



The Relevance of Indigenous Toponyms in Preserving the Culture and Heritage in Igbomina-land

Dr. Olushola Ayodeji Akanmode

Directorate of University Wide Courses, Landmark University, Omu-Aran, Kwara State.

*Corresponding author: akanmode.olushola@lmu.edu.ng

Abstract: This study delves into the cultural significance of toponyms in Omu-Aran, Nigeria, and their role in shaping the indigenous population's cultural identity and heritage. By examining the interplay between toponyms and cultural expression, this research reveals the complex dynamics of colonialism, religion, civilization, and modernization on the town's cultural landscape. The findings indicate that settlement expansion and fragmentation led to toponymic adaptations, while war and colonization had a minimal impact. This research underscores the importance of integrating indigenous toponymic values to preserve cultural heritage in Omu-Aran and other West African communities, striking a balance between tradition and modernization. By illuminating the significance of toponyms in shaping cultural identity and heritage, this study highlights their potential for promoting cultural preservation and revitalization.

Keywords: culture, heritage, indigenous, Omu-Aran, preservation, relevance, toponyms

Introduction

Toponyms are place names or names given to landforms and landmarks including towns, streets, and tourist centers (Oha, Anthony 2017). Naming places goes beyond ordinary labelling or identification. According to Soyinka, a Nigerian Nobel laureate, playwright and essayist, naming is an important business in traditional African society because names consist of meaning and history. They are also indications of hope and confirmations of origin (Soyinka 1988). A previous study by Batoma (2006) revealed that African names are oral records that can be methodically processed and examined by African and African scholars. Batoma (2006) added that toponyms constitute fixed landmarks that are important data for research because of their durability. He also categorized the meanings of toponyms into five facets namely: the geographical, the historical, the linguistic, the symbolic, and the socio-political facets. In the same text, Batoma (2006) goes further to compile an annotation of sources on ethnonyms and toponyms from the Maghreb region and Sub-Saharan Africa dating from 1930 to the present irrespective of the author's origin, nationality and race.

Other renditions suggest that African names evolve from desires, needs, and aspirations. For instance, Momin (1989) argued that the name a person, town, city or village bears evolved out of the needs, desires, hopes and aspirations of people, and which provide an insight into their personal lifestyle (Momin 1989). According to Momin such names help throw light on a number of geographical, historical, religious and other aspects of the town's life as well as on the various natural resources which attracted men to settle and how the settlement started.

On their part, Aleru and Alabi, Nigerian researchers and archeologists, posit that when broadly applied, toponymy includes names of inhabited places, countries, natural features such as mountains, rivers, stars, and planets, and man-made structures such as roads and buildings



(Aleru and Alabi 2010). This narrative is linked to those shared by Odebode (2015) who critically examined the historical and oral accounts of six place-names in Nigeria and opined that names impact on the history, religion, economy, politics, customs and traditions of the immediate communities of a group of people instead of merely doing the illocutionary act of description... Thus, a comprehensive analysis of the names will yield more onomastic, historical, and narrative insights, affirming their socio-cultural importance in the lives of individuals (Odebode 2015).

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the names of places in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, hold valuable information that offers a glimpse into the historical, cultural, and developmental narratives of a region. This study delves into the significance of indigenous toponyms in preserving the culture and heritage of Igbomina-land, with a focus on Omu-Aran. By examining the relevance of these place names, the study aims to:

- Identify and elucidate the cultural and heritage practices of Omu-Aran indigenes, including their traditions, customs, and beliefs
- Analyze the impact of indigenous toponyms on the cultural and heritage preservation of Omu-Aran indigenes, including how they shape identity, community, and sense of belonging

Through this exploration, the study seeks to uncover the hidden stories and meanings behind Omu-Aran's place names, shedding light on the town's rich cultural tapestry and its people's traditions. By doing so, it highlights the importance of indigenous toponyms in understanding the cultural and historical context of a region, and demonstrates how they can serve as a valuable tool for cultural preservation and education. Furthermore, the study aims to contribute to the broader discussion on the significance of place names and identity in African cultures and their role in shaping community identity. Place identity comprises the emotional bond associated with place attachment and is linked to the symbolic importance of place relationships across different communities and societies. The formation of place identity can affect community expectations regarding activities and behaviours in specific locations (Donaldson, 2025; Kostanski, 2014).

Context of the Study

The people of Omu-Aran practiced cultism with the existence of Ogboni and Imule fraternities. This was a culture inherited by the whole community and they promoted it. The person saddled with the responsibility of this traditional practice is called Ogbo. He is symbolized by the figure of a person carrying a cutlass. He is known as a pathfinder because it is believed that he found the path that led the indigenes to their settlement. The name Ogbomona means 'the one who knows the path' (pathfinder). The name Igbomina (refers to the indigenes of Omu-Aran) is derived from Ogbomona. Omu-Aran indigenes possess an object called 'Ogbo' and they celebrate it every year in May or June (before the new yam festival) during a festival called 'Orugbo'. They cannot do without celebrating this festival and it is upheld that no religion can terminate it because it is linked with the installation of a king.

