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**INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO DATA COLLECTION IN
EGUNGUN MASQUERADE FESTIVAL CONFLICTS AMONG THE IBADAN PEOPLE
OF SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The study of the *Egungun* masquerade festival among indigenous Ibadan scholars faces significant challenges in method and methodology, primarily due to the application of Eurocentric frameworks that often deviate from African cultural and philosophical contexts. Limited attention has been paid to the reliability and validity of data collection and interpretation within the Yoruba heritage, particularly in the context of *Egungun* festival conflicts. This study addresses this gap by examining indigenous philosophical approaches to data collection and interpretation, focusing on the 1976 conflict between *Egungun* Olóòlù and Islamic worshippers in Ibadan, South-West Nigeria. The study employed empirically focused, community-based participatory methods, including oral traditions and site visits for participatory observations. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with individuals possessing extensive knowledge of the *Egungun* festival in Ibadan, alongside key informant interviews with *Egungun* cult members. The study proposes a culturally grounded framework rooted in Yoruba philosophies of *ajobi* (family kinship) and *Ajogbe* (communal kinship). This paper aims to offer a novel approach to understanding *Egungun* festival conflicts in Ibadan, South-West Nigeria. The adopted framework will undoubtedly encourage scholars to explore new directions in the study of the *Egungun* masquerade festival among the indigenous people of Ibadan, South-west, Niger and elsewhere. .

Keywords: *Egungun* Masquerade, Festival Conflicts, Yoruba Philosophy, Indigenous Methodology, Ibadan.

Introduction

In July 2018, after scheduling a meeting with the head and spiritual leader of one of the most revered *Egungun* in South-West Nigeria, *Egungun* Olóòlù, I realised why vital information about indigenous culture is often not readily accessible. High Chief Kazeem Abija represents two significant cults in Yorubaland: the Ogboni and *Egungun* Olóòlù cults. From a distance, non-initiates

have used stereotypes to define him and his cults. Despite his busy schedule, High Chief Kazeem Abija was prepared to meet me. I noticed that he was not alone, he had arranged for other important individuals to be present. As the stage was set, some more people arrived to listen to our conversation and verify stories they had previously heard about this cult. My encounter with High Chief Kazeem Abija revealed the essence of African indigenous knowledge. Thus, one of the greatest challenges facing contemporary scholars in African studies is the use of methodologies that align with the cultural and philosophical realities of the communities under study. Scholars and organisations, such as the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), have long advocated African-centred approaches, arguing that Western epistemological frameworks often produce findings inapplicable to African contexts (CODESRIA, 2019; Keane and Seehawer, 2017). Consequently, many recommendations from African studies are often irrelevant to the environments in which they were conducted due to inappropriate methodologies. While interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to the study of African culture are increasing, vital ethnographic and historiographical studies have been compromised (Seehawer, 2018). In some cases, core African values can only be expressed within their cultural origins. For instance, among the Yoruba, how can traditional festivals, dances, and other socio-religious practices be captured through a quantitative approach? How can the history that gave rise to them be conveyed through “Yes” or “No” questions?

Among the Yoruba, the *Egungun* festival is an annually event and attracts large crowds from across the globe. Similarly, Islam, a foreign religion, has been embraced by some people in Ibadan. Records document conflicts between these religions in Ibadan (Imaledo, 2024; Adeboye, 2012). Intriguingly, these conflicts often target individuals who are Ibadan by birth or residence. The *Egungun* festival, a religious event, transcends diverse cultures within Ibadan’s social life. Social and religious lives among the Yoruba are inseparable, creating an interface between religious festivals and Ibadan’s festival culture. Sociologists have often unconsciously applied quantitative methods to research the *Egungun* festival, resulting in inconsistent conclusions that generalise people with diverse and heterogeneous cultural identities and statuses. This is why Nhemachena et al. (2016) concluded that research, particularly by indigenous African scholars, sometimes exacerbates negative perceptions of their culture. This claim underscores the need to examine how Africans project their indigenous knowledge to preserve their history. Against this background, this paper focuses on the 1976 conflict between *Egungun* Olóòlù and Islamic worshippers in Ibadan, employing indigenous philosophical lenses, specifically the Yoruba concepts of *ajobi* and *ajogbe*, to decolonise research methodologies and provide a deeper understanding of these cultural dynamics.

