

Cowrie Shells in Ọjọ-Aláwòrò: A Nexus of Art, Culture, Tradition, Heritage and Economic Development

Àjàyí, Noah Olúwasanjó & Adékòyà, Elizabeth Ọlaniké

Abstract

In the old days, most villages and towns of states and nations in Africa were founded with or through cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ), thereby serving as evolutionary symbols and objects. There are several arts, cultures, traditions, heritages and economic development (ACTHED) activities in which, cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ) are being used in Nigeria and Africa generally, and Ọjọ-Aláwòrò town specifically, which is the target of this study. This ACTHED does not leave out socio-cultures, religion-magical and spiritual endowments. The aforementioned artistic activities are gradually facing out in our society through civilisation. Therefore, this study focuses on appraising and refreshing our memories of the significance and vital roles that cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ) played and still playing in the sojourn of the human race in Ọjọ-Aláwòrò town of Lagos State, Nigeria. In this regard, functionalism and symbolic interactionism theory of culture were used as a theoretical framework to analyze this study. As a qualitative research design, data were collected through the semi-structured interview (SSI) with five participants. They are indigenous elders (three males and two females) ages 70 to 85 years. The reason for this purposive sampling is that elders are wiser and more experienced in ACTHED, hence the Yoruba adage “íríri làgbà.” The findings were discussed extensively which shows that cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ) are inevitable in Ọjọ-Aláwòrò town despite civilisation in the town. To this end, a conclusion was made and recommendations were suggested to revive the values of cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ).

Keywords: Art and culture, cowrie shells, economic development, heritage and tradition, Ọjọ-Aláwòrò town

Introduction

African society especially Nigeria is richly blessed in arts, cultures, traditions, heritages and economic development (ACTHED) which includes trades, norms, values, and identities that have been in existence since the creation of man. This richness in ACTHED serves as our ways of life in all-round efficiency of man; be it in greeting, communication, food, shelter, clothing and dressing cum fashion, religion-magical, socio-cultural, agriculture, trade and among others. In all these, cowrie shells cannot be emphasised in the foundation and evolution of villages, towns and communities like Ọjọ-Aláwòrò. Cowrie shells

have been used as currency, jewellery, and sacred objects in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town and several communities in Nigeria, Africa and all over the world. Cowrie is generally classified as a marine snail.

Cowrie shells had been in use in Nigeria before the European contact in the fifteenth century (Shaw, 1977). According to Jay (2020), cowrie comes from the Sanskrit word *kaparda* which means “small shell.” Bozman (1967) in Akpan (1993 p. 129) affirms that “cowrie is a name given to Gastropod mollusca of the Cypraeidac family.” Cowries are mainly tropical, some of the large forms being objects of great beauty. In the young cowrie, the shell is usually spiral-shaped but as it grows, it changes form; the tip thickens and turns inwards, causing the opening to reduce to a narrow slit. Cowrie can also be seen as a shiny brightly-coloured tropical shell, used in former times as money in parts of Africa and Asia (Summers, 2001). Cowrie shells are admired for their delicate shells and markings and have been an integral part of many ancient cultures, traditions and belief systems (Jay, 2020). From Jay’s definition, cowrie is a culture on its own which is as old as the creation of man, this seems to be highly evinced in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town; a reason for, and focus of this study. The work of Adébòwálé, Àjàyí-Adéyèlú, and Àjàyí (2013) assist in this research. However, for the purpose of this study, we can maintain that cowrie shells are ACTHED. Hence, more discussions on the meaning of cowrie shells and keywords of this study will be exhumed under the literature review.

Research Objectives

Cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ) are an inevitable object in Nigerian and African society, specifically Qjọ-Aláwòrò town, the scope of this study. This is based on the fact that the arts, cultures, traditions, heritages, and economic development (ACTHED) of the indigenous/inhabitants of a particular community cannot be taken away from them. Therefore, this study appraises the utilities/significance of cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ) in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town of Lagos State, Nigeria. This study also explores the ancient roles owó ẹyọ have played in the evolution of Qjọ-Aláwòrò town and phases of development cum civilisation therein. It also assesses the influence of civilisation and technological age over the norms and values of ACTHED in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town. Likewise, this study examines the effects of owó ẹyọ in this jet age where digital technology has made the world a global village. Above all, the impact of the new religion on cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ) was also justified.