Ogbo has a priest called Onigemo and he is the custodian of Ogbo because of his marital connection. Anyone who'd be appointed as a priest of Ogbo must come from Ogun-Arojo. One of the residential enclaves of the Okeki compound is Okeki Ogun-Arojo (mentioned earlier among the compounds in Okeki. The celebration of Ogbo during the Orugbo festival lasts for



nine days. During this period, first thing in the morning before daybreak, the incumbent king will go to a place called Igangu Ile Tuntun to enquire what the Olugbo (oracle) will accept as a sacrifice for a particular year. This can range from a cock, she-goat, ram and others. In the year 2023, the Olugbo oracle chose a she-goat as a sacrifice. This was given to the residents at Ile-Tuntun with tubers of yam to prepare pounded yam along with the sum of ten thousand naira to procure soap ingredients to cook the soup with which to eat the pounded yam. These items will be carried first thing in the morning of the festival, to the compound of the king's family house. The carriers of these items will be entertained with palm wine and akara (bean cake) fried with palm oil. The carriers of the festival items are the first people to start the celebration in the king's compound as they beat the Bata and Dundun (local) drums in the king's family house and proceed to the palace while still beating the drums.

The king sits on his royal throne while this is going on with an aged woman known as Edemo Omu, who by tradition assumes the role of the first wife of the Olomu (king). The second wife is called Ojomu Omu and being a junior wife, she sits by the king's leg because she is not allowed to sit on a royal chair beside the king like the first wife throughout the nine days of the festival. These two wives are just ceremonial wives while the festival lasts, they are not the original wives of the king. Interestingly, the first wife is much older than the king and most unlikely to be his wife in reality according to their culture.

The royal throne is called 'Ite-Oba' and the pillars around it are usually wrapped with clothes, women's wrappers in particular. During the festival, four or five sets of people will dance around the compound of the palace, and on a particular day, the king will also dance and that is the only day the king must dance. This festival is so important in Omu-Aran that it cannot be canceled despite the advent of civilization.

Presently, there is no religious discrimination among the indigenes. For instance, at the meeting of the Olomu-in-Council², a Christian usually prays before the commencement of the meeting in the first week of the month while a Muslim prays on the last week of the month. The people believe that they are one.

Toponyms

Toponyms are essential for fostering a feeling of cultural and social continuity between historical and contemporary contexts. For numerous individuals within communities, place names function as cognitive maps enriched with encoded knowledge, historical legacies, and symbolic significations (Randell-Moon, 2024; Savage, 2020). In South Africa, which is characterised by a variety of political and cultural beliefs, changes in place names can serve as either a unifying or divisive force. Therefore, the renaming of locations following political power shifts is a global occurrence (Donaldson, 2025). Similarly, a recent study in China has revealed that economic activities and population migrations throughout history have significantly influenced the cultural landscape of toponyms, facilitating the evolution of village site selection and distribution patterns while profoundly impacting naming conventions for toponyms (Li et al., 2025). The construction and growth of the cultural landscape of several traditional town toponyms come from the interplay of natural geographical factors, cultural systems, and historical economic dynamics (Randell-Moon, 2024). Likewise, traditional villages embody significant historical knowledge and cultural memories, featuring a deep cultural legacy and unique humanistic landscapes.



Toponyms embody Indigenous epistemologies and signify ecological histories and profound connections among Indigenous groups, habitats, land, and time (Porter et al., 2025). Colonial naming conventions have predominantly used anthroponyms and toponyms, both historically and currently. In Zimbabwe, many toponyms were assigned in commemoration of the homeland and as tributes to conquest, while personal names originated from colonialists, particularly missionaries, notably Anglicans and Catholics, who bestowed the names of their saints upon perceived pagans, especially those who had embraced Christianity (Mapara & Siamena, 2024). However, traditional Indigenous place names hold substantial linguistic and cultural significance as they encapsulate spatial, temporal, and cultural connotations, including knowledge intended for transmission alongside the name, such as culturally important narratives, songs, and hunting territories (Donaldson, 2025; Porter et al., 2025). Moreover, place names are significant for conveying a shared history with others, particularly through narratives and songs that communicate vital familial or cultural events or facts associated with certain locations. Toponyms not only indicate a profound connection to the landscape but also contain significant information, making the compilation of toponymic data valuable to scholars, the academic community, and the society from which the data are derived (Porter et al., 2025).

The study of toponyms has evolved into a longstanding scholarly tradition among historians and geographers (Donaldson, 2025; Elisifa, 2024). The written representations of place names illustrate power dynamics among the colonized, postcolonial nationalism, and evolving political ties (Elisifa, 2024). The relationship between toponyms and matters of power and identity, especially in multilingual and multicultural nations, frequently complicates the dynamics of history and power (Andersson, 2020).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach, relying on primary and secondary sources of data to gather information about Omu-Aran. A purposive sampling technique by way of expert sampling was used to gather from three interviewees. The interviewees consisted of three prominent indigenes of the town, carefully selected for their wealth of knowledge and experience. These individuals included:

- His Royal Majesty Oba Abdulraheem Oladele Adeoti Akolade Agboluaje is the 27th king of Omu-Aran. He ascended the throne on 22 September 2018. As a knowledgeable leader in his late sixties, he provided valuable insights into the town's history and cultural heritage.
- High Chief Emmanuel Olusegun Oyedepo is a respected elder in his eighties who is a custodian of traditional knowledge. His traditional title is the 'Asanlu' of Omu-Aran, and he is one of the chiefs who serve alongside the king, contributing his wisdom and expertise to the community's cultural preservation and development.
- Elder Oluwaponmile Abigail Bankole is a nonagenarian matriarch born and raised in Omu-Aran. She stands as a testament to the town's rich history. As a successful trader in her active years, she offers a unique perspective on the evolution, growth, and cultural heritage of Omu-Aran. Her life experiences and insights contribute valuable understanding to the community's past, present, and future.

The majority of the information gathered came from the interview with the king, who possesses extensive knowledge of the town's history and cultural practices.

Supplementing the primary data, this study also drew upon secondary sources, including:



- Personal observations and experiences gathered during twelve years of residence in Omu-Aran.
- Consultation of relevant materials, although limited in availability.

