

---

# Documenting Genealogies: A Semiological Study of Tribal-Facial Marks and Lineage Networks of the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria

OLUKEMI A. FADEHAN AND OLATUNDE O. BARBER

---

## ABSTRACT

This article investigates the tracing and documentation of genealogies among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria using the semiological mechanism of tribal-facial marks. The study lends itself to qualitative research methods and called for the involvement of memory institutions (libraries, archives, and museums). A purposive sampling method, including a combination of focus group interviews and semistructured individual interviews, was deployed in the selection of four categories of participants. Data obtained were transcribed and analyzed using the recursive abstraction technique. The study established the indigenous practice of using indelible facial marks as a form of documentation and tracing of lineages and subethnic groups among the Yoruba. Although they are an endangered species, this study highlights some traditional methods of documentation and justifies a change in the narrative by advocating for an intensification of formalized documentation of the art vis-à-vis relevance to lineage and subethnic genealogies and situating the role of memory institutions in the project. Recommendations include intensive information harvesting and documentation enabled by the development of an active information policy that will take into cognizance various genres of indigenous knowledge systems, including tribal-facial marking systems, as a tool of genealogy.

## INTRODUCTION

This work represents a modest interdisciplinary exercise as it attempts to draw a nexus among an array of disciplines with a view to achieving service to posterity and channeling a path of social reconstruction for the

future. To this end, this work addresses genealogy through the window of information studies. Genealogical studies are gaining more ground and attention globally, and as such attention is required beyond structured, formalized environments, particularly in the African terrain.

Interest in genealogical studies is becoming more dynamic as the average human as a social being is desirous of keeping or tracing his or her roots. More challenging or enigmatic is the issue of fixing lost identities or, simply put, identity discovery. Peoples of different races and affiliations—traditional, regional, cosmopolitan, continental, or diasporic—are growing more concerned about root issues to the extent that efforts in several quarters are made to carry out DNA tests to dispel the obscurity of their source in the face of borderless and multicultural development. Therefore, genealogy, simply defined, is the scientific study of ancestry, descent, race, origin, family, history, and related matters.

Ordinarily, the use of advanced technologies has overcome the issue of generic or biological identities. However, it is expedient to note that tribal-facial marks have remained a historical phenomenon among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria since ancient times and were significant during the nineteenth century as well as during the slave trade era. To this end, this article investigates genealogies and identifies the use of semiology through the mechanism of tribal-facial marks (the art, the practice, the persona) as one of the potent routes of tracing and accessing genealogical information using the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria as a case study. Though the practice exists among other tribes in Nigeria and Africa at large, it is more prevalent among the Yoruba.

Tribal-facial marks can be described as one of the elements of Yoruba semiology (the study of signs and symbols) that are primarily used for the purposes of identifying lineage and family members and forestalling social alienation and separation from the clan, tribe, or family, such as in the scenarios of wars or slave trade, as well as for reasons of aesthetics and beautification.

Again, it is expedient to note that tribal-facial marking is identified as a cultural phenomenon that does not fall within the general formalized social structure. It is an activity that is within the description of the indigenous knowledge system. Incidentally, it is one of the endangered indigenous knowledge practices that is considered old-fashioned, mainly because of Westernization, and has fallen within the arms of the law. The Nigerian Child Rights Act of 2003 proscribes the application of a tattoo or skin mark on a child and as such places a penalty on the practice. The proscription was in consonance with other international instruments, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Union 1990). In view of the national and international negative dispositions, and with some Nigerian states already domesticating the Child

Rights Act, it suffices therefore to note that the history of the art and culture might be lost to posterity without the documentation of the surviving elements of information on tribal-facial marks. The justification for the choice of tribal-facial marks is therefore historical, exhibiting their efficacy as a traditional vehicle of establishing lineage networks among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria.

More importantly, this study emphasizes tribal-facial marking as a social phenomenon outside formal knowledge spaces that document “history on the move” within an indigenous knowledge system. Primary information on the subject is sparse. Details of the practice, procedure, and posterity imports are not easily found within books to satisfy genealogical studies. It should be noted that core genealogy is not a common phenomenon globally. Literature affirms that the concept differs even from terrain to terrain. Regarding Europe and the United States, for instance, one source suggests that genealogical services in libraries and archives are currently still undergoing legislative review in Europe, while in the United States, for over four decades, “LIS have clearly acknowledged the adding of value of genealogy which has thus been well incorporated in the usual library reference system which is thoroughly transformed by Total Quality Principles and interoperability” (Sant-Geronikolou 2011, 9). Again, as much as the practice is more prominent in the West, it has also been observed that the strength of most libraries is not as much in primary sources but in related published books and online resources and links (Dwoskin 2009).

Even so, it is also pertinent to note that concerted efforts are being made in various quarters, particularly within library and information science professional associations, to create some momentum and space for genealogical library and reference services. Such advocacies, as each terrain strives to render desirable genealogy reference services, should include general reference materials in print, digital materials, information literacy services, location material, information resource evaluation, and interlibrary loans, among others. Other areas include the acquisition of adequate services through a vibrant collection development policy for resources like local history materials, family histories and genealogies of local families, pedigrees and/or compilations of family group sheets, acquisition of vital records, federal and state census data, land records, and genealogy research procedures.

Sant-Geronikolou (2011) also itemizes the purpose and required services in the area of genealogy as to be able to satisfy such needs as “personal need for accurate and valid ancestral past,” “documentation of cultural heritage,” and “inner need to establish our connection to the historical ancestral web to discover our most intimate ‘I,’ the ‘whys’ and the ‘how’s’ [*sic*] of our existence through our ancestors’ talents and traits revelations,” among others (6).

To this end, all stakeholders around the world—libraries, museums, and archives—need to muster all efforts to efficiently render genealogical reference services to their communities, particularly by facilitating access to indigenous or local materials in their communities by going out of their comfort zones and being involved in the process of information harvesting and documentation of this genre of primary resource. Information workers will thus add value and serve as access or links to such offline materials, borrowing a page from Dwoskin (2009) in the analysis of the librarian's role in genealogy. In other words, the involvement of information entities in ethnogenealogical research is expedient.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research is guided by the following objectives:

- to document the existence of the tribal-facial marking and tribal-facial practices among Yoruba;
- to find out the reasons for tribal-facial marking and tribal-facial marks among the Yoruba;
- to determine tribal-facial marks as a genealogical mechanism in Yoruba cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge system;
- to examine the desirability of tribal-facial marking and tribal-facial marks for preservation as cultural heritage; and
- to identify the mode of preservation of tribal-facial marks information as cultural heritage within the Yoruba indigenous knowledge system.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Information Service and Genealogical Studies*

Information services, whether structured or unstructured, have the primary goal of bringing an item of information to users. It is within this context that the role of the information specialist or provider can be appreciated as being interested in every aspect of information, from generation and preservation to utilization. By and large, the products of human endeavors are also of common concern to the information service provider.

To this end, and relating to genealogical studies, Mannix, Burchsted, and Whitlatch (2015) exemplified that the concerns of genealogical reference services should include the following:

- provision of access to primary documents
- provision of sources that guide genealogical instruction
- provision of materials that assist the researcher to locate materials
- provision of actual family histories, the genealogical end product

It is also noted that there is a general relative dearth of scholarly research and family communication in the area of genealogy (Smith 2012), and more pronounced is the dearth of information service on the same. This double-barreled lack of scholarly communication and information ser-

vices, especially within recognized cultural institutions, can no longer meet the increasingly enthusiastic thirst for information on or interrogation of family history as part of everyday information-seeking activities (Darby and Cloush 2013).

As a field of study, genealogy is generally described as the scientific study of ancestry, descent, race, and origin. It answers questions on origin or sources, reclaims lost narratives, and adds social significance by solving issues relating to social injustices and marginalization (Smith 2012). The genealogist, by and large, also is involved in historical research. This is done through involvement in information-sharing networks such as linking up with or posting research findings on historical websites (Fulton 2016).

It is therefore no exaggeration to opine that since histories on lineages and subethnic groups are created every day, such information should be captured and well documented in varied media so as not to lose them to posterity. To this end, the role of memory institutions, in particular libraries, archives, museums, and other affiliated information management agencies, cannot be overemphasized.

Categorically, as far back as 1985, Null stated about genealogical services that “in the face of reawakened public and scholarly interests the field of family history and genealogy can no longer be ignored by academic libraries. Old biases must be discarded in an effort to deal with new and increase demands on library collections” (Null 1985, 29). Recent developments have also indicated the need for collaboration among memory institutions (Hedegaard 2008; Martin 2008; Tanackovic 2008; Fadehan 2010).

