

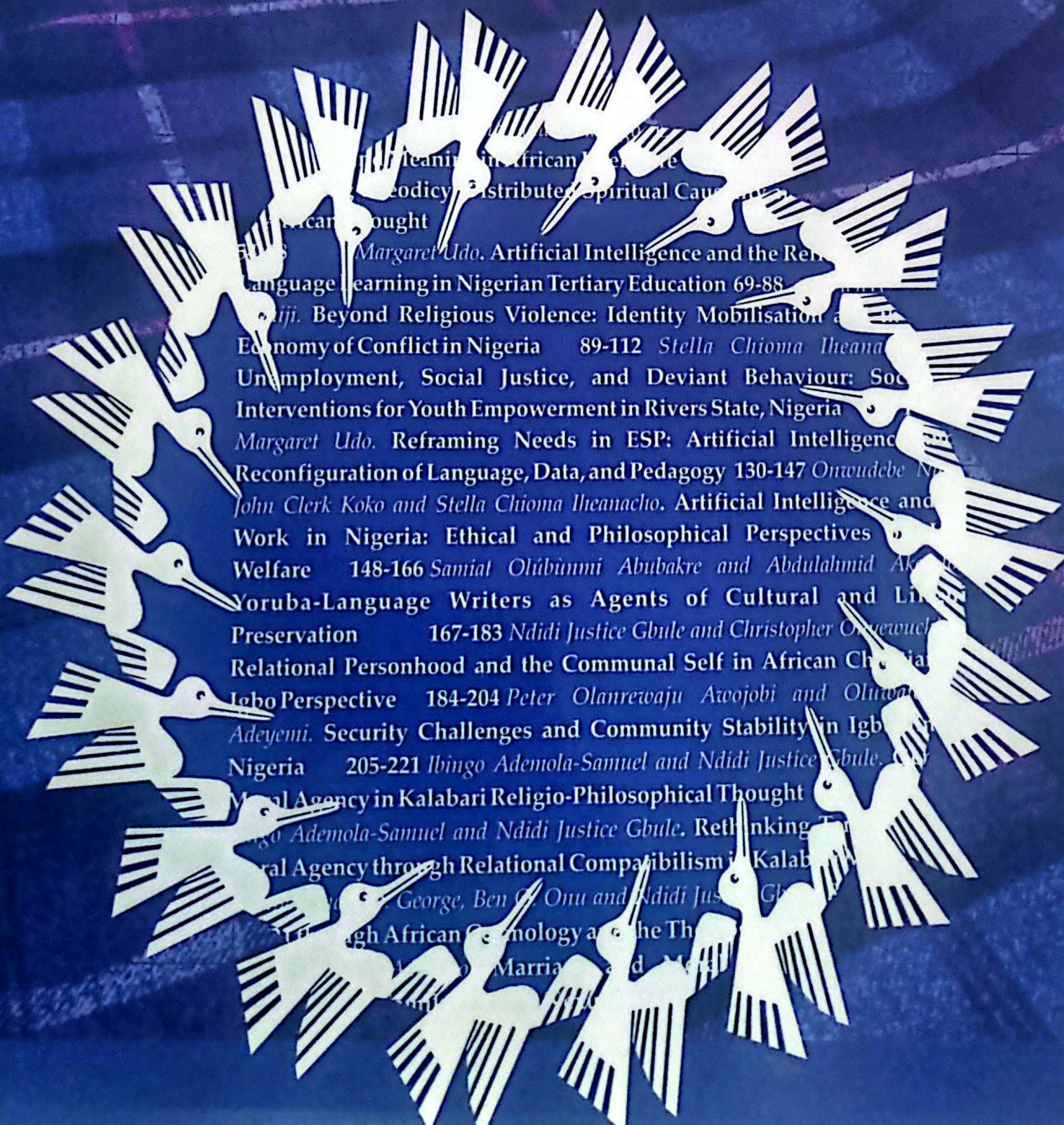
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Editor's Note

This thirtieth volume of *Kiabara* is a sequel to our special issue honouring a distinguished Professor of History and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Port Harcourt -Professor SJS Cookey.. The fourteen essays gathered here do not merely reflect contemporary humanistic concerns; they refract them—bending, scattering, and redirecting light across unexpected terrains. The Humanities today operate under shifting conditions: between analogue and digital, indigenous epistemology and algorithmic reason, the communal self and the autonomous individual. These essays register those transitions with remarkable acuity.

Karibo and Opara's "Faith in Action" examines Nigerian Pentecostal churches as agents of community development, tracing how prosperity gospel coexists with schools, health outreaches, and microfinance—generating solidarity even as it risks reinforcing inequality. Eluke's "Rethinking Theodicy" decolonises the problem of evil: where Western philosophy agonises over divine justice, African thought distributes causality across spirits, ancestors, and humans, making evil a negotiable, relational condition rather than a logical contradiction. Wala and Brown's "Refracted Modernities" traces African literature's turn toward interiority, memory, and digital performance, showing that new themes reshape how knowledge and identity are constructed.

Two essays by Udo confront AI as a refractive pedagogical agent. In language

learning, AI offers personalisation but risks standardising expression and marginalising local identities. In English for Specific Purposes, AI produces learner needs algorithmically rather than merely revealing them, demanding a layered hybrid model of analysis. Onwudebe, Koko, and Iheanacho extend this to social work, arguing through Ubuntu that AI must strengthen human agency and relational ethics, not exacerbate inequality.

Bamiji's "Beyond Religious Violence" demonstrates that religion and ethnicity are mobilising identities, not autonomous causes of conflict—political elites instrumentalise them within contexts of uneven development and institutional fragility. Iheanacho examines Rivers State's paradox: oil wealth alongside mass youth unemployment, pushing young people toward deviance. Social work interventions offer pathways for empowerment. Awojobi and Adeyemi shift to Igbomina land, documenting kidnapping and armed robbery in rural communities, arguing for community-based security responses.

Abubakre and Joláosù show how Yoruba-language writers—from Fágúnwà to contemporary authors—function as agents of cultural preservation, sustaining collective memory and ethical values through indigenous literature as a living, adaptive practice.

