MUSEUMS AND THE PROMOTION OF AFRICAN INDIGENOUS RELIGION IN YORUBALAND, NIGERIA

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Abstract
Museums are edifices meant for the collection of antiquities or relics of creativity, knowledge and culture, ensuring that these collections exist for future generations. They provide treatment and preventive care for rare and valuable artistic collections of high value. African Religion is an expressive religion that has sought over the years to express her religious experience through the medium of arts and crafts. One of the ethnic groups among the Africans whose religion has gone all over the world is the Yoruba. Their dominant religious expressions have produced several arts and crafts that have emerged along with others in various museums of the world. This paper, in its purpose has three main objectives: to examine the role of museums in promoting the documentation and dissemination of African Indigenous Religion, to evaluate the efforts of the museum association in the documentation, preservation and dissemination of information about African Religion and to create a general awareness of the need for the public to have access to information on the religion of their forefathers as contained in museum citadels. The historical method was used in the elucidation of this enterprise. The researcher also visited various museums in Southwest Nigeria for on the spot assessment and interviews. The paper concludes on the note that the museums of Southwestern Nigeria are trying to preserve the religious arts of the Yoruba people but the buildings need much to be desired. Consequently, they are not able to perform the role expected of them properly. It was recommended that private institutions should partner with these government enterprises to ensure that these enigmatic heritages are preserved for generations to learn.

Keywords: Museum, Indegenious, Religion, Promotion.

Introduction
African Indigenous Religion is one of the very prominent religions in Africa today. This religion, in spite of the virulent attacks at exterminating it by the foreign religions of Islam and Christianity, has continued to subsist even in present times. The religion dates back to time immemorial, employing oral traditions and transmission as its main vehicles of propagation and survival. Owing to diverse variables of the survival of other foreign religions, urbanization, globalization, modernity and neo - colonization, the Indigenous Religion has been mostly misunderstood and consequently misrepresented in the committee of nations. One of the areas in which the religion has been misunderstood and consequently misrepresented has to do with issues of visualization as they relate to their religious consciousness. Africans have produced several artifacts depicting their worldview, veneration of their divinities and images for both magical and medicinal

significance. Consequently, they have been regarded as idol worshippers, heathens, and people who have no idea of God. These images have been preserved in museums where several people from different continents can view them. Museums are edifices meant for the collection of antiquities or relics of creativity, knowledge and culture, ensuring that these collections exist for future generations. They provide treatment and preventive care for rare and valuable artistic collections of high value. The museums are expected to conduct and publish researches, house and care for art collections, carry out exhibitions, loan, monitor, and preserve the collections. Oftentimes, these buildings range from very large buildings to small houses where artifacts are preserved for the purpose of access to the public. Fayenuwo and Amusa[1] have identified several types of museums that are exiting:

> These include: museum of Antiquities-in which are housed ancient pieces of furniture or objects of art such as sculptures, paintings, ceramics, textiles and other crafts. Public record office museum serving as collection center for famous documents; War museum containing relics of national wars; Maritime museum for maritime history; museum for architecture, with types, structures and styles of building, etc., Museum for Local/Indigenous Technologies, Science Museum, with objects depicting history of science and engineering and Natural History Museum.

Museums activities in Nigeria serve as a veritable source for the conservation and preservation of its cultural heritage. Across the length and breadth of the country, there exist several museums where the cultural heritage of the citizens, existing for generations unborn, are preserved and documented for the public to see. It is noteworthy to say that in Nigeria alone, there exists arts and craft, both of bronze casting and wood, productions of terracotta in Ife, Nok, and those of Igbo Ukwu. Examinations of these cultural heritages that are documented in museums speak volumes of the activities of the people of the times they are trying to depict. These figures, their facial expressions, dressings, surroundings and times speak of the culture of the people of that era. One area that has been given much attention is the aspect that speaks of the religion of the people. Usually, religion happens to be one of the topics often mentioned in the coverage of the cultural expressions that are stored up for the audience to appreciate. Other areas of interest include aesthetics, archaeological discoveries of implements used by the ancient people. The resultant effect of this is that religion in most cases is not given the pride of place in these obligations. In cases where religion is mentioned, it is often done in the area of interactions between the people's indigenous religion and other religion. Often times mention is made of how Christianity came in contact with African Religion and how it has been able to dislodge the indigenous religion. The religious significance of these artistic figures to the Africans is rarely mentioned.

