Invisible Protectors: The Role of Deities in Security and Its Implication for Indigenous Knowledge Systems Among the Imasayi of Yewa North, Ogun State Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
Contemporary security challenges in Nigeria persist despite extensive state and international interventions. Yet, limited scholarly attention has been given to the role of deities and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in community-based security, particularly in Yoruba societies such as Imasayi. This study employed a qualitative research approach, drawing on oral histories, ethnographic observations, interviews with traditional custodians, and archival sources to examine the role of deities in Imasayi's indigenous security framework. Findings reveal that deities such as Aso (Asotedo), Elegba Ara, and palace-based shrines constituted an organised metaphysical security system that protected the community, regulated social conduct, and reinforced moral order. These systems complemented physical defence mechanisms and fostered communal resilience. However, modernisation, colonial legacies, and the spread of foreign religions have weakened the transmission and utilisation of this indigenous security knowledge. The study concludes that indigenous metaphysical security systems remain a vital but underutilised resource for understanding African approaches to security, governance, and community resilience. The Imasayi case demonstrates that pre-colonial African societies possessed sophisticated, holistic security architectures rooted in spirituality and indigenous epistemology. The study recommends institutional recognition of indigenous security knowledge, strengthened roles for traditional rulers, cultural education and re-orientation, documentation of oral traditions, and the thoughtful integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems with modern security structures to enhance local resilience and cultural sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

The world is increasingly confronted with diverse and evolving forms of insecurity. In the developing world, these challenges range from non-violent threats to highly violent manifestations and continue to assume more dangerous dimensions. The global community, through the United Nations Organisation (UNO), has acknowledged these threats and introduced numerous protocols, programmes, policies, and conventions aimed at curbing insecurity. Despite these interventions, their overall impact has remained limited, as insecurity persists globally with only marginal improvement.

Nigeria exemplifies this crisis. Security challenges in the country span banditry, kidnapping, drug-related violence,

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gun attacks, ritual killings, separatist agitation, and terrorism (Thompson, Afolabi & Abdulbaki, 2019; Thompson & Adams, 2021). Although factors such as ethnicity, social heterogeneity, religion, and resource-based conflicts have been identified as contributors, no clear or sustainable solutions have emerged. The consequences have been devastating, including massive loss of lives, widespread displacement, erosion of livelihoods, and growing threats to sustainable development (Mikail, Ayuba, Zubairu et al., 2025). Reports indicate that 63,111 people were killed during the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari between 2015 and 2023 (Vanguard, 2023; Daniel et al., 2025). Similarly, the Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration has recorded over 10,000 deaths from insecurity within its first two years (Amnesty International, 2025). These figures, widely regarded as conservative, stem largely from terrorism, banditry, herder–farmer conflicts, communal clashes, and extra-judicial killings. Additionally, it is estimated that 2,235,954 Nigerians were kidnapped, with ransom payments amounting to ₦2,231,772,563,507 (US$1.44 billion) (Egobiambu, 2024).

Efforts by state and non-state actors including the Police, Armed Forces, Navy, and vigilante groups have largely proven inadequate. In some instances, these efforts are perceived as outright failures due to poor funding, insufficient personnel, corruption, weak intelligence coordination, socio-economic grievances, sabotage, and lack of political will (Thompson & Adams, 2021; Titus, 2025). This persistent insecurity has renewed calls for alternative and complementary approaches to security beyond state-centric models.

While extensive scholarship exists on security, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), and cultural identity (Hall, 1990; Neema, 2025; Thompson, Adeosun et al., 2024), limited attention has been paid to the role of deities in securing local communities through indigenous epistemologies. Yet, IKS remains significant across all aspects of African life, including education, health, culture, and politics (Kaya & Seleti, 2013; Owawunmi & Oludare, 2013; Ugboma, 2014). Ugboma (2014) argues that indigenous knowledge is central to Africa's development, particularly in rural communities, where it functions as an effective resource for survival and social organisation. Owawunmi and Oludare (2013) further define indigenous knowledge as community-based knowledge derived from long-term interaction with the local environment and culture, with relevance for agriculture, medicine, arts, natural resource management, music, and theatre.

Importantly, Indigenous Knowledge Systems have contributed to addressing security challenges in Nigeria. For instance, it was reported that indigenous security mechanisms played a key role in dismantling the Badoo cult responsible for ritual killings in Ikorodu (Aderemi, 2017). Similar systems continue to function in various local communities, including Imasayi. Like many Yoruba towns, Imasayi in Yewa North developed indigenous methods of protecting the community long before colonial intervention. Notably, these systems have endured colonial disruption and the pressures of globalisation (Thompson, Folorunso et al., 2025).

