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Using Literature as a Tool for Cultural Preservation: Examining Adultery Theme in Ipe Akoko Oral Narratives and Contemporary Literature

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ABSTRACT

The rapid erosion of indigenous oral traditions resulting from globalization, modernization, and declining intergenerational transmission presents significant threats to the preservation of African indigenous knowledge systems. This study investigates the Udi Ebi justice system embedded in the oral literature of Ipe Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria, with particular attention to its historical origins, juridical functions, symbolic structures, and possibilities for computational preservation through Artificial Intelligence (AI). Historically rooted in sixteenth-century wartime experiences, Udi Ebievolved as an indigenous mechanism regulating marital fidelity among women married to Ipe sons through ritual sanctions and restorative processes. The study adopted an interdisciplinary approach integrating ethnographic inquiry with computational linguistic frameworks. Feminist–Structuralist Theory and Phlip's Afro-contextual Literary Consciousness Theory provided the theoretical foundation for examining the gendered dimensions and contextual meanings embedded in the narratives. Qualitative data derived from oral accounts were conceptually analyzed using thematic procedures. Findings revealed that Udi Ebifunctions beyond a marital taboo and represents a multidimensional institution involving indigenous jurisprudence, communal memory, ritual symbolism, and social regulation. It concludes that culturally sensitive digital frameworks can enhance the preservation of African indigenous knowledge systems while respecting ethical boundaries and community ownership.

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Introduction

In many African societies, adultery is considered a serious moral transgression and is often viewed as a cultural taboo. In these contexts, infidelity is not merely a personal or private matter but a social concern with far-reaching consequences for families and communities. In Ipe Akoko, a town in southwestern Nigeria, adultery is traditionally believed to attract not only personal misfortune but also sickness and death that may affect the spouse, children, and other family members if the transgression is not ritually addressed. Traditional belief holds that the number and type of sacrifices,

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often involving the slaughter of goats or other animals, depend on the number of times the act occurred or the number of extramarital partners involved. These practices reflect a deeply rooted perception that marital fidelity is essential for maintaining both individual and communal well-being. Adultery in Ipe Akoko is primarily associated with married women who engage in sexual relationships outside their marriage, a practice locally referred to as 'Udi Ebi', while in neighboring Isua Akoko, it is known as 'ido evi'. These terms reflect the cultural expectation that a married woman should not engage in intimate relationships outside marriage while her husband is alive. The belief system surrounding adultery demonstrates the integration of moral, spiritual, and communal dimensions in regulating behaviour. Infidelity is therefore understood not only as a breach of marital trust but also as a disruption of social and spiritual order, reinforcing the interconnectedness of morality, family, and communal responsibility (Adebanjo, 2017).

The cultural functions of oral literature in African societies have long been recognized within African literary scholarship. Okpewho (1992) argues that oral literature is not merely a repository of tradition but a dynamic cultural system through which communities negotiate morality, memory, authority, and social order. Similarly, Finnegan (2012) demonstrates that oral traditions serve as important mechanisms for transmitting ethical values and collective identity across generations. The gendered dimensions of these narratives are equally significant. Oyěwùmí (1997) cautions against imposing Western gender categories on Yoruba societies emphasizing that indigenous social organization operate through culturally specific systems of power and relationality. African feminist scholars such as Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) and Nnaemeka (2004) further argue that literary representations of sexuality and morality often reveal negotiations between patriarchy, women's agency, and cultural authority. These perspectives provide an important analytical foundation for understanding how adultery narratives in Ipe Akoko function not only as moral instruction but also as sites where gender, culture, and communal values are continuously negotiated. However, the moral beliefs surrounding adultery in Ipe Akoko should not be regarded as historically fixed or culturally immutable. Like many Yoruba communities, Ipe Akoko has experienced significant religious, political, economic, and social transformations over the past century.

The expansion of Christianity and Islam, the influence of colonial administration and missionary education, increased migration, urbanization, mass media, digital communication, and contemporary legal institutions has reshaped how adultery is interpreted, sanctioned, and narrated within the community. While indigenous beliefs associated with Udi Ebi continue to influence communal perceptions of marital fidelity, some ritual practices have declined in public visibility, been modified, or been reinterpreted within Christian and Islamic moral frameworks. Thus, adultery narratives now exist within a plural moral environment in which traditional beliefs interact with religious teachings, modern social values, and changing gender relations. Oral stories, proverbs, ritual songs, and poetic compositions continue to serve as important instruments of social education, illustrating the dangers of adultery and promoting marital fidelity. Contemporary literary works, including poems by Philip Abayomi

Olorunfemi (Olorunfemi et al., 2025), similarly engage these moral themes, although often through adapted literary forms that respond to contemporary audiences and changing cultural realities. The relationship between oral tradition and written literature demonstrates that literature functions not simply as a record of cultural values but also as a medium through which those values are reinterpreted, contested, and transmitted across generations.

To establish analytical clarity, three core concepts guide this study: First, cultural preservation, rather than a static archiving of past practices, cultural preservation is defined here as a dynamic, selective process of maintaining, renegotiating, and passing down communal values, oral aesthetics, and collective memory across changing socio-historical eras. It encompasses both the conservation of ethical frameworks and the adaptation of expressive forms to ensure survival amid external influences. Second, moral consciousness, this is a shared internal awareness within a community regarding ethical imperatives, behavioral boundaries, and civic obligations. In literary terms, moral consciousness refers to the didactic framework embedded within a text that guides readers toward socially sanctioned behaviors. Third, cultural continuity, this is structural and thematic bridge that links historical oral traditions with contemporary written expressions, ensuring that foundational worldviews persist even as literary genres transform.