Data analysis

The data gathered were subsequently evaluated using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a technique for detecting, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning, referred to as themes, within qualitative data and which can be applied across different theoretical frameworks and research paradigms (Clarke & Braun, 2017). To analyse the current data, codes, themes and categories were developed. For the current study, six major processes were adopted: familiarization with the empirical and secondary data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The initial phase of data analysis entailed familiarity with the dataset. I initially engaged with the data by thoroughly reading and re-reading transcripts and notes to achieve a comprehensive understanding. I recognised this stage as essential for revealing preliminary thoughts and insights that might guide further coding.

The subsequent phase was methodically coding the material, wherein text parts were designated with codes that encapsulate their essence. This coding technique compresses the data into digestible pieces, enabling the recognition of patterns. Subsequent to coding, I categorised the codes into prospective themes, discerning overarching patterns that arise from the data. This process needed careful thinking to make sure that the themes truly reflect the data's meaning, especially regarding how important Indigenous toponyms are for protecting the culture and heritage of Igbomina-land. This continuous procedure entailed re-examining the data to ensure that themes are adequately substantiated (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Squires, 2023). The subsequent procedure entailed explicitly delineating and designating, offering a succinct summary of its substance and importance. This clarity facilitated the successful communication of findings. The concluding part entailed synthesising the analysis into a report, amalgamating themes with pertinent material and offering opinions. This multi-faceted approach ensured a rich and nuanced understanding of Omu-Aran's cultural heritage, history, and traditions. By triangulating data from various sources, the researcher validated the findings and increased the reliability of the study.

Findings

The findings of this study is in two parts. The first section presents interviews with three participants. The second section focuses on an analysis of the secondary data that were gathered.

Findings – Interviews**Cultural Significance of Toponyms**

The significance of indigenous toponyms in preserving cultural heritage has garnered increasing attention in recent scholarly discourse. The current study examined the relevance of indigenous toponyms in preserving the culture and heritage in Igbomina-land with a focus on Omu-Aran. A participant explained the names of the core settlements:



The word settlement is broad, but I will narrow it to compounds which the settlements in Omu-Aran comprise. We have a combination of compounds in Omu-Aran that form settlements. Some Yoruba traditional settlements live in compounds; an extraction of Ile-Ife also lives in compounds in Omu-Aran. The earlier settlers came from Ile-Ife, made a stopover at Ijaregbe before coming to a place called Odo-Omu, very close to the first settlement. By implication, the compound name of the town (Omu-Aran) indicates that there are two settlements in one, Omu and Aran. It used to be Omuaperan [Participant 1].

The participant also explained how the title of the King reflects the name of the settlements. Excerpts below reflect the views of Participant 1:

The first king's title which is Olomu Aperan, reflected this name. The names of the first five prominent compounds at the early stage of their settlements are: Ikoja, also known as Ijawusi (this is the first compound) – he had a brother that settled in Aafin thereby making them two compounds, i.e, Ikoja and Aafin compounds. The second is Onigan, also called Igangu – there are seven additional settlements in this compound namely: Igangu Momolosh, Igangu Ayunomu Moye, Igangu Iwoye, Igangu Omilodogbo, Igangu Edamuletodo, Igangu Owolewa, and Igangu Iletuntun. The emergence of these other compounds translates to complexity in Igangu settlement.

The participant also explained how the names of the third and fourth settlements were derived. The names of the third and fourth settlements which are also compounds were explained:

The third is Akii, called Okeki – this settlement also has other compounds namely: Okeki Ile-Arilewo, Okeki Ogun-Arojo, Okeki Gbelejoye, Okeki Moloke, Okeki Monisale, and Okeki Ile-Akanmoleyin. The fourth is called Areyin, also called Oke-esa – this is a single compound and there is no complexity in its settlement. The fifth is named Ijoko, also called Ifaja – this has two settlements namely, Ijoko Olasekale. Here also are other compounds which are: Ile-Oja, Seke, Ile-Oba, Odo-Oro, Ile-nla Aladodo, Ile-nla Abegunde, Ile-nla Oloye, and Odo'ju consisting of Ile-Oba, Ijero, Ile-Osi, Ile-Oro, Ile-Oju, and Oke Iroko [Participant 1].

The respondent added that “the other three settlements that emerged later on are: Ora Ayoka, Raba and Ilaro. All the eight compounds and the compounds within them are categorized into two blocks which are Omu and Aran Blocks. The Omu Block is divided into two namely: Ihaye and Ifaja wards. The other compounds mentioned earlier, i.e. Akii, Areyin, Oni Igan, Ilaro, Raba, and Ora Ayoka, belong to the Aye ward in Omu Block” [Participant 1]. Feedback from participant 1 revealed how the cultural significance of toponyms is linked to the history, heritage and beliefs of the community.

Cultural Festivals as Heritage Preservation

Indigenous toponyms serve as vital components of cultural identity, encapsulating the history, beliefs, and practices of a community. In Omu-Aran, toponyms are intertwined with local traditions and the worship of deities, such as Orisa oko, which influences dietary customs, including the prohibition against consuming new yams during specific periods. This connection



underscores the role of toponyms in maintaining cultural continuity and identity amidst external pressures. A participant shared the culture and heritage of the Omu-Aran indigenes:

Before the advent of Christianity and Islam, Omu-Aran indigenes were purely pagans just like any other average Yoruba settlement at that period. As pagans, it was the culture of Omu-Aran indigenes to believe and worship their traditional gods and goddesses namely; Sango (one of the Alaafins i.e. kings that reigned in Aafin Oyo (Oyo's palace), Ogun (god of iron), Oya (river goddess and wife of Sango), Egungun (masquerade), Obatala (not far from Ifa oracle), Elele (an unknown god), Osun (river goddess), Orisa oko (native god). [Participant 1].

