

**SAMUEL JOHNSON OF YORUBA LAND, 1846-1901:  
RELIGIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY IN A CHANGING  
ENVIRONMENT AND THE MAKING OF A MISSION AGENT**

**By**

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I composed this thesis myself, and that it has not been previously accepted by any other institution for the award of a degree, and that all quotations have been distinguished by quotation mark, and all sources of information have been duly acknowledged.

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Kehinde Olumuyiwa Olabimtan  
September 21, 2009

To  
Bose, Bolarinwa, Olumide and Tinuoluwa,  
my immediate context of life, for the time and  
opportunities they sacrificed so that I may complete this research









BM	Basel Mission
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CUP	Cambridge University Press
EAPH	East Africa Publishing House
GL	Guildhall Library, London
<i>JACT</i>	<i>Journal of African Christian Thought</i>
<i>JAH</i>	<i>Journal of African History</i>
<i>JHSN</i>	<i>Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria</i>
<i>JTSA</i>	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
NAL	National Archives, London
OUP	Oxford University Press
RBGK	Royal Botanical Garden, Kew, London
WMS	Wesleyan Missionary Society

## **ILLUSTRATIONS**

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where it is possible, they should be used eclectically with insights from other disciplines.<sup>33</sup>

### **Religious Interpretation—A New Awareness**

It is ironical that the value missionary archives have acquired over the years as a veritable source of African history has been due to the use to which their contents have been put by the disciplines of secular history and the social sciences. This is not because secular disciplines find value in the archives. It is rather that the disciplines of theology and religious studies, for a long time, did not address themselves to the archives. Not until the mid-1970s did a gradual awareness of their value begin to develop in religious studies and theology. Among the literature that emerged early in this new trend was Louise Piroet's *Black Evangelists*.<sup>34</sup>

Pirouet's work is significant in that it opened a new chapter in understanding African missions, as it focused not on European missionaries but on their African agents. For several years, save when discussions on Christianity in Africa centred on the twentieth century indigenous initiatives, attention on mission Christianity has been focused on the activities of western missionaries often to the neglect of the contributions of their indigenous agents. The impression that has been conveyed, therefore, is that Africans have been responsible only in domesticating the faith after the initial ground-breaking efforts of western missionaries. Where attention has focused on indigenous contributions, as in the scanty biographies that have been done, their activities have been cast within a wider, nationalist agenda than in the planting of Christianity in Africa.<sup>35</sup>

This omission of the contributions of Africans to the evangelization of their peoples betrayed the notion that they were passive recipients of the Christian message from European missionaries. Stephen Neill inadvertently gave voice to this notion in his critique of Henry Venn's idea of the native church. He ruled out the competence of Africans to root Christianity among their people without western missionaries, believing that this accounted for the failure of Crowther's bishopric. On the other hand, for him, the

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<sup>33</sup> Norman Etherington, "Social Theory and the Study of Christian Missions in Africa—South African Case Study", *Africa* 1 (1977): 37.

<sup>34</sup> Louise Piroet, *Black Evangelists: The Spread of Christianity in Uganda 1891-1914* (London: Rex Collins, 1978). The publication of J.V. Taylor, *The growth of the Church in Buganda: An attempt at Understanding*. (London: SCM, 1958), was an earlier publication that addressed the exploits and martyrdom of Baganda evangelists.

<sup>35</sup> Examples are Ayandele's biographies of Rev. James Johnson and Mojola Agbebi, and Robert July's *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Centuries*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1968).



































































































































Samuel Johnson was approaching his seventeenth year when he arrived in Abeokuta in January 1863 to be trained under Mr. Bühler. If Ibadan was an utter contrast to Hastings as a place where indigenous culture had free course under indigenous rulers and the Christians were the underdog,<sup>73</sup> Abeokuta presented a synthetic environment of both indigenous influences and foreign elements brought in by the large presence of Sierra Leone returnees. And as Johnson resided there in the three years from 1863 till 1865, he would have observed the rising anti-European feelings among the people,<sup>74</sup> indicating a precarious form of relationship between them and their foreign benefactors. This would later translate into a serious tragedy for the Abeokuta Mission in the 1867 *Ifole* saga. Happily, Johnson had by then returned to Ibadan and was already employed in the service of the mission.

The major event taking place on his arrival at Abeokuta, however, was the movement of the institution from Ake to Igbein. At Igbein the teacher and his pupils would be far from Townsend's "philistinism" and would freely engage in their intellectual pursuits. Yet, the freedom was at a price. The students had to make their input of manual labour in the construction of the mission houses and the buildings to house the institution.<sup>75</sup>

But equally important was the introduction of classical languages of Greek and Latin to the training programme of the institution as Johnson was enrolling at the institution.<sup>76</sup> It was a special privilege for Johnson's class in particular to be schooled in them. Bühler wrote,

As most of the pupils of the I Class [that is Year 1] were sons of Sierra Leone emigrants they had a good knowledge of english [sic], but to improve it and to lead them deeper into the English language I thought a little Latin would do no harm, but would have many advantages.... I do not regret to have made a trial, some of the pupils have profited by it; they have certainly seen the great difficulties in acquiring such a language and I do not think their little Latin has made them proud. I think it has humbled them.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Hinderer once mentioned in his letter that "these [i.e. Ibadan] people are not restrained by any fear of English power, as is the case in Abeokuta". H. Hinderer to H.Venn, November 29, 1858, CMS C/A2/O/49/38.

<sup>74</sup> In 1859, Bishop Bowen had observed in Lagos and Abeokuta during his Episcopal visit to the Yoruba Mission "a class of young men who have already commenced & will do it more vigorously in future, an opposition to European agents". He then urged the missionaries to "be very careful" and "prudent". G. Bühler to H. Venn, July 2, 1859, CMS C/A2/O24/19.

