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**ÒSANYÌN / OSSÁÌM**  
**the YORUBA DEITY of Healing**  
**in Nigeria and Brazil:**  
**A Comparative Study**

**Dr. Abayòmi O. Sóbò**

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17 JAN 2001

Submitted for the degree of M.A (Anthropology) in the  
University of Durham 1999.

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To my late parents

Chief Mich. S. T. Shoboh  
The Otunbade of Iporo Sódeké

and

Chief Christiana D. Shoboh  
The Iyalode of Iporo Sódeké

and

My Brother

----- Ebenezer Akinbode Sóbò -----  
whose untimely death made me the  
head of two families.

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I am indebted to my friend and colleague Ladipo Yemitan, a renowned Nigerian historian whose writings on the Egba history kindled my interest in the study. He later became my mentor during my field study in Nigeria. Also to Dr. Aneesa Kassam for guidance during the study and write up.

My thanks go to my friends, Bisi Mabogunje and Solo Ochia who helped in transporting me from place to place in Nigeria to meet my interviewees in spite of petrol shortage; to Kadya Tall for her invaluable help as chauffeur and translator in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil and all those who gave me advice in one form or another.

My gratitude goes to all my interviewees in Nigeria and Salvador de Bahia. Of these special mention needs to be made of Chief J.O.Lambo in Nigeria. He died very recently. Also Nancy de Souza e Silva (Sisy) and Ildasio Tavares, my Brother in Sainthood.

Finally my wife deserves special thanks for her support and understanding during my absence on field work.

Katharine Jones gave permission for figures 3b and c to be reproduced from the Independent Newspaper of 3 April 1998. These were graphics produced by Kristina Ferris and Gidon Freeman.

Dr. Abayomi O. Sobò

## ÒSANYÌN (OSSAÌM)

The Yoruba Deity of Healing in Nigeria and Brazil:

A Comparative Study

M.A. (Anthropology) 1999.

### Abstract.

In Nigeria *Òsanyìn* and in Brazil *Ossaím* is the Yorùbá deity of healing credited with all knowledge of herbs, leaves and roots for medicinal purposes.

The myths of origin, history and religious beliefs of the Yorùbá of south west Nigeria were carried by the slaves across to the Americas and the Caribbean. It is said that in Bahia, Brazil the Yorùbá religion is at its truest (Herskovits and Herskovits, 1943). The religion is passed down through generations to this day albeit with minor modifications due to the influence of the Catholic religion. This factor has maintained a continuity in space and time with the original cult.

To the Yorùbá, health is a state in which there is a blending of physical, mental, emotional social moral and spiritual well-being. To achieve this harmony they resort to divination to find out the cause of and remedy for their illness.

The traditional healers fall into four groups and of these the diviner/herbalist meet the needs of anyone who is ill by providing both diagnosis and medication. Among this group are the *Olòsanyìn* who diagnose and provide the remedy through dialogue with the deity and the *Òsanyìn* who acquire the knowledge of herbs and the associated incantations through a system of apprenticeship.

In Bahia, diagnosis is made through divination using sixteen cowries. The herbs are collected by the *Babaloxá* under whose watchful eyes the medications are prepared.

The Yoruba celebrate the festival of *Òsanyìn* annually either individually or collectively in the town, led by the head of the cult and the Oba. In Bahia, the festival of *Ossaím* is held at the same time as that of the other *orixá*.

Giddens' (1979) theory of structuration is applied to elucidate how the system is reproduced; how knowledge is transmitted and why the activities associated with the cult remain in demand in the modern age.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

I am a western trained medical doctor and a third generation Christian. My parents and grandparents before me were baptised into this faith. I was brought up within the Yorùbá culture, but in an urban environment where the traditional way of life and religion were considered to be inferior. We belonged to the new British colonial social order. Yorùbá language was, however, spoken at home and was taught as a subject at the secondary school level .

As a city dweller in Lagos, I attended one of the many secondary schools run by the missionaries but knew very little about the traditional rites and rituals of my people, as these were not encouraged in the cities. After acquiring the necessary qualifications I studied and graduated in medicine at the then Durham University Medical School which was based at Newcastle-upon Tyne.

I later sought and rendered service in several developing countries in West Africa; first in Nigeria with the Federal Government, and then in Liberia and Sierra Leone under the World Health Organization (WHO) from 1973 - 1987.

During the period of service with the WHO, I developed an interest in the subject of anthropology and wrote a paper on the Comparative Study of the Age Standardised Cancer Ratio (A.S.C.A.R.) in Liberia, Cameroon and the Moshi District of Tanzania (Sobo, 1984:98) These three countries are situated within the Equatorial climate belt of Africa.

Through my readings on the Yorùbá I became interested first in the history of the Egba, a sub-division of the Yorùbá, and then in the philosophy of cultural nationalism which was put forward just before the end of the last century.

My interest in cultural nationalism kindled my desire to learn more about the traditional way of healing associated with *Òsanyìn*, the deity of herbalism and medicine.



As a Yorùbá with a good command of the language and with personal family contacts in Lagos, Abeokuta and Ibadan, I had the advantage of both my western medical training and access to the traditional system. Some of the problems experienced by non-native anthropologists were thereby eliminated.

I learnt about the part played by Chief Sodeke in the homeland of the Egbas from *A History of Abeokuta* (Ajisafe, 1924). Chief Sodeke was the charismatic leader of the Egba who led his people to their present home and also the one who welcomed the missionaries to Abeokuta in 1843. Through this gateway, Christianity entered Yorùbáland and the rest of Nigeria. I also learnt from the family history that I am a descendant of Chief Meroyi, a brother to Chief Sodeke and that the *Òsanyìn* (Medical Society) met in a hall in Chief Meroyi's compound (Chief *Òsanyìntola*, 1997).

Traditional medicine takes a holistic approach to health and integrates the various aspects of life to provide an effective means of healing within the Yorùbá cosmology. This all embracing outlook cannot be dissociated from religious beliefs.

Positive health to the Yorùbá is known as *alaafia* which is a blending of the physical, mental, emotional, social, moral and spiritual aspects of well-being. Every effort is made to achieve this harmonious balance. The traditional system embraces both curative and preventive aspects. It is defined as a body of knowledge, which includes techniques for the preparation and use of substances, based on the sociocultural and religious institutions. The techniques are gained through personal experience and observation handed down from generation to generation usually in a practical, though unwritten form. The system is used for the diagnosis, prevention or elimination of imbalances in the physical, mental or social states of well-being (Koumare, 1983:25).

A great deal has been written about the Yorùbá Pantheon of deities and some of these works are referred to in Chapter 4. However, very little is written about *Òsanyìn*, the deity of medicine and herbalists. Some refer to him as a minor *Orìsà* (Lucas, 1948) yet it is one of those that survived the persecution of the two faiths - Islam and Christianity which were introduced to Yorùbáland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively. It also

survived the transplantation to the Americas where it has acquired importance as one of the 14 *orixas* that are worshipped in the *candomblé* in Brazil. The *Candomblé* is the religion of the Brazilian Africans, the great ceremonies honouring the *orixás*, and the sanctuary in which they are held (Bastide, 1960).

*Òsanyìn*, known in Brazil as *Ossáim*, can be studied along two separate lines: in (a) religious terms and (b) in ethno-botanical terms as the medicines that the herbalists prescribed for their patients. The latter can be studied using analytical chemistry to identify the active ingredients in the plants and herbs used in the various preparations. Survey methods can also be used to find out the efficacy of the preparations for the different conditions treated. This study deals with the religious aspect.

Yorùbá traditional medicine not only makes use of herbs, plants and roots in the treatment of diseases, but also of divination in many forms. This study lays emphasis on the place of *Òsanyìn* as the deity of herbalists and medicine. The role of the two types of healers under the umbrella of *Òsanyìn*, the organisation of the cult, the role of the healer as a teacher as well as the attempt by groups of herbalists to seek recognition from the Government of Nigeria are all investigated. These aspects are examined in the context of the worship of *Òsanyìn* as a deity. In the text, the spelling of the Yorùbá words as used on either side of the Atlantic are retained. For example, *Òsanyìn* is spelt *Ossáim* in Brazil, and "X" is substituted for for the Yorùbá "Ṣ" or "Sh" as in *Ṣàngò* or *Oshun*.

A comparative study is also made of the transplantation of *Ossáim* (*Òsanyìn*) in the culture of the Bahianas in Salvador, the capital of the State of Bahia in Brazil. The Bahianas are the descendants of the African slaves who live in Bahia.

The dissertation is divided into eight chapters. In the first I explain reflexively, my own background and how I became interested in the subject of *Òsanyìn*.

Chapter two sets out the aims and objectives of the study and deals with the methods of data collection and analytical theory. It also discusses the problems encountered with the collection of the data.

Chapter three gives the background to the Yorùbá and discusses their supposed origins and their belief system to create a picture of the environment in which the practice of *Òsanyìn* takes place.

Chapter four describes the Yorùbá belief system and cosmology and contrasts this with the belief system that survived the transplantation across the Atlantic during the slave trade and now exists today in Brazil.

Chapter five explains the Yorùbá concept of medicine and how health is achieved. It describes the Yorùbá traditional healers, their training and their attempt to form themselves into a corporate body and to achieve recognition both by the government and the western trained medical profession.

Chapter six deals with *Òsanyìn* as a deity, how he came to be worshipped; his cult and symbols and their uses in Yorùbáland. It also deals with the myths and legends of Oossaim and the use of the knowledge of herbs within the *candomblé* cult in Brazil.

Chapter seven describes the celebration of the festival of *Òsanyìn* in Osùn-ún Èkìtì and Bahia, Brazil.

The final chapter provides a discussion of the system and the analysis of its structure and function. It draws on the structuration theory of Giddens (1979) which emphasises that social theory must acknowledge time-space intersections and continuity as essentials of social existence.

## Chapter Two

### Methodology

The need for promoting traditional health care systems in the face of shortages of trained personnel and infrastructure for health within developing countries was recognised by the WHO. In 1977, WHO encouraged its member States to consider the use of traditional healers as a strategy for meeting the health needs within the rural areas in their attempt to achieve the goals of Health for All by the year 2000. This generated an interest in the classification and training of healers. Some of the works produced are mentioned in chapter five of this dissertation

In view of these concerns, this study aims to throw light on the place of *Òsanyìn*, the Yorùbá deity of herbalists and medicine in the culture of the Yorùbá, his cult and festival and the changes brought about by the transplantation of this culture to Salvador in the State of Bahia in Brazil.

There are two types of the *Òsanyìn* system of health care in Nigeria. One is pure herbalism and uses incantation to bring out the healing properties in the herbs, while the other uses divination in the diagnosis of ailments and herbalism. The two types will be investigated and attempts made to examine the structure and function of the membership of the cult. The diviner uses two types of symbols and the function of each will be looked into and described. The changes in Brazil will also be described.

The anthropological method applied were (a) participant observation and (b) interviews conducted in Nigeria and Brazil to find out answers to the following points:-

- i. Was *Òsanyìn* a man who became deified or was he one of the deities that descended from '*Òrun*' (heaven) as an emissary of *Olódùmarè* (the Supreme Being);
- ii. The cult of *Òsanyìn* - its political structure, recruitment policy, apprenticeship and gender, initiation rites and linkage between cults as well as the symbol and taboos of the cult;

- iii. The festival of *Òsanyìn*, its significance and when it takes place;
- iva. The concept of health and illness among the Yorùbá and the ways of achieving the former;
- b. Classification of the various types of healers, their structure, role and association

The first set of questions were formulated before going into the field but were continually modified to reflect my field work experience and findings.

### Choice of Research Sites

Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan and Ibeje, all towns in Yorùbáland, were chosen to provide as varied an insight as possible into the subject matter and also to observe whatever differences there might be, given the distances between the towns. The first three towns were also chosen because of ease of access to interviewees while the last town was chosen because of the information received which indicated that the whole town participates in the celebration of the annual festival of *Òsanyìn*. Unfortunately my source did not indicate the actual date and time of the year when the festival takes place. Each town has its own peculiarities which makes for a spread of views and ideas although the core remains the same.

Lagos has retained its cosmopolitan character and it is the capital of Lagos State with all the ethnic groups which make up the Federation of Nigeria represented there. It has a mixture of cultures all trying to co-exist. The influences of Islam, Christianity, western education, and medicine are at their highest there. Yet the Yorùbá culture still prevails with the use of the traditional system of health care by herbalists and diviners. Information was collected from Lagos, Ilupeju a district of Lagos, and Otta a town on the border between Lagos State and Ogun State.

Abeokuta is the home of the Egba ethnic group and is the capital of Ogun State while Ibadan is the capital of Oyo State.

### Brazil

In the middle of the the 16th century, there was an extensive and prolonged importation of

slaves from Africa and Bahia's Bay of All Saints served as the main port of entry into Brazil. This involuntary population movement eventually became the greatest intercontinental displacement of Black people. By the nineteenth century, a well established group existed in Bahia and for a long time Nago (Yorùbá) was the language in use among these people (Pierson, 1967:240-246). In the 16th and 17th century, Bahia was one of the world's great sugar centres and was also the seat of the Portuguese control in Brazil, and the seat of the representatives of the Portuguese Crown. Later it gave its name to one of the States of Brazil at independence and its capital was then named Salvador.

The connection between Africa and Bahia is said to be more intimate than any other similar connection in the New World (Pierson, 1967:237-239). Bahian descendants of the slaves maintained direct contact with the West Coast of Africa even after the abolition of slavery by Portugal in 1850. Vessels regularly plied between Bahia and Lagos taking back emancipated slaves and returning with products prized by Africans and their descendants in Brazil (Calmon, 1933). Traded articles included cowries, cola nuts, bitter cola (both of which were used as sacred fruits), pepper, straw, soap and strips of cloth.

The movement of population, though voluntary, went on for many years in both directions. During the early part of this century, people went from Bahia to Nigeria to be initiated into the priesthood. Iya Nasso, the founder of the Engenho Velho *candomblé* was the daughter of a freed slave woman who on returning to Nigeria entered the priesthood. Iya Nasso herself was born in Nigeria but came back to Bahia. Her spiritual daughter Marcelina also left Nigeria of her own free will, but went back to perfect her knowledge of the cult. She returned to Bahia to replace Iya Nasso as the supreme priestess (Pierson, 1967:243). There is in Lagos today, an area known as the Brazilian Quarters which is designated as an area of historical importance. Amongst the families well established on both sides of the Atlantic are the Alakijas, the Augustos, the d'Almedas, the da Rochas and the Jibowus.

The above information of the connection between Nigeria and Brazil prompted me to choose Bahia in Brazil as a site for my field work.

## Identification of Interviewees.

### Nigeria

(a) Lagos - Chief Joseph Lambo (Fig.1a) was the first interviewee. He is a reputed herbalist and is the President of the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists. He was born in Abeokuta of Christian parents and was educated at a missionary school in Abeokuta and Lagos. He was a teacher by profession and taught in a Secondary School but later took up herbalism as a full time occupation.

(b) Iya-Ibiye - (the mother of healthy birth - the name of his Òsanyìn) is a herbalist/diviner of the Olòsanyìn type. He was in the armed forces of Nigeria but took up herbalism/divination on leaving the army. He practices in Ilupeju and specialises in maternal and child care and as such most of his clients are those who are desirous of having children although he does attend those who have other complaints.

(c) Chief Agboworin combines being an Olòsanyìn with divination using sixteen cowries. He is also a devotee of Ogun. He practices in Otta town.

These three persons are members of the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists.

(d) Abeokuta - Chief Joseph Osanyintola (Òsanyìn is worthy of honour) is a neighbour in the Sodekẹ district of Abeokuta . His father was an Òsanyìn (herbalist) and so he was taught the art of herbalism and about Òsanyìn in his youth. He now combines farming with politics and administration. He is one of the elders in the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Abeokuta.

(e) Ibadan - Chief Paramole is a Moslem who combines herbalism and divination with the worship of other deities. ( Fig. 1b). He practises in a district of Ibadan called Mapo. The introduction to him was arranged by an elderly relative who was a High Chief in the town of Ibadan.

### Brazil

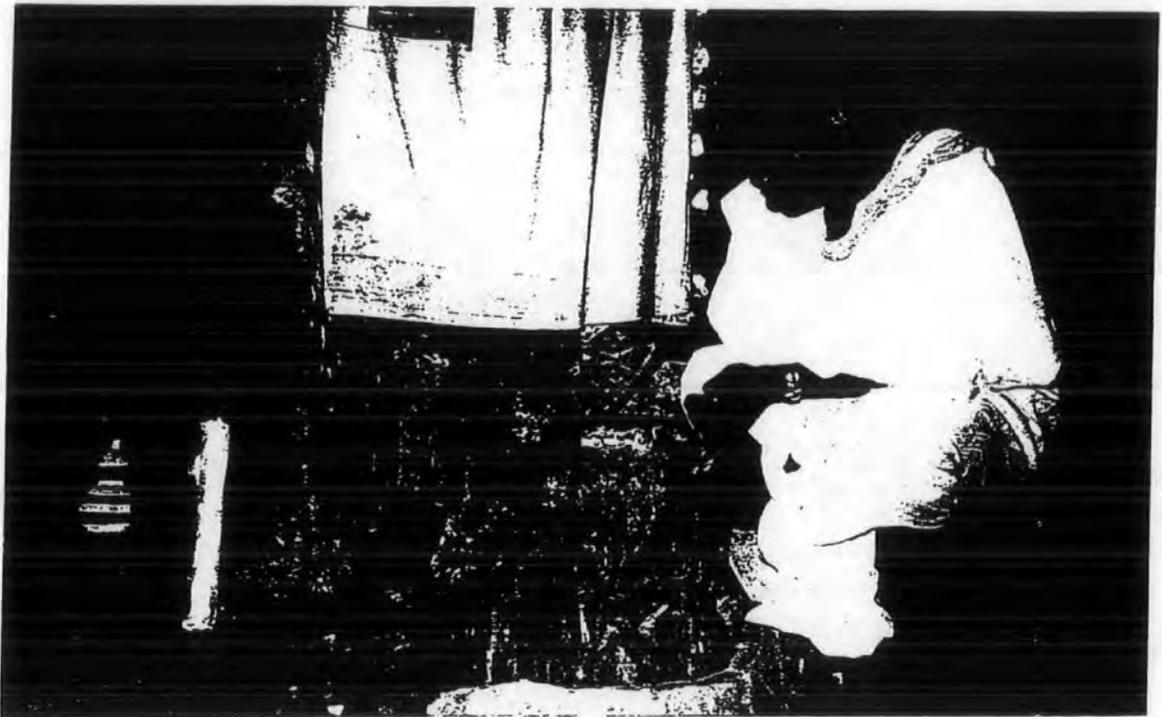
#### Salvador

Arrangements were made through the Brazilian Embassy in London for an attachment to

**Figure 1. Two Interviewees in Nigeria**



a. Chief J.O.Lambo President N.A.M.H.Lagos (Osanyin) in his Consulting Room.  
(died May 28, 1999)



b. Chief O. Paramole of Ibadan. *Olosanyin* in front of some of the gods he worships

**Figure 2. Interviewees in Brazil**



a. Dona Olga de Alaketu, *Iyaloxa* at Ile Morias Lage on her 73rd. birthday



b. Senhora Nancy de Souza e Silva (Sisy) and Ricardo at the Pierre Verger Foundation, Salvador de Bahia, Brazil

the Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais (Afro-Oriental Study Centre) within the Federal University of Bahia in the city of Salvador during my stay. On arrival in Salvador, contact was made with the Director of the Centre, Prof. Jeferson Barcelar who provided the names and telephone numbers of people who could be of help.

(a) The first person seen was Dr. Vivaldo da Costa Lima who had studied anthropology at the University on an aspect of the *candomblé* life and is now the Director of the Institute of Nutrition. Through him, contact was made with Dona Olga de Alaketu who is the Mae de Santos of Ile Maroia Lage, the *Candomblé* de Alaketu (Fig.2a). She is said to be the descendant of the first Alaketu of Ketu (Parrinder, 1956) the first king of Ketu and one of the sons of Oduduwa who brought the Yorùbás down to Ile-Ife.

On a subsequent visit she gave an insight into the life within her *candomblé* and allowed photographs of the inside of the house of each *orixá* to be taken. Figure 10a, shows the inside of the house of *Ossáim*.

In 1977, she went to Nigeria during the Festival of Arts and not being able to speak English, she had enough Yorùbá to get her through her stay of four weeks during which she was accorded the honour due to her as the descendant of the first Alaketu.

(b) Yeda Machado is an Ebomin of many years standing. She too had studied anthropology at the Federal University and she provided information on the worship of *Ossáim* and the life of the daughters of the *orixás*.

(c) Ildasio Tavares studied English in America and became a journalist. He is the author of several books and an opera called *Lidia de Oxum* in which Yoruba songs featured. He is an Ogan in the House of *Xangô* in the Ilé Axé Opô Afonjà (the house of the widow of Afonjà) and holds the title of *Otunba Arẹ* which is a Yorùbá title within the household of Afonjà in Oyo, Nigeria. The importance of this is explained later in the text. Through him contact was made with several of the Ogans in the *candomblé*, and also with Mae Stella de Oxóssi, the absolute sovereign as the *Iyaloxá* at the Ilé Axé Opô Afonjà.



c. Antonio do Santos  
'Baba la Konfin' at the Caboclo  
Cidade Nova with *Omolu* in  
the background

d. The Cowrie Board with sixteen  
cowries (*Erindilogun*)



(d) Mãe Stella de Santo is a graceful lady who is very charismatic and speaks some Yoruba. She has done a great deal to enhance the prestige of her *candomblé* to such an extent that the Government of the State of Bahia designated her *candomblé* a Centre of Historical Monument in December 1998. Her findings through divination is included in chapter five. She obtained permission through divination for an uninitiated person like myself to visit the interior of the House of *Ossáim* within her *candomblé* but did not allow the taking of a photograph of the interior of the house. While in Lagos in 1980, she thought of establishing a museum in her *candomblé* in addition to the existing school where Yorùbá is taught.

(e) Antonio do Santos. (Baba la Konfin) - My interview with this High Priest was arranged by Dr. Kadya Tall who was born in Senegal by a French father and a Senegalese mother. She studied anthropology in Paris and is now doing further research in Salvador. She helped me with the translation into English.

Antonio is a High Priest of a *caboclo* which is a combination of the worship of Yoruba *Orixá* and the American Indian Spirits. Figure 2c shows him at the divination board with the figure of *Abaluwaye* in the background. He spoke about the philosophy of the *candomblé/caboclo* and also that of the *Ossáim*. He also divined using the same method as Mãe Stella. This was part of Dr. Tall's research to compare the result or findings of two diviners. The two diviners agreed in their findings.

(f) Senhora Nancy de Souza e Silva (known as Sisy) is a lady in her 60s and is already over 40 years in Sainthood. She works at the Pierre Verger Foundation. She is a spinster who was forbidden to marry by *Ogun*. She gave a number of recordings about the variety of leaves sacred to the respective *orixás*. She has some Yoruba but not enough to sustain lengthy conversation. She therefore did the recordings in Portuguese and these were translated to English by Ricardo who also works at the Foundation. Figure 2b shows the two of them with a few of the *Ossáim* staff collected by Pierre Verger. He learnt to be a *Babaláó* in Yorubaland and so got the name Fatumbi. This means rebirth by *Ifá*. He wrote the book *Ewé the use of plants in Yoruba Society*. (1995)

### **Collection of Data**

The data was collected over a period of 10 weeks spread over three visits to Nigeria in 1996, 1997 and 1998. The first visit was made to find out whether I could expect cooperation from the chosen interviewees while the other two were spent collecting the data

Data in Brazil was collected over a period of five weeks spent in Salvador, the capital of the State of Bahia in 1998. During my stay, I found the vegetation and climate similar in all respects to that which I was used to in Western Nigeria except that Bahia being in the southern hemisphere, the seasons are usually six months later than that in the northern hemisphere. The people were very friendly and received me cordially, particularly within the cult of the *Orixá*. I found my Yorùbá very useful at the onset but had to resort to using translators when confronted by those whose only language of communication was Portuguese. The culture, particularly among the *candomblé* people, is very similar to what I am used to among my own people in Nigeria.

A small tape recorder was used in taking down information and this was acceptable to all except in Ijabe where the Oba thought he could probably make something of such a visit if it were done on a grandiose scale. He refused permission for a recording on the excuse that he needed notice of the questions to which answers were sought.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Giddens (1979:9) functionalism and structuralism share a similar origin and possess common features. Both of these theoretical approaches emanate from the work of Durkheim (1933). In British structural-functionalism, these theories were further developed by Radcliffe-Brown (1952), who provided a new meaning for Malinowski's psychological functionalism. Giddens (1979), however, pointed out the deficiencies in these ways of looking at society and put forward the view that social theory must acknowledge time-space intersections in social existence. Social activity, he maintains, is constituted in three intersecting moments of difference: temporal, paradigmatic (continuity of interactions in time) and spatial. For Giddens (1979:62-63) all practices are situated activities in each of these senses. He refers to this approach as the theory of structuration and maintains that the concepts of structure, system and structuration are necessary terms

structuration and maintains that the concepts of structure, system and structuration are necessary terms within social theory. In Giddens's view, the term social structure, however, combines two elements, the patterning of interaction which implies the relations between between actors or groups, and the continuity of interaction in time. Social systems, on the other hand, involve regularised relations of interdependence between individuals and groups that can be analysed as recurrent practices.

The present study fits Giddens theory in that the *Òsanyìn* phenomenon takes place in time and space and produces a continuity in the two communities although they are separated by geography, language and environment. The theory also provides a means of dealing with the problem of agency and social reproduction. Even now the worship of *Osanyin* and more so its health system is used in Yorubáland as modern medicine becomes more expensive due to inflation and there is a general shortage of western trained doctors in both the rural and urban areas.

In order to trace the continuities between the Yorubá' cult of *Òsanyìn* in Nigeria and in Brazil, Giddens theory of structuration is applied to formulate the following set of questions:-

- i) how is the cult organised?, who is responsible for ensuring its continuity as a group/network ? and how is the status of diviner/traditional healers filled by trainees. In other words how is the system reproduced?
- ii) how is this knowledge transmitted? if knowledge is defined as memory traces - how do the social actors perpetuate these traces as things done (said or written)?
- iii) why does the cult or its activities remain in demand?

## Chapter Three

### The Yorùbá

There are several stories on the origin of the Yorùbá, each varying to a greater or lesser degree. Ulli Bieir (1957: 25-32) reviewed the available evidence and concluded that the Yorùbá came to their present territory from somewhere north of the Niger River. He came to this conclusion by reviewing the information he obtained along the supposed route travelled by the Yorùbá. Ulli Bieir also made the point that the myth of origin commonly related today makes it difficult to differentiate between the original inhabitants of the area now occupied by the Yorùbá due to the following:

1. Yorùbá culture seems to have an unusual power to absorb and assimilate others;
2. The desire of all the chiefs to prove the antiquity of their crowns and the validity of their rights causes a great deal of deliberate distortion of the history of the Yorùbá.

Bieir then went on to illustrate these points with anecdotes gathered from the different cities he visited.

In spite of this critical appraisal, and in the absence of any other concrete history, the Yorùbá of today accept the narrative below as what they have and hold on to. It is beyond the scope of this work to attempt to unravel the definitive facts. It is however, believed that Ile-Ife was founded about 850 AD, while Oyo a rival kingdom, just northwest of Ile-Ife was founded about 1350 AD.

#### Historical Origin

The origin and history of the Yorùbá, like the origin and history of any nation is shrouded in mystery. The people did not have a written language before the advent of the missionaries in the nineteenth century, and so all that is known of their history was through oral tradition.

National historians existed in certain families and were retained by the King of Oyo, whose

office is hereditary. These families act as bards, drummers and cymbalists to the King and so serve as repositories of the history of the people. It is on their accounts that we depend for the information we now have.

The Yorùbá are said to have descended from *Lamurudu* who was said to be one of the Kings of Mecca (Johnson, 1921:3-14). One of his sons, Crown Prince Odùduwà, is believed to be the ancestor of the Yorùbá while the other princes became the kings of Gogobiri and Kukawa respectively. These are two ethnic groups in the Hausa territory, north of the area occupied by the Yorùbá.

The period of Lamurudu's reign is not known but accounts of the revolution which led to the dispersion of his descendants gave the impression that his reign was well after the life of Mohammed.

Oral history has it that Odùduwà, the Crown Prince, relapsed into the worship of idols during his father's reign and his reputation and influence were so great that he had a great following. His aim was to transform the state religion into paganism and therefore converted the mosque into an idol temple. He chose as his priest a man called Asara who was good at carving images which he sold to the people. Asara had a son, named Braima, who was brought up as a Muslim. During the boy's childhood, he helped to sell the images his father carved even though this activity was abhorrent to him.

Odùduwà once influenced his father to declare a compulsory three day hunting spree for all men just before the annual celebration of the festivals held in honour of the gods. When Braima was old enough he seized the opportunity of the absence of the men on such a hunting expedition to destroy the idols. He hung the axe with which he destroyed the idols round the neck of the chief idol. When the hunters came back and saw the carnage, they made enquiries as to who the perpetrator was. Braima was asked and in response said, 'ask that huge idol who did it.' The interrogators replied, 'Can he speak?' Braima then asked the men, 'why do you worship things that cannot speak?' He therefore became the first known iconoclast in the history of the Yorùbá. Others followed later.

As a punishment, Braima was ordered to be burnt alive. This resulted in confrontation between the idol worshippers and the Moslems. Unfortunately the former lost and the king was killed. His children and sympathisers were then expelled from the town. The Princes who became kings of Gogobiri and Kukawa went westwards while Oduduwa went eastwards. After several days of wandering Oduduwa arrived and settled at *Ile-Ife* with his followers and the two idols they brought with them. The Yorubá have since then looked on *Ile-Ife* as both their ancestral and religious home.

