

YORUBA AFRICAN CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL GROWTH: A THEORETICAL APPRAISAL IN GLOBALIZATION FRAMEWORK

ADEBAYO Abidemi Olufemi, PhD,
Department of English, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria
femishakespeare@yahoo.com adebayofemi@run.edu.ng
ORCID: 0000-0001-6369-284X
&
ADEGOKE-DANIEL Ibukunoluwa Esther
An Independent Researcher, Leicester City, United Kingdom
ORCID: 0009-0005-7409-3195
&
MAKINDE Oluwakemi Deborah
Department of English, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria
makindeoluwakemi77@gmail.com
ORCID: 009-0008-4592-4377
&
OLUWADE Oluwatoyin Ajoke
Department of English, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria
oluwatoyinoluwade@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0009-4358-6252

Abstract

This study appraises the concept of culture in Africa with particular emphasis on Yoruba culture. African cultures possess huge potential, but has not been adequately explored to emphasize the need to detoxify the cultures in Africa (especially Yoruba culture) of their impurities. This is with a view to identifying circumstances weighing African cultures down in the comity of nations using Yoruba culture as a contextual sample. The study is qualitative in nature and John Dewey's Progressivism and Oswald Spengler's Cyclical Theory are adopted as guides. Yoruba African communal culture promotes impunity, oppression, waste through the *owambe* indulgence, and greed. There is conception of supremacy for those in positions of a higher level in the societal construct. This set of people includes husbands, the older ones and traditional heads or religious leaders. These individuals substantially believe that they are superior and can, therefore, perpetrate dastardly acts with impunity. In addition to these, Yoruba culture as an African culture rests so heavily on voodoo as enabled by guiding deities, exemplified in the snatching opportunities from competitors of merit and offering of human blood in money voodoo. These engender some consequences; supremacy repels cooperation, impunity nullifies accountability, voodoo motivate unproductivity through merit substitution, while waste seen in *owambe* results in non-enterprising deployment of resources. These ills need to be jettisoned for relatibility and permissibility of initiatives, inclusive efforts among Africans and their countries, for social growth.

Key words: Culture theory, Sustainable development, Progressivism, Yoruba culture, Modernity

Introduction

The concept of culture in a critical engagement in the study of Africa as a continent with emphasis on its social and economic development. This is because culture is critical to the much-desired social development as applicable to the continent of Africa. Gnana's (2022) submission on this lends credence to the connection of culture to development, as Gnana opines that low socio-economic situations and conditions of a people faced with marginalization are instrumental to comprehending their culture. And this is a position upheld by Ajani et al (2022) who believe that culture is capable of increased, skills including material product which make life better for the people especially today in a globalized world. The continent of Africa possesses huge potential in many ramifications according to Wang et al (2024) and Arthur et al (2024), and the endowments of Africa need to be tapped into for development and social growth. In fact, Mariotti and Meacci, (2026) have stated that Africa has been viewed in the global economic circle as the driver of the world economy. Technology and science are, however, crucial in the development of the modern global society especially the African society (Kahn, 2022). However, since Africa's home-grown and intuitive science and technological advances are still in the pipeline, there is need to look at alternatives to ethno-social development of Africa away from science and technology. This is where culture comes in. Culture is at the center of this tremendous potential that Africa possesses.

However, it needs to be stated that in establishing the capabilities of the continent, manifesting or untapped, some reverse significations of the continent have to be brought to review and critical examination. That is, the cultural ills and social indignities of the continent have to be examined. This is a kind of self-examination and candour, taking Africa to account. This is best approach to developing Africa because the ills in the process and toxicity will be discovered and exterminated as the culture of Africa cannot be globalized with toxic impurities. Yet, globalizing African culture is non-negotiable as a culture consumed and practiced only by its own people is a retardation of growth. The impurities will not make the culture to be attractive to the rest of the world. For example, there exists the idea of culture indelibility which puts a limit to the dynamic attribute of culture and this manifests in the Yoruba culture context. This echoes the need for caution in the process when an individual is imbibing the impurities of a culture. African culture specifically, Yoruba culture has not been adequately explored and refined to impact the world. Yoruba communal culture promotes impunity, oppression, and greed, as there is conception of supremacy for those in a position of a higher level in the societal construct. This set of people includes husbands, the older ones and traditional heads or religious leaders. These individuals substantially believe that they are superior and can, therefore, perpetrate dastardly acts with impunity. For example, many husbands ride