<sup>75</sup> G. Bühler, Annual Report of Igbein Station, December 31, 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/47.

<sup>76</sup> G. Bühler to I. Chapman, January 30, 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/21.

<sup>77</sup> G. Bühler to I. Chapman, January 30, 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/21.

It is not clear how much Johnson profited from learning the languages considering his advanced age on admission into the institution. It seems because Bühler gave priority to teaching Greek to the younger pupils in his class—they could not be pulled out untimely for service—the young man from Ibadan did not acquire learning in the language.<sup>78</sup> However, his later publication, *The History of the Yorubas*, shows that he acquired sufficient knowledge from Latin and Scripture history. But how did Johnson himself assess the value of his training at Abeokuta? He wrote in his autobiography,

Separation from home, intercourse with students whose moral training was different from mine, the godly advices, warnings, and example of...Rev. G.F. Bühler...told much on me. The spirit was again powerfully at work. The depravity of human nature, and my own nothingness were vivid. I spent hours in private prayers. As if not enough, I obtained the consent of a fellow student...to join me in these prayers, although I did not unburden my mind to him. It was then the Igbein Mission houses...were in building...here we have a private place within its bare walls, to retire for spiritual devotion. Not content with this I used to return sometimes quite alone. At this time I can date my real conversion.<sup>79</sup>

Under Bühler the spiritual and intellectual formation begun at Hastings under Graf and nurtured in Ibadan under Hinderer came to final fruition at Abeokuta. Pietism finally triumphed in bequeathing its legacy to Samuel Johnson, and its virtues of self-effacement and noble suffering would thereafter mark his activities. In this light it is understandable that Johnson did not mention anything about his intellectual gains at the Training Institution, but his later interests and activities would uncover the complex cultural grounding he received there along with this spiritual berth. It is still significant for his time at the institution that while his colony born companions in Sierra Leone were moving into a difficult era of disillusionment, as a result of the incongruence between their experience and their self-understanding as citizens of an English colony, the future historian of the Yoruba was rising into a new cultural awareness of the veritable location of his roots.

Thus the recruitment of “Erugunjinmi” Henry Johnson by David Hinderer to serve with him in the Ibadan Mission brought his son Samuel to his ancestral homeland. There he went through his cultural seasoning in the new environment where Yoruba religions determined social life and ethics. The restiveness of the country also exerted its own

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<sup>78</sup> G. Bühler to I. Chapman, January 30, 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/21.

<sup>79</sup> S. Johnson to Secretaries, January 16, 1885, CMS C/A2/O 1885/67.

influence on him as his mission community suffered privations from the Ijaye war. Much more, through Hinderer and Bühler, he made his religious berth under the continuous influence of German pietism. At this final triumph of pietism, he now entered into the service of the Society at Ibadan, stepping in, as it were, into his father's shoes, he having passed on about a year before Samuel completed his training at Abeokuta.<sup>80</sup> To his ministry encounter with Ibadan social environment we may now turn.

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<sup>80</sup> "Erugunjimi" Henry Johnson died on February 10, 1865. Hinderer wrote of him, "A sincere Christian; a consistent life; & a happy death. Poor Johnson, I deeply mourn his loss. He was a faithful fellow labourer & a friend to me". D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 30, 1865, CMS C/A2/O49/66.

## Chapter 4

### Serving in Ibadan, 1866-1886

Johnson returned to Ibadan at the end of 1865, having completed his training at Abeokuta. A major difference that marked his pre-Abeokuta days in Ibadan and the present one was his father's death, which occurred earlier in the year.<sup>1</sup> All other things considered, the mission he was returning to was no different from the one he left behind in December 1862. The privation that marked the life of the Christian community under David Hinderer was as acute as it had ever been. The end of the Ijaye war had brought no peace to the country. Rather, in its aftermath, Ibadan became the centre of widening ripples of anger in the country, provoking and being provoked by victims of its ambitious warriors. To such a place Johnson returned at the end of 1865 to continue his service at the Kudeti day school.

As in the previous effort to carve a niche for Christianity in the Yoruba country, getting children for the mission schools in Ibadan was an arduous task. Lagos and Abeokuta, for their being home to many Saro returnees and for their association with Europeans, could appeal to the people with the prospects of the encroaching colonial order. But Ibadan was a different case. The mystery of book learning, though intriguing, did not move the people to accede to its novelty. The reason is not far to seek. The new value orientation the missionaries were propagating was too dull for the people's social temperament. Parents particularly saw the school in the same light as the church. It was an instrument of conversion, and the implication of sending their children there was not lost on them. They were going to lose them to Christianity and, consequently, be deprived of their traditional filial piety.

A veritable example of piety Yoruba parents expected from their children was the honour of proper burial after death, but which they feared Christianity would teach them not to give. In Ibadan, a burial ceremony was deemed honourable when it was publicly celebrated with proper rituals and visitors were well entertained with "drumming, singing, dancing, eating, drinking, & firing [of] guns".<sup>2</sup> In the pioneering days of mission in the town, the people performed these ceremonies for nine days if the deceased was a man and

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<sup>1</sup> D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 30, 1865, CMS C/A2/O49/66.

<sup>2</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, March 21, 1968, CMS C/A2/O75/19.

seven days if a woman. It was only when these had been done, even if it meant that survivors would pawn their children to do so, that deceased parents were considered to have been given the proper rites of passage into the world beyond. The fear parents entertained about being deprived this last honour was real, and they did not want to expose their children to a training programme they considered as encouraging impiety. And what was more, they had seen the lacklustre burial ceremonies of Christians and the austere spirituality being espoused by Mr. Hinderer and his agents—Olubi, Allen, Johnson and others—which discouraged manliness in war and fame. In other words, they were aware of the fundamental breach between their own social values and those of this new movement. It was a matter they considered serious enough to make them keep their children away from the school.

