

Symbolism and social control of *Zangbeto* among the Ogu of Southwestern Nigeria

Dominic Okure

PhD in cultural anthropology, Institute of African Studies

University of Ibadan; Ibadan, Nigeria;

e-mail: okuredominic@gmail.com

Abstract

Contemporary global trends undermine African indigenous methods of social control such as *Zangbeto* masked cult among the Ogu of Southwestern Nigeria. While *Zangbeto* has enjoyed a great deal of multidisciplinary publicity among Nigerian scholars recently, there are missing emphases on the organizational structure and extant symbolism which enable the cult to function beyond the boundaries of mere vigilantism, serving as an effective mechanism of informal social control among indigenous Ogu communities. This article examines *Zangbeto* as an integral component of Ogu culture with a variety of symbols that intensify its ethereal and mystical perception by people, as a result of which it is able to function as an effective informal agent of control. It argues that contemporary formal control systems in Nigeria should include indigenous cultural values and methods to attain greater efficiency.

Key words: Ogu; *Zangbeto*; social control; symbolism; indigenous people; masked cult

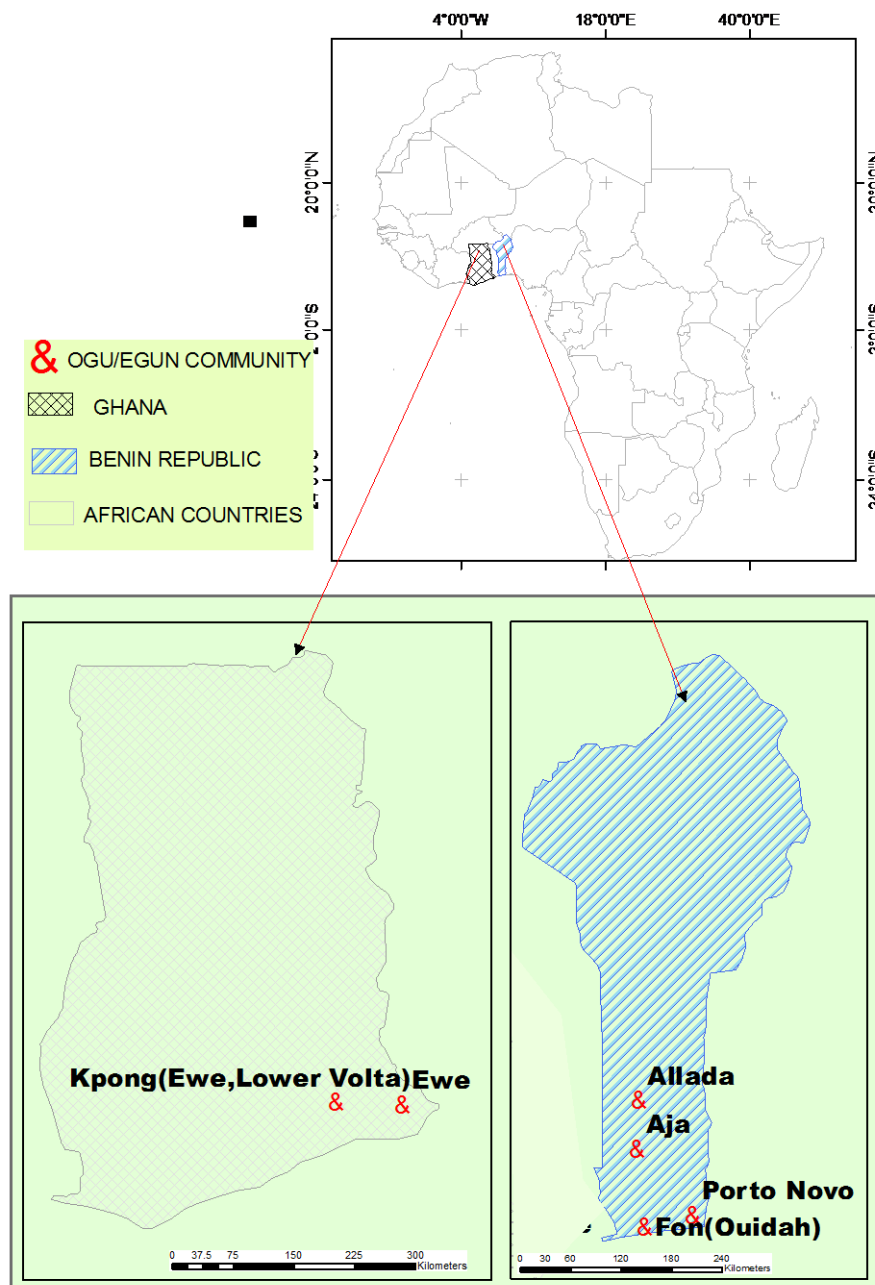
Introduction

The inability of formal social control systems in Nigeria and the rest of Africa to meet the unique challenges of their complex social structures, and the quest for sustainable development strategies and political stability pose a fundamental problem. This problem has been further aggravated by the emerging complexity in the nature and forms of violent conflicts, terrorism, criminality and deviance within the region.

A combination of approaches aimed at both complementing the efforts and possibly making up for the defects in formal control mechanisms as we know it today is imperative. Such approaches should include the examination of enduring social structures in indigenous societies, and assessing their methods and the strength and weakness of their models for social control with a view to discovering the possibility of applying such models, or integrating them into the existing framework for peace and security. While scholars on culture and development in Africa (Whitaker 1988; Gyeke 1996; Makgoba 1997; Nyasani 1997) have sought to abolish the traditional opposition between socio-political progress and economic transformation on the one hand, and the endurance and survival of African traditional values and practices on the other, many African nations still experiment between various Western political and economic models with a view to meeting the challenges of social control, economic growth, stability and global integration. As a result, social control models have emerged, which are both inadequate in addressing unique situations and deficient in their motivation either because they are devoid of the values and norms shared among members of various African societies (Kotter, Heskett 1992), or because they are characterized by excessive force and brutality deriving from the many years of militarism to which colonial and post-colonial Africa has been exposed.

Zangbeto “Man of the Night” is a traditional masked cult among the Ogu of South-western Nigeria and Benin Republic of West Africa, which has evolved from the level of local vigilantism to a level

of wider social control mechanism engaging in community policing, conflict mediation and justice delivery. It has a system of rich material and ideological symbols, organized leadership, and modes of operation (Okure 2015; Hunsu 2011) that make it an efficient informal social control mechanism, serving also to bridge the gap between the structural defects and disadvantages in the formal mechanisms and the level of crime and delinquency among the Ogu (Sampson, Groves 1989). *Zangbeto* highlights the strength of informal social control mechanisms as critical in achieving low crime rates in organizations and societies, and optimizing opportunities for growth and productivity (O'Reilly, Chatman 1996).



Pic. 1. Regions in Ghana and Benin Republic with Ogu roots (Drawn by the author)

While this article does not delve into the details of *Zangbeto's* social control methods, it examines the structure and symbolic elements in the cult, which enable it to function effectively in social control process among the Ogu of South-western Nigeria.

First, a brief presentation of the socio-cultural setting of the Ogu of Nigeria is given. This is followed by a general evaluation of West African masked cults and social control. Finally, *Zangbeto* masked cult and its symbolic elements are examined.