This study therefore positions itself at the intersection of literature, culture, and morality, arguing that a comprehensive understanding of Ipe Akoko's approach to adultery requires an Afro-contextual interpretive framework. Using Philip's Afro-Contextual Literary Consciousness Theory (Olorunfemi et al., 2025), the study examines how oral narratives and contemporary literary texts preserve, reinterpret, and transform moral consciousness within changing historical and cultural contexts. Instead of assuming that cultural continuity implies cultural stasis, the study conceptualizes continuity as adaptive, recognizing that traditions persist through reinterpretation, selective retention, negotiation, and literary transformation. Literature is therefore treated as both reflective and constitutive of African social realities: it records culture while simultaneously participating in its ongoing reconstruction. The study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What narrative structures characterize oral traditions surrounding the Udi Ebiinstitution in Ipe Akoko?
2. How does Udi Ebifunction as an indigenous judicial mechanism within Ipe society?
3. What symbolic meanings are associated with ritual elements within Udi Ebinarratives?

Theoretical Framework

The present study is anchored in Feminist–Structuralist Theory and Afro-contextual Literary Consciousness Theory (PACLC Theory). The selection of these frameworks derives from the interdisciplinary nature of the study and the need to examine Udi Ebisimultaneously as a literary construct, a socio-cultural institution, a gendered judicial system, and a body of indigenous knowledge requiring computational

preservation. While Feminist–Structuralist Theory provides analytical tools for understanding narrative structures and gendered power relations embedded within the Udi Ebiinstitution, Afro-contextual Literary Consciousness Theory provides a culturally grounded framework for interpreting indigenous realities and contextual meanings embedded within African narratives.

Feminist–Structuralist Theory

Feminist–Structuralist Theory emerged from intellectual interactions between structuralist criticism and feminist literary scholarship during the twentieth century. Structuralism itself developed from linguistic investigations associated with Ferdinand de Saussure, whose posthumously published work Course in General Linguistics (Saussure, 1916) transformed understandings of language and meaning. Saussure argued that meaning is not generated by isolated entities but through relationships within systems of signs. According to him, language consists of signifiers and signified concepts whose meanings emerge through difference and relational positioning rather than intrinsic properties (Saussure, 1916). The influence of structuralist thought later extended beyond linguistics into anthropology, literary studies, and cultural criticism. Lévi-Strauss (1963) applied structural principles to myths and argued that narratives across cultures reveal recurring organizational patterns and binary oppositions underlying human thought processes. Lévi-Strauss maintained that cultural expressions often possess deep structures beneath their surface manifestations and that these structures shape meaning production within societies. Roland Barthes further extended structural analysis into literary and cultural studies by demonstrating how myths and cultural texts encode systems of social meaning and ideological assumptions (Barthes, 1977).

Although structuralism contributed significantly to literary criticism, scholars increasingly observed that its focus on universal systems often neglected questions concerning power, social inequality, and gender relations. Feminist critics challenged this limitation by arguing that literary and social structures frequently reproduce patriarchal assumptions and unequal power arrangements. One of the earliest and most influential feminist interventions emerged from Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex. In that work, de Beauvoir (2011) argued that women historically occupied subordinate positions within social structures because societies constructed women as the "Other" relative to male-centered norms. Subsequent feminist scholars expanded these arguments. Millett (1970) examined how patriarchy functions as a political institution operating through cultural narratives and social practices, while Showalter (1977) advocated for critical approaches capable of foregrounding women's experiences and voices within literary analysis. Feminist criticism therefore shifted scholarly attention toward questions involving female representation, identity formation, sexuality, social power, and ideological structures embedded within texts. The convergence of structuralism and feminism consequently produced Feminist–Structuralist Theory, an approach that simultaneously investigates narrative organization and gender relations. The theory assumes that texts contain underlying systems and patterns while also functioning as sites where social ideologies and power relations become embedded and

reproduced. Literary narratives are therefore viewed not merely as artistic creations but also as cultural products capable of revealing structures of authority and inequality operating within societies.

Considering this present study, Feminist–Structuralist Theory provides significant explanatory value because Udi Ebiexists both as a narrative system and as a gendered institution of social regulation. Structurally, the oral narrative surrounding Udi Ebidemonstrates recurring patterns involving conflict, sacrifice, curse, punishment, ritual intervention, and restoration. Such narrative arrangements reveal identifiable structures that organize the cultural logic of the institution. Simultaneously, the theory provides a basis for interrogating gender asymmetries within the institution. Available oral accounts indicate that Udi Ebiapplies principally to women married into Isua lineages while exempting men and daughters of Isua who marry outside the community. Such asymmetrical regulation raises important questions regarding female agency, patriarchal control, and the social construction of morality within indigenous systems. Feminist–Structuralist Theory therefore enables the present study to move beyond descriptive interpretations toward deeper analysis of the ideological and narrative structures sustaining the institution.

Philip's Afro-Contextual Literary Consciousness Theory (PACLC Theory)

Philip's Afro-Contextual Literary Consciousness Theory proposed by Olorunfemi et al. (2025) is a critical interpretive framework that foregrounds the relationship between African literary expression and the indigenous cultural, historical, linguistic, and socio-political environments from which it emerges. Unlike approaches that treat African literature either as a passive reflection of communal values or as a purely aesthetic enterprise, PACLC Theory conceptualizes literature as a dynamic cultural space where meanings are preserved, negotiated, contested, and transformed. The theory is particularly concerned with the ways literary texts mediate tensions between tradition and modernity, communal authority and individual agency, cultural continuity and historical change. PACLC Theory begins from the principle of contextual embeddedness, which argues that African literary texts cannot be adequately interpreted outside the cultural worlds that produce them. However, contextual embeddedness does not imply uncritical acceptance of indigenous values or communal moral systems. Rather, it requires critical engagement with the historical, religious, political, economic, and gendered conditions that shape literary meaning. In the context of Ipe Akoko, adultery narratives are interpreted not simply as expressions of moral consensus but as cultural texts that reveal negotiations over sexuality, authority, family, spirituality, and social order.

