgement	
Introduction	1
Umuaja, Delta State	4
Sources and cultural significance of River Ethiope	4
Umuaja and history	4
Origin of Umuaja people	8
Ogbanje and Ebumoji belief system	11
Umuaja a spectacular scenery	14
Umuaja: an irresistible tourists' destination	19
Durbi Takusheyi, Katsina State	21
Durbi Takusheyi: Royals buried with personal belongings	21
Succession arrangements in the pre-Islamic era	25
Gobarau Minaret	28
Taushi Local drums	29
Designated historical places in Katsina and Durbi Takusheyi	30
Kusugu well	30
Dutsen Bamle	34
Dutsen Batere-tere	37
Dutsen Talkin	38
Durbi Takusheyi and National integration	40
Durbi Takusheyi: an irresistible tourists' destination	41
Ngwo: a stunningly endowed land, Enugu state	43
Miliken Hills	43

Ngwo Caves and Waterfalls	47
The pine tree and atmospheric chemistry	53
The Ozalla Lake and its Crocodile	54
Economic potentials of Ngwo Caves and Ozalla Lake	58
Ilare: its rich traditions and taboos	60
Ilare and early political influence	60
Origin of Ilare	62
The uncommon communal spirit	69
Ilare and the taboos	71
The cherished festivals	77
Advent of churches	87
Exploring the tourism potential	90
Conclusion	92

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FOREWORD

This book is the outcome of effort by National Library of Nigeria to present and draw attention to tangible and intangible aspects of our undocumented cultural heritage. An attempt aimed at highlighting unique aspects of our culture which could promote unity and national integration and definitely not a repeat or reconstruction of history.

It is structured in a way its use as reference tool for scholarship, lifelong learning and tourist's guide, is facilitated for people from all walks of life. A reader is assured a fulfilling experience as coloured box on each page provides additional information on historical places, photographs, events, and people.

Everyone appreciates how sometimes we struggle to find exact words to express our thought. Drawbacks associated with translation and transcript from local language to English were minimized by ensuring that interviewers were selected based on competence in written and spoken abilities in the local language of the community. Excerpts of interviews are contained in the CD attached to this book. Photographs, which are still-life images and effective documentation tools in digitization and restoration of materials have been extensively used in this book to aid readers' emotional connection to captured images.

It is hoped this book excites the interest of the scholars, information managers, policy makers, librarians, and tourists. The book will therefore, be found worthy of their time as we continue to produce more titles documenting materials of historical importance.

However, it is available for free download in Portable Document File (PDF) on our website:



Prof. Chinwe Veronica Anunobi

National Librarian/ Chief Executive Officer

1.0

INTRODUCTION

Unarguably documenting the historical sites, monuments and events, which are of significant value in terms of religious beliefs, history and myths, could be very fulfilling experience for the people. National Library of Nigeria's decision to walk the talk by being more responsive and alert to her responsibility as custodian of documentary cultural heritage, is a clear demonstration of her commitment to promptly and constantly meet the dynamic needs of her patrons.

Documenting newly discovered historic sites, monuments and events affords the nation the opportunity to tell stories relating to her people through her own prism. This book therefore, aims to provide concise and accurate information about all aspects of our cultural heritage, which were hitherto un-sung, undocumented or inadequately exploited for national development and cohesion. Also, the book explains how promotional activities in the tourism sector can exploit local culture and nature to boost the sector's contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) through improved travel consumption by foreign and local visitors.

The importance of accurate information is evident by the recent misrepresentation or better still, misinformation about Eyo masquerade in Lagos through a movie titled, "Gangs of Lagos" which drew the ire of Lagos State government as the movie does not reflect in any way the facts about the masquerade. While the excesses of the producers of the movie can be excused, one can conveniently blame the misrepresentation on inadequacies of verifiable information about Eyo masquerade. This book fills the gap created by lack of accurate information over the years about historical sites, monuments and events associated with the culture of the people. This explains why cultural heritage, includes tangible and intangible assets, which are mainly artefacts, monuments, tools, language, customary beliefs, social norms, dress, food, music and dance-style of a religious or social group passed from one

generation to another. These are of diverse historic, symbolic, aesthetic, and archeological significance.

For long it has been a misnomer or sheer misinformation referring to Mungo Park as discoverer of *River Niger* when people have lived in the area for ages. In the same token it will be a futile attempt at reinventing history for anyone in the future to lay claim to the discovery of the source of *River Ethiopie*, which has continued to excite indigenes of Umuaja and the facts of the Onyia's discovery has remained incontrovertible.

The need to provide policy makers with verified and balanced information about the type or nature of intervention needed to preserve and conserve historic materials of tremendous benefits to the people, is imperative. It makes this book, an essential companion for anyone interested in updating his or her knowledge of Nigeria's diverse cultural heritage. How past and current information about historical places is recorded, organized, interpreted and managed, is one duty National Library of Nigeria (NLN) is determined to prioritize. The unique methodology adopted in the project ensures that both tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage as experienced by the people are proudly portrayed as their own stories.

The common trajectory in the stories associated with historical places visited is the positive contribution of women in the provision of quality leadership and emancipation of the people. The exemplary leadership women have displayed over the years in all the places selected, shows clearly the capacity of women to be the last persons standing when the chips are down. They have passionately occupied the driver's seat when necessary. From Ilare, Durbi Takursheyi, and Umuaja to Enugu, women had provided leadership to save their respective society from the brinks of collapse.

It is the duty of National Libraries worldwide to ensure that historical materials collected are preserved and their useful life extended before they are lost. This makes restoration less cumbersome, where possible. Monuments, buildings and sites connected to history and way of life of the people have been lost to wars, and also, uncontrolled land use practices in the past. Numerous sites of historical values destroyed by wars abound in countries across the world. Ancient cities of Bosra and Palmyra; both in Syria, Timbuktu monument in Mali, Buddhas of Bamiyan, Afghanistan and the Jonah's tomb in Iraq are examples of places and monuments of great historical values destroyed by wars. A National Library owes the country the trust to ensure that a conducive environment is available, where diverse cultural expression is encouraged and cherished values are shared and promoted.

It is incontrovertible that irrespective of the success level recorded in the restoration of undocumented historical material, lost aesthetic, social and economic values might never be regained. It is interesting to note that a photograph could prove handy in a restoration effort, where no other records are available. It is important people are able to relate monuments, historical sites and events, which connect them to their history and define their national or ethnic identity. It is no wonder traditional and governmental institutions do create agencies to preserve and conserve such national historical sites and monuments.