The Yoruba philosophy of *ajobi* is built on familial kinship and collective responsibility, binding individuals to their lineage and ancestors. The word *ajobi* derives from “won jo bi wa,” meaning “we came from the same ancestor.” *Ajogbe* (“a jo gbe,” we live together) revolves around communal harmony and interconnectedness (Akinwowo, 1980). In the context of Ibadan, this philosophy acknowledges Ibadan as a melting pot for diverse Yoruba people in South-West Nigeria. These principles guide social interactions, conflict resolution, and knowledge transmission, shaping how data are collected and interpreted in culturally sensitive research. Using these philosophies challenges Eurocentric assumptions and reconstructs the narrative of *Egungun* festival conflicts through an indigenous lens, ensuring that the voices of Ibadan’s people are authentically represented. This approach aims to provide new insight into the uniqueness of qualitative data gathering among Ibadan indigenes and to decolonise research methodologies in African contexts.

Conceptual Clarification

To articulate the themes of this paper and understand the operational concepts defining this study, two reasons are highlighted: first, they facilitate in-depth analysis and valid conclusions; second, the concepts involved are inherently contested. Thus, religion, conflict, indigenous knowledge, *ajobi*, and *Ajogbe* are discussed.

Religion, Conflict, Indigenous Knowledge, Ajobi, and Ajogbe

How can religion be viewed in the context of culture and origin? Addressing this question provides greater clarity on why conflicts arise during religious festivals. What is religion? There is no universal definition of religion. Scholars perceive religion as a belief system rooted in cultural and environmental realities, particularly in Africa (Idowu, 1973; Mbiti, 1975; Agada, 2022). Africans' perception of religion is intertwined with the culture that shapes it. Thus, religion is embedded in the culture that produces it. Abe's (1990) conception of religion is rooted in Buddhist culture. His work emphasised the reformation of orthodox and esoteric Buddhism into a more modernised form, driven by belief in expressions about God. Beyond cultural context, religion manifests in various accessible forms. Among the Yoruba, traditional religion revolves around everyday experiences, explaining their polytheistic nature. The Yoruba worship multiple gods as they manifest in sensory experiences, appreciating nature's role in daily life. For instance, water, which supports growth, crops, animals, and sustenance, is worshipped through *Yemoja* (the water goddess); iron, used for tilling the ground, is similarly revered. These patterns of religious expression clearly reflect the Yoruba's indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is not a novel concept; however, it requires attention to reflect a people's identity. Warren (1991) views indigenous knowledge as the endowment of local people within their environmental context. Ellen and Harris (1996) consider it a natural and cultural way of life, while Crawhall (2006) describes it as belonging to marginalised groups, whose existence is often perceived as less impactful globally. Scholars agree that indigenous knowledge is unique and should be approached as such for better understanding. Moreover, indigenous knowledge, as expressed by a people, does not render them inferior. Indigenous knowledge manifests through religion and festivals, which may lead to conflict when interacting with unfamiliar or unaccommodating cultures.

Philosophy of Ajobi and Ajogbe and *Egungun* in the Culture of Ibadan

The worship of *Egungun* varies across Yoruba regions. This paper focuses on the *Egungun* in Ibadan. The *Egungun* festival is a continuous tradition of the third Ibadan, founded in the 1830s, redating Ibadan as one of the newest Yoruba towns. Although *Egungun* were used in some wars fought by Ibadan, they have always been integral to its culture. Myths recount that Lagelu, the head of Ibadan, and his men publicly disrobed an *Egungun* at the market square during the *Egungun* festival. In response to this taboo among the Yoruba, the Alaafin Sango, supported by the Olowo of Owo, the Awujale of Ijebu, the Alake of Abeokuta, Owa Ilesha, and Orogun Ile-Ila, launched a three-year campaign that devastated Ibadan (Layiwola, 2015). In Yoruba cosmology, ancestors exist between *Aye* (the visible world of the living) and *Orun* (the spiritual and invisible domain of ancestors, gods, and spirits). Ordinary individuals access the visible world by virtue of being human, but accessing *Orun* requires intermediaries, such as ancestors, who bridge the spiritual and invisible realms. Ancestor status is not universal; only those who live to a ripe old age and die "good deaths" qualify. These individuals may represent families, lineages, villages, towns, or kingdoms in the invisible

worlds. Their descendants and associated people regularly seek their intervention (Bamikole, 2013).