roughshod such as battery and financial extortion over their wives without consequences. Community elders expect children to be at their beck and call and any excuse advanced by a child in the community for not greeting an elder, the child's personal battles notwithstanding or irrespective of the present health worries of the child is counted against the child. These are instances of oppression, which suppress initiatives and collaboration and collaboration is needed in research and development. This will remedy the inability of Africans to record substantial breakthrough almost a century since independence despite the potential and endowments of Africa. However, the rest of the world is needed to consume African cultural products such as its apothecary for influence and dominion. Consumption of an imported product makes the consuming nation to be subservient to the production nation. It is ethno-cultural dominion.

This is good for Africa at this point in time in its search for development and social growth, and will be advanced in this study drawing illustrations from Yoruba aboriginal culture as a variant of the larger gamut of African culture. This task in the study begins with the conceptualization of the term 'Culture' and its semantic significations, which is a word that codifies ingrained habits, deeds, beliefs, as well as practices of an individual, a group of people, an organization or a society. The individual or group is generally known by peculiar habits, deeds, beliefs or practices. A culture is therefore, an identifier, and is of great essence in the daily lived experiences of the people as culture matters to the people and societies according to Raeff et al (2020). In the context of this study, culture is strategically categorized into Aboriginal Culture and Technology-and-Science Culture. The Aboriginal Culture has arisen from rustic human evolution in a locale. This results in animist practices and food and shelter discoveries, for example, Tech-and-sci culture is the modern culture and ways of life in communication, religion, transportation, health, education, politics and governance and clothing. Often times, native culture is private and communal or societal while Tech-and-sci culture is cosmopolitan or metropolitan. The private nature of native culture concerns personal culture, family and a village life style while the cosmopolitanism of the Tech-and-Sci culture concerns the European or Western sensibilities in the contemporary life style, political administration and organizational styles and deeds. This manifests in the national, sub-regional, regional, continental as well as West-oriented unified global practices. Examples of Tech-and-sci cosmopolitan culture consists in, for example, democracy, ECOWAS Protocol, duties, visa applications, diplomatic relations, the Olympic games, phone technologies, the internet, the making of Oba Femi (the Ruler in the wrestling world), the making of Wole Soyinka, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, as well as multinational trade franchise.

To this extend, culture anywhere in the world is an expression of ingrained habits, beliefs, and sustained practices of a given individual, a group, or an organization

(Colbert, 2010, Smith and Bond, 2019). Culture can be modified, but the part of culture that has been shed retains in the sub-conscious of the individual or the history of an organization. This is culture indelibility which puts a limit to the acclaimed dynamic attribute of culture. Culture is native; it is also Tech-and-Sci-driven. The latter gives rise to the Cosmopolitan nature of modern culture. In further consideration, the concept of culture has also been seen in other valid and divergent perspectives. For example, Wulf (2025) has seen culture as being mimetic and performative, that is, respectively, cultures are learned and lived. Yet, to Feng and Youya (2024) culture is interactive and in today's the Western culture often overrides lesser cultures, while Liu and Pan (2023) look at culture with emphasis on its intangibility but which has the potential to contribute to economic growth.

Theorization on Indelibility of Culture

One major nature of culture is its indelibility. By this of culture, even when an individual or group forsakes a culture, the culture forsaken hangs on to the person or persons concerned. Such culture retention is vicarious, remote, psychological (abstract) or diachronic. The retention is vicarious and remote because it is, after the purported forsaking, resides in the psychological domain of the individual or organization. Such a cultural retention is diachronic because it is historical. It is part of the past references of the person, organization or group. In illustration is an individual involved in adultery or culture of drunkenness. Change through proselytization would have occurred through a religious renewal on the consciousness of the inimical implications of either or both of the two cultures aforementioned. Therefore, the nature of being of the individual or group still or forever longs for the pleasant aspect of the culture forsaken. It is the implications such as, for example, eternal damnation and health complications that restrain the individual from relapsing into the “old” culture. That is indelibility of culture. Indelibility of culture is further noticed in a situation where a stronger culture evades another culture which in all ramifications, overtly or deniedly, is weaker than the invading culture. Or it occurs in a situation of two equal cultures interacting. Both borrow practices and words from each other. Such practices or words now become as at the moment, difficult or impossible to be expunged from the host culture. The difficulties or impossibility might have arisen from the unavoidable need to localize or internalize the product or thoughts that the invading culture has brought. This is especially so when the invading culture has brought a product which has no local variants in the receiving culture. The Yoruba has no local variants of a motor; therefore “moto” will continue to be relevant in the Yoruba language as the Yoruba people have no alternative to a motor. This situation might have explained the continued Latin lexicons in the English language. The Christian religion came with Roman/Italian incursion into the English society.