The celebration of cultural festivals, such as masquerade festivals in Omu-Aran, plays a crucial role in community engagement and cultural preservation. However, participation in these festivals has declined due to the influences of civilization and changing religious practices. Excerpts below reflect the views of participant 3 concerning cultural festivals and heritage preservation:

The reason for the change of name is that the settlers in the compound never accepted any cultural festival from the beginning. Such festivals include a masquerade, Sango, Oya and Obatala festivals. It is the only compound in Omu-Aran without any shrine for deities. The celebration of the masquerades' festival was another prominent culture in Omu-Aran. Each compound has its peculiar masquerade. For instance, the Alata compound is identified with Eegun Olore (cane masquerade). In the early days, indigenes that lived in other villages/towns used to come around to Omu-Aran for the celebration of the festival of masquerades. The people also practiced cultism with the existence of Ogboni and Imule fraternities. This was a culture inherited by the whole community and they promoted it.

Recent studies advocate for the revitalization of such festivals to strengthen community ties and enhance cultural identity, emphasizing their importance in the cultural landscape of Omu-Aran. The views expressed by the participants suggest a direct link between toponyms, cultural festivals and the preservation of the cultural heritage of the people of Omu-Aran.

Effect of modernization

The challenges posed by modernization and globalization on traditional practices are significant. Recent literature emphasizes the need for communities to navigate these pressures while striving to retain their cultural identities, highlighting the delicate balance between tradition and modernity (Mapara & Siamena, 2024). Participant 1 explained the impact of colonization, civilization, modernization and religion on the culture and heritage of Omu-Aran:

The impact has been destructive because the typical Yoruba culture of respect has been eroded. Modernization and civilization has wreaked havoc on the communal living of extended families as well as destroyed the love and bond among them. Extended families were regarded as a nuclear family in the olden days. I was not living with my father after I was born. I lived mostly with my grandfather with eleven other children and there was no discrimination among us. We slept and ate together and this fostered unity and love among us. In addition to that, when I was in



primary three, I lived with my uncle who was a teacher and I went with him to three different locations he was posted for teaching before I came back to Omu-aran. This helped my educational background a lot. Nowadays, hardly do you find anyone releasing his/her children to live with other people.

Notwithstanding the negative impact of colonization, civilization, modernization and religion on the culture and heritage of the town, Participant 1 also shared what he considered as the positive impact:

The major positive impact that modernization has on the culture is western education and that too has brought a negative effect because of the abolition of Christian and Islamic Religion Studies in the SS3 that is, final year of secondary schools which was compulsory in the olden days, but now the students no longer offer the subjects that can inculcate good morals and values into them. There is agitation by the parents and older generation for these subjects to be re-instated.

The case of Omu-Aran suggests that while colonialism and war have had limited effects on toponymic adaptations, the pressures of modernization present substantial challenges to cultural preservation.

Relationship between Omu-Aran and other communities

The culture and heritage of the people of Omu-Aran suggest age-long relationships with neighboring Towns. These relationships also produce specific impacts by way of socio-cultural, economic and political activities. These towns also understand the culture and traditions of the people of Omu-Aran. Participant 1 explained the relationship that exists between Omu-Aran and other communities:

Omu-Aran has had socio-cultural, economic and political impact on neighboring towns. On the socio-cultural Impact, Omu-Aran is the headquarters of a confederacy known as Iyangba Confederacy up to a town called Moba in Otun, Ekiti State. Other towns that belong to the Iyangba confederacy are Gogo, Ikosu, Ikun (Ekiti State), Oke-Ero, Oro-Ago, and Okanle (Kwara State) up to 141 settlements. All of them have the same socio-cultural tie such that in earlier days, the heads of the gods and goddesses in Omu-Aran celebrate the same day without any conflict. The political impact of Omu-Aran is possible because it is the headquarters of Kwara South Senatorial District and during elections, all the results including that of Offa (a town not classified as Igbomina), are collated in Omu-Aran.

Another participant also contributed his knowledge to the relationship between Omu-Aran and other communities:

The settlement of Omu-Aran is incomparable. Omu-Aran is the center of all villages around Irepodun L.G.A. I can say. We share a boundary with Ekiti, Osun, and Ilorin. Ganmo is in Irepodun L.G.A and it is the boundary of Irepodun. I was ordained as a high chief, the Asanlu of Omu-Aran, on 20 March 2020, and since that time, there has been a high rate of development in Omu-Aran. Omu-Aran is a lover of visitors. We are



accommodating. We love strangers. We offer you land if you desire to build a house and settle down in Omu-Aran. [Participant 2]

In addition to sociocultural and political impact, participant 1 also shared the economic impact of the relationship between Omu-Aran and other communities:

The economic impact occurs from the geographical location of Omu-Aran which makes it accessible to other surrounding communities. Also, the hierarchy of over twenty goods and services available in Omu-Aran makes other communities within a twenty-five to thirty Kilometres radius to come to Omu-Aran to enjoy the goods and services that are not available in their own community. Such services include hospital services (General Hospital, Landmark Medical Centre, etc.), education services, a university, and secondary schools (there are over twenty secondary schools in Omu-Aran and some of them have boarding facilities).