In view of the above, a study on the preservation, documentation and dissemination preservation of African Indigenous Religion in museums becomes a necessity. This will permit an elucidation of the people's religious ontology before the advent of the

missionaries, its resilience in the face of misrepresentations and how it became accepted outside the shores of Africa. This will further open vistas of opportunity to study the evidences of religion that are immanent in the museums. This study is necessary because the findings will reflect the kind of attention African Indigenous Religion enjoys from the public and policy makers. It is assumed that findings will generate further attention to the museums the content in them thus bringing about a general awareness for information needs to the global community.

This paper, in its purpose has three main objectives: to examine the role of museums in promoting the preservation, documentation and dissemination of African Indigenous Religion; to evaluate the efforts of the museum association in the documentation, preservation and dissemination of information about African Indigenous Religion and to create a general awareness of the need for the public to have access to information on the religion of their forefathers as contained in museum citadels. An examination of African Religion immanent in the ethnic groups of Nigeria will be rather too large for a good assessment. In the same vein, is the attempt at studying the museums that are established across the length and breadth of Nigeria. This study is therefore limited to art museums in the South-western part of Nigeria. These museums and galleries are spread across the six states of Southern Nigeria. These states include Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti and Kwara. It is worthy of mention that Kwara State is one of the middle belt states in Nigeria but merit inclusion as with the Southern states. The reason for this is that it shares affinity with the other southern states in ethnicity, historicity and boasts of the earliest museum in Nigeria. In support of this allusion is the position of Kalilu and Akintonde[2] who opine that the Yoruba sub-ethic groups in Kwara and Kogi states are also regarded culturally, as part of the Southwestern Nigeria. The Esie museum contains cultural artifacts similar to the cultural patterns of the south rather than those of Northern Nigeria.

Examining African Indigenous Religion across Africa within the museums will be rather inappropriate for a work of this nature as the religion though homogeneous in nature, contains slight differences among the ethnic groups. Besides, artifacts used for religious purposes differ from one region to another. It is in the light of this that it will be pertinent to examine the Indigenous Religion of the ethnic group under which the museums are situated. The Yoruba traditional beliefs will therefore be studied as representative religion of Africa within the framework of the artifacts preserved in the museums that are situated in Yoruba land.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Documentation

Culture and society evolve through communication and collaboration. But according to Buckland[3], we cannot communicate directly and we cannot collaborate in shared work environment for multiple very practical reasons. The other person of interest may be distant in space or time – and may even be dead. The best that can be done in circumstances like this is to have recourse to documents. What a person have said, done or written incorporates his work and his ideas as technology incorporates the effort of

past inventors. Buckland further posits that documents have increasingly become the means for monitoring, influencing, and negotiating relationships with others. This is an indication that the society today is a community that is dependent on documents. The word document can be seen from two perspectives in terms of meaning. As a verb, it means to make evident, to offer an explanation, but as a noun, it means something that is learned from, which includes a lesson, lecture or an example. Gradually, the word came to be seen as a text but conveys the meaning of evidence. Buckland posits that museums use the selective presentation and interpretation of artifacts to explain the past; mass media constantly transmit programs to entertain, to influence us, and to satisfy advertisers; libraries provide access to selective collections of documents to facilitate our reading;

According to Buckland documents has multiple aspects which include:

> 1. Phenomenological aspect. There is a phenomenological aspect to documents. So long as documents are objects perceived as signifying something, the status of being a document is not inherent (essential) but attributed to an object. Meaning is always constructed by a viewer.
> We can view the properties of a document as having three aspects:
> 2. Cultural codes. All forms of communicative expression depend on some shared understandings, which can be thought of as language in a broad sense;
> 3. Media types. Different types of expression have evolved: texts, images, numbers, diagrams, art, music, dance . . .
> 4. Physical media. Clay tablets, paper, film, analog magnetic tape, punch cards, digital media, and so on.