Research Questions

This study finds answers to the main research question; what significant roles do cowrie shell (owó ẹyọ) plays in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town of Lagos State, Nigeria? Based on this, sub-questions were also answered which includes include:

- How do cowrie shells sustain their existence in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town?
- To what extent do cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ) influence the developmental stages of Qjọ-Aláwòrò town?
- Of what effects is the digital technology age on the utilisation of cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ) and the value of ACTHED in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town?
- Lastly, what is the impact of the new religion on cowrie shells in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town of Lagos State, Nigeria?

All these questions and hidden ones are answered comprehensively in this study.

Theoretical Departure

The functionalism theory of culture (FTC) is founded by Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliff-Brown in the twentieth century (Lumen, 2022; Porth, Neutzling, and Edward, 2022). Two versions of this theory developed between 1910 and 1930; Malinowski's biocultural functionalism and the structural-functionalism of Radcliff-Brown (Porth et al., 2022). Lumen (2022) vehemently affirms that functionalists view society as a system in which all parts work – or function – or are efficient together to create society as a whole. In this regard, societies need culture to exist effectively. Cultural norms and heritage function to support the fluid operation of society, and cultural values guided people in making choice. Just as a member of a society works together to fulfil a society's need or target, culture also exists to meet its members' basic needs. The functionalists also study culture in term of values. In this regard, cowrie shells are important in the Qjọ-Aláwòrò community because it is valued. For the purpose of this study, the culture of cowrie shells including divination, currency, art, healing, spiritual, religion-magical, protection, prosperity, fertility, fashion, entertainment, and a host of others are values of making the members of Qjọ-Aláwòrò society to function effectively as an entity.

On the part of symbolic interactionism theory of culture (SITC), Lumen (2022) opines that it is most concerned with the interaction of face-to-face interactions/relationships between members of the society (Qjọ-Aláwòrò). The interactionists see culture as being created and maintained by the ways people interact/relate and how individuals interpret or project each other's actions. Proponents of this theory conceptualise human interactions as a

continuous process of deriving meaning from both objects (cowrie shells) in the environment and the action of others, thus, the term symbolic comes into play. Every object (cowrie shells) and action has a symbolic meaning and language that serves as a means for people to present and communicate their interpretations of these meanings to others. Those who believe in symbolic interactionism perceive culture as highly dynamic and fluid, as it depends on how meaning is interpreted and how individuals interact when conveying these meanings. Hence, people give different meanings to cowrie shells and their uses.

Literature Review

Art, culture, cowrie shells, heritage and tradition reviewed

Art has no specific meaning, individuals perceive it differently. Art is creativity, it is the act of making something, thereby expressing feelings through materials. This made art to be basic to human expressions generally. To this end, Oyèdun (2013) affirms that each work of art is the product of art in its own culture. Therefore, we can say art is culture. In the same manner, Ocvirk, Stinson, Wigg, Bone, and Cayton, (2009 p. 5) state that “the term art is often synonymous with craftsmanship, which implies knowledge of materials and their skilful handling.” They affirmed further that any creative and variable skill can be labelled an art. Art can be visual, performing and literary in nature.

Culture is a general way of life. The way we do several things is our culture, i.e. the way we cook, eat, greet, dress, communicate, sing, dance, entertain, among others. Cole (2019) refers to culture as values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share in common and that can be used to define them as a collective entity. It is the totality of the mode of any group of people as encompassed from birth to after death (Majemite, p. 13). This means culture is transferable from one generation to another, the reason we could study its prominent roles in Ọjọ-Àláfẹ̀ town of Lagos State, Nigeria.

Cowrie shells according to Simon-Hartman (2020) a small, glossed, porcelain-like shell that is typically light beige and has a gentile oval structure with a central aperture that splits them in half. Simon-Hartman affirms that cowrie shells hold significant spiritual and monetary value in African culture. It has egg-like shape in which glows and shines, and measures between 5mm to 19cm long depending on the species (Jay, 2020).



Fig. 1: Hump of cowrie shells in its nature and artistic expression of it (Àjàyí & Adékòyà, 2022).