The peace and serenity in Omu-Aran are other factors that make it sought after. According to a participant:

God has been keeping the town from any form of evil. There has been no crisis of kidnapping or armed robbery. There has also been no quarrel among the chiefs and residents in Omu-Aran. [Participant 2]

The feedback from the participants from Omu-Aran exemplifies how local practices and beliefs can inform broader discussions on cultural preservation and revitalization, emphasizing the need for proactive strategies to safeguard these invaluable cultural assets.

Findings - Secondary data analysed

History of Omu-Aran

Omu-Aran, an ancient town in Kwara State, Nigeria, West Africa, is the first settlement in all Igbomina-land of the Yoruba tribe. It originated over five hundred years ago as a result of the migration of people from Ile-Ife, Osun State, also in Nigeria, and it is currently the local government headquarters of Irepodun local government. The historical oral account of the origin of Omu-Aran states that the first person to settle in Omu-Aran was an influential and powerful Ife warrior called Olomu-Aperan who became the forebear of the Igbomina town of Omu-Aran in Kwara State, Nigeria. Another powerful and good hunter, also relevant to the history of Omu-Aran, was a man called Akii. He had his hunting adventure on a hill called Oke-Akii. The hill was named after him as it is a combination of his name, Akii, and 'Oke', which means 'hill' in the English language. Akii had three brothers namely; Igan, Ijawusi, and Areyin and there are places named after them in Omu-Aran. Akii and three brothers established the first four settlements on the hill.

The native dialect, which is the mother tongue, of Omu-Aran indigenes is a variant of the Yoruba language known as "Igbona" (Wikipedia 2023) and it is spoken mostly only by the indigenes of the town. The general Yoruba language is spoken by non-indigenes amongst themselves as well as with the indigenes of the town for easy communication and interaction. The English language, introduced through colonization, education and modernization, is



combined with the native dialect and is also spoken in the Omu-Aran community, particularly by educated indigenes and non-indigenes.

The name of the current king, whose traditional title is Olomu of Omu-Aran, is Oba Abdulraheem, Oladele, Adeoti, Akolade, Agboluaje¹ and he was enthroned on 22nd September 2018 (see Figure 1). He hails from the Idoku ruling house known as Olahelu Akolade Agboluaje Olomu Efon and he got his title from his mother's lineage.

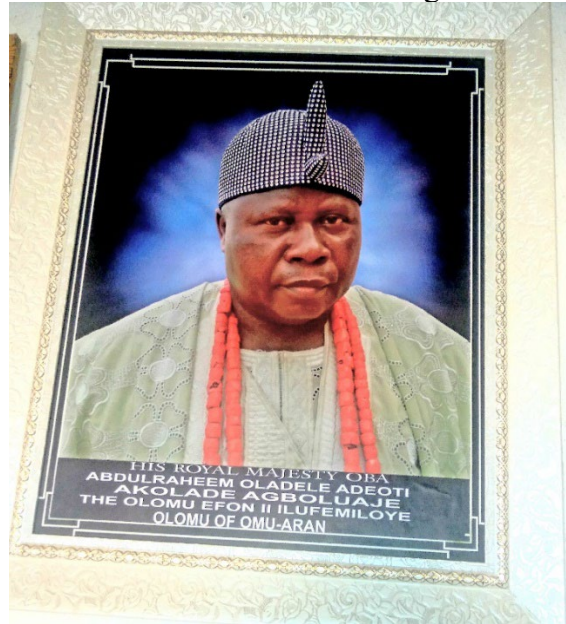


Figure 1- The king of Omu-Aran, Oba Abdulraheem Oladele Adeoti Akolade Agboluade

The inhabitants of Omu-Aran live in smaller settlements known as compounds. The earlier settlers from Ile-Ife made a stopover at Ijaregbe before coming to the place called Odo-Omu which is close to the present settlement. By implication, the compound name of the town (Omu-Aran) indicates that there are two settlements in one, Omu and Aran. The first king's title, Olomu Aperan, reflected this.

In another development, in 1931, there was a misunderstanding between Oba Eniyiye Arawande, the ruling king from 1928-30, and the Olomu of Omu which led to the exit of Oba Eniyiye Arawande (and his followers from a part of Aran), from Omu to settle in another geographical location to form another settlement called Arandun. In essence, this means that Arandun and Aran Omu comprises of people from the same lineage, i.e. two brothers can have the same family and one of them can be an indigene of Aranomu, while the other brother an indigene of Arandun. That settlement in recent times is known as Aran Odundun.

The compounds in Omu-Oran have names that are the toponyms referred to in this research. The names are mostly derived from the names of the first settlers in each particular compound. The names of the first five prominent compounds at the early stage of their settlements are: Ikoja, also known as Ijawusi (this is the first compound) – he had a brother that settled in Aafin thereby making them two compounds, i.e. Ikoja and Aafin compounds. The second is Onigan, also called Igangu (see Figure 2) – there are seven additional settlements in this compound



namely: Igangu Momoloshu, Igangu Ayunomu Moye, Igangu Iwoye, Igangu Omilodogbo, Igangu Edamuletodo, Igangu Owolewa, and Igangu Iletuntun. The emergence of these other compounds translates to complexity in Igangu settlement.



Figure 2- Igangu settlement in Omu-Aran

The third is Akii, called Okeki – this settlement also has other compounds namely: Okeki Ile-Arilewo, Okeki Ogun-Arojo, Okeki Gbelejoye, Okeki Moloke, Okeki Monisale, and Okeki Ile-Akanmoleyin. The fourth is called Areyin, also called Oke-esa – this is a single compound and there is no complexity in its settlement. The fifth is named Ijoko, also called Ifaja – this has two settlements namely; Ijoko Olasekale. Here also are other compounds which are: Ile-Oja, Seke, Ile-Oba, Odo-Oro, Ile-nla Aladodo, Ile-nla Abegunde, Ile-nla Oloye, and Odo'ju consisting of Ile-Oba, Ijero, Ile-Osi, Ile-Oro, Ile-Oju, and Oke Iroko. The other three settlements that emerged later on are: Ora Ayoka, Raba and Ilaro.