Sahibu at the head of an army went after Oduduwa and his followers with the intent to capture or destroy them but he and his army were defeated and a copy of the Koran was said to be among the spoils secured by the victors.

This was the commonly accepted history of the origin of the Yorubá as handed down through the years and taught in the secondary schools until 1950 when the writer left secondary school.

The following flaws in the narrative were pointed out however by Johnson (1921: 4ff).:-

- a. The Yorubás show no resemblance to the Arabs and could not have come from Mecca;
- b. No record of such an incident was recorded during the reign of any Arabian king;
- c. The habits and culture of the Yorubá however show a strong affiliation with the East and to the early Yorubá, the East is synonymous with Mecca. This is confirmed by Bieir's investigation as the River Niger is situated to the East of the area occupied now by the Yorubá.

Johnson (1921:3-14) quoted from extracts in Clapperton's record dated 1822-1824 and held by Sultan Belo of Sokoto who was the founder of that city that -

'The inhabitants of the province (Yarba) it is supposed originated from the remnant of the children of Canaan, who were of the tribe of Nimrod. The cause of their establishment in the West of Africa was, as it is stated, in consequence of their being driven by Yar-rooba, the son of Kahtan, out of Arabia to the Western Coast between Egypt and Abyssinia.

From that spot they advanced into the interior of Africa, till they reached Yarba where they fixed their residence. On the way they left in every place they stopped at, a tribe of their own people. Thus it is supposed that all the tribes of the Soudan who inhabit the mountains are originated from them as also are the inhabitants of Ya-ory. Upon the whole the people of Yarba are nearly of the same description as those of Noofee (Nupee)'.

The name Lamurudu might have been a modification of Nimrod. It is not certain who the Nimrod was but this extract goes some way to confirm the tradition of the Yorùbás and also throws some light on the legend. It is said that the descendants of Nimrod (Phoenicians) were led in war to Arabia, that they settled there and from there they were driven by religious persecution to Africa. There is said to be a similar story in the history of Mohammed that his first converts fled from Mecca to the East Coast of Africa (the first Hegira) due to religious persecution and from there they migrated to Ile-Ife through Upper Egypt. The Ife marbles which were discovered at the turn of this century lent credence to this story of migration. The most notable of these is the 'Ọpa Ọrǎnyàn' (Ọranyàn staff) an obelisk which stands on the supposed site of the grave of Ọrǎnyàn. This has characters cut into it which suggest a Phoenician origin. Johnson (1921:3-14) then made the following deductions -

1. That the Yorubas sprung from Upper Egypt or Nubia;
2. That they were subjects of the Egyptian conqueror Nimrod, who was of Phoenician origin, and that they followed him in his wars of conquest as far as Arabia, where they settled for a time;
3. That from Arabia they were driven, on account of their practising their own form of worship, which was either paganism or more likely a corrupt form of Eastern Christianity (which allowed of image worship - so distasteful to Moslems).'

The name of the priest is also rather peculiar as it sounds very much like "Anasara" a term that the Moslems use for Christians (the followers of the Nazarene) which makes it probable that the revolution spoken of has something to do with Islam and the corrupt form of Christianity of those days.

Odùduwà and his sons swore a mortal hatred of Moslems of their country, and were determined to avenge themselves; but Odùduwà died at Ile-Ifè before he was powerful enough to march against them. His eldest son Okanbi also died there, leaving behind him seven princes and princesses who afterwards became renowned. From them sprang the various tribes of the Yorùbá nation. His first born was a princess who was married to a priest, and became the mother of the famous Olowu, the ancestor of the Owu. The second child was also a princess who became the mother of the Alaketu, the progenitor of the Ketu people. The third, a prince became King of Benin. The fourth, the Orangun, became King of Ila; the fifth, the Onisabe or King of Sabe; the sixth Olupopo, or king of the Popo. Orányàn, the last born, was the progenitor of the Yorùbá proper, or as they are better distinguished, the Oyo. All these princes became kings who wore crowns as distinguished from those who are vassals and therefore did not dare to wear crowns but coronets called *akoro*.

The various tribes existed independently of each other and each had a distinguishing face mark which served as a passport particularly during the inter-tribal wars which only ended after the intervention of the British Administration in the second half of the nineteenth century. The term Yorùbá embracing the bulk of the people (e.g. Ijesha, Egba, Ekiti, Ijebu, Ondo, Oyo, Ifè) was not in use before the end of the second decade of the twentieth century. From the 1920s, when regular cash-cropping, education and conversion to the world religions drew more people into the Nigeria wide sphere of social relations, they adopted a unified Yorùbá identity (Peel, 1989:200). The slaves in the Americas and the Caribbean retained their ethnic identity but became commonly known as the Nagos, a term coined by the Dahomies and is synonymous with Yorùbá.

Orányàn became the most famous and the richest. When he felt strong enough he set off for an expedition against Mecca to avenge the death of their great-grandfather and the expulsion of his party from that city. He invited his brothers to take part in the expedition and left his royal treasures and charms in the care of one Adamu who was his father's trusted servant.

It is said that the route by which they came from Mecca was blocked by an army of black ants and so they were obliged to travel through Nupe Country. All his brothers except the eldest joined the expedition. At Igangan they disagreed over a pot of beer and so his brothers left *Qr̄anyàn*. *Qr̄anyàn* continued his journey until he reached the banks of the Niger River where the Tapas opposed his crossing. As he could not force his way through, he remained there for a while.

To return to Ile-Ife was too humiliating and so *Qr̄anyàn* decided to settle at the foot of a hill where he built a town which he named *Oyo*. This was marked in ancient maps as Eyeo and later termed *Qyo* and was the city visited by the English explorers Clapperton and Landers.

*Qr̄anyàn* remained in his new home and continued to prosper while his descendants migrated to the East, West and South-west but they maintained free communication with Ile-Ife. *Qr̄anyàn* was able to send for whatever he needed from the royal treasures in Ile-Ife. Adamu also prospered and his descendants still rule in Ile-Ife today. Adamu's mother dedicated him to the god *Obàtálá'* to whom she was to have been sacrificed. He was referred to as *Omo Oluwo ni* 'the son of a sacrificial victim'. This became contracted to *Owoni* and later became *Ooni* which is the title of the kings of Ife till today.

In reviewing the story of the origin of the Yoruba based on the writings of Sultan Belo of Sokoto, Lucas (1948 : 16) doubted the veracity in the similarity of the words 'Yaa-rooba, Yarba and Yorùbá'. He wondered why the people would call themselves Yoruba when they were driven out of Arabia by Yaa-rooba or even call their town Yarba. He went on to review the works of Mary Kingsley, which stated that the Benin and the Yorùbá were the children of Canaan, and that of Farrow which accepted the fact that the Negritic Yorùbá and the Semitic Hebrews may belong to branches which at some early stage were united to a common stem. Lucas also referred to the works of Sir A.C.Burns and Prof. Leo Froebenius that 'it is possible that the Yorùbá were not originally of negro blood.' which suggested to him that the Yorùbá at one time were in Asia and that Asia may be regarded as their original home. This probability he claimed is further enhanced by the name of Nimrod which is corrupted to Lamurudu by the Yorùbá and which figures prominently in their mythology.

Lucas (1948 : 18-30) also traced a connection with Egypt which was probably one of the stopping places on their way to their present domicile. To justify this connection he used the similarity or identity of language, religious beliefs, religious ideas and practices as well as the survival of customs, names of persons, places and objects. He concluded that the Yorùbá might have been expatriate Egyptians. Throughout his book *The Religion of the Yorùbás* he made every effort to illustrate this connection. His account stressed the diffusionist theory which was commonly held by some at the time.

Wescott (1957:10-15) disputed Lucas's claim and went on to show the discrepancies as he saw them. He dwelt largely on the linguistic diffusionist theories and their interpretations as they relate to Lucas's hypothesis.

Purely internal analysis based on oral history has not been successful in separating the wood from the trees in establishing the true origin of the Yorùbá. It will therefore be necessary perhaps to depend on archeology to unearth the history of the people. The archeological maps of West Africa still show the distribution of individual efforts rather than a comprehensive picture of ancient cultures (Willet 1973:138). Unfortunately there has not been much recent work to fill in the blanks in our knowledge.

### **Mythical origin**

There are numerous legends about the origin of the Yorùbás which , while agreeing in tracing decent from Odùduwà and Ile-Ife, do not refer to a migration from anywhere. Two of these are narrated below.

The Yorùbá believe that the world and creation began in Ile-Ifè through the handiwork of *Olodùmarè* , who also fixed man's destiny. Oral tradition has it that what is now earth was once a watery, marshy waste. Up above was the sky (heaven) which was the abode of *Olodùmarè* and the divinities. *Olodùmarè* conceived the idea of creating the solid earth and set out to put this into effect. He called *Òrìṣà-nlá*, the arch-divinity and charged him with the duty. For material, *Òrìṣà-nlá* was given a packet of loose earth and for tools a five-toed hen and a pigeon (Idowu 1962: 18-29).

When *Orìṣà-nlá* descended, he threw the loose earth on a suitable spot on the watery waste and let loose the hen and the pigeon who scattered and spread the loose earth. The ridge formed by the scratching of the hen's foot formed the valleys and the high ground, the hills and mountains. At the completion of the exercise, *Òrìṣà-nlá* went back to report to *Olodùmarè* who then sent the chameleon to inspect what had been done. On the first visit it reported that the earth was wide enough but it was not sufficiently dry. A more favourable report was given after the second visit and the sacred spot where the work began was called *Ile-Ifè*. According to tradition this was how the city got its name. This seems similar to the story of the flood in the Old Testament.

The creation of the earth was said to be completed in four days and the fifth day was set aside for the worship of the Deity and rest. *Òrìṣà-nlá* was then sent to equip and embellish the earth. This time he came with *Òrunmìlà* as his counsellor. *Olodùmarè* gave *Orìṣà-nlá* *Igi Òpe* 'a palm tree' to plant. Its juice would provide drink, its seeds would provide oil as well as kernels for food. The original hen and pigeon were also brought to multiply and provide meat for the dwellers on earth.

*Òrìṣà-nlá* came down and did as he was told. Later, *Oréluéré*, one of the beings who had been prepared was sent to lead the other beings into the world and they became the nucleus of the human occupation on earth. As time went by there was a shortage of water and so *Òrìṣà-nlá* appealed to *Olodùmarè* for rain.

*Òrìṣà-nlá* was given another duty to perform. He was made the sculptor-divinity whose duty it was to mould human physical features while *Olodùmarè* gave life to the handiwork of *Òrìṣà-nlá*. This office gave *Òrìṣà-nlá* the prerogative to make at will figures perfect or defective, and according to the colour he chose. The hunchback, the cripple, and the albino are special marks of his prerogative and these are referred to as *Eni Òrìṣà* - (those who are set aside for the *òrìṣà*).

It would seem that when the world began, it was possible to travel back and forth between heaven and earth at will and that all could have a direct contact with the *Olodùmarè* until man sinned and the privilege of free communication was withdrawn.

Another version of this story of creation was that on his way to carry out the wishes of *Olodùmarè*, *Òrìṣà-nlá* became thirsty and drank so much of the supply of palm wine that he became drunk and fell asleep. How long he slept for was not known, but *Olodùmarè* then sent *Odùduwà* to go and find out what had happened. *Odùduwà* came down and found *Òrìṣà-nlá* fast asleep. He did not wake him up but quietly removed the materials and went and performed the task of creating the earth. This met with the approval of *Olodùmarè* who then promoted *Odùduwà* to the post of creator of solid earth and elevated him over the other divinities.

This second variant is important in that it raises the question of the identity of *Odùduwà*. The name appeared in both the historical and mythical narratives. In the former, he was portrayed as a very charismatic leader of his people who led them to Ile-Ife.

Idowu (1962:23) put forward the hypothesis that *Odùduwà* was a warrior and leader of his people, wrapped in legend to the extent that it is now very difficult to discern the outline of the original. He went on to state that 'there is no doubt that this leader lived in Ile-Ife'. Oral tradition has it that when *Odùduwà* arrived in Ile-Ife there was already a community of aboriginal people there under *Orèlúéré* to whom they paid homage. Later *Odùduwà* became arrogant and *Orèlúéré* had his daughter poisoned. This brought him to heel as *Orèlúéré* was the only one who could give a remedy for the poison. *Odùduwà* had to submit to the punishment prescribed and this included fines of sheep and fowls and after this his daughter was cured. So *Odùduwà* placed himself under the protection of the original divinity of the land, which was *Òrìṣà-nlá*, the tutelary divinity of Ile-Ife.

This showed that *Odùduwà* and his party met with resistance on arrival at Ile-Ife and that this went on for a long time. During this period, the Ogboni cult was established. This was a secret society, the membership of which was restricted to the original owners of the land (*Onile*). The cult remained underground for a long time while *Odùduwà* continued to acquire land and spread his influence. He and his party had children who intermarried and became assimilated. By the time *Odùduwà* died, his influence had spread so widely that after his death he became a cult object within the setting of ancestor worship and so gained a place in the pantheon. This promotion raised two questions: firstly who created the solid earth? was it *Òrìṣà-nlá* or *Odùduwà*? and secondly, was he a god or goddess? The

# Map of the Yoruba Country (Johnson, S 1921)

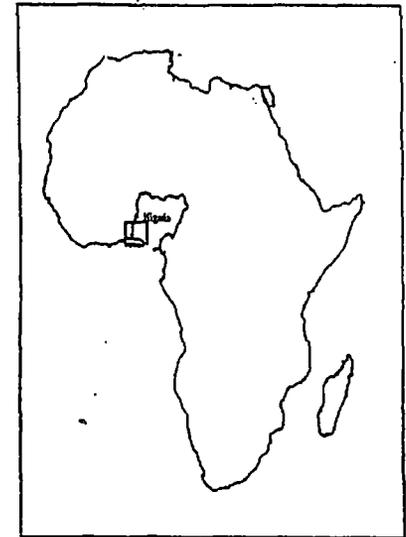
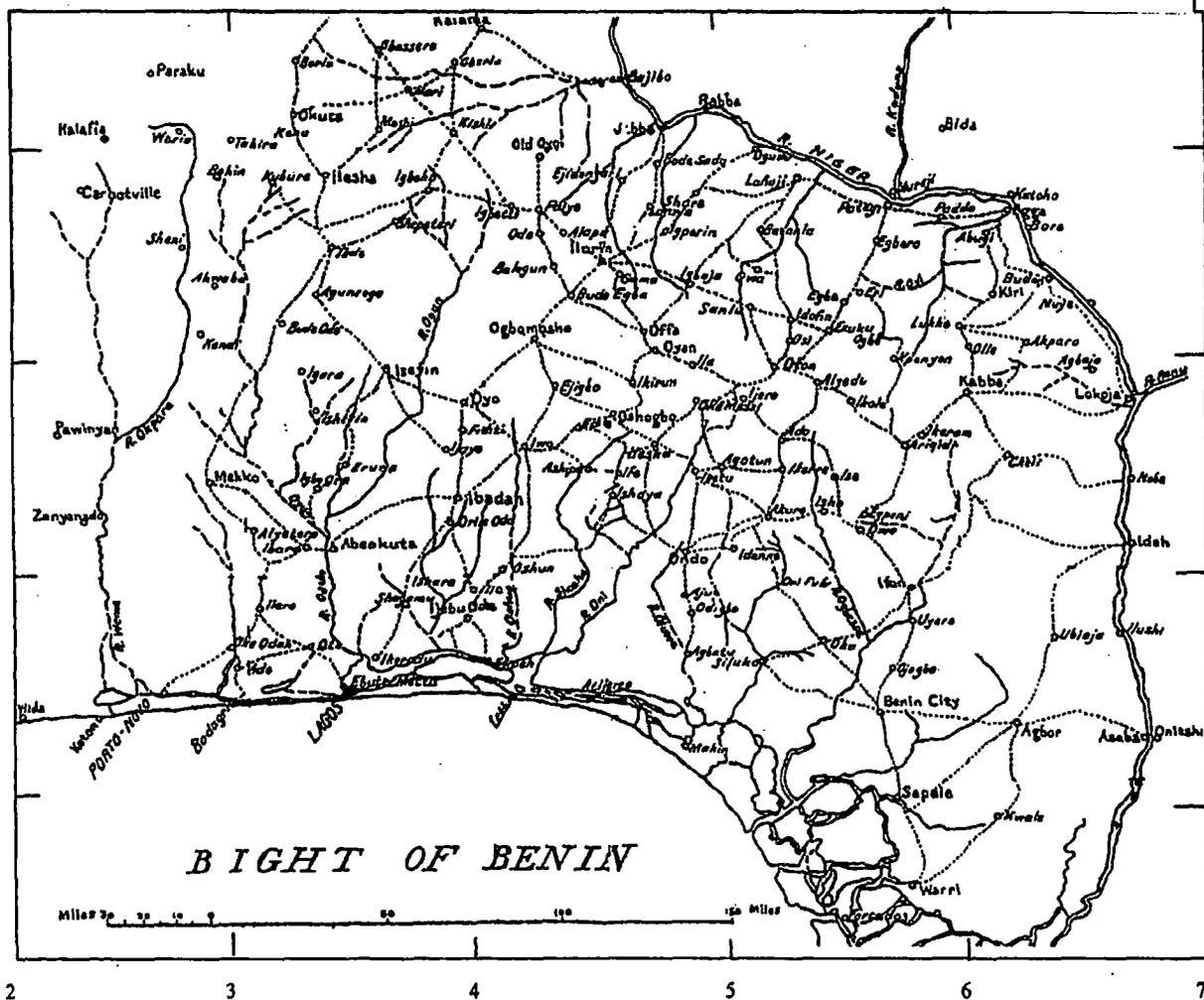


Fig 3a.

answer to these questions is however beyond the scope of this work.

### The Yorùbá Speaking People

The area inhabited by the Yorùbá people in West Africa is not clearly defined. Like any other group of people they are very mobile and constantly on the move both outwards and inwards into particular areas depending on trade. The boundary of the area they occupy is therefore always changing. Secondly, those who decided the present political boundaries did not take into consideration the irregular spread of ethnic groups. They found it easier to draw the boundary lines on the ground than to take cognizance of the homogeneous cultural areas.

At the height of their military power the Yorùbá, were said by Parrinder (1947:125) to spread from Eyeo (Old Oyo) to Ketu, Idassa, Shabe, Kilibo and beyond Dahomey into Togoland to the west; as far as the banks of the Niger to the north and Benin to the east (Fig.3a).

Clapperton in the journal of his second expedition published in 1929 stated that :-

‘The kingdom of the Yorùbá extends from Puka on the south, which is within five miles of the sea, to Lagos and Whydah in that line, to the north about 10th degree of north latitude. It is bounded by Dahomey to the northwest which is reckoned a tributary province: Ketto (Ketu) and Maha countries on the north, Borgoo on the northeast, the Qoorra (Kwara) to the east, Accoura (<sup>(Akure)</sup>~~Aeera~~), a province of Benin on the southeast, five days distant; Jaboo (Ijebu) to the south and west. Its tributaries are Dahomey, Alladah, Badagry and Maha’.

Shortly after, the boundaries changed considerably due to continuous warfare which came to a climax in the middle of the nineteenth century when Old Oyo lost a greater part of the north to the Fulani. The Benin kingdom to the southeast also asserted its sovereignty. The redrawing of the international, regional and provincial boundaries further reshaped Yorubaland and realigned its people.

The Anglo-French international boundary was drawn through the western sector of the kingdom in 1889 and this resulted in the cutting off of the Yorùbá in Dahomey to form a

political entity known as the Republic of Benin. These people however still maintain their cultural link with the other Yorùbá people across the border. In a less dramatic way, the Yorùbá within Ilorin and Kabba provinces have had a cultural shift to the north partly due to the influence of Islam and partly due to regional realignment which separated them from their kith and kin in the rest of Yorùbáland.

The slave trade resulted in the transportation of a great number of Yorùbá across the Atlantic to the new world. A good concentration of them settled in Brazil, Cuba and Trinidad where they are known to still maintain their religious culture albeit in a modified form. A large number also found themselves in the United States of America.

Yorùbáland or what is left of it now lies between the Tropics of Cancer and the Equator. Its coastline lies 6.22 N of the Equator, while the most northerly part is 9.05 N. The longitudinal references are 2.40 E and 6. E. The land mass falls within three clearly discernible regions. The first is the narrow lowland running east-west parallel to the coast. It is less than 100 ft. above sea-level and is characterised by lagoons, creeks, sandbanks and swamps. The second is referred to as the dissected margin with heights ranging from just above sea-level to about 1,300 ft. This is a zone of sedimentary rocks and links the coastal lowland with the third zone. This covers more than two-thirds of the whole area and varies in altitude from 1000 ft. to over 3000 ft. It is an area of bare rocks, and boulder-strewn hills (Ojo, 1966:22).

There are two seasons in the year, wet and dry, and each lasts approximately six months. The former extends generally from early April to the end of September and through into October. Generally the rain decreases in amount and distribution from the coast to the hinterland.

### **Organisation of Yorùbá kingdoms**

For centuries, the Yorùbá have lived in large, densely populated cities where they are able to practice specialised trades that provide goods and services for the society as a whole. Most of them commute to the countryside for part of the year to raise staple foods such as yams and cassava on family farms.

Ile-Ife is universally recognised as the most ritually important. Each city-state maintains its own interpretation of its history, religious traditions, and unique art style, yet all acknowledge the ritual sovereignty of Ife, honour the pantheon of Yoruba gods, and seek solutions to problems of everyday life from Yoruba herbalists and divination priests. Such ancient institutions provide a common bond of experience that links all Yoruba sub-groups.

At the head of each city-state or town is an *Oba* (king) who wears a crown. The *Oba* of each town has a specific title by which he is known. The main ones are the *Ooni* of Ife, the *Alake* of Abeokuta, the *Alaafin* of Oyo, the *Owa Obokun* of Ilesha, the *Awujale* of Ijebu-Ode etc. The role of the individual in Yoruba society depends upon his place in that society. It is therefore necessary to determine the role and stature of some individuals or groups of individuals within the social structure as it is through this that the extent of rights and duties can be determined.

### The Oba or Chief

The institution of kingship or Chiefship is generally regarded as sacred in African society, but no holder of either office is above the law. He has no divine right to dispense and suspend the law of the tribe, although there have been tyrants who have sometimes set aside the law (Elias 1956:98).

Certain prerogatives are often attached to the kingly or chiefly office, since the proper and effective exercise of authority would be impossible without them particularly in a society with a system of monarchical rule. The council of elders or notables called *Igbimọ* acting as a sort of cabinet ensures that the king's actions do not go against the accepted norm of propriety. A king or chief who exceeds his legitimate powers and refuses to mend his ways, may be deposed or sometimes asked to commit suicide voluntarily or be put to death by the unanimous verdict of public opinion. The king or chief can be deposed with the agreement of the government.

### Men

The *Igbimọ* or Council of chiefs is made up of men who represent certain lineages ,

descent groups within the town, and are bound together by strong kinship ties. The well ordered system of government allowed everyone to carry out his or her daily pursuits with confidence and without fear.

Some of the principal occupations for men were agriculture, commerce, weaving, iron-melting, tanning, and leather work, carving on wood and calabash, music, medicine and other minor employments (Johnson, 1921:117)

### Women

The women's place was usually in the home looking after their husband and children. They have very little part to play in public life although this is now changing. In advanced years they seeded cotton and spun thread. The seeded cotton is rendered fluffy for spinning. The process is carried out at a leisurely pace and the reels of thread are sold to dyers.

Some women who live on the farm employ their time shelling palm nuts, tending poultry, goats and sheep which they sell at the markets. Dyeing is also an occupation carried out by women. The most common colour used is blue or blue-black using indigo dye. Some women also engage in weaving and selling cash crops.

### The Slave Trade and Africa

Trade in slaves was not a new phenomenon in the fifteenth century for during the first millennium, the European peninsular had supplied slaves first to Byzantium and later to the Islamic world. Slave labour was employed in the sugar cane plantation and the mines as early as the twelfth century in Cyprus and Sicily. The Europeans also used slave labour in Asia. During the Crusades, Moslems and Christians enslaved each other until the end of the fifteenth century. In the thirteenth century, the peoples of Genoa and Venice imported Turks and Mongols through Tana, while in the following century a great number of Slavs and Greeks were imported into Europe as slaves. Although slaves could not be bought at public auction in Venice after 1386, they continued to be bought by private contract until the sixteenth century.

Slave trading was not confined to Europe; coal miners and salt pan workers in Scotland were still enslaved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and some were even made to wear collars which bore their owner's name (John Miller 1781 quoted by Davis 1966:437; Mantoux 1928:74-75).

The English also relied heavily on indentured servitude to provide labour for the New World Colonies. This was a contractual relationship in which parties, upon certain terms and conditions and for a certain period of time were used to supply labour. This differs little from slavery as the servants could be and were sold and bought while contractually bound. They were harshly punished for breaches of discipline, and many did not outlive their period of bondage. Of every ten indentured servants in English North America between 1607 and 1776, only two attained the status of independent farmer or artisan at the end of their term (Wolf, 1982:202).

The American Indians were also used as slaves in the eighteenth century. The Spaniards enslaved the Indians especially during the first phase of colonising the Caribbean. The Central American mainland was raided and so were the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of North America. In Brazil, the Portuguese used native labour in the sugar districts of Bahia and between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries slave raiders operating from Sao Paulo were reported to have enslaved as many as 350,000 Indians (Curtin 1977:6).

In North America, the English settlers obtained Indian slaves captured in war and rewarded slave hunting groups with European commodities. The Indian slave trade in the Carolinas reached its peak in the Yamasee war of 1715-1717 and then declined (Wolf, 1982:203).

Following the seizure of Constantinople in 1453, the Turks blockaded the route to the east. The slavers had to find fresh fields and Africa seems a virgin territory. The Portuguese opened up the trade along the coast of Africa and were soon followed by the Dutch, French and the English.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Guinea Coast was not teeming with people. It was estimated that the population of 11 million lived in the area extending from Senegal to

Nigeria and 8 million in the Equatorial Africa, Zaire and Angola (McEvedy and Jones, 1978:243-249) but that this grew to 20 million and 11 million respectively by 1800 as a result of the introduction of food crops such as maize and manioc. This helped to provide slaves for transatlantic agricultural needs.

African slaves were preferred over native Americans because they were felt to be better and more reliable workers. By the 1720s they fetched higher prices than Indian slaves (Perdue, 1979:152). The main factor, however seems to have been that the Indian proximity to their native groups encouraged rebelliousness and frequent escapes. Added to this was the fear that Indian slavery could alienate American allies in the war against the Spaniards and the French.

Once started the demand for slave labour rose steeply and was estimated to be about 275,000 between 1451 and 1600. This rose to over 1.25 million during the seventeenth century in response to the demands on the sugar plantation particularly on the islands of the Caribbean. The eighteenth century saw a further rise to 6 million between 1701 and 1810. During that period alone over 2 million slaves from West Africa were exported by Britain. This was about two thirds of the total number shipped by the other powers (Wolfe 1923:198).

In the early period of the trade, the Portuguese had the upper hand and the slaves were obtained from the region south of the Senegal River to Sierra Leone as these places were easily reached from Cape Verde Islands (Curtin, 1969:96). In the 16th century, the region of the Senegambia remained a major supplier particularly following the collapse of the Jolof State. At the same time the area south of the Congo River grew in importance due to the Portuguese penetration of the Kingdom of Ndongo (Curtin, 1969:101-102). In the mid-seventeenth century the majority of the slaves exported to the Spanish sector of the New World were Angolans.

During the eighteenth century, Senegambia and Sierra Leone became less important as major suppliers as sixty percent of the slaves came from West Africa while the others came from central and south eastern Africa (Curtin 1969:211). Within West Africa, the number

of slaves exported from each area varied with changing circumstances. In the final decade of the century, the Bight of Benin played a major role through the port of Whydah and the Gold Coast as a result of the Ashanti polity. Between 1740 and 1760 slaves came in large numbers from present day Liberia.

The British abolished the slave trade in 1807 and so ended the flow of slaves to the British Caribbean and greatly reduced slave import to the US. However more than 600,000 slaves were sent to the Spanish dominions of the New World in the nineteenth century. Of these, 500,000 were sent to Cuba and the rest to the French Caribbean between 1810 and 1870 while Brazil acquired as many as 1,145,000 mainly from Angola. Fig.3b shows the area of origin of the slaves from the West Coast of Africa and Fig.3c, the slavery factfile.

### **Mechanism of Enslavement**

There existed three mechanisms that might turn a free man into a potential slave before the advent of the Europeans. These were the institution of pawnship, the judicial separation of a person from the protection of his lineage and warfare for captives.