It is expedient to note that documentation and information services in the area of genealogical research have reached a much more advanced level in the Western world while leaving more to be desired in the African setting, which since ancient times transferred their cultural heritage via oral traditions. Even though critical efforts are being made to document this plethora of traditions, much still eludes print and electronic media. Such works in African, Nigerian, and Yoruba environments fall within the definition of an indigenous knowledge system. In this arena, works such as Fadehan (2010) discuss the dynamics of African indigenous systems and articulate the role of memory institutions. Memory institutions are referred to as libraries, archives, and museums, a group of institutions involved in the acquisition, documentation, and dissemination of information and knowledge. Using the analysis of Bearman and Trant (2002), Fadehan (2010) presented archives as an organ that deals in records of action, museums in records of objects, and libraries in records of information.

Furthermore, taking a cue from the Western world, the Genealogy Committee of the History Section of the Reference and User Services Association of the American Library Association (1995) opined that library

and information science schools need to include genealogical research and services in schools' curricula. The advocacy covered such themes as definition of genealogy and family history, motivating factors of patrons in genealogy research, patron orientation and education in the use of genealogy resources, ethnic and legal concerns of using genealogy resources, and genealogy collection development.

Finally, the suggestion of Fadehan (2010) that memory institutions needed to participate in the collection of indigenous and tangible and intangible heritage is desirable in the collection of such indigenous resources in Africa. Such is also applicable to the Yoruba genealogical genre of tribal-facial marking and tribal-facial mark resources.

*Understanding the String: Indigenous Knowledge, Culture, Cultural Heritage, and Documentation*

Indigenous knowledge, culture, cultural heritage, and documentation are concepts that are very germane to these studies. Understanding of these concepts and their roles goes a long way toward understanding the dynamics that govern the sustainability and posterity of the tribal marking system as a vehicle of genealogy. The following represent an attempt at describing these concepts vis-à-vis their relevance to this work.

*Indigenous Knowledge, Culture, and Cultural Heritage.* Indigenous knowledge systems in Africa are premised on orality. According to Fadehan (2010), the medium of cultural transmission in Africa is essentially oral in nature. The stories that surround both the tangible and intangible culture of the African terrain are usually passed down to successive generations by word of mouth.

This oral mode of communication versus the permanence in writing that characterizes Western civilization has subjected African cultures to a lot of criticism regarding the originality and substance of ideas. Fadehan (2010), therefore, alluded to the likes of Hegel and Trevor-Roper, who shared the view that African history is dark and inferior (Hegel [1830] 1956, 99; Trevor-Roper 1963, 871). Fadehan (2010) further took a look at the perception that indigenous knowledge runs the risk of extinction because of lack of proper documentation. This stresses the import of this work. Indigenous knowledge can therefore be described as "the systematic body of knowledge acquired by local people through the accumulation of experiences, informal experiments, and intimate understanding of the environment in a given culture" (Rajasekaran 1993, 13).

Rajasekaran (1993) leveraged the words of Warren (1987), describing indigenous knowledge as "local knowledge" unique to a given culture or society, as well as the incisive explanation of McClure (1989, 1) as thus:

Indigenous knowledge systems permeate all we do and think and believe. Some indigenous knowledge is fact, as western scientists know and define fact. Some of it is belief as philosophers and theologians define

belief. And a lot of it is folk wisdom. Indigenous knowledge systems are learned ways of looking at the world. They have evolved from years of experience and trial-and-error problem solving by groups of people working to meet the challenges they face in their local environments, drawing upon resources they have at hand. Indigenous knowledge system is a broad topic which cuts across many disciplines and professions. Indigenous knowledge system is an integrative concept which keeps the focus on the individual or group as it functions in the local setting, and it facilitates bringing together the social scientist and the biological scientist on collaborative work within a task environment.

Closely linked with Indigenous knowledge systems are the concepts of culture and cultural heritage. Fadehan (2010), citing the International Council on Monuments and Sites of the International Cultural Tourism Committee (2002), identified culture as “the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, materials, intellectual, and emotional features that characterize a community, society, or social group. It includes not only arts and literature, but all modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, and beliefs. Culture encompasses the living or contemporary characteristics or values of a community as well as that which survived from the past.” Fadehan (2010) therefore summarizes that indigenous knowledge is a byproduct of the culture of a people.

The above string of concepts and derivatives also culminates in yet another related phenomenon, cultural heritage, which can be defined as “an expression of ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions, and values. Cultural heritage is often expressed as tangible or intangible cultural heritage” (International Council on Monuments and Sites, International Cultural Tourism Committee 2002, 21). To this extent and within the dynamics of the above definitions, the tribal marking system of the Yoruba is well situated as an integral part of a culture, cultural heritage, and indigenous working tool and system being investigated as useful in reestablishing genealogies among the Yoruba.

*Documentation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems.* The increasing awareness that indigenous knowledge systems are facing the risk of extinction has created an attendant zeal to look into the issue of posterity. Fadehan (2010) opines, “The very fact of extinction of African Indigenous knowledge needs to be addressed on the premise of general resurgence of global interests in Indigenous knowledge. This no doubt has implications for memory institutions . . . libraries, archives and museums” (262). Quite a number of works have also attested to the import of indigenous knowledge in African development, and attempts from different quarters are being made to evolve ways of addressing the challenge of documentation.

Generally, Africa seems to be not very visible in the global research space, and from all indications, the volume of research activity remains small (Adams, King, and Hook 2010). Peculiarly also, this brings to the

fore the need for conscious and conscientious documentation of the African indigenous knowledge systems. There is therefore a potential for works on indigenous knowledge to fill a relevant research space through intensive documentation. In corroboration of this perception, Lindh and Haider (2010, 2) opine that “as a form of cultural heritage Indigenous knowledge is often dealt with from the perspective of documentation . . . that is, it is seen as requiring documentation for its continued survival.”

In the pursuit of documenting the Yoruba indigenous systems or cultural heritage, within which the practice of tribal marking falls, the following are revealed by the literature as some of the considerations among others as discussed in Fadehan (2010):

- Policy formulations, legislation, and copyright considerations
- Knowledge of culture-related subjects
- Linguistic knowledge and transcription considerations
- Conduit development considerations, which include multimedia approaches such as images, audio, and videos (African environment requires a hybrid format), digitization, deployment of appropriate software (such as the Dublin core) and other information and communication technologies, interoperability deliberations, and so on
- Preservation and conservation of resources (including reformatting, substituting, and surrogating considerations)
- Cataloguing and classification (evolution of common glossary terms and metadata)
- Development of regional, national, and international databases
- Capacity building
- Understanding the convergence phenomenon among memory institutions with the view to reducing the polarization of libraries, archives, and museums and leveraging on the benefits of collaboration.

Last, it is not an exaggeration to say that the sustainability of indigenous knowledge systems hinges on intensive, effective, and efficient documentation. This view is supported by Sithole (2007), who submits that documentation is the way to protect indigenous knowledge systems; it is also a way of saving it from actions of others. This no doubt, according to Ngu-lube (2002), will also promote accessibility and availability.

Finally, an understanding of the above enumeration will add value to the promotion of tribal marks as an effective vehicle and resource for tracing genealogies among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria.

#### *A Look at Semiology*

Semiotics has been described as the study of signs. By extension, however, the signs have been further analyzed to mean “any mark, bodily movement, symbol token, etc., used to indicate and to convey thought, information, commands” (Sebeok 1994, xi). Over time, the definition has been

enumerated to include or convey different types of elements. First is the linguistic expression of the body of knowledge that has assumed synonyms that range from semiotics to semiosis or semiology. Whichever the variant, the common denominator is the communication of an idea or information by a sign, which according to Sebeok (1994, 10) is composed of six key factors, namely “messages and codes,” “source and destination,” and “channel and context.”

Warner (1990) positions semiotics as regarding all sign systems as the product of a single human faculty for creating order. He connects information science with semiotics in its concerns with the retrieval and transmission of material products of the semiotic faculty and with meaning to concept relations. He finds that semiotics can be used for the interpretation of significant issues within the established domains of information science.

Theoretically, two founding major schools of thoughts have been identified. These are cited by Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2010) as Saussure, who has been widely acclaimed as the founding father of semiotics and who emphasized the linguistic sign used in human communication, as well as Pierce, who christened his version as semeiotic and widened the scope to encompass the meaning-making import and utility of signs among human beings and also incorporating human ideas. Pierce, again as discussed by Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2010), further culminated his thoughts on the intermingling of signs, objects, and meaning as the consummation of semiotics. Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2010) further gives a longitudinal assessment on semiotics to cover the propositions of Barthes (1961), Danesi and Perron (1999), and Chandler (2003). Abdullahi-Idiagbon observes a merger of Barthes (1961), which he perceives as a paradoxical view of the Saussurean lexical term of “Semiology,” and the Peircian conceptual scope of semiotics, resulting in the following definitions: “Semiology aims to take in any system of Signs, whatever their substance and limits, images, features, musical sounds, objects and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of ritual convention or public entertainment, these constitute, if not language, at least systems of signification” (Barthes 1961, 9). Danesi and Perron (1999), as well as Chandler (2003) as cited by Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2010), however, add culture as a significant variable in the interpretation of signs.