However, modernisation, the spread of new religions, and globalisation have weakened communal reliance on deities that once served as reliable defenders. Although these religious transformations have contributed to development in some respects, they have also created confusion and increased vulnerability to internal and external threats. Traditionally, Yoruba kings underwent rituals that spiritually fortified them against attacks. Today, many traditional rulers, despite undergoing such rites, distance themselves from indigenous defence systems due to religious and social pressures, thereby weakening communal protection.

Against this background, the study is guided by the following research questions: Where is Imasayi located, and what is its historical background? Which deities are responsible for defending the community, and how effective are they? What are the implications of these findings for Indigenous Knowledge Systems and security? Addressing these questions is significant for sustainable development, particularly in relation to indigenous knowledge, peace, justice and strong institutions, and sustainable cities and communities, as well as for policymakers and security practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many academic scholarship on deities, security and indigenous knowledge management. On deities, Richard (2010) contends that the world in Africa is alive with a variety of spirit beings (deities), who are said to have been created by the Supreme Being and have less power than the creator. Mbiti (1969: 75-76), contributes that "… the spiritual world of African people is very densely populated with spirit beings; spirits and the living- dead." These divinities are on the whole thought to have been created by God, in the ontological category of the spirits. Busia in Forde, (1954: 191) agrees that "… it is believed that God purposely created the deities to guard men."

Onwubiko (1990) similarly affirms that deities constitute a central feature of African Traditional Religion and, by extension, the worldview of African peoples, making their environment deeply infused with spiritual presence. This aligns with Egonu's (1988:329) observation that, for Africans, "the material world becomes a creation of God, a world of wonder and interest and a school for curiosity and its satisfaction." Such perspectives echo Rudolf Otto's idea of the "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*," capturing both the awe and appeal of the sacred. In African cosmology, the invisible realm is vividly real—a structured world of spirits and divinities arranged in a hierarchy: the

Supreme Being at the apex, lesser divinities beneath, and the ancestors forming the foundational tier.

Zarepour (2022) posits that most religions share a belief in deities—supernatural beings with powers that influence the world, human life, and destiny, often possessing forms of perfection far beyond human limits. Because deities are central to religious practice, philosophical inquiry naturally addresses their existence, nature, and attributes. Contemporary philosophy of religion, shaped largely by Christian thought, has tended to focus on the God of Christianity and, by extension, the other Abrahamic faiths. However, issues specific to Judaism, Islam, and non-Abrahamic religions have been significantly neglected. The passage argues that a more inclusive and diverse philosophy of religion must engage seriously with the full range of deities across all religious traditions.

In Africa, Ushe (2017) explores African conceptions of the Supreme Being, divinities, and ancestors, emphasising that belief in multiple spiritual beings does not conflict with belief in a single Supreme Being, contrary to some Western interpretations. Using an interdisciplinary approach involving interviews, observations, and secondary sources, the study analyses the metaphysical roles of these beings in African traditional religion. The findings show that the idea of a Supreme Being is deeply rooted in African thought and that traditional African societies recognise no atheism. Divinities are understood as emanations or authorised agents of the Supreme Being within a unified theocratic system, while ancestors act as intermediaries between the divine realm and the living. The paper concludes by recommending improved religious education, a theology of enculturation, and greater appreciation of African worldviews to sustain these traditional beliefs and practices. Okeke and Olekaibe (2022) advances that from the early 19th century, the study of African Traditional Religion gained significant attention through the works of scholars such as J.S. Mbiti, Ikenga Metuh, Parrinder and Bolaji Idowu, who sought to recover African identity by examining Indigenous religious thought. A central theme in these studies is the role of deities, which hold an important place in African spirituality. Contrary to earlier Eurocentric claims that Africans were incapable of conceiving a Supreme Being, African scholars have demonstrated that such views were inaccurate and misleading. Africans had knowledge of and worshipped God long before colonial contact, and groups such as the Igbo of Nigeria possessed well-developed concepts of the divine from their earliest history. Despite colonisation, modernity and foreign cultural influences, African deities continue to be recognised and revered today.