Pawnship was widespread and was used as a means of debt settlement. It transfers to the receiver all rights over the person's labour, reproductive activities and progeny during the duration of the pawn. The mechanism could be used to pawn oneself or a relative in case of famine in exchange for food. The second mechanism operated through a judicial process either due to infraction against the kinship order or the ancestors. When the punishment for a crime is severing a person from his lineage, he loses the support of his kin and his ancestral spirits. Such people could be sold into slavery (Balandier 1970:338). The third mechanism is captive in war. This means that the victim was severed from his native lineage and deprived of the support of his kin. Potential slaves were in general obtained by cutting their ties from kin and transferring these to the owner's kinship set up. Once the transfer has been achieved, a pawn or slave becomes a functioning member of the domestic group of the owner even without being absorbed into the owner's lineage. Pawning and slavery could have relatively benign consequences without any of the attributes of chattel slavery which characterised the practice in the western hemisphere. Being denied the rights and protection of his or her lineage, the pawn or slave is open to manipulations by the

# Movement of slaves by major powers 1600-1800

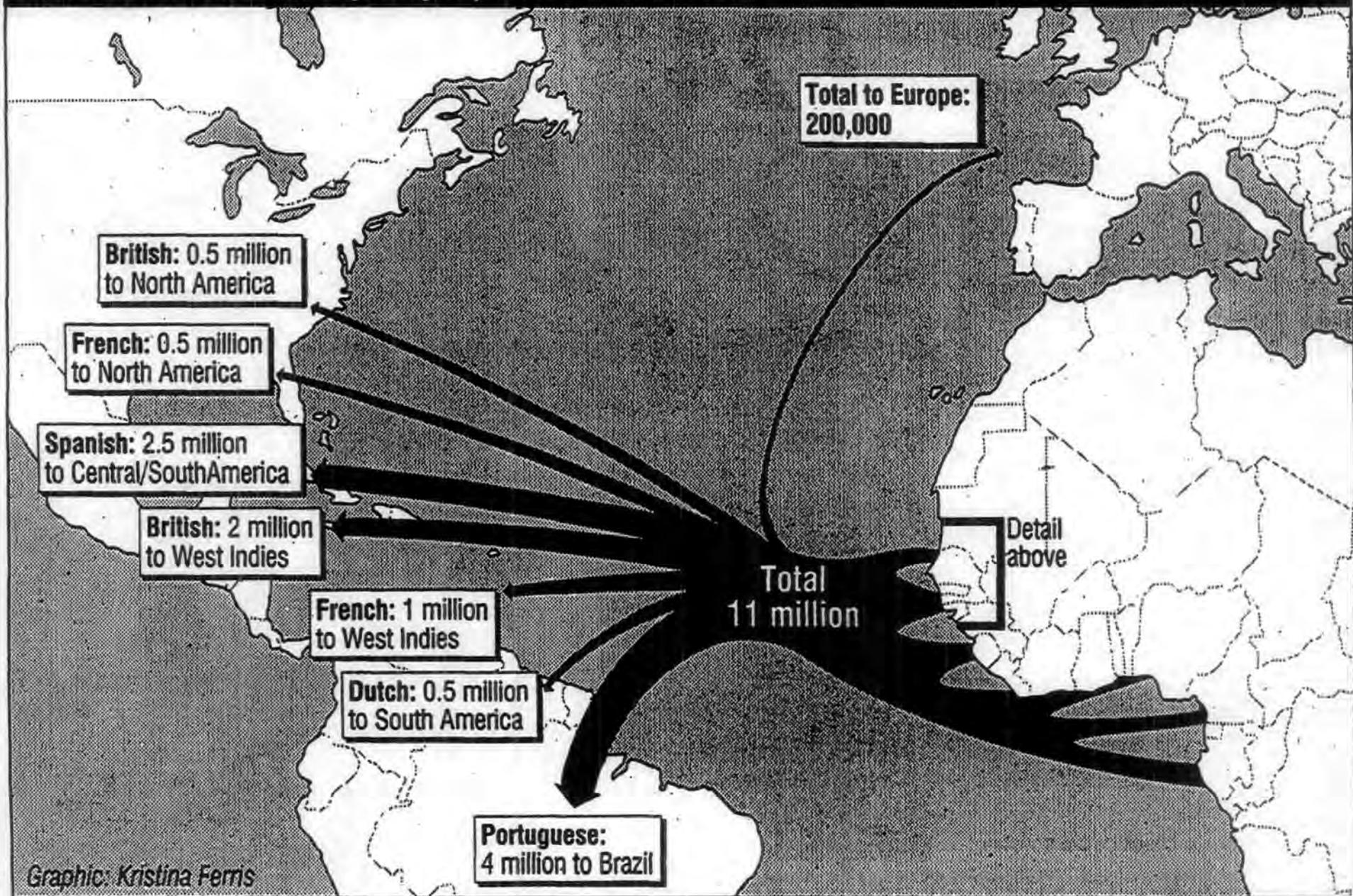


FIGURE 3C

### Slave trade abolished:

Denmark:	1804
Britain:	1807
United States:	1808
Sweden:	1813
Netherlands:	1814
France:	1818
Spain	1820
Portugal	1850

(Slave trading continued to Spanish and Portuguese colonies, in violation of the law, until 1880)



### Factfile

- Between twelve and twenty million Africans arrived in the Americas between 1550 and 1850.
- As many as one in five slaves died in transit
- Slaves were expensive. In 1850 a male slave from Senegal cost £28. Women and children were cheaper
- Two men were transported to the Americas for every woman.
- Only about 200,000 slaves ended up in Europe.

*Gidon Freeman*

owner. Mary Douglas (1964:303) pointed out how such manipulation operated .

'A pawn woman produces lineage segments of other clans who can be expected to reside in his (the owner's) village and remain under his control. He can offer her daughters to his young clansman as wives and so build up his local clan section. Her sons, who will also be pawns, he can persuade to live in his village. By offering them wives from his own clan he can counteract the tendency for men to join their mother's brothers. Pawn owners can also make elaborate alliances between their pawns of different clans.'

Under conditions of polygamy, pawnship could put additional powers into the hands of the lineage elders as they control the allocation of women and bridewealth (Douglas, 1964:310).

All these mechanisms work at different levels of the culture. Pawns, criminals and captives acquired by chiefs and paramount rulers did not become members of the domestic groups but were put to work in the chief's gardens, farms, royal gold mines or as carriers of goods on long distant trade. Merchants also use slaves to raise food for caravan stops along the trade route. For the military, judicial and commercial elites slave labour provided a considerable proportion of surpluses on which they rely for their support as well as goods and services in keeping their status (Terry, 1973). These three mechanisms were used to provide slaves for the trade, thus adapting existing institutions to the benefit of the European mercantile expansion.

The sources tapped for slaves varied from one country to another. Those imported into the English colonies came from an area known as the Gold Coast while those destined for the Spanish territories were drawn mainly from Angola and the Congo. This however changed from time to time. Bahia in Brazil was a good example in that during the sixteenth century slaves were brought from the Guinea Coast, but in the seventeenth century the source switched to Angola and Cote de Mina in the eighteenth century. It is therefore clear that the culture that was imported in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been lost and the present day culture of societies only go back to the late eighteenth century at the end of the slave trade. This explains why the Bantu culture from the Congo and Angola has been overshadowed by that from the Cote de Mina.

From the outset, urban slaves and 'free blacks' were organised into 'nations' with their own 'kings' and 'governors'. This made it possible for the slaves to think that they were not being exploited and so allowed the slave owners to continue the policy of divide and rule. This policy paid off in that some plots were betrayed by the slaves of another tribe or group to the bosses in advance. On the other hand the system served those who belong to the same trade or craft and those who wanted an opportunity to associate with fellow countrymen. It also helped to foster an atmosphere of togetherness when celebrating their customary feast days and religious traditions albeit under the guise of Catholicism.

In Bahia, the division into nations operated at several levels and in different institutions: the army, for example, where the coloured troops formed four separate battalions and were known as Minas, Ardras, Angolans and creoles respectively. The Catholic religion also exhibited a similar pattern in that Our Lady of the Rosary had only Angolan members while the Yoruba met in a down-town church. There were also the mutual-aid societies with their fraternal houses in the suburbs where African religious ceremonies were carried out and armed rebellions planned (Bastide, 1971:9).

It is therefore pertinent to speak of a double diaspora in South America, that of the African culture which transcended ethnic groupings and that of the people themselves who lost their original African characteristics through interbreeding and absorption into the social environment be that English, Spanish, French or Portuguese.

In any given area there is a dominant African culture but this predominance bears no relation to the preponderance of that ethnic group in the slave shipments to the area concerned. In Bahia for example, there are the Nago (Yorùbá), Gege (Dahomey, Angolan and Congo) *candomblés*, never the less it is the Nago *candomblé* which has and still inspired all the rest with its theology, ceremonial rituals and basic festivals.

The next chapter gives an insight into the Yorùbá religious beliefs, the hierarchy of the orisas and the external influences on religious observance in Nigeria and Bahia, Brazil.

## Chapter Four

### Yoruba Belief System

Religion is part of all cultures and consists of beliefs and behaviour patterns by which people try to influence that area of the universe that is beyond their control. It is characterised by a belief in supernatural beings or forces to which people appeal through prayer, sacrifice and ritual activities. Supernatural beings are grouped into three categories: major deities (gods and goddesses), non-human being spirits, and ancestral spirits.

Paul of Tarsus in addressing the philosophers of his time on Mars Hill told them that he believed them to be very 'religious' people (Acts, 17:22-24). The same could be said of the Yoruba, for they exhibit a devotion and faithfulness to their *Òrìṣà* of which there are quite a number.

The Yorubá religious belief system is predicated on the existence of the Supreme Being *Olódùmarè* and a number of *Òrìṣà*. The *òrìṣà* are thought of as emissaries of *Olódùmarè* on earth. Their actual number is not easily determined. It has variously been estimated to be 200, 201, 400, 401, 460, 600, 601, 1700 or even more (Awolalu, 1979:20).

OLÓDÙMARÈ - The origin of the name *Olódùmarè* is uncertain and there has been no satisfactory etymological analysis of the name (Lucas 1948: 41; Idowu 1962:33; Fadipe 1970:281; Bamgbose 1972:25-32; Awolalu 1979:11). In the popular tradition the name is attributed to He who has superlative greatness and everlasting majesty and He on whom man depends. He is also known and referred to by the following names:-

Olórun - the owner of *Orun* (the sky or heaven) or He whose abode is in the sky. Ellis (1894:36-38) referred to Him erroneously as the sky god of the Yorubá. The two words are sometimes used together as *Olórun Olódùmarè*, and not the other way round, to mean the Supreme Being who lives in the heaven above.

Elédáá - the Creator. This suggests that he is known as the maker and source of all things.

Alààyè - this translates to the Living One. The Yorùbá conceive Him to be ever-living and ever-lasting - One who never dies. This is expressed in the saying *A kì í gbọ ikú Olódùmarè* (One never hears of the death of Olodumare).

Elémí - the owner of life. This suggests that the Supreme Being is the giver of life to all living things. To *Olódùmarè* is ascribed that which is pure and white - the real source and norm of unrestricted and binding moral values. He is known as *Ọba Mímọ*, the 'Pure King'. A full and detailed description of the meaning of His name and His attributes are documented in *Olódùmarè, God in Yorùbá Belief* (Idowu, 1962:30-47).

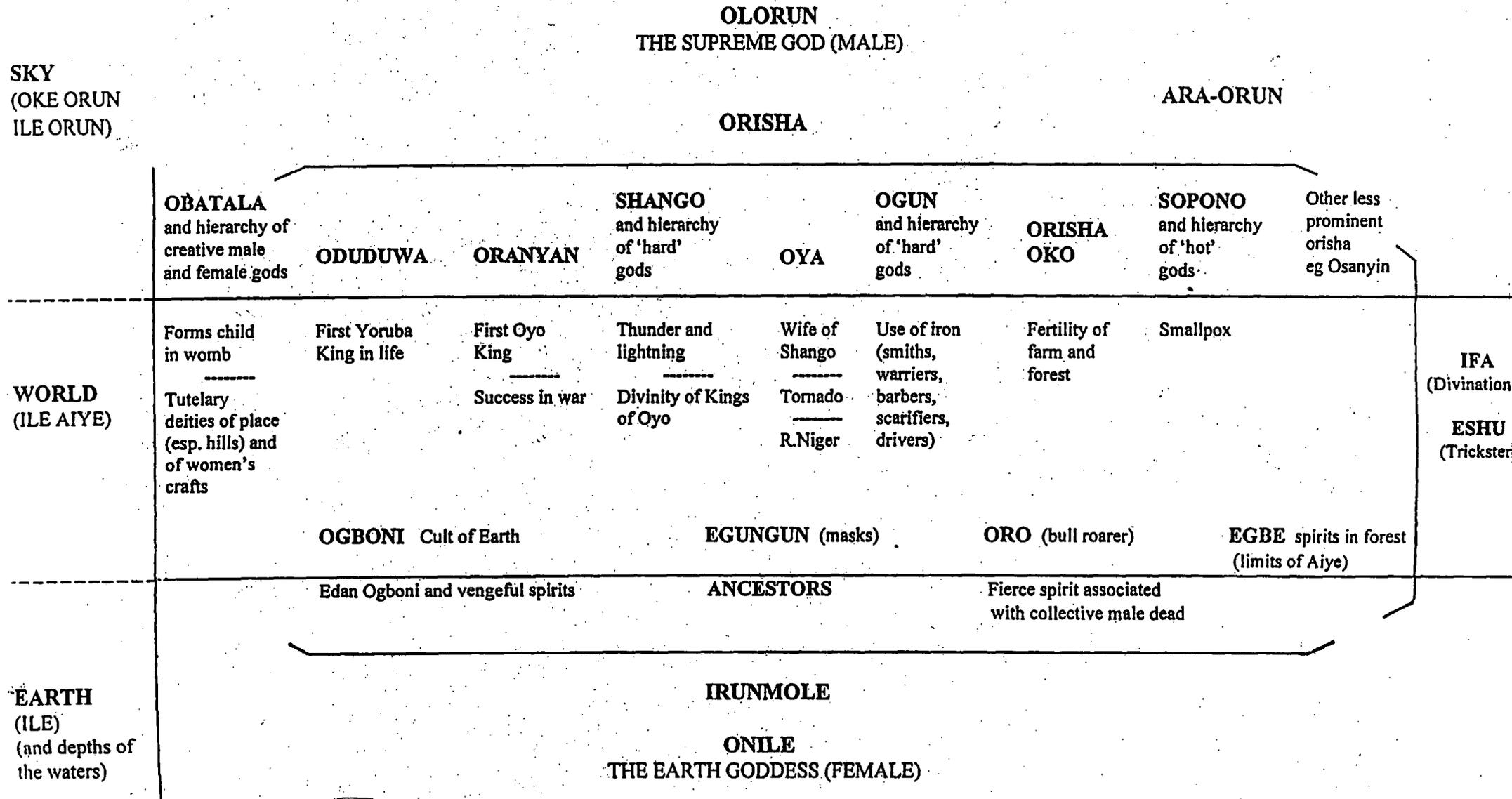
The Yorùbás have a myth about the creation which encompasses the sky, above, the earth below and the world in between the two. These creation stories (referred to in the previous chapter) influenced Morton-Williams (1964:243-260) in proposing a new outline of the cosmology of the Yoruba in contrast to the conventional models of earlier writers such as those of Crowther (1852), Bowen (1857), Ellis (1894), Froebenius (1912), Talbot (1926), Epega (1931), Farrow (1924), Parrinder (1940) Lucas (1948), Idowu (1962), and Awolalu (1979) who attempted to ascribe a hierarchy among the *òrìṣà*. It is interesting to note that most of these writers were clergymen and one wonders whether their judgment may not have been coloured by the Christian faith which finds it difficult to accept a complementary being to the God of Heaven (Morton-Williams, 1964 :244).

Morton -Williams's outline showed a threefold structure (Fig. 4) with *Ọlórún* at the top. Next to Him are the principal subjects known collectively as *òrìṣà* who are referred to at times as gods or deities. Also resident in the sky are the *ara-ọrun* (sky people) who are the spirit double of the living and souls of those waiting to be born. The term may also be used to describe the spirits otherwise called *egbe-ọrun* (the band of heaven or sky) who are from time to time reincarnated in *abiku* children. It is believed that a woman who gives birth to a succession of children who die in infancy is repeatedly bearing *abiku* children. The Yorubas believe that these children die when their band calls.

Some of the *òrìṣà* were believed to have been with *Olódùmarè* before creation and are referred to as primordial deities (Awolalu 1979:20) while others were historical figures - kings, culture heroes and heroines, war champions or founders of cities who have become

FIGURE 4

**THE YORUBA COSMOLOGY**



(adapted from Morton-Williams, P 1964)

deified. Others, however, represent the personification of natural forces and phenomena. Life in the second realm - *Ile-Aye* 'World' is good when a peaceful relationship exists between the *òrìṣà* and spirits in the other two realms. The Spirits of every category have a part to play in enabling mankind to live, prosper and reproduce itself. The *òrìṣà* give the blessings of children, health, and wealth if this is ordained by *Olódùmarè*. They can become vengeful if neglected. They have control over lightning, hunting, smithing, war, the use of iron, smallpox and productivity of the farm and forests. Some of these *òrìṣàs* are considered below.

OBÀTÁLÁ (ÒRÌṢÀ - NÌLÀ) - He was one of the earliest divinities. A great deal has been written about him under the heading of the mythical origin of the Yorùbá. He is referred to as the arch divinity and his cult is widely spread throughout the land. Although he is known by different names in different towns, the form of worship accorded him is the same throughout Yorùbáland. The divinity is believed to mould the foetus in the mother's womb and so it is common for the people to pray that the *Òrìṣà* may fashion a good work of art for a pregnant woman (*Ki òrìṣà yanà ire ko e o*) Awolalu 1979:21). *Òrìṣà-nílà* is highly respected for his purity and so is robed in white and housed in a white-washed place. His devotees wear white and are expected to be as clean and as upright as the deity. Even the food sacrificed to the *orisa* must be procured whitish, that is, no palm oil must be used in its preparation.

ÒRÚNMÌLÀ - was believed to be *Olódùmarè's* vice-regent on earth as he was with *Olódumàrè* when the world (*Ile Aye*) was created. As vice-regent he was able to intercede with *Olódumàrè* on behalf of man to avert or rectify unpleasant events. He was also known as the oracular divinity and the geomantic method of divination is called *Ifá* (Awolalu, 1979:23). *Òrúnmìlà* is believed to have knowledge and wisdom of the fate of man having been present at his creation. He is therefore able to advise on ways of affecting change when necessary. He is credited with the knowledge of the likes and dislikes of the other divinities and is able to guide mankind along the right lines to avoid catastrophes. Through the medium of *Ifá* he is able to pass on information on the type or form of sacrifice for any given occasion.

*Òrúnmìlà's* worship is widespread in Yorùbáland. His emblem consists of 16 sacred palm nuts called *Ikin*, which are put in a bowl with a lid, actual or graven pieces of elephant tusk, some cowry shells, the divination tray (*opón Ifá*) and conical bells or tappers (*Ìrofá*). These are placed on a mound in the corner of a room and are curtained off from public view (Awolalu 1979: 24).

The priest is called *Babaláwo* (Father of mysteries), and usually has his head shaved. He wears an amulet and carries a whisk. He commands the respect of the people and is ranked higher than any other Yorùbá priest. He is spared the courtesy of prostrating to any other human being, not even his parents or the king. The traditional Yorùbá will not embark on any important project without consulting the oracle through the *Babaláwo*.

Oral tradition has it that the *Babaláwo* must not abuse his office in any way and if he does he will never be received into heaven. He should neither use his office to enrich himself nor refuse to offer his services on account of money. Those who are too poor to pay the customary pittance for divination should be attended free and if the person can ill-afford the prescribed sacrifice, the *Babaláwo* must take whatever the suppliant can afford and translate 'the will for the deed' (Idowu, 1962:79).

ÈSÙ - (The Trickster) - He has been depicted by both Christianity and Islam as the 'devil' or 'shaitan' respectively, thus indicating that he represents evil, standing in opposition to goodness and light. As one of the functionaries of *Oloḍùmarè* he is seen by the Yoruba as that part of the divine which tests and tries people. He has been likened to Satan in the Book of Job. To him is assigned the duty of bringing some calamity by way of punishment upon those who go astray (Idowu 1962: 80). He is similarly believed to have power, and is ready to confer benefits on its worshippers.

He has been described by some as a trickster or mischief maker and by Awolalu (1979:29) as the 'Inspector-general' who is found in the market place, at road junctions and also at the threshold of houses. He does not discriminate in carrying out errands both good and evil. He has no priesthood because he is associated with all the other divinities. His devotees wear black or maroon beads round their necks and to them he is a tutelary deity. He is

known as *Baba* (Father) amongst other names. Offerings to *Èsù* include grains of maize, or beans, black chicken or fowl, male goats and dogs. He loves palm oil, but detests oil extracted from palm kernels.

### **OTHER LESS PROMINENT ORISA**

Lucas (1948, pp. 153-174), named twenty-one minor orisa under this heading. Some are so minor that they neither have adherents nor is a lot remembered about them. Amongst these are the following who are associated with medicine and herbalism :-

AJÀ (Whirlwind) is a benevolent *òrìṣà*. She is looked on as a spirit which carries off persons whom she meets into the forest with a view to imparting to them the medicinal properties of herbs, plants and roots. Those who are fortunate enough to be so carried away become native doctors. They regard her as their tutelary deity and worship her by placing presents of food in front of the 'Ajà vine', the leaves of which they use for curative purposes.

ARÒNI like *Aja* dwells in the forest but, unlike the latter, is credited with both malevolence and benevolence, yet admires courage. Whenever he encounters a courageous person, he takes them into the forest and treats them kindly and teaches them the secrets of herbs, plants and trees. When the person is proficient, he becomes the favourite of the deity and is sent back as a fully-fledged medicine man. As a certificate of proficiency he is given a hair from his tail and are looked upon with respect in his community. *Aròni* however deals unkindly with cowards. Those who run away from him, he devours and his malevolence towards such people is implacable. He has been described as an elf which possesses the head and tail of a dog and has only one leg. The other parts of his body are in human form. It is this that frightens those who encounter him. These two must be very minor as very little is remembered about them by my three interviewees nor did my enquiries unearth a devotee or adherent .

ÒSANYÌN - This is the third *òrìṣà* associated with medicine and herbalists. It is believed that he is in charge of roots, leaves and herbs. He is said to have more knowledge of the use of plant materials in curing illness than any other *òrìṣà*. He is described as the

god represented by the figure of a bird on an iron bar (Abraham 1958:528).

Unlike the other two he does not carry people into the forest for instruction but heals those who pray to him either by inspiring them to use suitable herbs or other material medium. His worship is general throughout Yorubáland as health is regarded by all as a precious gift.

The third realm Earth (*Ile*) is the domain of the goddess *Onile*. She is believed by those who worship her to have existed before the *òrìṣà*. She receives the souls of the dead who become earth spirits. She also harbours the ancestors and other dead, who can pass through to the sky from where they become reincarnated through the power of *Olórùn* and the *òrìṣà*. People swear by her since it is believed that man is created from her and returns to her after earthly existence. To swear falsely by her is to seek early death.

## **WORSHIP**

Worship is an eminent part of every form of religion, but it is not essential to it. Among the Yoruba, the chief reason for worship is to secure the active favour of the gods, thereby ensuring the physical, mental and spiritual welfare of the worshipper. The Yorubá believe that if worship is duly given to the gods, spirits and the ancestors, they in turn will fulfil their own part of the commerce by granting the worshipper his wishes. Failure to perform the rites and rituals on the other hand may result in serious consequences to the individual or the community.

Worship is expressed by word as well as by deed and takes the form of rites and ceremonies which may include prostration, praying (incantations), invoking and hailing the spirits of the object of worship, making offerings, singing, drumming and dancing. It may be private or corporate and is expected to be done with reverence and in an appropriate manner to achieve the desired effect.

The prominent elements of worship are: -

Liturgy : consists of ritual form and includes prayer, music and dancing;

Sacrifice : offerings for different purposes;

Cultural functionaries : The officials and attendants at worship;

Sacred Places : where worship is carried out - shrines, temples and altars.

For the Yoruba sacrifice meets certain needs and aspirations. It is utilised as a means of :-

- (a) expressing gratitude to the spiritual beings;
- (b) fulfilling a vow;
- (c) establishing a communion between man and spiritual beings;
- (d) averting the anger of the divinities and spirits;
- (e) warding off attack of enemies;
- (f) purification of individual or community after a broken taboo;
- (g) preventing or getting rid of epidemic.

Types of sacrifice: -

1. Ebo opé àti idàpò (thanksgiving and communion)

This serves as a means of expressing thanks to and communion with the *òrìṣà*. It is always accompanied by feasting; the worshippers and the *òrìṣà* share a common meal thus maintaining a beneficial relationship. It takes place usually during the annual festival celebration of the *òrìṣà*.

2. Ebo Èjé' (votive sacrifice)

It is common among the Yoruba for the devotees of some *òrìṣà* to pour out their minds to the *òrìṣà* and to promise a specified offering if their needs are met. Vows may be made at any time but are usual at times of special needs or during times of stress when human help is of no avail. To fail to fulfil the promise is to incur the wrath of the divinity and to lose the benefits already received.

3. Ebo Ètutù (propitiatory sacrifice)

The anger of the gods, evil spirits, or some ritual error or defilement by man is believed to be responsible for failure of crops, famine, epidemic, protracted illness and any other calamities. Efforts are made to find out the causes of these and a propitiatory sacrifice is usually used to appease the anger of the divinity.

4. Ebo Ojúkòríbi (preventive sacrifice)

The Yoruba believe that sacrifice also wards off evil and misfortune. Precautionary measures are therefore taken to prevent imminent danger or disaster predicted by the oracle.

### 5. Ebo Ipilè (foundation sacrifice)

This sacrifice combines several functions i.e. prevention, propitiatory and thanksgiving. It is used when the foundation of a house is contemplated, new enterprise is planned or setting out on a journey.

The following materials are used by the Yoruba for sacrifice (Ebo) -

Food-crops: Obì (kola-nuts), Orogbò (bitter-kola), Isu (yams), Ogèdè (plantain),  
Èko (corn-meal), Àgbàdo (maize), Àgbon (coconuts), Ìrèkè (sugar-cane);

Birds: Obi adie (hen), Òromadiè (chicken), Àkùko (cocks), Pepeye (ducks),  
Eyèle (pigeons);

Animals: Ewure (she-goat), Òbukò (he-goat), Agutàn (sheep), Àgbò (rams),  
Eledè (pigs), Eranlá (cows);

Liquids: Omi tũ̀tũ̀ (cold water), Emu (palm wine), Oti (gin), Epo-pupa (palm-oil);

Others: articles of clothing, money, fish, especially mud-fish (eja arò).

## **FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST TRADITIONAL RITES**

Islam and Christianity, the two comparatively new religions, Western education and culture and improved medical facilities were three main factors that have undermined the Yoruba traditional religion and ethnomedical practices. Their influences are considered below.

### **Islam in West Africa**

Trimingham (1962) in his book *The History of Islam in West Africa* maintained that Islam was introduced to West Africa through the caravan routes along the Sahara and took about a thousand years to take root, develop and be refined in the West African crucible. It made sense out of the complex of African institutions, including those of religion and medicine (Kirby 1993:237-247). It entered the systems on their own terms, transformed them from within and slowly brought about changes. It also adapted to local circumstances and gradually transformed the structures of society. Islam took African problem-solving seriously while insinuating into the African mentality and institutions some fundamentally new perspectives hoping this would be a solid base for Africans to develop their own medical systems.

## Islam in Yorùbáland

Awolalu (1979:183), states that the entry of Islam into Yorubaland might have been sometime in the seventeenth century. The Hausas, who were northern neighbours to the Yoruba were known to have embraced Islam as early as the fourteenth century through trade along the caravan routes of the Sahara. Many of the Yorubas were and still are traders and must have come across Islam on their travels. Gbadamosi (1968) claimed that Islam was established in Ketu, a Yorùbá town before the eighteenth century and that between 1775 and 1780 there were Moslems in Lagos, also a Yorùbá town. This shows that Islam was introduced before the Christian missionaries ever set foot on Yorùbá soil. This assertion is confirmed by a Yoruba song :

<i>Aiye l'a ba'Fá</i>	Ifa religion is age-long
<i>Aiye l'a ba'Malè</i>	Muslim religion is age-long
<i>Osangangan n'Igbagbọ wòle de</i>	But Christianity came much later - in the afternoon

The existence of Muslim communities within the society created some tension because Islam being a monotheistic religion frowned at and looked down on the Yorùbá traditional religion which allowed for a plurality of gods. Muslims however, did not repeat the iconoclastic act of Braima narrated in the legendary history of the migration of the Yorùbá under Odùduwà.

In the course of time there were converts to this new religion and the adherents had to adopt new ways of life which were quite different from traditional ways which they were taught to condemn.

The teachers of this religion were called Mullahs and knew Arabic and Islam but their numbers were few. They were, however, held in high regard for their learning, piety and ability to make charms. The main difference between the old and the new religion was that the old preached polytheism and the maintenance of traditional religious rites, which included sacrifices, while the new decried these and preached the supremacy of Allah who requires praise only and no sacrifices. Secret societies of all types were condemned and all those who held on to the old religion were stigmatised as unbelievers.

While there was conflict between the old and the new, these were only ripples in the otherwise calm and peaceful co-existence. The people who preached the new religion were no different from those they tried to convert and besides preaching they carried on normal trading activities while living with the people.

## Christianity

Christianity came to Yorùbáland in 1842 through Badagry and then Abeokuta. Chief Ṣódeké, the leader of the Egbá and his fellow chiefs welcomed the missionaries with open arms. The missionaries were led by the Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman, a mullato who was then the Methodist Superintendent of the Mission to Cape Coast and the Rev. Henry Townsend for the Local Committee of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Sierra Leone. These were later followed by the main CMS Mission in 1845.

The report of the missionaries showed that 'Although there was no open hostility or persecution, the hold of the traditional religion on the people was firm. They had welcomed the missionaries not because they wanted Christianity but because they were weak and poor and hoped that the missionaries could attract some trade to the town' (Ajayi 1965: 34). There was also the additional reason that the whites held an attraction for them being of a different colour.

This showed how deep rooted the traditional religion was amongst the people just as in Badagry where the people accepted the new religion for economic reasons. Those who really advocated the introduction of Christianity were the westernised liberated slaves who wanted the sort of western education and fellowship which they had come to associate with Christianity while they were in Freetown but found missing in Yorubaland.

Between 1843 and 1846, Christian missions were established in Badagry and Abeokuta and also in Lagos in 1851 following the suppression of the slave trade. This guaranteed free movement of missionaries and trade between Abeokuta and Lagos which is a sea port.