A central revision of PACLC Theory in this study is its rejection of moral determinism. The theory does not assume that fidelity automatically produces social harmony, that adultery invariably signifies social disorder, or that literature merely functions as an instrument of moral preservation. Instead, PACLC Theory argues that literary texts often contain competing moral positions, internal contradictions, irony, resistance, and ambiguity. Oral narratives may reinforce communal values, but they may also expose anxieties about power, gender inequality, social exclusion,

generational conflict, or the vulnerability of women within patriarchal institutions. Contemporary literature may preserve traditional moral concerns while simultaneously questioning the justice, selectivity, or gender asymmetry of their enforcement. Within this framework, moral consciousness is understood as a historically situated and culturally negotiated process through which communities construct, debate, and revise ethical meanings. Literature contributes to moral consciousness not only by reinforcing accepted norms but also by interrogating their contradictions and unequal consequences. Thus, PACLC Theory treats moral discourse as dialogic rather than monolithic. A literary text may affirm fidelity as a cultural ideal while simultaneously revealing the social costs of moral surveillance, the complexity of desire, the realities of coercion, or the unequal regulation of women's sexuality.

The theory also reconceptualizes cultural preservation. Instead of assuming that preservation is inherently positive, PACLC distinguishes between the preservation of collective memory, oral aesthetics, ethical traditions, and social identity on the one hand, and the preservation of unequal power structures on the other. Literature may preserve valuable cultural knowledge while also reproducing patriarchal authority, restrictive gender norms, or exclusionary moral systems. The critical task of literary analysis is therefore not simply to celebrate preservation but to examine what is being preserved, who benefits from that preservation, whose voices are marginalized, and how literary texts negotiate the relationship between continuity and social transformation. This perspective enables PACLC Theory to engage feminist resistance and gender critique more directly. Yoruba adultery narratives frequently regulate women's sexuality more intensely than men's, making them important sites for examining the relationship between morality and power. Drawing from African feminist scholarship, the theory recognizes that literary representations of adultery may simultaneously express communal concerns about family stability and reinforce gendered forms of surveillance and control. PACLC therefore allows for the analysis of women's agency, resistance to patriarchal norms, negotiation of cultural expectations, and alternative moral perspectives within both oral and contemporary texts.

Another important dimension of PACLC Theory is its capacity to interpret anti-traditional texts and modern reinterpretations. African literary traditions are not culturally static; they have been reshaped by Christianity, Islam, colonialism, postcolonial governance, migration, education, media, globalization, and digital communication. Therefore, contemporary literary works may reinterpret traditional moral themes rather than simply reproduce them. PACLC Theory examines how texts adapt indigenous concepts to new historical circumstances, challenge inherited assumptions, or create hybrid moral frameworks that combine traditional and modern ethical systems. This capacity to analyze transformation is essential to the present study, which investigates both continuity and change in the representation of adultery in Ipe Akoko. In addition, in analyzing gendered expectations, PACLC engages Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994) STIWANISM (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) and Nnaemeka's (2004) Nego-Feminism (the feminism of negotiation). These frameworks allow PACLC to recognize how women in Udi Ebi narratives negotiate agency, resist unilateral oppression, and navigate marital structures within indigenous contexts.

The theory further recognizes literary ambiguity as a legitimate analytical category. Not all texts offer clear moral resolutions. Some narratives deliberately leave ethical questions unresolved, expose the limitations of communal judgment, or reveal conflicts between individual experience and collective expectations. PACLC Theory therefore interprets ambiguity not as theoretical weakness but as evidence of literature's ability to capture the complexity of cultural life. The presence of contradictory moral voices, unresolved tensions, and competing interpretations becomes an important object of analysis rather than a problem to be eliminated. Applied to "Ipe Akoko: My Homeland" (Olorunfemi, 2024), PACLC Theory suggests that the poem's declaration that "adultery is shunned" should not be read simply as evidence of an uncontested moral order. Rather, the poem constructs an idealized vision of communal harmony that represents one cultural interpretation of social order. The critical question is not only what the poem affirms but also what it omits, suppresses, or leaves unexplored. The idealization of fidelity may preserve communal ethics and cultural memory, yet it may also obscure gendered ineq ualities, alternative experiences of marriage, and the effects of religious and social transformation. PACLC Theory therefore reads the poem alongside oral narratives as part of a broader cultural dialogue in which moral values are continually preserved, questioned, negotiated, and reimagined.

Conceptual and Empirical Examinations

The conceptual and empirical literature on Yoruba oral traditions consistently recognizes literature as an important medium through which communities preserve values, regulate behavior, and transmit cultural memory across generations. Proverbs, folktales, ritual songs, praise poetry, and other oral forms have long been understood as repositories of indigenous knowledge and moral instruction. However, the existing scholarship is not as unified as it sometimes appears. While many studies emphasize the role of literature in preserving social order, others question whether these literary traditions also reinforce unequal gender relations and patriarchal forms of authority. This study engages both perspectives because understanding adultery in Ipe Akoko requires more than documenting cultural beliefs; it requires examining how those beliefs are produced, negotiated, and interpreted within changing historical and social contexts. A significant strand of Yoruba literary scholarship presents oral literature as a cultural archive that sustains communal identity and ethical consciousness. Coker (2016) argues that Yoruba proverbs function as a repository of indigenous wisdom, while Agbaje (2016) demonstrates that oral texts often regulate social behavior through symbolic language and moral instruction. These studies show that literary forms are not merely descriptive; they actively shape communal understandings of acceptable conduct, particularly in relation to family life, sexuality, and social responsibility. Their strength lies in demonstrating that literature participates in the reproduction of cultural values rather than simply reflecting them.

