

Abstract

From time immemorial, African Traditional Religion has kept the practice of succession, inheritance, caring and sharing as part of their life. So also, the Yorubas of the western part of Nigeria do have their own traditional practices too. Generally speaking, almost every aspects of the Yoruba people's life has been politicized. This is evident in our social life interaction, economic, education, religion, dressing, and so on. Possession of inheritance and holding on to whatever belongs to one's lineage is also an integral part of life in Yorubaland as applicable to other traditional tribes in Africa. This succession and inheritance policy equally ranged from land and landed properties, farmland and farming tools, house and household properties, human beings, clothes, beads, gold, herds of animals, aviary of birds, and so on. As the norms of protecting their lineage inheritance is being kept by the Yorubas, it is equally evident as well, to see them demonstrating the aspect of caring and justifiable sharing among themselves. This is hitherto seen as an aspect of rich and dynamic culture and tradition among the Yorubas and has erstwhile been kept, protected, preserved and sustained in the indigenous society since their over five centuries of existence. This Study examines some of these practices such as respect for lineage, sense of communal living, respect for elders and constituted authorities, good behavioural practices, and others too numerous to mention. This study therefore sees the rich Yoruba culture of inheritance, succession, sharing and hospitable heritage as golden which should not be allowed to go down. It should rather be promoted, revived and sustained.

Key words: Caring, Cultural Heritage, Inheritance, Lineage Inheritance, Sharing

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is gloriously located in the western part of Africa with over three hundred (300) ethnic and tribes with each having their separate organized way of life. The blessed Yoruba tribe happens to be one of the major tribes in Nigeria and equally located in the forest region of the western part of the country. The tribe occupies a considerable landmark and at the green belt zone of the Nigeria. They were blessed with fast growing fertile land that is good for growing both the food and cash crops, as well as arable farming.

However, the increase in the societal challenges caused by human beings especially the leaders of the Yoruba traditional religions are being ascribed to the influence of civilization and foreign religions. The previously kept tradition of fear, respect and obeisance to the laws and doctrines of the land and the African traditional religious heritage have changed to the liberally and lackadaisically being uphold by those who should act to keep the institution.

This study examines the role of traditional and cultural beliefs in wealth succession planning, the challenges often encountered in the politics of succession, inheritance, caring and sharing of properties, and with the focus on study of the Yorubas. The complexity attributable to multi ethnicity nature, diverse dialectical languages and religious practices of the Yorubas coupled with their over eighty ethnic groups and

languages is the major clog to the wheel of the study.

The elders and traditional religious leaders are expected to effectively correct the negative aspects of the societal beliefs and influences about the politics of inheritance, caring and sharing. Instead, some are actually encouraging the foreign religions believes and doctrines over the African traditional religious practices.

This hypothetical tale is an example of the intricate dance between tradition and modernity, and the challenges faced by typical Nigerian of Yoruba indigents in navigating the complexities of succession and sharing in a changing world. In a nation where family ties are deeply rooted and revered, the concept of wealth succession planning holds profound significance. Families now acknowledge that without proper planning, accumulated wealth may dwindle, leading to financial instability for future generations. This realization prompts a shift in mindset, with an increasing number of Nigerian Yoruba families opting for an all-inclusive succession plan.

The primary aim of this study is to show that within the African traditional religions, especially the traditional Yorubas they have their doctrine of caring and sharing with the spirit and politics of inheritance. The specific objective of this study is to explore to which extent the politics of inheritance caring and sharing are being practiced and demonstrated among the Yorubas in the

context of African traditional religious practitioners.

To analyze the wisdom principles accruable to the practice and demonstration of spirit of godliness through caring and sharing.

ETHNICITIES IN NIGERIA AND THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEVES

The Country Nigeria is blessed with over 300 ethnic groups, and each ethnicity has its own cultural and political practices of succession, inheritance, caring and sharing. It is imperative to examine the typical examples of the common cultural and political practices of ascendance and inheritance across some ethnicities in each of the regions in Nigeria. Before we go deeply into the study of the Yorubas, it is important to examine and understand the inheritance and sharing tradition with respect to cultural beliefs of some other ethnic groups too.

Northern Region:

The norther region of Nigeria inhabits many tribes of which the major ones are the Hausas and Fulanis. Succession is largely based on the dictates of Islam as the Northern Region is dominated by Islamic religion. Under Islam, the Holy Quran makes provision for succession practices upon the demise of an individual. Islam accords succession rights to the wives and female offspring as well and not only the male offspring, as seen in some other cultural practices. Under Islam, for a deceased man

with wives and children, the wives and daughters will be entitled to a portion of the estate. The Holy Quran also provides specific guide for other peculiar circumstances.

South-East Region:

South Eastern region of Nigeria is equally having many tribes with Ibos and Ibibios in majority. Traditionally, the Ibos inheritance and sharing pattern states that the deceased person's estate is primarily inherited by the first male offspring (often called "*Okpara*"), who then distributes to the other male offsprings as he deems fit. Often, the first male offspring gets the largest share of the inheritance. In the case of a titled man, the title is also passed down to the first male offspring. The wives and female offsprings do not inherit any landed property of the deceased, but will be catered for by the male offsprings pending when they are married off from the family or until death.