On the other hand, some of the resources that were being generated by the mission for training their pupils were directed at the foundation of indigenous society. Their contents indicated an intention to enlighten the pupils by giving explanation to society's values and traditions. But the goal was not to reinforce the existing order for its own sake, even if the mission was interested in making the people Yoruba Christians and not English. It was rather to dislodge the grip of indigenous religions and their attendant traditions on the pupils as well as to lead them into a conscious commitment to the faith of the church, which was considered noble and elevating for them and their society in the long run. In this process myths were explained, sometimes away, and traditions and beliefs were demystified. The case of a young boy described in Johnson's journal aptly demonstrated how successful this could be.

He was attending the school at Oke Aremo in 1880 under R. S. Oyeboode, the schoolmaster, when he was withdrawn to work on the farm. There he soon learned to use his leisure time to gather a number of children together to instruct them in the Christian faith. From time to time he brought the report of his exploits to his catechist, Samuel Johnson, who was gratified by his initiative. On one of such occasions he requested from Johnson a Yoruba primer to teach his pupils on the farm, one of whom was an intelligent slave boy.

[This boy] listened to the story of Sango as related in the Yoruba reading book, and enquired from the reader if really the story is true. He received an answer in the affirmative, and he replied "Then are we so much deceived?" He was also told that all the other idols have a similar history. He pondered over this in his thought for many days, and formed his resolution that he shall have nothing to do with idol worship as long as he

lives. He is now learning to read, and prays regularly....He very much wished to attend our service at home, but he is a slave, and his master pawned him.<sup>3</sup>

Up until the century of missionary activities in the Yoruba country, the Sango cult was a very influential religious system among the people, enjoying the power of impunity whenever duty called. The demands of the ritual necessary to draw out of the ground the supposed thunderbolt often left Sango's victims in heavy debts. In this, as with the other cults, the Christians—missionaries and converts alike—saw nothing but a system of deceit to be subverted and from which people's mind must be freed. The literature designed for teaching did not indiscriminately controvert the existence of the divinities; rather, they provided explanation for their emergence, where such explanations were available, or explained the phenomenon they represented. The story of the Sango cult, which provoked the rational enquiry of the slave boy, was particularly handy in this respect and shows how successful the teaching method could be. The explanations were meant to enlighten the mind, question the validity of the systems, and free the people to embrace Christianity. The success of this approach is evident in the awakening of the slave boy's subsequent habit of prayer and desires for more learning and church attendance.

If the captive situation of this boy shows the limit of Christian formation for some young people, domestic situations could also exert pressures on the availability of the pupils already enrolled at school. Since many of the unconverted would rather keep their wards away, the few who attended school were children of the converts and beneficiaries of the Hinderers' liberality, who were either rescued or brought by their parents to be boarded in their home. And the availability of the children of the converts could still not be guaranteed. Being economically poor, and highly discouraged by Mr. Hinderer from holding slaves, they often needed their children's assistance for domestic chores after school and for work on the farms.<sup>4</sup> Where complications arose on the domestic front, the availability of enrolled pupils could also be threatened as in the case of a man who withdrew his three children from Johnson's school at Kudeti in September 1866.

The man's mother and several of his wives were communicants at the Kudeti church, but he himself had refrained from it. He decided to withdraw from school his

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<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 18, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1882)/23.

<sup>4</sup> D. Hinderer to H. Wright, July 15, 1875, CMS C/A2/O49/80; S. Johnson, Journal Entry, June 16, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/161.

eldest son who had been a boarder with the mission for several years, because he wanted him to learn a trade. The boy's mother was opposed to the plan and wished her son to remain longer at the school. The other women took her side over against their husband's. The battle line was drawn, and the master of the house decided to exercise his prerogative by withdrawing not only his eldest son but the other two children also. The matter was resolved by the senior agents of the mission—Olubi, John and Allen—who visited the man and pleaded that he allowed the two younger children to continue their education if he must withdraw the eldest. The counsel was agreeable to him, and, the following day, the two of them were back at school.<sup>5</sup>

The moment of need often served as an opportune time for the agents to ask for the parents to enrol their children in school. Since they were the purveyors of the new skill of literacy and members of society were appreciating its value, they often used the opportunity of their being consulted for counsel to advise parents to enrol their children in school so that they would be available to carry out their correspondence.<sup>6</sup> But both the agents and the parents often knew that more was at stake than acquiring literacy skill; yet the agents could still whet their appetite to enrol their children at school. It was in this connection that Johnson advised a friend of the mission who lived at Kudeti.

Daniel Olubi had persuaded the man to cast his lot with the Christians, and in response he started attending Sunday services regularly. But he still maintained his annual traditional religious festival during which he entertained his friends. Using the story of Lazarus and Dives and “our state in the other world”, Johnson advised him to break with his past religious practices. He then pressed on to ask him to enrol his children in the school:

I...pointed to him the advantage of giving up his children for a Christian education now [that] they are young, as it will make them morally good;— that they may in time be his teacher,— and that this is the treasure he can bequeath to them. He thanked me for my advice; and told me his fears [for] his son of 4 who is already growing too wicked; that he shot a boy of his age with an arrow about his eye some few days ago, and bruised another. I assured him that early education can make a good impression on him, & that he might eventually grow a better boy.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, September 25, 1866, CMS C/A2/O75/18.

<sup>6</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, May 8, 1866, CMS C/A2/O75/17.

<sup>7</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, October 24, 1874, CMS C/A2/O58/3.