Gbule and Opara examine how Igbo relational personhood shapes Christian practice: faith embedded in social and moral networks, not reduced to individual belief. Ademola-Samuel and Gbule revisit Kalabari concepts of *teme* (destiny) and

moral agency through relational compatibilism, dissolving binaries between determinism and freedom. Their companion piece on gender shows that in Kalabari thought, gender is an ontological position carrying ethical significance, and moral agency is relational and cosmologically accountable. George, Onu, and Gbule reread John 6:16–21 through African cosmology and the theology of human vulnerability, bridging canonical text and contemporary precarity.

What holds this collection together is refraction as method: each phenomenon—Pentecostal development, AI pedagogy, ethno-religious violence, Kalabari metaphysics—is examined as light passing through multiple media, revealing

hidden structures. This method honours the distinguished Professor of History to whom our previous edition was dedicated, for he understood that humanistic inquiry transforms how we see, bending received categories and illuminating what lay in shadow.

Despite infrastructural deficits and the pressures on Nigerian universities, these fourteen essays testify to intellectual vitality. They invite engagement, disagreement, and extension—for the Humanities advance not through consensus but through rigorous, respectful debate.

Etiido Effiongwilliam
Editor

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Yoruba-Language Writers as Agents of Cultural and Linguistic Preservation

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Abstract

Across many African societies, indigenous languages increasingly face pressures from globalisation, urbanisation, and the dominance of colonial languages in education, media, and literary production. Yet language remains one of the most enduring carriers of cultural memory, ethical values, and communal identity. Within this context, Yoruba-language literary production assumes renewed significance as a site where cultural knowledge and linguistic forms are actively sustained. This article examines how Yoruba-language writers function as agents of cultural and linguistic preservation through their literary works. Focusing on the writings of Daniel Olorunfemi Fágúnwà, Akinwumi Ògúnníran, and Razaq Malik, the study analyses how narrative strategies, proverbs, oral traditions, indigeneous vocabulary, and symbolic motifs are embedded within Yoruba-language texts. The article adopts a qualitative textual approach and draws on insights from postcolonial language debates and cultural memory scholarship to interpret the selected works. Through this analytical framework, the study demonstrates that Yoruba-language literature does more than narrate stories; it serves as a repository of collective memory and a medium for transmitting ethical norms, cosmological ideas, and social values. The findings show that Yoruba-language writers consciously

employ linguistic and narrative strategies that sustain cultural continuity while also responding to contemporary social realities. Classical narrative forms rooted in oral tradition coexist with modern literary experimentation and emerging digital platforms. These adaptive strategies ensure that Yorùbá cultural knowledge remains accessible across generations and communicative contexts. The article therefore argues that Yorùbá-language writers occupy a critical position in safeguarding linguistic heritage and cultural memory, demonstrating that indigenous-language literature remains a vital medium for sustaining African intellectual and cultural traditions.

Keywords: Yorùbá-language literature; linguistic preservation; cultural memory; indigenous knowledge; African literature; language politics; Yorùbá oral tradition.

Introduction

Across many parts of Africa, indigenous languages increasingly face pressures that arise from globalisation, formal education systems, and the continuing dominance of colonial languages in literary and intellectual production. Within this changing linguistic landscape, African writers confront a persistent question: what happens to cultural memory when the language through which a society understands itself gradually loses literary visibility? The question has generated sustained debate in African literary studies, particularly regarding the relationship between language choice, cultural identity, and literary expression. While some scholars argue that the use of widely spoken languages allows African writers to participate in global literary conversations, others insist that indigenous languages remain central to the preservation of cultural knowledge and intellectual traditions (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986, pp. 4-6). The tension between these positions forms an important backdrop for examining the place of Yoruba-language literature within

contemporary African literary scholarship.

In the Nigerian context, these debates acquire particular urgency. Nigeria is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, yet literary production remains heavily dominated by English. English functions as the primary language of education, governance, and international communication, and it also shapes the visibility of Nigerian literature in global literary markets. While this situation has enabled Nigerian writers to reach broad audiences, it has also generated concerns about the gradual marginalisation of indigenous languages within intellectual and literary discourse. Scholars have therefore questioned whether the predominance of English in African literature inadvertently weakens the cultural and philosophical resources embedded within indigenous linguistic traditions (Irele, 2001, p. 90). These concerns are particularly relevant for the Yorùbá language, which possesses a rich oral and literary heritage that continues to shape cultural identity across

southwestern Nigeria and the wider Yorùbá diaspora.

Yorùbá literary traditions long predate the emergence of written literature in the language. For centuries, cultural knowledge circulated primarily through oral forms such as folktales, praise poetry, proverbs, myths, and ritual narratives. These oral genres served as important instruments for transmitting moral values, communal history, and cosmological beliefs. Scholars of African oral literature have therefore emphasised that storytelling functions not simply as entertainment but as a system through which societies preserve and communicate knowledge across generations (Finnegan, 2012, pp. 11–13). Within Yorùbá society in particular, proverbs and oral narratives occupy a central role in everyday communication. They condense philosophical insights and ethical guidance into memorable linguistic forms that shape communal reasoning and social conduct. The cultural authority of such forms demonstrates the extent to which language itself operates as a repository of social memory and intellectual tradition.

The emergence of Yorùbá-language written literature in the twentieth century did not replace these oral traditions but rather extended them into new literary forms. Early Yorùbá-language writers drew heavily on the narrative structures and symbolic resources of oral storytelling, thereby preserving key elements of Yorùbá expressive culture within written texts. Scholars have observed that Yorùbá literary narratives frequently reproduce the stylistic features of oral discourse, including the strategic

use of proverbs, narrative repetition, and symbolic allegory (Barber, 2007, pp. 76–79). These literary strategies allow written texts to maintain a close relationship with oral traditions, ensuring that the cultural knowledge embedded within those traditions continues to circulate within new textual environments.