From the foregoing, a document can therefore goes beyond the idea of paper but can also include paper materials, musical instruments, objects, films, arts or even images. The document may refer to objects with a particular meaning to either the viewer or the community, thus giving it a cultural significance. In this light, arts give a two dimensional interpretations viz the acquirer and that of the community. To the acquirer, it may be seen as an evidence of something that speaks of the weakness, backwardness and victory over a community. This is demonstrated in the film *1897 Invasion* in which the British were depicted to carried off the arts and crafts of the Benin people. However the same arts to the indigenes have great theological significance which they cherish very much.

This present work is premised on Lund's[4] Complementary Theory of Documents. This can be summarily classified under three categories. According to him, documents have three simultaneous, inseparable and complementary characteristics. These include the

technical and technological aspects of documents; the social roles of documents and the mental aspect of document. This third part highlights the cognitive aspects of the relationship between and individual (or community) and the document. The technical aspect of document covers issues related to particular documents and their contents that cover bibliography, information retrieval, bibliometrics and textual analysis. In her assessment of documentation, Briet[5] opines that document is a "new cultural technique" and a "necessity for our time" when considered against the backdrop of libraries, museums, archives and other cultural agendas. On the social plane, it is easy to see most religions using sacred texts to affect beliefs while artists function to challenge people who visit museums and places where these images are kept.

Conclusively on documentation, this writer subscribes to Buckland when he came up with three views of documents in that document can be viewed firstly in the conventional, material view, this is touching on graphic records on paper, clay tablets, microfilm or on word processor. These documents are materials that can be transferable. Where it concerns terrestrial globes and sculptures, the objects are regarded to as documents. The second view according to him is that document serves a functional view. He believes that anything that serves as a document signifies something can be used as evidence. In this category includes educational toys, natural history collections and archaeological materials. This third position is the semiotic view. He insists that if anything is to be considered as a document we have to look at the deeper cultural interpretation the producers of that document gives the document. It has been shown above that a work of art can be seen as documents, their documentations can also be regarded documents and that these documents give information of a people who produced these documents.

Preservation

In this paper, conservation, for the purpose of brevity is used to cover other similar but different terminologies bothering on the safe keeping of objects in a museum. These nomenclatures, apart from conservation are preservation and restoration. The words, though similar are in actual fact different from one another. It is pertinent to explicate these words in order to understand the intricacies of their mutual exclusivities. Conservation is the taking possession of objects and collections for the purpose of allowing future generations see what have been produced by past generations. What is referred to as conservation is the action of prolonging the existence of important objects. It covers every actions aimed at safeguarding historical objects and collections. Its responsibilities include the retention of an object's significance historically, aesthetics, and technological qualities. The term includes researching, recording, cataloguing, use, acquisition and donours to mention a few. In addition to this the word also covers proper documentation of photographing, identifying its needs, determining its history, manufacture, setting, and retaining all information related to the object.

Preservation precludes all actions taken to maintain an object in its existing or original condition. This will include the minimization of the process of change, limit further

deterioration and prevent damage. Preservation of an object involves: the preservation of the integrity and authenticity of the object, the object must be safely displayed and stored in a safe. This action entails controlling agents of deterioration like temperature, humidity, light, pests, dust and other pollutants. Preservation also covers superintending conditions of use, display, visitor interaction and loans. In addition to the above, it is the responsibility of those in preservation department to treat objects and document their actions. This is usually carried out by trained conservators who understand the object's structure and chemistry. If an object is deemed to have historical, cultural, technological and/or aesthetic significance, then preservation is the preferred option to restoration

Restoration concerns actions taken to amend the existing material and structure of an object so as to return such object to its original condition. Restoration usually entails the removal of signs of aging of a particular object through painting, replacing and or reconstructing missing or worn parts with new parts. It must be mentioned here that restoration of objects are usually irreversible and can negatively influence the history and theological significance of objects of restoration.

Dissemination

Dissemination, according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*[6]means to spread or give out something, especially news, information, ideas, etc., to a lot of people:Images, textiles materials, works of arts are intellectual property that must be managed with care. One of the major responsibilities of a museum is the dissemination of the materials resident in such museum. According to Harmsworthand Turpin[7], dissemination falls under three main areas which include dissemination for awareness, dissemination for understanding and dissemination for action. As the names suggest, dissemination for awareness implies creating awareness of what one has to the world to see. The dissemination for understanding covers the preparation of information materials with a view that such audiences will benefit from that exposure. Dissemination for action precludes that which the audiences are drawn together for a particular purpose of taking action.