Johnson was using the need of the man, as he perceived it, to encourage him to embrace Christianity. At the same time he ventured to use his prospect's felt need to see his children grow into decent persons to stimulate his interest in placing them in school. But there was no resonance in their discussion as the man was engrossed in his own "innocent life", evidently concerned that his child was showing aberrant behaviour so early in life. Obviously he was aware that giving up his children for school was as good as losing them culturally.

To the irregular attendance of pupils at school, as a challenge to the mission, may be added the need to maintain and repair church buildings and mission houses. This need placed demands on the teachers whose time was consequently taken up in much manual labours.<sup>8</sup> And so it was a demanding task that Johnson entered into, like the other schoolmasters, when he agreed to serve with the Ibadan Mission in 1866. Fortunately for him, the unpromising situation was compensated by a more interesting engagement with people in itinerant preaching.

### **Itinerant Preaching**

David Hinderer established the tradition of itinerant preaching in Ibadan when he began his work among the people in 1853. He assigned the same task to Henry Johnson and William Allen when it became necessary to retain them for service in Ibadan rather than send them into the interior. After the untimely death of Henry Johnson, William Allen continued the tradition. By the time Samuel Johnson returned to Ibadan on completing his training at Abeokuta, Allen had been joined in street preaching by two other agents, Daniel Olubi and Thomas John, another Sierra Leone returnee Hinderer recruited in 1859.<sup>9</sup> Towards the end of Johnson's first month as a teacher at Kudeti station, Daniel Olubi co-opted him to go out with him on one of these preaching exercises, Allen and John being unavailable.<sup>10</sup> Johnson found the experience interesting and soon indicated his willingness to be part of the itinerating team.<sup>11</sup> It was the beginning of an adventure that would bring him into regular conversation with the people on the Christian faith and Yoruba religions and culture.

After four years of tutelage, Johnson eventually chose the Onikoyi quarter as his base for itinerant preaching. He had been attracted there a few years earlier on his way to

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<sup>8</sup> D. Hinderer to H. Wright, July 15, 1875, CMS C/A2/O49/80.

<sup>9</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, March 22, 1870.. CMS C/A2/O75/25.

<sup>10</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, January 23, 1866, CMS C/A2/O75/17.

<sup>11</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, February 6, 1866, CMS C/A2/O75/17.

Areemo with his senior schoolmaster, Olubi. The quarter being a well populated neighbourhood on a highway lined with *Odan* trees under which the young and the old passed their time in idle chatter, the two of them considered it suitable for street preaching. From time to time, after Sunday school, Johnson retired there for preaching with Mr. Thomas Williams. Ikoyi, the people's hometown, was a premier provincial town of the defunct empire. But they had been forced to move south in the aftermath of the dissolution of the empire, an event in which they were active participants as powerful warriors. Their precarious position during the revolution was further compromised by the internal politics of succession to the Onikoyi's royal office, which became to the combatants at Ilorin and Oyo another subject of power struggle that led to the desertion of the town.<sup>12</sup> Like Ijaye people, they were now scattered all over the country with some of them living within the same quarter in Ibadan. There they kept together by appointing their own *Bàlẹ*. Johnson was aware of this history and saw them as "a very superstitious, wild, and obdurate set of people."<sup>13</sup> He would not find such people with injured pride and cohesive community life in exile an easy nut to crack.

From the first day of his mission among them they made it clear to him that it was no use trying to convert them to Christianity. Johnson's message of God's love did not resonate with the war aspiration of many of his young listeners there, who often used it as their reason against becoming Christians. After a few weeks of regular preaching, a young prospect who for a time attended the church as a result of Johnson's preaching eventually dropped out. The elderly also had their own counterpoints against Johnson's message. One of them, an Ifa priest, argued the seniority of the indigenous religions to Christianity. In a hierarchically graded society like the Yoruba nation, such seniority implies superiority.

After several visits to Ikoyi Quarter, Johnson became a familiar face in the neighbourhood as he also began to identify friendly faces and opposing countenances. He put his growing familiarity with the people to advantage by visiting them in their compounds. On a day he left his companion, Williams, in the street with three of their "obstinate hearers" and visited a compound whose headman had gone to war, he was welcomed with the question "if the message from God to them today is favourable". Obviously, the novelty of his message, reasonable to the elderly but confounding to the

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<sup>12</sup> S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: CSS Bookshops, 1921), pp. 219,220.

<sup>13</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Extracts for the Years 1870 to 1873, CMS C/A2/O58/1.

young, had cast him as a bearer of messages from God. As they would often ask their traditional priests if their divination portends good or evil, even if Johnson was proving to be of a different order, they could not but respond to him as they would do to their own. And in a troubled age when society was at its extremity and a new religious movement was making its inroad, it mattered to the people whether the message of its preachers would further ruffle their comfort zones or calm their anxious fears. Happily, Johnson's response on the occasion was affirmative: "Yes...it is the same as usual; a gracious invitation to partake of life eternal." Their response was no less gratifying to Johnson too,

Many left their work, and gathered around me to hear. I addressed them from Ps. 121. [sic] and dwelt specially on verses 3,4, to allay their fears with the precious promises of protection offered if we can at all "look up to the hills from whence cometh our help." The sighs, [and] the shaking of heads show an impression of conviction.<sup>14</sup>

But it was not all success that day. For while he held his audience captive with his preaching in the family compound, Williams was locked in a rowdy encounter with cynical youths in the street. Some railed at his message and others laughed it to scorn. Johnson came on the scene to restore order, but it was clear that the young men would not give in that day.