As representations of ancestral spirits, the *Egungun* festival is a collective responsibility, with every household member expected to participate actively in Ibadan. During this period, the spirit of a household's founder physically appears as *Egungun*. Cultural norms require household members to hold a vigil the day before the public appearance of their *Egungun* to invoke ancestral spirits. This vigil holds greater spiritual significance than the physical appearance of the *Egungun*. Immediate *Egungun* members use this time to seek divine intervention for issues beyond physical strength, termed *ipenija* (a call for divine intervention). Issues such as barrenness, misfortune, health, and economic challenges are presented individually and collectively to ancestors believed to have the power to alter circumstances (Babalola, 2019). At the special grove of these *Egungun*, within the ancestors' compound, the *Alagbaa* recounts the life and contributions of the ancestor who founded their compound. Typically Ogun worshippers, the *Alagbaa* appease Ogun, Sango, and Esu on behalf of the household and others seeking assistance from their *Egungun*. In Ibadan, the *Egungun* festival last pans three months; from May to July, with feasts every fifth day. In contemporary Ibadan, not all chiefs have *Egungun*. Thus, *Egungun* perform for Ibadan's chiefs in order of seniority, with each chief selecting a day to commemorate their ancestors with relatives. During these visits, eating and drinking occur, with chiefs, elders, and invited guests watching lineage masquerades dance. Some *Egungun*, accompanied by devotees, visit sections of Ibadan, with men and women wearing uniforms specially purchased for the festival.

The philosophical foundations of *ajobi* and *ajogbe*, Yoruba ethos, are evident in the festival's organisation. In Ibadan, there are two types of *Egungun*: *Egungun Ogun* (war masquerades) and *Egungun ebo* (sacred masquerades). All *Egungun Ogun* are family *Egungun*. Ibadan's family settings comprise multiple families headed by a *bale* and an overall *mogaji*. For instance, the Ode Aje family, where Olóòlù resides, oversees over thirty families. Other *Egungun* in Ode Aje may represent each *agbole* (quarters) within this area. For *Egungun ebo*, the only *Egungun* is *Egungun Olóòlù*, a community *Egungun* representing Ibadan's collective belief in the religious cosmology of ancestors (Imaledo, 2024). Thus, *ajobi* manifests in the collective participation of households, where family members honour ancestors through shared rituals, reinforcing lineage ties. *Ajogbe* ensures the festival fosters community unity, as diverse groups celebrate and resolve disputes through dialogue and mutual respect. These principles guide not only the festival's execution but also the research process, ensuring data collection aligns with community values and priorities.

Research Methodology

This paper draws on personal research experiences gathered while examining the conflict between Islamic and Isele religions in Ibadan. The study employed empirically focused, community-based participatory methods designed to align with the Yoruba philosophical principles of *ajobi* and *ajogbe*, ensuring that data collection respects familial and communal values. By prioritising indigenous voices and practices, the study seeks to decolonise research methodologies, offering a model for culturally sensitive inquiry in African contexts. Oral traditions, for instance, tap into Ibadan's rich history of storytelling, preserving and transmitting knowledge across generations. Site visits enabled immersive observation of *Egungun* rituals, providing firsthand insights into their cultural significance. Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with careful attention to cultural protocols, such as respecting custodians' authority and ensuring truthfulness in sacred spaces. These methods collectively ensure that the data reflect the lived experiences and

philosophical worldview of the Ibadan people.

African Indigenous Knowledge and Interview Patterns

African Indigenous Knowledge of Ajobi and Ajogbe in Data Collection: Various methods and patterns exist for conducting interviews in traditional African societies. This section draws on my experiences collecting data between 2015 and 2024 in Ibadan, Oyo State. Three methods are discussed: Focus Group Discussion, Key Informant Interview, and In-depth Interview.