The Ogu

The Ogu socio-cultural group has also been referred to as Egun (Newbury 1965; Hodder 1962; Avoseh 1938). Although the language of the people has been variously called Gu, Gugbe or Egun (Akran 2001; Asiwaju 1979), this paper applies the term Ogu to both the people and their language, as there is indeed no justification for assigning them different nomenclatures. Besides, this is consistent with other language groups like the Yoruba, Efik, Hausa, and Ibibio, Igbo and others in Nigeria, who have the same designation for both the people and their language (Okure, 2015).

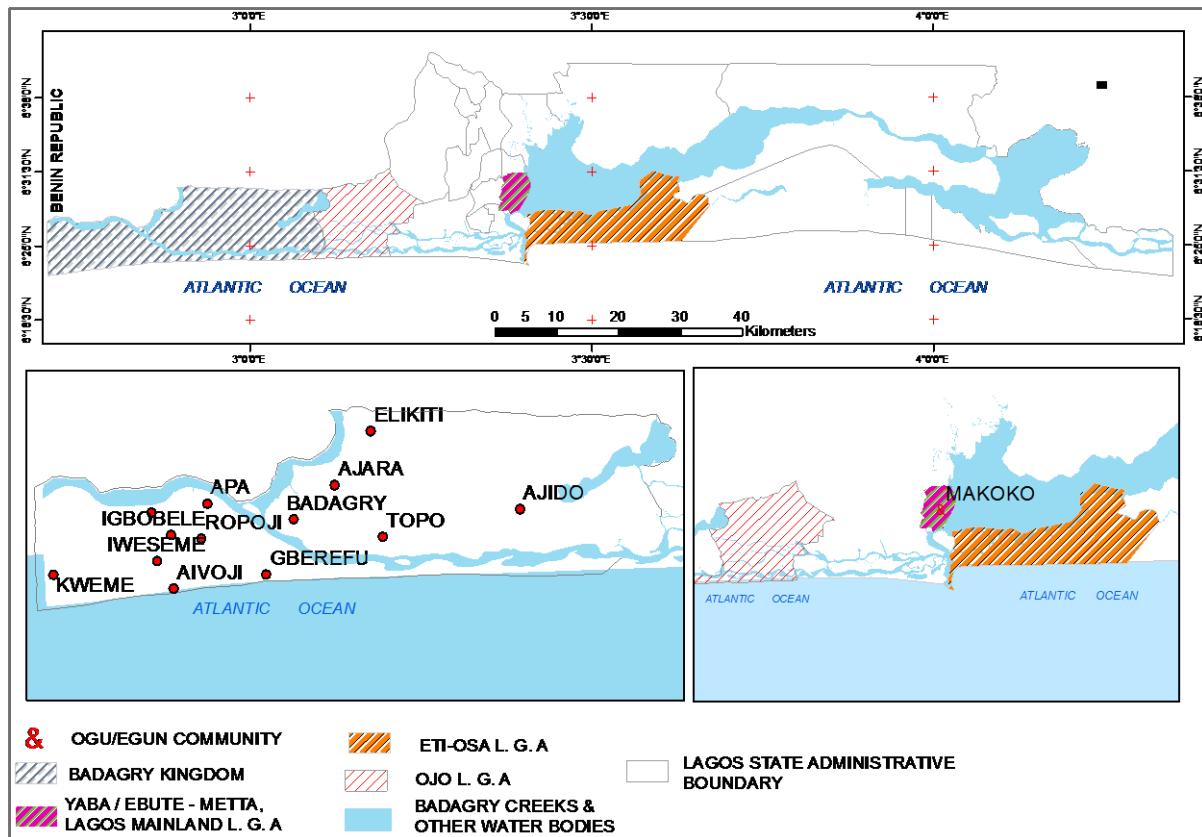
In fact, it has been opined that the term 'Egun' is a corruption of the term 'Gu' due to cross-cultural contacts with Yoruba during the increased Oyo trade (slave hunting) in 18th century which caused "several Yoruba groups to migrate and settle in Badagry" (Akran 2001: 36).

Ogu is a language of Aja, which shares a certain level of mutual intelligibility with Ewe and Fon, spoken in the regions between lower Volta in Southern Ghana and extreme North-Western Nigeria by the Nigeria-Benin boarder (Akran 2001). It is also a unit of the Kwa language family of West Africa (Westerman, Bryan 1970). Kwa languages constitute a sub-family of Niger-Congo family of Congo-Kordofanian language family (Greenberg 1970).

A recent narrative (Dotse 2011) has linked Ewe, Fon and Gu (Ogu) to a common primordial ancestry that goes back to Ham (second son of Noah in the Christian Bible). However, some scholars (Chukwu, Madubuko 2014) have opined that certain African theories of origin, including those with 'hamitic' flavor (Dotse 2011) may have been influenced by the desire to establish ethnic equality among different groups or assert the superiority of one group over others.

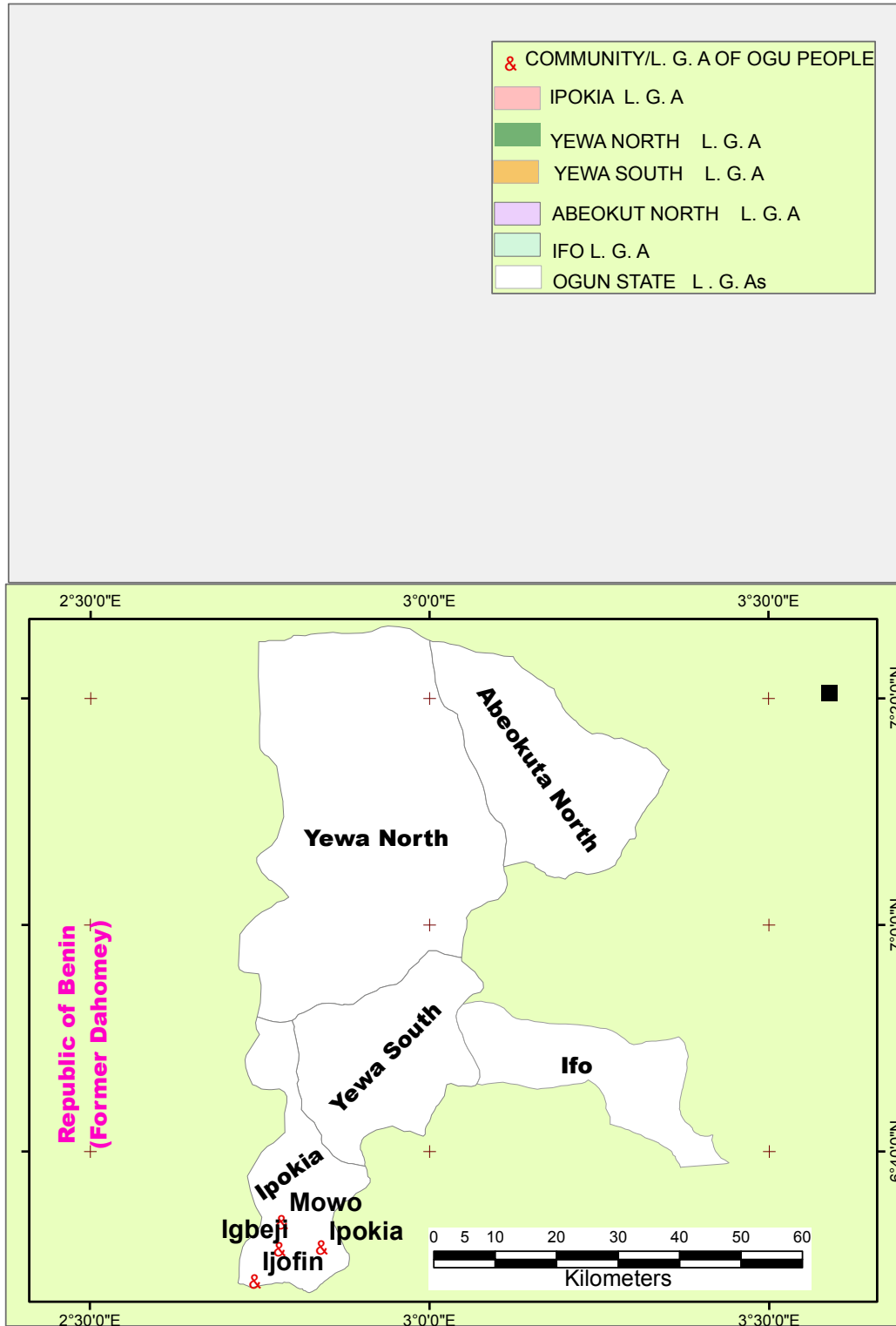
While the shared cultural traits among them may have other explanations (Akran 2011), it is noteworthy that the Ogu have their separate language, and trace their origin to the Republic of Benin (Porto Novo) (Wusu, Isiuogo-Abanihe, 2006). It suffices, therefore, to share in the submission that the Ogu of Badagry "migrated voluntarily from Weme Kingdom" (Akran 2001: 41).