Aside from the major proponents and propositions articulated above, more remote sources have linked the “science of signs, semiotics” as well as the oldest usage of semiotics to the medical sciences as applied to the study of observable patterns of physiological symptoms as indicated by diseases (Danesi 1994). However, there are social imports of the use of semiotics. Signs are used to achieve specific ends, no matter how infinitesimal. Ogunkunle (2013, 1105) submits that “there is a specific kind of connection between Semiotics and Culture.” Olatunji (2013, 251) also

opines that “there are the formalistic and social” aspects of semiotics, the abstracting signs forming the contexts of their usage, while the latter examines semiotic practices that are specific to culture.

It is within the cultural context that this study interrogates the use of tribal-facial marks, a cultural semiotics practice among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria, as a significant tool of genealogy with a view to determining the role of information agencies and practices in the documentation of the social practices that are of ethnographical significance.

### *The Yoruba*

The name “Yoruba” refers to a group of people numbering several thousand and bound together by a common language and culture as well as originating from a historical common source of the ancient town of Ile-Ife (Biobaku 1973) in Southwest Nigeria. The Yoruba inhabit the southern part of the country, with smaller groups present at the surrounding border countries, such as the Republic of Benin and Togo. There are also quite a significant number of Yoruba in the diaspora either as a direct result of the slave trade or through migration. Presently, the Yoruba, as the predominant group in Southwest Nigeria, is one of the three largest ethnic groups in the country. The Yoruba language is spoken in ten of the thirty-six states of Nigeria: Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Edo, Delta, Kwara, and Kogi (Enaikele and Adeleke 2017).

The term “Yoruba” doubles as both the language and the name of a people. The Yoruba language has become a phenomenon that has led a country like Brazil to trace its antecedents to the Yoruba race and propose the Yoruba language as one of the official languages of Brazil (*Pulse Nigeria* 2019). Also note that the Yoruba language belongs to the Benue-Congo family, with variations among the very diversified subethnic groups. Biobaku (1973) referred to the subethnic groups as “numerous independent kingdoms” and noted that the history of the Yoruba must be studied as the history of the various kingdoms.

### *Tribal-Facial Marks and Groups*

Traditionally, facial marks, otherwise known as tribal-facial marks, have been identified as part and parcel of social norms and customs among the Yoruba. Yoruba history has further identified facial marks as one of the twelve subsets of Yoruba traditional manners and customs, which include “social polity,” “facial marks,” “diet,” “dress,” “marriage,” “trades,” “professions learning,” “wealthy personages,” the “Iwofa system,” “distraint for debt,” “war,” and “funerals” (Johnson [1921] 2001, 98–140). Johnson ([1921] 2001, 104–9) further stated that facial marks basically serve the purpose of distinguishing among various families. In addition, the work further attempted a categorization of the major Yoruba facial marks as exemplified in table 1.

Table 1. Categorization of the Major Yoruba Tribal-Facial Marks







Groups	Prototype varieties	Affiliations
<p><b>Group A</b></p> <p>Oyo marks</p> <p>(1)</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(i) Double set of three parallel and horizontal lines on each cheek</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(ii) Three single parallel or horizontal lines on each cheek</p> </div> </div> <p><b>Abaja in sets of three</b></p>	<p>The double and single sets of three are primarily attributed to the Royal Family and Basorun lines of old Oyo, respectively.</p>
<p>(2)</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(i) Four double sets of parallel and horizontal lines on each cheek</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(ii) Four single parallel and horizontal lines on each cheek</p> </div> </div> <p><b>Abaja in sets of four</b></p>	<p>The marks originally distinguish some noble families of Oyo and have come to be adopted by Oyo-oriented groups.</p>
<p>(3)</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(i) Three vertical lines on two double sets of parallel or horizontal lines on each cheek</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(ii) Three vertical lines on one set of parallel or horizontal lines on each cheek</p> </div> </div> <p><b>Other variations of Abaja</b></p>	<p>The variety of Abaja facial marks worn by the diverse Oyo-speaking groups</p>

Table 1. (*continued*)







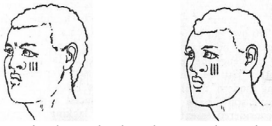
Groups	Prototype varieties	Affiliations
(4)	 <p>(i) Four to five perpendicular and three vertical lines on both cheeks</p> <p>(ii) Four to five perpendicular and three vertical lines on both cheeks with a stroke across the nose (Ibadan)</p> <p><b>Keke or Gombo</b></p>	Prominent among the Oyos and the Egbados
(5)	 <p>Short vertical lines over both cheekbones</p> <p><b>Pele</b></p>	Part of the Oyo group marks; not limited to any group of Yoruba origin
(6)	 <p>Four long and thin vertical lines on both cheeks</p> <p><b>Ture</b></p>	A variety among the Oyo group
(7)	 <p><b>Mande and Jamgbadi</b></p>	Extinct but historically associated with aliens who got naturalized among the Oyo

Table 1. (continued)

Groups	Prototype varieties	Affiliations
<b>Group B</b> Owu marks (1)	 <p>Three vertical lines over serrated perpendicular lines</p> <p><b>Keke Olowu</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the two facial marks historically associated with the Owu</li> <li>• Marks are similar to the keke or gombo of the Oyos</li> </ul>
(2)	 <p>Three vertical lines or three parallel and horizontal lines</p> <p><b>Abaja Olowu</b></p>	One of the two facial marks associated with the Owus
<b>Group C</b> Egba marks (1)	 <p>Three vertical marks but longer than the Pele of the Oyo on both cheeks</p> <p><b>Abaja Oro</b></p>	Identified with the Egba

It should be noted that while some of the marks are peculiar to some tribes or families, others such as the pele (more commonly associated with one of the Oyo tribal-facial mark group) might not necessarily be worn exclusively by the Oyo subgroup alone. For instance, the Egbadò share the same brands of the variations of the Oyo tribal-facial marks. According to Johnson ([1921] 2001), this was premised upon that fact that the Egbadò were historically in close connection with the Oyo, especially in their alliance to and connection with the Alaafin (the head of the Yoruba Empire in the nineteenth century) after the breakup of the Oyo Empire and the establishment of the tribal-facial independence. This work has, however, enumerated the major tribal-facial marks predominant among the Yoruba by adopting the analysis done by Johnson ([1921] 2001). Table 1 therefore articulates the various major subgroups of Yoruba tribal-facial marks from primordial times to date, namely Oyo, Owu, Egba, Ebado, Ijebu, Ife, and Ijesa marks. Others are Efon, Yagba, and Igbominas. Mende and Jangbadi are considered extinct.

Table 1. (*continued*)

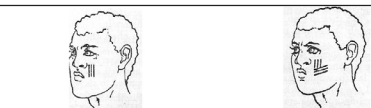






Groups	Prototype varieties	Affiliations
<b>Group D</b> Egbado marks	All varieties of Oyo marks	Egbado marks; similar to the Agbaja Oro of the Egba
<b>Group E</b> Ijebu marks	 <p>(i) Three long vertical lines</p> <p>(ii) Three vertical lines over perpendicular lines, curved, Abaja Olowu version</p> <p><b>Abaja Oro and Abaja Olowu variations</b></p>	Adapted from the Owu; the Ijebu are Owu descendants
<b>Group F</b> Ife marks	 <p><b>Three horizontal lines (Abaja variation)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While the three horizontal and parallel lines are peculiar in Ife, they also share other varieties of Oyo marks such as the Pele of the Oyo, while others are plain faced.</li> </ul>
<b>Group G</b> Ondo and Idoka marks	 <p><b>One bold vertical line</b></p>	Peculiar to the Ondo of Yoruba tribe
<b>Group H</b> Ijesha marks	 <p>Most prominent with the long horizontal lines</p>	The Ijesha share other Yoruba with other varieties Yoruba; others are mainly plain faced.

Table 1. (continued)

Groups	Prototype varieties	Affiliations
<b>Group I</b> Efon marks	 Mostly known for close horizontal lines	Other varieties are also available.
<b>Group J</b> Yagba marks	 Three converging lines at the corner of the mouth	Most northeasterly tribe of the Yoruba
<b>Group K</b> Igbomina marks	 Three bold widely spaced horizontal and parallel lines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A tribe midway between the Oyo and the Ekiti</li> <li>● Long horizontal lines like the Oyo but set wide apart</li> <li>● Has other varieties like the Pele of the Oyo</li> </ul>

Source: Images adapted from Johnson ([1921] 2001, 104–09).

Note: While the images and categorizations of the major Yoruba tribal marks were Johnson's, they are reformatted to suit the purpose of this study, serving as a basis of analysis of Yoruba indigenous knowledge systems in respect to tribal marks.