Nigeria's security is porous with variants of threats to the society and development (Thompson, Afolabi & Abdulbaki, 2019; Thompson and Adams, 2021). Bala (2020) contends that Nigeria continues to struggle with escalating insecurity, particularly the persistent threat posed by Boko Haram, whose activities have expanded into neighbouring African countries and taken on a regional dimension. In response to the prolonged crisis, this study examines the performance of Nigeria's security agencies and evaluates their daily operations through a comparative lens informed by international best practices. The analysis reveals that many of the sector's shortcomings stem from weaknesses in the institutional design and implementation of the national security architecture. The study also emphasises the need for stronger coordination and collaboration among security agencies, as these remain central to addressing the country's major security challenges. It concludes that a comprehensive reform of Nigeria's security framework is essential to curb rising crime and terrorism. The recommendations focus primarily on actions required of the federal government as the principal custodian of national security policies and institutions. Additional suggestions highlight the importance of international cooperation, noting that crime and terrorism often have cross-border implications that demand harmonised efforts in information sharing and threat management. Ayodele (2021) advances that debates on decentralising Nigeria's security structure persist, intensified by emerging regional security outfits. This study examines the media's role in discussions on community policing, state police and regional networks. Using interviews with media scholars and professionals, findings show that the media provides an essential platform for analysing security challenges but must remain unbiased as regions pursue outfits such as Amotekun and Abube Agu. Poorly managed regionalism may worsen insecurity, and stakeholders, including the media, must promote ideas that strengthen national security. Awotayo and Omitola (2024) examines Nigeria's complex security challenges, including terrorism, banditry and communal conflict, and finds that the centralised security structure is inadequate. Using a questionnaire and descriptive analysis, it identifies over-centralisation and distorted federalism as major contributors to insecurity. The findings show that excessive central control alienates citizens from securing their communities. The study recommends adopting true federalism by amending the 1999 Constitution to shift key items to the concurrent list, enabling regional integration and security outfits such as Amotekun.

Before the advent of colonialism, most of what is known or Africa's world view was on indigenous knowledge system (IKS). This extends beyond social, political, economic to cultural and economic spheres of the society. Kanu and Ndubisi (2020) aver that every society has unique ways of acquiring and transmitting knowledge shaped by its cultural experiences. Indigenous knowledge, once dismissed as irrelevant or superstitious, is now increasingly recognised for its value in development planning, especially in areas such as participation,

capacity-building and sustainable resource management. Africa offers rich examples of such systems. This book provides a platform for APAS scholars to explore and highlight African Indigenous Knowledge Systems, offering insights that can guide policymakers toward meaningful integration and practical application in contemporary development efforts. Ayeni and Aborisade (2022) contend that Solutions to human problems are rarely unilateral; they often emerge from multiple knowledge sources. It is therefore essential to remain open to all forms of knowledge, free from ego or bias, and assess their relevance to contemporary challenges. As this paper argues, African Indigenous Knowledge offers practical, tested and effective solutions across various domains. Ignoring such valuable knowledge systems would be a grave mistake, especially when they can help address many of the crises humanity has created and now confronts.

While many studies are increasing on deities, security, and indigenous knowledge system, much work has not covered deities in Yoruba towns especially Imasayi, Yewa peoples of Ogun state.

The Yewa People of Ogun, Nigeria

The origins and historical development of Yewa are closely intertwined with the histories of Ile-Ife and Oyo, both widely regarded as the ancestral centres of Yoruba civilisation. Yewaland and its people have existed as a distinct socio-cultural entity since at least the thirteenth century. As a sub-ethnic group within the broader Yoruba region of southwestern Nigeria, Yewa evolved through waves of migration involving princes, seasoned warriors and hunters who departed from Ile-Ife, Oyo and Ketu in search of new territories. These migrants, accompanied by their followers, founded independent settlements that later matured into autonomous kingdoms and chiefdoms. This decentralised pattern of foundation explains why Yewaland comprises a diverse collection of communities with varied ethnic and sub-ethnic backgrounds, yet united through common historical and cultural threads.

Following 1890, the people of Egbado, an earlier name for the groups inhabiting this region requested and received a British protectorate, resulting in the establishment of a small military outpost in the area. In 1914, during the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria, the region was formally incorporated into the British Colony and Protectorate as the Egbado Division within Abeokuta Province. Today, the Yewa people primarily occupy the western corridor of Ogun State and include several interconnected sub-groups such as the Ketu, Sabe, Ije (Ohori), Ifonyin, Anago, Eyo and Ogu (Egun).