Cowrie shells are of different species but this study is limited to white cowrie, yellow cowrie and tiger cowrie. According to Jay (2020), the white cowrie shells (WCS) are the most common and popular variety, they are used for astrological purposes and are believed to contain divine powers. Yellow cowrie shells (YCS) have a yellow shade and are used for prosperity and wealth, they are also kept to balance the mystical powers of planet Jupiter. While the tiger cowrie shells (TCS) have a mound that resembles the pattern of a tiger’s skin, they are used to repel negative energy and ward off the eye level.



Fig. 2: Sample of tiger cowrie shells (TCS), Jay (2020).

Heritage is core tangible and intangible things or properties (intellectual and indigenous or physical) inherited from our forefather which is transmitted to another generation. UNESCO (2021) opines that heritage is the cultural legacy that we received from the past, lives within the present and will be passed on to future generations. This may be in form of monuments, collections of objects,

and other practices. To UMass Amherst (2022), heritage is the full range of our inherited traditions, monuments, objects, and culture. Our totality as a group is our heritage.

Tradition is synonymous with culture; it is a subset of culture. It is the transmission of customs or beliefs from one generation to the next. Majemite (1996, p. 12) states that tradition deals with customary beliefs, practices and inherited modes of living as passed on from generation to generation. It touches every aspect of the lives of people—beliefs and practices about birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, marriage, old age, death and after death, socials, games, and leisure. It also embodies health practices, law, trades and occupations of the people and lastly religion. Graburn (1997, p. 7) says tradition was the name given to those cultural features which, in situations of change, were to be continued to be handed on, thought about, preserved and not lost. At this junction, let us briefly look at cowrie shells in Nigeria as a country.

Origin of Cowrie Shells in Nigeria and its Ethnic Names

Cowries have always been found in large quantities in Nigeria. Although their origin is believed to be foreign. In the thirteenth century, cowrie shells were brought to Africa from the Maldives in the Indian Ocean by Arab traders (Akpan, 1993. 128). They first came to Egypt and then crossed the Sahara to the Western Sudan region. Later, they were brought in by Dutch and English traders through Guinea coast porters of West Africa. On the contrary, cowrie shells had been in use in Nigeria before the European contact which started in the fifteenth century. Shaw (1977, p. 86) is of the view that in the middle Niger, “the use of cowries as currency seemed to have begun in the tenth century AD,” Some Arab writers also hold this view. Cowrie shells had been in use in the kingdom of Benin before their importation at the beginning of the sixteenth century by the Portuguese who obtained the commodity from the Indian Ocean where the importation was on a large scale.

The questions is, if the cowrie shells are not native to Nigerian waters, how did they find their way into the Nigerian society? Boahen (1966) in (Akpan 1993. 130) has drawn attention to the contact between North Africa and Western Sudan through the trans-Saharan trade which started as far back as 3000-2000 BC. It must be mentioned also that Igbo-Ukwu (Shaw, 1977) civilization, dated to the ninth century AD, showed evidence of cowrie shell. It is suggested that cowrie shells were introduced into Nigeria and throughout West Africa, through the agency of the long-distance trade. Shaw (1977) observed that in 1964, a French archaeologist named Theodore Monod found 2,000 brass rods and a large number of cowrie shells buried in the region of Mauritania. These were found along with the basket in which they were tied. This find strongly

supports the North-South of movement of cowrie shells. On the contrary, Shaw (1977) is of the view that cowrie shells reached Hausa land from the South through Nupe. This South-North movement, he opines was heightened by an increase in the slave trade and commodities.

If cowrie shells were in use in parts of Nigeria as early as the tenth century AD as postulated, is it possible that life cowries had existed in Nigeria until an increasing demand due to their use as currency led to their extinction? If so, the situation must have been desperate, leading to the importation of cowrie shells to satisfy this demand. For now, this view is highly speculative, for there is no strong evidence to support it. However, there is evidence that the *Cypraea moneta* came from the Maldive Island in the Indian Ocean (Akpan, 1993 p. 130). However, the use of cowries as currency in Nigeria according to Èyò (1979) in Akpan, (1993 p. 130) spanned centuries. It is not clear when this usage started. What is clear is that as a result of its importation, perhaps from the sixteenth century, its value depreciated. This glut of the commodity brought about the problem of storage. Since more cowries were accumulated because of a tremendous increase in business transactions, it became necessary to create an additional storage facility.