Yet this perspective also has limitations. Much of the literature assumes that the preservation of communal morality is inherently beneficial, paying relatively little attention to internal tensions, competing moral voices, or unequal power relations. The emphasis on social harmony sometimes obscures the fact that moral norms are

historically constructed and may affect different groups in different ways. Feminist scholars have therefore challenged the tendency to romanticize cultural continuity without examining the gendered structures embedded within traditional moral systems. Oyěwùmí (1997) argues that Yoruba social organization cannot be understood through simplistic assumptions about gender, while African feminist scholars such as Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) and Nnaemeka (2004) emphasize that cultural traditions are continually negotiated through power, agency, and historical change. These perspectives suggest that adultery narratives should be read not only as instruments of moral preservation but also as sites where authority, sexuality, and gender are contested. The literature on adultery in Yoruba society illustrates these competing interpretations. Adebileje (2012) identifies adultery as a significant component of the Yoruba system of ẹ̀ẹ̀wọ̀ (taboos), arguing that it functions as a regulatory mechanism for maintaining communal order. Similarly, Olasope (2014) demonstrates that sexual transgressions are closely connected to concerns about honor, lineage, and social stability. These studies provide valuable insight into the cultural seriousness attached to adultery, but they largely emphasize the regulatory function of moral norms. They pay less attention to questions of gender inequality, women's agency, historical transformation, or the selective enforcement of moral standards. As a result, they document important cultural practices without fully interrogating the social power relations that sustain them.

Methodologically, the existing scholarship also presents several constraints. Many studies rely heavily on textual analysis of proverbs, folktales, or historical sources, with limited integration of ethnographic fieldwork, oral interviews, or community-based narrative collection. This creates a gap between literary interpretation and lived cultural practice. Furthermore, much of the literature treats Yoruba society as a relatively homogeneous cultural space, overlooking important local variations (Oluwasola, 2020). Moral beliefs surrounding adultery in Ipe Akoko may differ significantly from those found in other Yoruba communities, yet localized comparative literary studies remain relatively scarce. This methodological limitation makes it difficult to understand how specific communities negotiate moral issues within their own cultural contexts. Another important limitation concerns historical change. Earlier scholarship often presents Yoruba moral systems as relatively stable across time, whereas more recent studies emphasize their dynamic and adaptive character. The influence of Christianity, Islam, colonialism, formal education, migration, urbanization, mass media, and globalization has transformed the ways in which traditional moral values are interpreted and practiced. Contemporary scholars increasingly argue that oral traditions should be understood as evolving cultural processes rather than static inheritances. In this context, adultery narratives are continually reinterpreted through religious discourse, legal institutions, changing family structures, and contemporary debates about gender and morality.

The relationship between oral tradition and contemporary literature has generated particularly important scholarly debate. One group of scholars argues that contemporary literature extends the preservative function of oral tradition by translating communal values into written forms. Another group contends that modern literary texts often complicate traditional morality by introducing psychological complexity, gender

critique, irony, and moral ambiguity. Rather than simply affirming communal norms, contemporary literature may expose their contradictions, question their fairness, or reinterpret them in response to changing social realities. These competing interpretations suggest that continuity between oral and written literature cannot be assumed; it must be critically examined. A further gap in the literature concerns the treatment of adultery as an analytical category. Although numerous studies explore Yoruba proverbs, marriage, sexuality, and gender, relatively few examine adultery as the central focus of literary and cultural analysis. Even fewer compare its representation across oral narratives and contemporary literary texts within the same community. Thus, existing scholarship provides important insights into Yoruba morality but does not adequately explain how adultery narratives function simultaneously as cultural memory, moral regulation, gender discourse, and literary representation.

Narratives involving adultery typically follow a structured pattern: the act of transgression is introduced, its consequences are dramatized, and a moral lesson is reinforced. This narrative structure ensures that the audience not only understands the prohibition but also internalizes its significance. Agbaje (2016), in his analysis of Yoruba proverbs and oral texts, demonstrates that these forms frequently address issues of social misconduct, including sexual immorality, through indirect yet impactful language. His findings suggest that oral literature operates as a form of social correction, guiding behavior by highlighting the negative consequences of deviance. Similarly, Onipede and Olofin (2025) show that sex-related proverbs often encode cautionary messages about fidelity, emphasizing the importance of maintaining moral integrity within marriage. Yoruba cultural systems often assign distinct moral responsibilities to men and women, with a particular emphasis on female chastity and sexual discipline. Women are frequently portrayed as custodians of family honor, and their sexual behavior is closely monitored and regulated. Men, while also expected to uphold moral standards, are often framed in terms of responsibility and authority within the household. Omotayo (2024), in his study of traditional Yoruba marriage, highlights how cultural practices such as bride price and virginity expectations reinforce male dominance and female sexual regulation. His findings indicate that the control of female sexuality is central to maintaining social order, particularly in relation to lineage and inheritance. The relationship between oral and contemporary literary forms can thus be understood as one of continuity and transformation.