All the eight compounds and the compounds within them are categorized into two blocks which are Omu and Aran Blocks. The Omu Block is divided into two namely: Ihaye and Ifaja wards. The other compounds mentioned earlier, i.e. Akii, Areyin, Oni Igan, Ilaro, Raba, and Ora Ayoka, belong to the Aye ward in Omu Block.

The Ifaja ward consists of Ijoko, Ile Alasekale, Seke, Ile Aladodo, Ile nla Abegunde, Ile nla Oloye, Ijero, Odo Oro, Ile oro, Ile Igbogbo (now called Ile Igbagbo) Gbagida Oke, Gbagida Isale, Ile Oja, Oja Eleru, Oja Esunsun, Edidi Omu all in Omu Block.

The Aran Block came into existence during the reign of Olumefon the First. Olomu of Omu-aran is Olumefon the second. Olumefon (1) was the one that brought Aran to Omu thereby having a combination of the two communities to create the town of Omu-Aran. The prominent



compounds in Aran are Oke-Esan which consists of four compounds namely: Oke-Esan Ile Odun, Oke-Esan Ile Okankan, Oke-Esan Ileti, and Oke-Esan Odo Sare. Other compounds emerged after these four and they are Ile Ade, Edidi Aran, and Oke-Apa. In Oke-Apa are other compounds which are: Ile Awure, Ile Oloje, Ile Oniwo, Apakere, Oke Aja, Orolu, Ile Otan, Moji, Ile Amule, Mode, and Agan-Oru.

Agan-Oru, a bustling marketplace, has its roots in a unique circumstance - a night market. The name "Agan-Oru" is derived from the bi-annual festival of "Agan" and the Yoruba word for night, "Oru". In its early days, women traders would converge on the market from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., selling food items harvested from farms during the day. This nocturnal market allowed farmers to dispose of perishable goods, ensuring they didn't go to waste.

The women traders would then return home, often waking their sleeping children to share a late dinner, as food preservation methods were scarce. Over time, the market expanded beyond Agan-Oru, spilling onto the main Aperan road, where the central market is now located. This evolution transformed Agan-Oru into a vibrant commercial hub, showcasing the resourcefulness and resilience of the local community.

Oja Ojomu, situated in the Omu Block, serves as the central market of the town. Unlike Agan-Oru, a night market located in Aran Block, Oja Ojomu originally operated as a day market. Notably, the central Mosque is also situated within Oja Ojomu. Interestingly, both markets, Agan-Oru and Oja Ojomu, have evolved to operate during both day and night in present times, catering to the needs of the community around the clock.

Background of Selected Toponyms in Omu-Aran

Okeki is the third out of the first five prominent settlements mentioned earlier and the first ward in this compound called Okeki Arilewo, used to be called Okeki Igbo. 'Igbo' means 'thick forest' and after civilization/modernization cum exposure, the indigenes no longer wanted to be identified with thick forest because it connotes primitiveness and non-civilization.

Oke-Esa (the fourth out of the first five prominent settlements) derived its name from Areyin, which means honey harvesting. There was a masquerade from that compound identified with honey bees from nowhere hovering above his head. This unresolved mystery led to the naming of that compound as Areyin, meaning 'the one who cuts honey' in earlier days but now the same compound has been re-named Oke-Esa.

Ile tuntun- means 'new house', it is named after the people that settled in the land and who started building new houses. Ile Ayunomu Moye means 'the one who goes to Omu to be conferred with a chieftaincy title'. The compound is named after those who do such. Ile Igbogbo means 'the house of cane', later became Ile Igbagbo, which means 'the house of Christians'. The reason for the change of name is that the settlers in the compound never accepted any cultural festival from the beginning. Such festivals include a masquerade, Sango, Oya and Obatala festivals. It is the only compound in Omu-Aran without any shrine for deities. Three-quarters of the inhabitants are of Cherubim/Seraphim or Anglican denomination. Ile Oro became Ile Ire because Ile Oro means 'house of agony' and the inhabitants do not want to be identified with such a negative name. Although the panegyric of that compound still presents



‘oro’ because they could not change the name in that particular phenomenon. Oke-Apa, which means ‘the hill of a destructive person’, is another compound that the settlers have attempted to change the name to Oke Imole/Oke Igbagbo because most of them are either Christians or Muslims, but they could not.

In response to a question by the researcher on the possibility of religious crisis, the king said that such can never happen in Omu-Aran because of the connections and relationships of the indigenes of the town. For instance, the king is a Muslim, his wife is also a Muslim while his wife’s twin sister is a Christian and her children lived with the king and his wife. There are several other instances of such circumstances in Omu-Aran.

The Culture and Heritage of Omu-Aran

Before the advent of Christianity and Islam, Omu-Aran indigenes were purely pagans just like any other average Yoruba settlement at that period. The advent of these religions changed the situation of things. The religion that came first to Omu-Aran is Christianity with the emergence of the Anglican Church in 1958. Thereafter came Sudan Interior Mission which became the Evangelical Church of West Africa and now Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA). The Church that was established after ECWA was the Seventh Day Adventist followed by the Pentecostal.