Fig. 2: A lady at LASUED, Qtò/Ìjànikin and Àkàndá Qrò Awìkonko decorated their hairdo with cowrie shells during the 2022 Ajé-Olókun festival video (Àjàyí & Adékòyà, 2022).

Cowrie shells have been used for different purposes, for example, as currency, for body adornment, hair-do decoration, as a symbol of wealth/prosperity—Ajé-Olókun (wealth deity), for art and craft, for rituals as sacred or mystical objects and for games. Cowrie shells have elicited investigations into their place in Nigerian society. Initially, imported cowrie shells were used as a medium of exchange before the introduction of coinage. When coins replaced cowrie shells as a medium of exchange, they were put into other uses. It is the purpose

of this study to examine various functionalities of cowrie shells in Qjò-Aláwòrò town of Lagos State, Nigeria. However, Nigerian ethnic groups have vernacular names for this multi-purpose and spiritual object such as:

| Ethnic group | Cowrie shells names |
|--------------|---------------------|
| Bini Edo | Igbigho |
| Efik | Mbaba |
| Fulani | Edere |
| Hausa | Wurin |
| Ibibio | Mbara |
| Igala | Eyoku |
| Igbo | Ego Ayolo (Eze-Ego) |
| Ijo | Okobatrou |
| Nupe | Ewa |
| Urhobo | Ibigho |
| Tiv | Anyi Asoho |
| Yoruba | Owó Eyo/Ajé-Olókun |

(Akpan 1993 in Adébohwalé et al., 2013)



Fig. 4: Giant cowrie shells. Àjàyí and Adékòyà (2022)

Cowrie shells are found in the shrines of deities. Indeed, shrines have become their abode. What is the place of these shells in the shrines? Why are they used in the preparation of charms either for personal or household protection? Is there any myth surrounding cowrie shells? These questions will be addressed in this study based on functionalism and the symbolic interaction theory of culture.

Ojò-Aláwòrò Historical Brief

Ojò-Aláwòrò is an Àwòrì speaking settlement and a major ancient town in Ojò Local Government, Badagry division of Lagos State, Nigeria. It houses popular commerce centres; Ojò-Aláwòrò coconut market, Ojò-Aláwòrò modern market, Afòlábí Ègè modern market, Alábà Ràgó market, Alábà international Market, as well as the main campus of the first Lagos State University – LASU. This ancient town was founded by Aina Asheba in the early 18th century before the invasion of Lagos by Benin (Ayílárá, 2011). This Prince of defunct Bendel State now known as Edo State told his father (the then Oba of Benin) that he wanted to embark on a journey, the Oba approved the journey and then gave him ‘òpá àṣẹ’ symbol of authority (staff of office) and royal beads which were used by his father then. Also, a crown was given to him with a ‘gbèdu’ drum and a sacrificial god called ‘Òrìṣà Aláwòrò’ which the town was named after and this is evinced in every Yoruba kingdom that migrated from Benin.

When Prince Àiná Asheba embarked on the journey to Ìdó, he met Qlòfin who accepted him honourably. He spent a few days with Qlòfin before he continued his journey. Qlòfin then helped him with the canoe, paddles, and paddlers. Àiná Asheba with his wife, Ìyálájé alongside his son Ebuli, moved from Olofin’s place and instructed the paddlers to alight him where he so wished. He then cut some trees to make a small hut for himself and his family. When they got to the shore of Ojò Lagoon, he told the paddlers to stop; he walked down the bushes and was satisfied as he wished. He then cut additional trees to make a small hut for himself and his family. The hut signified the first house in Ojò-Aláwòrò town. He later ordered the paddlers to go back to Qlòfin to deliver the good news of his settlement which they did. He spent more than three weeks in the hut with his family before he saw a man coming toward his area. Ayílárá (2011), affirms that the man was just passing by as he saw smoke emitting out of the bush, meaning there are people living in that area.