Owing to certain cross-cultural traits among them, some scholars have suggested a common origin for the Yoruba and the Ogu (Olupana 2011; Ogunyemi 2009). This has, however, been challenged with linguistic and historical evidence (Akran 2001; Agbaje-Williams 1990), along with those that link the Ogu of Badagry with the refugees of the Dahomey wars of the 18th century (Messawaku et al, 2000; Law 1977; Ajayi 1965; Newbury 1965).



Pic. 2 Lagos state with some major Ogu communities (drawn by the author)

The Ogu of West Africa live mainly along the regions spanning from Porto Novo and Weme in the Republic of Benin to the Awori settlements along the Badagry Creek in Ojo and Lagos, Nigeria (Akran 2001; Faluyi 1994). In Nigeria their population is about 15% of Lagos state population, they live mainly in Igbobele, Kweme, Aivoji, Iweseme towns and villages of the Badagry axis. Their domain also includes several villages and hamlets such as Apa, Gberefu, Topo, Ajara, Erekiti, Ajido and many others (Akran 2001) up to some part of Eti-Osa Local Government Area of Lagos state. There are also a significant number of Ogu-speaking populations in Makoko, a fishing and trading settlement located on the lagoon between Yaba and Ebute-metta in Lagos State. Salt production also encouraged the development of some Ogu villages and settlements. For instance, the Bapo village in Igbogbele was well known as a salt producing location. The Ogu are also found in Yewa communities of Mowo, Ipokia, Igbeji and Ijofin of Ogun State, though in a marginal proportion, while some much smaller pockets of Ogu indigenous communities can also be found in some parts of Abeokuta and Ifo, also in Ogun State.



Pic. 3 Ogun state with some Ogu communities (drawn by the author)

Social Control and Masked Cults of West Africa

Social control is generally perceived as the processes and mechanisms put in place within a society to regulate behavior with a view to moderating infraction from laid down rules. As such, it points to how a society ensures that rules governing human conduct are adhered to both formally and informally through such agents as family, kinsmen, employers, fellow workers, government officials, local leaders, courts, police, prisons, army, religion, and in recent times mass media, among others (Aderinto, Oludayo 2012).

Each group of people as a cultural domain has evolved ways of dealing with issues of social control and conflict resolution in their unique circumstances. Therefore, key to understanding a culture's system of social control is in understanding the norm upon which it is based (Okure 2015).

While in the Western world law enforcement mechanisms and other formal or state social control measures seem to have largely proven reliability; they are not equally successful in most African societies. While it may sound anachronistic to try to explain this gap or disparity purely in terms of cultural differences, it goes in some way to demonstrate the inappropriateness of a unilateral adoption and application of Western models in the socio-economic and political advancement of non-Western societies.

Among the societies of West Africa, masked cults have always played a significant role in social control. Although this is less obvious in some societies today than in others, the power of the masked cults remains a potent force. This is because masquerades were not identified as particular individuals within the society. Their mystical identity and their perceived close link to ancestral realms significantly curtailed prejudices in their operations, opening them to a spiritual or supernatural ascent by the people (Aremu et al. 2012; Weil 1971). West African masquerades generally command utmost respect in their traditional settings not just because of their perception as ethereal ancestral beings, but also because they are believed to embody supernatural wisdom, strength and purity, and are above human pettiness (Asigbo 2010). Like secret societies in general, masked cults occupied a prominent place in the process of development of traditional African societies, and through their modes of operation characterized by ritual powers, participated prominently in peace processes, social control and governance of the society (Olaoba 2010). The venerated position of masked cults also derived from the strong belief in life after death and the cult of ancestors that are widely spread among West African cultures. Some studies of Egungun masquerade among the Yoruba (Strong 2000; Babayemi 1980) have noted that Egungun is one of the most unique ways of manifesting the ancestors. The strength and importance of Egungun as a cult derives directly from the strong belief in life after death: death is not the end of life but a means whereby present earthy existence is transformed to another. It is a passage into a life beyond (Soyinka 1974; Idowu 1962).

Although West African masked cults and their masquerades served diverse purposes, they were not primarily about entertainment. They were essentially spiritual mediators in matters of governance and social control. Consequently, such studies which lay emphases on costumes and aesthetics (Thompson 1971; Drewal, Drewal 1978; Aniakor 1978; Asigbo 2010), oral arts and speech (Horton 1981; Hunsu 2011), psychology (Ottenberg 1982), ritual and performance (Ogundeji 2000; Amankulor 1981), and their occasional social functions (Pratter 2008, 2007; Bravmann 1974; Murphy 1980), give partial interpretations to the phenomenon of masquerade. Some masquerade cults carry out only one of such functions as administration of oaths, imposition of sanctions, execution of sentences or arbitration and settlement of disputes. *Zangbeto*, on the other hand,

performs all of these. Consequently, it functions in such a manner as to, practically, render other control mechanisms - formal and informal - redundant.