Dissemination for Understanding There will be a number of groups/audiences that you will need to target directly with your dissemination. This will be because you believe that they can benefit from what your project has to offer. It will be important, therefore, that these groups/audiences have a deeper understanding of your project's work.

Theorizing Religious Objects in Museums

It will be apposite to examine theoretical models from anthropology and history. The reason for this is the affinity of these disciplines with arts and sacred arts in the museums. Other important disciplines are museology and religious studies. The relevant theoretical issues hinges on a visual discourse where the display of sacred objects are seen as a result of Western aesthetic appreciation, understanding, and classificatory systems. This position is held by Clifford[8]and Myers[9].By implication, whenever objects are taken into a museum, they become objects of arts rather than religious objects. Corroborating these assertions, Grimes[10], Lindholm[11], Cote[12] and Gaskell[13] all agree that these objects are

then defined with a western spectacle. In the opinions of Grimes[14] and Gaskell[15], the museum strips the objects of theirreligiosity giving the objects different meanings from what they aremeant to the people where the objects emanated. These are then set in places that are secular. Catalani[16] has observed this in the itemization of the Yoruba people and their objects. Anthropologically, the museum objects, hinting on the religious are often interpreted from the perspective of the Western perception of religious. If it does not fit their definition of religion, the object is treated as non-religious. This definition will fall short of the Yoruba or African idea of the religious. This idea has been adequately discussed by Stocking[17], Clifford and Myers. Of recent, museology of sacred objects has come to be seen from religious studies. This is regarded as the concept of 'aesthetics of religion', or 'Religionsästhetik'. According to Kugele and Wilkens[18], this is a term and theory of anthropology propounded by German scholars. The object of study in this paper is the interaction between the objects in the museum and visitors to the museum. Here, focus is on perception and symbolic communication, the media of communication and the religion of the people the images represents. The value of this approach is that it allows for diverse knowledge of sacred objects. It is in this level the term 'museality', which concerns production, reception and circulation of knowledge about religion in museums, has emerged as a critical analytical tool. Koch *et al.*[19]with Kugele & Wilkens[20]have favoured the submission above.

Different aspects of display of exhibitions in a museum also assist in the appreciation of sacred objects in a particular museum. The art historian Carole Duncan[21] came up with a theory of museum as a ritualized space. This is not really a new phenomenon as museums have been regarded as sacred spacesas Jeffers[22]puts it. Duncan[23] posits that the monumentality of the architecture, the layout and the arrangement of the objects in the museum prompt the visitors to enact a ritualized performance.

The Place of Arts in Yoruba Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices

As stated earlier, the homeland of the Yoruba of Nigeria is traditionally known to occupy seven states of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Oshun, Ondo, Ekiti, parts of Kogi and Kwara. These people have several things in common. They have a common ancestry, culture and above all, they share a common traditional religious background. Much has been written about the Yoruba that focusing on their history will be a repetition. Another area where much research has been done is in the area of their indigenous religion. The works of patriarch scholars like Awolalu and Dopamu[24], Idowu[25] 1962, Parrinder[26] are indelible on the prints of Africa. Surfeit to say that they believe in the existence of God and in the theocratic governance of the universe. He is assisted by the divinities that are over four hundred. In addition, the Yoruba believe in the ancestors, spirits and they believe in the power of magic and medicine.