In-depth Interview and Reliability

One strength of cultural studies scholars examining festival religions is the use of in-depth interviewing. As a qualitative research method, in-depth interviewing targets a small number of respondents to explore their viewpoints on the issues under discussion (Boyce and Neale, 2006). A traditional festival like the *Egungun* festival is staged among a cult that may include non-initiates, who are likely to have less in-depth understanding than initiates. This explains why the group of interviewees is often small in such festivals. For instance, Ibadan hosts various Islamic sects, and engaging specific groups narrows the information documented about them. The *Egungun* festival conflict, particularly the one involving *Egungun Olóòlù*, the most revered and contested *Egungun* in Ibadan, exemplifies this. *Egungun Olóòlù* is a religious masquerade highly respected for special ritual sacrifices in certain areas of Ibadan. During my fieldwork, responses to questions about the conflict between followers of *Egungun Olóòlù* and some Islamic worshippers diverged significantly from popular narratives. Respondents' interests and assumptions about the *Egungun Olóòlù* cult varied widely. These respondents were crucial because I carefully selected key insights from their extensive narratives. I further sought individuals with neutral knowledge of the conflict to confirm narratives influenced by other parties' interests.

In a traditional African society like Ibadan, in-depth interviewing can clarify allegations, truths, or generalisations about significant issues. For example, how can one conclude that ritual killings occur during the *Egungun* festival's public procession in Ibadan? This question requires careful consideration, free from sentiment or hasty generalisations. Such revelations could dispel public conflict. Denzin (2001:28) describes in-depth interviewing as a means by which "the personal is made public." In traditional Ibadan settings, truth is vital to uphold the philosophies of *ajobi* and *Ajogbe* (family and community). These philosophies take precedence over religious affiliations where unity is required. Indigenous Ibadan people respect their religion and the cultural festival that defines them. The *Egungun* festival re-echoes the ancestors' role in founding the city. Every Ibadan indigene has an ancestor who lived in a village or city within Ibadan, represented by a *baale* (village representative) or *mogaji* (city representative). The *ajobi* and *Ajogbe* philosophies guide the narratives of Ibadan indigenes who witnessed the *Egungun* festival conflict. For instance, when I asked, "I heard that human beings are used as sacrifices?" the response was, "Omo ti obo bi, obo kin pa, eran aya di ni" (He who came from a woman is not killed by a woman, rather animal is used). This implies that *elegungun* do not use human sacrifices, only animals as substitutes.

Key Informant Interview

For traditional phenomena, Key Informant Interviews bridge gaps between scarce literature and public perceptions or interests. These interviews seek knowledgeable individuals whose rare understanding of the issue is crucial. African indigenous knowledge patterns naturally position

respondents around daily societal issues, reflected in roles such as the Olubadan, members of the Olubadan-in-Council, *mogaji*, *bale*, *baale*, and traditional heads of numerous *Isele* religions in Ibadan and other parts of the Yoruba kingdom. Culturally, gatekeepers in traditional African societies serve as custodians of community history. Key Informant Interviews with these custodians preserve their societies. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) recognise storytelling's significance as a tool for preserving a people and their culture. During interviews with key informants for the 1976 *Egungun* festival conflict, a purposive sampling approach selected respondents who were directly involved or had firsthand information. Creswell and Creswell (2017) note that gatekeepers with diverse insights enrich a study. Participants, including the Chief Imam of Ibadanland, the head of *Egungun* in Ibadanland, the custodian of *Egungun Olóòlù*, and Ajagbemokeferi's children, guided data collection. Their societal affiliations and connections to the conflict were considered. As custodians of their generation's and religions' histories, these individuals were key participants, confirming and ratifying data from in-depth interviews and FGDs. Excluding them would reduce the credibility and reliability of data on the conflict between *Egungun Olóòlù* followers and some Islamic worshippers.