South-South Region:

Historically, the *Igiogbe* (the deceased person's house, occupied until the time of death) is allocated to the first male offspring, along with the other assets of the deceased. This was done with the belief that the first male offspring will subsequently distribute the properties to other male offsprings and take care of the younger

offsprings and wives. However, this primogeniture culture brought a lot of rancor to families, as the first-born males often neglected their duties and amassed the properties for themselves. This gave rise to the *Uhro-System*, which is very similar to the South West Region's **Idi Igi**, where the deceased person's properties are shared based on the number of wives.

THE YORUBAS OF THE SOUTH WEST NIGERIA

WHO ARE THE YORUBAS?

The Yoruba people (IRAN YORUBA) also known as Awon Omo kaaro oojire (children of Yoruba) is one of the main ethnic groups of Nigeria, located in South West, North-Central as well as Southern and Central Benin, making up 21% of the country's population. There are more than eighty (80) ethnic groups and languages in Yoruba land, but all enjoyed living in their own kingdoms, towns or communities peacefully and harmoniously under a generalized name of the Yorubas. The Yoruba homeland is roughly the size of England and comprises a number of sub-ethno cultural groups. Some of the major tribes and kingdoms in Yoruba land are: Ijesas, Ifes, Oyos, Ijebus, Egbas, Ilas, Aworis, Ekitis, Okuns, Ibarapas, Oke-Oguns, Ibaribas, Ondos, Ikales, Akokos, Binis, Epes, Ilajes, Igbomina, Ikale, Oyan, Egbado, Ifonyin just to mention a few. The Yorubas are usually thought to be unique in number and size of their towns because of their tendency to form

into a large city groups instead of small village groups. The Yoruba customary law of inheritance and succession appears to be general among the sub-ethno cultural groups. For example, among the Ijesha people, mode of inheritance is bilineal, among the Ijebus it is patrilineal (although women can inherit) and for the Ilaje and Idanre people of Ondo State, it is bilineal.

Though they have different settlements and kingdom practices, so also, they have almost a common and unique way of succession, inheritance and ascendance to the throne of their leaders. Traditionally, it was a common and unique practice for the majority of them to consult and reference "Ifa" oracle who is believed to be one among the several deities that sees in and out of life and can unbiasedly choose for them. Others have their own excessively trusted deity that is capable of doing this for them as well. All these and many other practices and believe are embraced to enhance a peaceful co-existence, enjoy unaltered political progress and harmonious living relationship among the Yorubas.

INHERITANCE AND DISTRIBUTION AMONG THE YORUBAS

The Yorubas way of succession and sharing of a deceased man's inheritance with wives, can be in any of two the modes; distribution per stripe (known as *Idi Igi*) or distribution per head (known as *Ori O Jori*). Under the *Idi Igi*, the estate is shared equally

among the wives, and the wives subsequently distribute among their respective offsprings. For the *Ori O Jori*, the estate is distributed equally among all the offsprings.

However, the dynamics of inheritance among the Yorubas has evolved significantly in modern times due to a multitude of factors such as shifting cultural norms, changing gender roles, economic pressures, and advancements in civilization. These shifts have brought about new dynamics and further challenges that influence the mutual understanding of the norms and customs. In the modern day, Yorubas are faced with the unique challenges from balancing demand carriers to navigating the complexities of a rapidly growing world. It is within these contexts that the timeless wisdom encapsulated in the Yoruba politics of inheritance, caring and sharing gains profound significance. Regardless of cultural norms, the virtues of diligence, kindness and wisdom espoused in the context of Yoruba tradition form the bedrock of successful interrelationship with other ethnic groups.

As part of the norms in keeping the succession customs of inheritance, the Yorubas equally adhered strictly to the caring and sharing attitude. Taking care of people and the spirit of hospitality which, they believe enhances good relationship. They believe very much in the saying that “one good turn deserves another” and that goodness is gained with goodness. This aspect of caring is however not limited to their lineage or immediate family members alone.

Psychologically speaking, it is part of the Yoruba peoples’ custom or ethics of life to always be nice at people of all race, especially travelers and strangers. That corroborate the common saying in Yoruba that, a good gesture extended to somebody you see afar off, satisfies one more than food. (K’arini lokeere, k’a s’ayesi, o yo ni o j’ounje lo). This implies that the welcoming spirit is not only showcased through the words of mouth. Physical appearance, body language and good gesture disposition equally goes a long way to portray whether one is welcomed or not.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework helps in shaping the trajectory (pathway) and setting the bounds with which research is carried out. This is done in order to deepen discussion with other scholars who had written on the subject and also to understand the nuances of the same, and its applicability in the current study. This study is premised on using two theories.