However, after several months of preaching, a bright prospect of conversion emerged in one of the regular, elderly listeners, Aṭeṛe. Aṭeṛe might not have been hearing the Christian message for the first time from Johnson and Williams as he was related to one of the converts in Ibadan, the late John Adeyemi Oyan. On the day Johnson chose his text from Psalm 1:4-6, he elaborated on the notion of wickedness and the end of the wicked as it is differently understood in Yoruba popular culture and in Judeo-Christian tradition. He concluded his sermon with the encouragement to his "very attentive" audience of some 250 listeners "to cast their lot with the righteous to escape the great judgement day". His choice of the text was certainly informed by the violence of the age and its attendant culture of impunity. It was an urgent concern whose import his audience could not have missed. A respondent said after the preaching, "Yes, there is a God, and may we be enabled to serve him!" But Johnson and his colleague considered Aṭeṛe's replies to be more reasonable and seized the opportunity to accompany him home and further impressed the message on him.

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<sup>14</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, March 2, 1873, CMS C/A2/O58/1.

To show him the foolishness of idolatry, I compared it to dolls which children nurse, although they knew it could neither eat nor drink. So are all those who sacrifice to gods of wood and stone. He was deeply impressed, and his reply was, *Mo gbọ*. (I hear)<sup>15</sup>

It would appear that the discussion with Aṭeṛe moved away from the obvious culture of violence in the country, which the people, either as victims or as assailants, would readily understand as wickedness. Aṭeṛe could easily exonerate himself from that, having done with warfare, assuming he had ever been involved in it. But in Johnson's reckoning, the broader understanding of "wickedness" in Judeo-Christian tradition would be relevant to him as he was not a worshipper of the God and father of Jesus of Nazareth. He was rather an adherent of Yoruba religions whose cults were adorned with icons repugnant to Judeo-Christian spirituality, hence the exhortation on "the foolishness of idolatry". And although he seems to have concurred with the preachers that following his inherited religious traditions amounted to wickedness, his agreement to that position must be seen as unique. For the overwhelming contention between the preachers and the indigenous Yoruba peoples for much of the nineteenth century was the validity of the indigenous religions, with their iconographic representations of the divinities, vis-à-vis Christianity. Some of Johnson's listeners at Ikoyi quarter repeatedly assailed him with the argument that their ancestral faiths were the legacies of their forebears to which they must prove true if they would not incur their wrath.

Four months after the first personal discussion with the preachers, Aṭeṛe was again at the preaching forum at which Johnson addressed his audience from Ecclesiastes 1:2. As in the last encounter, Johnson and his companion had an interesting discussion with him after the message, during which he confessed that he often pondered over their messages. But he explained that he had been restrained by old age from responding actively. Johnson explained away his excuse with the question whether he was too old to die and followed up his negative response with the "Parable of the labourers in the vineyard". Aṭeṛe thereafter promised to set an example by attending church services the following Sunday. To the joy of the preachers he fulfilled his promise; but the whole Ikoyi quarter rose up against him and frightened him out of his audacity.<sup>16</sup>

That did not signal the end of religious conversations between Johnson and Aṭeṛe, but old age became the main excuse of Johnson's elderly prospect for not becoming a

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<sup>15</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Extracts for the Years 1870 to 1873, CMS C/A2/O58/1.

<sup>16</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Extracts for the Years 1870 to 1873, CMS C/A2/O58/1.

Christian. In this, Atere was representative of the older generation who often offered old age as their reason for not embracing the message of the preachers even when their content appeared to resonate with their aspiration for peace and order in the country. They considered themselves too old to learn a new religion whose rites the young still had the versatility of mind to comprehend. Their reason may not be considered escapist although it might be so with Atere whose heart was with the preachers but had been frightened away from the Christian community. But for many of the elderly like him, a change in religious profession would necessitate the transition from orality to literacy. This was the only way they would benefit from the new faith whose mysteries could only be unlocked from the written word—the Bible, catechism, and locally generated primers. To start all over by embracing a new faith would have been an arduous task at life’s sunset. Only the most persuaded, even most desperate, as Mele’s story would later reveal, would be painstaking to do that.

In the face of Atere and his colleagues’ failure to take the leap of faith Johnson so much desired, the evangelist concluded that many of these elders at Ikoyi quarter considered the hours he spent among them in street preaching as “times of amusement”. But one was candid enough to tell him:

[T]hat really we speak the truth, but that it is a fruitless exertion on our part, no body will hear us; and that he is sorry we shun[ned] his advice, as he urged us to desist from such an arduous task: for the Yorubas are too covetous [sic], that they will not embrace a religion which admits no eating and drinking ceremonies. This, said he, is his advice, and we thought he hated us.<sup>17</sup>

The young, on their part, were more difficult and would hardly give thought to Johnson’s preaching. They considered the message fit for the elderly, people who had had their fill of life’s pleasures. They were yet to take their turn at relishing them. And so both the elderly and the young preserved their communal cohesiveness with excuses.<sup>18</sup> But their application of force to stop Atere was an indication that Johnson’s religion was in fact considered a threat to this cohesiveness.

It is interesting that early in his itinerant preaching Johnson was showing a good grasp of the communication skill germane to his Yoruba context of service. A little distance from Ikoyi quarters he addressed the market women by drawing, not from the

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<sup>17</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 23, 1873, CMS C/A2/O58/1.

<sup>18</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, March 27, 1874, CMS C/A2/O58/2.