As pagans, it was the culture of Omu-Aran indigenes to believe and worship their traditional gods and goddesses namely; Sango (one of the Alaafins i.e. kings that reigned in Aafin Oyo (Oyo’s palace), Ogun (god of iron), Oya (river goddess and wife of Sango), Egungun (masquerade), Obatala (not far from Ifa oracle), Elele (an unknown god), Osun (river goddess), Orisa oko (native god). A peculiar thing about the Orisa oko worshippers is that it is an abomination for them to eat new yams. No matter how hungry they are, they cannot eat the yams harvested in June, they have to wait until October to November when the yams harvested early would no longer be new and tender. Even though yam was the staple food at that time, it could be quite tempting for them particularly when they see others eating or pounding yam to eat pounded yam during yam season. They have to make do with other types of meals made from corn, millet, guinea corn etc. to satisfy their hunger³. To indicate the extent of hunger an Orisa oko worshipper may be subjected to, an allusion is often made by any hungry indigene in their local dialect that “ebi to npa mi nisin yi ju ti Olosa oko lo” meaning “The hunger pangs that I am feeling now is more than that of Olosa oko”!

The celebration of the masquerades’ festivals was a prominent culture in Omu-Aran. Each compound has its own peculiar masquerade. For instance, the Alata compound is identified with Eegun Olore (cane masquerade). However, the interest and involvement of many indigenes have reduced drastically due to civilization and religion. In the early days, indigenes that lived in other villages/towns used to come around to Omu-Aran for the celebration of the festival of masquerades. One of the interviewees, Elder Oluwaponmile Abigail Bankole spoke with excitement, which indicates her nostalgic feelings for recollecting the pomp and pageantry associated with the celebration of the masquerade festivals in her days.

Traditional Food



There are certain types of food that are regarded as delicacies in Omu-Aran. Ewu-Iyan and Amala Idagbona (leftover pounded yam and yam flour meal respectively that are heated) fall into these categories. Freshly pounded yam can be eaten as dinner and the leftover as breakfast the following morning after heating it up in a special way such that it becomes hotter and more delicious than the freshly pounded yam! Others are Amala (made from yam flour), Ogi-Lile (Lagba), and Ogi-Eda (made from maize), commonly eaten for breakfast, and Ekuru (made from Beans) and eaten with a special sauce made from pepper and tomatoes. Rice rarely eaten in the early days has become a staple food.

The Impact of Colonization and Civilization on the Culture of Omu-Aran

The colonization and civilization of Omu-Aran have brought about a profound transformation in the town's culture and heritage. On one hand, Western education has been a positive outcome, enabling the town's inhabitants to access modern knowledge and skills. However, this has also led to the erosion of traditional values and practices, as the emphasis on individualism has replaced the communal living and harmony that once characterized Yoruba culture.

The king's account highlights the destructive effects of colonization and civilization on the culture, noting that the loss of traditional practices has led to a disconnection from the town's heritage. The once-strong communal bonds have been replaced by a focus on individual achievement, leading to a decline in social cohesion and community spirit.

Despite these negative effects, this research finds that civilization has had more positive than adverse effects on Omu-Aran. The 'Omu-Aran Day' ceremony, held every four years, is a testament to the enduring importance of culture and heritage in the town. This event brings together indigenes from far and near, fostering a sense of community and shared identity. Successful and wealthy individuals make significant contributions to the town's development, demonstrating their commitment to the town's progress.

Notable individuals, such as Gen. Bamgboye, a former governor of Kwara State, and Mr. Kayode Bangbola, a wealthy and successful iron rod merchant, have played a significant role in promoting the town's development. Their efforts have led to improvements in infrastructure, such as the installation of pipe-borne water and electricity, and have provided opportunities for cultural exchange and advancement.

Overall, the impact of colonization and civilization on Omu-Aran's culture has been complex and multifaceted. While traditional practices and values have been eroded, the town's resilience and commitment to its heritage have ensured their continued relevance. The interplay between modernization and tradition has resulted in a unique cultural landscape, reflecting both the challenges and opportunities of development.

The Impact of Omu-Aran on Neighboring Communities

Omu-Aran, is a vibrant town that serves as the epicenter of socio-cultural, economic, and political influence, extending its reach to neighboring communities in Ekiti, Osun, and Ilorin. Its strategic location and rich heritage have fostered a profound impact on the surrounding areas.

Socio-Cultural Impact



As the headquarters of the Iyangba Confederacy, Omu-Aran shares a deep-seated cultural bond with neighboring towns, including Gogo, Ikosu, Ikun (Ekiti State), Oke-Ero, Oro-Ago, and Okanle (Kwara State). This confederacy celebrates a common heritage, with the heads of gods and goddesses in Omu-Aran observing the same festive days without conflict. This cultural affinity has promoted unity and cooperation among the member towns.

Economic Impact

Omu-Aran's geographical location makes it an accessible hub for surrounding communities, offering a range of goods and services unavailable in neighboring towns. The town boasts a hierarchy of twenty goods and services, including hospital services (General Hospital, Landmark Medical Centre, etc.), education services, a university, and over twenty secondary schools, some with boarding facilities. This attracts residents from within a twenty-five to thirty-kilometer radius, stimulating economic activity and growth.

Political Impact

As the headquarters of Kwara South Senatorial District, Omu-Aran plays a pivotal role in the political landscape of the region. During elections, the town serves as the collation center for results, including those from Offa, a town not classified as Igbomina. This underscores Omu-Aran's significance in the political process, further solidifying its influence on neighboring communities.

Omu-Aran's impact on neighboring communities is multifaceted, encompassing socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres. Its rich heritage, strategic location, and range of goods and services have established the town as a beacon of influence, fostering unity, cooperation, and growth in the region.