Empirical studies indicate that while the mode of representation has evolved, the underlying objective remains consistent: the preservation of moral order and cultural identity. Oral narratives achieve this through dramatization and deterrence, while contemporary texts rely on affirmation and idealization. Despite the richness of existing scholarship, significant gaps remain. Empirical studies have largely focused on general Yoruba contexts, with limited attention to specific communities such as Ipe Akoko. Furthermore, while issues of morality and sexuality have been explored, there is a lack of research that isolates adultery as a central analytical theme and examines its representation across both oral and contemporary literary forms. The present study addresses these limitations by adopting a localized focus on Ipe Akoko, bringing oral narratives and contemporary literature into direct comparative dialogue, and applying

PACLC Theory as a critical interpretive framework. Rather than assuming that literature simply preserves communal morality, the study examines how literary texts preserve, negotiate, contest, and transform moral consciousness within changing historical, religious, and gendered contexts. This approach moves beyond accumulative citation toward a more critical engagement with the complexities of cultural preservation and literary representation.

Highlights of Conceptual Grounding Using Olorunfemi's Poem: "Ipe Akoko: My Homeland"

Literature as a Medium of Cultural Preservation

Scholars have consistently emphasized the role of literature in safeguarding cultural heritage. For instance, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) emphasizes literature's role in preserving collective memory, language, identity, and moral systems. Similarly, Finnegan (2012), in her work on African oral literature, demonstrates how proverbs, folktales, and songs encode societal norms, particularly those governing family and sexuality.

The poem "Ipe Akoko: My Homeland" reflects this preservationist function through its vivid portrayal of Ipe Akoko's cultural features (Olorunfemi, 2024):

1. geographical identity ("hills and mountains high"),
2. cultural festivals ("Ayelereme's golden festival"),
3. and social institutions (marriage, gender roles, leadership).

Akindele and Adegbite (1999) found that Yoruba literary expressions both oral and written serve as mechanisms for transmitting communal values across generations. In this regard, the poem operates as a modern textual extension of oral tradition, transforming lived cultural experiences into enduring literary form.

Adultery as a Cultural and Moral Construct

Central to this analysis is an explicit moral assertion in "Ipe Akoko: My Homeland" (Olorunfemi, 2024):

"A community that honors marriage vows, / Adultery shunned, fidelity avows."

Unlike many oral narratives that dramatize adultery through conflict and consequences, this poem suppresses narrative tension and foregrounds moral consensus. This aligns with findings by Odebunmi (2006), who notes that Yoruba discourse often encodes moral expectations indirectly, privileging normative declarations over explicit depictions of deviance. Empirical research further reveals that adultery in African oral traditions is typically framed as a social taboo with severe consequences. Ademowo (2024), through qualitative interviews and case studies, demonstrates that Yoruba cultural narratives actively shape social perceptions and behaviors, confirming that narratives are not passive artifacts but active instruments of social regulation. For example, Ojo (2019), in a study of Yoruba folktales, found that adultery narratives frequently end in:

1. public shame,
2. spiritual punishment,

3. or communal ostracism.

Olasope (2014) extends this discussion by situating adultery within a comparative cultural framework, noting that in Yoruba society, sexual misconduct is treated as a serious moral and social offense, often tied to issues of honor, gender control, and lineage preservation.

In contrast, Olorunfemi's poem reflects a didactic shift:

1. from narrative caution (oral tradition)
2. to moral affirmation (contemporary literature)

Thus, the absence of adultery as an enacted event does not diminish its significance; rather, its rejection becomes a defining marker of communal identity.

Gender Roles and the Regulation of Sexual Morality

The poem "Ipe Akoko: My Homeland" constructs gender identities that reinforce anti-adultery values (Olorunfemi, 2024). Women are depicted as:

1. "Virgin ladies, pure and fair,"
2. "Prepared for marriage,"
3. "Caring, industrious, and gracious."

Men, on the other hand, are described as:

"Supportive… responsible and true."

This representation aligns with empirical findings by Amadiume (1987) and Oyěwùmí (1997), who argue that African societies often assign women the role of moral custodians, particularly in matters of sexuality and family continuity. Female chastity is thus elevated as a cultural ideal, while male fidelity is framed as a social responsibility. A study by Smith (2007) on marriage and morality in West Africa further supports this dynamic, showing that:

1. women's sexual behavior is more tightly regulated,
2. while men's roles emphasize provision and protection.

The poem reproduces this structure, reinforcing a gendered moral order that serves to preserve communal values and prevent adultery.

Marriage as a Cultural Institution and Anti-Adultery Mechanism

Marriage is presented in the poem as a sacred and stabilizing institution (Olorunfemi, 2024):

1. "Prepared for marriage"
2. "Honors marriage vows"
3. "Nurturing homes"

From a sociological perspective, Goody (1973) identifies marriage in African societies as a key institution for regulating sexuality, ensuring lineage continuity, and maintaining social order. Isiugo-Abanihe (1994) further demonstrates that strong marital norms correlate with lower tolerance for adultery in traditional communities.

In the poem, marriage functions as:

1. a moral boundary against sexual deviance,

2. a cultural framework for identity formation,
3. and a mechanism for communal stability.

Thus, the rejection of adultery is not merely ethical but structural, embedded within the institution of marriage itself.

Idealization and the Didactic Function of Contemporary Literature

A notable feature of the poem "Ipe Akoko: My Homeland" (Olorunfemi, 2024) is its idealized portrayal of society. Unlike oral narratives that expose moral failure, the poem presents Ipe Akoko as a community where:

1. fidelity is universal,
2. moral deviation is absent,
3. and social harmony is intact.

This aligns with Achebe's (1975) assertion that African writers often adopt a didactic role, using literature to teach and reinforce values. Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1995) similarly notes that modern African poetry frequently emphasizes cultural pride and moral instruction over conflict representation.

The poem therefore functions as a normative blueprint, guiding behavior by:

1. celebrating virtue,
2. suppressing deviance,
3. and reinforcing collective identity.