Christian scriptures, but from one of their local sayings: *Ori iba mo ibusun a tun ile ibe se*, meaning, “Should one know one’s place of [final] rest, one would better prepare it”. Johnson was sensitive to the market environment where it was virtually impossible to sustain the attention of buyers and sellers while reading from the Bible. In fact, reading from the Bible in such a place would have been exotic as to become counterproductive. One of the people’s succinct and direct sayings would do a better job of engaging their interest. But, much more, drawing from their own corpus of wisdom would furnish a familiar ground on which the preacher could establish a correspondence with his listeners and confront them with his new religious challenge to give thought to the after life: “Prepare to meet your God”.<sup>19</sup>

In another encounter with an *Akewi*, a Yoruba bard, who under the influence of a liquor spirit was singing the praise of a native agent, Johnson found the opportunity to draw from the local moral corpus to address his listeners. The fellow under the influence of alcohol argued against Johnson’s remonstrance to desist from the habit of drinking or eating to excess. Johnson then explained to him a proverb in circulation, “*Èsu yio je, èsu yio mu, èsu yio lo, nibo ni atampoko yio lo?*” “The locust will eat, the locust will drink, the locust will go away, but where will the grasshopper go?” He paraphrased it in the poetry,

After the joys of the earth  
 After its songs and mirth  
 After its hours of light  
 After its dreams so bright— What then?

John Peel has indicated that in contrast to the “polemical euhemerism” for which they are well known in their effort to create a niche for Christianity in Ibadan the agents of the CMS also appropriated “the best of Yoruba tradition”. In this Peel finds Olubi’s sermon of 1898 at the ordination of F.L. Akiele, Johnson’s colleague, as most eloquent in this cultural appropriation. Olubi dug into history and placed before the ordinand the tradition of the Eso military class in the defunct Oyo Empire as a model of loyalty deserving his emulation as a minister. Against the background of history and present reality of a people under a new imperial authority, Peel rightly sees Olubi’s sermon as “a move from the margins of society closer to its centre, and ...at last to appropriate something of the values of a past which [the Christian community] once deemed deeply

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<sup>19</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 12, 1874, CMS C/A2/O58/2.

inimical to it”.<sup>20</sup> What appears not to have been acknowledged is that Samuel Johnson, Olubi’s protégé, had been in the tradition of this appropriation for nearly three decades when he began to venture into the public arena to communicate the gospel.

Johnson’s creative appropriation of tradition for evangelistic purposes shows, at heart, that in the years following his arrival from Sierra Leone, young though he was then, he had been trading his fledgling Creole identity for a new one as a Yoruba. This transformation was, in part, the fruit of his first four-year residence in Ibadan, which may give the impression that his venturesome appropriation of Yoruba culture was intuitively motivated. But one wonders if the confidence with which he did so was not rather a result of his studentship under F.G. Bühler at Abeokuta, for whom learning in the mother tongue, and unavoidably from the inherent genius of the speakers, was a requirement *sine qua non*. This cultural conversion of Johnson shows the other side of the liberal education being offered by protestant missionary societies in the nineteenth century.

The engagement of their training materials with indigenous traditions in their various forms was as affirmative of indigenous cultures as it was critical of their religious traditions. Perhaps nowhere was this most evident as in the high premium missionaries placed on reducing local languages into writing, teaching in the mother tongue, developing primers, and translating the Bible, Sunday school materials, and other literature— as in Hinderer’s translation of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*— into the languages of the people. In the mid-nineteenth century CMS environment in particular, the honorary secretary of the society, Mr. Henry Venn, shaped the policy of the Society in this respect. He impressed on the missionaries overseas the goal of their endeavour as the establishment of indigenous churches in communion with the catholic Church but distinctly stamped with authentic marks of “national customs, notions, and tendencies”.<sup>21</sup> Johnson’s ministerial vocation would reveal the ambivalence inherent in attaining this goal, while his later intellectual achievement as a Yoruba historian would reveal the depth of his cultural conversion under the influence of the missionaries.

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<sup>20</sup> John Peel, “Two Pastors and their *Histories*— Samuel Johnson and C.C. Reindorf,” in *The Recovery of the West African Past: African Pastors and African History in the Nineteenth Century— C. C. Reindorf and Samuel Johnson*, ed. Paul Jenkins (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1998), 78-79.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Williams, “‘Not Transplanting’: Henry Venn’s Strategic Vision,” in *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, ed., Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids/Surrey, UK: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing/Curzon Press, 2000), 148.

## Encounter with Yoruba Social Values

The dissonance between the social values of the Yoruba country and those being espoused by the mission became an impediment to be overcome in the verbal exchanges between Johnson and his evangelistic prospects. The same incongruence also dogged the practice of Christianity and that of Yoruba religions, the latter finding expression in physical imageries, laborious rituals and blood-spattered sacrifices in contrast to the largely cerebral faith of mission Christianity. The consequent energetic exchanges between Johnson and his audiences often assumed various forms— agreement, objection, and appeals to history and tradition. Although the conversations often began with Johnson’s sermons, the audience eventually determined the subjects of engagement as they responded to the evangelist. Here Johnson often argued his point of view on the basis of rational judgement, a method his audience often found difficult to match being unschooled in it. But Johnson’s winning arguments did not always result into the conversion of his opponents to Christianity; for, ultimately, the issue with them was not the logic of argument, even though this sometimes provoked their introspection. The issue was rather faithfulness to the faith of their forebears and the efficacy of religious systems in transcending obstacles to the good life. Johnson’s encounter with two young men by an “*orisa shed*” may be appropriate in this respect.

The two men were in a happy mood and were enjoying themselves when Johnson approached them with the intention to make known to them “the way and means to true happiness in time and eternity”. He addressed them at length while their number increased.

One of them listened to me with marked attention and smiled and [applauded] my pointing out the discontentment & unhappiness which marked our career in life, and especially as the consequence of heathenism. One or two of them offered to make the general excuse that idolatry is the religion of their fore-fathers to which they were tutored from infancy, and which is an obligation imposed on them as dutiful children. No, I said to them, this is not a matter of obligation, nor should you risk your future life for a religion which you are convinced is a false one. It is remarkable, I said, that only in this you are stiff, but in the introduction and adoption of foreign custom and dress, you seem to forget your father’s [sic] simplicity of manners and diet. And again, you are more privileged than your fathers in hearing the gospel, therefore they will be your judges. *Ōto ni, ōto ni*, (tis true, tis true) they said, and one of them promised to come to listen at our services.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, September 9, 1874, CMS C/A2/O58/3.