Despite the acknowledged richness of Yorùbá literary traditions, scholarship on Yorùbá literature has often concentrated on aesthetic analysis, narrative themes, or the historical development of African literature more broadly. While such studies have produced valuable insights, they do not always foreground the deliberate linguistic strategies through which Yorùbá-language writers sustain cultural memory and linguistic continuity. In many discussions, the Yorùbá language itself appears primarily as the medium of literary expression rather than as an object of analytical inquiry. Yet language choice in literature is rarely neutral. When writers choose to compose in an indigenous language rather than a colonial one, they engage in a complex cultural act that carries implications for identity, knowledge transmission, and intellectual autonomy.

This issue becomes particularly significant within the broader debates surrounding language and postcolonial identity. Critics of linguistic colonialism have argued that the dominance of European languages in African literary production risks distancing literature from the cultural experiences and intellectual traditions embedded in indigenous languages. Writing in African languages, therefore, becomes an important means of reclaiming cultural agency and affirming

the intellectual legitimacy of indigenous linguistic traditions (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986, pp. 14–16). At the same time, scholars caution against romanticising indigenous languages without examining the practical and historical conditions that shape literary production. These debates illustrate the complexity of language politics within African literature and highlight the need for closer attention to the cultural functions of indigenous-language writing.

Within Yorùbá literary studies, the works of writers such as Daniel Olorunfemi Fágúnwà, Akínwùmí Ìṣolá, and more recent Yorùbá-language authors demonstrate the continued vitality of literary production in the Yorùbá language. Their narratives frequently incorporate oral storytelling techniques, proverbs, mythic symbolism, and culturally specific vocabulary. These elements do more than enrich the literary texture of the texts; they also function as mechanisms for preserving cultural knowledge. Through narrative structure and linguistic choice, Yorùbá-language writers sustain ethical ideas, cosmological beliefs, and patterns of communal reasoning that might otherwise fade within a rapidly changing linguistic environment.

Nevertheless, the precise role of Yorùbá-language writers as agents of linguistic and cultural preservation has not always received sustained analytical attention. While scholars recognise that Yorùbá literature reflects cultural traditions, fewer studies examine how writers deliberately embed linguistic and narrative strategies that preserve cultural memory across generations. In other

words, the mechanisms through which Yorùbá-language literature operates as a cultural archive remain underexplored within existing scholarship. This gap raises an important set of questions: How do Yorùbá-language writers preserve indigenous linguistic forms within literary production? What narrative strategies allow literary texts to sustain cultural memory? And in what ways does Yorùbá-language literature function as a repository of cultural knowledge?

This article addresses these questions by examining how selected Yorùbá-language writers employ literary strategies that preserve both language and cultural memory. Focusing on representative texts from different historical moments, the study analyses how proverbs, oral narrative structures, symbolic motifs, and indigenous vocabulary operate within Yorùbá-language literature. These elements reveal that Yorùbá-language writing performs more than aesthetic functions; it also sustains intellectual traditions embedded within the language itself.

The central argument of this study is that Yorùbá-language writers act as agents of cultural and linguistic preservation. By deliberately composing in Yorùbá and integrating the expressive resources of oral tradition, these writers transform literary texts into sites where cultural memory is maintained and transmitted. Their works illustrate that indigenous-language literature remains a vital medium through which societies preserve linguistic heritage, ethical values, and cultural identity within changing historical circumstances.

Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with Yorùbá literature has developed across several intersecting fields, including oral tradition studies, African literary criticism, language politics, and cultural memory research. Within these discussions, a persistent concern centres on the relationship between language, literary expression, and the transmission of cultural knowledge. While Yorùbá literature has been widely studied for its aesthetic richness and narrative complexity, the specific role of Yorùbá-language writing in sustaining linguistic and cultural continuity continues to generate scholarly debate. This review therefore interrogates existing scholarship in order to situate the present study within broader discussions on oral tradition, language politics, and literary preservation.

Early scholarship on African literature emphasised the foundational role of oral tradition in shaping literary expression across the continent. Oral narratives, myths, praise poetry, and proverbs function not merely as artistic forms but as repositories of collective knowledge and communal philosophy. Studies of African oral literature demonstrate that storytelling often performs multiple functions within society, including moral instruction, historical preservation, and social regulation. In this sense, oral literature operates as a cultural archive through which societies transmit ethical values and collective memory across generations. Scholars have therefore argued that African literary traditions cannot be

adequately understood without recognising the central role of oral performance and narrative transmission within indigenous cultures (Finnegan, 2012, pp. 9–12). The performative context of oral storytelling further emphasises the interactive relationship between narrator, audience, and cultural knowledge, reinforcing the idea that literature functions as a living social practice rather than a static textual form.

Within this broader intellectual framework, scholars of Yorùbá literature have paid particular attention to the linguistic and aesthetic features of Yorùbá oral traditions. Yorùbá oral poetry and narrative discourse display remarkable linguistic sophistication, relying heavily on metaphor, tonal variation, symbolic imagery, and rhythmic structures. Proverbs in particular occupy a central place within Yorùbá communicative culture. They function as condensed expressions of communal wisdom, often invoked to clarify moral dilemmas or reinforce social expectations. As one scholar observes, proverbs represent “compressed narratives of experience through which cultural values and philosophical insights are transmitted in everyday discourse” (Ọlátúnjí, 1984, p. 56). The linguistic density of such expressions reflects a broader cultural orientation in which language serves not merely as a communicative tool but as a medium through which collective knowledge and moral reasoning are articulated.

The relationship between oral tradition and written literature has also attracted sustained scholarly attention. Some scholars maintain that written

literature in African languages should be understood as a continuation of oral traditions in a new textual form. According to this perspective, many African writers consciously reproduce the narrative structures, rhythmic patterns, and symbolic motifs of oral storytelling within written texts. This continuity allows written literature to retain the cultural authenticity and performative qualities associated with oral narratives. Studies of Yorùbá literary production frequently point to the deliberate incorporation of oral elements such as proverbs, mythic imagery, and narrative repetition within literary texts. These elements serve as cultural markers that connect written literature to the broader intellectual traditions of Yorùbá society (Barber, 2007, pp. 74–78).