Fig. 5: The shrine of Òrìṣà Aláwòrò in the shore of Ojò-Aláwòrò town (Àjàyí and Adékòyà, 2022)

Without hesitation, he went straight to the hut to get some water to drink because he was seriously thirsty. They gave him food and water to his satisfaction. Later, he was asked his whereabouts and he said from Ile-Ife to Ìlogbò-Èlégba and from Ìlogbò-Èlégba to search for greener pasture before he saw the smoke that made him to stop over. Àiná Asheba asked after his name and his occupation? He answered: Q̣ṣúngbèní, a traditional priest (Babaláwo) – herbalist. Prince Àiná Asheba then asked him to help consult the oracle whether he has reached his place of abode. Q̣ṣúngbèní did and confirmed he has reached where he (Àiná Asheba) is going but he must make a sacrifice to appease the land. Àiná Asheba asked after the sacrifice materials which were: 8 cocks (àkùkò adìḗ ṃéḗḗḗ), 8 hen (àgbéḗḗ adìḗ ṃéḗḗḗ), 8 pigeons (ḗyélé ṃéḗḗḗ), 8 snails (ìgbín ṃéḗḗḗ), 8 colanuts (obì ṃéḗḗḗ), 8 bitter colas (orógbó ṃéḗḗḗ), 8 traditional pepper (atare ṃéḗḗḗ) and 8 fishes (ḗja ṃéḗḗḗ) were to be used. Therefore, eight sacrificial materials in eight places were to be used (Ayílárá, 2011).

After the preparation of the sacrifice, Q̣ṣúngbèní told Àiná Asheba and his family to sing while carrying the sacrifice to the shore where it will be dropped. The song goes thus:

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Ìlú yìí á jò sówó, á á jò | This town will be gathered with money, it will |
| Ìlú yìí á jò ṣòba, á á jò | This town will be gathered with the king, it will |
| Ìlú yìí á jò ṣòṃo, á á jò | This town will be gathered with children, it will |
| Ìlú yìí á jò ṣòrò, á á jò | This town will be gathered with wealth, it will |

This was how they started calling the place Aláwòrò town and Àiná Asheba bàbá ḗḗḗ, till the village became Q̣jò-Aláwòrò town right from the old Ajéṛmí Local Government to the present Ojo LGA in Lagos. This is synonymous with how Èbá-Q̣dàn in Oyo State gradually metamorphosed to Ibadan till the present, in which numerous villages, towns, and communities are founded in this form or process.

Value of Cowrie Shells in Q̣jò-Aláwòrò

Based on functionalism and symbolic interactionism theory of culture, let us have an in-depth look at the relationship Q̣jò-Aláwòrò had with cowrie shells in the historical account of Ayílárá (2011). It was recorded that, Q̣jò-Aláwòrò was founded by Àiná Asheba (Bàbá Èḗḗḗ). It was also recorded that cowrie shells had been in use in the Benin kingdom before the importation started in Nigeria at the beginning of the sixteenth century by the Portuguese who obtained the commodity from the Indian Ocean.

Consequently, while Bábá Ẹ́ẹ́jọ was coming from Benin, his father gave him royal emblem and items such as Ọpá Àşẹ (staff of authority), royal beads, a crown, gbẹ̀du drum, and a sacrifice god called “Ọ̀rìşà Aláwòrò” (fig. 4) which can be found in every Yoruba Kingdom that migrated from Benin. Most of these items possessed cowrie shells on them as design and decoration. Apart from these objects, this historical background gives assurance that, while Bábá Ẹ́ẹ́jọ was coming from Benin, he must have come with cowrie shells either as currency, for religious or cultural purposes and for healing.



Fig. 6: Cowrie shells used for child teething cord for suspension of headache, temperature and stooling in Ọjọ-Aláwòrò town (Àjàyí and Adékọyà, 2022).

Cowrie shells are used as a curative teething cord for children when teething to suspend headache, stooling (ìgbẹ́ ẹ́yín) and temperature which they did not experience throughout the teething period (fig. 5) Some natural concoction was soaked with cowrie shells for some days before being tied to their waist, which the child crawled around with till toddling stage.