Geographically, the northern part of Yewaland is home to the Ketu subgroup. Towns such as Ijoun, Ijaka, Ijale, Egua, Igan Alade, Imeko, Owode-Ketu, Tata, Ilara and Idofa were all established by migrants from Ketu, founded historically by Alaketu and now located in modern-day Benin Republic. Directly south of the Ketu are the Ije or Ohori people, who occupy areas including Oja-Odan, Obele, Ohunbe, Ibeku and Isale. Further south lie the Ifonyin communities whose major towns include Ikolaje, Ilashe and Ifonyintedo.

To the east of Ketu, Ohori and Ifonyin are the groups formerly classified as Egbado. These include the peoples of Ilaro, Ibara, Ilewo, Ilogun, Imala-Aiba, Ilobi, Ibese, Igbogila, Imasayi, Sago, Igan Okoto, Joga, Ayetoro, Idofoyi, Tibo, Keesan, Oke-Odan, Erinja and Ajilete, among others. South of the Egbado communities lie the Awori, whose main settlements include Ota, Ado-Odo and Igbesa. To the west of the Awori are the Anago, interwoven with the Eyo, who established towns such as Ipokia, Agosasa, Ijofin, Ibatefin and Ihunbo. Further south are the Ogu (Egun) people, concentrated mainly around the Badagry area. The Egun have historically intermarried with their Awori, Anago and Egbado neighbours, and their significant settlements include Ipokia, Tube and Maun.

During the final decades of British colonial rule, all these sub-groups were administratively categorised under the Egbado Division of Abeokuta Province. Over time, administrative adjustments led to the creation of multiple local government councils to accommodate population growth and administrative needs. In contemporary Nigeria, the Yewa people are predominantly spread across Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government, Ipokia Local Government, Yewa South Local Government, Yewa North Local Government, Imeko-Afon Local Government and Abeokuta North Local Government, all within Ogun State.

A major milestone in Yewa identity occurred in 1985 when the people collectively decided to replace the name "Egbado" with "Yewa," inspired by the Yewa River that runs through the region. This decision sought to correct historical misrepresentations and foster a stronger, unified identity for the culturally diverse communities within the area. The quest for self-definition and a cohesive identity culminated in a landmark meeting of Egbado Obas on 24 November 1994, where the formal resolution to adopt the name Yewa was agreed. Subsequently, on 28 February 1996, the Egbado Traditional Council officially became the Yewa Traditional Council. The name change was legally affirmed by the Ogun State Government through Gazette No. 51, dated 18 December 1997. Today, the name Yewa symbolises not only geographical belonging but also cultural unity and shared aspirations for progress among the people of the region.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design in order to capture the historical, cultural, and metaphysical dimensions of indigenous security practices among the Imasayi people of Yewa North, Ogun State. A qualitative approach was considered most appropriate because the subject of inquiry deities, rituals, oral traditions, and

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is deeply embedded in lived experiences, belief systems, and collective memory that cannot be adequately examined through quantitative measures alone.

Primary data were generated through in-depth oral interviews, ethnographic field observations, and visual documentation of sacred spaces, shrines, and ritual sites. Interviews were conducted with key custodians of indigenous knowledge, including the Oba of Imasayi, palace chiefs, Ifa priests, elders, and long-term residents who possess historical and ritual knowledge of the community's security traditions. The selection of participants followed purposive and snowball sampling techniques, initiated with the consent and guidance of the Oba, who identified individuals with relevant experiential and cultural authority. All participants voluntarily consented to take part in the study, in line with ethical research standards.

Field observations enabled the researchers to document ritual spaces, annual festivals, and the spatial organisation of palace and town deities, providing contextual depth to interview narratives. These observations were complemented by pictorial documentation, which served as visual ethnographic evidence of indigenous security infrastructures.

Secondary data were sourced from academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, palace records, archival materials, newspapers, and credible online resources. These materials provided historical context and theoretical grounding for interpreting indigenous metaphysical security systems within broader debates on security, governance, and cultural identity. Data were analysed thematically through careful transcription, coding, and interpretation of recurring patterns, symbols, and narratives, allowing for triangulation between oral accounts, observations, and documentary sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The History and Origin of Imasayi People of Yewa, Ogun State
In the pre-colonial era, communities had established mechanisms to safeguard themselves from internal, external and even metaphysical threats. Imasayi-Yewa is an ancient town in the present Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria whose original settlers migrated from Oyo and were the direct descendants of Oba Oluaso, The Eighth Alaafin Oyo who reigned about the year 1766, a period covering about four centuries. The story of Imasayi is a history of several years of migration and movement of a group of people from one settlement location to another in line with the directives of Ifa divination and peculiar circumstances that necessitated the movements.