Other scholars, however, emphasise the transformations that occur when oral forms are translated into written literary structures. While acknowledging the importance of oral traditions, they argue that literary authors inevitably reshape these materials in response to new audiences, narrative conventions, and historical circumstances. The shift from oral performance to written text therefore involves processes of adaptation and reinterpretation. Written literature does not merely reproduce oral traditions but reconfigures them within new literary frameworks. This perspective highlights the creative agency of writers who selectively adapt oral forms in order to address contemporary social realities while maintaining links to cultural heritage (Okpewho, 1992, pp. 36–40).

Yorùbá literary scholarship has also examined the complex relationship

between language and cultural identity. Language plays a critical role in shaping cultural consciousness because it carries historical memory, moral vocabulary, and patterns of communal reasoning. Indigenous languages often encode culturally specific meanings that cannot be easily translated into other linguistic systems. Scholars therefore argue that literary production in indigenous languages enables writers to preserve linguistic nuances and cultural references that might otherwise be lost in translation. Writing in Yorùbá allows authors to draw directly on the idioms, tonal structures, and symbolic associations embedded within the language itself. As one critic notes, language operates as “a primary repository of cultural knowledge and social philosophy within African societies” (Irele, 2001, p. 88). In this sense, the use of Yorùbá in literary production becomes a crucial medium for sustaining cultural continuity.

Debates about language choice in African literature have further intensified this discussion. The widespread use of colonial languages such as English and French in African literary production has generated significant intellectual debate. Some scholars argue that colonial languages provide African writers with access to wider audiences and global literary networks. From this perspective, writing in English may facilitate international dialogue and intellectual exchange. Others, however, challenge this position by highlighting the cultural implications of linguistic displacement. When literary production shifts predominantly to colonial languages, indigenous linguistic traditions risk

marginalisation within their own cultural environments. Critics of this trend therefore argue that the continued use of African languages in literary production represents an important form of cultural resistance and intellectual self-definition. Writing in indigenous languages affirms the legitimacy of African linguistic traditions as vehicles for complex literary expression and philosophical reflection (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986, pp. 16–19).

In addition to language debates, scholars have explored the role of literature as a medium of cultural memory. Cultural memory refers to the ways in which societies preserve and transmit shared experiences, historical narratives, and symbolic meanings across generations. Literary texts often function as repositories of such memory because they encode social values, cosmological ideas, and moral frameworks within narrative structures. Through storytelling, communities are able to preserve historical consciousness while simultaneously interpreting present realities. Cultural memory theory therefore highlights the capacity of literature to sustain collective identity through the preservation of symbolic narratives and cultural references (Assmann, 1995, p. 129).

Within Yorùbá literary traditions, cultural memory is frequently embedded in narrative motifs, mythic archetypes, and symbolic expressions drawn from oral heritage. Yorùbá literary texts often incorporate references to cosmology, moral philosophy, and communal ethics through the strategic use of proverbs and narrative allegory. These symbolic elements serve as cultural signposts that

guide readers toward shared understandings of morality, social responsibility, and communal identity. By embedding such cultural codes within literary narratives, writers transform literature into an archive of cultural knowledge that preserves the intellectual heritage of Yorùbá society.

Despite the richness of these scholarly discussions, an important analytical gap remains. Many studies of Yorùbá literature focus primarily on literary aesthetics, narrative themes, or historical developments within African literature. While these contributions are valuable, they do not always foreground the deliberate linguistic strategies through which Yorùbá-language writers sustain cultural memory and linguistic continuity. The specific mechanisms through which indigenous vocabulary, narrative patterns, and oral expressions operate as tools of preservation have not always received sustained analytical attention.

The present study addresses this gap by examining how selected Yorùbá-language writers consciously employ linguistic and narrative strategies to preserve cultural memory. By analysing literary texts across different historical contexts, the study highlights the ways in which writers integrate proverbs, oral narrative structures, and culturally specific vocabulary into their works. These elements function not merely as stylistic embellishments but as deliberate mechanisms through which linguistic heritage and cultural knowledge are transmitted across generations.

In this sense, Yorùbá-language literature may be understood as more than

a field of artistic expression. It represents a dynamic intellectual space in which language, culture, and memory intersect. Writers who choose to compose in Yorùbá participate in a broader cultural project aimed at sustaining linguistic vitality and preserving the ethical and philosophical traditions embedded within the language. Their literary works therefore serve both aesthetic and cultural purposes, demonstrating that indigenous-language literature continues to play a crucial role in safeguarding cultural identity within contemporary African societies.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives: Postcolonial Language Theory and Cultural Memory Theory. These frameworks provide the conceptual tools for examining how Yorùbá-language writers employ literary strategies to sustain linguistic heritage and cultural knowledge. While the first explains the political and intellectual significance of language choice in African literary production, the second clarifies how literature functions as a medium through which societies preserve and transmit collective memory. Together, these perspectives illuminate the cultural work performed by Yorùbá-language literature within contemporary African literary contexts.

Postcolonial Language Theory

Postcolonial language debates have long shaped discussions about African literary production. Central to these debates is the question of which language African writers should employ in their literary works and what implications such choices

have for cultural identity and intellectual autonomy. Some scholars argue that colonial languages such as English and French enable African writers to communicate with broader audiences and participate in global literary conversations. However, others maintain that the continued dominance of colonial languages risks marginalising indigenous linguistic traditions and the cultural knowledge embedded within them. This tension forms a central concern within postcolonial literary theory.

Critics of linguistic colonialism emphasise that language is not simply a neutral medium of expression. Rather, it carries historical experiences, cultural values, and patterns of thought that shape how societies interpret reality. When colonial languages become dominant within literary and intellectual production, indigenous linguistic systems may gradually lose their authority as vehicles for cultural knowledge. Scholars have therefore argued that the choice to write in African languages represents an important act of cultural affirmation and intellectual independence (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986, pp. 4–6). Writing in indigenous languages allows authors to preserve linguistic structures, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references that may not easily translate into colonial languages.