Because cowrie shells were used for the transaction in the then Lagos in 1870, 2,560 tons of cowries were imported to Nigeria through Lagos, definitely, it would have migrated to Ọjọ-Aláwòrò town. Ẹ́yọ (1979) in Akpan (1993 p. 130). Since the colonial administration collected their taxes on farmlands, herds of cattle, dye pits, trade and almost all aspects of human life in cowrie shell, there is a tendency that such was applicable to Ọjọ-Aláwòrò town of Lagos State, Nigeria for economic development. In essence, cowrie shells are encompassing, the figure below depicts it.

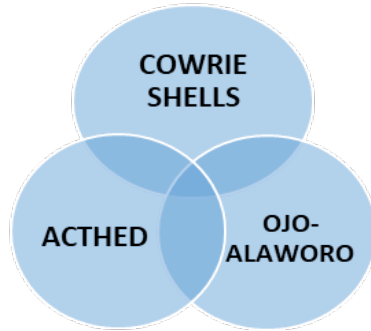


Fig. 7: Diagram showing the encompassing nature of cowrie shells in Ojò-Aláwòrò town, Lagos State, Nigeria. Àjàyí and Adékòyà (2022).

Apart from business transactions, cowrie shells were used to make special payments like bride price, divination fee (owó iyẹ́fáwò), funeral ceremony, naming ceremony, family contribution (owó ẹbí), and initiation into secret societies like Ògbóni, Egúngún cult, Oro cult and host of others (Ayilara, 2011). Above all, cowrie shells in Ojò-Aláwòrò were and still used for decoration on clothing and costumes like war jackets or atire (aṣọ ògùn), hunter's jacket (gbérí ọḍẹ), masquerade regalia (ẹ́kú), drums like bẹ̀n̄b̄ẹ̀, bàtá, gángan (talking drum), gbẹ̀du (royal drum), ẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀ (gourd-maracas), royal dining table, necklaces, ritual masks, furniture, architecture, games and computations, shrines, Ifá divination, Ifá board or tray, among others.



Fig. 8: Cowrie shells used for costume, mystical symbol (àrokò) which depicts Èjì Ogbè (Ifá pedigree) and a cultural dancer in costume decorated with cowries. Cultural room, Department of Yorùbá language, Lagos State University of Educa-

tion, Oṣṣ/Ìjànìkìn Lagos, Nìgeria, and annual Conference at University of Jos, Àjàyí and Adékòyà (2022).

The above regalia/costume decorated with cowrie shells serves a dual-mode; is either used for protection by hunters, or warriors and cultural display with or without spiritual implication. The mystical symbol (àrokò) with Èjì Ogbè (Ifá pedigree) is also used for protection, prosperity and healing as claimed by the participants when the necessity arises in Ojò-Aláwòrò town, but participants of this study did not avail them to the researchers, and a cultural dancer decorated in cowrie shells costume.



Fig. 9: Diagram showing the importance of cowrie shells in Ojò-Aláwòrò town at a glance. Àjàyí and Adékòyà, (2022)

Challenges of Cowrie Shells

Cowrie shells has some challenges that minimize their uses in our society, these include:

- Cowrie shells seen as evil and fetish, with onset of Christian missionary activities
- It is termed to be primitive, archaic and old fashion.
- Cowrie shells were replaced by coins and note currency as a medium of exchange.
- Cowries were stopped from circulation by the colonial government.
- The problem of storage and delivery value of cowrie shells contributed to its replacement as a medium of exchange.

- Cowrie shells are not native to Nigeria water; they found their way into Nigerian society through North Africa and Western Sudan of the trans-Saharan trade which started as far back as 3000-2000 BC.
- The dominance of Western culture/civilization devalues cowrie shells.
- The introduction of a new religion (Christianity and Islam) also contributed to its phase-out.

Research Methodology

This study aims to appraise the utilities/significant values of cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ) in Ọjọ-Aláwòrò town of Lagos State, Nigeria as a case study. A case study is an optimal in-depth description of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014) which provides rich data for a good, rich, and deeper understanding of the phenomenon (cowrie shell) under investigation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

It employs a qualitative research design (QRD), data were collected from a smaller group of five participants through semi-structured interviews (SSI) for about fifteen minutes each cum observation within Ọjọ-Aláwòrò town. These data were audio-recorded and transcribed. The participants were indigenous elders (three males and two females) ages 70 to 85 years due to their wealth of experiences in art, culture, tradition, heritage and economic development (ACTHED). The main SSI questions and responses were analysed and discussed below.