The name Imasayi is a corrupt form of the word Masayi, a crown Prince of Oyo. Masayi was the son of Oba Olunso, he had ten wives but did not have any issue. In line with the common practice then, Masayi was said to have consulted the oracle to unravel the mysterious unfortunate situation he found himself, and was advised to make a sacrifice of 10 pigeons, 10 fowls, 10 bitter kolanuts among other things to Yewa River that could give him a child. He complied with the advice and so went with his ten wives and some slaves to the Alaketu at Aro-Ketu who guided him to the location of Yewa River for the sacrifice. It is also beliegd that he left with one of his brothers known as Sawon (Sawonjo). However, while Masayi stayed at the first land he occupied, Sawon informed his elder brother that he would continue his journey and gathering people.[i]

After the sacrifice, Masayi and his entourage returned to Aro-Ketu with Alaketu where Ifa oracle was consulted once more to know when Masayi should return to Oyo. The oracle directed him to a new settlement for himself where he would be blessed with children (Imasayi Book, nd). The new town which was later named Ilukimo is now called Ilikimo, in present day Republic Of Benin. A few months after he had settled down at Ilikimo, two of his wives became pregnant and bore children. The first child was a male. Masayi immediately sent to his father Alaafin Oluaso to intimate him of the happy development. The Alaafin ordered that the child and mother be brought to him and he named him Asotedo which literarily means "Aso found a settlement" as the oracle had indicated to Alaafin earlier on that, anywhere the child was born should be his town, The child and mother later returned to Ilikimo about three months after the child was named, while the Oyo Mesi came on behalf of Oyo people to rejoice with Masayi at the new settlement on the birth of Asotedo.

On arrival at the new settlement, the Oyomesis with one voice greeted Masayi and the new child as "ilu ki omo o (The town, Oyo greet the child). This is why the settlement was named llukimo now corruptly called Ilikimo. More people later on came from Oyo to join Masayi to settle at Ilikimo, Oba Oluaso, the Alaafin, noticed the growth in number and popularity of its people at likimo, now sent a beaded crown, beaded shoe, beaded staff, through one of his children named Onigbogi to go and crown Masayi, at Tlikimo. That was how Masayi became the first Oba of what is today known as the Imasayi Town. The people relied mostly on river for water then, the only source of water for the town which was the river was not good (Imasayi Book, nd)

Oba Masayi, having noticed that the water at Ilikimo was not good for drinking, then decided to move to a place near the bank of Yewa River, but before they moved, an agreement or solidarity was made among Oba Masayi, Onigbogi and their neighbours, Alaketu, Onishabe and later with Onidofa and Onijale at a town called Ika. The agreement was symbolized by six sand moulds, each participant making accompanied by a group of singers known as the Akinjeles. As a local art historian posits that

the moulds which are referred to as Okiti Imule are still there up till today, and had never reduced in size

With the Fulani invasions and constant attacks by the Fulani during the Fulani wars, Oba Masayi and his people and they moved to another settlement called Ojoko, Oba Masayi died after reigning for thirty-six (36) years.

Asotedo, his first son whose turn it was to ascend the throne and who at that time become the Balogun declined to be crowned. He instead, installed his brother, Adepegba. The new Oba decreed that any Oba along that line should be titled Olu Masayi after his alter father Oba Masayi. After the death of Adepegba, the second Imasayi Oba, Adeleke, the son of Adepegba became the 3rd Oba.

Unfortunately there was a smallpox epidemic at Ojoko which led to many people dying. Hence, the people moved again to another settlement near Iju River (Odo Aganju). The new settlement was called Ilufun. Oba Adeleke, the 3rd Oba died at Ilufun. After Oba Adeleke's death Olublyi, Adeleke's brother became the Oba, After Olubiyis death, Akinyelu the son of Adeleke became the 5th Oba, After the death of Akinyelu, Asotedo was still alive but very old, he ordered the people to move to the present location of Imasayi having been assured by Ifa divination that Imasayi should be the final place of settlement for the people. They finally settled in a dense forest (Aginju) where they met woman they supposed was a spirit, she wore a white wrapper and drew water from the Iju River. The woman called herself Iju, a woman of dignity who helped greatly in the final settlement of Imasayi people. At Imasayi, Asotedo crowned Asobiyi as the 6th Oba, then Asoblyi became the 1st Oba to reign at the present Imasayi town.