***Zangbeto* Masked Cult**

There are various narratives about the origin of *Zangbeto* masked cult (Hunsu 2011; Oyefolu 2003; Oyesakin 1994). They are partly anchored on the Ogu belief in re-incarnation, and seem predicated also on the view that spirits of ancestors can assume forms of human beings in order to interact with the living. There is, however, the account that contains elements of historicity, which traces *Zangbeto* to a certain Te-Agbanlin, from Agbome in Dahomey (Benin Republic) (Sanou, Oloudee 1988). Te-Agbanlin was said to be son of Zeririgbe, brother of king of Allada, who migrated to Porto Novo as a professional farmer in search of new farmlands in 17th century. When he came to settle in Porto Novo around 1684, he met local inhabitants who were Nago (Yoruba). According to this account as further narrated by Chief Francis Agoyon, an Ogu community leader in Makoko, Lagos State:

Te-Agbanlin asked the Chief of the Village of Aklon for a piece of land to settle – even if just large enough to accommodate the antelope skin he had to lay on, which was just about the size of his body. When he was granted freedom of choice, he instead cut the antelope skin into tiny shreds, joined them together to make a long rope with which he encircled a vast portion of land on which he built a huge edifice. His name ‘Te-Agbanlin’ is actually a nickname, meaning “antelope’s leg”, for he was tall and lanky. To ward off wild animals and human invaders from this isolated edifice, he designed and erected figures of *Azo*, which later became *zanho* (house of the night) at its entrance. With horn of an antelope, he made a trumpet-like devise which he blew to produce terrifying sound that scared men and beasts away. The antelope horn later became the distinguishing mark of *Zangbeto* (Personal Interview, 30/07/2011, Makoko).

It was from this single act of ingenuity and creativity by Te-Agbanlin that the idea of an institutionalized community security organization with *azo* as its main symbol emerged, which later became *Zangbeto*. *Zan-gbeto* literally means “man of the night”, which indicates that *Zangbeto* initially operated at night. However, with the development of society and the emergence of more complex organizational and social structures, other elements of the Ogu socio-cultural values, including religious beliefs, were incorporated into *Zangbeto* to give it its present form and content. It was believed, for instance, that spirits of ancestors inhabited the entity (*zanho*) built by Te-Agbanlin, transforming it to *Zangbeto* with mobility and supernatural powers. However, it is essential to note that the origin of *Zangbeto* goes beyond mere material historical antecedents, and includes firm belief in re-incarnation and strong connection between the Ogu people and their ancestral spirits. Secondly, *Zangbeto* emerged out of the necessity for security and protection from physical and spiritual inimical forces. It has always been an integral and functional aspect of Ogu culture wherever they are found. These two considerations define the significance and function of *Zangbeto* in contemporary Ogu culture (Okure 2015). Today *Zangbeto* serves as an agent of socialization through communication and crime prevention through vigilantism. It brokers peace through mediation, resolves issues of conflict among parties and enforces judgments through coercion. It also secures items and property from vandals through its various symbols.

Structure, organization and symbols of *Zangbeto*

The structure, categories and various symbols of *Zangbeto* both as a masquerade and an organization or cult are the very elements that define its unique place and functionality among the Ogu. It is important to emphasize, from the start, that the various symbolisms of *Zangbeto* are so deeply embedded in its form and organizational structure that they can only be properly discussed in such contexts.

Structure of *Zangbeto* masquerade

As a masquerade *Zangbeto* has some formal structures that are visible in its various sizes, colors and specifications.

Formal symbolism of *Zangbeto* is contained in its costumes usually made from special threads of raffia-palm leaves, which are then dyed with desired colors and dried out for use. In most of West-African cultures, palm leaves - especially the fresh fronds - are symbols of potency and are typically associated with traditional spirituality and magic. This material component of the costume readily assigns *Zangbeto* to the realm of the spiritual, so its purity and potency are never in doubt.

Coloring agents, which may vary from red to green, yellow, purple or brown, or a blending of these colors, are obtained from a mixture of some special herbs known for their special magical qualities, and some local dye. In some cases conventional oil paint may be used after due ritual processing.



Pic. 4 *Zanho* – *Zangbeto*'s costume by the Shrine (photo taken by the author 12.06. 13).

These colors, which transcend the realms of ordinary aesthetics, are highly symbolic. They represent various aspects of life in the natural order such as: vitality, fertility, progress, pain, sacrifice, maturity, among others. They also signify that *Zangbeto* embraces every aspect of life. The raffia shreds, also known as *zanshan*, are arranged into a cone-shaped (horn-like) costume, which is worn or inhabited by spirit, with some other apparel sometimes attached to the upper part (head), which serve different purposes. This costume is known as *Zanho* that literally means “the house of night”. It gives *Zangbeto* the semblance of a moving house. Sometimes, especially during ritual processions (*homa*), *zanho* is made of ropes from grass or banana leaves, which symbolize

destruction and also create the impression of darkness (Oyefolu 2010; Mesewaku et al. 2000). This intensifies the awesomeness of *Zangbeto*. There is also a mask covered with thick strands of raffia, hardly visible to on-lookers, from within which the spirit operates. These symbolic costumes are sacred and so the uninitiated and women should have no contact with it under any circumstance, unless certain rituals are performed. Unlike most other masquerades *Zangbeto* has no identifiable body parts. There are no limbs (hands and legs) or face; *Zangbeto* is able to operate with such agility and ease that serve to intensify the element of mystery. Apart from fortifying *Zangbeto*'s mystical identity, this symbolic form insulates *Zangbeto* from such limiting threats as human semblance and gender and makes it a neutral but all inclusive entity.

In most Ogu communities such as Ajido, one of the Quarters in Badagry kingdom of Lagos State, there are four different identifiable types or categories of *Zangbeto* in terms of designation and symbolism, namely: *Zanholu*, *Ataho*, *Oho yin-yin Ataho*, and *Ohosi*.

Zanholu

Zanholu is the head or king of all other *Zangbeto*. It is usually bigger and taller than the others. *Zanholu* normally appears only once in three years during the major *Zangbeto* festival, or otherwise at the installation of an *Aholu* (King) or burial ceremony of high chiefs or top *Zangbeto* members like *Zangan* (Chief priest of *Zangbeto*). *Zanholu* is celebrated as a spirit that lives at sea and usually comes from the depth of the sea. It emerges from the waters within the locality (Ogu settlements are usually on coastal areas and riverside) about midnight. The *Aholu* and his high chiefs welcome and then escort it into the village.

Zanholu normally remains invisible and incommunicado in the community for three days before it appears to the wider public. This is perhaps why *Zangbeto* is erroneously believed by some to have originated from the sea (Rush 2001).



Pic. 5. *Zanholu* – The head of *Zangbeto* (photo taken by the author 03.31.2013)

Ataho

There is also *Ataho* which is more popular and more commonly seen in *Zangbeto* hierarchy, especially during cultural displays and local festivities. *Ataho* is quite spectacular and impressive in its dancing abilities and magical fits during performances. For instance it could be set ablaze and left to burn out, after which another costume (*zanho*) is placed over the ash that instantly becomes a living *Zangbeto*. It intermittently interrupts drummers to introduce its own chants to suit its magical endeavors. It can also give birth to younger *Zangbeto* during performances, in which case a younger *Zangbeto* emerges from underneath the bigger *Ataho*. This act of giving birth by *Ataho* is another of *Zangbeto*'s symbolisms. According to High Chief Nugboweyon (2012) of Ajido, this is sign of increase of productivity that the ancestors bestow on the land by their presence. It also is sign of mystery about *Zangbeto*'s gender. According to the High Chief:

This is a sign of abundance both in offspring and in human enterprise that ancestors bring to the community when they are celebrated. But a man cannot give birth. So the ancestors are neither male nor female, and they have power to do anything. That's why *Zangbeto* is neither male nor female, but can function as both (Nugboweyon; Personal communications, 2012, Badagry).