In decoding Yoruba tribal-facial marks, there are specific names given to some popular Yoruba tribal marks. These names and the verbs that qualify them denote how the marks are made. Odunbaku (2012) analyzes Yoruba tribal-facial marks as being characteristically vertical and horizontal lines concentrated on the face from the cheekbone to the jaw. Most of the time the marks are wide, but they can be expressed otherwise in a situation where the marker and the face pattern in question requires a different interpretation. Odunbaku finds that in most cases the marks are deftly inscribed vertical or horizontal and necessarily parallel lines, except in the case or cases of poor marksmanship on the part of the marker. However, he observes that the marks for medicinal or health reasons are usually not parallel; they are inconsistent and incoherent. This may be because of the incautious attitude of the markers.

There are three basic patterns from which other patterns are formed.

They are the single stripe, triple stripes, and quadruple stripes (Orie 2011; Odunbaku 2012). There is no evidence of the occurrence of double stripes in Yoruba tribal-facial marking tradition. Orie positions the numbers one, three, and four as underlying the patterns, unlike the number two, as demonstrated by the absence of double stripes (Orie 2011). Other patterns, such as six and seven stripes, are derived by combining the basic single, triple, or quadruple stripe patterns. Facial stripes in general are characteristically symmetrically replicated on each cheek. However, there are occurrences of asymmetrical patterns as a signifier of the union and intermarrying of royal or wealthy families. Children born in such contexts are given asymmetrical stripes, which are meant to announce their membership in these families and to ascribe the status of their parents onto them. Both cheeks must be striped. Thus, there are no individuals with stripes on only one cheek (Orie 2011). The analysis of patterning of Yoruba tribal marks as submitted by Orie (2011) and Odunbaku (2012) synchronizes with the pictorial analysis in the treatise of Johnson ([1921] 2001). The patterns and variations are still true of Yoruba facial marks to date. Hence, this demonstrates the semiological import of this work.

The main impact of the everyday nature of tribal-facial marking is that it serves as an information badge for the carrier. This function, however, is fast coming to extinction. The main import of this research is to point out the need for documenting this cultural practice for posterity and reveal that further studies should be done in the future. The continual collation of resources, tangible and intangible, relating to the tribal marking system is recommended to be the focus of the future database collection and information services on Yoruba genealogies. This article therefore serves as an addition to the literature that points to this concern. It should be noted that the issue of documentation is beyond the confines of this article. The research serves as one of the theoretical baselines to such special areas of information provision, service, and use as obtainable in similar theoretical frameworks in other areas of information studies.

#### *Yoruba Tribal-Facial Marks and Essence*

Historically, the primary reason for tribal-facial marks is identity. This is expressed as the facial marks of different types and patterns. Johnson's treatise on the history of the Yoruba asserted, "The facial marks are for the purpose of distinguishing the various Yoruba families" ([1921] 2001, 106).

To this end, subethnic groups of the Yoruba have the typical marks identified with each. Various families also adopted any patterns that are peculiar to them and traceable to the generic ones associated with their families and roots. This accounts for the classification earlier enumerated by Johnson ([1921] 2001). Oral history and observation also reveal that facial or tribal-facial marks have aesthetic value and thus are worn to enhance beauty.

It is a common reality that over the years, the practice of putting facial marks on people for either identity or beauty began to wane and has been declared as an endangered practice, especially with continual contact with Western cultures. Initially, the decline of this customary practice assumed a dimension in which parents reduced the practice of inscribing facial marks on all their children but the first male or female, and later the first male child alone.

Present studies are becoming more analytical in approach by corroborating the previous ones. Enaikele and Adeleke (2017, 107), in their study of the dying culture of facial mark incision among the Yoruba, submit that the culture “constitutes an important element in the construct of ethnic, lineage, household identity, history, heritage, and consideration for aesthetic values and beauty.”

This study further emphasizes the contextual relevance of facial marks with theories of functionalism, which stressed the peculiarity of community needs without anyone casting any aspersion of inferiority on them. The corollary is that of the theory of structural functionalism that emphasized cultural adaptivity, with a proviso that anthropologists should not submit to such propensity of negativity but should appreciate people’s behavior and cultural values within the context of their local realities.

## METHOD

This is a qualitative research study that lends itself to the use of a semi-structured interview method and purposive sampling technique. Creswell (1994) assesses qualitative research as mainly an investigatory procedure where the researcher analytically unravels the intricacies of social phenomena by comparing, contrasting, replicating, classifying, and cataloguing the objects of study. The goal of qualitative research is to develop deeper insight and perception of a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction. The purposive sampling method is typically used in qualitative research. It is employed, according to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016, 2–3), to enable the seeking out of participants—groups and individuals who have the required characteristics, proficiency, and knowledge of the phenomena of interest, are willing to provide information by virtue of their knowledge and experience, and have the ability to convey their opinions and experiences well. There are four categories of interview participants deployed for this study, namely (A) the tribal-facial marking practitioners (focus group interview) and (B–D) individual interviews, namely tribal-facial marks carriers, historians/Yoruba culture scholars, and observers.

### *The Participants*

Interviews with respondents were carried out with the four categories as follows.

*Group A: Tribal-Facial Marking Practitioners' Category (Focus Group).* This category was made up of a focus group of circumcision/tribal-facial mark practitioners in Ibadan City, Oyo State in Southwest Nigeria. The participants were twenty practitioners under the name of Oloola Association Descendants of Ibadan. The association is a subset of a larger national group of practitioners in Southwest Nigeria known as the Circumcision Descendants Association of Nigeria. Oloola is the customary name, meaning "mark-makers." The marks are diverse, including circumcision, tribal-facial marks, and all kinds of body and skin marks.

The choice of Ibadan was informed by the fact that Ibadan is the capital of Oyo State and is the most populous and cosmopolitan city among the Yoruba and Southwest Nigeria. It is also Nigeria's largest city, with a population of about three million. Historically, Ibadan has the highest conglomeration of Yoruba-speaking peoples from various Yoruba subethnic groups. The "destruction of states and settlements and the rise of new urban conglomeration" positioned Ibadan as a major protagonist in the nineteenth-century wars (Afolayan 1993, 12), hence the choice of taking a purposive sample of focus groups from the city. It should be noted that tribal-mark practitioners popularly known as the Oloola in Yoruba (body or skin maker) are not Ibadan bound. They are skilled in both the art of circumcision and inscription of any tribal-facial marks affiliated to any subethnic groups of the Yoruba geopolitical entities. The profession is hereditary. The practitioners come only from known families that have indigenous knowledge and skills passed down from generation to generation. Non-lineage members cannot enter into the practice.

*Group B: The Tribal-Facial Marks Carrier Category.* Using the purposive sampling design, a sample of tribal-facial marks carriers' category within Ibadan and Lagos cosmopolitan environments in Nigeria was taken. A total of eight tribal-facial marks carriers were interviewed. They consisted of (1) two tribal-facial marks carriers in a less cosmopolitan setting (than the latter) in Ibadan and (2) six participants from a university in the more cosmopolitan (than the former) city of Lagos. The importance of the choice of localities was that the participants were of two types. On one hand, two of the participants came from the less cosmopolitan setting in Ibadan and represent the more traditional perspective. On the other hand, in the case of the remaining six participants sourced from the University of Lagos, their age demographics varied and represent a bridge and transition between the past and present social values. This perspective bears significance for posterity and cultural heritage transmission and transition.

*Group C: The Historian/Yoruba Culture Scholars Category.* The historian and Yoruba culture scholar category consisted of two professors of African history as well as one professor of African studies, based at the University of Lagos.

Table 2. Demographics of Participants

Types of Participants	No. of Participants	Age Range	Characteristics of Participants
Group A: Tribal-Facial Marks, Practitioners Category	20	25–75	All skilled in all traditional body marking practices, viz. circumcision, tribal-facial marking, other types of skin marking All belong to the traditional Oloola group (i.e., the traditional skin-marking association) registered under the name Circumcision Descendants Association of Nigeria Profession is hereditary (by family) Years of experience is lifetime All are focus group interviewees
Group B: Tribal-Facial Marks, Carriers Category	8	22–54	All belong to an undergraduate/working-class socioeconomic class The environment of the interview was within a university in cosmopolitan Lagos and a less cosmopolitan setting of Ibadan, the mostly densely populated Yoruba-speaking city in Nigeria
Group C: Historian/Yoruba Culture Researchers Category	3	59–61	Two were professors of history One was a professor of African studies with an emphasis on the Yoruba health system All interviews took place within a university in cosmopolitan Lagos
Group D: Observer Category	5	20–27	All participants fell within the undergraduate socioeconomic class The interview was carried out within a university in cosmopolitan Lagos

*Group D: The Observer Category.* The Observer Category consisted of five identified participants from a reputable university environment in cosmopolitan Lagos.