Shortly after the coronation, Asotedo was said to have mysteriously vanished into the ground at the site called Oju Aso in Imasayi. Before he vanished, he promised that he would always rise again to defend the town in the event of any external attack.

The Role of Deities in Security of Lives and Property among the Imasayi People

This section provides the main deity responsible for the protection of the town and its precedence. It also shows how it has been tested and the result of the test. Oba Lukman Kuoye said most of the ancient deities in Yoruba history are also in Imasayi, noting that they consult the oracle every August to know which deity they are going to worship and what they would need in worshiping them, as it is their belief that their own new year starts every September, when they celebrate their festivals such as Egungun, Aje, and Gelede, among others. These deities can be categorised into palace and town deities.[ii] The palace deities are those within the palace while the town are domiciled outside the palace.

Palace Deities

Aside Aso (Asotedo) there are many other deities protecting the people of Imasayi. These deities ranged from palace deities, market to town deities. There is a shrine in the palace whre the King enters to make some sacrifices. In this place, there is the Igba Aje, Ade isembaiye and other deities as well as heritages. One of the defenses of the town is a shrine where the King can lay a curse and also pray for the people. It is believed that if the King curses, it cannot be reversed. The shrine is strategic as the King can curse any intruder or attacker from the place. So most times, it is advisable for the King not to lay curse when entering the shrine.

Figure 1: The Igba Aje

Aside the Igba Aje which brings wealth and prosperity to the town. It is believd that when people are wealthy or economically buoyant then they are secured. That is, the security of lives and property begins when the populace have food, clothing and shelter. This can only be done when traders. This deity known as Igba Aje is also worshipped annually and it is believed that once it is offered its needs, the trade and commerce of the town would blossom.

Figure 2: Oju Eegun Oba

Figure 2 is where the king's masquerade comes to pray before they open start of festival.

Town Deities
Among the town deities is the Elegba Ara. The Elegba Ara is a mole hill but not just the ordinary ones. This is because it is a line of defense. In times of crises, the bees can be summoned to go and fight against attackers. It is usually worshiped annually. Before it can be worshipped, the Aboore (Ifa Priest) would do a divinity to know what it wanted to take for that year. It could range from palm oil, kolanut to bitter cola, water, gin, etc. It could also demand for small or big animals like chicken, goats, cows but it does not demand for human being.

Figure 3: Elegba Ara

Figure 3 is the Elegba Ara which releases bees and flying insects to attack any intruder. It is an automatic security defense which perceives enemy or intruders. Once, it recognises that an enemy was in the town, it automatically triggers its defense system by attacking them. And it is only when they leave or stung to death that the bees and insects returns to its base.

Figure 4: Sango Ilu

Figure 4 is the site of the Sango Ilu. This is worshiped by the town and it is done annually unlike the Ogun Oja which is done at every five days (market days). Sango Ilu accepts gin, cold water and palm oil for propitiations. It is the god of thunder. By this, it is believed that no harm would come to the town entirely and it is one of the lines of defense.

Figure 5: Ogun Oja

The Ogun is the god of iron. It is believed that whatever they do in the market, there is need for them to worship the god of iron so that any related death that has to do with iron (gun, cutlasses or machetes) would not harm them. Thus, this deity is worshiped with live dog. Even when an enemy is coming to attack, it will do so with Ogun and by fortifying or worshipping the Ogun deity, such attack would come to null.

Aso the Defender and the Test of Potency
After the proclamation by Aso that he would defend the town anytime they called on him, many people still doubted him. So some people conspired to test the potency of his power and promises.
So one day, the people gathered themselves together at around the spot where Asotedo entered the ground and blew the war trumpet (named Apala) as commanded by Asotedo whenever there was war. To their utmost. shock and astonishment, Asotedo came out from the ground followed by several warriors Asotedo then ordered his soldiers to start killing all those around, taking them for enemies
When taking count of the war casualties, Asotedo then saw that the dead people had Imasayi native tribal marks, *baamu*. He was shocked and very sad. He then asked what happened from the elders, who revealed to him that some people conspired to test his vow to appear whenever there was an aggression and blew the war trumpet, *Apala*.[iii] So infuriated and angered was Asotedo by this act of lack of faith that he vowed never to appear again physically, but would continue to defend the town from externally aggression.