Therefore, National Library of Nigeria (NLN) is committed to the creation of a *Nigeria Register of Historical Places and Events* with the view to providing access to information on historical materials, documenting unrecorded historical places and promoting events, which are of value to scholarship. The overall essence of information organization, analysis and presentation of undocumented historical materials, places and events is to facilitate access in a sustainable way.

5.0 ILARE: ITS RICH TRADITIONS AND TABOOS

5.1 Ilare and early political influence

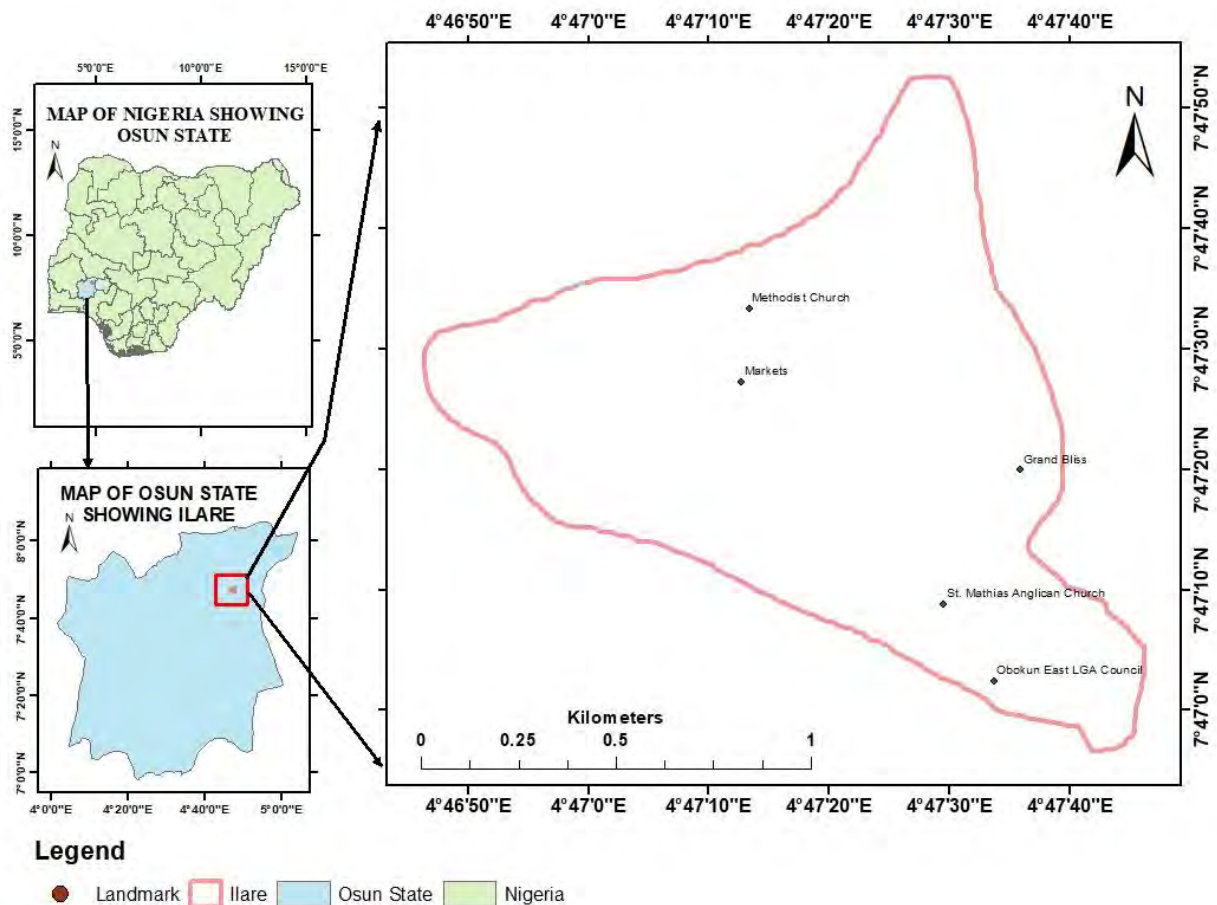
Ilare, an ancient town in Osun state has many aspects of her fascinating traditions, beliefs and taboos still largely un-recorded. These are issues of historical value, which will continue to influence way of life and socio-political development especially, inter-marriage and relationship with communities connected to her precolonial political development. The transformation of the Ilare from political prominence to obscurity and re-emergence as stabilizing authority for the resettlement of people dispersed across communities in Yoruba land in the 18th century has been well documented.

The choice of Ilare as the headquarters of Obokun-North Local Government in 1983 by Chief Bola Ige's administration (though short-lived) and the subsequent reinstatement in May, 2019 by former Governor Rauf Aregbesola as the headquarters for the newly created Obokun East Local Government Development Area, attest to the town's greatness and precolonial political influence. Its geographical co-ordinates are 7° 48' 0'' North and 4° 47' 0'' East (Figure 6).

Except for a few aspects, oral history of Ilare and traditions are consisted with accounts so far documented by historians. No matter the perspective from which a history is viewed, its accuracy depends greatly on the capacity to objectively reconstruct a narrative. Ogundiran's¹ work remains the most authoritative publication on the Ilare history and traditions.

Ogundiran¹ work publication titled "*Factional Competition, Sociopolitical Development, and Settlement Cycling in Ilare District (ca. 1200-1900): Oral Traditions of Historical Experience in a Yoruba Community*"

According to author, the ruins of ancient settlements and mnemonic forming some aspects of oral history of Ilare have been preserved.



Field data, which resulted from archeological excavation of several sites date 800 years and confirm the assertion that Ilare is one of the three ancient towns in Yoruba land. Ogundiran and the town's spokesman, who also doubles as the Owalaré's mouth-piece (the Odole), Chief Tope Abiola (Plate 58) believe only Ife and Oyo have comparable archeological data. This informs the reason an Ilare man would proudly claim that the oral history of Ilare is not a myth but verifiable accounts of the past as experienced and backed by archeological data. The town however, remains one of the most conservative communities in the entire nation, though a

majority of the population now professes to be Christians and a small fraction claims to be Moslems



Plate 58: The Odole (2nd from the left) and other cabinet chiefs narrating the history of Ilare

5.2 Origin of Ilare

The current Owalare, Oba Adejoro Otebukola (Plate 59) is the 56th traditional ruler of Ilare and the Owa dynasty can be traced to Ajalorunoro Olofin. Oduduwa and Ajalorunoro were siblings. According to Odole, it is only in Ife that the type of beaded crown seen on the Owalare in Plate 59 be found. Ajalorunoro left Ilare quarters in Ile-Ife with thirteen people and a dog. Again, this explains why the image of a dog features prominently in the official logo of the town as shown in Plate 60. Some oral traditions believe that the name “Ilare” is from assimilation of Ijesa dialect

of the original migrants from Ife. Oduduwa had informed Ajalorunoro about what would signal to him where he should settle his entourage.