#### *Coding and Data Analysis*

Data from all the interviews conducted were recorded and transcribed. The focus group interview with the Circumcision Descendants Association of Ibadan, that is, the traditional circumcision and tribal-facial mark practitioners popularly known as the Oloola in the Yoruba language, was conducted in Yoruba then transcribed and translated, while the other three were conducted in English because of the environment (the university) and were also subsequently transcribed.

The qualitative data were analyzed using the recursive abstraction technique. The recursive abstraction technique enables relatively uniform indices, especially among the various participants within the various categories. It also enhances the identification of patterns within the data categories by compacting the data using themes and codes (Polkinghorne

and Arnold 2014). The data for this study were interpreted, processed, and organized thematically under the various groups that took part in the interviews.

### *Ethical Concerns*

Ethical concerns were taken into consideration, particularly the right of consent of the participants to grant interviews. Throughout the study, participants were made to understand the essence of the study, and responses were willingly rendered while they were assured of confidentiality. There was no infringement whatsoever on the human rights of any of the participants in the interviews.

## FINDINGS

The interviews conducted with all indicated participant categories revolved around the five objectives guiding the study, which were to establish the existence of tribal-facial marking and tribal-facial mark practices among Yoruba; reasons for tribal-facial marking and tribal-facial marks among the Yoruba; the role of tribal-facial marks as a genealogical mechanism in Yoruba cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge systems; the desirability of tribal-facial marking and tribal-facial marks practices for preservation as cultural heritage; and a mode of preservation of tribal-facial marks information as a cultural heritage within Yoruba indigenous knowledge systems. The summary and discussion of findings are presented below.

### *Group A: Tribal-Facial Markings Practitioner Category (Focus-Group Interview)*

*Homogeneity of Group Members.* The focus group interview was conducted at the meeting venue of the tribal-facial marking practitioners at Ibadan. It was discovered that membership in this group consists of homogenous practitioners popularly known as the Oloola. The group was made up of descendants from the Oloola family living and practicing in Ibadan. Membership in the association numbers up to 280 scattered all over Ibadan. Only 20 were present on the meeting day.

*Training and Experience.* Training and skills are acquired naturally within the Oloola family as a heritage passed from generation to generation. Experience in practice cannot be quantified. It is a lifetime process and is therefore relative from person to person as longevity permits. In other words, nonlineage and nonfamily members cannot be initiated or permitted to practice the art. This study confirms previous findings (Olofinlua 2012; Osae-Brown 2014) that in the present circumstances of Western education, old family members still nominate or elect one of the male children (despite formal education) to learn the art in order to facilitate succession and transference of the cultural heritage.

*Knowledge of Tribal-Facial Markings and Marks.* Participants in the focus group interview showed that they had an in-depth knowledge of the tribal-

facial marking system. They enumerated the purposes the tribal marks served. These purposes included identification, differentiating one family from another, indication of a birthplace, and beautification. Another reason for tribal-facial marks is to prevent consanguinity in marriage, as intrafamily marriage is abhorred in Yoruba culture. Facial marks therefore serve as caution for prospective suitors to ascertain the respective roots of carriers before commitments, paternity (as members of the same family were expected to bear the same tribal-facial marks), prevention of false identity in cases of apprehension by law enforcement agencies, investigation of crime, and litigation.

The focus group interview was also revealing in other respects. First, it corroborated the real-life practice that marks are sometimes inscribed on inward parts of the body, such as the abdomen. Second, it was also discussed that tribal-facial marks of various lineages were integrated in the panegyric poetry of respective families. The lineage affiliations were usually revealed in the recitation, that is, the oral panegyrics poetry peculiar to each Yoruba lineage. During this process, the type of tribal-facial marks and family roots would be mentioned. The focus groups also alluded to the marks on the terra-cotta head/face of the Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba similar to that of the Iseyin (in Oyo North) and the Kanuris (of Northeast Nigeria) as an indication that tribal-facial marks had existed since primordial times.

In all, the findings revealed the existence of tribal-facial marking practices among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria. The numerous submissions also confirmed the literature, especially Ogunkunle (2013) and Olatunji (2013), that signs are used for specific purposes. They also corroborated the submission of Enaikele and Adeleke (2017) on the theories of biocultural relevance by Bronislavs Malinoski (1884–1942), which focused on the cultural and unique identity of a people. Again, it suffices to mention that there is evidence of informal documentation of tribal marking patterns and systems today. This evidence includes the indelible tribal-mark system on the human carriers, oral panegyric poems of lineages and Yoruba subethnic groups, and archaeological findings of sculpture from the ancient Ife civilization, as well as testimonies of the Oloolas, the facial tribal markers.

*Knowledge of Age of Inscribing Tribal-Facial Marks.* The participants agreed that marks were inscribed during childhood. However, some adults submit themselves to inscription when they have issues to solve in respect of such matters as paternity, heirship, identification, and the right to inheritance to ascertain their affiliation and belongingness to the families involved.

*Relationship between Circumcision and Tribal-Facial Marks.* The interview revealed that an Oloola (i.e., the skin mark maker) is skilled in the arts of both circumcision and tribal-facial marking, since all mark-making arts are within their purview.

*Types of Facial Marks.* The focus group participants were familiar with the various tribal-facial marks as outlined in the literature and in common use among the Yoruba. They include Abaja, pele, keke, Gombo (with all their varieties), and so on. It was, however, noted that a lot of integration had taken place among all the tribal-facial marking societies of the Yoruba. Yoruba marks, however, still have their features that are distinct from the Igbos and the Hausas.

*Tribal-Facial Marking and Religion.* Participants came to a consensus that tribal-facial marking has nothing to do with religion and that tribal-facial marking was purely a cultural heritage phenomenon. During the focus group interview with the Oloolas in Ibadan on October 27, 2019, one of the participants stated that the Ifa corpus itself was made up of signs.

*Posterity of Tribal-Facial Marking and Marks.* The participants agreed that the cultural practice of tribal-facial marking was fading away through the continual threat of Westernization. However, they agreed that the culture needed to be preserved through the following mechanisms:

- Continual handing over to the successive generations irrespective of the official proscriptions;
- Sustaining the interests of the younger generation in learning the arts;
- Sustaining the art of reciting and rendering panegyric poems, which they agreed was an oral form of documentation;
- Educating children, who, being nurtured from the proceeds of the art, would continue to defend the cause and ensure the sustainability of same; and
- Conducting research efforts such as this project to help the cause to survive.

It was categorically stated that the art would continue to be oral, as they would not be disposed to committing it to writing for fear of losing intangible knowledge integrity of the art to those outside the Oloola descendants or caucus. However, on the question of lack of written evidence of the various genres of marks affiliated with various smaller units or individual families, the participants agreed to the need for preservation of other aspects of the art, apart from the mark processing itself (i.e., the process of inscription). However, the modes of documentation as discussed under the “Knowledge of Tribal-Facial Markings and Marks” section above remain the informal ways of documenting this practice.

#### *Group B: Tribal-Facial Marks Carrier Category*

*Confirmation of Carrying Tribal-Facial Marks.* Two of the participants in this category in their fifties were both tribal-facial mark practitioners as well as tribal-facial mark carriers. One wore Abaja, mejo-mejo (eight horizontal marks on each cheek linked to his family in Ibadan). The other had two different marks on either cheek. One was called mejo-saponrede,

which is a variation of Abaja directly linked to his family (in Ibadan) and could be worn by any families from the Oyo-speaking group, which is why the eti-sagba was indicated as a trademark for the tribal-facial marking practitioner lineages. Other participants had pele, mostly with the variations from Oyo and Egba/Egbado. About two of them had one-stroke marks associated with the Ondo, while one other was with a shorter and slimmer stroke associated with the Yoruba of Ilorin descent. There was also a participant who had Gombo with Ibamu, a stroke across the nose (see table 1), hailing from the Oyo North community.

*Date and Age of Marks.* There was a consensus that the marks of the participants had been inscribed in childhood. The age range of participants was from twenty to fifty-four years at the time of the interviews.

*Experience Note.* Participants could not recall their experience since the marks were inscribed in childhood, but they were informed that it was painful.

*Reasons and Perception for Inscription.* All the participants agreed on the genealogical relevance of tribal-facial marks, as the marks had served as a means of identification from experience. One of the participants added the reason of a spiritual healing remedy for her tribal-facial marks. While the older participants from more traditional settings shared the view that the marks might still survive the future, the younger participants perceived that the customs would go extinct. Reasons adduced for the latter by the younger participants were mainly lack of aesthetics and disrespect for the carriers in the new dispensation. The older participants advocated for continuity of the practice, while the younger generation were divided between total abrogation and freedom of choice, without casting any aspersions on those who subscribe to it. All participants, however, subscribed to the preservation of the history of the art and culture.