The Yoruba have always been engaged in the production of art long before the advent of the Europeans. According to Fagg[27], ninety percent of the wood carvings in Africa were produced by the Nigerian artists with the Yoruba artists in the fore-front. In the opinion of Kalilu and Akintonde,[28] their arts have been used in the service of the Indigenous

Religion and leadership roles. In appreciation of the role of arts in religion, the definition of religion in the *Oxford Living Dictionaries*[29]is apposite. It defines religion as the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods. It goes on to say that the word also speaks of a system of faith and worship. Religion and arts are integral parts of the culture. As a result of this, there is a symbiotic relationship between religion and arts. In Africa, both are intrinsically connected. The traditional art in Africa is basically for worshipping purposes according to Azeez[30]. Though there exist several arts that are often used for various other purposes such for domestic, aesthetics and a host of other purposes, yet most arts are connected tithe the intention of using them for the worship of the divinity. Arts often serve a dual purpose in religion. It can either be a means of expression or objects that are devoted for worship. Azeez[31] concludes in his assessment of the relationship between religion and art as:

> Art, like religion, could be regarded as a means of revelation. Like religion, art re-creates by offering assets of symbols of our own being, of community, and of sacred. Again, like religion, art heals and recreates, just as it offers categories for evaluations in the society. The precinct of the connection between art and religion seems largely confined to rituals in religion though not exclusively so.

The traditional Yoruba artists do not only work for the purpose of aesthetics, they work with the intention of producing carvings that will be relevant to worship. In Yoruba land, certain families are endowed with the responsibility of the production of these artistic materials. These families are connected to the worship of one divinity or the other. Their productions are basically in two forms; this is either in the areas of verbal arts (consisting of panegyrics, chants, or recitations) or visual arts (comprising of sculptures, paintings or decorations). The visual art are often expressed in iron, bronze, terra cottas, wooden and also textiles. These works of art are used for divining, figurines depiction of divinities or individuals, masquerades portraying the ancestors, and images used for the purposes of sending symbolic messages to people. Until the introduction of Islamic, Christian religions and western culture into Nigeria, traditional Yoruba art thrived in archetype and patronage.

Interestingly, art and craftsmanship are an intrinsic part of the worship life of the Yoruba. As a matter of fact, the peoples' use of arts in the expression of their religious beliefs has made some foreign religions and scholars to give them obnoxious nomenclatures. Some of these wrong terminologies include idolatry, paganism and heathenism to mention only a few. Arts generally fall under two categories viz: the visual arts which cover the ones that can be observed with the eyes. These include such artistic impressions like tie and dye clothes, paintings, carvings, decorations, even sculptures and paraphernalia. In the second category of arts are the verbal arts. These are those artistic presentations dealing with the faculty of the ears rather than that of the eyes. Verbal arts include artistic renditions of praises, fables, cognomen, songs, proverbs, parables, incantations,

recitations and worship. Across the nooks and crannies of Yoruba cities, towns and villages are craftsmen (and women) who are dedicated to the production of these valuable works of arts. These forms of arts actually go together. Some verbal arts are intertwined with the visual one so as to be efficacious. Though people are trained for the production of these artistic designs, it is usually believed that it is a function that runs within a particular family. These people are believed to be endowed with special creative abilities and talents that without formal training, they are able to give artistic impressions to the abstract perceptions of their clients. In most cases, these artistic impressions have diverse functions ranging from historical antecedents, aesthetics, tourism, religious, economics and social functions.

In Yorubaland like other parts of Africa, religion is so intertwined with various other activities that it has become a part and parcel of the average African life. Religion in Africa is not isolated but permeates the life of the people. Interestingly, a lot have been written about the religion of the Africans especially the Yoruba. The pivotal and immense works of Idowu,[32]Mbiti,[33] Awolalu and Dopamu have continued to be sources of knowledge about the peoples' Indigenous Religion.

Certain fundamental elements are central to the discussion of most traditional religious beliefs of all the ethnic groups of Africa. These are the five pillars that form the structure of the religion. These five cardinal areas are immanent in all the African ethnic groups' appreciation of their religion. That is the reason why it is generally believed that their religion is homogenous though with little degrees of difference in emphasis across these ethnic groups in Africa. The five areas are the people's belief in God, belief in the divinities, belief in ancestors, belief in spirits and their belief in mysterious powers. On the Yoruba perception of the Supreme Being, God is known by two primary names of Olorun or Olodumare. Olorun means the owner of heaven. Being that as it were, the Yoruba believe that God cannot be approached directly by man. He can only be approached through the divinities that have emanated from him. As a Spirit, he cannot be localized, he can be worshipped anywhere, anyhow and by anybody. He has no priest or priestess to officiate for him. By extension, there is no place of worship that is built for him. In the light of this, there are no symbolic representations of him. Nowhere is his image carved by the maestros of arts because nothing can be compared to him. That is why the representation of the Supreme Being of the Yoruba is not in any of the museums under study. It will be apposite to end this summary of the Yoruba conception of Olodumare with Modupe Oduyoye's[34] observation on the matter:

> Olorun is so all-sufficient psychologically and materially that he does not need man either to *bo* (adulate) him or to *bo* (feed) him. . . Fathers demand service, shrug off adulation as too sentimental and pray never to have to be fed by their children. It is not because Olorun is too remote that no sacrifice is offered to him.