The way a new Owalare is independently installed appears uncommon in Yorubaland. A new one is appointed by the community without any external interference or contribution, unlike interdependence, which exists among some communities in Yoruba land. The Owalare is usually installed in the open at the Baba Ilare Ritual Field in front of the people and all the rituals necessary to make the installation legitimate, are performed. The Odole hands over the newly installed Owalare to Odofofin, who takes him into Ipebi at his house. The new Owa is taught during the period the culture and rudiment of general administration and justice system in the town. An Owa Ilare rarely talks in the public and whatever he pronounces becomes a Law. According to oral tradition, the Owalare talks to the public through Odofofin, who traditionally he is the king's spokesman.



Plate 61: The Owalare donning the Ade-Ilare



Plate 60: Owalare's palace entrance

Among the people that left Ile-Ife with him were Leigun, Erele, Osuta, Arijajo, and Aramufe. He had several stoppages on the journey and at each stop he left immemorial landmarks. Effects of some of his actions are still being preserved till date in these communities across Ijesha land. According to oral tradition the Ajalorunoro's staff left at Ibodi is still being worshipped. At Ita Balogun in the present day Ilesha, he left his sword and at Esa Oke he helped to ward-off their enemies and left another staff for remembrance of his prowess as a warrior.

He moved from Esa Oke to Imesi-Ile where he again continued his journey with his entourage and people in the surrounding hamlets to Igbo-Iloye, which historians recognized as the first site of Baba Ilare Ritual Field. Ogundiran¹ states in his work that archeological investigations of cultural material in Ife and Iloye have shown that both belonged to same cultural sphere between thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. At Igbo-Iloye, Ajalorunoro established the political structure called Eka Osun, which he used both diplomacy and force to sustain. It was a form of confederacy which allowed individual communities to retain their identities. Communities involved in the confederacy included Igigun, Iketewi, Ipepeji, and Oke-Igun and all retained their identities.

Though there had been no attempt by historians to estimate how long the confederacy arrangement survived. Three major factors influenced its collapse. First, the occupiers' claim of geographical area disrupted the hierarchical order among the traditional rulers during the precolonial era. Second, the desire of Ita, the traditional ruler at Ilemure, to avenge the humiliation he suffered when Ajalorunoro prevented the use of the sacred "Igbin drum" to celebrate the remembrance of his ancestors. Third, the alliance Ita forged with Obarabara, a great warrior, to undermine the authority of Ajalorunoro. However, some historians have argued that the crisis resulted from the refusal to treat Ilemure as equal stakeholder in the Eka-

Osun political alignment. Ita's daughter, Okipo, who had earlier been given out in marriage to Ajalorunoro, succeeded in her espionage role. Ilemure together with her allies took Ilare by surprise and eventually left Ajalorunoro's ego badly bruised.

However, the warrior who helped Ita to attain temporary success, later turned round to sack the Ilemure and changed the name of the settlement to Ibokun. To date history is silent about the fate of Ita and his daughter. Information about their lives after the Okipo war would have made the entire narrative more instructive and empathetic. Many believe that the sacking serves the town right as reward for unholy conspiracy against the Ajalorunoro and subsequent termination of Ita's dynasty in the present Ibokun. Some also insist that they both died in exile.

However, when Obarabara died, his succession plan in Ibokun could not succeed because people resisted his son's rule and he was expelled. The family sought refuge in several settlements including Ileketi, Ilowa, Ejinoro, Ipole and Ilesa. According to oral tradition, after many battles Owuluse succeeded in establishing the family dynastic at Ilesa in the early seventeenth century. At the same time Otuluuya, listed as the sixth ruler to reign in Ilare, mobilized and spear-headed the establishment of a new settlement at Okun. The settlement could not re-emerge as a regional power after the death of Obarabara because the period coincided with the time Ilesa was strongly emerging as the new political power in Ijesha land. From the different historical accounts across Yoruba land, Ilare never lost her independence despite the desecration of Baba Ilare Ritual Field when Obarabara established Igbo Ekun and dedicated the Ibokun section of the field to the worship of other deities.

Irrespective of the temporary setback, historians believe that the resilience of the Ilare people and trust in their leaders, helped. The town still retains her greatness as one of the ancient Yoruba towns. For example, the view that Ilare maintained a 'nominal but precarious local autonomy' in the precolonial era as being expressed

in some quarters; is unfounded and appears biased. Ilare was never under the control of any dreaded political or military power in the precolonial era. Therefore, occasional show of affection through showering of gifts on another party does not equate tributes payment. Despite the Kiriji war between 1872 and 1888, Ilare at no time lost her independence with the theatre of war at Igbajo- Imesi, 9 km north of the settlement. Several oral traditions confirm the independence of Ilare, even when she collaborated with others to resist the ruthless Ibadan expeditionary force raving Yoruba land, during the Kiriji war.

Again, Ilare was where all military hardwares the entire Ijesha land relied upon to resist the expansionism tendencies of Ibadan, were manufactured. The foundry where local guns and other operations related to iron smelting, still stands (Plate 61). Though it has gone through several renovation work to preserve it. Plate 62 shows the Okuta Ogun at the Babaalagbede's compound. Interestingly, the current Odole of Ilare is the head of the Agbede family, the custodians of the community's foundry. Anyone who wants to be involved in welding and smelting activities in the town must undertake some rituals at the Ogun shrine or he or she pays the family for the rituals to be conducted on his or her behalf. Also, at the centre of the town is a house, which has been preserved for the Odole and he alone could enter the building (Plate 63).



Plate 61: The Babaalagbede compound, which served as the foundry where weapons used by the Ijeshas were fabricated

Plate 62: The Odole showing the NLN's team the Okuta Ogun used in the foundry during the Kijiri war



Plate 63: The ancient house at the centre of the town only the Odole enters

Several historical accounts affirm the symbolic importance of Baba Ilare Ritual Field as the ideological and spiritual sentiments all potentates in the Eka Osun's political sphere subscribed to and used to pledge allegiance to Ajalorunoro. Plates 64 and 65 show the side view of Baba Ilare Spiritual Field and one of the spots use as shrine. Igbo Ekun became part of Ilesa ritual field when Ibokun lost her autonomy. Historians agree that the oldest deity in the Ilare Ritual Field is Erele. The annual Erele Festival celebrated in Ikirun to date, took its origin from Ilare through the people who migrated to the town during Okipo war.