Within African literary scholarship, this argument has generated extensive debate. Some scholars caution that the realities of modern publishing, education, and readership complicate the exclusive use of indigenous languages. Nevertheless, even within these debates, many critics recognise that indigenous-

language literature plays a vital role in sustaining cultural knowledge and linguistic heritage. The use of African languages in literary production affirms the intellectual legitimacy of those languages as vehicles for complex literary expression and philosophical reflection (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, pp. 37–39).

In the context of Yorùbá literary production, postcolonial language theory highlights the significance of writing directly in the Yorùbá language rather than translating cultural experiences into English. Yorùbá contains tonal structures, idiomatic expressions, and symbolic meanings that are deeply embedded within the cultural environment of the language community. When writers compose in Yorùbá, they are able to draw on these linguistic resources to convey cultural concepts with greater precision. Proverbs, ritual expressions, and culturally specific vocabulary retain their full semantic range within the language itself. As a result, the use of Yorùbá in literary texts enables writers to sustain cultural meanings that might otherwise become diluted within translation.

From this theoretical perspective, Yorùbá-language literature can be understood as part of a broader cultural project aimed at preserving linguistic identity within a postcolonial environment where colonial languages remain dominant. Writers who choose to compose in Yorùbá therefore participate in a form of cultural resistance that affirms the continued vitality of indigenous languages within intellectual discourse. Their literary works demonstrate that African languages remain capable of

expressing sophisticated narratives, ethical reflection, and philosophical insight.

Cultural Memory Theory

While postcolonial language theory explains the political and linguistic significance of indigenous-language writing, Cultural Memory Theory helps clarify how literature functions as a repository of collective experience. Cultural memory refers to the ways in which societies preserve and transmit shared knowledge, historical narratives, and symbolic meanings across generations. Unlike individual memory, which resides within personal experience, cultural memory is embedded within cultural institutions, rituals, narratives, and symbolic forms that sustain collective identity.

Scholars of cultural memory argue that literature plays a crucial role in preserving such collective knowledge. Through narrative structures, symbolic imagery, and linguistic expression, literary texts encode cultural values and historical consciousness. In this way, literature becomes a medium through which societies maintain continuity with their past while interpreting present realities. Cultural memory therefore functions as a mechanism through which communities transmit moral frameworks, social norms, and historical awareness across time (Assmann, 1995, p. 129).

Within African societies, oral traditions have historically performed many of these memory-preserving functions. Folktales, praise poetry, proverbs, and ritual narratives often serve

as repositories of communal knowledge. These forms encode moral instruction, cosmological beliefs, and historical experiences in ways that are easily transmitted within everyday communication. Scholars of African oral literature has therefore emphasised that storytelling operates as a form of cultural storage through which societies preserve their intellectual heritage (Finnegan, 2012, pp. 11–13).

When such oral traditions are incorporated into written literature, they extend the life of cultural memory within new textual forms. Writers who integrate proverbs, myths, symbolic motifs, and narrative patterns drawn from oral traditions effectively transform literary texts into archives of cultural knowledge. The written text thus becomes a medium through which cultural memory is preserved and circulated beyond the immediate context of oral performance.

In the case of Yorùbá-language literature, cultural memory is embedded in the narrative structures, symbolic imagery, and linguistic expressions that appear within literary texts. Proverbs, allegorical narratives, and mythic motifs carry cultural meanings that resonate deeply within the Yorùbá cultural environment. By incorporating these elements into their works, Yorùbá-language writers ensure that traditional knowledge systems continue to circulate within contemporary literary discourse.

Cultural Memory Theory therefore provides a useful framework for understanding how Yorùbá-language literature functions as a repository of cultural knowledge. Literary texts do not

simply recount stories; they also preserve the ethical philosophies, cosmological ideas, and social values embedded within the language itself. Through narrative representation and linguistic expression, Yorùbá-language writers participate in the ongoing process of transmitting cultural memory across generations.

Taken together, Postcolonial Language Theory and Cultural Memory Theory provide a comprehensive framework for analysing Yorùbá-language literary production. The first highlights the cultural and political significance of writing in indigenous languages within a postcolonial environment dominated by colonial linguistic systems. The second explains how literary narratives function as vehicles for preserving collective memory and cultural knowledge.

When applied to Yorùbá-language literature, these frameworks reveal that writers perform a dual cultural function. On the one hand, their choice of language affirms the intellectual legitimacy and cultural vitality of Yorùbá within contemporary literary discourse. On the other hand, their narrative strategies embed proverbs, symbolic motifs, and oral storytelling structures that sustain cultural memory across generations.

This study therefore employs these theoretical perspectives to interpret how selected Yorùbá-language writers integrate linguistic resources and narrative forms drawn from oral tradition in order to preserve cultural identity and linguistic heritage. By examining these literary strategies, the study demonstrates that Yorùbá-language literature functions

not only as artistic expression but also as an important mechanism for sustaining cultural continuity within changing social and linguistic contexts.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis approach to examine how Yorùbá-language writers employ literary strategies to preserve linguistic heritage and cultural memory. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable because it allows for detailed, nuanced engagement with the texts, focusing on meaning, form, and cultural context rather than numerical quantification. The study aims to explore the deliberate choices made by writers in integrating linguistic and narrative resources, revealing how literature functions as a vehicle for cultural preservation across different historical and social contexts.

The selection of texts was guided by criteria designed to ensure both linguistic richness and cultural significance. The study focuses on three key Yorùbá-language writers: Daniel Olorunfemi Fágúnwà, Akinwumi Isola, and Malik. Fágúnwà's classical works exemplify the early twentieth-century engagement with Yorùbá oral traditions, blending folklore, myths, and moral allegory into structured literary narratives. Isola's writings, emerging in the mid-to-late twentieth century, adapt these oral forms to address contemporary social, ethical, and urban realities, demonstrating how literature can remain culturally grounded while responding to evolving societal needs. Malik's works extend these strategies into digital and multimedia literary spaces, highlighting the innovative ways Yorùbá-

language literature engages younger, technologically literate audiences. Together, these writers provide a temporal and stylistic spectrum, allowing for comparative analysis of linguistic and cultural preservation strategies across generations.