Generational theory: Different groups of people tends to have different settings and values of life, ranging from cultural, political and even the economic way of life. So also, the Yorubas with their age long of over five centuries of existence and still keeping their lineage practices from generation to generation. Hence the application of generational theory as opined by Mannheim, 1952. This framework suggests that different generations have unique values, attitudes and

work styles shaped by their experiences and cultural influence. (Mannheim, 1952).

Organizational behavior theory: Another theoretical framework that is applicable to this study is the organizational behavior theory as opined by Robbins and Judge, 2013. The framework provides insights into the dynamics of organizational behavior including communication, religious practices, inheritance procedures, succession and leadership management, throne ascendancy, caring and sharing practices among others. (Robbins and Judge, 2013). The complexity attributable to multi ethnicity nature, diverse dialectical languages and religious practices of the Yorubas coupled with their over eighty ethnic groups and languages is the major constraints to the study.

IMPACT OF TRADITIONAL BELIEFS ON WEALTH SUCCESSION

According to some sources, about 95% of Nigerian family-owned businesses rarely survive up to the third generation. This is largely because traditional succession plans alone cannot cater to the complexities of the modern world.

From the overview of the cultural practices among the varying ethnicities, it can be seen that each cultural practice has its shortfalls. Certain cultures give priority to a specific gender over the other, thus fostering an environment of inequality and rancor.

The propagation of primogeniture (succession system that favours inheritance of a deceased person's estate by the firstborn male offspring) by some cultures has left a lot of families in discord, as they often neglect their duty to look after the rest of the family. The emphasis on the eldest male inheriting the majority of assets can inadvertently sideline other family members, contributing to strained relationships and conflicts. Additionally, such traditional succession culture does not consider the individual strengths before allocating the properties of the deceased. This has often led to the mismanagement of the deceased's estate or business.

In general, traditional beliefs have profound impact on wealth management, influencing how individuals and families approach financial decisions, investments and succession planning.

SUCCESSION AND MODE OF INHERITANCE IN YORUBA LAND

Succession is the passing of property to persons upon the death of the owner of the property. The law of succession involves the transmission of the rights and obligations of the deceased person in respect of his estate to his heirs and successors. It governs the order of succession to various monarchies. Succession may be testate or intestate. Where a deceased person made a Will, he is said to have died testate. Where a deceased person did not make a Will, he is said to have died

intestate. Intestacy rule is the rule under customary law.

The rule of inheritance among the Yorubas are similar, however, there are some minor differences. The method of inheritance in Yoruba land is dependent upon whether the property is a family property or personal property.

Family property is property that devolves on the descendants to be used for the benefit and enjoyment of the whole family as a body corporate. Upon the death of the deceased, the *Dawodu* who is the eldest surviving son succeeds as head of the family. Family property is usually under the control of the head of the family who holds it for the beneficial interest of the members of the family, no member of the family can alienate or dispose of the family property. Each member may be given an allotment of the family property for use if necessary but this does not confer a right of ownership to the allottee as his interest is limited to his lifetime.

Self-acquired property is property a person acquires during his lifetime through a conveyance or any other formal method of alienation, English or customary. A deceased's self-acquired property is distributed among his children upon his death. There are two methods of distributing the deceased's self-acquired property, namely:

1. Idi-Igi (per stripes)
2. Ori o 'jori (per capita)

MODE OF DISTRIBUTION

Our various interviews revealed that the two modes of distributions are mostly used in the distribution of a father's property. We were informed that the mother's property does not need much deliberation, it is only in some exceptional cases where the mother has a lot of properties (real and personal). The mother's property is usually shared by the eldest child among his younger ones.

ORI OJORI

Under the *Ori Ojori* method of distribution (per capita), there is a direct distribution of the property among the children of the deceased equally. This method of distribution is usually used in monogamous families where the deceased has only one wife or in polygamous families where the deceased has enough property to go share among the children of all his wives. However, during our course of interview, we were informed that this method of distribution is no longer preferred for use in polygamous families. The reason being that it works injustice. For instance, where the first wife started from the scratch with the deceased, built the estate with him, and she had a child or two, and the third wife who came after the establishment of the estate gives birth to five or six children, it will be unfair on the part of the first wife to inherit less than the other wives based on the number of children had by each.

IDI-IGI

The second method of distribution is known as *idi-igi* (per stripes). In a situation where the deceased have more than one wife, the *idi-igi* method is usually used as each wife representing one *Igi* meaning BRANCH. Nigerian courts have had cases to state their opinion on the validity of this mode of distribution. Even the supreme court supports that, in a case where the deceased died and was survived by nine children from four wives and some grandchildren, the estate should be distributed per capita (*idi-igi*) which simply means it will be divided into four parts representing the number of wives and not per stripes i.e. the number of children.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that the rich Yoruba culture of inheritance, succession, sharing and hospitable heritage as golden which should not be allowed to go down. It should rather be promoted, revived and sustained. It is the recommendation from this study that the Yoruba culture of inheritance; sharing and hospitable heritage should not be allowed to go down. It should rather be promoted, revived and sustained. Individual religion and religious believes of people should not be tampered with because it has formed part of their lives. In every instances of heritage dealings, fare of God and justice should be applied and not to cause enmity and rancour.

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