After the death of Chief Ṣódeké, some say through poison by fetish priests who were opposed to the propagation of Christianity, his successor proved friendly to the

missionaries as Sódeké himself had been and allowed them to build mission houses, churches, and schools. Among the first converts were the mother and sisters of the Rev. Ajayi Crowther and an Ifa priest (Awolalu 1979:187). The people of Abeokuta recognised a Supreme God whom they referred to as Olórun, but the worship still persisted of such deities as Ifá (the god of secrets), Ògún (the god of iron and war), Shàngó (the god of thunder) and more so the spirit that they believe dwells in the caves in the Olumo Rock and had provided them with shelter and protection during their migration.

Christianity, like Islam, divides the communities into two camps - the converted who looked down on the traditional religion and the devotees. After a period of time, young male converts in Abeokuta encountered difficulties in finding wives because they refused to marry non-believers who could not join them in reading the Bible. The female believers were threatened with the mysterious terrors of the Orò cult, which for years had filled the women with fear. The converts however remained resolute in their new-found faith as recorded by Walker (1931: 63)

‘ There grew a general feeling of sympathy with the people who could suffer so bravely for their faith. The persecutors were puzzled and asked : ‘ What is it that the white man gives you to eat that made your heart so strong.’

The Egba in Abeokuta were not alone in being resolutely opposed to the Christian faith. Rev. David Hinderer, the first white man to set foot in Ibadan had similar experiences to that of the missionaries in Abeokuta. He was warmly received by the head chief but with less enthusiasm by the people. These were warriors who indulged in both slavery and human sacrifices. Anything that disturbed their way of life was therefore most unwelcome. The Ijebu, too who were neighbours to the Egba resisted the advance of the missionaries. They boasted to the Lagos Government that their religion was good enough for them as it made them peaceful, happy and prosperous and that the white man's religion only fermented war. They were right in their perception because it was the white slave traders who introduced them to the use of firearms for war. The Governor therefore used force in 1892 to subdue the Ijebus and so put an end to human sacrifice, slavery and all the forms of vice which the missionaries accused them of practising

On hearing of the defeat of the Ijebu, the Ondo put a stop to human sacrifice in 1893 and accepted the British way of life including religion. Following this, missionary activities spread like wild fire throughout the land at the expense of the traditional religion and rites.

With the new religion developed new ideals and new social groupings. New converts were in some cases withdrawn from the community and on baptism were made to adopt Biblical names like David, John, Joshua, Josiah, Michael, Moses etc. while the women took on such names as Christiana, Mary, Eunice, Ruth, and Victorian English names like Elizabeth, Victoria, Alice etc. Some even adopted English surnames like Smith, Davies, Johnson, Pearce, Jones, Crowther, Williams, Campbell etc. Those who accepted Christianity and civilisation were made to withdraw from traditional rites and rituals of kinship which were associated with the divinities and the ancestral spirits. They were also made to destroy their deities, bringing about the second iconoclastic period in the history of the Yorùbá.

### Education and Western culture

The most potent factor which militated against traditional practices was western education and culture. Both were linked with Christianity and civilisation. The 3Cs - Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation went hand in hand. In claiming to work for the spiritual salvation of the people, the missionaries also claimed to work for their material well-being which in essence was training the people to fit into the British Administration. The missionaries and the liberated Africans who accepted Christianity regarded themselves as representing British Christian Civilisation while for the Yorùbás to be educated meant to adopt the British way of life to the detriment of their own indigenous culture.

The converts were taught the Scriptures and the 3Rs ( Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic) which encouraged them to disregard their own faith. Some of them who had the knowledge of Scriptures became catechists and preachers, and later became ordained and so preached against the worship of indigenous deities, rites and rituals. They became friends of the white man and so started a new social order which undermined the traditional life and family structure. Those who belonged to this new social order claim not to be able to take part in traditional festivals which they regard as evil. They even shunned their traditional dress for the English way of dressing.

Education encouraged migration to the cities from the villages and rural areas. Such migration weakened the traditional hold on people and alienated them from the traditional pattern of life and beliefs. Education also brought improved medical services. Before Christianity and western education, those who were ill consulted the oracle to ascertain what supernatural powers were at work. Today education has changed people's outlook to the extent that medical practitioners rather than the oracles are consulted by the educated who have access to modern medical facilities.

In spite of all attempts by the missionaries to maintain Christianity, they did not have it their own way all the time for there were some educated Yorùbá within the new social group who yearned for the old religion.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, many Christian Yorùbá began to develop an interest in indigenous Yorùbá culture or cultural nationalism. These were the second generation of Christians who did not have to make a personal choice between Christianity and the traditional Yorùbá culture.

Cultural nationalism represented in part the failure of Christianity to win large numbers of converts among the indigenous societies. It was therefore thought that the expansion of Christianity was inhibited by its close association with the European civilisation and that the work of the evangelisation might be advanced by developing forms of Christianity more compatible with traditional African culture (Law 1983: 109). Other aspects of cultural nationalism was the wearing of Yorùbá dress, the use of Yorùbá language in preference to English, an increasing attempt to defend or tolerate indigenous institutions and the creation of African Churches independent of the European missions in the 1880s (Webster 1964: 104). The United African Native Church which was founded in 1891 as a result of the activities of those involved with cultural nationalism still exists today with its more African form of Christianity.

It is a pity that the missionaries of the Protestant persuasion who first set foot in Yorùbáland were bent on establishing their form of Christianity which was alien to the Yorùbás instead of adapting the religion and culture of the people to Christianity in the form

of syncretisation as happened with the Roman Catholic faith in South America. There the culture of the slaves has been well integrated to the benefit of both. Perhaps the Roman Catholic faith found it easier to accept the concept of having icons in the churches as well as praying to God through these icons. This was a practice not too dissimilar from what the Yoruba slaves were used to at home.

### **The Orixás in Exile in Brazil and Bahia in particular**

The Yorùbá religion in exile is said by Bastide (1960) to have been one of the most faithful to its ancestral tradition. In Brazil it goes under the name of *Candomblés* Nago (Bahia) or Xangô in the States of Pernambuco and Alagoa and Batuque in Pôrto Alegre. The word Batuque imitates the drum beat. In Cuba, the term used is Santaria, while in the West Indies, it is known as Chango. The *Candomblé* of the Angola, Congo, Jeje, Nago, Ketu and Jexá nations practised different traditions and it is possible at present to distinguish differences in the rhythm of the drums, music and language of the sacred chants, liturgical vestments, the names of the deities, and certain aspects of the ceremonies. The necessity to preserve the cult in the face of police repression in the 1930s resulted in unification around the Nago practices.

### **The effect of the Catholic faith on the African religion in Exile**

During the Colonial period, Catholicism superimposed itself over the African religion, rather than replacing it. In the shadow of the cross, whether situated on the plantation or in the city church, ancestor worship continued to be practised and even more so towards the end of the era of slavery. This was made easy by the fact that the slave owners were interested in the slaves' bodies and not their minds. They regarded the slaves as machines performing labour and not souls to be saved. The chaplains also fulfilled their duties as a professional obligation to which they brought no Christian charity. Even as late as the 19th century when the moral climate changed radically in Brazil, and an interest was shown in the moral welfare of the workforce, the chaplains did no evangelising but simply performed their job. They married and baptised the Negroes but gave them no instruction (Bastide, 1960:127). Not every plantation had a resident chaplain and the distances between the slave quarters were at times so great that it was not possible for regular visits to be

maintained. The slave therefore used the streets as a venue of escape from the master's strict supervision and the nocturnal meetings as a means of refreshing himself among the members of his 'nation' and also to sustain himself with memories of his native civilisation. While religious instruction was the order of the day in the country, it was neglected in the cities. Among over a thousand Negroes, there might have been two or three who voluntarily adopted Christianity, while in the others it remained a religion imposed from outside. In the early nineteenth century, Luccock quoted by Bastide (1960:128) asserted that Catholicism of the blacks and mullatoes was purely nominal - reduced mainly to gestures devoid of spiritual significance. The whites were interested in their slaves' religion only in so far as it affected them personally, either when the noise of the singing and the drumming kept them awake or when the black priest instigated or led revolts or mass escape or suicides.

There was a mingling of the African sects with Catholicism in Bahia as in other parts of Brazil. This started with the Jesuit fathers who made concessions in the religious practices of Blacks and Indians to encourage more conversion to the Catholic faith. In the ceremonies in which slaves participated, there were many manifestations of the African cults such as chants and dancing. Therefore it is common to find many *terreiros* or temples displaying the Catholic saints with which they syncretised their *orixá* although there is no correlation between the saints and the deities. Other Catholic habits have been incorporated into the practice of the *Candomblé*, such as the celebration of Mass at our Lord of the Bonfim Church in Bahia.

In Yorubaland, the *Orìṣà* is regarded as the ancestor of the lineage and its cult is always kept alive by the oldest chief in the group from one generation to another but without recourse to a state of trance. However certain members of the lineage, together with other non-related persons who have received the call from the deity (e.g. after an illness or as a result of a dream), form fraternities whose members dance in honour of the *orìṣà* and are at times possessed by him. The former are known as sons of the *orìṣà* whilst the latter are said to be born by the *orìṣà*.

A similar system of acquiring an *orixá* exists in Brazil. Even though slavery disrupted the

lineages and so made it impossible for the African pattern to continue, one may acquire an *orixá* from either the father or the mother. It may also be acquired after misfortunes or illness which in effect is a call from the *orixá* and a consequent consultation with the *Babaláo* or *Iyalorixá*. The *orixá* may also be acquired as a result of the manner of the child's birth.

In order to escape persecution by the Jesuits or the police, the Blacks associated each of their *orixá* with a saint, seeking to match the entities' common traits and characteristics as much as possible even though there are really no identifying factors between the African deities who came from distinct age-old traditions and the saints of the Catholic Church.

### The Orixás

Each *orixá* which survived to the present day has a corresponding saint in the Catholic Church with specific characteristics such as day of the week, colours, vestment, ceremonial greetings and food. Although there are fourteen *orixás*, they bear different names in the Americas and the Caribbean. At first sight, one might be tempted to think that these are separate *orixás*, which would make the number higher. This is probably one of the reasons why the number of *orixás* in the Yoruba pantheon is said to vary between 200 and 1700.

The *orixas* that survived are :-

**Oxalá** (*Orişánlà in Yorùbá*) is the oldest and is known as the father of all *orixá*. He is associated with Our Lord of Bonfim or Jesus Christ. He has two designations - *Oxalufon*, the older and *Oxagian*, the younger warrior. He is known as in Yorubaland as the divinity of creation. Friday is his day and white his colour. This extends to his food which is also white. His greeting is said to be *Epa Baba*.

**Yemanjá** - is the goddess of fresh water and is believed to be the mother of all *orixas* except *Oxumarê* and *Omolú*. Her colours are white, pink and light blue. She is identified with Nossa Senhora da Concepcion (The Lady of Conception) - The Virgin Mary. Saturday is her day and her food is prepared with salt and palm oil and her greeting is *Odo Iye* Her dance interprets the movement of rough water.

**Nana** is said to be the oldest of the water divinities and is the mother of *Oxumarê* and

*Omolú* . Her colours are blue and white. She is identified with Saint Anna. Her day is Tuesday, her food is black eyed beans and her greeting is *Saluba*.

*Omolú or Obaluwaiye* (Sopanna in Yoruba) - is the god associated with diseases. He is credited with the power to cure or provoke epidemics. He is identified with Saint Lazarus. His day is Monday, his colours red and black or black and white. His greeting is *Atoko* and his food is *Abarem*. His body is covered with straw and his face is hidden. His dance symbolises disease, suffering and deformity.

*Exú* - is the messenger between man and the deities. He is known to be very temperamental and must be appeased first, receiving offerings before the other *orixas* or man. Monday is his day and his colours are red and black. He eats popcorn and manioc meal fried in palm oil and his greeting is *Laroye*.

*Ogun* - the god of iron, is the brother of *Exu* and *Oshossi*. He is the holy warrior and is identified with Santo Antonio. Tuesday is his day and his colour is dark blue while his greeting is *Ogunhe*. He dances armed with a sword.

*Oshossi* - is referred to as the Sultan of the Forest (Bastide, 1960:196) and is the Yoruba god of the hunt. He is identified with Sao Jorge 'St. George' and his colours are green and blue. His day is Thursday and his food is made of corn and coconut while his greeting is *Ake Aro*. He dances with a bow and arrow in one hand and '*irukere*' (whisk) in the other and imitates hunting.

*Oxumarê* - (Oshumare) is syncretised with Sao Bartholomeu (St. Bartholomew) and is said to rule the rainbow. He is able to take the shape of a serpent and his colours are green and yellow while his day is Tuesday. His food is beans prepared with corn and palm oil and his greeting is *Aro Mobol*

*Xango* (Shango) - the god of thunder and lightning. He was the first king of Oyo in Yorubaland. Myth has it that he had three wives - Yansan, Oshun and Oba. Each of these was deified. All his traditions are practised at the Ile Axe Opo Afonja *terreiro* (temple) of

which he is the patron. His day is Wednesday and his colours are red and white while his food is *amala* and his greeting is *kabo kabiyesi*. He dances with dignity holding his *Oxe* a double-axe, in his hand.

*Yansan* (*Oya*) the wife of *Xangô* and goddess of the river Niger is also known as the goddess of lightening, winds and tempest. She is syncretised with Santa Barbara. She is said to be restless, authoritarian and a warrior, having been her husband's partner in wars. Her day is also Wednesday like that of *Xangô* her husband; her colour however is red while her food is *acara* - Black eyed bean balls fried in palm oil and her greeting is '*Epahei*' She dances with arms outstretched as if she dominates the elements and the soul of the dead.

*Oxun* (*Oshun*) is the second wife of *Xangô* and is the goddess of fountains, fresh water beauty and sensual love. She is impudent and vain. She dances with a fan in her hand, mimics a flirt who is going to bathe in the river, looks at herself in the mirror and jingles her bracelet with joy. Saturday is her day and her colour is golden yellow. Her food is black eyed beans and eggs. She is identified with Nossa Senhora das Candelas (the Virgin Mary) and her greeting is '*Ore Yeyeo*.'

*Oba* is the third wife of *Xangô* and is the goddess of *Oba* River . When she does appear at an *Ishire* with the other *orixá* she does so only to pick a fight with *Oxun*. Legend has it that *Oba* was the last love of *Xangô*. One day *Oxun* advised her to cut off her ears and cook this with *Xangô's* food as this would increase *Xangô's* love for her. When *Xangô* discovered the plot he rejected her even more and so started an eternal loathing of *Oxun*. She is identified with St. Joan of Arc.

*Logun Ede* is syncretised with Sao Miguel Arcanjo. He is the son of *Oshóssi* and *Oxun*. His day is Thursday and his colours are blue and yellow. His food is the same as that of his mother and his greeting is *Logun*.

*Ibeji* is the protector of children and is syncretised with the twin saints Cosme and Damiao in Bahia where he is one of the most popular *orixá*. He is celebrated on September

27, and many temples offer a feast known as *caruru* in his honour. His day is Sunday and his colour varies but is predominantly gold. His food is amala or *caruru*, and sweets.

Among the different nations whose descendants practice their cult in Bahia, there exists many lesser known *orixás* such as *Ossáim*, the god of sacred leaves and medicinal plants; *Onilé*, god of the earth; *Orixá Oko*, the god of agriculture and harvest and *Ifá* or *Orúnmilá*, the god of divination. Of these *Ossáim* comes out sparingly with the other *orixás* during the *Ishiré* as there are still those who are sons and daughters of *Ossáim* and those who are born by him.

*Orixá Oko* seems to have been neglected during the slavery as the slaves were not too keen to seek the blessing of this *orixá* on their master's plantation. *Ifá* on the other hand became relegated when the last true *Babaláo* died. He was sent by his parents to Nigeria to be initiated into the cult and on his return became the *Babaláo* at the Ile Axe Opo Afonja where he maintained the authentic practice as he got it from Yorúbáland. With his death the cult of *Orúnmilá* became silent. To resuscitate this might mean someone going to Nigeria for initiation. Communication with the *orixás* and the ancestors in Bahia is generally carried out using sixteen cowries - a practice which also exists in Nigeria where it is known as *Erindilogun* and is associated with *Exú*.

**The Terreiro** - The *terreiros* or temples occupy an extensive acreage in the forest at the edge of the city in Brazil. As the city expanded the temples were surrounded by habitations, so that today no-one needs to travel far to get to one of these cult centres. The *terreiros* are able still to hold on to the plot of land they acquired at their inception.

The *terreiro* is a complex of buildings put up to serve differing purposes. The main building is where the *Ishiré* 'celebrations' take place and the others are dedicated to the individual *orixá*. Within the main building is situated a room set aside as the *Pegi* 'the main altar' where the *orixás* are fed during the celebrations. The other houses are used on the feast day of the individual *orixá*. There is also a general building in which the older priestesses are given a room of their own. This building also serves as common dormitory for the *Abias*, who are the initiates in training. The other daughters of the *orixá* also use

the facility during celebrations. It also serves as a training venue where songs and dance steps are taught. The building is usually a hive of industry where the young ladies are taught dress making, the ways of the cult, the difference between the various *orixa*, and their likes and dislikes (taboos). In essence the set up is reminiscent of a convent

### **The hierarchy and functionaries within the Terreiro**

**Iyaloxa** (Mãe de Santos - mother of saints) - is the Chief Executive and Director of operations without whose permission nothing can happen. Her authority is final and she resides on the premises. She is usually chosen by divination unless the last mother had indicated a preference for a particular individual to succeed her.

**Iya Kekere** (Mãe peguana - Little mother) assists the mother in her duties. She might be a member of the mother's age group in sainthood or one of the eldest in the *terreiro*. She is closer to the other priestesses in that she sees more of them than does the *Iyaloxá*. Other mothers who play important role in the life of the community are *Iya tãbêxê* who is the singer who starts each hymn and sometimes sing solos, *Iya bassê* who cooks the food for the *orixa* and the *dagan* and *sidagan* who devote themselves to the cult of *Exú*. These functionaries are chosen from among the senior *Ebomin*.

The other daughters in sainthood are the following in ascending order :- **Abias** - these are young ladies who have 'have given food to the head' (*Ori*) but have not completed their initiation. They constitute the reserve for the *candomblé* (Bastide,1960:195-196)

**Ekeidi** - (this term is derived from the word Ekeji which means 'second' in Yorùbá) These groups act as the assistants or servants to the brides of the *orixás*. They have not undergone any initiation but see to the comfort of the *Iyaos* (brides) at celebrations. They remove shoes, beads and other items that might harm the *iyao*s during a period of trance or while being ridden by the *orixá*. They also wipe their faces during dancing and lead the *iyao* into the house to have them dressed in the apparel of their *orixá*.

**Iyao** ( bride) these are the brides of the *orixás*. They become brides after undergoing an initiation ceremony and receive a new name in sainthood. The initiation ceremony could

last three to four weeks during which period the initiate does not have any secular life but lives on the premises.

**Ebomin** - (from the Yorùbá word - *Egbonmi* which means 'my elder'). This is the next step up the ladder and is only achieved seven years after initiation within the *Ketu* and *Jexá'* nations.

These are intake groups and they progress upwards together. The age status within the cult is measured from the day of initiation. This means that some people can be older chronologically but still be quite young in their sainthood age if they came into the cult later in life.

### **Sons in Sainthood** -

The men within the cult undergo an initiation of a kind and although they do not fall into trance they exercise priestly duties as follows:-

**Babaloxia** - (Pai de Santos or 'father of the cult'). He runs the affairs of the cult in collaboration with the mother but is not resident on the premises.

**Pegi-gan** - this official is in charge of the altar in the *pegi*, and the **Ashogun** is responsible for the sacrifices while the **Alalbé' - huntor** is in charge of the musicians and the drummers.

**The ogans** - this is a word derived from *ouranga*, the Gabon name for priest. Some of these priests are merely honorary patrons of the cult and have their origin from the days of persecution by both the police or to represent the cult in civil action. They are selected by the *orixas* and are subjected to minor initiation rituals. They are also able to raise funds, advise the cult as necessary and do service as godfathers to the priestesses at their initiation.

### **The Philosophy, Mysticism and Emotionality of the Candomblé.**

The cult members from the beginning appeared to be good Catholics but were ignorant of the basis on which that faith was built. In this they are no different from other Catholics in different parts of the world where Christianity was planted.

Karl Marx has called religion the opiate of the masses, but in this case the real opiate is said to be their ignorance and illiteracy for which the landowners and the inefficient economy were held responsible (Landes, 1947:88).

*Candomblé* was and is still believed in Brazil to be a creative force which gives the people courage and confidence to concentrate on solving their day to day problems rather than the peace hereafter. The priestesses were and are still very close to the people. The *Iyaloxás* and *Babaloxás* are expected to know the answers and so are the diviners. The daughters know certain answers depending on the length of their training and experience and every one has an idea of what is to be done or who can get it done. In this, the *candomblé* is similar to the Catholic system of belief that everything that happens has some mystery behind it. It is believed that nobody dies a natural death and nobody gets married happily just as a matter of course, nobody is successful merely through luck or talent, nobody gets sick for natural reasons - always there is a saint or *orixá* involved who is revenging himself or blessing his protege or some black magic is being practised.

The Catholic priests teach the people about the same thing as do the mothers in sainthood - i.e. to rely on the saints and to obey the commands rather than one's own reason or intuition. The priests say that it is not only important to know God's will but also under any circumstance, it is obligatory to obey it. The people of the *candomblé* speak of God in the Catholic Church and *Oxalá* in the African. They both believe they are practicing only one religion but using different languages. The logic goes on that Jesus has the saints to express his will while *Oxalá* who is syncretised with Jesus has a number of *orixás* to express his will. Each *orixá* reveals some aspect of *Oxalá*.

The Catholics do not worship God as much as Jesus, Mary and the Saints. The people of the *candomblé* feel similarly that *Oxalá* is remote, old and pallid but the other *orixás* are still exuberant: they feud and love like the Greek gods, they descend among their worshippers to play, and love a certain amount of mischief.

The next chapter defines the Yoruba concept of health and how this is achieved in Nigeria and Brazil.

## Chapter Five

### Health and Yoruba Traditional healers

Yorùbá oral tradition has it that soon after creation, human beings on earth (*Ile - ayé*) became conscious of several illness such as headache, fever, stomach-ache and difficult childbirth. They attributed these to the work of the trickster (*Èṣu*) and witches (*Àjẹẹ*). They sought help from the Supreme Being in Heaven (*Ọlórún, Olódùmarè*) who sent the deity *Orúnmilá* to sort things out. It is evident, therefore, that the people appreciated good health quite early in their history.

The Yoruba in Nigeria were, and still are, a fun loving people who value health highly and would go to any length to achieve both health (*Ilera = ile-ara*) and wealth (*Orọ*). Their concept of health also referred to as *Alááfia*, is total well-being and peace. Therefore in greeting each other at any time of the day, after the equivalent of good morning and so on, they ask the question *Ṣe alááfia ni?* 'How is your health today?' *Alááfia* is a state in which the organs of the body are said to be in equilibrium with the environment i.e. a state of social, physical, mental and spiritual well-being. This definition was given to me by Chief J.O.Lambo, who was one of my interviewees. This is a far sighted understanding which predated the World Health Organization Charter (WHO, 1947). To the Yoruba ill-health is *aije, aimu, aisun, aiwo, aiṣu ati aitọ* - the inability to eat, drink, sleep, and attend to the calls of nature.

The above definition of health is mirrored in the Yorùbá belief in the usefulness of the oracle in the diagnosis of illness either physical or mental which does not seem to have an easily recognisable etiology. To them illness (*Ailerá = aile - ará*) or disease (*arun or aisán*) is caused by infection (*Akorán*), congenital malformation (*Arinnako*), or the intervention of a third party (*Afiṣe*).

In most cases the behaviour in illness is dependent on its severity. A sick person may feel

pain but continue with the task in hand. If however the person needs to lie down, this suggests something more serious and those around would render home remedies. If, in spite of this, the ailment persists then outside help is sought from either the traditional healer or a western trained doctor or health personnel, depending on which is more easily accessible and affordable in terms of finance and other invisible costs or religious belief.

At present those who are ill have a choice of being treated by western trained doctors / health personnel or a traditional healer (*Onisegun*). The former treatment is based on well tried empirical, contemporary science while the latter is a total body of knowledge, techniques for the preparation and use of substances, measures and practices based on sociocultural and religious beliefs. These are founded on personal experience and observations handed down verbally from generation to generation. This system also persists in Bahia which is one of the States in Brazil.

About three decades ago in Nigeria, western-trained medical personnel (doctors and paramedics) and facilities were situated in the cities where 20% of the population lived (Olatubosun, 1975). The other 80% who lived in rural areas have recourse to traditional healers initially and found their way to the cities for treatment, usually at the later stage of their illness. Even within the cities, where western-trained health personnel were found some people still believe that certain illnesses are only amenable to traditional medicine and so try both. Traditional healers are therefore still in demand even within the cities (Ademuwagun 1969:1085-1091; Maclean 1969:172-186; Lambo 1969:201-210; and Harrison 1974:11-25). This could be referred to as a belt and braces policy and is supported by the Yorùbá saying that 'before maize came into the world, the chicken ate something ( ...*Ki agbado to de ile aye nkan kan ni adię n ję* ).

I can illustrate this point with three personal experiences.

I was brought up as a Christian in a Christian household as mentioned in the introductory chapter, and therefore belonged to the social group which did not know much about the traditional way of life of the Yorùbá. My father accepted Christianity when he was in his early twenties, but had been brought up in the rural area as a farmer's son. He therefore had knowledge of the traditional way of life. The stories that follow are from three periods

of my life. The first occurred in my early teens, the second in my late teens, before I went to study medicine in England, while the third related to a period of my life when I was a fully qualified medical practitioner.

At the age of fourteen, I took ill at school (a Missionary Secondary School in Lagos) and had to spend the night at school being nursed by the white missionary teachers. I was sent home the following day having been treated for malaria, but was still rather weak. At the weekend, a friend of my father's came to the house and the three of us were in a room where this friend sat on a mat with an *Opele* used by the Ifá priest for divination. I was too young to understand what went on, but when I went out into the open air I still remember vividly that a gentle breeze swept over me and I felt as if something had happened to me. What this was I did not know, nor did I enquire. All I would say was that I felt happier and stronger in myself.

The second story was just before I left home for England for the first time. This was just before my twenty-first birthday. An Islamic Mullah who had always visited the house whenever his services were needed came a few days before my departure. I remember that this particular evening he had water in a drinking glass and on top of this, he placed a plank on which I stood. Here too, I did not know what to expect, but a few days later, I was presented with a charm that I had to take with me to England. I secretly threw it away after a period of two years in England. What the charm was for was not explained to me.

The third story took place while I was working in one of the universities in Nigeria as a Senior Research Training Fellow and fell ill. I was in bed for more than three weeks being fed on both anti-malarial drugs and antibiotics as I had a very high fever and perspired a great deal. When my father heard of my illness, he became worried and decided to do something about it. He also knew that I could not leave my bed and that even if I could I would not accept being seen by a traditional healer nor accept any traditional medication proffered. He therefore had to seek out someone who could help me without my knowledge. He undertook a journey in a canoe to do that which he felt was necessary. I did not know what took place but I got better immediately after this journey. My father did not tell me the story. It was my sister, who is the eldest of my siblings, who told me the

story after the death of my father. These stories only go to support the fact that even people who are Christians and live in cities still make use of traditional healers.

The acute shortage of western trained health personnel in the rural areas and its implications was recognised by the WHO. In 1975 it encouraged the Member States to explore the possibility of using the services of traditional healers within their primary health care system as a means of achieving 'Health for All by the year 2000'. This led to a series of reports on how to achieve this end (WHO 1976(a,b,c) and 1978). The situation in Nigeria as a whole has deteriorated since the WHO advice referred to above as most western trained doctors have and are still seeking service outside the country due to several factors outside the limit of this study.

### **The Yoruba Traditional Healers (Onisegun)**

A major impediment to the adoption and execution of the WHO policy is the lack of information about traditional healers, their methods of practice and the training of their apprentices.

Previously recorded classification and categorisation of the healers carried out by Margetts (1965:115-118); Maclean (1965:237-244); Ademuwagun (1969:1085-1091) and Odebiyi (1976:61-78) were incomplete in that the functions of each type of healer were not clearly delineated. A recent classification obtained from an interviewee (Ibiroga,1997) in Lagos gave five broad types and this classification is not dissimilar to that given by Oyebola (1980b :23-29). It runs thus:-

1. *Elewe - Omo* (Traditional herbalist) - this role is reserved primarily for women who are usually post-menopausal. They sell *materia medica* for various remedies in most of the popular markets (Fig.5). These include all sorts of leaves, roots, barks, fruits, seeds and various parts of the anatomy of different mammals, birds, reptiles and molluscs. Some inorganic materials such as potash, sulphur and chalk are also stocked as these form part of the components of some of the medicines.

The role of the women is limited to the selling of *materia medica* for making medicine *Oògùn* but not its preparation. Young women in the post puberty are not felt suitable to



Figure 5. Materia medica at the market



undertake this trade as it is believed that menstruation interferes with the potency of the medication. These women are not even allowed under the same roof as the (*Oniṣegun*) while he is preparing the medicine (*Oògùn*). Women are not taught the incantations which are believed to activate the ingredients which exist in the materials used. This is a form of division of labour at best or gender discrimination - a way of keeping the profession exclusively for men. In the true Durkheimian fashion it could be said that the women look after nature and the men control nurture.