The Divinities occupy the second strata of the structure of Yoruba traditional belief system. The divinities are called Orisa and ontologically believed to be emanations of the Supreme Being raised for the purpose of serving in the theocratic governance of the universe. The divinities are innumerable; several figures have been advanced with regard to their census. Some of the figures range from 201,401, 600 and 1, 700. According to Dopamu, the divinities are technically intermediaries between God and man in the theology of the Yoruba. They are the objective phenomena of Yoruba religious worship. Since God is not offered direct worship by the Yoruba, the divinities are offered worship. These divinities are in three categories, they include primordial divinities, deified ancestors and personification of natural phenomena. The primordial divinities are those who were emanations of Olodumare. They include such divinities like Orisa-nla or Obatala, Orunmila or Ifa, Ogun, Esu or Elegbara, while the deified divinities include Sango, Moremi and Ayelala. The natural divinities are Oya, Osun and Yemoja. Functionally, the divinities play various roles in different facets of the theocratic governance of the universe. Orisa nla for example is saddled with the responsibility of moulding the physical form of human beings. Orunmila is in charge of matters related to wisdom, foreknowledge and prognostication. While Ogun is in charge of war, hunting and metallurgy, Sango, Ayelala and Soponna take charge in punishing human misdemeanor. Other areas of ministering to man are in the provision of the blessings of the womb. Osanyin is in charge of magic and medicine. It is worthy of mention here that these divinities have statuettes made and kept in their shrines. There are also innumerable arts and images made to facilitate easy worship of these divinities. The Yoruba do not worship these figures rather they stand as symbols of the divinities to which they are dedicated to them. The shrines dotting the Yoruba territorial land space are evidences and veritable sources of the religious ontology of the people of Southwest Nigeria.

Closely following the divinities are the ancestors. These are the living dead of the people. The Yoruba eschatological perception is that death is not final end of a person but actually a step to a continued existence in which nothing has actually changed outside the fact that the person is now a spirit. The Yoruba, like other African ethnic groups hold the view that the ancestors are interested in the affairs of the living members of their families. They retain their places of honour and roles as father, mother or grandfather. They can affect living members of the family positively or negatively. They often guide, guard, and punish errant members of the family who may have done illicitly with the family property or members. There are festivals held in honour of these living dead on communal basis. Cults like Egungun, Oro, Agemo, Gelede and Adamu-Orisa are dedicated to the veneration of the ancestral spirits. During festivals, masks are worn by cultic functionaries who go around blessing the people in the communities. The Yoruba believe these masquerades are the ancestors who have come to bless the people. Many of the masks are found in most of the museums found displayed in the museums at Ile- Ife. Ogundele[35] has identified many of these regalia as one that is calling attention of the people to the supernatural.

The apparitional entities called Spirits are the occupants of the fourth rung of the strata of the Yoruba religious beliefs while mysterious powers is the last position in the structure of their religion. According to Dopamu[36]

> Spirits are believed to be apparitional entities which form a separate category of beings from divinities and ancestors. The Yoruba regard them as powers which are almost abstract entities that take on human shape. They are usually associated with natural phenomena like trees, rocks, rivers, lagoons, forests, bushes, hills, earth, mountains, winds, dark groves and unusual places, and these become their abode. These spirits may even inhabit animals or birds or snakes. Such objects as they inhabit are regarded as having certain mysterious powers and they may become the emblems of the spirits. The objects may be used in the preparation of magic and medicine in the belief that they possess magical significance because of the spirits residing in them.