It is remarkable that Johnson did not just apply logic to refute the objection of his hearers but entered the ground they prepared to contest the validity of their argument. It is equally significant that he did not condemn their fathers but rather concerned himself with his audience. He knew that they lived in the light they had. And this is confirmed by his acknowledgement of their modesty where their now professed faithful descendants had become vain in eating and drinking to excess and in adopting uncritically foreign culture and tradition. Johnson was doing two things at the same time with his critique. On the one hand, he was pointing out their inconsistencies in feigning traditional piety when, in fact, they had betrayed its essence. On the other hand, he was seeking to enlighten them that the faith of their forebears was not a final phase in their religious itinerary, but a stage in the unfolding revelation of religious knowledge and truth. In Johnson's reckoning, their refusal to respond positively to the present opportunity being offered them would not earn them the commendation they thought their forebears would accord them for rejecting Christianity. For although they pretended that they were rejecting the Christian message because of their loyalty to the faith of their fathers, they had in reality denied the essence of those religions.

In method, Johnson adopted the same selective response to the religious and cultural legacies of the ancestors as his listeners had done. He denounced their religion; but, expectedly as a pietist Christian, he extolled their ethics. Yet, he succeeded in turning the argument around to the defeat of his audience. This is because he opted for a comparatively more rigorous selective response to the past where his audience had settled for the easy and the convenient. Knowing that in this he occupied a higher moral ground, they could not but agree that he was right.

In another encounter, two years later, Johnson's listeners articulated as their reason for refraining from embracing Christianity the perceived incongruence between the prevailing social values in Ibadan and those that Christians were commending to society. At the palace of another displaced royal family, Petu Osin, he visited members of his congregation who were bereaved and used the opportunity to open up a discussion with other members of the household on "the necessity of seeking the salvation of their souls".

"Ah", the man replied, "we cannot make noise in the world if we be Christians, for the Christians are quiet people, averse to fame and worldly honour[?]. Here we commenced, and the conversation was so warm...He

found me so ready to refute his weak arguments, and to be bringing before him plainly the subject of his soul's salvation.<sup>23</sup>

Johnson won the argument in his characteristic logical approach, but the question of survival in a precarious world was a fundamental issue at the root of society's religion and culture. His host was not done with him; he wanted him to provide an answer to this predicament:

...[H]e offered me a sit [sic], and begged my attention to a very important objection to their embracing Christianity. He said, "To have one wife is a dangerous state, next to living and dying childless. It is commonly said, "If you have a wife by whom you get children who all die in infancy (which the Yorubas call Abiku children, who are supposed to have evil spirits or companions) the remedy is to get a second wife and if you have a dozen wives, and each have a child, then you have at your decease many children to mourn you." My argument [,] I said to him [,] is about your soul, and if you have a dozen wives or more, they also are concerned to seek the salvation of their souls.<sup>24</sup>

In sticking to the abstract concept of "salvation of the soul" in conversation with people for whom reality must be incarnated in flesh and blood for it to be understood, Johnson appears to be oblivious of the breach in his communication with his prospects. The result was that he could not connect the message he was preaching with their quest for immortality through longevity of life and extension of existence through procreation. In the nineteenth century Yoruba country where life expectancy was low, society was unsettled, and religious institutions had been grossly undermined, the quest for survival and for meaning could not but become the crux of human existence. Ordinarily the Yoruba universe, in its religious and social systems, seems to provide meaning in the linkage between generations—the unborn, the living and the dead—and in encouraging procreation. In troubled times when the foundation of society had been badly shaken and old answers to life's predicaments did not seem adequate for the present, human frustration with existence becomes urgent. And what could a people for whom childlessness is the ultimate tragedy of life do when they are so confronted by the urgency of life? Johnson appears not to have appreciated this deep sense of insecurity as lying at the roots of his people's multiplicity of wives and children. Rather, he saw the process as sheer aberration as he reported, "I...gave him some practical proofs to show the moral inconvenience of polygamy".

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<sup>23</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 5, 1876, CMS C/A2/O58/6.

<sup>24</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 5, 1876, CMS C/A2/O58/6.

The people knew the inconveniences of multiplicity of wives; at least the *Obatala* cult, one of the Yoruba religious systems, discourages it.<sup>25</sup> What the people wanted to know, as the conversation continued, was whether the faith Johnson was introducing to them would guarantee life. In this regard another female listener asked him “if our religion admits taking medicines for bodily ailments or we simply trust God.” Whatever her fears might have been, Johnson’s response could not but be assuring when he told her, “We do both together”.<sup>26</sup> The surprise in this encounter is that in spite of the incongruence between their approaches to salvation, in this world or in the next, the people were nonetheless fascinated by Johnson’s novel ideas. An observer was alarmed that Johnson’s host was absorbed in thought over his sermon and warned him, “[“]Your look betray[s] you to be serious in thought but take care what you do”. Yet another elderly observer who had had interaction with Christians commended his message.<sup>27</sup>

The novelty of Johnson’s message to his audience was not limited to the difference between the popular ethics of his time and those he and his colleagues were commending to the people. It also bordered on the difference in their understanding of history. In June 1877, Ibadan was plunged into another protracted warfare that engulfed all the sub-ethnic groups of the Yoruba country. Against repeated remonstrance from his fellow war chiefs and the agents of the mission, Are Latosa remained obdurate and insisted on launching the war to end all wars in the Yoruba country.<sup>28</sup> Johnson well understood the times and could not but address the issue of war as they were brought forward by his listeners in his evangelistic encounters with them. Could a people who had known no other world but one that was perpetually at war imagine a better one? Months after the commencement of hostility, Johnson was on another round of itinerant preaching in the now melancholic town and,

[e]ntered a compound in my district; and as I knew nobody there, I asked for the Bāle. He was not in, and the young man who answered me, asked me politely to take my seat, when he observed that I am [sic] not in a hurry to pass. As the general talk now is [sic] nothing but about the war, the subject was immediately introduced. I told him the cause of it, especially of the unjustifiable war we so often have in our country, from Jas. 5:1. and enlarged upon its awful consequences. The whole ...compound were nearly gathered together to hear me, and they heard with wonder God’s promises that “men shall beat their swords into ploughshares & c.” One of

<sup>25</sup> Bolaji Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba belief*, rev. ed. (Ikeja, Nigeria: Longman, 1996), 72.