2. *Ajawe - wegbo / Alagunmu* (Providers of medicine in the form of powder). These are men who obtain fresh ingredients which they pound and dry in the sun before grinding them into powder. The powder is prescribed to be mixed with water or gruel and taken by mouth. These prepared powders are usually bottled and sold at the market. The range of illnesses that this people can treat is limited and are specific e.g. piles (*jèdi-jèdi*) stomach ache (*Inu rirun*) and fever (*Iba*).

3. *Adahunṣe* (One who does things by himself). Ibirogbá divided these into two groups according to the power they have.

(a) *Awon to le gbò sughon won le bere* (Those who can hear but cannot ask)

(b) *Awon to le gbò ti won si le beere (Adahunṣe agba)* (Those who can hear and can also ask.)

The two groups have a room which they call the "Healing Room" (*Ile iwosan*) where the patient is kept. The healer then sleeps in an adjoining room and during the period of sleep, the healer receives knowledge of the diagnosis. Those in group (a) are able to inform the patient of the cause and diagnosis of the illness (*ailera*) with the advice that he/she should see the (*Babaláwo*) "Father of secrets" or the *Ọ̀lọ̀sanyìn* "Owner of Ọ̀sanyìn" (see below for the role of these two). Those in group (b) are able to tell the patient the prescribed remedy which may be a sacrifice, a prayer of forgiveness to the ancestors, an infussion or a sacrifice.

4. *Asawo - ṣòdgun* (diviner/herbalists) fall into two separate groups (a) those who practise divination and also prescribe the remedy in the form of herbs or sacrifice; and (b)

practise divination and also prescribe the remedy in the form of herbs or sacrifice; and (b) those who use herbs.

(a) i. *Babaláwo* (Father of Secrets) are the devotees of the deity *Orunmila* and use the *Ifa* oracle as the medium of divination;

ii. *Elerindinlogun* (Owner of 16 cowries) uses cowries for divination (See Fig.2c);

iii. *Òlosanyìn* (Owner of *Òsanyìn*) has a dialogue with the deity *Òsanyìn* to find out the diagnosis and prescribes the remedy;

iv. Those who use mirrors;

v. Those who use water;

(b) *Òsanyìn* : these are herbalists who have knowledge of the use of herbs and incantations with which they are able to release the active ingredients within the herbs, roots and leaves which are present in the medications that they prescribe for their patients.

The difficulty encountered in the various attempts at classification stems in part from variations between the areas of Yorùbáland in which the information is gathered and the usage of the various terminologies. There is definitely an overlap in the function of each group and also the capability of each individual depending on the training received. This study concentrates mainly on the part the *Òsanyìn* and the *Òlosanyìn* play in the health delivery system of the Yorùbá.

*Òsanyìn*, according to Lucas (1948), is a minor *orisa* but others consider it more important (Abraham, 1958:528; Adeoye, 1985:214; Awolalu, 1979:74). I am inclined to hold the latter view as it must have been an important enough *orisa* for those who were transported as slaves to South America to retain *Òsanyìn* as one of the *orisa* which they worship. He is syncretised in Cuba with St. Rafael who in the Roman Catholic faith is the patron saint of medicine; St. Manuel in Porto Alegre and St. Francis of Assisi in Maranhao which are two states in Brazil (Bastide, 1960:266).

### **Traditional Healing in Bahia, Brazil**

In Bahia when people fall ill, they have a choice of consulting a western trained doctor, a *Babalaó* where such exists or *Iyaloxá* or *Babaloxá* in one of the *candombles* who would make the diagnosis by divination using the system of *erindilogun* (sixteen cowries Fig.2d).

displeasure of an ancestor, or the need to perform a sacrifice to one or other of the *orixas* as still takes place in Yorùbáland. If however the ailment is perceived from the findings during the divination to need the use of herbs, the diviner is knowledgeable about herbs to be able to make up the necessary prescription.

In Brazil every one is believed to have an *orixá* which acts as one's guardian and is referred to as *Ori*. I became rather curious about this and wanted to know the name of my own *orixa*. To satisfy my curiosity, I had to subject myself to the service of *Iyaloxá* Mae Stella de Azevedo in the Ilé Axé Opô Afonjà. This was not as involved or sinister as it might sound. It entailed presenting myself at the appointed time at the *candomblé* in the room where the *Iyaloxá* operated. On being called in, I was ushered to a seat in front of the table on which the divination board was placed. I was then asked my name which she wrote on a piece of paper. She then cast the sixteen cowries on this board and after repeating the casting about four times using four cowries each time she wrote down her findings in Portuguese. She tried a translation into Yorùbá but realising that her Yorùbá was not perfect she got someone to do the translation into English while she spoke in Portuguese filling in the full meaning of her findings which runs as follows:-

'The *orixá* for Abayomi is *Oxaguián* the young *Oxalá*. He is a bright person who is very thoughtful but can be very obstinate. He gets valuables through his hands but does not keep them for long. Money passes through his hands and he gives it away. He should avoid confidants as sometimes the confidant could harm him through jealousy but *Oxáguian* will afford him protection. His ancestry is very strong and he has a lot of spirituality. He has to value his dreams as they always bring messages. *Xangô* will give him victory in his work. As soon as possible he should consult a doctor as he needs an operation. This is not life threatening.'

The divination indicated the need for an operation which cannot be carried out by the system as this only deals in herbs and sacrifices. Unfortunately I did not have a good enough command of Portuguese to probe further as to the system within my body that

enough command of Portuguese to probe further as to the system within my body that needs attention. However since my return I have been plagued by indigestion for which an endoscopy has been recommended by my GP.

### **Herbalists ( Òsanyìn - Onisegun)**

The herbalist in Yorùbáland is usually a male member of the society in which he lives. By the time he becomes renowned for his trade, he is usually an elder in the community or village. When he is approached by a patient he takes a history of the illness and based, on his clinical judgment and experience, comes to a diagnosis before prescribing a remedy. This is usually in the form of medicine to be taken by mouth, soap to be washed with, or ointment to be applied externally. The patient is usually seen a few days after the medication has been prescribed and if the condition has not improved or shows no sign of improving, the patient is referred to a *Babaláwo* to find out why the medication has not been effective. This could be due to wrong diagnosis of the aetiology or wrong type of medication i.e. the cause of the illness might be due to the wrath of the ancestors or that of any of the *orìṣà* in which case a sacrifice or ritual may be called for.

The herbalists are called *Òsanyìn* after the deity. Although they, like the deity, have knowledge of the use of herbs and roots, they neither worship the deity nor keep its emblem. Within the context of health care their practice conforms with the definition of a craft organisation as described by Lloyd (1923:30-44).

### **Brazil**

In Brazil there is a modification in that the diagnosis of illness is done by either the *Iyaloxá* or *Babaloxá* through divination and medications prescribed and dispensed for members of the community. However, there are herbalists who practice outside the environment of the *candomblé*. Indeed the art of herbalism has been given such recognition by the state that herbal medicines are now prepared under licence by trained phytotherapists. Their training and mode of practice is outside the scope of this study and so will not be discussed.

## Training of Healers (Òsanyìn) in Yorubaland

All traditional healers and midwives receive formal training before they are recognised as practitioners. The mode of training is by apprenticeship of the would be trainee to an established practitioner. In some families the craft is passed on from father to son or, as in the other crafts, the occupation of healing is passed from uncle to nephew if the occupation is carried out by the mother's lineage. In these two examples the training starts from about the age of seven and goes on until the learner is of mature age. Some people are destined to become healers or a type of healer/ diviner and this can only be revealed by consulting the oracle. In modern times, however, anyone who shows an interest in herbalism irrespective of their sex or religion can become a healer or diviner by going through the training process. The duration of training varies from place to place as does the age at which the training starts and the learning potential of the trainee. In most crafts the training period is usually laid down and lasts about three years. It follows the philosophy that the trainee will merely play during the first year of acculturation and acclimatization. In the second year, he will learn the trade, and in the third year will serve his master (Lloyd 1923). Oyebola (1980a :31-37) found that the period of training with traditional medicine, could range from two to thirty years with a mean of 10.0+/ 7.3

Before the training starts the trainee and his relations, usually the father or an uncle or whoever is chosen by the family to act *in-loco parentis*, will be interviewed by the master who indicates the terms and conditions of the apprenticeship. This will include the expected duration of the training as well as the fees to be paid. The agreement is usually in the form of a verbal pledge. The fees usually vary from place to place and depending on whether the master is expected to feed, clothe and house the trainee.

During the training period the trainee is expected to undergo the following process :-

\* Observation - The apprentice spends the first six months getting used to his new role. He runs errands which might include going to the market to buy various items needed for medicinal preparation, washing utensils, performing social duties and helping with household chores.

The next stage is that of being taken to the bush to learn to recognise different leaves,

barks, roots and items used for medicinal purposes and the medicines for which they are used. During this period he is also taken to the market to familiarise him with the section of the market where the *materia medica* are sold by women (*Elewe - Omo*) (Fig 5). With the passage of time, he learns the use of these substances. At first, he is taken by the master or a senior apprentice until he has the confidence and the know how to go on his own.

\* Participation in the preparation. - This is the start of his practical training with such works as pounding various medicinal herbs, roots, barks and chemicals; charring various preparations, boiling mixtures with instructions on the precautions to take during each process. He learns when not to allow things to froth or foam into the fire, and when he needs to observe silence while preparing others. He is instructed in the incantations to repeat and when to do so, so that the medicine can be potent. There are others which are prepared cold and are only soaked in solvents e.g. cow's urine.

Some of the preparations need certain rituals in their preparation and the trainee has to learn these by heart unless he is lettered himself in which case he could write them down. A few of such writings have survived to this day and some can be seen at the University of Lagos Library.

## Types of medicine

Medicines are constructed in many different ways but most conform to one of the following ideal types :-

(a). *Agbo* (infusion) which means that 'which is squeezed' and comprises of vegetable ingredients. There are two types of *Agbo tutu* 'cold infusion'. The fresh ingredients may be squeezed by hand in water or in some other liquid and left to infuse over a period of time before use. The other type is known as *Agbo Gbigbono* 'hot infusion' because it is prepared by cooking the ingredients in water or in some other liquid and is usually taken while it is still hot. It is either taken by mouth or used to wash all or a part of the body.

(b). *Aseje* (medicinal food - 'that which is cooked and eaten') - The recipe contains one or two medicinal ingredients. The main ingredients are cooked with palm-oil to which is added ground-up seeds, alligator pepper (*ataare*), salt and water. This mixture is then eaten with cooked yam or cassava. It can also be accompanied by pieces of fish or meat on a separate plate.

(c). *Agunmu* ('pounded medicine') - fresh ingredients are pounded in a mortar. They are

then removed and dried in the sun and then ground to a powder on a grinding stone. This type of medicine is always taken by mouth. It may be licked, mixed with liquid such as water, alcohol or hot or cold eko. This form of medicine is now made into pills or tablets.

(d). Ose (medicinal soap) - The local soap is made from palm-kernel oil (*adin*) and is black. The ingredients used in medicinal soap are pounded in a mortar with the soap and used in washing the whole body

(e). Etu (burnt medicine) This is a black powder prepared by slowly burning or charring the ingredients in a pot without additional liquid. It is either taken by mouth by licking it from the palm of the left hand or mixing it with a liquid, or rubbed into incisions (*gbere*) cut into a specific part of the body.

Incantations are always repeated while these medicines are being prepared or at the time it is being used. Each has its own incantation.

\* Diagnosis and Disease Management - The trainee is now at a stage when he is allowed to stay in the room while the master does his consultation. He studies the method of history taking, when and when not to examine the patient. He is also allowed to watch the master at divination if the latter is a diviner. The healer uses both the medical history approach and the personal history approach in the diagnosis of illness. The former is disease centred while the latter concentrates on the patient and his/her environment. As mentioned earlier both of these approaches play an important part in the healer's attempt to obtain the desired effect.

The trainee also pays attention to the method of treatment either by way of drugs, sacrifice or warnings on the taboo that the patient should observe.

At the end of the consultation, the master discusses the patient, his problems, as well as the solution, with the trainee. During this period, the trainee learns the names of the various illnesses, their presentation and management. After some time, the trainee is allowed to attend to patients under supervision as the final stage of his training. When the master is satisfied with the competence of the trainee he is presented for examination by a fellow herbalist who usually is the oldest herbalist in the community. This form of examination

legitimises not only the trainee in his practice but also the master's competency at training.

At the end of the examination, the trainee then receives his freedom to practise. Before this, he has to undergo the rite of passage which is an elaborate ceremony. The trainee is asked to bring his parent (or whoever concluded the agreement for his training) and a date is fixed for the graduation ceremony. On that day the balance of his tuition fee has to be paid.

On the day of the graduation ceremony the following items are provided by the parents of the graduant:-

<i>Igo oti kan</i>	1 bottle of Schnapps or Whisky
<i>Igo oyin -igan kan</i>	1 bottle of pure honey
<i>Àtaarè mokanlelogun</i>	21 whole fruits of alligator pepper ( <i>Afromomum meleguata</i> )
<i>Obi abata (alawe merin) mokanlelogun</i>	21 pieces of kola-nuts ( <i>Cola acuminata</i> )
<i>Suga</i>	Sugar
<i>Āadun</i>	Corn floor mixed with palm oil
<i>Iyọ</i>	Common salt
<i>Omi ti o mo ninu awo funfun</i>	Clean water in a white basin ( <i>Òsanyintola, Abeokuta</i> ).

All the herbalists in the town or village are invited and the most senior of them is asked to perform the ceremony. The officiant pours some of the Schnapps into a glass and addresses the graduant saying:-

<i>Iwo</i> ( name of the graduant)	You Mr. ( <i>so and so</i> )
<i>Ìbà, Aye mo jubà</i>	My respects, people of the world
<i>Ìbà okunrin</i>	My respects to males
<i>Ìbà obinrin</i>	My respects to females
<i>Ìbà tako-tabo</i>	Greetings to males and females
<i>Ìbà loḍo awon ajunilo</i>	Greetings to those greater than me
<i>Edumàré ìbà</i>	Edumare, I pay my respects
<i>Irunmolè ìbà yin o</i>	Irunmole , I greet you all
<i>Orúmìlà baba mi agboniregun</i>	Orunmila, my father agboniregun

<i>Ìsanyìn<span style="font-size: small;">bikan</span> ìbà o</i>	I greet you
<i>Ìbà Oso</i>	Osanyinbikan I give my regards
<i>Ìbà aje</i>	My respects to the wizards
<i>Ìbà akoda</i>	Greetings to the witches
<i>Gbogbo aseda</i>	Greetings to the primordials
<i>Gbogbo awon awo ìbà yin o</i>	Greetings to the creator
<i>Ìbà eniti o gbòn</i>	All herbalists, I greet you
<i>Ìbà eni ti o go</i>	Greetings to the wise
<i>Aye ìbà yin o</i>	Greetings to the foolish
	Greetings to everybody

To this all those present will reply in unison, 'May your greetings be accepted'.

After this the herbalist performing the ceremony will take each of the items listed and use them in praying for the graduant. During the prayer reference is made to the symbolic importance of each item. Sugar, salt and honey are pleasant to taste and so stand for prosperity. The item *aadun* also stands for sweetness and symbolises happiness. The "clean water" as well as anything white stands for purity, and peace. The items used are therefore meant to indicate the wishes of those present for prosperity, happiness and purity and peace in the life of the graduant. During the prayers, the relevant portions of the Ifa corpus are cited to reinforce the prayers and to emphasise the connection between *Òrúnmìlà* and *Ìsanyìn*.

The ceremony usually ends with a blessing like this one :-

*A kii ri idi okun*

*A kii ri idi osa*

*Aye ko ni i ri idi re*

*Nitoripe Ifá kan lo wi lojo kinni pe*

*Olukobinu l'oruko ti a a pe Ifá*

*Olomo ajiyonusi ni oruko ti a a pe Odu*

*Ojinikutukutu -rerin- la- ilu- ja loruko ti a npe osun para*

*Ooyo loni ti e ba ti ri emi lagbaja ki e maa yonu si mi*

*Ekuku loni ti e ba ti ri mi ki e ma ko buruku inun yin danu*

*Nitori enikan kii fi oyin senu sin ito*  
*Ilu kii gba ara won jo ba iyọ sota*  
*Iwo lagbajà, aiyè ko ni gbogun ti é*  
*Aye ko ni i kọ ohun e*  
*Gbogbo ohun ti o ba nfe, ni ti rere ni ayè yoo ma a fe fun e*

The response is "Ase"

We cannot see the bed of the sea  
We cannot see the bed of the lagoon  
Human beings will not discover your secrets  
Because it is one *Ifá* that said that  
Olukobinu is the name we call *Ifá*  
Olomo ajiyonusi is the name we call *Odu*  
Ojnikutukutu rerin la ilu ja ( someone who wakes early in the morning  
smiling right across the town) is the name we call osun apara  
It is Ooyo who says that if you see me, *Mr. "X"*, that you should be  
happy with me  
It is Ekuku who says that if you see me, you should discard the evil in you  
Because nobody holds honey in his mouth and spits in disgust  
A whole town does not gather together to make enmity with the salt  
You, "Mr.X", people will not declare war on you  
People will not refuse your words  
Whatever your wishes are, provided they are good, will receive the blessings  
of society.

The response is "so be it".

### **Formation of Associations**

The herbalists formed themselves into regional and local institutions which they called associations as early as the middle of the 19th century. The *Babaasegùn* (Father of healers) was the head of such associations. Most of the members could neither read nor write and so hardly any records of their activities exist today. Records that are available show that the Ekiti - Parapo Herbalist Association was formed in 1886, as was the Beje

Medical Herbalist Association in Èkìtì. About the same time a Herbalist Association was formed in Ijebu - Igbo (Oyebola 1981 :87-92). Of the 18 Associations in the survey carried out by Oyebola, 11(61%) were said to be active in 1977.

In the fourth decade of this century, attempts were made by a group of herbalists in Lagos to form an association with a view to obtaining formal acceptance of their status by the government. On the 28th day of July 1947, they sought and obtained a licence of Incorporation under the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria Companies Ordinance of 1922 under the formal name of The Nigeria Association of Medical Herbalists (Appendix 1), with Headquarters in Lagos. The Objects and the Articles of Association are attached as Appendix 2 and 3.

The training process of the trainees for membership of the Association are not too dissimilar from those of their colleagues within Yorùbáland except that there is a Board of Examiners who appoint an examiner to assess the competence of the trainee either verbally or in writing. If the candidate is found to be competent he is awarded one of four grades of Proficiency Certificates ( Fig.6a,b,c,d ) as stated in the Articles of Association in Appendix 3. The training exists also for Traditional Midwives.

The supreme authority of the Association is vested in the Annual Convention which decides on matters of policy and such matters as are referred to it by the Executive Board which comprises of the following

officers : -

Supreme Head

Two Vice Supreme Heads

The President

Two Vice Presidents

General Secretary

Two Assistant Secretaries

The Treasurer

Financial Secretary

Two Auditors



## Principal Secretaries

### Two Social Secretaries

Each of these officers assume the role and status of equivalent posts in any structured organisation. The Association still functions and its members at present are drawn from areas in the southwest of Yorùbáland.

Although traditional healers exist in all parts of Nigeria, there is paucity of information on their activities except among the Yorùbá. The various Associations have tried to respond to improved educational, economic and political awareness by attempting to modernise their practice. Such attempts are geared towards correcting some of the criticism of elites who are usually western trained doctors in opposing government's recognition of traditional healers as professionals.

Investigation by Oyebola (1986), showed that several associations exist in most of the States of Nigeria. Unfortunately, there is no cohesion among them due to petty rivalry for leadership. Also such factors as ethnic loyalty, the lack of a common language for use at meetings, and the system of electing officers to cover such a wide area create an insurmountable problem.

In spite of these difficulties, the leaders of some of these groups and individual healers have attempted to canvass for a change of attitude towards the profession. Politicians, Ministers of Health, Chief Medical Officers and Public Health Administrators at every level of government have been lobbied for support. As a result of the lobbying, one State Minister of Health sent out a circular letter encouraging all local government secretaries to submit the names of proficient traditional healers in their area for consideration as members of the Rural Health Care Institutions. Further representation was made to the Senate Committee on Health and Social Services in 1983. As a result of this representation, a week-long meeting was held to make recommendations to the Federal Government for recognition and legalisation of the profession. Those represented at the Senate hearing were the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists, Nigerian Health Physicians, The Bendel State Trade - Medical Association, African Medical Herbalists and the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners.

Unfortunately, the Senate Committee was not able to produce a report as all the activities had to be suspended due to a military coup. Since then one military government has virtually replaced another so that the report may never see the light of day.

The next chapter investigates *Òsanyìn* as a deity - his connection with *Òrúnmìlà* and how he introduced the latter to the medicinal use of herbs.

## Chapter Six

### Osanyin - the Deity

Information gathered during the field work was inconclusive as to the origin of *Osanyin*, whether he was a deity in his own right or a man who became deified. What was not in doubt was the belief of the Yorùbá that *Osanyin* is believed to possess more knowledge than any other *orìṣà* on the use of plants and can bring to life the power hidden in leaves, plants, seeds and roots which are very useful in curing ailments. It was also clear that he was associated with *Orúnmìlà* while the latter was on earth.

There are several myths to explain his origin and these vary from place to place. Some of these are narrated below, not because they serve as clues towards unravelling the truth, but to indicate the complexity that surrounds oral tradition.

The first of these myths was narrated by Chief J.O.Lambo who was one of my interviewees in 1996. He is a herbalist, an astrologer and is the present President of the N.A.M.H. He said that when *Olódùmarè* made heaven and earth, He created human beings. Unfortunately, at that time there were several illnesses such as headache, fever, stomach-ache, and difficult childbirth to mention but a few. These were attributed to the intervention of *Èṣù* (otherwise known as the trickster and not the devil as suggested by the missionaries) and *Ajẹ* (witches).

Prayers were said to *Olódùmarè* for help. In response to the prayers, *Orúnmìlà*, the arch diviner, who was credited with wisdom, foresight and the ability to communicate directly with *Olódùmarè* was sent to earth to put things right. He, *Orúnmìlà*, then became *Olódùmarè's* deputy on earth. He operated through divination and was able to help those who were ill. This story is referred to by Idowu (1962:77). *Orúnmìlà* needed help as the task set before him was rather daunting and *Osanyin* was the helper.

The second and subsequent stories have their origin in the *Ifá* corpus and it is to these that some *Babaláwo* refer to substantiate their claim as to the origin of *Òsanyìn*.

The second story has it that there was a woman who made palm oil for sale as women still do today but unfortunately had no child. One day while coming back from the market with a basket of raw palm nuts on her head, she met *Òrúnmìlà* who asked her for some nuts as he was hungry. The woman granted his request and in gratitude *Òrúnmìlà* told the woman that before the end of the month she would become pregnant. When she had the child, she named him 'Esan eyin' (the reward for palm nuts) and this through usage became *Òsanyìn* (Orimoogunje, 1986:1-4)

The third story was said to come from *Odu Ose - Oniwo* (Ifa corpus) and runs thus:-

<i>Òsé, awo won n'ílé Elérín</i>	Ose was their (Ifa) priest at Elerin
<i>Èfúùfù lègè lègè awo ò 'Jámo</i>	The tempest was the priest at Ijamo
<i>Adiá fún Elésìjé - Mogboòràyé</i>	Who divined for Elesije - Mogbooraye
<i>Akoni i'orí ò gbodò fò</i>	The hero cannot suffer headache
<i>Adiá f'Òrúnmìlà</i>	Who divined for Orunmila
<i>Edu Olójà nínú eborá</i>	The key one among gods
<i>Ní'jó tí wón ní ò lèni kankan</i>	On the day it was alleged
<i>àó bá sere mọ</i>	that he had nobody to play with.

At the meeting of the spirits, *Òrúnmìlà* was laughed at as one who had no next of kin. This made him sad so that he consulted a diviner to see whether he could be helped. He was told to make a sacrifice. For this he needed the following items:-

180 palm nuts, 9 rats, 9 fish, turtle, snails, 9 ataare (aligator paper), 9 kola nuts, 9 bitter nuts, and 9 bags of money.

These were assembled and mixed with the leaves of Ifa to make the sacrifice. He gave the resultant mixture to his mother with an explanation. She told him that she was 20 years past her menopause but he persuaded her to take the medicine. Four months later she became pregnant but no mention was made of her having been with a man. The story goes on that the son born of this intervention was a mystery as he spoke in the womb. When he

was born, he had a leaf in his hand. the leaf was planted and it soon spread throughout the world and is known as 'Ewe Òsanyìn' (the leaf of Òsanyìn - *Elytraria marginata*).

It was customary for the *Babaláwo* (Father of secrets) to name a new born as they are the only one who can tell what taboos if any the child must avoid. As the pregnancy came out of a sacrifice with 9 palm nuts, the child was named 'Esan eyin' which later became Òsanyìn (Orimoogunje ,1986:1-4).

These two stories suggested a link between Òrúnmìlà and Òsanyìn . It is not surprising that the two stories came out of Ekiti where Òsanyìn is venerated by the whole town and where its annual festival is celebrated by the whole town.

Further readings revealed another myth that Òsanyìn was a helper to Òrúnmìlà in heaven and that Òsanyìn came into the world with Òrúnmìlà due to their friendship. This is narrated in the *Ifá* corpus called 'Òkànràn Òtúrúpòn' which reads thus (Adeoye,1985:214-217) :-

<i>Ifá kíkó ní mú ni mọ Ifá</i>	It is the study of Ifa that enables one to master Ifa
<i>Ònà síṣì ní mú ni mọ ọna</i>	A miss of the road enables one to know the right path
<i>Ònà tí a kò rìn rí</i>	The path which one has not walked on
<i>Níí ẹ ni ní ṣìbálá ṣìbolo</i>	Gives one cause to puzzle which way to take
<i>Adífá fún Òrúnmìlà</i>	Was the Ifa divined for Orunmila
<i>Akì fún Òsanyìn Ewèlè</i>	And recited to the hearing of Osanyin Ewele
<i>Lójó tí Olódùmàrè dé igbá kalẹ</i>	On the day Olodumare set up a covered calabash
<i>Tí Òrúnmìlà ní ọ̀un lẹ kífá</i>	When Orunmila claimed he could recite Ifa verses
<i>Kí ọ̀un mọ ohun tí n'be</i>	And thereby know the contents of the covered calabash
<i>Nínú igbá tí Olódùmàrè dé kalẹ</i>	Which Olodumare set up as a test
<i>Tí Òsanyìn ní ké pé</i>	On the occasion in which Osanyin insisted that
<i>Dandan kí ì dan n ti'dan</i>	Since necessity implies unavoidable compulsion
<i>Ibi tí Òrúnmìlà bá yán</i>	To wherever Orunmila goes
<i>Ibẹ ni ọ̀un Òsanyìn ní rẹ</i>	To that very place he Osanyin will also go
<i>Àfì kí Ewèlè tẹ lẹ Òrúnmìlà</i>	At all cost Ewele must follow Orunmila
<i>Ifá nké pé ọ̀de kò dára</i>	Ifa warned insistently that the terrain was rough

<i>Eni tí a wí fún kó gbó</i>	Let him who is warned learn to obey
<i>Kí á sòrò fún ni kí ágbà</i>	To be warned and to abide by the warning
<i>Àwugbó Àfòògbà ojó kinni</i>	A stubborn disobedience at a point in time
<i>Ló sọ̀ Ọ̀sanyìn di eru Ifá</i>	Has resulted in Osanyin becoming Ifa's slave

When Ọ̀sanyìn came into the world he continued his friendship with Ọ̀rúnmìlà. During the war of 'Ayele' Ọ̀sanyìn was captured and Ọ̀rúnmìlà looked in vain for his friend and resorted to Ifá to find out what had happened and from the verse called Ọ̀gúndá Méjí he got the answer:-

<i>Gbinrin bí itì , bí itì gbinrin</i>	Weighty as a log of wood
<i>A difá fun Ọ̀rúnmìlà</i>	Was divined for Orunmila
<i>Ifá n' lọ ra Ọ̀sanyìn loko eru</i>	Ifa was going to purchase Osanyin from slavery
<i>Ọ̀sanyìn nbe ní igbèkùn</i>	Osanyin was languishing in chains
<i>Ọ̀sanyìn n' fì omi ojú se ògbéré igbèkùn</i>	Osanyin was crying his eyes out
<i>Ọ̀sanyìn n' ráré loko kòlójó</i>	Osanyin was suffering in the farm of Kolojo
<i>Ọ̀rúnmìlà wá owo kàn</i>	Orunmila found money at all cost
<i>Bàbá rẹ̀ ra Ọ̀sanyìn loko eru</i>	Father went and bought Osanyin out of slavery

On learning that Ọ̀sanyìn was to be sold into slavery, Ọ̀rúnmìlà hastened to all the markets where slaves were sold. At Èjigbòmekùn market, he found Ọ̀sanyìn bound to a tree. He hastened to loosen him and embraced him. Ọ̀sanyìn was so filled with joy that he sang :-

<i>Ogun kó mi o! o! o!</i>	Alas! I have been captured in war
<i>Ogun màmà kó mi</i>	Indeed, I have been captured in war
<i>Ọ̀rúnmìlà ni ó mú mi wá àjò</i>	Orunmila it was who brought me on a journey
<i>Ogun kó mi</i>	And I got captured in war!

This song moved Ọ̀rúnmìlà to tears and he enquired how much was wanted for Ọ̀sanyìn. He gladly paid the asking price of 240 bags of cowries. He took Ọ̀sanyìn home and had him washed and adorned in fineries for three months after which he sent him to work (Adeoye, 1985:214-217). It is therefore not surprising that there are so many different stories associated with the relationship between Ọ̀rúnmìlà and Ọ̀sanyìn.