As spirits, they are not often given much expression in the artistic portrayal of their being. They are similar to the mysterious powers of the people whose major preoccupation is in the area of the use of herbs and roots. Even if these were to be preserved, it may not have the lasting effect arts have. However, they are popularly known in the area of verbal arts rather than visual arts.

Overview of Museums in Yoruba land, Nigeria

The Yoruba land of Nigeria is a multicultural and multidialectal region with rich antecedents. The rich cultural heritage of the people spread from the slave trade activities preserved in Badagry, the entry port of the Europeans, the religious heritage also documented across the region and the beauties of their natural environment as featured in the meeting of cold and warm water springs, myriads of falls spread across the crannies of the region. In Lagos State, the National Gallery of Modern Art is situated in the National Arts Theatre in Lagos. The museum boasts of traditional artworks and cultural pieces that have been kept there for all to see. However, the art work there shows different works of arts from all over Nigeria. In Kwara State, the Esie Museum beckons to lovers of history as the content of the museum speaks eloquently of the history of the people. This museum was the first to be established in Nigeria and it was opened in 1945. Its collection of tombstone images and figures is reputed to be the largest collection of soapstone images in the world as documented by Oladumuye, Bolajoko and Tolulope.[37] In an interview with Mr Akano, a festival is held every year in the month of April where an animal is sacrificed in the shrine at the front of the museum. Owo museum is situated in Owo in Ondo state. It was founded in 1968 to house antiquities that were formerly in the palace of the Olowo of Owo. The museum also contains several artifacts found in Owo and its environs. Its strategic position between Ife and Benin makes it a custodian of

artistic traditions of these two civilizations. It contains terracotta sculptures of the 15th century period. The town of Oshogbo in Osun State housed the Ulli Beier Museum. This is museum serves a dual function of an art gallery and art school attached to the sacred groove. According to Olatunji and Ezenagu[38] the museums in Oshogbo was established by the artists Ulli Beier and Susanne Wenger. In addition to the above, is the National Museum of Unity in Aleshiloye, Ibadan, Oyo state capital. A big museum equipped with four galleries namely, Unity Gallery, Masquerade Gallery, Pottery Gallery and Yoruba Gallery. Each of these galleries house artifacts that goes along with each name. Unity Gallery contains works of arts across Nigeria. Masquerade Gallery houses masquerades regalia and paraphernalia. Pottery Gallery is devoted to artistic works of pottery while Yoruba Gallery is devoted for arts mainly found in Yoruba land. It must be added here that the museums also contain musical instruments used in the past. Of particular interest is a drum reputed to have the curative attributes of the ability to heal impotence. In Ogun State, the researcher visited the National Museum at Abeokuta. This museum boasts of artifacts and records from the pre-colonial times, the colonial era and post-colonial times. It contains different types of artistic textile designs inclusive of other relics of the past in the area. These museums are mere representative museums of the museums dotting the landscape of the Yoruba.

An examination of these museums reveals artifacts that date back to time immemorial. They reveal the cultural patterns and affinities of the people. According to Oyewo,[39] the perception of museum as custodian of arts and cultural objects overshadows its other functions and definitions to the extent that it has led to estrangement between the museum and the community whose heritage it is supposed to preserve. These arts and crafts depict the Yoruba worldview, domestic activities, aesthetics, myths, human and human activities. Some of these museums have buildings dedicated to them others have houses, palaces or shrine dedicated to the safe keeping of these artifacts. All the museums have documents highlighting the arts found in them. Many like Esie museum show attempts at preserving and restoring images that have been damaged.

Many of the museums visited reveal a shortage of staff strength. The building housing these artifacts have become so old that they need repair. The security surrounding these museums is appalling. The effects of these are that it may not attract strong patronages from the outside world thus impeding the dissemination of the knowledge of these works of arts for perpetuity. Besides this, the date of collection of the artifacts there are old. There is no evidence of new collection. On enquiry, it was revealed that due to financial difficulty, collectors and archaeologists cannot work.

Regarding indigenous religion and museums of Southwest Nigeria, there is a difficulty in the mediation of the object-centered exhibitions. It is difficult to bring to the fore the spirituality of the immaterial or intangibility of some of the artifacts. Many museums generally do not have visitors as a result of their location. In some cases, access to the museums is often through bad roads, or in the hinterland. At other times inability to gain access to the museums may be as a result of political instability, religious crisis and

ethnic wars. According to Areo[40] "location of museums in Nigeria is one of the greatest challenges affecting levels of visitorship".