Focus Group Discussion in *Egungun* Festival Conflicts

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are a vital instrument for qualitative data collection. Their importance lies in the belief that interviewing a group together helps guide memories and life stories, avoiding distortions. Alabi and Ukpokolo (2019) note that FGDs enable knowledgeable participants to discuss and debate issues objectively. They advocate objectivity and identify gender equality in these interviews. However, this cannot be generalised within the scope of the of the *Egungun* festival conflict. In most African societies, males and females are not equal in roles or relations. While Western feminist ideologies attempt to penetrate African culture, many advocates are females seeking male responsibilities. This may succeed in some African cultures, but not in the worship of *Egungun Olóòlù* in Ibadan, a focus of this paper. For a female to don the *Egungun Olóòlù* costume is taboo, punishable by death. *Egungun Olóòlù* must not see a female, nor may a female see him: "Ani mo ko ko, eni ko komo" (he who knows him does not meet him, he who meets him does not know him) (Abija, 2018). The *Egungun* cult is male-dominated among the Yoruba. Although some female *Alagbaa* (custodians), known as *Iya Agan*, exist, male cult members lead them, as reflected in the Yoruba saying, "oso loko aje" (wizard is the husband of the witch). Thus, mixed-gender FGDs discussing issues forbidden to females may be restricted to single-gender groups.

The number of FGD participants varies. Ayantayo (2015) suggests four to twelve, grouping them into mini (at least four members) and full FGDs (minimum six). Alabi and Ukpokolo (2019:49) propose five to ten participants without such distinctions. In African monotheistic or polytheistic religions, respect or honour for positions, not individuals, must be considered. Even in colonial religions, Africans reflect their defining culture in rituals. The philosophy of *ajobi* guided participant selection, ensuring family representatives and *Alagbaa* contributed significantly to data collection. *Ajogbe* fostered communal consensus, with participants debating narratives to reach a shared truth. At the Ogunmola compound, *Alagbaa Ogunmola* and *Alagbaa Ibikunle* noted their forefathers' close friendship and collaboration in decision-making. This *Ajogbe* bond preserved memories and strengthened frail recollections during data collection, enhancing data trustworthiness and aligning with Yoruba values of collective responsibility and harmony.

Individualist-FGDs of *Egungun* Festival Conflicts

Some FGDs in African studies overlook their individualistic nature. This study introduces “Individualist-FGDs,” a method rooted in Yoruba philosophy’s emphasis on hierarchical truth-telling. Individualist-FGDs represent an indigenous, philosophically based technique, distinct from Western FGDs dictated by gender and participant numbers. The 1976 *Egungun* festival conflict between *Egungun* Olóòlù and Alhaji Ajagbemokeferi in Ibadan served as an experiment. *Egungun* Olóòlù is primarily ritualistic, with few authorised to speak about him. How could FGDs be conducted? As noted, position, not age, is paramount in African religion. The custodian of *Egungun* Olóòlù, Alhaji Kazeem (Abija), could not be grouped with others to discuss the cult’s affairs. In a special room where truth is upheld due to deities that punish lies, the chief custodian sat with six key cult members behind him and five others in front. Questions prompted deliberations. For some, he initiated objective discussions for two reasons: first, the *Egungun* Olóòlù festival is a legal event in Ibadan, opened by the Olubadan; second, Islam in Ibadan allows observance of both religion and culture (*baale*), benefiting the custodian. To ensure truth, he answered questions based on witnesses’ conclusions. Among Muslim leaders in interviews on the 1976 conflict, Individualist-FGDs mirrored those of *Egungun* Olóòlù followers. The principal interviewee was the *bale* or *kalifa*, head of the Alhaji Ajagbemokeferi dynasty. Alhaji Kalifa Ajagbemokeferi, who witnessed the conflict as a child, maintained all facts and records. During the interview, he ensured two family members and six members of the central mosque his father built were present. His name, Ajagbemokeferi (“he who speaks the truth at all costs”), welcomed co-respondents’ criticism. He restructured questions for deliberation, relaying answers to me, confident in their truth as the household’s chief custodian. These Individualist-FGDs reflect the cultural and philosophical importance of trust among Yoruba religious leaders. Cultural considerations determine their feasibility. This Yoruba indigenous and philosophical framework persists across generations, despite foreign religious influences.