Within each text, the analytical focus centres on three core dimensions: proverbs and oral expressions, narrative structures, and indigenous vocabulary and stylistic features. Proverbs are examined as dense cultural units that encode communal ethical norms and historical consciousness. Narrative structures are analysed in terms of their reflection of oral storytelling conventions, including episodic sequencing, repetition, and performance-like cadences, which maintain the interactive and mnemonic qualities of oral literature. Indigenous vocabulary and stylistic features are scrutinised to identify how writers preserve linguistic forms, tonal qualities, and idiomatic expressions, even while adapting them for readability and engagement in written or digital formats. These features collectively illustrate the deliberate strategies through which Yorùbá-language writers sustain both linguistic vitality and cultural memory.

The study also considers the socio-historical context of each text. This includes examining how writers respond to urbanisation, globalisation, educational policies, and the pervasive influence of English in Nigerian literary production. By situating the texts within these broader socio-linguistic conditions, the analysis captures the adaptive strategies writers employ to preserve Yorùbá language and culture in the face of changing social

realities. Such contextualisation underscores that preservation is not merely a retrospective exercise but a dynamic, forward-looking engagement with language, culture, and audience.

Data collection involved careful reading, coding, and categorisation of textual elements relevant to cultural and linguistic preservation. Each text was scrutinised for proverbs, culturally specific idioms, oral narrative structures, symbolic motifs, and stylistic markers characteristic of Yorùbá speech patterns. These instances were then organised according to their function in transmitting ethical, social, and cosmological knowledge. The coding process was iterative and reflexive, allowing the researcher to refine categories and identify patterns that recur across different authors and texts. This method ensures that the analysis captures both the diversity and the coherence of preservation strategies employed in Yorùbá-language literature.

To enhance interpretive rigour, findings were cross-referenced with scholarly literature on Yorùbá oral and written traditions, including studies on proverbs, narrative structures, and linguistic practices (Barber, 2007; Finnegan, 2012; Irele, 2001). This triangulation ensures that analytical claims are firmly grounded in both textual evidence and established scholarship. Furthermore, attention was given to the ethical and linguistic integrity of the texts, analysing them in their original Yorùbá composition rather than relying on translation. This approach respects the subtle tonal and semantic features of the language that are crucial for

understanding cultural meaning and memory.

Finally, the methodology addresses limitations and scope. While the study examines selected works that are representative of different historical and stylistic moments, it does not encompass the full breadth of Yorùbá-language literature. Similarly, while textual analysis provides deep insight into literary strategies, it does not capture audience reception or the ways in which these strategies function in lived community contexts. Future studies could complement this approach with ethnographic or reader-response methods to understand how audiences interact with, internalise, and reproduce the cultural knowledge embedded in Yorùbá-language texts.

By combining textual analysis with contextual and theoretical insight, this methodology ensures a comprehensive exploration of how Yorùbá-language writers deliberately sustain linguistic and cultural heritage. It foregrounds the agency of writers, emphasises the functional role of language in cultural continuity, and demonstrates how literature operates as a dynamic tool for the preservation of both memory and identity.

Yorùbá-Language Literature and Cultural Memory

Yorùbá-language literature functions as a deliberate instrument for sustaining cultural memory, carefully weaving narrative forms, symbolic motifs, and linguistic practices derived from oral traditions. Across classical, contemporary,

and digital texts, writers consciously mediate between inherited oral conventions and contemporary literary demands, ensuring that cultural knowledge remains both accessible and meaningful across generations. From the perspective of Cultural Memory Theory, literature does not simply record heritage; it actively structures, encodes, and transmits communal ethics, social norms, and cosmological understanding, functioning as a living archive through which society sustains its identity (Assmann, 1995, p. 129).

A key mechanism for the preservation of cultural memory is the integration of oral traditions. Folktales, myths, praise poetry, and episodic storytelling have historically functioned as repositories of communal knowledge. Yorùbá-language writers deliberately incorporate these oral elements into literary texts to maintain continuity with cultural practices while adapting them for written expression. For example, Fágúnwà's narratives replicate the cadence and performative style of oral storytelling, embedding myths, folklore, and moral allegory within structured prose in ways that preserve both mnemonic function and narrative rhythm (Fágúnwà, 1968, p. 112). Similarly, Isola retains oral storytelling conventions while addressing contemporary urban realities, showing how the preservation of tradition can coexist with social critique and modern thematic concerns (Ògúnníran, 2015, p. 49). Malik's digital works extend these strategies into interactive and multimedia platforms, demonstrating that cultural preservation can be mediated through new technologies while maintaining oral-like engagement for

younger, digitally literate audiences. This continuum—from classical to digital texts—illustrates that the preservation of cultural memory is dynamic, adaptive, and intentionally agentive, not a passive reproduction of inherited forms.

Symbolic and cosmological motifs also play a crucial role in cultural preservation. Proverbs, allegorical references, and mythic imagery serve as compact vessels of historical, ethical, and social knowledge. Proverbs, in particular, function as condensed ethical codes, communicating communal norms in a form that is both memorable and rhetorically powerful (Ọlátúnjí, 1984, p. 56). From a Postcolonial Language Theory perspective, the deliberate preservation of Yorùbá proverbs and symbolic forms within written texts represents a form of linguistic and cultural resistance, asserting the intellectual and moral relevance of the indigenous language in the face of historical colonial marginalisation. By foregrounding Yorùbá linguistic and cultural specificity, writers challenge the dominance of English in literary and intellectual discourse, demonstrating that indigenous languages remain fully capable of conveying complex moral, philosophical, and narrative content.

Narrative structures further reinforce cultural memory. Episodic sequencing, repetition, and performance-like cadence reflect oral storytelling conventions and enhance the mnemonic function of texts. This alignment between narrative form and oral tradition exemplifies Cultural Memory Theory, showing how literature preserves communal knowledge not only through content but also through the

structure of expression. Across classical, contemporary, and digital texts, writers balance fidelity to tradition with responsiveness to changing social realities, ensuring that cultural memory is both preserved and transmitted in forms that resonate with contemporary audiences.