It is quite significant that being essentially a male cult *Zangbeto* embodies and celebrates an aspect of life that pertains exclusively to womanhood. Gender balance in *Zangbeto* cult, which reflects the neutrality of gender of ancestral spirits facilitate wide acceptance of *Zangbeto* by everyone regardless of gender. Although this does not necessarily imply that *Zangbeto* is open to men and women on equal terms; it emphasizes *Zangbeto*'s gender inclusiveness and demonstrates the ancestors' opposition to discrimination against females.



Pic. 6. *Ataho* from Ajido
(photos taken by the author 3.31.2013)

Ataho and its younger *Zangbeto*

Oho yin-yin Ataho

The third category of *Zangbeto* in the hierarchy is named *Oho yin-yin Ataho*. This *Zangbeto* is less complex in its form (costume), but more agile and remarkable in its dancing skills and acrobatic displays. Thus *Oho yin-yin Ataho* is usually a symbol of youth, as demonstrated by its agility and lack of complexity (personal communication with High Chief J. A. Nanuwa Ajiko 2011). It symbolizes that the ancestors not only possess vitality and agility of youth, but also have the powers and prerogatives of bestowing these qualities on the community. “In the realm of spirits age is not a factor” (personal communication with High Chief Ajiko 2011).



Pic. 7. *Oho yin-yin Ataho* (photo take by the author 31. 03. 2013)

Ohosi

Another member of *Zangbeto* family is *Ohosi* – the war-like *Zangbeto*. It is also referred to as *Ogbo* (Goat) because of its warrior-like recalcitrance and seemingly stubborn behavior. This particular *Zangbeto*, according to High Chief J. Ajiko, is a symbol of strength, bravery and resilience for Ogu in general. That’s why it is used as symbol of all *Zangbeto* in most cases in which the statue of the masquerade is erected in public places. There are indications that the name and function of this particular *Zangbeto* have some cross-cultural links to *Oshosi* (*Oxissi*), the *orisha* of the forest and one of three warrior *orishas* referred to as *Ebora* among the people of Brazil (King 2008). There are other remarkable features about *Ohosi* that intensify its mystery and awesomeness, which are worthy of note. The first is that in Ogu language words with *si* endings are

generally signs of feminine subjects. It is therefore outstanding that a stubborn warrior, which symbolizes strength, masculinity and resilience has name that is suggestive of femininity. Secondly, *Ohosi* always carries horns of braided hair. This also is a characteristically feminine feature exhibited by a warrior that symbolizes masculinity. This aspect of *Zangbeto* once again strongly emphasizes the element of gender balance within the cult and gender neutrality of ancestral spirits. It indicates that fullness of human strength resides not in male or female genders exclusively, but in harmony between genders.



Pic. 8. The Symbol of *Ohosi* “the warrior” (photo taken by the author 12.12.2014)

Membership in *Zangbeto*

Membership in *Zangbeto* is open to every Ogu male wishing to identify himself with the group. In fact according to High Chief Metonu Nugboweyon, who is also a member of the Badagry chieftaincy committee, membership in *Zangbeto* is mandatory for every Ogu male (Personal communication, 2012, Ajido).

However, it is important to make a distinction between two kinds or categories of membership. There is ordinary membership through external identity, solidarity and association, which involves payment of a token, a simple initiation and acquisition of a secret coded name that serves as a password for the initiate. Coded name is given at initiation. It serves to provide certain immunities to the member from restrictions that are usually imposed on non-members. Ordinary membership in *Zangbeto* is normally open to non-Ogu males who are resident in Ogu communities under certain terms and conditions. This is a unique feature in *Zangbeto* that distinguishes it from most other Nigerian and West African masked cults.

On another level there is membership in the inner caucus that implies participation and commitment to group solidarity within the cult. This membership usually happens by the processes of observation, choice and initiation, and is not open to everyone. It gives to initiates the right to ascend through ranks of the cult. It also serves as a measure of social integration and solidarity among Ogu male caste. There are certain rites of passage details of which are never disclosed to non-initiates. There is also certain monetary fee as well as other items prescribed by the cult. Consequently, not everybody can seek membership in *Zangbeto* (Oyefolu 2003). Besides, even though there are no financial benefits from membership in the organization, the members take a special pride in their membership in the organization, maintaining an internal cohesion, cultic solidarity and discipline within its ranks. They are governed by certain rules of conduct.

Another unique element concerning membership in *Zangbeto* is that being a male cult, there is a level at which a certain category of women are admitted into its inner circles. These women play quite significant roles in the organization. They are admitted and initiated into the cult based on such considerations as physical and psychological maturity, as well as their ability to keep secrets. Apart from undertaking certain aspects of surveillance for *Zangbeto* these women *Zangan* play very active roles in other areas of the organization. Their identities are usually not disclosed for security and other cultic reasons. This aspect of *Zangbeto* is both significant and unique, as it has enabled *Zangbeto* to tap into both worlds (masculine and feminine) and draw from their riches.

Organization and leadership in *Zangbeto*

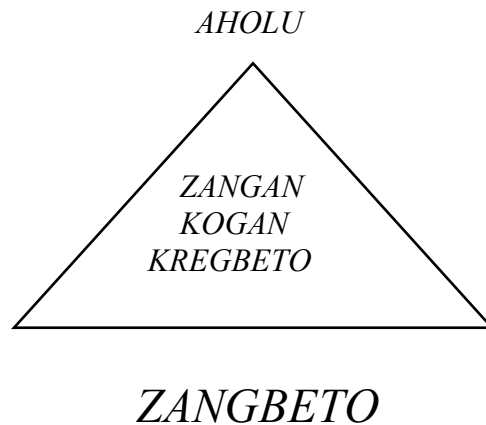
The *Zangan* oversees *Zangbeto* cult. Owing to the great importance of this office, *Zangan* is chosen by members of the group in consultation with *Aholu* (king) or *Totagan* (king's regent). While *Zangan* retains office for life, the position is rotational among kindred groups represented in the cult, and cannot be inherited. "*Zangan* is the overall head of the *Zangbeto* cult" (Mesewaku et al. 2000: 84 – 85), directly responsible to *Aholu* (king) or *Totagan* (chief) and also performs legitimate duties of a member of the ruling council. *Zangan* mediates between *Zangbeto* and the community on sensitive issues, advises *Aholu* or *Totagan* and represents people before him. Thus, *Zangan* is to be a person of tested integrity. *Aholu* as leader of the people is point of reference in all socio-political, cultural, organizational, cultic and other matters concerning the community.

Each *Zangbeto* has one or more male attendants or bodyguards known as *Kregbeto* (literary: “man of the day”). They are responsible for giving directives to the crowds from *Zangbeto*, and coordinating the affairs of *Zangbeto* generally during public performances. *Kregbeto* master the symbolic arts of *Zangbeto* and are always in a position to interpret its moods and dispositions, and pass them to the crowd.

There is also *Kogan* whose rank is higher than that of *Kregbeto* but lower than that of *Zangan*. *Kogan* is like a supervisor or overseer in logistical and ceremonial aspects of the organization. *Kogan* do not necessarily accompany *Zangbeto* during performances, though they are usually present, but they look after the shrine and assist *Zangan* in ceremonial matters.