Findings and Discussion

The functionalism and symbolic interactionism theories of culture form the root of discussion based on their school of thought. The findings were based on the main research question: What significant roles do cowrie shell (owó ẹyọ) plays in Ọjọ-Aláwòrò town of Lagos State, Nigeria?

Participant 1: You see, traditionally in Ọjọ-Aláwòrò here, especially this our Ikemo Quarters; there is nothing we do that cowrie shells are not inclusive. Our great-great-great-grandfather (Àiná Asheba) even founded this town with some emmm cowrie shells and spent it as money. Like during egúngún festival, other deities' festivals, and some em, emm royal and traditional sacred rites, we used these cowries either for protection, prosperity, or magical powers. My son, I cannot deceive you, owo eyo has many spiritual values and implications that I cannot disclose all to you people.

The response above is a confirmation of Malinowski's functionalism theory of culture (FTC) in Lumen (2022). FTC believe that society is a system where all parts work—or function—or are efficient together to create a conducive, noble,

and holistic society. Likewise, the symbolic interactionism theory of culture (SITC), believes in face-to-face interactions/relationships between members of the society (Qjọ-Aláwòrò) and how individuals interpret or project each other's action/activities. Hence, all the usefulness of cowrie shells in Qjọ-Aláwòrò is justified by one action or the other.

How do cowrie shells sustain their existence in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town?

Participant 2: Well, I can't say much about this question deeply. All I know is that emm cowrie shells were met on earth and we are using them for various purposes as desired, only God who created them knows where they came from. But emm our forefathers said they are from the river (lagoon), some said they were dug from the ground while some people claimed they were gotten from the sea. Well, whichever is correct, all I know is that from the historical account of Qjọ-Aláwòrò, Prince Àiná Asheba who founded this town came with plenty of cowrie shells which he spent as money then. I think that was how cowrie shell got to Qjọ-Aláwòrò and we are still making use of them to present for different purposes.

The response above shows that cowrie shells sustained their existence due to human utility for different functions in daily activities. This means that the indigenes of Qjọ-Aláwòrò usually have contact with cowrie shells, they interact with it either, on daily basis or occasionally for one purpose or the other. In this view, both functionalism and symbolic interactionism theories of culture are in consonance with cowrie shells' utility in the society (Qjọ-Aláwòrò) because it's a part of the culture on its own.

To what extent do cowrie shells (owó ẹyọ) influence the developmental stages of Qjọ-Aláwòrò town?

Participant 3: Hmm, initially cowries were spent as money before its abolition. Despite this, we still use it for other things. As a woman, we used it for art and cultural display during the festival; even for decoration of our hair-do. But emm, civilisation has made the original cowrie a bit scarce, but we now have it in plastic and different colour which we make use of. You know, we women are fashion conscious, as development takes place, we saw dynamic production of synthetic cowrie shells for hair-do, ear-ring, anklet, wrist band, even emm as a ring, which are good development. Therefore, it cannot be stopped in our society.

In fact, it is highly obvious that development or civilisation influences cowrie

shells in another dimension which is justifiable in the symbolic interactionism theory of culture (SITC). Cowrie shells as symbolic object wear the same meaning in a new action as individual wishes to interpret or project it. Virtually, most youths in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town especially the females want to use synthetic cowrie shells to decorate their hair-do and wrist. Thus, the demand for using synthetic cowries for fashion and hair-do by women is on the high side. So we observe that this demand even boosts the economic development of Qjọ-Aláwòrò town in the sense that more hair-do centres (salons) and fashion homes spring up to make money and interact with each other.

Of what effects are the digital technology age on the utilisation of cowrie shells (owò ẹyọ) and⁴¹⁰ the value of ACTHED in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town?