Implication for the Indigenous Knowledge System
The findings of this study have far-reaching implications for the understanding and sustainability of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) within Yoruba society and Africa more broadly. The Imasayi experience demonstrates that deities and spiritual agencies constituted essential components of indigenous epistemology, particularly in the organisation of security and communal well-being. The traditional reliance on deities such as Aso, Elegba Ara and palace shrines shows that pre-colonial African societies had established intricate metaphysical mechanisms for social regulation and territorial protection. These systems were not merely religious expressions but embodied strategic knowledge, cosmological insight and community-based intelligence that guided decision-making and strengthened internal cohesion. By recognising these elements as forms of indigenous knowledge, the study reinforces the argument that African societies were never without sophisticated governance and defence structures before colonial intrusion.
However, the research also reveals the challenges confronting the continuity of these knowledge systems.

Modernisation, the spread of new religions and globalisation have significantly weakened communal confidence in indigenous security practices. The reluctance of contemporary traditional rulers who themselves benefit from traditional rites to publicly acknowledge or utilise these systems highlights a disconnection between inherited cultural responsibilities and present-day identity formation. This dislocation has contributed to increased vulnerability, as communities that once relied on spiritually fortified defence mechanisms now lack culturally grounded alternatives to counter rising insecurity. Revitalising indigenous knowledge therefore requires not only cultural remembrance but also conscious re-education, community sensitisation and institutional support that validate these practices as integral to local development. As Kaya and Seletei (2013) notes that IKS is significant to education as well.
The Imasayi case highlights the epistemic richness of African metaphysics, encompassing divination, ritual systems, ancestral mediation, and the cosmological organization of space and power. These practices offer frameworks for conflict resolution, environmental management, moral accountability, and intergenerational learning. Their continued relevance demonstrates how indigenous knowledge can complement the modern security architecture of the state and local communities. Strengthening Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) requires a holistic approach that goes beyond mere documentation, emphasizing active transmission through cultural festivals, folklore, apprenticeship, scholarly research, and formal policy recognition.

Discussion of Findings
Findings show the historical reconstruction of Imasayi reveals that the community's identity, settlement patterns, and security consciousness were deeply shaped by migration, divination, and spiritual guidance. The repeated movement of the Imasayi people—from Ilikimo to Ojoko, Ilufun, and finally the present location—was not random but directed by Ifa divination and responses to ecological challenges, epidemics, and external threats. This demonstrates that decision-making in pre-colonial Imasayi society was informed by indigenous epistemologies that integrated spiritual insight with practical survival strategies. Such reliance on divination and ancestral guidance confirms that indigenous knowledge functioned as both a planning and security tool, guiding settlement choices and reducing vulnerability. The origin narrative of Aso (Asotedo) and his transformation into a permanent metaphysical defender further reinforces the inseparability of political authority, ancestry, and security. The disappearance of Asotedo into the ground symbolises the institutionalisation of ancestral protection as a continuous security presence. This finding supports

Africanist scholarship which argues that ancestral veneration and spiritual guardianship formed the backbone of governance and protection in many pre-colonial societies. In Imasayi, history itself becomes a security resource, shaping communal identity, territorial legitimacy, and collective confidence against external aggression. As Ayeni and Aborisade (2022) posits that African Indigenous knowledge is one with such rich source of Knowledge that represents workable solutions on a variety of issues that have been tried, tested, and certified as excellent. The story of his testing, which resulted in catastrophic consequences, reinforces communal values of faith, restraint and reverence for sacred institutions.

Secondly, the findings show that security in Imasayi is decentralised and distributed across a network of deities with clearly defined protective functions. Centralisation of power and security architecture of the Nigerian state has proven to be one of the challenges of modern society with many calling for the need to restructure the security architecture and follow the path of federalism (Bala, 2020; Awotayo et al 2024; Ayodele, 2021). Aso (Asotedo) occupies a central position as the town's ultimate defender, while palace-based deities such as Igba Aje and ritual spaces within the palace perform economic, judicial, and spiritual security roles. The association of Igba Aje with wealth and prosperity reflects an indigenous understanding that economic stability is foundational to the security of lives and property, anticipating contemporary notions of human security. Town deities such as Elegba Ara demonstrate the sophistication of indigenous intelligence and defence systems. The mobilisation of bees and flying insects as a deterrent to intruders reflects ecological knowledge harnessed for communal protection. Similarly, deities such as Ogun and Sango serve as metaphysical safeguards against violence associated with iron and lightning, reinforcing norms of restraint and justice. These findings illustrate that Imasayi's security architecture was not symbolic but operational, combining spiritual authority, environmental knowledge, and moral regulation to prevent conflict and deter aggression. The testing of Aso's potency and the tragic consequences that followed further highlight the ethical dimension of indigenous security. Security was sustained not only through fear of metaphysical sanctions but also through communal trust, discipline, and reverence for sacred institutions. This underscores that indigenous security systems relied on shared belief and moral consensus rather than coercion. These deities are no doubt significant in preventing external attacks and sustaining peace in addition to its role in conflict resolution and adjudicators (Olaoba, 2005; Adetola et al 2023)