*Preservation Method.* Methods of preservation suggested were photography, historical documentation, and festival celebration and preservation of artifacts related to tribal-facial marks in a museum.

#### *Group C: The Historian/Yoruba Culture Scholars Category*

*Knowledge of Yoruba Tribal-Facial Marks.* Participants in this category were very knowledgeable about Yoruba tribal-facial marks by virtue of age, experience, and observation as well as disciplines and level of education (being professors of history and African studies). They all confirmed the existence of the tradition and spoke fluently on the varieties of tribal-facial marks among the Yoruba. The professor of African studies confirmed the documentation of Yoruba tribal marks through oral reference to it in a verse of the Ifa corpus.

*Purpose of Tribal-Facial Marks.* They established the genealogical relevance of tribal-facial marks and confirmed identity as the chief reason for them, especially during the slave trade era, and as a sign of royalty (such

as in the case of Oyo), where it is still used to distinguish members of the royal family and aesthetics as confirmed by the Yoruba adage “Tita riro la a Kola, bi o ba jina tan, a dewa,” which means “the process of having a mark is painful, but when it heals up, it becomes beautiful.”

*Current Status of Tribal-Facial Marks.* It was a common perception that tribal-facial marks were facing extinction. The practice was common only in purely traditional settings, among the royal family, and within some religious groups. Participants did not advocate continuity because culture was said to be dynamic. Participants were aware of the existence of the Child’s Right Act of 2003, as discussed earlier, but one of them opined that it has tampered with the culture of the people and therefore the people should be allowed to choose which way to go.

*Need for Preservation of the Cultural Heritage.* Participants subscribed to the need for preservation of the memory of the tradition, but not by observance. Suggested means of preservation included keeping artifacts, photographs, and sculptures in museums and galleries, documenting experiences through multimedia, and organizing festivals to showcase the culture.

#### *Category D: The Observer Category*

*Perception of Reason for Tribal-Facial Marking.* Reasons for tribal-facial marks included identification of families and lineage, including reference made to the exigency of Yoruba civil wars, as well as for aesthetics. Participants shared a strong opinion related to genealogical relevance.

*Current Status of Tribal-Facial Marks.* The practice was considered old-fashioned and facing extinction and of no value for the future.

*Preservation of the Cultural Heritage.* Participants subscribed to preservation via awareness creation and cultural orientation, documentation through pictures and exhibitions in museums, and encouraging research on the subject.

## DISCUSSION

This article investigated the tracing and documentation of genealogies through a semiological study of the cultural practice of tribal-facial marking among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria. This cultural practice, though widely practiced in the past, is currently on the verge of extinction. Although the participants with formal education specifically mentioned museums as a means of documentation, the findings of this study have brought about the need for the urgent intervention in its documentation for posterity in memory institutions such as libraries, archives, and museums due to its relevance to lineage and subethnic genealogies. The recommendation of these threefold memory institutions is leveraging on previous works that have advocated them as veritable vehicles of documenting indigenous knowledge systems. The trio have been collectively

nicknamed cultural repositories (Bearman and Trant 2002, as cited by Fادهان 2010). Tribal marks and the tribal marking system fit appropriately into this space. The threefold institutions are required to deploy appropriate documentation strategies.

The study found that tribal marks serve the following purposes:

- Primarily they serve as marks of identification that are predominant among Yoruba and distinguish lineages and subethnic groups from each other despite their subjective beauty.
- Derivatively, they prevent consanguinity in marriage and act as proof and evidence of paternity and prevent false accusations in the case of mistaken identity in cases of litigation and investigation of crime as well as spiritual purposes.
- The practice constitutes an attempt of using semiology as an approach, via the indelible facial marks, to document and trace lineage and subethnic groups among the Yoruba that has been deployed since primordial times.

Along with the above summary, this study made some observations in the responses of the participants. There were generational differences of opinion in the focus group and among the individual participants in the other three categories, namely the tribal-facial marks carrier category, the historian/Yoruba culture scholar category, and the observer category. The focus group participants from an older generation and practitioners of the art subscribed strongly to handing over the tradition of wearing tribal marks and not just the arts to successive generations despite official prescriptions and the current unpopularity of the practice.

Nonetheless, they still shared the hope of sustainability through the reinvigoration of learning the art, intangible recitation of the panegyric poems that celebrate the practice, and tracing of Yoruba origins as a form of documentation as earlier discussed as part of the submissions of the focus groups in the “Knowledge of Tribal-Facial Markings and Marks” section above. They also believe that research such as this article will sustain the practice.

The majority of the younger participants within the other three categories subscribed to total abrogation of the tradition and emphasized documentation as the only way to properly remember and celebrate the tradition. To this end, the younger participants acceded to preservation through artifactual documentation such as photographs, sculptures, exhibitions, and all forms of multimedia in libraries, galleries, and museums. Sculptures are of particular interest as a permanent conscious mode of documentation. The process of making the sculpture is representative and is not attached to any particular living personality as in photographs. Rather, it is an artistic impression depicting the history, culture, times, and period of a people (except for portrait sculptures of probably a legend



Figure 1. Abayomi Barber, *Ori Olokun*, 1973, plaster of Paris, 46 centimeters. Reproduced with permission from the artist.

---

that carries such marks). It also has the advantage of being used in the generic sense without any nuance or offense to the sensibilities of any person who does not wish to be put in the public glare.

However, an example of a generic sculpture is one that can be described as a grand representation of *Ori Olokun*, which is a major Ife archaeological finding (Craddock et al. 2013), though several replicas have been made in various quarters. An expression is presented in figure 1, as reinterpreted by Abayomi Barber. Photographs ordinarily will bear the images of specific persons, except for those who make themselves available to be captured in portraits. Again, it is almost an assumption that libraries primarily will keep documentary evidence in terms of paper records (published works and photographs as depicted in table 1) and their surrogates. To this extent, the role of these three memory institutions cannot be overemphasized in the documentation of these traditions. The emphasis of each of the memory institutions will be expressed only in terms of the medium of material collection. Nevertheless, the intervention of information and communications technology has streamlined what can be documented and the interoperability among these institutions. Hence,

the issue of convergence of these resources comes to the fore, as earlier explained by Fadehan (2010). The role of research was also articulated in the findings.

In all, the main objective of the study, which was to establish the need for intensive documentation as a major means of Yoruba genealogy, was supported by the findings. Documentation has been found to be necessary, as current developments show that the practice is waning and in the near future it may be difficult to find examples of these tribal marks on any human faces. In other words, there soon may be no more tribal-facial mark carriers. Therefore, documentation seems to be the only vehicle of cultural transmission, bringing the past to the present as well as defining what the future may bring. The danger of total historical amnesia will definitely be alleviated by memory institutions.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The interdisciplinary nature of this work has extended the frontiers of knowledge among indicated cognates. Most essentially, it has established the relevance to and the reality of the stake of information studies in every area of human endeavor. Again, significantly, the exercise represents a re-establishment of the trajectory in services of memory institutions beyond the formalized orientation into ethnographical studies, particularly within the African setting, which also forms the contextual locale of the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria. In today's globalized world, a harvest of vast knowledge of African indigenous resources is required to enhance visibility, presence, and all knowledge derivatives. Oral societies should not lose the integrity of the nature, characteristics, inherent value, and needs of their cultural resources, but channel them into the global knowledge space for recognition, intellectual property for patent acknowledgment, and availability and accessibility for effective utilization and impact.

To this end, this study has investigated Yoruba tribal-facial marks as an instrument of semiology for genealogical study and as a subject of concern for information studies. The research has established the major purpose of tribal-facial marks as the identification of lineage, tribe, and roots. The fact that the practice is on the verge of extinction is a consensus of the study. While the practitioners (the Oloola Descendant Union being the traditional hereditary custodians of the indigenous knowledge system) are conscious of the threat of extinction either by legislation or by anachronistic societal perception, they advocate for its continuity through freedom of choice. There was also almost unanimous indication for abolishment from the other three categories of younger participants, with insignificant numbers advocating for continuity with a proviso of choice in adulthood. Table 3 explains the dispositions of participants to the abolishment of tribal marks.

Results from the study do indicate unanimous affirmation of the need to preserve the tradition through documentation of the surviving elements

Table 3. Perception of Interviewed Participants on Abolishment of Tribal Marks by Groups

Types of Participants	No. of Participants	Age Range	Perception on Abolishment
Group A: Tribal-Facial Marks, Practitioners Category	20	25–75	All 20 strongly advocated for continuity with a caveat of government allowing “freedom of choice” while the legislation lasts
Group B: Tribal-Facial Marks, Carriers Category	8	22–54	3 participants said yes 5 participants said no 1 participant said no to the continuity of the practice with the exception of freedom of choice and self-adherence to family tradition
Group C: Historian/Yoruba Culture Researchers Category	3	59–61	All 3 participants said no, but 1 highlighted the exception of adults who choose to subject themselves to taking the marks for proof of belonging and purpose of rights to inheritance
Group D: Observer Category	5	20–27	1 participant said no with the exception of choice in adulthood

through photographs, sculpture, preservation of artifacts in galleries and museums, further research, and documentation of various genres of tribal marks applicable to smaller units of families and lineages for posterity.