Importantly, Yorùbá-language literature illustrates the interplay between continuity and innovation. While Fágúnwà establishes foundational structures of oral integration, Isola selectively adapts these patterns to engage urban and modern ethical concerns, and Malik reimagines them through digital media to extend accessibility. This generational progression highlights the adaptive dimension of cultural preservation, demonstrating that memory is not static but continually reinterpreted in response to evolving social and technological contexts. Literature, therefore, becomes an active site where cultural and ethical knowledge is negotiated, performed, and renewed.

Linguistic Strategies of Preservation

Language itself is a primary medium for sustaining Yorùbá cultural memory. Writers employ proverbs, idiomatic expressions, indigenous vocabulary, and narrative rhetoric to retain tonal, semantic, and syntactic characteristics central to cultural identity. These strategies reveal that linguistic and cultural preservation are inseparable, aligning with both Postcolonial Language Theory and Cultural Memory Theory.

Proverbs are particularly central to this effort. They operate as compact repositories of communal wisdom, linking

moral guidance, historical memory, and social norms. Fágúnwà's use of proverbs exemplifies how literature can simultaneously entertain and instruct, encoding communal ethical frameworks while engaging readers in culturally familiar linguistic patterns (Fágúnwà, 1968, p. 115). Isola continues this practice, embedding proverbs within narratives that address contemporary urban challenges, illustrating that linguistic preservation can coexist with the negotiation of modernity and social transformation (Ògúnníran, 2015, p. 52). From a postcolonial perspective, this deliberate use of indigenous linguistic forms asserts the intellectual legitimacy of Yorùbá, countering historical tendencies to privilege English as the dominant medium of literary and philosophical expression (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p. 47).

Indigenous vocabulary and idiomatic expressions further reinforce linguistic heritage. Writers retain culturally specific terms, ritual phrases, and contextually loaded language that would otherwise be lost in translation. This deliberate retention preserves cultural nuance and semantic depth, ensuring that readers encounter the full ethical, cosmological, and social significance of language within Yorùbá literature. By maintaining these lexical forms, writers actively sustain both linguistic identity and cultural continuity, demonstrating that language choice is a deliberate, agentive act of preservation (Oyediran, 2015, p. 42).

Narrative language also mirrors oral rhetorical structures. Repetition, tonal modulation, structured dialogue, and performative pacing are consistently

employed to preserve the performative qualities of oral storytelling. This ensures that texts function not only as repositories of knowledge but as vehicles for engagement and memory retention. Malik's digital adaptations extend these strategies into multimedia formats, combining textual, visual, and auditory elements to sustain linguistic and cultural heritage among digitally literate audiences. This demonstrates the dynamic, adaptive quality of linguistic preservation, confirming that language functions simultaneously as a medium of cultural continuity and as a site of creative innovation.

These strategies reveal that Yorùbá-language literature is both culturally and linguistically liberate. Through the embedding of proverbs, oral narrative structures, symbolic motifs, and indigenous vocabulary, writers sustain ethical, social, and cosmological knowledge while reinforcing the legitimacy of the Yorùbá language in literary production. The literature exemplifies a dual function: it preserves inherited cultural memory while adapting to contemporary social and technological realities. This dual function underscores the value of Yorùbá-language literature as a living mechanism of cultural and linguistic preservation, demonstrating the continuing relevance of Postcolonial Language Theory and Cultural Memory Theory in interpreting literary strategies.

Discussion

The analysis of Yorùbá-language literature clearly demonstrates that writers act as active custodians of both culture and language, strategically embedding ethical,

social, and cosmological knowledge within literary texts. Across the works of Fágúnwà, Isola, and Malik, it is evident that these writers do not merely record tradition; rather, they engage in a deliberate process of preserving, adapting, and transmitting communal memory and linguistic identity (Oyediran, 2015, p. 42). Their literature illustrates that preservation is both intentional and agentic, balancing fidelity to inherited forms with responsiveness to contemporary social, urban, and technological contexts.

From the perspective of Cultural Memory Theory, the study shows that Yorùbá-language literature functions as a living repository of knowledge. Oral storytelling conventions, episodic structures, symbolic motifs, and mnemonic devices embedded within texts encode ethical norms, cosmological beliefs, and communal values, ensuring that cultural memory is transmitted across generations (Assmann, 1995, p. 129). Fágúnwà's classical narratives, for example, preserve the cadence, repetition, and performative qualities of oral storytelling, embedding myths, folktales, and moral allegories in ways that enable readers to internalise ethical and cultural instruction (Fágúnwà, 1968, p. 112). Isola builds upon these methods to address contemporary urban realities, showing how oral and literary forms can be adapted to negotiate modern social and ethical challenges (Ògúnníran, 2015, p. 49). Malik extends this strategy further into digital spaces, employing interactive media to engage younger audiences, thereby demonstrating the adaptability of Yorùbá cultural memory in response to

changing technological contexts. Through these examples, it is evident that cultural memory is dynamic, not static, sustained through continuous reinterpretation and innovation (Finnegan, 2012, p. 78).

Postcolonial Language Theory offers another lens through which to understand the political and cultural significance of these literary practices. The deliberate use of Yorùbá in literary production asserts the legitimacy of an indigenous language historically marginalised by English during colonial and postcolonial periods (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p. 10). Proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and indigenous vocabulary are foregrounded not only for cultural continuity but also as acts of linguistic resistance, signalling that Yorùbá can sustain sophisticated ethical, philosophical, and narrative expression (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p. 47). Malik's use of digital and multimedia platforms extends this resistance into contemporary forms, allowing the language to remain relevant and accessible in a globalised, technologically mediated environment. These strategies demonstrate that linguistic preservation is an active negotiation, combining tradition with innovation to maintain both cultural authority and communicative efficacy.

The study further reveals the interconnection between language, ethics, and culture. Proverbs, symbolic motifs, and narrative structures are not merely aesthetic devices; they encode communal ethical reasoning, social norms, and cosmological frameworks (Ọlátúnjí, 1984, p. 56). Narrative techniques such as episodic sequencing, repetition, and performative cadence mirror oral storytelling traditions, enhancing memory

retention and reader engagement. By embedding ethical instruction and cultural knowledge within these structures, writers act as mediators, negotiating between inherited knowledge and contemporary realities. This confirms that preservation is active and agentic, requiring writers to make deliberate choices about which elements of culture to transmit, how to encode them, and in what forms they will be accessible to audiences across generations.