This situation of cultural interaction or overriding influence to be put more

appropriately affects the Africa culture in relation to Western cultures, in high magnitude. There is indelibility of Western cultures in Africa (Sibani, 2018; Arowolo, 2010). On the one hand, Africa cannot erase the coming of the West to Africa at least not totally, easily, and in nearest future. The question of Africa relapsing into the historical past of cultural adaptation is on a higher pedestal. This is because Africa's experiences of the infiltration of Western cultures have continued to be renewed through innovative ideas and products especially technologically and scientifically. The severance from Western culture through independence was just a mere procurement with no force of validity and effect. The declaration of independence in Nigeria in 1960 was at the super-structural level while at the base, the people have never forsaken the English culture even up till date. The exposure of the rich in Nigeria to the advancements in health science and technology has continued to attract the rich to abandon the local apothecary for the English health care medication. And the poor look on in shock, though they desire such, and an internal pain for not being able to access such facilities mounts. The duplication of such health outlets in Nigeria for the not-so-rich through technology transfer is on agreement with the original owner of the health facilities from China. Or the outlet in Nigeria, for instance, is a subsidiary of the parent-institution. Also, the West continues to produce commodities such as cars, airplanes, and so on which, in spite of denouncing and the condemnation of Westernism by some African intellectuals and out culture custodians, this continues to make European culture relevant, in fact irresistible to Nigerians (Africans). When the genre of music that is called Nigerian music or African music is considered, it becomes further incontrovertible that culture is indelible. For the convenience of this study, it is to be conceived that the English Western culture was formalized in Nigeria through the Amalgamation of 1914 and formally jettisoned with the declaration of Nigeria's independence in 1960. However, the makings of, for example, Davido's, Wizkid's, Naira Marley's, and Tiwa Savage's music in terms of instrumentation, scenes, and digital recording are all Western. Yoruba words and experiences are only used as proxy. The exposure and adoption of the ways of life of the Western people by the rich among the Yoruba as well as the entire Africa is an instrument of oppression in the hands of the moneyed class against the poor. This continues to sustain the English (British or Western) culture visibly among the Yoruba as well most Africans. The Western/European culture becomes indelible. Culture is indelible no matter how susceptible to change it might be. This echoes the need for caution in the process when an individual is imbibing a culture.

The Nature of African Culture in Contemporary Time

In the context of the contemporary time in Africa and the entire universe, based on the innovations, advances, or universal ethno-social developments, African culture has been examined and conceived in and from different ramifications. To begin with, the term “African Culture” cannot be said to be too generalizing or absolutist as a codifying expression, just as some critical postulations have suggested. It, however, can be of such

terms as “Western Culture” or “European Culture” can also be said to be aberrations. In the same vein, if such terms as “Orientalism” and “Occidentalism” are no aberration, the “African Culture” cannot be impeccably described as too generalizing. All these terms or expressions are codifications of commonalities that identify some places and peoples. Indeed, Ostrowki (2023) moots the idea of unification and integration of all Europe due to their cultural and ideological commonalities. This is in spite of divergences, divisions, differences, and diversities which each of these terms or expression encapsulates. The Danes are a people representing other peoples in Denmark. The English are different peoples. All are Europeans, yet they are different. But they are the same altogether. This is the supremacy of continental feat. Most European countries have risen beyond worrying or struggling with the provision of basic needs of their peoples. In fact, as Yeboah (2025) has noted the concern of the European countries is to pay attention to price stability, efficiency of public investment, trade openness, labor force participation and prudent debt management. They have risen beyond grand corruption, though there maybe instances here and there. Perpetrators of either grand or petty corruption do not go scot-free. The native practices of the people have been reshaped by the Tech-and-Sci advances. This is such the Tech-and-Sci are becoming or will become native with time. In fact, it could be averred that Tech-and-Sci capability is traditional with the Europeans their Tech-and-Sci culture is older than Nigeria's especially Yoruba tradition as traceable in the contemporary period. In effect, the concept of African culture is not too generalizing when we are concerned with continental commons called a bloc culture according to Dilmac et al (2026). It is only when attention is on a specific culture that it can be maintained that the term is generalizing. This is when we are calling the Bantu Culture when the attention is on the Bantu Culture itself and not the unifying cultural properties identifying the different cultures in Africa.