Plate 64: The side view of Baba Ilare Ritual Field



Plate 65: One of the shrine at the grove

The Ilare people have been tolerant of other people as traditional practices from other culture have been assimilated. In the Ilare, Onimaka traditional practice brought by early settlers from Offa after the Kiriji war, is still in practice, while it had long been discontinued in Offa, where it originated (Plate 66). The annual Egungun festival also brought by settlers from other parts of the Yoruba land is also popular. Plate 67 shows the Egungun's shrine, called Igbo-Igbale, which is situated on a large expanse of land.



Plate 66

Plate 66: The Onimaka's shrine



Plate 67

Plate 67: The Igbo- Igbale

However, Ilare people are excluded from Ilesha ritual field, which centred on Ogun and Obokun deities. In return, Ilesha people and their allies are also excluded from Baba Ilare Ritual Field.

5.3 The uncommon communal spirit

The capacity of the Ilare people to bounce back anytime she suffers a setback has been recognized in the oral traditions across Ijesha land. According to oral tradition, Otuluuya succeeded in resettling his people at Okun, 30 km north because the communal spirit among the people places Ilare' survival spirit first, against all odds and deprivations. Ilare people again demonstrated their resilience when Olufadi Osaakamola, according to historians led population of less than 100 people back to Ilare and started the re-building process. Ilare remains one of the few towns in Yoruba land settlers from different ethnic backgrounds have proudly called home.

Communal spirit of Ilare people propels the desire to always meet their own needs through self-help, which has resulted in many social infrastructural amenities, such as post-office, boreholes, hospital and schools, being provided by the community. Recent construction of Ibokun-East Development Area, headquarters by the community, again demonstrates the capacity of the community to take their destiny into their own hand. Their effort at self-development could only be surpassed by few communities in Nigeria. The Ilare Community High School built by the community and commissioned by the late Prof. Bolanle Awe, then Commissioner of Education in Oyo State, has continued to soldier on, despite limited presence of government in the school by making up the short fall in staff supply. Two motorized boreholes the town enjoys were donated by a philanthropic organization in 2017. The community again demonstrated her capacity to fend for herself when she provided palliatives for her people during COVID-19 knockdown, through the Ilare Development Association.

The Odole asserted that Ilare people refrain from any act of injustice to fellow human because the consequences could be very severe. This is evident by the fate of Osaonipapa, who at a time abused his privileged position. According to oral tradition in Ilare, though usually discussed in hushed tones, Osaonipapa had unwholesome relationship with another traditional ruler's wife. A plan was hatched to poison the only source of water for Ilare community, in revenge. The effect of the poison was so devastating that many people died. Osaonipapa, who stayed back when a significant number of the population moved out of the settlement, lost his life. According to historians, he remains the only ruler not buried in the building meant for past royals.

Odole would proudly say to anyone who cares to listen that an Ilare man conducts himself in the most civil and friendly manner. He would not take undue advantage

of any situation or betray any confidence reposed in him. Ilare people believe any diabolical act designed to harm them either individually or collectively, will revert to the perpetrator(s) with appropriate consequences. This explains why Ilare people are reportedly feared and respected across Yoruba land.

5.4 Ilare and the taboos

In Yoruba traditions taboos are acts people generally refrain from to ensure orderliness and tranquility in a community. Some taboos are meant to encourage good conduct, promote good health, personal hygiene and safety. However, in Ilare everyone respects the taboos, option to experiment with the ideas behind them are never entertained, unless he or she is prepared to dare the gods. The taboos have become norms well respected by the people, though scientific investigation could be difficult as willingness to test the veracity of these claims would be a forlorn attempt. The fact that experience of the people could not be described in the strict sense as empirical, some real-life situations witnessed by the people could be referenced.

Many traditions and customs are still in practice, despite efforts by the current Owalare, Adejoro Otebukola to see them discontinued. However, Ilare people are friendly and hospitable to make a stranger's experience, pleasant. They are usually quick to advise visitors to respect the traditions of the land in order to enjoy the blissful scenery, the town offers. According to oral tradition, stepping or sitting on the "Apere" - a raised platform in the palace (Plates 68 and 69), is forbidden. The Owalare sits on the apere whenever he is in the palace presiding over affairs of the community. Also, a woman must not adjust her headgear in the presence of Owalare. The consequences of disobedience to the taboo include: severe headache, dehydration and death within days. For example, a woman who still menstruates

might never experience her period again. If she has reached menopause her partner would experience permanent sexual dysfunction.

Another mystery at the palace, is the presence of a stone by the left side of the Owa's palace gate. The stone is called *Oso Ko gbin* and rituals for installation of new chief are only completed when it is paid homage (Plate 70). However, no one appears to know how long it has been there, but effort to relocate it has not been successful. Recently, a group of white men visited the palace and took the challenge to lift *Oso ko gbin*, not only was the attempt futile but the men left with physical deformities of various degrees. Anyone who visits the palace is usually shown the stone and humbly invited to attempt a lift.



Plates 68 and 69: The Apere viewed from the front and side.



Plate 70: The ancient stone (Okuta Osokogbin) at Owa Ilare palace

In Ilare what could be regarded as gender bias is evident by the exclusion of women in the Owaware-in-council. Irrespective of the level of success so far recorded with global campaign against gender bias, Ilare people care, less. The community believes women are to be denied the opportunity to partake in discussion about the community's welfare and security, based on past experience. This position was informed by lessons learnt from the treacherous act of Okipo, the daughter of Ita, the potentate of Ilemure (now Ibokun). Ita had given out his daughter in marriage to Ajalorunoro, with the intent to deceive, after a truce was observed. Ajalorunoro sincerely accepted the Greek's gift laced with mischief to investigate the secrets behind his powers. The eventual betrayal by Okipo emboldened Ita and Obarabara, a great warrior, to conspire and challenge the authority of Ajalorunoro. The animosity has continued to shape the nature of relationship between Ilare and her allies on one hand and Obokun and her allies on the other hand.