Finally, the findings show that this has implications for indigenous knowledge system. The Imasayi case demonstrates that Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) encompass complex security logics that extend beyond ritual practice into governance, environmental management, and social control. The decline in the open use of these systems, driven by modernisation, colonial legacies, and religious intolerance, has weakened their transmission and practical application. Thompson, Folorunso et al (2025) have asserted how modernisation, foreign religions and shifting cultural values have weakened indigenous security knowledge (Thompson, Folorunso et al 2025). Traditional rulers, once central to the activation of metaphysical security, now operate under pressures that limit their engagement with indigenous defence mechanisms, creating a disconnect between cultural inheritance and contemporary leadership.

The persistence of festivals, annual consultations, and the careful maintenance of sacred sites indicates a continued, albeit evolving, relationship with indigenous epistemologies. This highlights the resilience of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and their potential relevance to contemporary security challenges when thoughtfully integrated with modern approaches (Brownson et al 2024; Koley, 2025; Sustainability Diary, 2025). The Sustainability Directory (2025) states that resilience in this context goes beyond the physical environment to include social, cultural and economic dimensions. Indigenous perspectives regard these elements as deeply interconnected, emphasising that a community's ability to endure and adapt to external pressures is closely tied to the strength of its social bonds, cultural identity and collective wellbeing. Hall (1990) provides a similar framework for understanding identity, arguing that individuals possess three levels that become more or less prominent depending on the situation: personal, relational and communal. His notion of communal identity closely aligns with Taylor's idea of social identity. Gudykunst further refines this category, offering an expanded classification that highlights its significance in intercultural communication. As Chen (2014) argues that cultural identity is constructed and maintained through the process of sharing collective knowledge such as traditions, heritage, language, aesthetics, norms and customs.

CONCLUSION
This study examined the role of deities in Imasayi's indigenous security framework, showing that African traditional societies developed sophisticated spiritually anchored protection systems long before colonial or modern state structures. Historical reconstruction, ethnographic evidence, and oral traditions reveal that deities such as Aso, Elegba Ara, and other palace-based spiritual entities formed an organized metaphysical security system, safeguarding the community from physical and spiritual threats. These deities acted as agents of communal defense, social regulation, and moral order.

Colonialism, new religious ideologies, and modernisation have eroded confidence in indigenous defence systems, creating gaps in cultural continuity and community resilience. Traditional rulers now navigate tensions between inherited spiritual responsibilities and contemporary religious expectations, resulting in the loss of access to protective knowledge systems. The study underscores the relevance of indigenous metaphysical knowledge in addressing modern security challenges, especially where formal state structures are weak or overstretched.

Findings reaffirm that Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are vital for understanding African approaches to governance, spirituality, and security. Preserving and integrating these systems strengthens local security strategies, restores communal confidence, and sustains cultural identity. The case of Imasayi illustrates that indigenous spiritual defense mechanisms, when respected, remain relevant and offer insights into holistic community protection.

Recommendations include institutional recognition of indigenous security knowledge; strengthening traditional rulers' roles; promoting cultural education and community sensitisation; integrating IKS with modern security structures; documenting oral traditions; encouraging enculturation in religious practice; and adopting participatory, community-based research approaches. These measures ensure the preservation, utilization, and transmission of indigenous knowledge, enhancing resilience and reinforcing the cultural heritage of future generations.

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INTERVIEWS

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[i] Excerpt of oral interview from Chief J. A Odu, the Atunluse of Imasayi, palace, 30/10/2025
[ii] Except of Oral interview, Oba Lukman Kuoye, PhD, palace, 30 October 2025
[iii] Except of Oral interview, Oba Lukman Kuoye, PhD, palace, 30 October 2025; Imasayi Book (nd)