The Yoruba land part of Nigeria is home to diverse culture and amultiplicity of dialects dating back to antiquity. This cultural diversity has been responsible to the people's abundance of religious expressions across the length and breadth of Yoruba land. As a result of this, attempts have been made to preserve the cultural heritages of the people

Role of Museums in Promoting the Preservation, Documentation and Dissemination of African Indigenous Religion

Most of the artifacts and collections from remarkable culture areas in Nigeria are displayed in museums and galleries all over the world.Onyima[41]corroborates this assertion by tracing some of these artefacts to Europe. This is an evidence of the fact that artifacts from Yoruba land are well preserved all over the world. Preservation is actually in three stages. According to Onyima,[42] these are the pre-colonial stage, the colonial stage and the post-colonial stage. The pre-colonial stage covers the era when preservation was in royal palaces, head of families those in charge of shrines, grooves and tools used in the prosecution of festivals. These custodians of the people's religious artifacts preserved the custom of the people.

Colonialism ushered in a period of looting, vandalism and banditry of the people's cultural heritages. According to Fasuyi[43], this period spans from 1900 to 1960 human activities such as looting, vandalism, thefts, unscientific excavation of grave goods, iconoclasm, wars, illicit trafficking of cultural objects among others. Fasuyi[44] goes further to identify the period 1900 to 1960 as the era of colonization in Nigeria. This period also marked attempts at establishing museums across Nigeria by the colonial master. The aim then was to present objects in the light of the Western perspectives of prejudice, racial superiority and attempts are presenting the objects as those of a conquered territory. By the post-colonial period, things have changed and the Nigerians, in this sense, the Yoruba have taken over the running of the museums. They understood the heritage; they understood where they came from and the theological imports of the images. Afigbo and Okita[45] have highlighted five main areas that the museum can contribute to nation building and by extension contribute to the preservation, documentation and dissemination of Africa Religion. These are summarized as

a. Cultural education of both young and old people within the society.
b. Promoting mutual understand among the various ethnic groups in the country.
c. Contribution to stability by reorienting Nigerians away from naked materialism and petro naira
to subtler values of human society.
d. Reactivation of rural handicraft and animation of rural area
e. Economic progress through money earned from tourism.

Challenges of Museums of Southwest Nigeria in the Performance of their Roles

Workers of museums are experiencing several challenges in the discharge of their duties. These include but not limited to security matters of losing the artifacts kept in the museums from the colonial days. Others include the effects of Christianity and Islam, civilization and lack of financial support for the museums. There also exist natural agents of denudation which is negatively affecting the artifacts.

Recommendation

From the foregoing, and for the museums to be alive to their responsibilities, a few recommendations will be necessary. This will be divided into three main places, the area that concerns the government, that of the private institutions and a reorientation about the religious practices of our forebears. On the side of the government, it is recommended that government should come up with a preventive conservation plan which must include staff training, good record keeping and provide adequate financial muscle to address the needs. The need to have conservation laboratories for the museums is long overdue. In addition to this, these museums should be made attractive to members of the public by rehabilitating their buildings. The members of staff should be paid their salaries as at when due and should be given a worker friendly environment. The above mentioned attempts at ensuring proper documentation and dissemination cannot be borne by the government alone. This is where it becomes necessary for private partnering with private research institutions, companies and industries to bear part of the financial involvement of the museums. On the third part is embarking on promotion of the museums through the mass media to attract patronages from those in Nigeria and beyond

Conclusion

This work is based on the role of museums in promoting the preservation, documentation and dissemination of African Indigenous Religion in Yoruba land of Nigeria. Of the five museums visited, it was discovered that the museum's members of staff are doing their best to preserve, document and disseminate religious images. However, their efforts are below expectation as they are encumbered by a number of factors. It was discovered that religion is just an aspect of their work. The religious affiliation of some of the members of staff has watered down the religiosity of some of the images there. If the museums follow the recommendations it is believed that the museums will be strategically positioned to present the African Religion in a better light for a public that is fast losing its heritages and identities.

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