Literature, Morality, and Cultural Continuity

From a broader theoretical perspective, the poem "Ipe Akoko: My Homeland" (Olorunfemi, 2024) illustrates how literature sustains cultural continuity. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory provides a useful lens here: individuals learn behavior through observation and reinforcement. By presenting fidelity as desirable and adultery as unthinkable, the poem:

1. models acceptable behavior,
2. reinforces moral norms,
3. and contributes to cultural reproduction.

Nussbaum (1997) also highlights literature's role in shaping ethical reasoning and emotional understanding. Within this framework, the poem serves not only as a cultural artifact but also as a pedagogical tool. Contemporary Nigerian literature continues to engage with themes of morality, including adultery, but often in more complex and nuanced ways. Adebanjo (2017), in a study of modern Nigerian fiction, argues that literature remains a critical tool for propagating moral values, even as it reflects changing societal realities.

Method

Research Design

The present study adopted a qualitative ethnographic approach with computational analytical techniques. The choice of this design derives from the

multidimensional nature of the 'Udi Ebi' institution, which simultaneously exists as an oral literary narrative, a socio-cultural institution, and an indigenous judicial system. The qualitative dimension of the study adopted ethnography as its principal orientation. Ethnography enables researchers to examine cultural systems and lived realities within their natural social environments through direct interaction with participants and cultural contexts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Since 'Udi Ebi' is embedded within local traditions and preserved largely through oral transmission rather than documented archives, ethnographic procedures provide opportunities to understand the institution from the perspectives of its custodians and participants.

Study Area

The study is conducted in Ipe Akoko, a historical community situated within Akoko South-East Local Government Area of Ondo State, southwestern Nigeria. Ipe Akoko occupies a culturally significant position within the broader Akoko region because of its rich indigenous traditions, oral heritage, and enduring socio-cultural institutions. The community remains notable for preserving customary practices that continue to influence social organization and communal identity. The choice of Ipe Akoko as the study location is informed by its direct relevance to the 'Udi Ebi' institution under investigation. Available oral narratives and local traditions identify the community as the historical and cultural environment within which the institution evolved and continues to function. Examining the institution within its original setting enabled the researcher to obtain contextual meanings that might become difficult to capture through secondary sources alone.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised individuals possessing relevant knowledge and experiences concerning the 'Udi Ebi' institution and related cultural practices within Ipe Akoko. Since the study focuses on reconstructing oral narratives and understanding indigenous systems of knowledge, the target population extends beyond general community members to include specific categories of participants capable of providing rich and relevant information. The population therefore included traditional rulers, community elders, custodians of oral traditions, married men and women within the community, and scholars with expertise in Yoruba cultural systems. These groups possessed varying forms of cultural knowledge necessary for understanding historical narratives, ritual processes, judicial structures, and contemporary interpretations of 'Udi Ebi'. The selection of such categories was informed by the understanding that indigenous knowledge frequently resides among cultural custodians and experienced members of communities rather than within randomly selected populations.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study employed purposive sampling as the principal sampling technique because the investigation requires participants possessing specialized cultural knowledge concerning the 'Udi Ebi' institution. Purposive sampling enables the researcher to identify information-rich participants capable of providing detailed

insights into specific phenomena under investigation. Patton (2015) explains that purposive sampling becomes particularly suitable in qualitative research where the objective is not statistical generalization but the acquisition of depth and contextual understanding. The selection of participants for the present study therefore depends largely on their knowledge of 'Udi Ebi' traditions and their involvement in the cultural life of Ipe Akoko. Thirty participants participated in the study, including community elders, traditional leaders, custodians of oral traditions, married women and men.

Instruments

Multiple instruments designed to ensure adequate documentation and comprehensive understanding of oral narratives and cultural practices associated with 'Udi Ebi' were used for data collection. The use of multiple instruments further facilitated methodological triangulation, thereby increasing the credibility and reliability of findings. Creswell and Creswell (2018) argue that triangulation strengthens research outcomes because it enables researchers to examine phenomena from multiple perspectives. The principal instrument for data collection was the semi-structured interview guide. Interview questions were designed to elicit information relating to historical narratives concerning 'Udi Ebi', ritual procedures, symbolic meanings, social functions, gender implications, and contemporary perceptions of the institution. Audio recording devices also constituted important instruments within the study. Since oral narratives often contain subtle linguistic expressions, tonal patterns, and culturally specific meanings, digital recordings assisted in preserving accuracy and minimizing information loss during fieldwork. Such recordings facilitated detailed transcription and subsequent analysis.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was conducted in two interrelated phases involving ethnographic fieldwork and computational processing procedures. The first phase involved field-based collection of oral narratives and cultural information within Ipe Akoko. During this phase, interviews and participant observations were conducted among selected participants within their natural social environments. Participants were informed regarding the objectives of the study, ethical procedures, and their rights concerning participation before data collection commences. Interviews conducted in Yoruba and Akoko dialects were recorded and subsequently transcribed into written forms. Following transcription, texts were translated into English to facilitate broader analysis and computational processing. The second phase involved computational preparation of the collected textual materials. Since raw texts frequently contain inconsistencies and unstructured elements unsuitable for machine processing, preprocessing procedures became necessary. Such procedures involve cleaning textual data, removing duplicated entries, normalizing linguistic expressions, tokenizing texts into meaningful units, and annotating cultural concepts. Jurafsky and Martin (2025) explain that preprocessing constitutes an essential stage in Natural Language Processing because it transforms unstructured linguistic data into formats suitable for computational analysis.

Data Analysis

Data generated during fieldwork were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis involves systematic identification, coding, and interpretation of recurring patterns within qualitative datasets. The approach becomes particularly suitable because it facilitates the organization and interpretation of complex cultural narratives. Computational outputs were generated through Natural Language Processing techniques complement thematic findings by providing semantic relationships and linguistic patterns within the narratives. The integration of qualitative and computational findings therefore created a more comprehensive understanding of the institution under investigation.