Participant 4: To the best of my knowledge, digital technology has greatly influenced human civilisation and survival in all-around efficiency of human endeavour which, cowrie shells are not left out. In the past, there were no colourful and synthetic cowrie shells but today with the help of digital technology, we now have them in abundance with different colours. As a result of this, it⁴¹⁵ is now easier for us women, even men too, to get and use cowrie shells for fashion, decoration and any other thing we can think of, thereby, promoting ACTHED directly or indirectly.

The indication of the above response shows that digital technology has greatly influenced the use of cowrie shells in Qjọ-Aláwòrò society for fashion, decoration and other purposes. This justifies its functionality according to FTC. This influence is highly evinced in Qjọ-Aláwòrò to the extent that women (young and old) use it for fashion, decoration and other purposes, though men too do but not as that women. The study finds out that with the production of these synthetic cowrie shells and its usage by Qjọ-Aláwòrò society, ACTHED is highly promoted.

What is the impact of the new religion on cowrie shells in Qjọ-Aláwòrò town of Lagos State, Nigeria?

Participant 5: Well, it is glaring that Christianity and Islamic religion did not support the use of cowrie shells for anything. Hmm, both religions believe and tag it to be fetish, evil and crude. Well, well, well, I will say this causes limitation to the use at will, but people are still using it because it is part of us, it is our arts, culture, emmm heritage, and tradition as a Yoruba man, so we cannot shy away from it, no matter what happens. We met cowrie shells on earth, we will use them and leave them on earth, thank you.

The response of the above participant shows that cowrie shells are ancient cultural objects that have been in use before the arrival of a foreign religion. Therefore, Western or Eastern religions cannot sweep away or eradicate their usage totally, because members of the new religions still make use of it according to their cultural heritage and activities when the need arises. Thus cowrie shells still function well in Ojò-Aláwòrò town of Lagos State, Nigeria and Africa at large.

The study finds out that all the participants' responses were similar, but were just saying the same thing in different ways. Their responses indicate the great functions and roles cowries shells had played and still playing in Ojò-Aláwòrò town and Nigerian society at large in different sphere of life (see figure 9), which is the basis of this study. The study also finds out that digital technology has made synthetic cowrie shells surplus in different colours and sizes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In Ojò-Aláwòrò town of Lagos State specifically and Nigeria at large, cowrie shells have been seen and shown to have a dominant influence on our culture and economy as they have been put into various uses. But it is tremendously obvious that cowrie shells are gradually facing off completely despite the significance and roles it plays in our society. Initially, it was used as a medium of exchange. Later, when the cowries were replaced with other forms of legal tender, including coins and paper currency, they were converted to other uses like body adornment, beautification of attire, costumes, regalia, hair-do, headgear and belts. They are also used as mystical and ritual objects.

Presently, due to Western culture, civilization and technological age, natural cowrie shells are fast losing ground to coral beads and other synthesised materials for decoration. The same process is also in motion as regards mystical and ritual matter, except that cultural ambivalence which Western influence has introduced to the Nigerian society, has tended to deliberately slow in attacking superstition. Above all, cowrie shells are still in use thereby dominating some spheres of life in Ojò-Aláwòrò town till the present. These areas include traditional religion, socio-cultural, ritual/sacrificial proceedings and execution, royal and general fashion, masquerade regalia, curative measure and divination. Therefore, due to the un-neglecting value of cowrie shells revealed in this study, it is recommended that:

- Cowrie shells should not be abandoned totally; it should be given prior recognition, through their usefulness being made known to the world.
- Natural cowrie shells should be given a new meaning and definition, through a

new use, for example in fashion, entertainment, and education. This will help to foster its value more.

- Cowrie shells should serve as a symbol of identity through their creative use.
- The image of cowrie shells had somehow been painted black, it is now seen as objects associated with evil and spiritual use only. This erroneous belief must be changed and rebranded so that people's minds will be renewed and acquainted with positive thoughts and values. This can be achieved by making sure that cowrie shells are not only used by a herbalist or African Traditional Religion people.
- All tiers of government through the traditional heads (kings and chiefs) and tertiary institutions should introduce and implement a fascinating and vibrant yearly carnival and art exhibition tagged "Cowrie shells our heritage" where people converge to celebrate the values of cowrie shells according to individual's creative potentialities and tendencies.

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