Trustworthiness of Data Collection in the *Egungun* Masquerade Festival Conflict among the Indigenous People of Ibadan in South-West Nigeria

The trustworthiness of data is fundamental to a study’s validity. Although validity is often associated with quantitative research to verify whether it meets its aims and objectives (Joppe, 2002), it is equally significant in qualitative research. LeCompte (1990:31–62) suggests that the accuracy and reliability of findings are central to validity. Within the context of the *Egungun* Masquerade Festival Conflict among Ibadan’s indigenous people, indigenous knowledge systems ensure accuracy and trustworthiness. My fieldwork findings incorporate gods, reputations, response patterns, and published texts.

The God/gods

The influence of gods is pivotal in ensuring data reliability. My experience indicates that the average indigenous Ibadan individual is acutely aware of divine presence in human affairs. In this study, this presence is conceptualised as God, understood as Allah, Olodumare, or Olorun. For *Egungun* worshippers, Olodumare is the supreme deity, preferred over Olorun. Subordinate deities, including Ogun, Sango, Yemoja, and Egungbe, complement Olodumare. Both *Egungun* adherents and Muslims carry sacred symbols of these deities. For Muslims, these include the Koran and rosary; for *Egungun* followers, symbols include a red cloth around the neck, beads on the neck and hands, and uniquely designed sticks representing specific deities. These symbols safeguard against

falsehood during interviews. A devout Muslim would not lie while holding the Koran, just as an *egungun* would not speak falsely in Ogun's presence. This reverence enhances data trustworthiness, particularly in the conflict between *Egungun* Olóòlù followers and certain Islamic worshippers.

Reputation and Oral Preservation of History

Reputation, as an individual's cultivated image, shapes data collection for *Egungun* Masquerade Festival Conflicts. Adeboye (1998) explores how communities sustain identity rather than compromise it through conflicts. Many informants allowed mentees and families to engage in discussions critical to cultural survival. Most respondents, regardless of religion, consciously transmitted accurate narratives to future generations, either as eyewitnesses or to safeguard family honour by providing precise accounts. Local historians present during discussions corrected memory lapses, reinforcing collective recollection.

Published Texts on the Subject Matter

Published texts on the conflict between *Egungun* Olóòlù followers and certain Islamic worshippers are limited, primarily in select newspapers. The Tribune Newspaper played a crucial role in preserving the 1976 Ibadan conflict, documenting its causes and resolutions. Newspaper reports corroborated interviews and verified their cultural alignment with Ibadan's traditions. Comparing sources, I reviewed direct interviews with key figures like Alhaji Ajagbemokeferi and *Egungun* Olóòlù, attended by crowds, many still alive. Their insights enriched the study and guided accurate conflict reconstruction.

Conclusion

This paper's primary objective is to explore African indigenous knowledge's role in reconstructing historical narratives. Examining the conflict between Alhaji Ajagbemokeferi and *Egungun* Olóòlù, the focus was on how respondents preserved narratives to ensure data reliability, not the conflict itself..

Recommendations

To advance research on *Egungun* festival conflicts and similar cultural phenomena, the following recommendations are proposed, grounded in the Yoruba philosophies of *ajobi* and *ajogbe*:

S/N	Recommendation	Description	Expected Outcome
1	Adopt Indigenous Methodologies	Scholars should prioritise qualitative methods like in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and Individualist-FGDs, aligning with <i>ajobi</i> and <i>ajogbe</i> to capture culturally nuanced data. Training in Yoruba philosophical frameworks should be integrated into research design	Enhanced authenticity and reliability of data, leading to culturally relevant findings that resonate with Ibadan communities.
2	Foster Community Collaboration	Engage scholars who are <i>Egungun</i> cult members, Islamic leaders, and Ibadan indigenes as co-researchers to co-design studies. Use <i>ajogbe</i> principles to build	Increased community trust, richer data from insider perspectives, and reduced risk of misinterpretation.

		trust and ensure community ownership of research outcomes.	
3	Promote Interdisciplinary Research	Encourage collaboration between anthropologists, historians, sociologists, philosophy and religious studies scholars to study festival conflicts holistically, integrating <i>ajobi</i> for familial context and <i>ajogbe</i> for communal dynamics	Comprehensive insights into cultural conflicts, fostering innovative approaches to conflict resolution

The paper recommends that thoughtfully applied qualitative research methods can significantly aid in reconstructing African histories.

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