As members of inner circle of *Zangbeto* cult, *Kregbeto* and *Kogan* are also expected to be men of proven integrity within the cult, the community and in the larger society.

Social structure of *Zangbeto* cult:



There is a shrine for *Zangbeto* in each locality or quarter. This is where the *Zanho* and other cultic apparatuses, including musical instruments of *Zangbeto*, are reverently kept. Moreover, and especially before important performances such as the major *Zangbeto* festival when *Zanholu* appears, a group of its members (also considered as ‘hunters’) occasionally meets in a central shrine. This is located in a grove (apart from the local shrine located within the community) where other ceremonial emblems and ornaments are kept, to perform their sacred rituals and rededicate themselves along with those emblems. At the entrance to this grove there is a statue for *Legba* the operating force within *Zangbeto* (Oyefolu 2003). This symbol indicates that only initiated, bold and strong members can enter the grove.

Triple symbolism of *Zangbeto* cult in Ogu culture

Besides the symbolisms inherent in the formal and organizational structure of *Zangbeto* as mentioned above, there are also other aspects of Ogu socio-cultural structure within which it thrives. As a distinguishing and arguably one of the most celebrated elements in Ogu culture it

remains a major characteristic feature of Ogu organizational structure wherever they live. It influences every aspect of people's life. *Zangbeto* tradition among Ogu people over the years expresses itself in three aspects.

Firstly, it is an organization that provides security and maintains law and order within the community, secondly it is a cult which embodies, preserves and celebrates the presence of ancestral spirits among the people, and thirdly it is a cultural masquerade that thrills, entertains and perpetrates Ogu heritage and identity.

It is within this triple framework of organizational, cultic, and cultural, that *Zangbeto* establishes and sustains its symbolism and powerful influence on the entire Ogu community.

Organizational symbolism

Zangbeto is considered as the police force of the *Aholu* (King). This is because it has been and continues to be a potent force and an indispensable element of security and maintenance of law and order within Ogu communities. This aspect of the masked cult is the essence of its foundation and existence, and also stands out as the most distinctive and valuable of its symbolisms and functions. As the very name suggests *Zan-gbeto* ("Night man" or "Man of night") engages in nighttime vigilantism by patrolling corresponding locations, watching over people and homes, detecting thieves and sorcerers, and bringing culprits to instant justice. Through a combination of its physical strength and spiritual powers it wards off unwanted elements from the community with ease.

Zangbeto neither makes rules for the community nor takes orders from anyone. It operates within the limits of the substantive rules of the community concerning those sets of behavior that are socially accepted or are considered deviant and need control. Possession of material or political power does not exclude anyone from *Zangbeto*'s surveillance nor immune anyone from its sanctions. No one is above *Zangbeto*, not even the king or an influential person in the community. Today *Zangbeto* organization is a member of the Lagos State Informal Policing Structure (LSIPS). As it has been observed in other works (Hunsu 2011; Oyesakin 1994) the Lagos State Police Command recognizes *Zangbeto* (especially within the Badagry region) as a community vigilante group with license to arrest criminals and present them for prosecution.

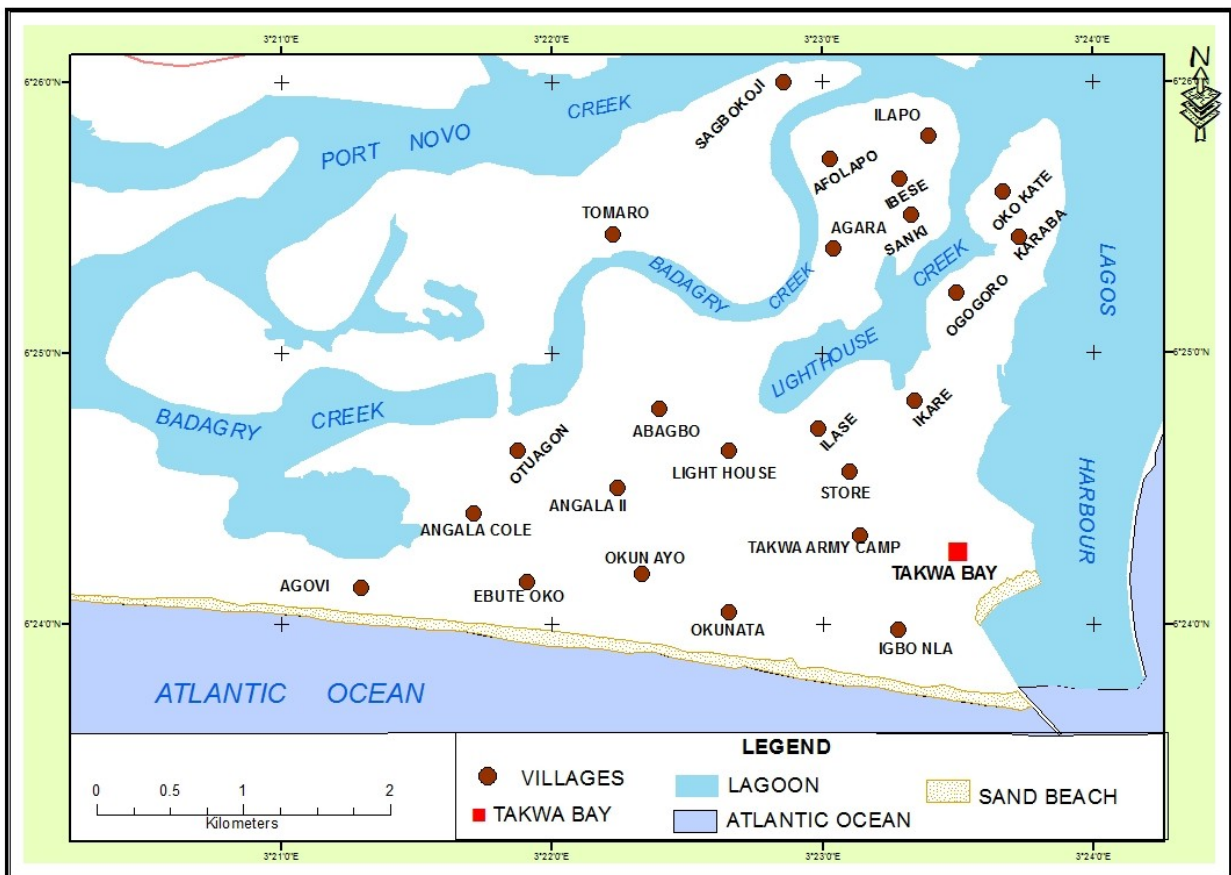
Cultic symbolism

Zangbeto (as well as *Oro* and *Egungun* among the Yoruba) are believed to be re-incarnation of ancestors who continue to protect and support their descendants (Babayemi 1980). In this connection and according to Chief Emmanuel Shokoti (leader of the Ebute-Oko community in the Tarkwa Bay region of Lagos State):

Every black man has a way of paying respect to their ancestors, and keeping their spirit alive in the community... This is the case with *Zangbeto* which represent ancestors of all Ogu everywhere (Personal interview, 28/8/2011).