Finally, the research findings are of great significance to memory institutions, highlighting the roles they can play in this documentation. Recommendations for the intervention of memory institutions within the Southwest Yoruba and Nigerian spaces include:

- intensive documentation of ancestry history;
- the involvement of libraries, archives, and museums in ethno-information research;
- creation of genealogical reference services in Nigerian libraries, archives, and museums, and reinvigoration of the same where they exist;
- taking a cue from foreign climes, there should creation of genealogy and local study groups by professional associations of memory institutions;
- promotion of international cooperation in the preservation and conservation of materials in genealogy and local studies;
- creation of indexes to materials on tribal-facial materials (multimedia);
- creation of more definitive nationwide information policy comprising all formats and modes of indigenous knowledge systems (including tribal-facial marks);
- delineation of and apportioning of relevant entities for the harvesting, documentation, and management of the tribal-facial marks information system; and

- creation of an all tribal-facial marks management information system (a convergence of all resources).

In closing, it can be said that in favor of posterity and facing the extinction of the Yoruba tribal marks system, the role of memory institutions cannot be overemphasized. All efforts need to be mustered to facilitate information harvesting and information documentation of the cultural resource genre of tribal-facial marking of the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria.

## REFERENCES

- Abdullahi-Idiagbon, Mohammed Sanni. 2010. "African Traditional Semiotics: The Example of 'Ar'oko' in Yoruba Tradition." *Language Society and Culture* 31. [www.obafemio.com/uploads/5/1/4/2/5142021/semiotics.pdf](http://www.obafemio.com/uploads/5/1/4/2/5142021/semiotics.pdf).
- Adams, Jonathan, Christopher King, and Daniel Hook. 2010. "Global Research Report: Africa." Leeds: Thomson Reuters. <http://people.rennes.inria.fr/Eric.Badouel/Africa/DOCUMENTS/globalresearchreport-africa.pdf>.
- Afolayan, Funso S. 1993. "Reconstructing the Past to Reconstruct the Present: The Nineteenth Century Wars and Yoruba History." *Passages* 6: 12.
- African Union. 1990. "The African Charter on the Rights of the Child 1990." [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36804-treaty-african\\_charter\\_on\\_rights\\_welfare\\_of\\_the\\_child.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36804-treaty-african_charter_on_rights_welfare_of_the_child.pdf).
- Barthes, Roland. 1961. *The Fashion System*. Translated by Matthew Ward and Richard D. Howard. London: Paladin.
- Bearman, David, and Jennifer Trant. 2002. "Cultural Institutions in a Networked Environment." Stockholm: Archives & Museum Informatics.
- Biobaku, Saburi O., ed. 1973. *Sources of Yoruba History*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Chandler, Daniel. 2003. "Semiotics for Beginners." <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/document/S4B.11/2000>.
- Child Rights Act. 2003. In *Laws of the Federation of Nigeria*, vol. 4, § 24 (1–2), Cap. C50-16. Durban: LexisNexis.
- Craddock, Paul T., et al. 2013. "The Olokun Head Reconsidered." *Afrique: Archéologie & Arts* 9 (1): 13–42.
- Creswell, John W. 1994. *Research Design: Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Danesi, Marcel. 1994. "Introduction." In *An Introduction to Semiotics*, edited by Thomas A. Sebeok, xi–xvi. London: Pinter.
- Danesi, Marcel, and Paul Perron. 1999. *Analyzing Cultures: An Introduction and Handbook*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Darby, Paul, and Paul Cloush. 2013. "Investigating the Information Seeking Behaviour of Genealogists and Family Historians." *Journal of Information Science* 39 (1): 73–84.
- Dwoskin, Beth. 2009. "Genealogy in the Jewish Library: An Update." *Judaica Librarianship* 15: 13–24.
- Enaikele, Mohammad, and Adeniyi Taofeeq Adeleke. 2017. "Ethnographic Study of the Dying Culture of Facial Mark Incisions among the Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria: A Case Study of Ibadan." *Fourth World Journal* 16 (1): 107–17.
- Etikan, Ilker, Sulaiman A. Musa, and Rukayya S. Alkassim. 2016. "Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling." *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* 5 (1): 1–4.
- Fadehan, Olukemi A. 2010. "Cultural Renaissance through Indigenous Knowledge System in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges for Memory Institutions." In *New Frontiers in the Teaching of African Diaspora History and Culture*, edited by Tunde Babawale, Akin Alao, and Tony Onwumah, 256–78. Lagos: Concept Publications for Centre for Black African Art and Culture (CBAAC).
- Fulton, Crystal. 2016. "The Genealogist's Information World: Creating Information in the Pursuit of a Hobby." *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 8 (1): 85–100.

- Genealogy Committee of the History Section of the Reference and User Services Association. 1995. "Guidelines for a Unit Course of Instruction in Genealogical Research at Schools of Library and Information Science." Chicago: American Library Association.
- Hedegaard, Ruth. 2008. "The Benefits of Archives, Libraries and Museums Working Together." In *International Genealogy and Local History: Papers Presented by the Genealogy and Local History Section, IFLA General Conferences 2001–2005*, edited by Ruth Hedegaard and Elizabeth Anne Melrose, 53–64. Munich: De Gruyter Saur.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. (1830) 1956. *The Philosophy of History*. Translated by J. Jibree. New York: Dover.
- International Council on Monuments and Sites, International Cultural Tourism Committee. 2002. "ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter: Principles and Guidelines for Managing Tourism at Places of Cultural and Heritage Significance." Australia: ICOMOS Secretariat.
- Johnson, Samuel. (1921) 2001. *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*. Lagos: CSS.
- Lindh, Karolina, and Jutta Haider. 2010. "Development and Documentation Knowledge: Good Intentions in Bad Company?" *Libri* 60 (1): 1–14.
- Mannix, Mary K., Fred Burchsted, and Jo Bell Whitlatch, eds. 2015. *Guide to Reference in Genealogy and Biography*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- Martin, Robert S. 2008. "Cooperation and Change: Archives, Libraries and Museums in the United States." In *International Genealogy and Local History: Papers Presented by the Genealogy and Local History Section, IFLA General Conferences 2001–2005*, edited by Ruth Hedegaard and Elizabeth Anne Melrose, 65–76. Munich: De Gruyter Saur.
- McClure, Gail. 1989. "Introduction." In *Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Implications for Agriculture and International Development*, edited by D. Michael Warren, L. Jan Sikkerveer, and S. Oguntunji Titilola, 1–2. Ames: Technology and Social Change Program, Iowa State University.
- Ngulube, Patrick. 2002. "Managing and Preserving Indigenous Knowledge Management Era: Challenges and Opportunities for Information Professionals." *Information Development* 18 (2): 95–100.
- Null, David G. 1985. "Genealogy and Family History in Academic Library." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 11 (1): 29–33.
- Odunbaku, James B. 2012. "The Use of Tribal Marks in Archaeological and Historical Reconstruction: Isale Abandoned Settlement as a Case Study." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 2 (6): 251–60.
- Ogunkunle, Oluwamayowa V. 2013. "A Semiotic Reading of the Symbols of Yoruba Traditional Marriage." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3 (7): 1103–9.
- Olatunji, Rotimi W. 2013. "Uses of Semiotics in Period of Hostilities, Armed Conflicts and Peace Building among the Yoruba, South-West Nigeria." *AFRREV IJAH* 2 (4): 247–56.
- Olofinlua, Temitayo. 2012. "Facial Marking Fades in Nigeria." *Global Press Journal*, September 10. <https://globalpressjournal.com/africa/nigeria/facial-marking-tradition-fades-in-nigeria-2/>.
- Onyeakabu, Adaobi. 2020. "Yoruba Is Allegedly an Official Language in Brazil." *Pulse Nigeria*, August 7. <https://www.pulse.ng/lifestyle/food-travel/yoruba-is-allegedly-an-official-language-in-brazil/rdnkyxr>.
- Orie, Olanike O. 2011. "The Structure and Function of Yoruba Facial Scarification." *Anthropological Linguistics* 53 (1): 15–33.
- Osae-Brown, Funke. 2014. "Oloolas and Their Dying Craft." *Business Day*, March 16. <https://businessday.ng/life/article/oloolas-and-their-dying-craft/>.
- Polkinghorne, Martyn, and Amy Arnold. 2014. "A Six Step Guide to Using Recursive Abstraction Applied to the Qualitative Analysis of Interview Data." Bournemouth University Briefing Paper. <http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/21367/>.
- Pulse Nigeria*. 2019. "Yoruba Allegedly an Official Language in Brazil." October 10. <https://www.pulse.ng>.
- Rajasekaran, Bhakthavatsalam. 1993. "A Framework for Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Systems into Agricultural Research and Extension Organizations for Sustainable Agricultural Development in India." PhD diss., Iowa State University. <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/10180>.