What then, can be the main identification of African Culture? What stands out in African Culture? What general features can be found in all cultures of Africa? The first is that African culture has not been and is not being explored to make an impact in the world. In the area of medicine, African medicines are not being used to heal the sick across the world. That is Asians, Europeans or Americans are not using the African cultural apothecary to heal themselves. In the area of food/cuisine, African delicacies are not eaten by people of other parts of the world as standard everyday cuisine as Nigerians are proud of West Chinese restaurant in the morning, afternoon, and evening for breakfast, lunch, and dinner respectively. In fact, the ability (financially) of a Nigerian to afford the Chinese delicacies on a daily basis is a source of power and social pride as not many people in Nigeria can afford the food served at Chinese restaurants in Nigeria. Additionally, in terms of religion, African traditional religions are not spread across the world such that the religions win converts on daily basis among the locals in Singapore, the United States or Finland, just as other religions from other parts of the world are

and reinterpreting aspects of Igbo traditional religion, often incorporating elements such as ancestral veneration, the revitalisation of various deities linked to different natural elements, seasonal festivals, and rites of passage (birth, marriage, death), sometimes adapted to modern contexts to accommodate contemporary life and perspectives (Isiani et al., 2022). Another significant feature is the veneration of Mother Earth, illustrated in the worship of the earth goddess. In traditional Igbo society, the earth goddess (*Ala*) occupies such a central role in the people's beliefs that any modern practice or revival of the pristine Igbo religion without reference to her seems illusory.

Neopaganism in Igbo society can be described as rooted in nature. Followers are convinced of *Ala's* potency, and many avoid actions that might offend her designs (Onwuaturgwu & Mmadudiri, 2020). Although adherents believe in the transcendence of the sacred, which exists beyond every living creature in spiritual entities such as gods and goddesses, deities, and spirits, they also maintain that the sacred is present in every living being. They often perceive nature as sacred and interconnected with the divine. In their rituals, they utilise natural objects, animals, and living beings to connect with life, nature, and otherworldly entities. Rituals are, therefore, not merely performances but highly transformative events that can influence an individual through the power they are believed to invoke when performed.

There is significantly more involvement of the youth than the elders in Igbo Neopaganism. This can be attributed to factors ranging from their ease of adapting to change to the quest for exploring alternative spiritualities and the prevailing get-rich-quick syndrome within Igbo society, which is championed by the youth. Unlike their forebears, who showed genuine devotion to the gods, many of today's Igbo youth are attracted to Neopaganism due to promises of a brighter future and greater material wealth.

An offshoot of these beliefs is the infamous *Oke-ite* ("significant pot") ritual, which is believed to make someone who engages in it instantly rich. Here, traditional cultural practices of sacrifice and blood rituals, along with their potency, combine with the modern quest for quick wealth among Igbo youths. It is crucial to understand that this is not a traditional or accepted part of mainstream Igbo culture or religion (*Odinani*), but rather a dangerous and often criminal deviation within the current Neopaganism in society. The ritual consists of a charm or concoction prepared in an earthenware pot ("*ite*") using various ingredients. These ingredients are often reported to include bitter herbs, animal parts (such as dogs, elephants, monkeys, and bats), and, alarmingly, human body parts, sometimes specifically those of virgins or individuals who have not given birth (Nnatuanya, 2022; Mefor, 2025). The purported aim of the *Oke-ite* ritual is to bring sudden and immense wealth to the person who performs it, often without requiring hard work or legitimate means.

The *Oke-ite* ritual has been portrayed as an evil, barbaric, and satanic practice

visible and practised by Nigerians especially the Yoruba (Africans). Contextualizing this in the Yoruba milieu, if Ogun or any other deity is worshipped by Yoruba migrants in Canada, or Brazil, this is pseudo-globalization because it is not the natives of Brazil that have adopted the religions but the same set of devotees whose ancestral home is Western Nigeria. The difference is location is explicit and crucial, hence, the factor of universalism in cultural expansion and impact in trans-cultural adoption of the cultural commodities.