Wearing of the costume (*zanho*) enables the masquerade to be possessed by ancestral spirit with special knowledge of secret motives and actions of people. That's why *zanho* is more than just a costume or an artwork; it is also a house of encounter between world of ancestors and our world. There is strong conviction among the Ogu that the very symbol (statue) of *Zangbeto* itself not only

commands reverence but also has the potency to ward off enemies and potential intruders. Thus, erection of *Zangbeto's* statue in some strategic locations among certain Ogu communities goes beyond mere aesthetics. Moreover, even a single strand of raffia thread pulled from *Zangbeto's* costume (*zanho* or *Zangbeto-ho*), which is referred to as *zanshan*, is highly symbolic and full of mystical potency. It is believed to possess the very powers of *Zangbeto* itself. It is often used to place restrictions on places and items, designating them as forbidden. *Zangbeto-ho* especially of *ohosi* (See Pic. 8) is used for imposition of sanctions and for enforcement of judgments.



Pic. 9 Other Ogu communities along Tarkwa Bay and Badagry Creeks, Lagos, Nigeria (by author)

Zangbeto is a secret society with strict code of secrecy it has in certain matters. The masquerade has the ability to disclose evil secrets and to scare wizards and witches. “*Zangbeto* evokes a power that is said to have inhabited the earth long before the appearance of man and provides a source of wisdom and continuity” (Butler 2006: 32). As representatives of spirits of ancestors *Zangbeto* is mediator between present and ancestral generations. Also *Zangbeto* protects communities against evil spirits, epidemics, famine, witchcraft and evildoers, as well as ensuring the well-being, prosperity and productivity of the whole community. Prayers and blessings offered by *Zangbeto* are believed to be efficacious, and people can be usually seen offering money to *Zangbeto* in exchange for such blessings.

Although it is seldom heard, except during vigilantism or in a prayer, *Zangbeto* refers to itself as a voice. It uses a special version of Ogu language that differs significantly from that of everyday use. This use of a special language immediately sets it apart from the realm of everyday life. The quality of its voice is very intense. It is gruesome, unearthly and so awesomely frightening that the listener cannot help associating it with the supernatural or at least something extra-terrestrial. This voice serves as a powerful force that attracts everyone's respect and reverence to *Zangbeto*.

Cultural symbolism

Besides annual festivals, *Zangbeto* occasionally puts up public performances to celebrate Ogu culture. It is performed, for example, during funerals of members or high chiefs, or in some cases, to welcome eminent visitors or to simply entertain people. In such occasions music and songs along with the *kregbeto*, women and children accompany *Zangbeto*. Also, women play some visible role in chanting *Zangbeto*'s cognomen (*mlayin*), singing and dancing, which in turn stimulates and brings out the best from the performing masquerade. In such occasions also *Ataho* gives birth. Additionally the *zanho* that houses *Zangbeto* is occasionally lifted off the ground and turned upside down in order to show that there is no one but just a spirit inside. This intensifies *Zangbeto*'s authority over the people, and enables it to serve as an effective informal mechanism of social control.

The power and overall effectiveness of *Zangbeto* organization derives largely from the internal organic solidarity that exists within its organizational framework, and between the organization and the community. This means that within the organization itself as an element of society, and between the organization and the Ogu community within which it functions, there is an interplay of commitment and acceptance that cannot easily be overlooked. This element, which fortifies *Zangbeto* in preventing, apprehending and punishing criminal and deviant behavior, as well as ensuring the general orderliness of the community, is deemed vital to the creation of functional and effective social control models.

One of the key points concerning the effectiveness and strength of *Zangbeto* in social control process is its positive perception by the Ogu, based on the manners of its operations and relationships with the community. It neither carries any physical weapon nor engages in violent confrontations, however, it operates effectively. This implies that effective social control should first be community oriented; it should be derived from positive relationships between the control agents and the community; it also should be based on positive mutual perception between them rather than on the use of force. This applies especially to policing, since as a concept it is governed by the same variables, usages and interpretations as social control, such that one is often used to describe the other (Wilson 1993). It requires a high level of tolerance, peacefulness and neutrality. It should be non-partisan, accommodative of other points of view, non-biased and less coercive. Secondly, if social control is to be effective it should operate through the norms and value systems that are familiar and meaningful to the people whose life it seeks to regulate and safeguard. In other words, cultural and social factors in their peculiarities should be given adequate consideration (Garland 2012). *Zangbeto* masquerade cult and its methods of operation are deeply rooted in Ogu socio-cultural norms and system of values, which are also closely bonded with the religion. The failure of the formal social control system and its various organs in Nigeria is a result of their alienation (in content and in form) from the people and their values. Nigeria's current social control endeavors seem to undermine the fact that the lifestyle of Nigerians is fundamentally different from

their western or European counterparts. Alien social control models may not be effective in regulating relationships within the Nigerian social and cultural contexts. Besides, the persistence of indigenous social control systems like *Zangbeto* exposes the inadequacies of the formal control systems. It indicates that as borrowed models, the latter are estranged and alienated from the people whose interest they were meant to serve. To obtain justice, for instance, one needs to invest enormously on time, money, and other bureaucratic procedures, which very often amount to

humiliation, and which most people cannot afford. Any effort at social control, be it in justice delivery, crime prevention and control or law enforcement, which follows official governing rules of conduct that do not reflect the traditional values and aspirations of the people is neither likely to be effective nor resilient in the long run.

The importance of cultural considerations in assessing the dynamics of social control mechanisms and theories in the efforts to evolve effective social control models for different kinds of societies cannot be over-emphasized. The uniqueness of societies and diversity in the norms guiding their value systems cannot be ignored in fabricating their social control models. The adoption and application of unitary or identical models of social control for every society is not capable of producing equally tangible results. Even within the Nigerian socio-cultural space, which is relatively homogenous in terms of basic worldview, there is such diversity in value systems that similar social control models may not achieve equal efficacy in different regions. The success or efficacy of *Zangbeto* as a social control apparatus derives primarily from the fact that it is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions and belief system of the Ogu (Okure 2015).

References

- Aderinto A. A., Oludayo T. 2012. Culture, Deviance and Social Control in Nigeria. *People and Cultures of Nigeria*. Jegede, A. A., Olutayo, A. O., Omololu, O. O., Owumi, B. E. (eds.) Dept. of Sociology, Faculty of Social Science, University of Ibadan; pp.: 345 – 356
- Agbaje-Williams B. 1990. Ife-Old Oyo Relationship: A New Insight from Archaeology, in Jemkur, J. F. and Igirigi, A. B. (eds.) *Proceedings of the 8th Annual Conference of the Archaeological Association of Nigeria*, Zaria; pp.: 121 – 132
- Ajayi J. F. A. 1965. *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841 – 1891*. Longmann Publishers, Essex
- Akran V. S. 2001. The Founding of Badagry Reconsidered. *Lagos Historical Review*. Vol.1; pp.: 33 – 44
- Amankulor J. 1981. Ekpe Festival as Religious Ritual and Dance Drama, in Ogunbiyi, Y. (ed.) *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Nigeria Magazine, Lagos; pp.: 113 – 130
- Aniakor C. A. 1978. The Ijelle Mask. *African Arts*, Vol.11, No 4; pp.: 42 – 47

Aremu P. S. O., Biodun B. O., Yaya O. 2012. Egungun Tradition in Trado-Modern Society in South Western Nigeria. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Science*. Vol. 3, No 1; pp.: 283 – 288

Asigbo A. C. 2012. Transmutations in Masquerade Costumes and Performances: An Examination of the Abuja Carnival 2010. *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol.13, No1; pp.: 1 – 13

Asiwaju A.I. 1979. The Aja-Speaking People in Nigeria: Origin, Settlement and Cultural Adaptation Up to 1946. *Africa*, Vol. 49, No1; pp.:15 – 28

Avoseh J. I.1964. *A Short History of Badagry*. Ifeolu Press, Lagos.