The consequences of daring to eat melon before the annual Ipaye festival in Ilare, could be very severe. Several cases of people presenting with swollen body and confessing to have eaten new melon before the festival, have been witnessed. The Odole personally narrated the story of a woman who presented at the palace with swollen body and confessed to have eaten the forbidden melon before the annual festival. The palace did all it could to save the woman, to no avail.

The festival heralding the eaten of new melon is usually celebrated with pomp and pageantry by the town's maidens and young women (between ages 18 and 21), each carrying a specially lit local lamp at the front of Baba Ilare Ritual Field. They will gather and dressed in beautiful attires to entertain the entire community with beautiful dance steps from 6 pm till dawn. This provides opportunity for eligible bachelors and married men, who want a new wife, the "right of first refusal". More importantly the festival signifies the end of a successful planting season as all farming activities are expected to have ended.

It is also a well-known taboo across Yoruba land that Ilare people are not allowed to be involved in piggery in any form inside the town, but they could eat pork inside the town or anywhere. All that is required is that a live pig must not be brought to Ilare. A live pig brought to the town will get dehydrated in record time without suffering from diarrhoea. Recently, in an interview with a daily newspaper, the Owalare states that Ilare people could not rear pig because it was same animal their ancestors offered as sacrifice to the gods for peace and progress of the town, so out of reverence to them, pigs are forbidden in the town.

Apart from these taboos, there are other taboos which are unique to Ilare town and not yet documented. First, Ilare indigenes either at home or abroad must not pound yam beyond six pm. Another, place in the entire Yoruba land, pounding of yam in the nigh is prohibited, is the Ooni's palace. Pounded yam is a staple among the Ilare

people and could be eaten as many times in a day but it must be prepared before 6.00 pm. Any infraction of this taboo reported to the town's authorities could possibly be remedied if was done out of sincere ignorance but if hidden from the palace, serious calamity awaits the culprit(s) within days. Many people in the town could attest to the echoes of mortal's sound in the evening, so no matter how the act could be cannily done, echoes of sound from the pounding act will be so audible outside and the palace will get to know.

The veracity of this taboo has been demonstrated by the community through attempt to make pounded yam after 6.0 pm and left it overnight at the village square. The pounded yam was met untouched the next day, to the surprise of all. Even animals could not dare to consume it. Fresh or leftover pounded yam made within the approved time was consumed by animals within minutes. By training from young age, Ilare people take dinner before 6.00 pm anywhere they are. They respect this norm, so much that it is one of the traditions, strangers will be warned against within hours of arrival at the town. Violation of this simple tradition is fraught with severe consequences, which could even be generational.

Night market is a taboo in Ilare, though individuals who have shops outside of the market could sell their wares till 10 pm. No commercial activity at the village level takes place in the town beyond 6 pm, except during the Osu Oja festival when night market is allowed for seven days. This norm in Ilare is respected by everyone in the community, so opportunity for anyone to commit any infraction is limited by the willingness of people to voluntarily comply. The consequence for any infraction is rarely mentioned because compliance is total.

The issue of inter-marriage is one tradition, which is well known and respected beyond Ilare. An Ilare man or woman is forbidden to take a partner from Ibokun. The reason could not be unconnected with what Ilare people as taken to be un-

forgivable treacherous act by Okipo. Investigation revealed that parents in Ibokun equally warn their wards before they reach puberty not to marry from Ilare. The rift between the two communities will continue to shape and influence their socio-political development because it is at the centre of what drives the emotional and spiritual attachments to their respective community. It is on record that outcomes of marriages consummated in breach of the tradition have always been disastrous and horrifying. Numerous examples of people, who dare to marry, ignoring the norm are usually referenced, though not with the intent to slight or make mockery of their plights.

The case of a couple from the two communities, who got married on the account of their faith that the idea of inter-marriage prohibition is outdated and evil, is usually referenced. The marriage ended in pains and regrets as the man not only impregnated his mother in-law but lost the son from his wife and the son he had with his mother in-law, was mentally challenged. In another verifiable case of disregard for the tradition as narrated by Ilare' spokesman, a union that could not produce any child for 15 years and without any of them suffering from any medical challenge, but when realities forced their separation and individually remarried, they are proud parents, today.

Ilare seems to be a town of multiple taboos, where orderliness and peaceful co-existence are cherished by the people for socio-economic development. The assertion by the late Elechi Amadi in one of his works, where he stated that human societies are peaceful and orderly unless the gods are wrong, aptly explains why culture is held in high esteem in Ilare. The people are not pretentious about their faith in the Baba Ilare Ritual Field and are always proud to identify with the emotional and spiritual fulfilment, it offers. It is one ancient town the people's way

of life in the 21st century is being governed by past beliefs and deeds to promote the general well-being of the people.

An Ilare man does not involve himself in any act which compromises the general safety of the community or take undue advantage of the community to serve his personal interest. The community is fully conscious of her independence in driving socio-political and religious beliefs, which is the good for the community. This is appreciated when one considers the peculiarities, which make the town sacred since the precolonial era. According to Odole, Owa of Ijesha cannot physically visit Ilare, even if on transit to Otan-Ile, he must be completely shielded and not see the light. An Ilare man is fully aware of what the gods and the community expect of him and constantly takes steps to discharge them diligently.

5.5 The cherished festivals

The air of warmth and gaiety about the annual celebrations such as Ipaye, Arujajo, Osu Oja, Egungun and Onimaka Festivals, are what every Ilare man looks forward to with nostalgia at the beginning of a new year. All the festivals have strong historical and spiritual significance, except the Egungun festival which in Ilare is purely theatrical. The commencement of these festivals are usually determined after due consultation with gods associated with each celebration. For example, the celebration of Ipaye Festival commences with the Owalare instructing the Odole to consult the Baba Ilare Ritual Field for a date. The date is announced to the people and young girls in their late teens and early twenties will converge at the Baba Ilare grove, frontage. They are usually well-dressed in beautiful attires and each young lady armed with “Apara” (local lamp) to light the night. They will dance to traditional music all night and broadcast prepared Ito (processed melon) in the Baba Ilare Ritual Field before dawn. Every Ilare man after the ceremony is concluded at dawn, is now free to eat fresh Ito until the next harvest.

The Arujajo festival is a special worship ritual performed at the foot of a huge Iroko tree by the elderly women, where prayers are said for the progress of the community and every Ilare man and woman. The gods will be consulted to know when the next raining season will commence. This aids their preparations for the forthcoming planting season.