In the context of arts, aesthetics is still restricted. It is not yet universal for global relation and appreciation as well as internalization. Let's take, for instance, the *gangan* drum among the Yoruba people in Western Nigeria. This element of traditional art has been claimed to be a talking drum. However, the language that the drum speaks is the Yoruba Language. In as much as this is true, this element of Yoruba (African) culture will be glorified as a Yoruba heritage without any universal appeal and acceptance. Again, when one considers the making of the *gangan* drum, it is very crude. It is the same fetishistic outlook that it had at the beginning about three or four thousand years ago that it still wears today. This is absence of innovation to acclaim modernity.

On attitude, belief systems, Yoruba African culture promotes impunity, oppression and greed. These are seen in situations where a community elder beat a child or a husband wears his wife out through drudgery or financial extortion, both unjustly. The Yoruba traditional society does not anticipate any claim to injustice. The interest of the elder and that of the husband comes first. In Yoruba aboriginal society, there is conception of supremacy for someone in a position or a higher level in the societal construct. These set of people includes husband, the older ones as well as traditional heads or religious leaders. These individuals believe that they are superior and so they can do things without being asked to account for their actions. Husbands ride roughshod over wives with impunity. Community elder expect the children to be at their beck and call and any excuse advanced by a child in the community for not greeting an elder, the child's personal battles notwithstanding or irrespective of the present health worries of the child is counted against the child. Community leaders and chiefs expect regular indigenes to go off the road as they pass. These are instances of oppression. Why do elders in charge of public purse divert community windfall to personal purses. Community leaders have been alleged collect largesse from white expatriates as compensation for environmental hazards caused in the course of mining, for instance in their community. This is greed. The *owambe* party culture is rampant among the Yoruba. Though partying is common among other groups in Nigeria and Africa at large, however, the Yoruba are at the core center of this discourse. In addition to this, the model of party culture of the Yoruba requires frequency of partying; abundance of alcohol; a band stand of high booking, lavish spending on clothes, food, venue booking and so on.

These are economically inopportune and inappropriate, especially because money is expected to be sprayed and thrown into the air for the party organizer and the musician. Such spending can be utilized on economic undertakings and research and development. These attitudinal vices are regressive. They are central figures of African culture.

Today, a culture or sub-culture in Africa that can make its cuisines appealing to the global society; that can make its medicine heal people of multi-nationalism; that can make its traditional region friendly and the global society can therefore practice it; that makes its heritage understood by multinational communities that can make everyone humble at heart and operate at the pedestal of the promotion of humanity, freedom, and equity; such a culture would cease to be an African Culture. It would be a European/American/Asian culture of African land.

Nativity, Jingoism and the Stark Realities

African culture is the most continental culture out of the bloc cultures that are in the world. Africans lay claim to many purportedly outstanding features or accomplishments of African culture. But all of these claims have turned out to be mere intellectual rhetoric and this needs to be addressed through pragmatic approach to intellectualism and scholarship. African scholars and culture custodians are guilty of the larger-than-life and larger-than-reality posture of African culture. They do this under the aegis of the intellectual concept of Africanity with its regional Anglophone antecedent being Negritude. Is African culture really the best? It needs be said that the individual or personal fulfillment or relish obtained from element of African culture is not a veritable yardstick for measuring the status or utilitarian value of a given culture. Rather, it is its widespread status and independent capabilities. What is meant to be these yardsticks is that the strength of a culture in the comparative domain consists in its adoption elsewhere around the world, as well as the culture's ability to live or sustain itself with the background help of other cultures from elsewhere. African culture does not meet these yardsticks in whatever contexts. The claim of the potential endowments of African culture is abstract, indeed intangible and impractical. Much in the direction global relatability still needs to be done in order to maximize the huge potential that Africa possesses.