Babayemi S. O. 1980. *Egungun among the Yoruba of Oyo*. Oyo State Council of Arts and Culture, Ibadan.

Bravmann R. A. 1974. *Islam and Tribal Arts in West Africa*. Cambridge University Press, London.

Butler S. 2006. *Benin*. Guilford Press, Connecticut.

Chukwu D. O., Madubuko, C. C. 2014. Racism, Hamitic Hypothesis and African Theories of Origin: The Unending Debate. *Journal of Integrative Humanism*. Vol. 3, No 2; pp.: 85 – 96

Dotse A. K. 2011. The Origins and Brief History of the Ewe People.

<https://ferrusca.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/the-origins-and-brief-history-of-the-ewe-people.pdf> – accessed May 2016

Drewal M. T., Drewal H. J. 1978. More Powerful Than Each Other: An Egbado Classification of Egungun. *African Arts*, Vol.11, No 3; pp.: 28 – 39

Falola T. 1999. *The History of Nigeria*. Greenwood Press, London

Faluyi K.1987. The Awori Factor in the History of Lagos, in Adefuye, A. *et al.* (eds.) *History of the Peoples of Lagos State*. Lantern Publications, Lagos.

Garland D. 2012. *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*. University of Chicago Press, Illinois.

Greenberg J. H. 1970. *The Languages of Africa*. Mouton & Co, Hague

Gyekye K. 1996. *African Cultural Value: An Introduction*. Sankofa Publishing Company, Philadelphia & Accra

Hodder B.W. 1962. Badagry 1: Slave Port and Mission Centre. *Nigerian Geographical Journal*. Vol. 5, No 2; pp.: 75 – 86

Horton R. 1981. The Gods as Guests: Aspects of Kalabari Religious Life, in Ogunbiyi, Y. (ed.) *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*, Nigeria Magazine, Lagos; pp.:81 – 112

Hunsu F. 2011. Zangbeto: Navigation between the Spaces of Oral Arts, Communal Security and Conflict Mediation in Badagry, Nigeria. *A Discussion Paper of the Nordiska Africainstitutet*. Uppsala, Sweden

<http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:419980/FULLTEXT01> – accessed May 2016.

Idowu E. B. 1973. *African Tradition Religion: A Definition*. SCM Press Ltd, London.

King C. S. 2008. *Nature's Ancient Religion: Orisha Worship and Ifa*, United State.

Kotter J. P., Heskett, J. L. 1992. *Corporate Culture and Performance*. Free Press, New York.

Law R. 2004. *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving Port, 1727-1892*. Ohio State University Press, Ohio.

Makgoba M.W.1997. *MOKOKO, the Makgoba Affair: A Reflection on Transformation*. Vivlia Publishers and Booksellers, Florida Hills.

Murphy W. P. 1980. Secret Knowledge as Property and Power in Kpelle Society: Elders versus Youth. *Africa*. Vol. 50, No 2; pp.:193 – 207

Newbury C.W. 1965. *The Western Slave and its Rulers*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Nyasani J. M. 1997. *The African Psyche*. University of Nairobi and Theological Printing Press Ltd, Nairobi

Ogundeji P. 2000. *Ritual as Theatre, Theatre as Ritual: The Nigerian Example*. Iseese Monograph Series, Vol. 2 No1. University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Ogunyemi Y. D. 2009. *The Oral Traditions in Ile-Ife*. Academica Press, Palo Alto, USA

Okure D. U. 2015. *The Zangbeto Masked Cult as an Apparatus of Social Control among the Ogu of Tarkwa, Lagos, Nigeria*. University of Ibadan, PhD thesis (unpublished).

Olaide-Mesewaku A. B., Olaide-Mesewaku B. A., Olaide-Mesewaku P., Adeyemi S. 2000. *Badagry: Cultural Heritage*. Abacus Publications & African Renaissance Foundation, Lagos

Olaoba O. B. 2010. African Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution. *Study Notes for National Open University*, Lagos and Abuja; pp.: 1 – 170

Olupona J. K. 2011. *City of 201 Gods: Ile-Ife in Time, Space and Imagination*. University of California Press, Berkeley

O'Rielly C. A, Chatman, J. A. 1996. Culture as Social Control: Corporations, Cults and Commitments. *Research in Organizational Behaviour*. Vol.18; pp.: 157 – 200

Ottenberg S. 1982. Illusion, Communication and Psychology in West African Masquerades. *Ethos*. Vol. 10, No 2; pp.: 149 – 185

Oyefolu T. A. 2003. Cultural Festivals in Lagos State, in Ajotunmobi A. (ed.) *The Evolution and Development of Lagos State*. A-Triad Associates, Lagos; pp.: 184 – 200.

Oyesakin B. A. 1994. Preliminary Notes on *Zangbeto* the Masked Vigilante Group among the Egun in Badagry, in Ogunremi M, et al. (eds.) *Badagry: A Study in History, Culture and Traditions of an Ancient City*. Rex Publications and Syndicate Communications, Ibadan; pp.: 165 – 175

Pratten D. 2008. Introduction. The Politics of Protection: Perspectives on Vigilantism in Nigeria. *Africa*. Vol. 78 No1; pp.: 1 – 15

Rush, D. 2001. Contemporary Vodun Arts of Ouidah, Benin. *African Arts*. Vol.34; pp.: 32 – 47; 94-96.

Sampson R. J., Groves W. B. 1989. Community Structure and Crime: Testing Social Disorganization Theory. *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 94; pp.: 774 – 802

Sinou A., Oloude, B. 1988. *Porto Novo, Ville d’Afrique Noire*. Parentheses, Marseille

Strong L. 2000. Egungun: The Maked Ancestors of the Yoruba. <http://www.mythicarts.com/writing/Egungun.html> – Accessed May 2016.

Thompson R. F. 1971. Black Gods and Kings: Yoruba Arts at UCLA. Los Angeles: University of California. Occasional Papers of the Museum and Laboratories of Ethnic Arts and Technology, No 11

Westerman D. and M. A. Bryan (Eds.). 1970. *Handbook of African Languages: Languages of West Africa, Part II*. Dawsons of Pall Mall, Folkston.

Whitaker J. S.1988. *How Can Africa Survive?* Harper and Row Publishers, New York.

Wilson C. 1993. Police-Citizen Interactions: Conflict Resolution Tactics and their Influence Upon the Resistance Patrol Officers Encounter; Risk Management, Study 1. Australia: Australia National Police Research Unit. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/publications/abstract.aspx?ID=152923> – Accessed May 2016

Wusu O., Isiugo-Abanihe U. C. 2006. Interconnections among Changing Family Structure, Childbearing and Fertility Behaviour among the Ogu, Southwestern Nigeria. *Demographic Research*, Vol. 14, No 8; pp.:139 – 156