There is convergence of the various stories from this point onwards in that it is said that

one day *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* went out and asked *Ọ̀sanyìn* to clear the field at the back of the house. When *Ọ̀sanyìn* went to carry out *Ọ̀rúnmìlà's* instructions, he found out that most of the plants in the field had medicinal properties and so did not cut them down. When *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* came back he was furious and wanted to know why his orders were not carried out. *Ọ̀sanyìn* then answered in verse :-

<i>Ọ̀rúnmìlà mú Ọ̀sanyìn re inú oko</i>	Orunmila took Osanyin to work on his farm
<i>Ìgbà tí Ọ̀sanyìn dé inú oko</i>	When Osanyin got to the farm
<i>Ọ̀sanyìn n̄ké tantan pé</i>	Osanyin began to cry insistently that
<i>Ewé aje n̄yì o</i>	Here are the leaves for obtaining money
<i>Èwo ni kí n ro</i>	Which one of them am I to weed out
<i>Gbinrin bí ìtì, bí ìtì gbinrin</i>	Weighty as a log of wood
<i>Ewé aya n̄yì o</i>	Here are the leaves for obtaining a wife
<i>Èwo ni kí n ro</i>	Which one of them am I to weed out
<i>Gbinrin bí ìtì, bí ìtì gbinrin</i>	Weighty as a log of wood
<i>Ewé omọ n̄yì o</i>	Here are the leaves for obtaining children
<i>Èwo ni kí n ro</i>	Which one of them am I to weed out
<i>Gbinrin bí ìtì, bí ìtì gbinrin</i>	Weighty as a log of wood
<i>Ewé ọ̀là n̄yì o</i>	Here are the leaves for prosperity
<i>Èwo ni kí n ro</i>	Which one of them am I to weed out
<i>Gbinrin bí ìtì, bí ìtì gbinrin</i>	Weighty as a log of wood
<i>Ewé iyì n̄yì o</i>	Here are the leaves for honour
<i>Èwo ni kí n ro</i>	Which one of them am I to weed out
<i>Gbinrin bí ìtì, bí ìtì gbinrin</i>	Weighty as a log of wood

When *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* heard the song he asked *Ọ̀sanyìn* for its meaning. He then told *Ọ̀sanyìn* that the talents he was given by *Olódùmarè* were those of foresight and incantations but if *Ọ̀sanyìn's* talents were the knowledge of the use of herbs and roots, then he should not weed the plants but use them to the benefit of mankind. This was how *Ọ̀sanyìn* showed *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* the leaves, roots and plants and so became deified and worshipped by herbalists and medicine-men (Oniṣègun) who repeat the following verse when they have prepared medicine for their patients :-

<i>Ọ̀sanyìn 'Mole, ọ́ dowo re</i>	Osanyin, the sacred one pleadings to you
-----------------------------------	--

*K'ó o j'óogùn yí jé bí iná*

*K'ó gbà bí oòrùn*

*Ijé iná ni k'ójé*

*K'ó má jé ijé oòrùn*

*Nítorí bíná bá sun' su l'óko*

*a á muún jé ni*

*B'óòrùn bá sì sun' su l'óko*

*Se là á sọ ọ̀ nù*

Let this medicine work like fire

Let it be effective as the sun shines

Enable it to be as effective like fire

And not in the way that the sun does

Because when fire roasts yam on the farm

It is ready to be eaten

When the sun scorches yam on the farm

It is only fit to be thrown away

(Adeoye, 1985)

*Òsanyìn's* mother was said to be his first patient and from her he obtained a fee for the medicine. The mother therefore said that it is through this work that he would earn his living, and that the medicine would only work for those who pay the fee required (Eje ogun). This is why the devotees of *Òsanyìn* request payment for services rendered (Orimoogunje, 1986:7) in contrast with the Babaláwo who is not supposed to use his position to enrich himself (Idowu, 1962:79).

Oral tradition further has it that *Òrúnmìlà* attempted to teach *Òsanyìn* Ifá divination but he was more interested in the herbs and roots and so *Òrúnmìlà* diagnoses and *Òsanyìn* supplies the medicine. Therefore the Ifa priest is always found near an *Òsanyìn* or *Olosanyìn*.

### The Cult of *Òsanyìn*

*Osanyin* is described as being impatient and through his impatience lost his legs and arms. Like most *orisa*, the power of *Osanyin* can be used for evil or for good - to cure illness, especially those caused by witches, to ensure good health, in child birth or to injure others. It is believed that he attends the meeting of witches and is the power behind them. All curse methods can only be effective if they have his approval (Simpson, 1980:43: Awo Fasina Falade: 1997).

### The Symbols of *Òsanyìn*

The main symbol of *Òsanyìn* is called *osun Òsanyìn* and is a staff made of iron. It consists of sixteen pigeons surrounding a bird (*Ologeesa*) which forms the finial of an iron

**Fig 7.**



**a. Ossaim Staff**  
Salvador  
In  
Bahia, Brazil

(Piere Verger Foundation, Salvador de Bahia Brazil)



**b. Herbalist's Staff (Opa Osanyin)**  
Nigeria, Yoruba, Oyo  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.

Iron  
44<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (114 x 30 x 35cm)

1994.4.580

Nigerian Museum, Lagos.

into medical preparations. It is known as the physician bird and is regarded perhaps with unconscious symbolic import as the most elusive of all birds. It is never killed except for medicinal purposes. The sixteen pigeons stand for the sixteen principal *odu* (utterances) of Ifa oracle according to Williams (1973:88-89). This acknowledges the divine element in healing and the association between *Ọsanyìn* and *Ọrúnmìlà*. A small platform stands in vertical relation to the head of the *Ologeesa* bird and it is on this that sacrifices are placed during propitiation of the *orìsà* (Thompson, 1971:ch.4). Other varieties exist. On the staff used by the Yorùbá in the south western area especially in the Republic of Benin, the birds are said to be arranged in several clusters along the upper portion of the staff, with a single bird at the top. The position of the bird is enhanced by two branches with large oval leaves (Drewal and Pemberton 1989:34). Among the southern Yorùbá, the simple graceful lines and energetic interplay of curves by which the blacksmith depicts the birds on the staff disclose admirable artistic sensitivity. In the poetry of Ifa it is said that *eye kan* (the lone bird) also known as *eye oko* (bird of the bush) was bisexual and could not give birth. After consulting Ifa and making the appropriate sacrifices, *eye kan* gave birth to male and female birds. In gratitude to Ifa, *eye kan* took up residence in the house of the diviner, and was henceforth known as *eye ile* - the bird of the house (Drewal and Pemberton, 1989:34).

The staff is usually found at the entrance to the shrine and it serves to localise the *orìsà* which is worshiped by the devotees. *Ọsanyìn* is said to have ordained that the staff be planted in front of *Ọrúnmìlà*'s house after his death and that sacrifice should be offered to his staff when anyone needed to communicate with him. This also confirms the relationship between the two.

#### The function of the staff

The staff is used to combat and forewarn of the coming of death and witches *Aje*. It is used as the guardian of homes and minds. It also serves as a protector from external and internal hate and envy. It protects the mind from insanity and other afflictions which affect the sense of reason and balance. It is placed over the bed or in the room of any one who suffers from nightly visitation of witches or if wrong-doing is suspected. The witches are believed to be capable of transforming themselves into night-birds with talons and beaks. These birds then fly through the night, alight on the chest of their victims, suck out the

believed to be capable of transforming themselves into night-birds with talons and beaks. These birds then fly through the night, alight on the chest of their victims, suck out the spiritual essence and leave the victim to die.

The arrival of the witches triggers the jingling of the bells attached to the *osun* staff and the rooster standing on guard nullifies the witches' action with the medicine and the seed of the peony. The latter is a very hard seed half red and half black. It is said that the peony seed does not know whether to remain red or black i.e. whether to cling to life or death. When the peony confronts the witches it makes them leave their victim and go elsewhere to seek another and easier prey (Awo Fasina Falade, 1997).

#### The image of man (*Èrè enìyàn*)

This is the second known symbol of *Òsanyìn*. It is an image of a man carved out of *Orúru* tree (*Spathodea campanulata*). It is usually kept in the corner of a room and usually dressed (Fig.1a). This symbol of *Osanyin* does not utter any sound.

The slave of *Òsanyìn* (*Eru Òsanyìn*) is also carved out of the *Orúru* tree but is not dressed. It is kept in the corner of the room, usually next to the image of *Iyami Oṣoronga* (*Ajé*) (Fig.8) and is manipulated by means of ventriloquism. During a consultation by the client, the priest addresses questions to the puppet who answers either by whistling or in a thin voice. The priest then interprets this for the client.

The first interviewee that I encountered was Chief Paramole in the town of Ibadan. I went to see him first thing on a Saturday morning before any of his clients arrived. He called on the *Òsanyìn* and my colleague and I heard the voice and we were able to record this. Unfortunately we were not admitted into the room where he operated and so we were not too sure what took place behind the curtain.

The second visit was made to an *Olòsanyìn* in a district of Ikeja called Ilupeju in Lagos. On the day that I was taken there, there were over thirty people, mainly women, who were waiting for consultation and were summoned in threes to cut down on consultation time. The consultations were not private by any means and those who sat outside the room could



Figure 8. Ọsanyìn in Ago - Owu, Abeokuta, with Iyami (Aje) by its side.

because they were ill or their child was ill. The general public is now turning more and more to this form of health care as the western hospitals are at present poorly equipped; the number of medical personnel are greatly reduced as doctors seek their financial and job satisfaction outside the country. The medicines prescribed by western trained doctors are usually not easily available or affordable (BMJ,1997).

When my guide and myself were ushered in, I noticed that the *Òsanyìn* was housed in a specially constructed cabinet which is usually closed but opened periodically during the consultation - (I presume this was for effect). The puppet was made in the image of a human being and was dressed in white with a small gourd round its neck. It seemed to have only one hand on which were sewn some cowry shells. There was also a mechanism in place which makes the puppet adopt a rocking movement while the sound is being uttered. I could not make out whether the movement only comes on when the cabinet is opened.

The *Olòsanyìn* sat in front of the cabinet while those who went for consultation sat on a bed a little behind and to the right of the *Olòsanyìn*. He sat with his head propped up with his right hand. This hid the minimal movement of his lips but to a keen observer a slight movement of the muscles of the floor of the mouth was apparent while the *Òsanyìn* spoke. This confirmed to me that the *Olòsanyìn* or operator used ventriloquism to communicate the pronouncement of the *orìṣà* to those who had come for consultation.

The *Olosanyìn* is one who worships and communicates with the *Òsanyìn*. Before he becomes a communicator, he has to undergo some rituals which makes him a "seer". He communicates with the *Òsanyìn* in ordinary language but the *Osanyìn* replies in a very fine voice which is similar to that produced by a ventriloquist. This seems in effect to give credence to the *Olosanyìn* and what the *Òsanyìn* says. Some who are described as fakes are known to use a whistling device to imitate the voice of the *orìṣà*.

The *Olosanyìn* in Ilupeju had a loose leather collar round his neck. This had a few cowry shells sewn on and is called *Ere* a listening device. How this works was not made known to me. I presume, however, that this is part of the attempt to give credence to what goes on. Every attempt to photograph the *Òsanyìn* in Ilupeju failed because the *Olosanyìn* was

to me. I presume, however, that this is part of the attempt to give credence to what goes on. Every attempt to photograph the *Ọsanyìn* in Ilupeju failed because the *Ọlosanyìn* was very elusive but Fig.8 shows the photograph taken at Ago-Owu, in Abeokuta. Here the *Osanyin* was static unlike at Ilupeju.

As with the herbalists, there is here a gender distinction. The *Ọlosanyins* are mainly men. A woman may become *Ọlosanyìn* but must have a man to front her (Chief Agboworin of Sango Otta). This stems from the fact that the Yoruba do not have faith in women to keep secrets and is contrary to the practice in South Africa where only women can be both herbalists and diviners (Ngubane,1977:100).

#### The function of the Cult

The individual accepts the *Ọsanyìn* and so the cult. Although those who have received the cult can and do communicate with each other, no formal cult association or hierarchy exists in most towns. The only formal coming together is through such body as the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalist which admits anyone associated with healing.

The *Ọlosanyìn* is consulted by anyone who is ill no matter what the ailment is. The one who comes for consultation does not need to say what or why he has come for consultation except to give his or her name. The *Ọlosanyìn* is expected to know this through divination. If an illness is diagnosed, the *Ọlosanyìn* then prescribes herbal medicine which is curative. This he compounds himself. If however the cause of the illness is diagnosed as being due to the life-style of the enquirer not being in keeping with the wishes of the ancestors or one of the *orìṣà*, then a sacrifice or prayer in the form of incantation is prescribed. This usually happens when psycho-somatic disorder is diagnosed.

#### Other uses of the *Ọsanyìn* system

In the pre-colonial days, the *Ọ̀̀sanyìn* used his art of divination to detect or find out the offender when an anti-social act has been committed. The efficacy of the system was never in doubt. In the early colonial days, the system was used in the court of law to prove the innocence or guilt of an accused person until the system was outlawed and its evidence no longer acceptable in law. However the practice still persists in the rural areas. The

longer acceptable in law. However the practice still persists in the rural areas. The following anecdote was provided by Chief Ọ̀sanyìntòlǎ in 1997 during an interview in Abeokuta as a personal eye witness account.

‘He said his own farm was looted and a lot of yams were stolen. When he discovered the incident, he was shocked and did not know what to do. He was then taken to the Ọ̀lò̀sanyìn in the nearest village. Here after paying the asking fee of N 600 ( about £ 4.50 at the exchange rate of N135/£ in 1997) the Ọ̀sanyin said that it was going to the farm to see what had happened. When it returned it greeted the people and named the persons who had looted the farm’.

All herbalists and all Ọ̀lò̀sanyìn are devotees of the *orisa* even though they might also adhere to other faiths either Christianity or Islam as it is through the help of the *orisa* that they earn their living.

The Ọ̀sanyìn is also known as the partner of the diviner, herbalist , *Iyalosá* (mother of the ọ̀rìsà - high priestess) and *Babalosá* (Father of the ọ̀rìsà - high priest) and without his knowledge the diviner is incapable of offering any medication for ailments.

#### The taboos associated with Ọ̀sanyìn

The following items are taboo to the *orisa* and must not be brought before it unless one wants to solicit its help for a wicked or vengeful purpose.

- |    |              |   |
|----|--------------|---|
| 1. | Àdí          | Oil prepared from palm-kernels          |
| 2. | Àgbàdo ẹ̀yan | Roasted corn                            |
| 3. | Aásáà        | Snuff                                   |
| 4. | Osùn         | Camwood cream                           |
| 5. | Efun ilẹ̀    | Ground chalk (as opposed to lime chalk) |
| 6. | Ọ̀bẹ̀ s̀ilò  | A small knife with a curved head.       |

Any one who brings any of these objects before Ọ̀sanyìn has undergone an undesirable change of ritual status and the misfortune which might befall him is death. These objects therefore can be said to have ritual values.

### Sacrifice to Òsanyìn

As Òsanyìn is closely associated with Òrúnmìlà either as slave or kinsman, it is assumed that a sacrifice to Òrúnmìlà is as good as one to Òsanyìn. Anyone desirous of offering prayers or sacrifice to Òsanyìn would do so at the shrine of Ifá. The Òsanyìn devotee offers sacrifice to his òrìsà every fifth day (Fadipe, 1970:264) to seek help in attracting a steady stream of clientele for consultation.

### Annual Festival of Òsanyìn

The mode of the celebration of the festival of Òsanyìn varies from one area of Yorùbáland to another. In most places the individual Òlòsanyìn decides when he would celebrate the festival. In such places there is no formal cult as the function of the Òlòsanyìn is mainly to provide healing for those who are unwell. The celebration usually takes place during the third quarter of the year. However, in some towns, the celebration is for the whole town irrespective of the religious leaning of the individual. In these towns all herbalists in the locality are informed of the date of the festival of Òsanyìn and do attend as a sign of respect and in recognition of the fact that very little can be achieved without the blessing of Òsanyìn as the partner of the diviner, herbalist, *Iyalosha* and *Babalosha*.

The festival usually lasts for seven days but can be varied by the individual depending on his financial circumstances. On the first day of the ceremony, the symbol of Òsanyìn is washed in water to which the following leaves have been added (Simpson, 1980:42-43) : -

Iná	<i>Urra manii</i> ( Wedd) Benth, & Hook.F. Urticaceae
Oyin	Honey
Èsìsì	<i>Sida urens</i> L. Malvaceae
Àragbá	<i>Bridelia atroviridis</i> Mull. Arg. Euphobiaceae
Tètè àtètédáyé	<i>Amaranthus hybridus</i> L. Amaranthaceae
Pèrègún	<i>Dracaena fragrans</i> (L.) Ker Gawl. Agavaceae
Iyeyè	<i>Spondias mombia</i> L. Anacardiaceae
Omi Igbin	Water from snail
Epo pupá	<i>Palm oil - Elaeis guineensis</i> Jacq palmae
Ori	<i>Buty rospermum paradoxum</i> (C.F> Gaertn.) Hepper subsp.
Òdúndún	<i>Kalanchoe crenata</i> (Andr.) Haw. Crassulaceae

The water used in washing the *Òsanyìn* is offered to those who have attended the festival to wet the floor of their houses and this is called *Omièrò* (which translated into English means that which softens the heart, Abraham 1958:193) and is meant to give peace in the household during the year.

On the next day, the symbol is placed on a white cloth in one corner of the room and the following are used as offering.

The items used during the festival are (Fig 9): -

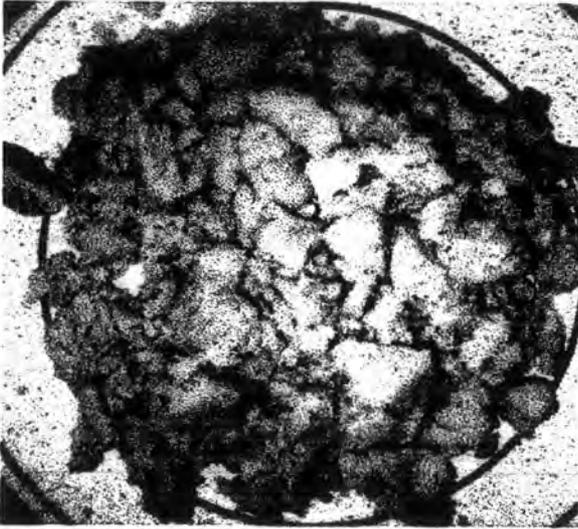
1. *Ìgbín* Snails (this was *Osanyin's* favourite meat in his life-time).
2. *Èkuru* Mashed cake made with beans (*Waltheri indica L. Sterculiaceae*)
3. *Agbo or Ewúré* Goat or sheep
4. *Àkukò* Cockerel
5. *Eye ilé* Pigeon
6. *Èko* Corn gruel (solid corn meal)
7. *Obi Àbàtà* Kola nuts - *Cola acuminata*
8. *Àiààrè* Alligator peppers-*Aframomum melegueta*  
(Roscoe Zingiberaceae)
9. *Àkàrà* Cakes made from beans ground and fried

The kola nuts are opened and split on top of the divinity's symbol. Two kola nuts are then opened and thrown up; if two or more halves land face up and the rest are down, which means the offering is accepted and the participants say "Éépà! *Òsanyìn!*" The blood of a fowl or animal is shed on the *Òsanyìn* and there follows singing, dancing and meriment. The items offered for festival are prepared for general consumption with little bits placed in front of *Òsanyìn's shrine* while prayers are offered.

The Praise verse (Oriki) Of *Osanyin* - this is usually said by the devotee-

<i>Agbénígi, òròmòde abidì sònsó</i>	One who is versed in the use of roots, one who has sharp-pointed tail like that of a chick
<i>Esinsin abedo kinnikinni</i>	One who has a liver as crystal clear as a fly's;
<i>kòògò egbèrò irin</i>	one who is as powerful as an iron rod.
<i>Aképe nígbà òràn kò suwòn</i>	One to whom people appeal when things are bad

Figure 9. ITEMS used during the festival



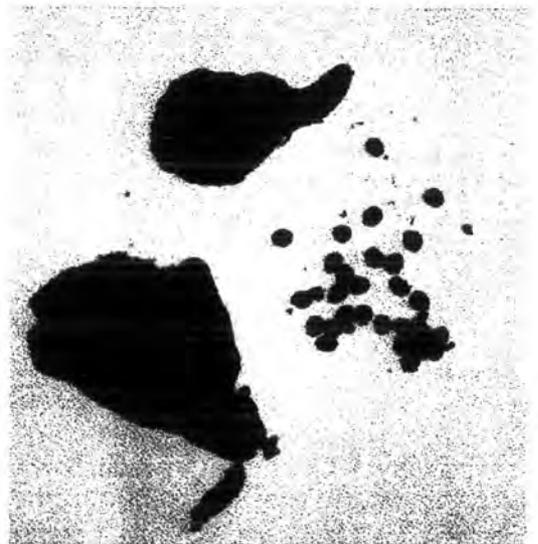
*Èkuru funfun* - Boiled ground beans



*Àkàrà* - Fried Bean Balls



*Ìgbín* - Edible snails



*Àtààrè* - *Aframomum melegueta* (Rosco)  
K.Schum., Zingiberaceae

*Títóó tín, o gba aso òkùnrin ta glègìè* The extremely slender one who in curing  
snatches the apparel of illness and moves as if he  
would fall

*Elésè kan ju elésè méji lo* The one-legged man who is more powerful than  
those with two legs.

*Aro abi-okó lièlìè* The weak one with a weak penis.

*Ewé gbogbo kiki oògùn* One who turns all leaves into medicine

*Agbeniji, èsisi kosùn* Agbeniji, the deity who uses camwood

*Agogo nla se eré agbára* The large iron bell that produces  
powerful sounds

*Ogbà wón là tán, wón dúpe tènùtènù* The one to whom people give unreserved  
thanks, after he has saved them

*Ogba aso òkùnrin ta glègìè* One who snatches the clothes of illness  
and staggers

*Okùnrin gbogbo, dá nkan dá nkan* The powerful man who commits crime

*Elésè kan ti ó lé elésè méji sáré* The one-legged man who puts two-  
legged man to flight

*Aròni já si kòtò di oògùn máyà* Aroni, who jumps into a pit with charms  
tied on his chest

*Okùnrin gbogbo, dá nkan dá nkan* The powerful one who commits crimes

*Agúdúgbú-Ojà, tíótító tó tenu mórán* Agudugbu-Oja, one who remains firm on  
an issue

*tí ká se*  
*Afínjú omọ tí ngbégun ilé* The neat one who lives in a corner of a  
room.

(Simpson, 1980: 43-44; Awo Falade, 1977: <http://home.aol.com/IFA>)

### Osanyin in Abeokuta.

The Egbas entered Abeokuta in 1630 under the leadership of Sodeke and settled tribe by tribe using the Olumo Rock as protection. They then spread out to cover the area now known as Abeokuta. The various tribes that united and are now known as the Egbas consist of the following four provinces (Ajisafe 1964: 19) :-

Egba Alake

Egba Oke - Qna

Egba Owu (also known as Egbado or the Egba of the lower side of the river)

Egba Agura

Each of these provinces has an Qba (Crowned King) and the Alake (the owner of Ake) is the senior of the four. The others are listed in the order of seniority.

After choosing their Qba, they built their council rooms. Each tribe built its Ogboni House, Chamber of War, Chamber of Commerce, Oro and Egungun groves. In the days of Sodeke, the ruling powers were the war chiefs and the Ogboni chiefs. These were the days when they were often having to fight wars against their neighbours in order to survive. The chiefs met in a hall built in the market in front of Sodeke's compound for the Qsanyin (or medical) Society. In this hall also stood the *Shàngó* Shrine.

There are now 45 townships in all and each has its own Qsanyin cult. The head of the cult is the Balogun Qsanyin. The other chiefs according to their place in the hierarchy are - Otun (right hand), Osi (left hand), Ekerin (the fourth), Bada, Ogboye, Sarunmi, and Are. Each township has a similar hierarchy in each of the four provinces.

Each cult in the four provincial areas has a right to submit a candidate for the post of the Balogun Qsanyin of the Egbas. There is then a caucus at which the Balogun is chosen as well as the other chiefs. The Balogun is then introduced to the Alake who gives the Balogun an umbrella as a sign of office. He is one of the few who is allowed to wear a hat in the palace. In spite of this formal structure the festival of Qsanyin is still celebrated individually. There are however as noted above, some towns in which the whole population participates. Such towns are in Ekiti and Ijabe in Oshun State (Ministry of Local Govt. 1977). A full account of the celebration will be given in the next chapter.

### **OSSÁIN : - The Orixá of the Leaves in Bahia, Brazil**

This is the *Orixá* which has the power to mobilise the energy of the leaves in the life of any human group and especially in the *candomblé*. He is the personification and the essence of

the leaf itself. The power of *Ossáin* appears in the daily life of humans in the form of the chlorophyll which we breathe in every garden, park and forest which are now being defended by the ecological campaigns in Brazil. This makes the people of the *terreiro* preserve the authority of the greenery within and outside their environment. It is common to hear in the *candomblé* the saying *Kòsi ewé kòsi orixá* which means 'Without leaves there is no *Orisa*' signifying the importance of *Ossain* the master of the essence and mystery of leaves.

### Myths and Legends of Ossáin

In the African myth, *Ossáim* appears as the master of the mystery of healing/ magic combination of plants. It was explained that *Ossáin* alone had the knowledge and control of the magic healing powers of leaves. The other *Orixás* went and complained to *Olódùmarè* about this monopoly and *Olódùmarè* delegated the finding of the solution to this problem to *Iyansa* the mistress of the wind and tempest. She directed a soft wind towards *Ossain's* house and the window knocked over the calabash in which *Ossain* kept all the leaves. The wind continued and blew the leaves around. *Ossáin* then sought the help of the other *Orixás* to gather in the dispersed leaves. The *Orixás* accepted to help but instead of giving back the leaves to *Ossáin* they picked what they wanted and disappeared. This was how the other *Orixas* came to possess some leaves which are now known to be sacred to them. *Ossáin* was not too disheartened as he alone knew the secret words that unlock the mystery of the leaves and without his authority the leaves remain inactive.

*Ossain* lives in the depth of the forest, removed from human habitation, looking for the essence of the healing herbs in the company of other beings in the forest. *Aroni* is believed to be his servant and the enchanted red bird brings him news from the four corners of the world. *Àronì* was also mentioned in the story collected from Yorubaland. There he was a healer in his own right. The enchanted red bird is usually found represented on the staff of *Ossáin* (Fig. 7a).

### Feuding of the Orixás

*Ossáin* and *Àronì* were having problems with *Ossáim's* wife and so *Ossáin* went to *Exú* for help. *Exú* told *Ossáin* to dig a well and jump into it as this would impress his wife.

pay. He dug the well and jumped into it. In doing this, he broke a leg, an arm and hurt his eye on the way to the bottom of the well. He called out to *Exú* for help but since he was not prepared to pay the fee required the help was not forthcoming. When he managed to get out of the well and got home his wife would have nothing to do with him and went away with *Àròṅṅè*. From that day *Ossáin* remained with one paralysed leg and arm and a blind eye (Mãe Stella de Santos, 1998).

### *Ossáin enchants Oshóssi*

The story is told that one day *Oshóssi*, the deity of Hunters went into the most concealed place in the forest while tracking the enchanted snake. After travelling for several days he suddenly came to a concealed hut which as a hunter he approached with caution. He saw that someone sat by the hut watching a brew on the fire. Suddenly, *Ossáin* turned round to face *Oshóssi* who asked who he was. *Ossáin* then revealed himself, but went on to observe that he had not seen anyone for a long time and that no hunter had ever ventured to come thus far. *Ossáin* then complimented *Oshóssi* for his bravery. The latter responded with arrogance, stating this had been mentioned to him before. *Ossáin* then offered *Oshóssi* a taste of the brew he was making. When *Oshóssi* finished the drink he became enchanted and fell into a deep sleep which lasted for several days. At home his brother *Ogun* looked for him everywhere without success. He went to their mother *Yemanjá* and reported that *Oshóssi* had been gone a long time. *Yemanjá* then went to *Ifá* to find out what had happened to her son and was told that he had been enchanted by *Ossáin* in the depth of the forest. *Ogun* raised a group of hunters to go out into the forest to rescue *Oshóssi*. *Ossáin* could smell them when the party got near enough, and so hid in the trunk of a tree. *Oshóssi* received the group of hunters happily as though nothing had happened to him. *Ogun* however was very angry and wanted to know what had happened. *Oshóssi* then said that nothing had happened and he wondered what the fuss was about. *Ogun* told *Oshóssi* that he had been missing for several days and *Oshóssi* replied that he did not disappear but decided to stay longer than planned. *Ogun* then responded that if this was so then he and his group would go away. At that point *Ossáin* came out of hiding, spread the powder of the bamboo on *Oshóssi* and this made him merge with the leaves. To this day in Brazil, there is the saying that 'he who is detained because he drank the cup of *Ossáin* cannot be rescued not even by the sword of *Ogun*' (Nancy de Souza e Silva, 1998).

cannot be rescued not even by the sword of *Ogun* ' (Nancy de Souza e Silva, 1998).

In the myth preserved in the Brazil *Terreiro*, *Ossáin* always appears apart from the other *orixás* and does so in an aura of mystery and exorcism. When he appears, the priestess after the trance comes out carrying the staff of *Ossáin* in one hand and the pestle in the other.

#### Importance of green leaves and herbs within the Terreiro

The knowledge of leaves demands dedication, carefulness and attention. The *Babaloxá* also known as the *Olossáin* has the initiation knowledge of leaves, flowers and plants and acquires this through his lifetime. Leaves have ritual functions for specific liturgical duties. With the leaves the negative energy from the body is removed and replaced with positive energy. The *Babaloxá* does not work without the rituals.