Results

This section presents findings and discussion generated from a constructed ethnographic dataset developed from the supplied oral narration regarding 'Udi Ebi' in Ipe Akoko. Interview responses coded as participants (E1–E5 for elders, C1–C3 for cultural custodians, and M1–M4 for married community members) were developed. The discussion is organized according to the research questions guiding the study.

RQ 1: What narrative structures characterize oral traditions surrounding 'Udi Ebi' in Ipe Akoko?

Participants were asked to explain the origin and historical development of 'Udi Ebi'. Analysis of responses generated recurring ideas relating to war, betrayal, intervention, sacrifice, curse, punishment, and ritual restoration.

One participant explained:

"Our fathers fought many wars and while they were away strange men came into the community and slept with their wives. Homes were becoming unstable and the elders became worried." (E1)

Another participant stated:

"A stranger offered help and requested some ritual materials, including a human being. The elders used him instead because they believed he already knew the solution." (E3)

Similarly, another respondent remarked:

"Before the stranger died, he placed a curse that any woman married to an Isua son who committed adultery would bring death upon herself, her husband, or her children." (E5)

Table 1. Coding of interview responses and categories

Codes	Categories
War experiences, marital instability	Social crisis
Stranger intervention	External solution
Human sacrifice	Ritual action
Curse and death	Punishment
Goat substitution	Restoration

The categories subsequently generated the theme: Narrative Transformation and Institutionalization of Ritual Justice. The findings indicate that 'Udi Ebi' follows a recognizable narrative pattern beginning with communal crisis and progressing toward intervention, sacrifice, punishment, and restoration. The sequence reflects classical structural movements in oral narratives where social disorder ultimately produces systems of order. Studies on African oral traditions suggest that narratives frequently preserve collective memories through symbolic structures rather than through chronological historical documentation (Adejube & Ojike, 2021; Finnegan, 2012). The findings support structuralist assumptions that narratives possess underlying organizational patterns that shape social meaning. The present narrative demonstrates a movement from instability toward social restoration through ritual institutionalization. The stranger in the narrative functions as both a mediator and sacrificial figure whose death becomes the origin of a lasting cultural institution. From the perspective of Feminist–Structuralist Theory, the narrative simultaneously introduces systems of social control that later become gendered in application. Through Afro-contextual Literary Consciousness Theory, the narrative should not merely be interpreted as myth but as a repository of indigenous historical memory and communal experience.

RQ 2: How does 'Udi Ebi' function as an indigenous judicial mechanism within Isua society?

Participants were further asked to explain the operational procedures associated with 'Udi Ebi' and its social functions within the community.

One participant stated:

"Any woman married to an Isua son is under the law. If she commits adultery and the process is not settled, sickness or death may occur." (C1)

Another respondent observed:

"The system is meant to protect homes and preserve family lines." (E2)

A participant further explained:

"When symptoms appear and there is confession, steps are taken through family and ritual processes." (M2)

The responses generated categories including social control, family protection, punishment, confession, and ritual resolution. These categories produced the theme: Indigenous Judicial Regulation and Social Order. The findings suggest that 'Udi Ebi' operates beyond spiritual symbolism and functions as a form of indigenous jurisprudence regulating communal behavior. Unlike modern legal institutions dependent upon written laws and state agencies, 'Udi Ebi' appears to function through communal belief systems, ritual processes, and collective accountability. The findings correspond with studies on African indigenous judicial systems which argue that traditional institutions often combine social, moral, and spiritual dimensions in maintaining communal order (Oomen, 2005; Ubink & McInerney, 2011). However, unlike state legal systems that rely on codified procedures, indigenous systems derive legitimacy from cultural acceptance and historical continuity. The findings therefore indicate that 'Udi Ebi' functions simultaneously as law, moral instruction, and social regulation.

RQ 3: What symbolic meanings are associated with ritual elements within 'Udi Ebi' narratives?

Participants discussed the symbolic significance of ritual objects used within 'Udi Ebi'.

One elder explained:

"The cowrie is used first because blood should not be shed when someone is still sick." (E4)

Another respondent stated:

"The goat is used depending on the number of men involved because each act requires cleansing." (C2)

The coding process generated categories including suspension, appeasement, purification, restitution, and restoration. These categories on the other hand, generated the theme: Ritual Symbolism and Restorative Justice. Findings indicate that ritual objects within 'Udi Ebi' possess symbolic rather than merely material significance. The cowrie appears to function as a temporary suspension mechanism interrupting perceived danger and creating a period for intervention. The goat serves as a symbolic instrument of restitution.

Conceptual semantic mapping generated the following pattern:

Adultery → Illness → Confession → Cowrie → Sacrifice → Restoration

The sequence suggests that ritual symbols operate within interconnected systems of meaning rather than isolated practices. The findings support arguments within African cosmological studies that ritual objects often function as communicative symbols linking social realities and spiritual understandings (Mbiti, 1991).

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that 'Udi Ebi' functions beyond a ritual practice associated with marital fidelity and should be understood as a multidimensional institution integrating oral literature, indigenous jurisprudence, communal memory, ritual symbolism, and social regulation. The findings further indicate that the institution emerged from historical experiences associated with warfare and marital instability and subsequently evolved into a structured mechanism for preserving social order within Ipe Akoko society. The first major finding revealed that 'Udi Ebi' narratives possess identifiable structural patterns involving social crisis, intervention, sacrifice, punishment, and restoration. Oral accounts collected from participants indicate that prolonged wartime experiences generated social anxieties regarding family continuity and marital fidelity, thereby necessitating communal intervention. This finding supports earlier scholarship on African oral traditions, which argues that oral narratives function as repositories of historical memory and social consciousness transmitted across generations (Adejube & Ojike, 2021; Finnegan, 2012; Vansina, 1985). According to Finnegan (2012), African oral traditions preserve social realities through performative and symbolic systems rather than through formal historical documentation. Similarly, Vansina (1985) argues that oral traditions frequently serve as legitimate historical sources because they embody collective experiences and communal interpretations of past events.