In fact, it is uncharitable to predicate the strength of African culture on what it is doing and not what it has done or has been doing over centuries. The authenticity of a claim is not sustained on possibility but on evidence. Veracity is practical. And it is no longer tenable that the whites have suppressed the potential of Africa in all ramifications. Africans may need to begin to wonder why almost a century since the colonialists began to grant African countries independence, the countries have not been recording ground-

breaking feats which African countries can relate with and which the continent can present to the world as unparalleled achievement. Covid-19 presented a golden opportunity for Africa to prove its medical mettle. The world was plagued with unprecedented epidemic with uncontrollable lethality and the world was searching and experimenting for. Africa could only go as far as the rhetoric and jaunty claim of the herb. Today, the world is yet to see a herb that is used worldwide as a cure for Covid-19. What is intended is the manner of safety and efficacy of Johnson and Johnson Covid vaccine. Is African attire really the best attire? In terms of what is it the best? Perhaps, it is in terms of fabric and fitting shapes. To this extent, the accolades go to the makers, the manufacturers of the fabrics and the tailoring machines used in making what the Africans call, *the African native attires*. At least, the *Ankara* fabric is produced in Indonesia (Nnewuihe, 2020) and the Sewing machine is made in the Western/Eastern sphere of the globe. Africans pride themselves in Swiss wristwatches and Italian shoes.

It should at this juncture, be emphasized that when someone wears what they have known all their life such as, Agbada and up and down or Iro ati Buba among the Yoruba, they are expected to brag about this dressing. In the same vein, when the Yoruba people eat *eba*, *iyen*, *amala funfun*, *amala dudu ati efo riro*, the relish they derive make them have the feeling that it is the best delicacy. We may not have to compare which the word best signifies. But if we have to compare because it is the age of globalization, then we may have to take cognizance of the extent of the appeal consumption of the valued delicacies. This brings to the question, what research has been done to improve or enhance the nutritional content of amala or eba since centuries ago when it was discovered. As it stands today, Yoruba African cuisines are only consumed by Yorubas themselves in Southwest Nigeria, other Nigerians who have been in Southwest Nigeria and the Yoruba (or Africans) who have been in Diaspora. Therefore, when we say the Yoruba cuisines or African cuisines are the best, we have to ruminate over why such cuisines are not being consumed by the citizens of other parts of the world. Or when we say African cultures are the best, we have to return encomium to the fabric makers and the technologies behind the sewing machines, threads and needles. Otherwise, our claims are mere Nationalistic Propaganda. They express cultural nationalism. They trumpet communal rhetoric and the earlier we tell ourselves the truth, the earlier we face realities, the better for us as it will mean the earlier, we get out of the mire of the retrogression we are in. This pressing need for realities will be impossible because of the need for those who have plunged us into this convoluted cultural situation to act as the society expects them to or to protect their jobs. In this category are commissioners and ministers whose portfolios cover culture, University intellectuals on cultural defence, as well as monarchs in Yorubaland. They are saddled with the responsibility of making the people to believe that their culture is better. Overtime, convincing evidence has not been provided along the line of this claim.

Conclusion

Yoruba culture as an African culture is rich in potential for social development in the magnitude that makes it compete favourably with known cultures around the world. This is by developing and making the development indicators, products, and aboriginal initiatives make impacts around the world. However, to be able to do and attain this, initiatives, products, as well as the potential of Yoruba people must be available around the world through cultural globalization. However, there are many strands of Yoruba culture that are antipodal to this perspective. That is those strands of Yoruba culture cannot be exported to the rest of the world. These include superiority complex of the higher element in a binary of social construct, non-explorative instinct, profligacy, wide-spread indulgences and the toxic aspect of indigenous spirituality. All these cannot be sold to the rest of the world. Yet, the potential of the Yoruba culture such as the potency of its apothecary and spirituality as well as its flora and fauna need to be exported with the culture to the rest of the world. This outcome of this is that Yoruba culture should be filtered to extract and discard its toxicity. In addition to this, the people should discard aura of superiority as such repels cooperation. It, however, should be underscored that cooperation at all levels is needed for development as it allows comparative cost advantage. In addition to this, profligacy is a waste, and no nation advances with wastages but austerity and asceticism, by utilizing available resources judiciously. The non-explorative instinct of the Yoruba (African) people manifests in the fact that not many research undertakings are on/have been on to discover how to add value to the natural endowments of the subregion. This accounts for why the foodstuffs produced in the region still remain the same in terms of quality as they were in the early Yoruba society. In fact, it can be asserted that the quality depreciates as a result of adulteration. The apothecary of the Yoruba also remains the same as it was in the early society, and this is because adequate research has not been conducted to improve the food stuffs and the apothecary. This is due to the non-explorative instinct of the people which should be addressed.

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