Osu-Oja is an annual celebration but provides Owalare the opportunity to wear Ade-Are once in every three years (Plate 59). According to Odole, Ade-Are is the beaded crown Olofin handed to Ajalorun-oro, the founder of Ilare. It can again be worn by the Owalare during state functions, such as official state meetings and receiving the State Governor. To date, it is only the Ooni of Ife that wears a similar crown because the sources of both crowns could be traced to Oduduwa and Olofin, who oral traditions have recorded, were siblings and arrived Ile-Ife together.

A day to the commencement of the Osu-Oja festival, Ilare receives a high-powered delegation of chiefs from Imesi-Ile to deliver freshly tapped palm wine, called 'Ajabale'. This act has continued from time immemorial to present day as it symbolizes love, which existed between Ajalorunoro and the founder of Imesi Ile. The day begins for the Owalare at 6.00 am with prayers for the community wearing the Ade-Are. People with bowl of water mixed with salt in their hands will gather at designated places closer to their different houses to receive the Owalare, who prays individually for them (Plate 71). After the prayer the bowl of water is poured to the ground and the Owa steps on it. The people will show their appreciation of the Owalare's concern for their physical and spiritual wellbeing by showering money, gifts and other valuable items on him. The Owalare will later move to the Baba Ilare statue, placed at the centre of the town to offer prayers for the whole community (Plate 72).

The pomp and pageantry associated with the festival are what the people cherished apart from the spiritual fulfillment, which the people hope will accrue to them individually. Participation is not compulsory for every Ilare man or woman but it is what he or she hates to miss. The highlights of activities include: traditional dance by single young women, display of array of royal crowns used by past Owalare, and traditional procession by different age groups and cultural associations. The display of royal crowns on “Eni Ore” (a traditional mat on which archived crowns are displayed), under the watchful eye of the Odole. This exercise offers members of the Omo-Ile Owa family, the satisfying emotional reconnection to their ancestors, as it is considered a home coming for their spirits. It is usually a soul lifting event which promotes healthy rivalry and orgy of spending. However, by 6.00 pm the exhibition ends, which is not unconnected with the same reasons the Owalare does not stay outside beyond sunset.



Plate 71 (a): The villagers waiting at the designated sites close to their residence, with their solution of water and salt for the Owalare;s blessings



Plate 71(b): Owalalare moves round praying into the salt solution presented for blessings.



Plate 72: The Owalare and the Olori (fourth and fifth, respectively from the right) at the Baba Ilare praying for the community during the Osu-Oja Festival.

The traditional choreographic display by Ilare's young women and the accompanying social interactions help to strengthen the brotherhood bond among the people (Plate 73). It is a season of joy for every young girl as she sincerely hopes to find a suitor at her first participation. Despite the influence of western civilization and pursuit of academic excellence by young people, what should be the ideal age for marriage remains controversial?



Plate 73: Choreographic graphic display by young women during Osu -Oja festival

In Ilare, the pressure for early matrimonial life for young girls is thinning out just like in most communities in Yoruba land, due to economic realities. A once popular folk song in the town, though it sounds funny but it is an interlocutory way of stampeding young girls into marriage, unprepared. According to Obanla, second in hierarch to Owalare (Plate 74), the song goes thus:

O to gbe won o gbe

O to mu won o mu

Yio ma aba iya re so orogun

Abi bebe leti omi

In literary translation, it is an attempt to mock young ladies who were unsuccessful in their bids to attract a suitor. However, the festival has become a social platform, where young ladies exhibit their beauties and talents to the admiration of all.



Plate 74: The Obanla, second-in command to Owalare

The other highlights of the festival include: hunters visit to Igbo-Iloye for games as tributes to the Owa, and the seven-night market. The adventure to Igbo-Iloye, which Ilare people were forced to abandon as a result of the Okipo war, has remained symbolic to the people not only as the emotional reconnection but as the original site of Baba Ilare Ritual Field.

On 26th September of every year, the hunters usually celebrate the annual Ogun festival, which involves offering of a dog as sacrifice to the gods. The rituals are quite distinct and restricted to Egungun Ode, in terms of the prerequisites for participation and items used. The key participants in the rituals especially, the three individuals that will be involved in the severance of the dog's head, must abstain from sex seven days prior to the ceremony.

The main Egungun festival begins with the observance of six palm fronds sprouting from a palm tree in the Igbo-Igbale (Plate 75) and the elders including the Alagbaa consulting the gods for a date (Plate 76). The announcement of a date for the commencement of Egungun festival is usually done in the wee hours and no one will see the message bearer. Two quarters in Ilare, the Omo-Olofa and Alaran are the major custodians of Egungun, credited for their dogged determination to sustain the festival. They are migrants from Offa, Ikirun and other Yoruba land. It is important to note that the festival is purely for entertainment; no abusive act is tolerated. The violence associated with Egungun festival celebration common in most Yoruba communities has never occur in Ilare because structures are already in place to ensure peaceful conduct of everyone.



Plate 75: Side-views of different sections of the Igbo-Igbale



Plate 76: The Alagbaa (on the left) looks on as High Chief Ogungbemi, explains the uniqueness of the Ilare's Egungun festival

Gbado the head of masquerade in Ilare, belongs to the palace but must not be sighted by an Owalare. The Owalare entertains the whole community with foods on the 3rd day the Egungun festival, starts. Obalan takes his turn to entertain the community on the 5th day. This will be followed by the six Egungun families in Ilare, who share the 6 weeks dedicated to the festival.

On the eve of the day allocated to an Egungun family, people will be served foods and drinks, which range from akara (bean cake), eko (maize palp), to Iyan (pounded yam with delicious soup and palm wine to complement. Members of the families are at liberty to invite people from far and near to join them in the celebration of the “reunion” with their ancestors.

The other popular masquerades in Ilare include Fopo, Alekewogbe, Layewu, Eye, and Sare-Olola, who during the festival brings to the notice of the community any unethical act, which threatens peace and progress of the community. The masquerade goes to the culprit’s house to announce specifically, the ignoble act to the community and challenges him or her to contest the allegation.

As part of effort to build harmonious society and tolerance among people of different faiths, masquerades are prohibited from moving round the town on Fridays, until the Jumat’s prayer is said. A stranger, cleric or any elder, either known or unknown are usually spared from harassment by the masquerades. The usually practice in most Yoruba’s communities, is the acceptance of the aphorism that says, ‘A masquerade only taunts people known to him’. Therefore, peaceful co-existence which exists during and after Egungun festival, is influenced by the mutual respect people of different faiths have for one another. A clear evidence of religious tolerance and egalitarian nature of Ilare as an ancient town is shown by the fact that no indigene enjoys any privilege, a stranger is denied. A taboo in the society, applies to everyone in the community equally, except those specific to Ilare indigenes. For example, the

eating of Ito before Ipaye festival is forbidden for every Ilare man or woman at home and abroad.