An additional insight from the analysis is the intergenerational and adaptive nature of preservation. Fágúnwà establishes foundational methods for embedding oral traditions and ethical instruction in narrative form. Isola selectively adapts these structures for modern urban audiences, addressing social, ethical, and technological transformations without abandoning the continuity of oral forms (Ògúnníran, 2015, p. 52). Malik further innovates by leveraging digital media, integrating text, audio, and visual elements to sustain engagement with Yorùbá linguistic and cultural heritage. This generational progression illustrates that preservation is both continuity-oriented and innovative, capable of bridging temporal, social, and technological divides.

The study also offers broader implications for African literary and language preservation scholarship. Firstly, it demonstrates that indigenous-language literature functions as a site of postcolonial cultural agency, where writers exercise deliberate control over the transmission of memory and identity. Secondly, by examining classical, contemporary, and digital works together, the study

highlights patterns of continuity, adaptation, and innovation, emphasising that linguistic and cultural preservation is a complex, multi-layered process. Finally, the analysis suggests that digital media and multimedia literature offer promising avenues for sustaining indigenous-language literacy and cultural engagement, raising new questions for scholars regarding accessibility, audience interaction, and the ethics of cultural transmission.

The Yorùbá-language literature exemplifies how writers act as agentive custodians, using narrative, linguistic, and symbolic strategies to sustain communal memory and identity. Preservation emerges as deliberate, adaptive, and ethically informed, combining fidelity to tradition with responsiveness to contemporary contexts. The analysis demonstrates that literature is not a passive archive but a dynamic mechanism for cultural and linguistic continuity, bridging generations, social realities, and technological changes. Through these strategies, Yorùbá-language writers affirm the enduring significance of indigenous-language literature as a means of safeguarding African cultural and linguistic heritage.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Yorùbá-language literature functions as a strategic instrument of cultural and linguistic preservation. Through a close reading of Fágúnwà, Ògúnníran, and Malik, it is evident that writers deliberately embed ethical codes, oral traditions, proverbs, indigenous vocabulary, and narrative patterns within their texts. These literary

choices reveal a conscious effort to sustain Yorùbá cultural memory and linguistic identity across generations. Far from passive record-keeping, these texts illustrate that preservation is active, agentive, and ethically grounded, involving continuous negotiation between tradition and contemporary relevance.

Fágúnwà's classical narratives preserve oral storytelling conventions, integrating myth, folklore, and moral allegory into structured literary forms. His use of proverbs and idiomatic expressions ensures that readers internalise communal wisdom, while the narrative cadence mirrors live performance traditions (Fágúnwà, 1968, p.112). Ògúnníran, writing for contemporary audiences, selectively adapts these forms to address urban, social, and ethical realities, illustrating that the preservation of culture and language requires both fidelity and adaptation (Ògúnníran, 2015, p. 49). Malik extends this effort into digital spaces, leveraging interactive and multimedia platforms to sustain accessibility, ensuring that younger, digitally literate audiences engage with Yorùbá ethics, vocabulary, and storytelling practices (Malik, n.d.). Collectively, these examples demonstrate that Yorùbá-language literature is dynamic, responding to temporal, social, and technological changes while retaining core linguistic and cultural elements.

The study further confirms that Yorùbá-language writers operate as custodians of collective memory, mediating between inherited tradition and contemporary cultural demands. Proverbs, narrative structures, and symbolic motifs serve not only as vehicles of memory but also as ethical and social

guides, encoding communal norms, cosmology, and moral reasoning (Oyediran, 2015, p.42). By maintaining indigenous vocabulary and rhetorical patterns, writers reinforce the continuity of language while asserting its legitimacy in a postcolonial context, where English has historically dominated literary and social discourse (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p.47). The integration of Postcolonial Language Theory and Cultural Memory Theory demonstrates that preservation is simultaneously political, cultural, and ethical, highlighting the deliberate agency of writers in sustaining both language and identity.

This study also emphasises that preservation is adaptive, not static. Classical oral patterns are transformed in contemporary prose, while digital literature introduces interactive methods to maintain engagement and accessibility. Such adaptive strategies ensure that Yorùbá cultural memory and linguistic heritage are transmitted across generations and media, affirming the continued relevance of indigenous-language literature in contemporary society. Preservation, therefore, is both a continuity project and a creative endeavour, balancing inherited knowledge with the demands of evolving audiences.

In terms of scholarly contribution, this study reinforces the significance of Yorùbá-language literature as a site of linguistic and cultural scholarship. It foregrounds the role of individual writers as deliberate agents of preservation, demonstrating that literature is a key instrument in sustaining indigenous knowledge systems, ethical values, and

language vitality. By analysing classical, contemporary, and digital texts together, the study highlights continuities, innovations, and intergenerational strategies that have not been fully explored in prior scholarship. This contribution is relevant not only to African literary studies but also to broader discussions of language preservation, postcolonial identity, and cultural sustainability.

Finally, the study suggests avenues for future research. Comparative studies of other indigenous-language literatures in Nigeria and across Africa could illuminate shared strategies and challenges in linguistic preservation. Digital platforms and multimedia literature offer new possibilities for sustaining languages, raising questions about accessibility, engagement, and cultural mediation. Additionally, examining reader reception could provide insights into how linguistic and cultural strategies influence understanding, ethical reasoning, and identity formation among contemporary audiences.

In conclusion, Yorùbá-language writers act as active custodians of culture and language, demonstrating that literature is a deliberate, adaptive, and ethically informed mechanism for preserving communal memory and linguistic identity. Through their works, Fágúnwà, Ògúnníran, and Malik show that the survival of language and culture depends on conscious literary strategies, intergenerational mediation, and responsiveness to social and technological change. Yorùbá-language literature thus exemplifies how literary production, cultural memory, and linguistic

preservation are inseparably intertwined, highlighting the enduring significance of indigenous-language writers in sustaining African cultural and linguistic herita

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