The infusions, oils, and boiled medicine close the wounds and heal the pain. Tiredness is treated with baths which reestablish the energy. Specialised teams deal with this work. The domestic healing plants are cultivated aside as they are fragile, delicate and have a short life span.

Green leaves channel the *Axe* (power) and are used to decorate the dishes which are the offerings for the *orixá*. The leaves give a touch of beauty and harmony as well as preserve the space for negative energy e.g. green leaves are worn in the hair to avert the evil eye.

The *terreiros* are located among trees which have *Axê*. The floor is covered with herbs as these have an abundance of oxygen which the people believe makes the environment lighter, agreeable and calm. Sprigs of herbs and flowers are often used by women.

Selected herbs are rubbed on the body by the children of *Ossáin* before the sun rises. The preparation is called *Abo* (protection) and is kept in a mud container in a place not accessible to strangers. It is unwise to make indiscriminate use of leaves. Many of them are forbidden for internal use while others can either heal or kill. Each leaf belongs to an *orixá* as explained above. The combination and ritual used in the constitution of any medication is a secret known to the *Babaloxá* who is the only one allowed to pick herbs

and leaves for medicinal purpose. It is said that *Ossáin* is reserved and does not tolerate visits outside specific moments. Mistrust is also said to be one of his main attributes.

I was fortunate to be in Salvador, Bahia at the right moment to have been allowed to photograph the interior of *Ossáin's* house (Fig. 10a.) at the terreiro Ile Moroia Lage where Olga the Alaketu (Fig. 2a) is the *Iyaloxá*. To enter the House of *Ossáin* at the Ile Axé Opo Afonja, the *Iyaloxá* Mãe Stella do Santos had to obtain permission for me from *Ossáin* through divination. I was not allowed to take a photograph of the interior of the house and so had to contend myself with that of the exterior (Fig. 10b).

*The supposed attributes of the sons and daughters of Ossáin.* ( Ildasio Tavares, 1998)

The sons and daughters of *Ossáin* are analytical, quiet and not known to talk too much. They have strong feelings, attach a lot of value to their own reputation and do not keep bad company. In their quiet way they gather information and analyse situations because their eyes are made to see all over. There is something that suggests a certain isolation and mystery in them. This is characteristic of the habit of *Ossáin* - the bush surrounded by a dense cloud of leaves. They possess an analytic potential which they use under the form of passive resistance. They like activities in which they can work in isolation and quiet and are known for their varying artistic expressions. Generally, they have an inner fear of failure and this why they are quiet and like to observe without being seen - i.e. behind the leaves.

Their introverted nature forms a shield which conceals their true feeling and can create difficulty which can be misunderstood by others. They dislike people who are loud and vulgar and do not make friends easily but those they make , they keep for life.

*Ossáin* does have a dark side when the light is obstructed by the density of the forest and so his children are equally affected by darkness. At such times, his children become hypochondriacs and complain of bad luck when things go wrong. They are said to live on dry leaves and forget the vitality of the essence of green leaves. They make continuous visits to the doctor because of a series of symptoms which plague them.

The next chapter narrates in detail the festival of *Osanyìn* in the town of Osun-un Ekiti in Oshun State and also in Bahia.

Figure 10. The House of  
Ossaim  
in Salvador de Bahia.



a. Interior of the house at Ile  
Morias Lage

b. Exterior of the house at Ilé Axé  
Opô Afonjà



## Chapter Seven

### The Festival of Òsanyìn

In the towns where the annual festival of Òsanyìn is held, every member of the community participates irrespective of their faith or religion. It forms a unifying force as the blessings bestowed by the òrìsà are on every member of the town. Besides the merriment is such that no one wants to miss the fun.

I made a trip to the town of Ijabe in Oṣun State where such a festival is held every year. Unfortunately the *Qba*, *Onijabẹ of Ijabe*, only ascended the throne about five months previous to my visit. There was a hiatus of a period of five years due, I surmise, to a dispute over the right to sit on the throne. During this period the festival was not held as the *Qba* by tradition has to provide a cow for a sacrifice of thanksgiving and communion with Òsanyìn. The *Qba* who had not attended such a festival in his present capacity, invited my mentor in Nigeria and myself to return in August when we could celebrate the festival with them. We were, however, able to ascertain during the period spent at the palace, that the festival is usually held just before the festival of Òrúnmìlà and that the structure of the celebration is similar to that held in Èkìtì with some minor modifications. The festival as it takes place in Osùn-ún Èkìtì is narrated below as described by Caleb Orimoogunje who is a native of that town. A similar celebration in another town in Èkìtì is described by Ojo (1976:50-60).

#### Òsanyìn in Osùn-ún Èkìtì (Orimoogunje, 1986:14-39)

The people of Osùn-ún Èkìtì thought that Òsanyìn was a man who was born in the household of Elesije in Ile-Ife and came to Osùn-ún Èkìtì. He migrated with the *Qba Qwa Ajibiye* as far as Ipole-Qwa where he died. His staff was however brought to Osùn-ún Èkìtì by *Osán-kò-pón-òògùn* as a sign of the strength of Òsanyìn and since he became the deity universally worshipped by the whole town.

### The Festival of Osanyin in Osun-un Ekiti.

The festival usually lasts seven days but the planning and execution of the rites and rituals revolves round the following : -

Asosanyin (Olosanyin) - He is the priest of Osanyin and all the power and glory for the worship is vested in him. On the day appointed for the festival, he brings out the symbol of Osanyin, and removes last years palm leaves with the following song : -

<i>Omodé tù sò èsì</i>	The child discards last year's dress
<i>Mi kẹ bọ ọ ní</i>	I am not at enmity with you
<i>Mi kẹ bọ ọ l'odì</i>	Nor am I at loggerheads with you

When he clothes the *Osanyin* with fresh palm leaves he sings : -

<i>Mèè ró, mèè ró</i>	I shall adorn you
<i>Odoodún pèrègún í ró sọ</i>	As the peregun plant adorns itself yearly
<i>Mèè ró, mèè ró</i>	I shall adorn you
<i>Odoodún pèrègún í ró sọ</i>	As the peregun plant adorns itself yearly

The Asosanyin then takes the Osanyin into the house as he sings : -

<i>Olúyoyọ àkòsìn</i>	Osin has a trail behind
<i>Àkòsìn í k'ómọ rìn í re'le o</i>	Osin goes home with children trailing
<i>Yoyọ àkòsìn</i>	behind him
<i>Àkòsìn yoyọ</i>	Osin with a trail behind

The Asosanyin performs the rites and rituals and is one of those who dances at the foot of the Erele tree outside the palace.

### The Oba/ Owa

In the hierarchy of the festival, the Oba ranks next to the Asosanyin, the high priest and has a hand in the planning of the festival. The Oba comes out of the palace with the high priest to announce the day of the festival and also supplies thirty three fried bean balls with which the deity is worshipped in the palace. On the day of the festival, the Oba goes round the whole town to pay homage to his predecessors buried at a place called 'Ògún - Àgbèdè'. It

In the afternoon, the Oba is expected to dance under the Èrèlè tree outside the palace under the gaze of the whole town. The role and status of the Oba in Yorùbáland is identical and was described in chapter three. On the seventh day, the Oba goes with everyone else to the house of Chief Odoba for the merriment to mark the end of the festival.

### Èyé Oyoyìn

Èyé Oyoyìn is a female chief and is third in the hierarchy. It is her responsibility to get the leaves of Òdúndún (*Kalanchoe crenata*) Ewé Tètè (*Amaranthus hybridus*), and the leaves of Ròròwó (*Senecio biafrae*) with which the Òsanyìn is bathed. She fries twenty four bean balls to take to the palace for the worship of Òsanyìn. Although she plays a very important part during the festival, she does not know the full details of what goes on as she is a woman. Tradition has it that as women do not have a prominent thyroid cartilage like men they are not able to keep secrets. Men are supposed to keep secrets in their thyroid cartilage known locally as Gògòngò. This is also a way of gender discrimination.

### Adòlé

Adòlé is also a female and is the head of the married women in the town. She serves as their spokesperson during the festival. On the day of the festival she chooses those women who carry the bean balls fried by the women to the Òsanyìn grove. The married women must do what she tells them and must not cross swords with her. If any of the women have any problems they tell her during the festival.

### The Chiefs (Ìjòyè)

The role of the chiefs are described under the heading of the political organisation of the Yorùbá. During this festival they are the pillars on whom the Oba depend. They go out with the Oba when he dances round the town and direct him to the important places in the town. All the chiefs have a hand in the planning of the festival. For peace and tranquillity during the festival the chiefs make a propitiatory sacrifice (Ebo Ètùù) on the eve of the festival.

### Onikòyí ati Àwon Olómoge (the maidens)

The Onikòyí is also referred to as the mother of youth. She must be a virgin to attain this

position and is the leader of the maidens of the town. Once the date of the festival is announced, she and her group meet every night to make merriment - dancing and singing until the day of the festival. On the evening of the day the festival is announced, they start with this song : -

<i>Qwá dá 'mi 'jò Ìsánní ni</i>	The Owa has named the day of the festival
<i>Qwá dá 'mi 'jò ùgbà à è sorò ò</i>	in eight days time
<i>Osupá mọ lé dedere</i>	The moon is resplendent in the sky
<i>Qowá dá 'mi 'jò ùgbà à è sorò ò ò</i>	The Owa has named the day

If the maidens are offended, they take themselves out of town to a flat area about a mile away to do their singing. On such occasions, the Qba will appoint some chiefs to go and pacify them. They sing praises to the Qba but can be a thorn in the flesh of wayward members of the community.

### Eri-Merunun

These are young men who sing and make merriment during the duration the period of the festival. On the day of the festival, these young men lead the dance round the town and direct their praise songs to the high priest, the Qba and the nobles. They sing sixteen songs and special songs for the chief dancers of the day. As they sing they beat the Ipesi drum and without them the festival will be dull.

### Àwon Eléégù/ Emerò

This group consists of sixteen men who are professional dancers and dance outside the palace. Of these only twelve dance at any time in front of the palace. This group goes to the *Qsanyin* grove in order to offer the sacrifice of propitiation (*Ebo Ètùtù*) and on their way back they pay homage at the grave of a man called *Ihòrò-sorò* the founder member of the Eléégù with the following song : -

<i>Ihòrò sorò</i>	Ihoro soro
<i>Ihòrò sorò</i>	Ihoro soro
<i>Q mọ gb'órí mọ gb'òní gbe</i>	Descend lest you forget this occasion
<i>Ihòrò sorò</i>	Ihoro soro

After much dancing they disperse to their respective homes.

### Àwọn Awo (Members of the Cult)

The Awo group is made up of Ifá priests, and the herbalists. Before the festival there must be rain. If it had not rained, the Oba will consult the 'Olori Awo' (the head of the cult) to find out what can be done. The cult would then perform the necessary rituals to ensure that rain falls, and return in the rain to the palace to show their power. On the day of the festival, the Q̄losanyìn, the Q̄ba and the members of the cult form a procession in that order and dance round the town.

### Egbe Òdòbà

This group sweep the grove of Òsanyìn before the public arrive for the festivities. They also carry the pole which bears the staff of Òsanyìn before the Q̄losanyìn. They leave the pole under the tree outside the palace where the people congregate. On the final day of the festival, the whole town including the Q̄ba, chiefs and the dignitaries retire to the house of the Òdòbà where they are offered fried bean balls. The group also goes out with the Q̄ba during the festival.

### Àwọn Èju

Members of this group entertain the people with satirical songs but not on the same evening as the Onikòyí and her group. When they perform they dress like women but carry whisks in their hands and beads round their necks. They eulogise the Q̄ba, the chiefs and the dignitaries in the town but abuse the miscreants.

### Àwọn Èjùà

These are hunters who see to the security of the town throughout the festival play and saw to it that the town was not open to sudden attack while the merriment was on.

### Àwọn Òdómokùnrin ( the Youth)

Early on the morning of the festival, the youth bring out the 'bata' drum and congregate outside the palace. As they dance they sing this song : -

Oyele a kèè kú

Oyele , we shall not die

Oyele

Oyele

*Kúkùkù, Oyele*  
*A kèè kú Oyele*

Never , Oyele  
We shall not die, Oyele

By the end of the day of the festival, the drum is usually useless and a new one has to be made for the following year. It is necessary that all the groups participate during the festival as the success or otherwise of the festival depends on this.

### The Worship of *Osanyìn*

It is the belief of the Yoruba that it is through the sacrifices offered to the *òrìsà* that good luck abounds. The rituals associated with the celebration take place in six stages. The first stage starts when the date of the festival is announced. The hierarchy meet at the palace to worship *Osanyìn* and sprinkle palm wine in front of its symbol in the palace. They meet again five days later and repeat the ritual carried out on the first day. The *Àsòsanyìn* announces the day of the festival thus : -

*Osanyìn mò dọ̀rún lé isán*  
*méjì loò la ò*

The festival of Osanyin takes place  
in twenty-one day's time

*Osanyìn mò dọ̀rún lé isán*  
*méjì loò la ò*

The festival of Osanyin takes place  
in twenty-one day's time

After the announcement the *Asosanyin* touches the ground three times with the symbol of *Osanyin* which represents his office and those in attendance will sing thus : -

*Okó ọ̀ọ́ ké' èrùbò*

The hoe never works on day of sacrifice

*Àdà ọ̀ọ́ ké' èrùbò*

The cutlass never works on day of sacrifice

*Akè y'óko 'jọ' èrùbò*

It is forbidden to farm on day of sacrifice

*Okó o kú ọ̀dún*

Happy celebrations to you hoe

*Àdà oo kú ọ̀dún*

Happy celebrations to you cutlass

*A kò ní í l'oko l'ọ̀jọ́ ọ̀dún*

We never go to the farm on festival day

Five days later this step is repeated for the third time and the *Asosanyin* then announces that the festival will take place in fifteen days time. The people will then shout with joy --

*Orò Orò Orò*

Festival

*Orò ò ò ò ò*

Festival

The fourth step takes place on the morning of the festival. All the town gather together at the palace to make a sacrifice to *Osanyin*. The *Oba* and the *Aṣṣosanyin* will each present thirty-three fried bean balls, the *Èyée Yoyin* will present twenty-four, to make a total of ninety for the sacrifice. The Chief *Odòfin* will then provide the other items - kola nuts, alligator pepper, and a cockerel on behalf of all the chiefs. These are then used for a thanks-offering on behalf of the town while expressing the wishes for the coming year. The *Eléégú* will pick one kola-nut and one alligator pepper and hand these to the *Aṣṣosanyin* who then presents these with supplication to the *Osanyin*. Following this, everyone will go home.

On the day of the festival which marks the fifth step, all the married women will bring five fried bean balls each to the 'Èrèlè' tree outside the palace. In the afternoon of the same day, the *Adòlé*, who represents them, chooses the women to carry who will carry the basket of bean balls to the grove of *Osanyin*. The *Aṣṣosanyin* performs the rituals in the grove with the bean balls, kola-nuts, and a cockerel presented by Chief *Odòfin*. The blood of the cockerel is drained on the *Osanyin* and a few bean balls are broken and thrown on the ground before the *Osanyin* while the rest of the food is eaten by all those present.

The sixth step takes place on the final day of the festival when all those who received blessings from *Osanyin* the previous year will come with their pledges. Various things are pledged i.e. dogs, cockerel, chicken, kola-nuts. These are handed to the *Aṣṣosanyin* who will repeat the following prayers : -

<i>Osanyin, 'Molè</i>	Osanyin, the spirit one
<i>Ejé i lé bó o jé</i>	The promise that was made to you
<i>Uhun mò lẹ á san ì í o</i>	Is brought to you in fulfilment
<i>Osanyin, 'Molè</i>	Osanyin the spirit one
<i>Ejé tó wá bá o jé</i>	The promise made by the individual
<i>Ló wá san yí o</i>	He has now brought in fulfilment

All the living things brought will be killed and their blood drained on the shrine of *Osanyin*.

The kola-nuts are used for prayers while the other items are eaten after the sacrifice.

In Brazil - the community of the various candomble do not hold a separate festival for *Ossáim* but he is venerated at the same time as the other *orixás* associated with the forest - i.e. *Oshossi, Ogun and Oxumarê*. During this period sacrifices are made to these *orixás* on the morning before the *sire* and the animals used for this sacrifice and the rituals that appertain thereof are only known to the initiated members of the community. However since the African religion in Brazil is very true to its origin barring minor modifications it is more than likely that the same sacrificial items were being used with the same meaning.

The spiritual significance of the rituals woven round the festival is worthy of mention. The use of kola-nuts in sacrifice is believed to ward off death, disease and pestilence in the community. Bean balls were thought to be one of the delicacies that *Ọsanyìn* enjoyed while on earth. Using this in sacrifice is said to ensure his support in any enterprise during the year and to pacify the witches who are known to also favour this delicacy.

The dog is used to ensure progress and prosperity for any one who offers this to the *òrìṣà*. Palm wine is spilled on the floor of the shrine of *Ọsanyìn* from the day the festival is announced. This serves two purposes - it saves the people from early death as well as pacify *Iḗ* (earth). This is also thought to ensure popularity and happiness either to the individual or to the community. The Alligator pepper pod is full of seeds and an offering with this guaranties abundant money and children.

The traditional festival of *Ọsanyìn* has two aspects to it. There is the religious aspect which takes place in the grove and the profane which is the feasting that follows. In Brazil, although *Ossáim* does not descend on his daughters as often as the other *orixás*, he is still fed at the *pegi* when the others are fed. Here too the feeding of the *orixás* collectively forms the religious aspect while the communal feeding that follows represents the profane aspect.

The next chapter discusses the *Ọsanyìn* system within the social theory of structuration as put forward by Giddens (1979).

## Chapter Eight

### Discussion

#### The festival of Osanyin

It is evident from the account given in the previous chapter, that the traditional festival of *Osanyin* is a ritual in the Durkheimian sense. It constitutes a social action which contains sacred and profane components: the sacred which is the religious rite at the grove and the profane which is the feasting that follows. It can also be seen to foster social solidarity among the people of Osùn-ún Èkìtù, where everyone participates in the merriment, feasting and dancing which takes place. Even in the areas of Yorùbáland where the individual *Olòsanyin* keeps the festival, the celebration brings together neighbours, friends and in some cases those who have received blessings from the *òrìṣà* during the year. This creates feelings of social integration, and harmony within the organic system of the society. Leach (1954:280) commented that such solidarity may not be long lasting but certainly existed during the period of the festival.

Similarly, the feast at the *Sire* also has two parts: a sacred aspect when the *orixás* descend to mount their daughters and a profane one when the community feasts after feeding the *orixás* at the *Pegi*. It serves the same purpose in Brazil, although with the eyes of the *Iyaloxá* on everyone, dissent is dealt with immediately through the system of supervision that exists within the community.

#### Time and Space interaction choreography in Yorùbáland and Brazil

Slavery brought about transplantation of some Yorùbá across the Atlantic and with them their culture and beliefs. Some slaves were taken to Bahia in Brazil and others to various parts of the Americas and the Caribbean.

In the festival of *Osanyin* in Osùn-ún Èkìtù, each actor within his/her group and also within the town community knows much about the structure of his/her group and the part that it

plays in the overall activities of the festival. In so doing, each actor has face-to-face interaction with those in the other groups and this gives him/her a sense of importance. An example of this is the Onikòyí and her group of maidens who if offended are likely to take their performance out of town to await the Oba's emissaries to pacify them.

The festival itself takes place annually at a prearranged season although the exact date needs to be fixed by the Oba in consultation with the *Oḽsanyìn*. The festival also goes on for a definite period. Giddens (1979:205) refers to this as time-geography which produces time-space choreography of individual existence over given time periods.

Each individual within his/her own group has a definite daily routine which is charted in time and space. These 'activity bundles' (Giddens, 1979:205) occur at definite locations where the paths of two or more individuals coincide. For most of the individuals in the town this is outside the Oba's palace.

In Bahia, the *Sire* takes place every six months and here too there is group identity and the activities of each group follows closely the step by step explanation of time-space relationship described above. Here, however, the community of the *candomblé* emphasises the time-space relationship which has maintained the system despite the distance and the influence of the Catholic faith which was forced upon the people. During the middle decade of this century, there was a two way movement of people to maintain contact and keep alive the tradition on both sides of the Atlantic. The two way movement helped the Bahianos (the Black inhabitants of Bahia) to keep in touch not only with their roots, but also to ensure purity in their faith and traditions. This movement also emphasises the coordination of movement in time and space in social activity as well as the coupling of multiplicity of paths.

### **Role and Status**

Within the context of the festival, the following have ascribed status in the town of Osun-un-Ekiti. The *Aṣòsanyìn* as the head of the hierarchy, followed by the Oba, Èyè Oyoyìn, Addólé, the Chiefs, Onikòyí, Erí-Merùnún, Àwọn Elégú, Àwọn Awo (the cult), Egbè Òḽobà, Àwọn Elu, Àwọn Èjùà, and Àwọn Òḽòmokùnrin. The *Aṣòsanyìn* and Àwọn

Awo, also have achieved status by virtue of their acquisition of the knowledge of the secrets of the cult.

Some herbalists merely occupy a socially recognised status, others associate with one another as equals in a network for mutual support, yet others constitute themselves into an association or corporate groups. These various associations have their own hierarchy, a defined membership and internal organisation. They form social networks in their various branches, but collectively form a social group in which all the members stand in a definite relationship even though they fulfil different roles as office bearers or just ordinary members. They have a common purpose such as is described in the Articles of Incorporation of the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists (Appendix 1.). They also have a plot of land given to that Association by the State for the purpose of cultivating herbs. The group is relatively permanent and so could be referred to as a corporate group. As individuals each member has an achieved status by virtue of the skills they have acquired.

In taking on the status, or position, the incumbent finds that he/she must take on the whole array of action encompassed by the corresponding role. Role therefore implies a social determinism and a doctrine of socialisation (Giddens, 1979:116). Role also becomes the basic unit of socialisation for it is through this role that tasks in society are allocated and arrangements made to enforce their performance. The whole town forms a social group in respect of the festival in that it has an internal structure in which all members stand in a definite relationship to one another.

Social systems are constituted not only of roles but also of reproduced practices. It is these practices and not roles which have to be regarded as the points of articulation between actors and structure. Position, however, is a social identity that carries with it a certain range of prerogatives and obligations that an actor who is accorded that identity may activate or carry out. These prerogatives and obligations constitute what Giddens (1979:117) termed role-prescriptions which are associated with the position.

## Social Reproduction

An institution or a group is living when its various mechanisms run and mesh properly just like an organism which digests, breathes and reproduces by itself. The cult of *Osanyin* in Yorubaland and the *candomblé* in Brazil forms part of such an organism. Herskovits (1943) stated that the *candomblé*, an African religion exists to promote the security of its individual members through close solidarity as a mutual assistance group and through identification with the *orixás*. This helps to satisfy personal desire for prestige and improved social status by linking the latter with religious status. Lastly, it satisfies mass aesthetic or recreational needs through music, singing and dancing.

Durkheim (1993) used the analogy of cell replacement within the body of an animal to explain how people are replaced within the society when they die. The function of each organ within the body is said to be the contribution it makes in sustaining life of the organism. In the *Division of Labour*, he also expressed how collective consciousness changed as society went from being compound to being complex. With collective consciousness, all participants share identical values, which exert a collective force on each individual.

In the health care system under consideration, women in Yorubaland are allowed to sell 'material medica' at the popular markets, but they are not allowed to actually prepare the medication or to stay under the same roof when the men prepare the medicine. Women are not allowed to become *Olosanyin* either, as this involves keeping secrets. In *Osun-ún-Ekiti*, the *Oyoyin* is the third in the hierarchy during the festival, yet she is not privy to all that goes on. This is either a means of making both the cult and the craft a male preserve or a way of maintaining a division of labour in which nature is delegated to women and nurture to men. However, this is the opposite of what obtains in the family where women nurture the family ideals and the men go hunting and cultivate crops.

In Bahia, the *Iyaloxá* as the High Priestess heads the *candomblé* and is responsible for all that takes place within the community. Her consent is sought on all matters. She lives within the community and nurtures the whole family. She divines for those who come for

that takes place within the community. Her consent is sought on all matters. She lives within the community and nurtures the whole family. She divines for those who come for consultation and advice on all matters of both the heart and the head.

In the context of *Ossáim*, the *Iyaloxá*, like most members of the community, has the knowledge of leaves and their uses but neither she nor any female member of the community is allowed to go and harvest the herbs and leaves. This is the prerogative of the *Babaloxá* for it is he who knows the incantations to be used either before or after the leaves, herbs and roots are harvested. Some of the leaves and herbs must be gathered before sunrise and some just at sunset to retain their power. He also supervises the preparation of the medications. The sale of herbs and leaves is carried out at the market by men. Here too, within the community, nurture is part of the domain of the female sex, whilst men are involved in both nature and nurture.

In Yorùbáland, after graduation, the graduate retains a dyadic relationship with his trainer and any other herbalist who has acquired the achieved status. In practice the newly qualified can seek help and advice from any other person with the same status and so interact informally. This is known as social networking and helps to maintain standards. It can be uplifting to the new graduate.

Within the *candomblé*, the *Abians* (those who have 'given food to the head' but have not completed their initiation) come forward at the appropriate time and undergo the three stages of separation, limen and aggregation at initiation as described by Van Gennep (1960). At the end of the last stage, the initiate dresses in her fineries and goes out to greet relations and friends who might have contributed to her expenses during the initiation period. She also receives a new name in sainthood and her place within the community.

All social reproduction is grounded in the knowledgeable application and re-application of rules and resources by actors in situated social contexts. All interaction has to be brought off by those who are party to it. Change is therefore involved with social reproduction in both the basic and general sense. Social systems are produced and reproduced by their constituent parts. It is essential that any and every change in a social system involves the



totality and implies structural modification however minor or trivial this may be. The *candomblé* had to undergo such modification in order to exist in its present form as a result of the difficulties encountered during the time of slavery.

The whole town of Osùn-un-Èkìtì forms a social group in respect of the festival. The group is relatively permanent and so could be called a corporate group. As long as the whole community contributes in maintaining the cult and there is an Oba on the throne, there will always be an annual festival of Òsanyìn in its present fashion. The importance of the Oba to the festival is shown in the town of Ijabe where there was no festival for five years because there was not Oba on the throne even though the cult existed.

The *candomblés* exist independently of each other and the members of one share a dyadic relationship with the others. Each is a community or social group with its hierarchy based on the age of sainthood. The concept of sainthood constitutes a syncretic element which derives from Christianity. The *candomblé* is more than a mystic sect: it is a genuine bit of Africa transplanted to Brazil. It unites men, women and children in a coherent functional whole. This is achieved not only through their common beliefs and feelings through like minds and hearts, but also by moulding passions and desires, attractions and jealousies, according to a series of mystic models that enable people to coexist, join forces or cooperate in communal tasks. Anything that might separate the individuals and thus disrupt the group is controlled, not in order to suppress it, but to make it more compatible with the impulses of its members (Bastide, 1960)

The *candomblé* in the Ilé Axé Opò Afonja ensures renewal of itself, by recruiting potential sons and daughters while they are young. A school was founded within the community to offer equal opportunities of learning to all those who desire this; it represents a form of integration. The aim of the school is to make it possible for the children and young people within its sphere of influence to develop the aptitude and potentials within the pluricultural environment of *candomblé*. This school was recognised by UNICEF in 1987 and by the Brazilian Government in 1990. The school has five classrooms and takes students through grades 1-4 of elementary education in two streams - morning and evening, starting from the age of six years. The subjects taught are languages - Portuguese and Yorùbá,

mathematics, history, geography, biology, ecology and art.

When a member of the *candomblé*, usually a *Babaloxá* or *Iya Kekere*, feels the call to establish a new house, he or she asks for and receives the blessing and assistance from the mother house. Thus the *Axê* (power and authority) is passed from one house to the other in the same way as the laying of hands of the Bishop on a priest at ordination within the Catholic Church (Otun Oba Are, 1998).

The new house exists as an independent one, yet stands in the position of daughter to the older house. Its sons and daughters have a dyadic relation with those of the older house and receive help and recognition whenever a visit is made in either direction. This is a system of reproduction by multiplication unlike the practice of reproduction by division practised among the Yanomano Indians who split their villages after reaching the critical mass of 150 (Chagnon, 1968).

In Yorubaland, people are recruited either because they receive the call from the *orisa* or the *orisa* is regarded as the ancestor of the person's lineage. The person then undergoes the necessary rituals to become an *Olosanyìn*. Some learn herbalism as a craft and are known as *Òsanyìn*. As explained in the text, this group does not diagnose by divination but undergoes an apprenticeship which lasts at least three years. At the end of the apprenticeship, the individual undergoes a graduation ceremony

### **Importance of the Ceremony at the Graduation of the Trainee in Nigeria**

The ceremony to which all those who wish are invited introduces the graduate to the other herbalists and indicates that he has undergone the required stages of training. These stages correspond to the model of the rites of passage. As Van Gennep (1960) has shown, these rites accompany every change of place, state, social position and age. Turner (1967) employed the term 'state' to include all the other terms except transition. Van Gennep divided transition into three phases - separation, margin, (or limen) and aggregation (or reintegration). The trainee goes through the phase of separation when he leaves his parents' to live with the master or teacher, the liminal state when he is under tuition. This has also been referred to as the state of reflection. The third state (reintegration) is when

norms and ethical standards. The ritual also demonstrates to the public that he can be trusted as a well trained herbalist who can attend to their needs.

The first three lines of the prayer at the end of the ceremony expresses the desires that human beings will not discover the graduate's secret, just as no-one, in Yoruba belief, is able to see the bottom of either the sea or the lagoon. Although modern day science and engineering have made this possible, this prayer is satisfying and reassuring to the Yoruba as it signifies that failure will not attend the trainee's professional practice. He also believes every word of the prayer offered by the elders and so has no problem in answering *Aṣẹ o - Amen* (so be it). This gives him the psychological and cultural satisfaction that this will indeed be so.