Onimaka festival annually celebrated in Ilare originated in the present day Offa. Annual celebration or worship of Onimaka has been discontinued in Offa but it has become a highly cherished tradition in Ilare since the end of Kiriji war in 1888. Migrants from Offa, who had taken Ilare as home have maintained their identity, thereby considering the Onimaka as tradition, which continues to be important to their survival and entire way of life. Chief Ogungbemi, the Head of Omo Olofa compound in Ilare, explained to NLN'team, why Onimaka appears dear to them and the differences in the way the tradition is being practiced in Ilare vis-à-vis the way it was practiced in Offa. In Ilare's Onimaka tradition, a child is named on the 6th day with the mother visiting the shrine as early as 6.00 am to announce the end of her self-imposed abstinence from consumption of oil and salt. She rubs the child's mouth with oil and salt before she puts the same in her mouth. The community later responds to her call with prayers and showers money and precious gifts on the mother and child.

Then in Offa a female child would be named after seven days and a male after nine days. A visit to Olofa's palace to ascertain the nature of the relationship between the two towns with regards to Onimaka worship, was revealing. The Secretary to Olofa, Chief A. Kamoru agrees that the Onimaka celebration is purely an identity issue as a reminder of their migration to Ilare as many people from Offa moved to other settlements in Yoruba land in the aftermath of the Kiriji war. The differences in the number of days for the naming rituals can be attributed to the influence of other religious beliefs and practices in their new abode.

In Ilare, Erele is regarded as god of fertility and presently in Ikirun a day has been devoted to her celebration. However, Ilare people are prepared at all times to

proclaim to the world the faithfulness of Erele in addressing fertility issue in women. A woman only needs to take from the water fetched in portions into an earthen pot at the Baba Ilare Ritual Field. According to the Odole, people visit or send emissary from across Yoruba land to fetch the water for spiritual healing of all forms of ailment. A woman who becomes expectant after the use of the water must not bath the baby with warm or hot water.

5.6 The Advent of churches

The accommodating and friendly nature of Ilare people could be seen in the way missionaries, who brought Christianity to the town were embraced. The Methodist missionary arrived in Ilare in 1899 and followed by the Catholics in 1914. Up to 1926 church services were conducted under trees, when the Churches were allocated vast expanse of land. It is on record that the then Owalare only pointed to the missionaries in direction of a virgin land and asked them to take much land as they dined fit. This explains why land acquisition for developmental purposes, is taken for granted in Ilare. The first structure to be erected on the land was the missionary's residence. Plate 78 shows the relic of the building with only a wall at the extreme end, still standing. The first primary school was built in 1955 by the Catholic Church and many of the town's sons and daughters started from there (Plate 79). The old and new Methodist churches in Ilare are shown in Plates 80 and 81, respectively. The new Catholic Church in Ilare is shown in Plate 82.



Plate 78



Plate 79

Plate 78: The relics of the Methodist Church first missionary's residence in Ilare.

Plate 79: The relics of the Primary School built by the Catholic Church in 1955.

Again Ilare, is an epitome of what religious tolerance should be in a community to promote peaceful co-existence. Muslims in the town, despite their small population are accorded due recognition and honour. The leadership of the different religious persuasions interact perfectly well with each other and followers encouraged to do the same. The recent turbaning ceremony of town's Chief Imam had all the other religious leaders in attendance.

5.7 Exploiting the tourism potential

One of the acceptable ways the standard of living in a population can be determined is the percentage of the people who can afford to go on holidays either within or outside the country. This provides information about the general well-being of the people as it shows the effectiveness of government's policies on the quality of life. Ilare people have expressed their readiness to allow the Baba Ilare Ritual Field to be exploited as tourist Centre. There are many aspects of their heritage that scientific



Plate 80 and 81: The old and new Methodist Church in Ilare



Plate 82: The Catholic Church in Ilare

investigation can assist in reconstructing the myths surrounding the origin of the Yoruba race. The beautiful and peaceful scenery the town is noted for, offers anyone desirous of a quiet place, the opportunity to commune with nature and enjoy a refreshing experience about Yoruba civilization.

The Baba Ilare Ritual Field and its historical connection to the way of life of the people, presents a model for reality, applicable now. The scientific principle underlying flowering of Eku tree (*Brachystegia laurentii*) has long been understood and used by Ilare people. Many other plants of medicinal and industrial values are available for research and scholarship. *Oso ko gbin*'s challenge to visitors appears weird but it is a fascinating practical exercise, which again points to the political uniqueness of Ilare in Yoruba history.

These activities and excitements associated with Osu –Oja and Egungun festivals are enough to make Ilare a highly valued tourists' destination. Whatever, the business model government adopts to take Ilare to its full potentials, it will be a worthwhile investment. The collaboration of Ilare people and relevant authorities to guarantee adequate security of life and property, will go a long way to sustain the public's interest. Without prejudice to the capacity of Ilare people, issue of security can be taken for granted, given their antecedents. Government only needs to ensure that good road network to Ilare from nearest airport and train stations, is constructed and maintained. The private sector could be incentivized to build holiday resorts in and around Ilare with un-interrupted power and water supply. The multiplier effects of these developments, will be tremendous on the local economy and general wellbeing of the people.



Plate 83: The Obanla, Odole and Chief Ogungbemi 2nd, 3rd and 6th from the left with NLN's team during the visit.

6.0

CONCLUSION

The project demonstrates NLN's commitment to her statutory responsibility as the custodian of documentary and cultural heritage of the country. She owes the nation duty to gather data, organize, analyze, interpret, present and preserve information about undocumented historical sites, monuments and events, with a view to facilitating access for posterity. Honesty, loyalty, commitment to the communal good, and mutual respect for each other's culture, are virtues, which promote peaceful coexistence and social harmony.

From Umuaja, Durbi Takusheyi, and Ilare to Ngwo Enugu, the pre-requisite to hope for any good from the "gods" is the freedom from diabolical tendencies towards anyone. Taboos in these communities are meant to engender orderliness and promote the general well-being, so norms and traditions are well-respected by all.