Unveiling the Hidden Gems of Omu-Aran

Omu-Aran, a town steeped in tradition and culture, boasts a plethora of notable features that set it apart from its contemporaries. From its unique building system to its warm hospitality, this enchanting town is a treasure trove of experiences waiting to be discovered.

Architecture and Royalty.

The building system in Omu-Aran is characterized by a uniformity that is punctuated only by the grandeur of royal compounds. These majestic structures are distinguished by their ornate gates, which exude a sense of royalty and majesty (see figure 3).



Figure 3- Gate and entrance to the king's palace

The attention to detail and the emphasis on aesthetics are a testament to the town's rich cultural heritage.

Cultural Integration and Harmony

Omu-Aran is a melting pot of cultures, where non-indigenes and indigenes coexist in harmony. The town's welcoming nature is evident in its willingness to accommodate visitors and strangers, with plans underway to relocate the Hausa community to a larger space, facilitating their integration into the existing community.

Fashion and Tradition

The people of Omu-Aran are renowned for their love of fashion, particularly traditional outfits. The women adorn themselves in elegant 'iro and buba' (top and wrapper), while the men don 'buba' and 'sokoto' (top and trousers), often complemented by the majestic 'agbada' (ceremonial garment). These stunning outfits are crafted from local fabrics, showcasing the town's rich cultural tapestry.

Evolution of Professions

Farming, once the primary occupation, has given way to modern professions such as politics, trading, fashion designing, and more. This shift is a testament to the town's adaptability and willingness to embrace change.

Hospitality and Warmth

Visitors to Omu-Aran are greeted with warm smiles and open arms. The indigenes are known to be generous, often offering land to strangers who wish to reside in the town. This hospitality is a hallmark of Omu-Aran's culture, making it a haven for those seeking a sense of belonging.

Emerging Landmarks



New places are emerging in Omu-Aran, each named after its distinctive feature. From educational institutions like Landmark University to financial hubs like banks, hotels and event centers, the town is rapidly evolving while maintaining its cultural essence.

A Haven of Peace and Tranquility

Omu-Aran is a land of peace and tranquility, where growth and development are harmoniously balanced. Its positive impact on neighboring towns is a testament to its role as a beacon of progress and cultural richness.

Implications of the study

This study highlights the centrality of the organization of innovative traditional programs that showcase the town's art, music, and dance, blended with modern styles, on a rotational basis at least twice a year. This will not only attract younger generations but also encourage natives residing in other towns to participate, thereby providing an opportunity for them to contribute their wealth of knowledge and experience towards the positive changes and advancement of the town.

Furthermore, the creation of a comprehensive digital archive of oral traditions, cultures, and history of Omu-Aran is advocated. This archive can be utilized to translate and subtitle recordings of the Igbomina indigenous language using AI-powered tools, thereby making it accessible to a global audience.

In addition, the development of immersive Virtual Reality (VR) experiences that simulate festivals, ceremonies, and historical events is proposed. This will allow users to explore and interact with the town's cultural heritage, providing an immersive experience that fosters a deeper understanding of Omu-Aran's rich history.

The appointment of Omu-Aran indigenous ambassadors to promote the cultural heritage globally through cultural exchange programs, workshops, and lectures is also recommended. This will not only showcase the town's cultural heritage but also provide a platform for cultural exchange and collaboration.

Moreover, the development of AR-guided tours of the Toponyms in Omu-Aran is suggested. This will provide in-depth information and insights into their historical significance, thereby enhancing the understanding and appreciation of the town's cultural heritage.

It is also recommended that approval be given to certain compounds mentioned in the study who wish to change the name of their compounds for certain reasons. This will respect the cultural identity and autonomy of the community, acknowledging the evolving nature of cultural heritage and the need for adaptation.

Lastly, this study advocates for scholars, researchers, critics, community, and national leaders to explore and imbibe the values in indigenous toponyms not just in Nigeria but also in other West African countries. This will promote the preservation of cultural heritage without compromising modernization, ensuring that the cultural significance of Omu-Aran is preserved for future generations.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The naming of a place is a sacred tradition that holds immense significance, particularly in Omu-Aran, where compounds have been identified by traditional names since the early days. These names, often derived from the founders or circumstances of establishment, serve as a vital link to the town's cultural heritage and values. The use of traditional names has enabled the indigenes to uphold their cultural identity and distinguish one compound from another, fostering unity and easy identification among the indigenes and non-indigenes.

The traditional names in Omu-Aran have played a crucial role in preserving the town's cultural essence, reflecting the rich history and customs of the community. For natives of the town residing in other towns or in the diaspora, these names provide a vital connection to their roots, enabling them to easily trace and locate their ancestral homes if the need arises. This connection to their heritage is invaluable, providing a sense of belonging and identity.

Furthermore, the traditional names in Omu-Aran depict 'Africaness,' synonymous with the town, making it more endearing to its people. The use of these names has become an integral part of the community's fabric, highlighting the town's unique cultural essence. The ease of identification and location that these names provide is also significant, facilitating navigation within the town for visitors and newcomers.

In addition, the traditional names have enabled the indigenes to maintain a strong sense of cultural identity, setting them apart from other communities. This sense of identity is vital, particularly in today's globalized world, where cultural heritage is often lost amidst modernization. The people of Omu-Aran have managed to preserve their cultural essence, thanks to the traditional naming of compounds, ensuring that their heritage continues to thrive.

Overall, the traditional naming of compounds in Omu-Aran is a testament to the town's rich cultural heritage and values. It has fostered unity, easy identification, and a strong sense of cultural identity, making it an integral part of the community's fabric.

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