In its most elemental guise, tradition is the purest and most innocent mode of social reproduction (Pocock, 1972:255). It may be thought of as an indefinite series of repetitions of an action which on each occasion is performed on the assumption that it has been performed before. Its performance is authorised - though the nature of authorisation may differ widely by the knowledge or assumption of previous performance. Tradition has its greatest sway when it is understood simply as how things were, are (and should be) done. This is very true of the Yorùbá culture and beliefs in the power of their *orìṣà* to grant them their wishes including *alaafia* which is total well-being and peace.

That the Yorùbá understand the concept of health and illness is not in doubt, but it is the aetiology of the latter and the way to attain the former that demands explanation. To the Yoruba, illness is due either to punitive action of the ancestor spirits, malevolence of witches (*Aje*) or environmental causes. Their idea of the etiology of illness seems to be similar to those of other traditional African societies such as the Ndembu (Turner, 1961) and the Azande (Evans-Pritchard, 1937).

To achieve health the Yorùbá consult the oracle, venerate the family *orìṣà* or resort to any of the traditional systems described in chapter five. Amongst these the *Òsanyìn* health care system takes the pride of place as it combines both divination and herbalism as a cult and herbalism as a craft.

system takes the pride of place as it combines both divination and herbalism as a cult and herbalism as a craft.

The concept of the etiology of illness has survived the transplantation across the Atlantic and so has the method of diagnosis and medication within the *candomblé*. At present in Bahia, diagnosis is arrived at through divination by the *Iyaloxá* or *Babaloxá* using sixteen cowries referred to locally as *Erindilogun*. This is also used in Yorubaland. In some cases, the patient uses this system when all else has failed.

Within the *Òsanyìn* system, the structure has remained a continuum i.e. from the simple in the case of the *Òsanyìn* who remains and practices as an individual, through to the local Association of Herbalists to the level of the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalist, which is an aggregation of local associations.

Within the *candomblé* the concept of continuum exists also in that once the initiation has taken place, the *Iyao* continues to fulfil her obligations and after seven years becomes an *Ebomin*. She then progresses within the community and in her age group (in sainthood) and can become *Iya Kekere* and ultimately the *Iyaloxá*.

### Demand for the *Òsanyìn* Health System in Nigeria

In the mid 1970s, the Military Government in Nigeria, under General Yakubu Gowon, decided to go decimal. The naira and kobo therefore became the unit of currency to replace the pound sterling which was in use in Nigeria from the colonial period. In doing this, the Government opted for a system whereby the naira was worth £0.50. Later the naira grew in strength to be worth £0.75, on the strength of the oil wealth. This was however, short lived as one Military Government succeeded another and inflation ate into the value of the currency to the extent that now the pound is currently worth 174 naira (Independent page 25, 21/5/99).

The infra-structure within the country was allowed to run down to the extent that in Lagos, the commercial capital of the country, power outage and water failure were and still are the rule rather than the exception in some districts of the city. Petrol shortage is common place

and this affects transportation. Education is also affected and the universities are closed for months for one reason or another. The lecturers are dissatisfied with their lot, and doctors within the hospitals lack the material resources to give their patients the care they need. Western trained doctors therefore seek employment outside the country, thus creating a further shortage (BMJ,1997).

The present Military Government set a minimum wage at 2,500 naira which most employers are reluctant to pay or cannot afford to pay, particularly to the drivers, and domestic servants who appear to be at the bottom of the wage scale. Yet the market women have raised the cost of local foodstuff that these cadre of workers eat. Drugs are also very expensive to purchase at the chemist as they are not manufactured locally. There is also the temptation to flood the market with dubious quality drugs, albeit at a lower price to that at the chemist. Attempts to control these have not been successful due to lack of facilities for quality control.

Given such a condition, it is not surprising that people in both the urban and rural areas turn more to the *Òsanyìn* health care system where the patient receives treatment at a price he or she can afford. It is however, essential that further work is undertaken to assess the efficacy and effectiveness of the medications produced by the traditional healers who use herbs and roots, and to standardise dosages.

### **Demand for the *Ossáim* Health System in Bahia, Brazil**

Members of the *candomblé* and those from outside who are ill come to have their diagnoses made by divination and are informed whether their condition needs sacrifice, medication or surgery. In the case of the first two, the system provides the sacrifice or medication and, if surgery is needed, the patient is advised to seek the appropriate help.

The health service in Brazil realises the strength of the people's belief in herbal medication that some of the preparations are now made in factories under licence. The Government has herbivariums where some of the herbs are grown and turned into tablets or liquid medication as is appropriate and these are sold in the herbal medicine shops. This makes the price of some the medicine affordable to most people.

## Conclusion

This study found some changes in the structure, rites and rituals associated with the Yorùbá religion in Bahia, Brazil. These changes were found to be necessary due to the conditions under which the slaves were kept by their masters as well as the influence of the Catholic religion.

In Nigeria, the *òrìṣà* is thought to be the ancestor of the lineage and his cult is always kept alive by the eldest chief in the group, from one generation to another without any recourse to a state of trance. In Bahia however, slavery destroyed totally the concept of lineage although the notion that one can inherit the *orixá* on the distaff as well as the male side still persists. The true reality that has been preserved is embodied in the fraternity, since the family group has disappeared.

In Nigeria, each *orisa* has a separate fraternity or cult whereas in Bahia as in the rest of the Americas, there is a mixture of ethnic groupings particularly in the towns. This made the existence of a separate fraternity difficult. The priests therefore had no choice but to combine all the devotees of the various *orixá* into a single organisation. This in turn brought about the modification in the rituals so that it was no longer possible to invoke the same *orixá* on every occasion. All of them are mentioned one after the other in a predetermined order at the *siré*.

In Nigeria a person is only possessed once by the *òrìṣà* at the initiation. In Bahia however, there is likely to be a series of divine possessions.

Of all the Yorùbá *òrìṣàs* which could be said to number about 1700 (Awolalu, 1979:20) only fourteen survived in Bahia for various reasons. Those that survived are *Oxala*, *Osangian*, *Xangô*, *Oba*, *Yansa*, *Oxun*, *Ogun*, *Oshossi*, *Omolu*, *Yemanja*, *Exú*, *Ibeji*, and *Ossaim*. Others like *Òrúnmilà* and *Orixá Oko* are less in evidence. The worship of *Òrúnmilà* is now in decline since the death of the only true Babalaó who went to Nigeria to be initiated into the cult. *Orixá Oko* (the deity of forest and harvest) was never established because the slaves were not prepared to worship him as doing so might benefit their owner's plantation.

The *Òsanyìn* system has survived in both Nigeria and Brazil as it satisfies the desire of the people for health (*alaafia*). In Nigeria, people do this by consulting either the *Olòsanyìn* or the *Babaloxà* or *Iyaloxà* in Brazil when they are ill (*ailera*). Within the *candomblé*, the latter arrive at the diagnoses through divination with sixteen cowries whereas in Nigeria, the *Olòsanyìn* has dialogue with the *òrìṣà*. In each case the prescription is usually similar i.e. a sacrifice or medication with herbs. The *Olòsanyìn* or the *Babaloxá* not only harvests the herbs but supervises the preparation of the medication.

The system is reproduced through the agency of the *Olòsanyìn* and the *Òsanyìn* in Nigeria and the *Babaloxá* and *Iyaloxá* in Bahia. As heads of the cult these agents pass on the religious rites and rituals to their followers through oral tradition and also keep alive the observances of the festivals in which everyone participates. The time and space continuity is thus maintained.

The socioeconomic situation in Nigeria and also in Bahia has made the people look towards the system of herbal medicine. This further keeps the system alive. The government in each country recognised the importance of herbal medication for in Nigeria, the N.A.M.H. was given a parcel of land for the cultivation of medicinal herbs. Unfortunately, lack of funds and proper organisation on the part of the N.A.M.H. have hindered the project. In Brazil, however, the government has funded herbivariums and encouraged the production of some drugs from the herbs grown.

It can therefore be said that the Yorùbá religion in general and the *Òsanyìn* system of health care in particular have survived the transplantation across the Atlantic albeit with some modifications.

The next step would be the carrying out of research into the efficacy, efficiency and standardisation of the medicines produced and prescribed by the diviner/herbalists in each country. This would be a step in the right direction to provide Health for All at a price affordable to All.

## **APPENDIX**

1. **Certificate of Incorporation**
2. **Memorandum - Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists**
3. **Articles of Association of The Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists.**

No 638

Lands 29A



NIGERIA

## Certificate of Incorporation.

I hereby Certify

THAT

**The Nigeria Association Of Medical Herbalists**

is this day incorporated under the Companies Ordinance ( Cap 138 ) and that the Company is Limited by guarrantee.

Given under my hand at Lagos this Twenty-Sixth day of July One thousand Nine Hundred and Fourty-seven.

Fees and Deed Stamps ₦47 : 0k  
Stamp Duty on Capital ₦0 : 0k

(Sgd) H. H. MARSHALL  
AG. REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES

LICENCE OF THE REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES

---

WHEREAS it has been proved to the Registrar of the Companies that THE NIGERIA ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL HERBERLISTS, which is about to be registered under the Companies Ordinance as an Association Limited by guarantee is formed for the purpose of promoting objects of the nature contemplated by the 21st. Section of the Ordinance, and that it is the intention of the said Association that the income and property of the Association, whencesoever derived, shall be applied solely towards the promotion of the objects of the said Association as set forth in the Memorandum of Association of the said Association, and that no portion thereof shall be paid or transferred directly or indirectly by way of dividend or bonus, or otherwise howsoever by way of profit to the persons who at any time are, or have been members of the said Association or to any of them, or to any person claiming through any of them.

Now, therefore, the Registrar of Companies in pursuance of the powers vested in him and in consideration of the provisions and subject to the conditions contained in the Memorandum of Association of the said Association, as subscribed by seven members thereof, on the 26th day of March, 1947, do by this licence direct the Nigeria Association of Medical Herbalists to be registered with limited liability without the addition of the word "Limited" to its name.

Signed this 28th day of July, 1947.

(Sgd.) H. H. MARSHALL  
AG. REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES

# **The Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.**

## **The Companies Ordinance 1922**

COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE

A N D

Not Having a Share Capital

M E M O R A N D U M

O F

### **The Nigeria Association Of Medical Herbalists**

1. The name of the Association is "THE NIGERIA ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL HERBALISTS."

2. The Registered Office of the Association will be situated in Nigeria.

3. The objects for which the Association is established are:-

- (a) To unify or bring about the fullest collaboration between all groups of Herbalists in Nigeria and all over the World.
- (b) To promote, protect and safeguard the political, economic and social interests of all member Herbalists throughout Nigeria and to co-operate with all or any such association or society in other places to do so
- (c) To co-operate with the Government of Nigeria through its Medical and Health Services in all essential order and legislation. It shall seek and devise competent means of offering its advices, services and comments to the Governmet on all such matters concerning the health and welfare of the public of Nigeria.
- (d) It shall adopt suitable means of imparting and improving the medical and health knowledge of its members with a view to raising the standard of the practices and to setting up of a working model comparable with that of the most recognised institutions of its kind in civilized countries.
- (e) To assist, promote, establish and contribute to manage control or support funds, associations or institutions providing facilities for their members and Herbalists in general.
- (f) To adopt such reasonable means propaganda or publicity calculated directly or indirectly to advance the interest of Herbalist, e.g. by obtaining, collecting and disseminating news or by establishing a bureau of information.
- (g) To do all such other things as may be considered likely to advance the privileges, right and interest of its members and Herbalist generally throughout Nigeria
- (h) To do all things which may be expedient for the promotion of these objects, provided that the Association shall not be calculated to the a Trade Union from any fact or facts contained in all Memorandum.

4. The Liability of the members is limited.
5. The membership of the Association shall be unlimited.
6. Every member Group of the Association undertakes to contribute to the Assets of the Association in the event of its being wound up while it is a member or within one year afterwards, for payment of the debts and liabilities of the Association contracted before it ceases to be a member and the costs, charges, and expenses of winding up and for the adjustment of the rights of the contributories among themselves, such amount as may be required not exceeding ₦50.
7. The Income and property of the Association whencesoever derived shall be applied solely towards the promotion of the objects of the Association.
- Who the several persons whose names and addresses are subscribed are desirous of being formed into Association in pursuance of this Memorandum of Association.

Names	Address	Description
1. F. S. LarrCo	50, Agoraku Street, Lagos.	(Died 23. 8. 48)
2. J. O. Snyyo	50, Idoluwo Street, Lagos.	(Susperced 23. 11. 48)
3. I. O. Aderuga	12, Fuji Street, Lagos.	Herbalist
4. J. O. Joloso	21, Willory Liby. Street Lagos.	Herbalist
5. A. O. Akilo	31, Tapa Street, Lagos.	Herbalist
6. L. A. Adesgun	14, Fuji Street, Lagos.	Herbalist
7. E. O. Opuncion	37, Isalegangan Street Lagos.	Herbalist

Dated the.....day of.....1947

Witness to the above signatures

# The Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.

## The Companies Ordinance 1922

COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE

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ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION

OF

### The Nigeria Association Of Medical Herbalists

~~MEMBERSHIP~~

#### MEMBERSHIP

- 1 All Herbalist Groups (single individuals through Groups or Society only) throughout Nigeria shall be eligible for membership of the Association.
- 2 Groups or Societies in a Town or Province may be co-ordinated and formed into a Branch. Such move may be sponsored by the Association or the Association may approve any such branch that might have been formed and may cause it to be affiliated into the Association. Such affiliated branch shall be named after the town or area where it is formed e.g. The Nigeria Association of Medical Herbalists—(Ikorodu Branch).
- 3 A Group of Branch seeking admission or affiliation to the Association shall apply through the General Secretary of the Association. Such an application shall be accompanied with the admission or affiliation fees ruling for such admission at the time and it shall be sponsored by two registered and financial member groups of the Association.
- 4 The membership of any Group or Branch shall date from the time its application is approved. Every Branch or Member Group upon registration or affiliation shall be issued with a Certificate of Membership or Deed of affiliation as the case may be and shall be supplied with a copy of the Constitution and Rules of the Association free of charge by the General Secretary.
- 5 Member Groups shall cause to be registered all its individual members and Branches both their own member groups and the individuals within the groups, each member shall have membership Certificate.
- 6 Certificate of Proficiency shall be issued by the Association to its individual members in the grade and rank to which they are qualified
- 7 For this purpose the Association shall constitute a Board of Examiners from among the members.
- 8 The Board shall be competent to examine either verbally or in writing member candidates for the Proficiency Certificates of the Association.
- 9 There shall be four grades to the Proficiency Certificates of the Association.
  - (a) Fellowship.
  - (b) Associate.
  - (c) Members.
  - (d) Diploma.

10 The Board may delegate its power to Presidents of member Societies for purpose of awarding or issuing their individual members Membership Proficiency Certificate and Diploma of the Association but the Fellowship and Associate Certificate shall be awarded by the Board itself with the approval of Executive Committee the Principal Officer of which shall endorse the Certificate in the space provided for that purpose.

11 Issuing of Proficiency Certificates shall be strictly on merit Sub-Heads and Presidents of Branches are warned to exercise great care as the Association will view very seriously any discrepancies that may arise.

12 Fees payable for obtaining these proficiency Certificates after the necessary tests or examination shall be fixed from time to time by the Annual Convention, or the Executive Committee as the case may be.

13 In case of fees payable to Group Heads one-third such fees shall be payable to the Central Treasury and balance retained by the Group for its local or private expenses.

#### DISPUTES AND RESIGNATION

14 If there should arise between member groups any dispute or an unfair treatment by a Department of the or Association dissatisfaction of individual with the decision of its group or branch, a complaint may be made to the Executive Committee and should it be dissatisfied also with the decision of the Executive Committee it shall be entitled to appeal to the Annual Convention whose decision shall be final on all such appeal.

15 Notices of complaint or appeal shall be sent to the General Secretary who shall take necessary steps to place the matter on the Agenda of as the case may be, the Executive Committee or Annual Convention.

16 The Executive Committee has the power to stay the execution, of any decision of group or branch if application is made with the appeal to it to do so.

17 Members agree that they will abide in good faith with any settlement or decision of the Executive Committee or Annual Convention.

18 Any member of the Association may, after six months' notice of its intention to do so resign or withdraw from the Association provided that :-

(a) it is proved that such step is agreed upon by majority of its individual members.

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(b) that all its financial and other obligations up to the effective date of its resignation have been fully discharged.

19 Any member who or any member group which in the opinion of the Executive Committee shall have injured or attempt to injure the Association, or worked or acted contrary to the rules or interest of the Association or have attempted to cause rupture or break up or dissolve the Association otherwise than as allowed in this Constitution, or otherwise refused to comply with the order or decision of any Committee having jurisdiction over such member or member-union or acted contrary to any orders or directions of the Executive Committee or Convention may be punished by censure, fine or expulsion by the Executive Committee.

20 Any member or member-group who has resigned or has been expelled from the Association shall thereupon cease to have any claim upon the funds and other properties of the Association.

21 In case of intended expulsion it shall be necessary to give notice to any member group or member of the intention to proceed against it or him under this clause and of the grounds or matters which the Executive Committee are proposing to consider and every expelled member group or member shall afterwards receive notice of its punishment and the grounds thereof and shall thereupon have the right to appeal to the Annual Convention within one month.

#### GOVERNMENT OF THE ASSOCIATION

22 The supreme authority of the Association shall have been vested in its Annual Convention which shall decide broad matters of policy and consider other matters referred to it by the Executive Committee.

23 The Executive Committee shall be responsible for the general Administration of the business of the Association and for the Government of the Association in the intervals between two Annual Conventions.

24 The Council of Elders shall act in an advisory capacity in all matters of government referred to it by the Executive.

#### ANNUAL CONVENTION

25 The Annual Convention of the Association shall have supreme Authority over the Association and shall be attended by all the Officers of the Association and the representatives appointed on the following basis:-

- (a) Members of the Executive Committee of the Association;
- (b) The President, Secretary, Treasurer and one representative of the every member union of every affiliated Branch.
- (c) Two Principal Officers and two unofficial representatives of every member union other than a Branch.

26 Twelve representatives excluding the Officers shall form a quorum.

27 No one shall be a representative to the Annual or special Convention if he has not been duly appointed as such or who is not an active member of a member group or branch.

28 The Annual Convention shall meet during the 1st. or 2nd. Week in January every year, (not being more than 15 months after the holding of the last preceding Annual Convention) at such place and time as shall be fixed by the previous meeting of the Convention or in an emergency by the Executive Committee or President.

29 Except in an emergency, at least three months' notice of that Convention shall have been given by the General Secretary to those concerned.

30 The Annual or Special Convention shall have power.

- (a) To amend, repeal or remark the constitution as provided by the Companies Ordinance.
- (b) To order or decree or inaugurate any movement or proceeding in the interest of Association.
- (c) To elect or remove from office any Officer of the Association.
- (d) To expel any member, member group or dissolve Any branch of the Association

- (e) To decide the admission or registration fees of both member group and the individual members of Groups.
- (f) To make any levy on the member groups and to fix the yearly or monthly contributions.
- (g) To appoint, constitute or elect the Examining Board, Judicial Board and any other Boards of the Association
- (h) To appoint any Sub-Committee/s and to vest every such Sub Committee/s with such powers as may be deemed necessary or advisable and to define their duties.
- (i) To decide any appeal against the decision of the Executive Committee with power to remit each decision for the further consideration of the body and to give such directions in relation thereto as may be deemed expedient.
- (j) It shall direct the Executive Committee when necessary.
- (k) It shall do all such other things, whether of the kind before specified or otherwise as may be necessary or desirable in the interest of the Association or its members, in all these points, he shall consider the recommendations of the executive committee.

31 Members may send matters for inclusion in the Agenda of the Annual Convention such matter/s for the Agenda must reach the General Secretary by 5th week to the date of the Convention. The agenda then shall be issued for those concerned as soon as possible.

32 Should it be considered necessary or if it is requested for by one-fourth of the branches of the Association, a Special Convention of the Association may be convened by the Executive Committee or the President. Such Special Convention shall be held within a month from the date of the application and at such time and place fixed by the General Secretary on instructions from the Executive Committee or President. Matters to be considered by a Special Convention shall in all cases be submitted to the member groups so that full consideration might have been given to it and their representatives instructed accordingly.

33 Every decision of every Annual and Special Conventions shall be final and conclusive, and shall be binding upon all the member groups so far as it is accented to by the voice of the whole of the Association.

34 A notice may be given by the Association to any member group either personally or by sending it by post to its registered address.

35 Where a notice is sent by post, services of the notice shall be deemed to be effected by properly addressing prepaying and posting a letter containing the notice and unless the contrary is proved to have been effected at the time at which the letter would be delivered in the ordinary course of post.

36 The travelling expenses of the Officers of the Association attending the Convention shall be paid from the funds of Association; Branches shall finance their Officers from their respective funds.

37 Any financial member of a member group who is not representative may be permitted to attend the meetings of the Convention whilst in session upon proper identification. Such member shall not take part in the deliberation.

38 The right of admission to the meetings of the Convention is strictly reserved and no person or group or persons shall be allowed in the Convention meetings without the express permission of the President.

39 Each member group or branch shall submit to the General Secretary the names of its representatives elected for the purpose of representing

the group or branch at the Convention, not more than two or not later than one month to the date of the Convention, with the exception of emergency cases.

4) No representative of debtor member groups or branches shall be allowed to vote at the Convention

Voting at the Convention shall be either by individual vote or card vote i.e., each member union or branches shall jointly have one vote but the Officers of both Central Association and Branches shall have one vote.

#### OFFICERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

42 The Officers of the Association shall be the Supreme Head, two Vice Supreme Head etc., the President, two vice Presidents, General Secretary two Assistant Secretaries, the Treasurer, Financial Secretary, two Auditors, principal Organising Secretary and two Social Secretaries.

43 The above Officers shall be elected by the annual Convention from the financial members of the member groups. They shall vacate office yearly at the conclusion of the business at the Annual Convention and shall be eligible for re-election. "The Office of the General Secretary shall be held for five years and he may be suspended or dismissed through misdemeanor or negligence of duty. He may be re-elected in case of satisfactory service."

44 Election of Officers may be either by a show of hands or by ballot as the Presiding Chairman may direct.

45 It shall be the duty of the Supreme Head to preside at all Social or other important meetings of the Association but so far as the actual business of the Association is concerned shall delegate greater or all of his power to the President. His duty shall be advisory or supervisory over the President in all cases. The Supreme Head shall preside at all meetings of the Council of Elders.

46 The first vice Supreme Head will act in the absence of the Supreme Head and the second in the absence of the first Vice Supreme Head. The Supreme Head has the power to assign to any one of the Vice Supreme Head such duties as may be deemed necessary and expedient by him.

47 It shall be the duty of President to preside at all meetings of the Executive Committee and of the Convention in the absence of the Supreme Head. He (President) shall together with the General Secretary the Treasurer and Financial Secretary sign all vouchers and all orders on the Association Treasury also withdrawals from the Bank, and he shall perform all other duties pertaining to his office. Two of the Trustees of the Association of which the Chairman should be one could withdraw any amount from the bank.

48 The Vice Presidents shall act for the President in all duties pertaining to the Presidency in their orders. In the absence of the Presidents and the Vice Presidents at meetings one of the members present can be appointed to preside at that meeting

49 The General Secretary shall attend all meetings of the Executive and of the Convention. He shall keep in proper order the books provided for that purpose the Minutes of the Executive Committee and of the Convention. He shall conduct and be held responsible for all correspondence, notify Officers of their appointments, prepare the Agendum/Agenda for each meeting of the Executive Committee and Convention.

50 He shall keep a record of the names, addresses, and number of membership Certificates of the member groups, the register of their individual member. The nature and the number of Provisional Certificate issued to them and their respective and accredited representatives; he shall in all matters

be under the direction of the President and/or the Executive Committee.

51 In the event of his resignation or dismissal he shall hand over immediately to the President all records, files and all other property of the Association in his possession.

52 It shall be the duty of the Assistant Secretaries to assist generally the General Secretary in the discharge of such of his duties assigned to them by him and to act for him during his absence.

53 The Treasurer shall receive and pay promptly into the Bank approved by the Executive Committee, all with the exception of Ten Naira at any one time as Impress or Petty Cash, money received for and on behalf of the Association. He shall keep a true and accurate records of all receipts and expenditures and shall not pay any money out except on an order signed by the President, General Secretary, Treasurer and Financial Secretary. He shall render a proper income and expenditure annually, and prepare a Balance Sheet of the Assets and Liabilities of the Association annually, which must have been audited by the Auditors and he shall together with the President, General Secretary, Treasurer, and Financial Secretary sign all withdrawals from Bank respectively.

54 The Financial Secretary shall assist the Treasurer in the Secretariat work pertaining to finance.

55 Two Auditors shall be appointed and their duties regulated in accordance with Section 112 and 113 of the Companies Ordinance, 1922 or any statutory modification thereof for the time being in force, and for this purpose the said section shall have effect as if the word members were substituted for statutory Meeting.

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

56 The Executive Committee shall be responsible for the general administration of the business of the Association and for the Government of the Association in the intervals between every two annual Conventions.

57 The Executive Committee shall consist of the Officers of the Association, the President and the Secretary of each of the affiliated branches and also one elected representative of each of the member group of the Association.

58 Twelve members shall form a quorum.

59 The Executive Committee shall meet at least once a month on every Tuesday of the first week of the month at such convenient times and places as the President shall appoint due and sufficient notice having been given to the members.

60 The Executive Committee may appoint or constitute Sub-Committees or Board for dealing with special classes of business such as political economic, social, educational, financial etc., and may define their duties or invest them with such of the powers of Executive Committee as the Executive Committee may deem expedient. An appeal from every decision of a Sub-Committee shall be referred to the Executive Committee.

61 The Executive Committee shall administer the business and affairs of the Association subject to the Annual Convention. It shall have power to impose levies on affiliated branches and on member groups as it may consider necessary for the furtherance of the interest of the Association. It shall decide appeals from affiliated branches and from member groups. It shall have power to suspend the operation of any of its decision pending appeal thereupon, and to make regulation for dealing

with any state or circumstances arising in consequence of such suspension. It may seek for and take the opinion of member groups or affiliated branches on any question that may arise touching on the interest of the Association. It shall have power to appoint delegates from among its members or co-opt any other member from any group or branch of the Association to attend conference/s or meeting/s inside or outside Nigeria, interview any person or persons relating to any matter touching upon the interest of the Association. It shall perform all such duties and take such steps whether of the kind above specified or otherwise as it may think necessary or desirable for dealing with any circumstances that may be arise or the furtherance or protection of the interest of the Association or its members and shall determine anything that may be necessary whereon this constitution is silent.

62 Every decision or other of the Executive Committee shall be binding on members, member groups and affiliated branches subject to appeal to the succeeding Annual Convention and all and every member of the Association agrees that this clause shall be of full force or effect and that no order or decision of the Executive Committee whatever shall be questioned, reversed contravened or suspended except by way of appeal as aforesaid.

63 The travelling expenses of any officer of the Association travelling on any of the Association duties or attending Executive Committee Meetings and Convention shall be paid from the Central Funds of the Association but those of the Branches and member group shall be paid from their funds.

64 The President shall have power to co-opt or permit any accredited representative or member of any affiliated branch or member group to an Executive Committee Meeting either as a Visitor or as an expert on a subject to be dealt with at such meeting but otherwise as visitor such member or representative shall not speak or vote on any matter.

65 The President shall have power to bring to order or to expel altogether any member or representative from any meeting of the Association whose conduct is considered not to be in the best interest of the general working of such meeting of the Association.

#### FUND OF THE ASSOCIATION

66 The Fund of the Association shall be derived:—

- (a) from the subscriptions, fines and levies from member groups.
- (b) from affiliation, admission and registration fees from member groups, branches and members
- (c) from donations, contributions, entertainments, collections etc.

67 (a) The annual subscriptions payable by each member group to the Central Treasury shall be the sum of

- (b) The Branch or group shall regulate members individual subscriptions as may be deemed fit by themselves.

68 The funds of the Association shall alone be answerable for any debts and claims against it. No member of the Executive Committee, much as he may be a party to any other, shall be individually liable in respect of any order given or made by or on behalf of the Association, as between himself and the Association.

69 The Fiscal Year of the Association shall be 31st December, of the following year.

## AFFILIATED BRANCH

70 Affiliated Branch shall model all its function, officer, managements etc, like the Mother Association.

71 The Executive Committee may dissolve any Branch which they may consider unnecessary or undesirable prejudicial to the interests of the Association in which case all local officers shall cease to hold office and all money and other property held by the Branch or its officer shall thereupon vest in the Trustees upon Trust for the Association.

## BUSINESS OF THE ASSOCIATION

72 Mutual understanding of common cause necessary to assuage misunderstanding between the Association and the Government.

73 The Association will do all that is possible for the promotion of herbalism in general.

74 The Association shall reserve the right to table its representations to the Government in matters of extreme necessity.

Names	Address	Description
1. F. S. Lando	50, Agarawu Street, Lagos.	(Died 23. 8. 48)
2. J. O. Goyoye	56, Icoluwo Street, Lgcos.	(Suspended 23. 11. 48)
3. I. O. Adonuga	12, Faji Street, Lagos.	Herbalist
4. J. O. Jolaoso	21, Willoughby. Street Lagos,	Herbalist
5. A. O. Akilo	31, Tapa Street, Lagos.	Herbalist
6. L. A. Adesopun	14, Faji Street, Lagos.	Herbalist
7. E. O. Ogundiran	37, Isakgangan Street Lagos.]	Herbalist

Dated the 26th day of March 1947

Witness to the above signatures

.....Book-Keeper  
27, Idumabgo Avenue, Lagos.

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