- Reference and User Services Association. 2007. "Guidelines for Developing a Core Genealogy Collection." Chicago: American Library Association. [www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesdeveloping](http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesdeveloping).
- Sant-Geronikolou, Lia. 2011. "Linking Genealogical Research to Library and Information Science: Concepts, Perspectives, Considerations." <https://lekythos.library.ucy.ac.cy/bitstream/handle/10797/13068/Linking.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
- Sebeok, Thomas A. 1994. *An Introduction to Semiotics*. London: Pinter.
- Sithole, Jabulani. 2007. "The Challenges Faced by African Libraries and Information Centres in Documenting and Preserving Indigenous Knowledge." *IFLA Journal* 33 (2): 117–23.
- Smith, Amy M. 2012. *Tracing Family Lines: The Impact of Genealogy Research on Family Communication*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Tanackovic, Sanjika F. 2008. "Can Archivists, Librarians and Curators Join Hands to Do a Better Job?" In *International Genealogy and Local History: Papers Presented by the Genealogy and Local History Section, IFLA General Conferences 2001–2005*, edited by Ruth Hedegaard and Elizabeth Anne Melrose, 247–64. Munich: De Gruyter Saur.
- Trevor-Roper, Hugh. 1963. "The Rise of Christian Europe." *Listener*, November 28, 871.
- United Nations. 1989. "The United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child." *Treaty Series* 1577 (November): 3.
- Warner, Julian. 1990. "Semiotics, Information Science, Documents and Computers." *Journal of Documentation* 46 (1): 16–32.
- Warren, D. M. 1987. "Editor's Notes." *CIKARD News* 1 (1): 5.

## APPENDIX A. PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Place of Origin	Type of Facial-Tribal Mark	Date	Venue
A1	Focus group interview category Oloola descendants of Ibadan	25–75	Males and a female	Participants present were mainly of Ibadan origin and others from other Yoruba subethnic groups	Not applicable	October 27, 2019	Ogunbambi Oloola Family Hall, Odo-Okun, Oranyan Ibadan
B1	tribal-facial mark carrier category	59 years	Male	Igbomina	Abaja Meje-meje/ Abaja Afamora	October 27, 2019	Odo Okun, Oranyan Ibadan
B2	tribal-facial mark carrier category	54 years	Male	Ibadan	Mejo Sapomrende/ Eti-Sagba		Odo-Okun Oranyan Ibadan
B3	tribal-facial mark carrier category	22 years	Female	Kwara state	Pele—Kwara state variance	November 5, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
B4	tribal-facial mark carrier category	52 years	Female	Osun and Edo state	Minus or pele	November 5, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
B5	tribal-facial mark carrier category	23 years	Female	Ondo state	Pele	November 5, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
B6	tribal-facial mark carrier category	22 years	Female	Ogun state	Pele	November 5, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
B7	tribal-facial mark carrier category	30 years	Male	Ofa/Kwara	Pele	November 6, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
B8	tribal-facial mark carrier category	54 years	Male	Oke Ogun, Idikuaogo, in Iwajowa local government area of Oyo state	Combo	November 6, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
C1	historian/ researcher category	60 years	Male		Not applicable	November 8, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria

Appendix A. Participant Information (*continued*)

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Place of Origin	Type of Facial-Tribal Mark	Date	Venue
C2 historian/ researcher category	Participant	61 years	Male	Idanre, Ondo state	Not applicable	November 8, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
C3 historian/ researcher category	Participant	58 years	Male	Ekiti state	Not applicable	November 8, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
D1 observer category	Participant	20 years	Female	Urhobo/Edo state, Nigeria	Not applicable	November 5, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
D2 observer category	Participant	21 years	Female	Yoruba, Nigeria	Not applicable	November 5, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
D3 observer category	Adebayo Sefiu Olabode	24 years	Male	Yoruba, Nigeria	Not applicable	November 6, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
D4 observer category	Ibrahim	22 years	Male	Yoruba, Nigeria	Not applicable	November 6, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria
D5 observer category	Babalola Peters	27 years	Male	Yoruba	Not applicable	November 6, 2019	University of Lagos, Nigeria

**APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUP  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Name:
2. Address/locality (place of origin / place of practice):
3. Age:
4. Practice confirmation / years of experience:
5. Perception or reason for tribal-facial marking? (e.g., (a) aesthetics, (b) family/lineage relevance, (c) other historical reasons):
6. Is/are the practitioner(s) views personal/original/inherited knowledge?
7. Types of tribal marks known and administered / reasons & historical background:
8. What determines choice of tribal marks? (Are the choices telling a story? What types of stories?)
9. What is your opinion about tribal marks/tribal marking?
10. Can you share specific notable experiences (e.g., tribal marks linked to families, tribes, lineage etc.)?
11. Comments on the status of the practice of tribal marking/culture of wearing marks:
12. What is the future of tribal-facial marks & marking?
13. Do you think we should find a way of preserving the heritage?
14. Suggest the various ways that you think the cultural heritage should be preserved:
15. Documentation:
16. Others:
17. What is your general opinion about the tribal marks?

**APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TRIBAL-FACIAL  
MARKS CARRIER CATEGORY**

1. Name:
2. Gender:
3. Address/locality (place of origin):
4. Age:
5. Confirmation of tribal-facial marks, place of origin, type/name of tribal-facial marks:
6. Date/age of marks (how long have you been wearing the marks)?
7. Can you share your personal experience at the marking time?

8. Perception of reasons for tribal-facial marking (e.g., (a) aesthetics, (b) family/lineage relevance, (c) other historical reasons):
9. Are you of the opinion or perception that facial marks bear a genealogical relevance?
10. Have you ever been identified or affiliated to a family/place of origin etc. by the marks?
11. Please share your experiences:
12. What is the status of tribal marks in the society? (Is it still being practiced?)
13. What is the future of Yoruba tribal marks?
14. Will you advocate for continuity of the art/practice?
15. If you share the opinion that the culture is being threatened, what will you recommend should be done to ensure cultural memory (documentation, others)?
16. Recommendations:

#### APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR HISTORIAN/ SCHOLARS CATEGORY

1. Name:
2. Gender:
3. Age:
4. Profession/Occupation/Status:
5. Do you have any knowledge of Yoruba tribal marks as revealed by historical literature or evidence or oral tradition?
6. What do you perceive as the reasons for tribal marks/markings? (aesthetics, identification, tribal/lineage affiliation)?
7. Do you strongly share the view that tribal marks have any genealogical significance amongst the Yoruba?
8. What do you perceive as the current status or value of tribal-facial marks amongst the Yoruba?
9. What is your view of the future of tribal-facial marks as Yoruba cultural heritage?
10. How do you think this cultural heritage could be preserved (documentation, others)?
11. Any other recommendations?

#### APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR OBSERVER CATEGORY

1. Name:
2. Gender:
3. Age:
4. Occupation:

5. What do you perceive as the reasons for tribal marks/marking? (aesthetics, identification, tribal/lineage affiliation?)
6. Do you strongly share the view that tribal marks have any genealogical significance amongst the Yoruba?
7. What do you perceive as the current status or value of tribal-facial marks amongst the Yoruba?
8. What is your view of the future of tribal-facial marks as Yoruba cultural heritage?
9. How do you think this cultural heritage could be preserved (documentation, others)?
10. Any other recommendations?

---

Olukemi A. Fadehan (corresponding author) is a seasoned professional librarian with over thirty-three years of experience and is also an accomplished academic. She holds a bachelor of education as well as master's and doctorate degrees in library and information studies (Ibadan, Nigeria). She has a knack for multidisciplinary research/approaches to library and information studies, with greater emphasis on user studies and knowledge management with a tilt toward specialized groups and resources. Her works also cut across information packaging and repackaging of information resources, university archives, African oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems. She is registered with both national and international professional associations. As a self-actualized professional, she recently completed her tenure as the university librarian, University of Lagos, Nigeria, and is currently serving at the Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Email: kemifadehan@oauife.edu.ng

Olatunde O. Barber is a curator and artist. He obtained his BA degree from the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria, and an MA from the Creative Arts Department, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria in 2009, and he is about to round up his PhD at the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK. He is currently serving the University of Lagos as a curator in the museum section of the University of Lagos Library. His research interests include inquiries into the collection and preservation of African cultural heritage and the analysis of the relationships of national and global cultural negotiations. Email: Obarber@unilag.edu.ng