Holiday resorts built through public private partnership and a functional transportation model to move people around the designated historical sites will go a long way to attract tourists from around the world. Cultural youth exchange programmes among states with similar inspiring messages, could be initiated for mutual benefits in the national integration effort. Initiation of lecture series to dwell on issues, which promote national cohesion and development, is important.

Index

A

Abiola Tope 61

Abraka 5,

Adejoro Otebolaku 62, 71

Aesthetic 7,

Africa 3

Agbede family 66

Agriculture 14, 45

Ajalorun-oro 62-64

Akoku

Ancestors 79

Aniemeka 13

Anthropogenic 6

Arabic Language 22

Archeological data 61

Artefact 1, 34

Arujajo 77

B

Bachelor drum 29

Bayajjiddah 30-31

Babailare ritual field 62, 63, 65, 67, 69, 76, 77, 83, 87, 90

Babailare groove 77

Bola Ige 60

British colonial government 54

C

Catholic Church 57- 58, 87, 89

Caves 43, 44, 47, 48, 58
Celebration 77, 83
Christian 16, 61
Christianity 9
Churches 45
Clark J P 13
Coal 43-45
Colonization 92
Commerce 14
Communicable disease 11
Communities 54, 60, 6i, 64, 81, 83, 85
Community 14-20, 57, 70, 71, 73-77, 85
Confederacy 63-64
Conspiracy 64
Cultural exchange 41
Cultural heritage 1, 2, 40, 92
Culture 41-42
Curator 42
D
Degradation 7
Destination 43
Development 19-20, 43
Digital media 33
Digitization 34
Documentary 1, 92
Documentation 33-34, 39
Dutsen Bamle 30, 34
Dutsen Bateretere 30, 37

Dutsen Talkin 30, 38

Durbawa 21, 22

Durbi Takursheyi 21, 26, 30, 40-42

Dynasty 64

Dehydration 71

E

Ebumoji 11-13

Economic development 5, 45

Economic growth 19

Economic value 43,

Egungun festival 68, 77, 83-85, 89-90

Eka osun 63

Emir 29

Empathetic 64

Enugu state 43-45, 57, 59

Environment 11

Erele festival 67

Esa oke 63

Eyo masquerade 1

F

Federal government 45

Female Dynasty 31

Festivals 29, 77-78, 82-83

Forest 53

G

Galadima 22, 29

Germany 45

Gerontocracy 15

Gidan Makama 37

Global warming 53

Gobarau minaret 27

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 1

H

Hausa Bakwai 21, 41

Hausa Town 31

Hereditary 26

Hiking 43

History 8, 15, 33-34, 39, 59, 61

Historical materials 2,

Historical sites 21, 30, 34, 42-43, 59, 92

Historical values 3, 60

I

Ibadan 65

Ibokun 64, 65, 75

Ife 62-63

Igbin Drum 64

Ignatus Itodu 16

Ijeshaland 60, 63, 65, 69

Ilare 60, 62, 65, 69, 71, 73, 81, 83, 88

Illegal excavation 22

Ilemure 64

Ilesha 63

Imesi ile 63

Independence 77

Information 3, 4, 34, 64

Intangible assets 1

Inter-ethnic 41

Inter marriage 60, 75

Ipaye 77

Iroko tree 77

Iron Age 33

Islam 23, 26, 27

Islamic era 27

Isusu 16

Ita-Balogun 63

K

Kano 27

Karyagiwa 25

Katsina 21-23, 29, 33

Katsina state 39, 40

Kusugu well 30

Kuyamo Dynasty 22

kiriji war 65, 88

L

Lagos 1

Landforms 48

Landscape 7, 43

Laura Trevelyan 59

Leadership 1, 2, 26

Legal entity 7

Legal rights 6

Libraries 39

M

Mali 3

Mango Park 2

Manuscripts 22, 23

Massacre 44

Masqurades 1, 85

Material culture 12. 33-34, 39

Methodist church 87

Miliken hills 43-44, 47, 53

Missionary 87

Mohammed Korau 21

Muhammed Dikko

Monuments 1, 3, 21, 29, 30, 34, 38

Moslems 61

Museum 29

Muslim 17, 21, 26, 88

Mustapha 17

N

Ngwo caves 43-45

National commission for museum and monument 29, 33, 38, 39, 40, 42

National development 1

National grid 16

National identity 33

National integration 41, 59

National Library 1, 3

National library of Nigeria 51

National Orientation Agency 42

Natural resources 58

Nigeria 45, 57, 58

Nigeria Coal Corporation 45

Nkanu West Local Government 54

O

Obanla 81, 82, 92

Obokun East Local Government Development Area 60

Obokun North Local Government 60

Odole 61, 83, 89, 90

Oduduwa 62

Offa 68, 83, 88

Ogbanje 11

Olofin 62

Onimoka 68, 77

Onoku 9

Onyema Uchenwaneye 45

Onyia 2, 8

Oparauku 16

Oral tradition 22, 29, 37, 55, 62-65, 69-71, 78

Osun State 60

Owalare 62, 71, 73, 77, 78, 79, 80, 89

Oyi-Ukaka 43

Ozalla 54, 55, 57

P

Paganism 26

Peaceful coexistence 18, 92

Philanthropists 45

Photographer 42

Pine tree 51

Political development 60

Pre-colonial 60, 64-65

Pre-colonial era 25-26

Pre-Islamic era 25, 31

Priest 57

R

Railway 45

Ramadan 29

Recreation 43

Refuge 64

Reincarnation 13,

Religious tolerance 85

Restoration 34

Rituals 62

River 7, 9, 10, 12, 17, 19

River Ethiopie

River Ethiopie Trust Fund 6

River Niger

Royal crowns 79

Russia 45

S

Sacrifice 10

Sarki Sarau 22, 26

Shamsudeen Yusuf 22

Slave trade 58

Social harmony 92

Soron Bawada 29

Soyinka Wole 13

Spiritual bath 9

Stakeholders 59

T

Taboos 71, 74-76, 85, 86, 89-90

Tanbura 29

Tangible assets 1

Taushi 29

Tourism 43

Tradition 41

Transformation 60

Transportation 42

U

Udeme pastor (Mrs)

Umuaja 2, 4, 8, 10-11, 12-17, 19, 20

Urohobo 11

V

Valley 44

W

War 48

Waterfall 43, 48, 51, 58

West Africa 27

Woman 71, 75, **78**

Women 2, 73, 77, 91

Y

Yam festival 57

Yoruba 11, 26

Yorubaland 62, 65, 68, 69, 71, 74, 81, 83