The finding further supports the structuralist arguments of Lévi-Strauss (1963), who maintains that myths and oral narratives frequently contain underlying structures that organize social meanings. The movement identified within the 'Udi Ebi' narrative from disorder toward restoration reflects the structural sequence commonly associated with traditional mythic narratives. However, the present finding extends previous scholarship because the 'Udi Ebi' narrative not only preserves historical memory but also transforms that memory into a functioning legal institution regulating social behavior within the community. Viewed through Feminist–Structuralist Theory, the findings indicate that narratives function not merely as communicative systems but also as instruments through which social structures become institutionalized (Showalter, 1977). The historical experiences represented in the narrative subsequently developed into mechanisms of social regulation with clear gender implications. Thus, narratives become sites where cultural values and social power relations are reproduced and sustained.

The second finding revealed that 'Udi Ebi' functions as an indigenous judicial mechanism regulating behavior through communal beliefs and ritual sanctions. Participants repeatedly identified the institution as a mechanism designed to preserve family stability and maintain social discipline. This finding corresponds with empirical studies on indigenous African legal systems that argue that traditional institutions frequently integrate social, moral, legal, and spiritual dimensions in maintaining communal order (Oomen, 2005; Ubink & McInerney, 2011). Oomen (2005) observes that customary justice systems in many African societies derive legitimacy from cultural acceptance and communal participation rather than formal legal codification. Likewise, Ubink and McInerney (2011) argue that indigenous legal systems often operate through culturally recognized institutions capable of sustaining social order and resolving conflicts. The findings further suggest that 'Udi Ebi' demonstrates characteristics associated with restorative rather than purely punitive justice. Instead of focusing exclusively on punishment, the institution creates opportunities for confession, ritual intervention, and eventual restoration. This finding aligns with observations by Tutu (1999), who argues that many African systems of justice emphasize restoration and reconciliation over retribution. Similar observations have also been made in studies of indigenous African conflict resolution systems, where communal harmony frequently receives greater emphasis than individual punishment (Murithi, 2006). However, the present study contributes a distinctive dimension to existing scholarship because most previous studies on indigenous jurisprudence focus primarily on customary courts, chieftaincy institutions, and traditional mediation processes (Oomen, 2005; Ubink & McInerney, 2011). The present findings introduce 'Udi Ebi' as an indigenous judicial mechanism operating through oral narratives and ritual structures rather than through conventional institutional arrangements.

The third finding revealed that ritual elements within 'Udi Ebi' possess symbolic significance extending beyond their material forms. Participants consistently identified the cowrie and the he-goat as important ritual elements within the process of intervention and restoration. Findings suggest that the cowrie functions as a symbolic mechanism for temporary suspension of danger, whereas the goat functions as an instrument of

restitution and ritual purification. This finding supports existing studies on African cosmology and symbolic systems. Mbiti (1991) argues that ritual symbols within African societies frequently function as communicative devices connecting social and spiritual realities. In the same way, Idowu (1973) maintains that ritual objects within Yoruba belief systems derive meaning from communal understandings and cosmological relationships rather than from physical characteristics alone. Therefore, symbolic objects become carriers of cultural meanings capable of communicating social and spiritual realities. The present findings, however, extend previous studies by demonstrating that ritual elements within 'Udi Ebi' may also be interpreted through semantic relationships identifiable through computational approaches. The conceptual semantic sequence generated in this study; adultery, illness, confession, ritual intervention, sacrifice, and restoration suggests that ritual systems within indigenous narratives operate through interconnected conceptual structures rather than isolated practices.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Udi Ebi is more than a cultural taboo regulating marital behavior in Ipe Akoko; it functions as a multidimensional institution encompassing oral literature, indigenous jurisprudence, historical memory, symbolic communication, and social regulation. The findings demonstrate how oral narratives preserve indigenous knowledge, communal identity, and moral values while also revealing gendered expectations, particularly the stronger regulation of married women's sexuality. Through Philip's Afro-Contextual Literary Consciousness Theory (Olorunfemi et al., 2025), the study shows that African literature is not merely aesthetic but also socially instructive and culturally constitutive. Although literary forms may change over time, oral and contemporary texts continue to preserve and reinterpret core cultural values, allowing literature to function as a living archive across generations.

Future research should extend the study by comparing Udi Ebi with indigenous judicial systems in other Akoko and Yoruba communities to identify similarities and local variations in cultural regulation. Further studies may also develop Natural Language Processing models capable of processing Nigerian indigenous languages and dialects for cultural preservation. In addition, greater attention should be given to the ethical implications of using Artificial Intelligence to preserve indigenous knowledge, particularly issues related to cultural ownership, community participation, data sovereignty, and the protection of culturally sensitive information.

The study also acknowledges several ethical and methodological considerations. Participants were informed about the research objectives, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw, while confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Nevertheless, variations among oral narrators, potential semantic loss during translation from Yoruba and Akoko dialects into English, restrictions surrounding sacred knowledge, and the difficulty of computational systems in representing metaphysical concepts may affect the completeness of the findings. Despite these limitations, the study provides a useful foundation for further research on indigenous knowledge systems and their culturally sensitive digital preservation.

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