<sup>26</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 5, 1876, CMS C/A2/O58/6.

<sup>27</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 5, 1876, CMS C/A2/O58/6.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 413-416.

them asked, “Can it be so?” I said to him, “My word shall not return unto me void” saith God. I invited them to the house of God, which we see from a distance & left them.<sup>29</sup>

The frustrations of war became the means to induce people to embrace Christianity, but the new world Johnson portrayed was still a distant country his listeners could not imagine even as being desirable. Many had never known in their lifetime an alternative society where peace was the norm.

Still, in the same environment of war and uncertainty Johnson’s itinerant preaching could be seen as a distraction while his Christian understanding of history could be disturbing. By 1879, in the face of Ibadan’s terrible losses at the raging theatre of belligerence to the northeast, no other issue engaged the anxious concern of the people more than war. Ibadan was evidently at its extremity. Every able-bodied young man was expected to be at the seat of war or, otherwise, in the field farming; none was expected to be seen idling in the streets. But the agents continued their itinerant preaching, nonetheless. In the distress of the times an elderly man was alarmed at Johnson’s teaching about the end of the world, but not until he had first scolded the evangelist whom he considered not to have ordered his priority right.

Went out this morning for open air preaching....At my third stand, an old man said, “This is not the time for preaching; the time is hard, and your first business should be to see about the restoration of peace: for, if there was war you could not have come to reside in the town.” True, I said, but I am warning you against the times of greater tribulation for sinners which God’s word expresses as “such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” “When shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: when he shall gather his elect from the four winds from one end of the earth to the other: Before him shall be gathered all nations for judgement and each shall have to render account for what he has done in the body.” With breathless silence he listened as if alarmed while I read to him the above passages, and I believe we parted with a serious impression left on him. May the seed sown this day bring forth fruit in due time.<sup>30</sup>

The agents at Ibadan enjoyed privileges with the chiefs, one of which was that they often exempted them from some of the demands they sometimes placed on their people in times of emergency. Moreover, the Christian band had become recognised as a subculture in the country, well known for their idiosyncrasies— anti-war sentiments,

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<sup>29</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 22, 1878, CMS C/A2/O58/10.

<sup>30</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, August 14, 1879, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/160.

uncompromising religiosity and rigorous ethics. Although these were at a disjuncture with the prevailing norms of society, they were well respected. Their listeners at open air preaching, even when they disagreed with their point of view and could try to nauseate them, often could not but accord them respect for their conviction. Against this background the sharp reprimand Johnson received from the elderly man for not ordering his priority right was unique. And his earnestness in doing so reveals the degree of social anxiety at work in the town as a result of the war that had now shocked their seeming indifference to missionary activities and brought them into a critical questioning of missionaries' present relevance. Johnson himself would acknowledge the response as representative of the prevailing attitude at this time:

I must here remark that this man speak[s] out the general mind of the public. The excitement and the distress caused by the war are so distracting that few would listen to the message of salvation. Our volunteer preachers, especially the young men who usually go out to farm villages regularly, were obliged to suspend their work for the present; and it is wisdom not to give any occasion for persecution by attracting the attention of the public on them, the services of every young man being required in the field against the common enemy.<sup>31</sup>

It is remarkable that Johnson's response to the man was no less vehement, even when he knew his critic was speaking the mind of the people. He found an answer to his challenge in the frightening apocalypse of Jesus which could not but intensify the poor man's anguish. In telling the old man, "You have seen nothing yet!" he administered shock therapy on him, the effectiveness of which may be seen in the "serious impression" he consequently left on him. But it may not be out of place to wonder if Johnson himself was not responding to this elderly listener out of shock and desperation.

The alternative available to the evangelist was to bring a message of consolation and encouragement to the people; but he did not consider this as the appropriate response in this instance. And it would seem he was not being arbitrary. Neither was he merely seeking to justify his activities. On the contrary, it would seem his choice was informed by his knowledge of the people and the times in which they were living. After nearly thirty years of missionary activities in which both missionaries and respectable citizens of Ibadan had made fruitless efforts to curtail the restiveness of the war mongers in the town, its social and military violence remained unabated. In fact, Hinderer had shown that Ibadan's warlike spirit would not capitulate to peaceful remonstrance. And his experience

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<sup>31</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, August 14, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/160.

had taught him that neither would its leaders acknowledge anyone as worth anything until he or she could by his or her sinew affirm his or her dignity.<sup>32</sup> And twenty years before things now came to a head, at the outbreak of the Ijaye war, he remarked that “I have often thought & said, the Yorubas will yet want afflictions, before they can receive the humble gospel now offered to them”.<sup>33</sup> Johnson, as one of Hinderer’s protégés and successors, no doubt shared this understanding about the people among whom he was working. It was therefore, for him, a matter of duty to stand up for once and make the people appreciate the opportunity eluding them in their self-inflicted troubles.

Indeed, Johnson’s approach may be understood as intentional when viewed against the background of his observation that the public anxiety about the war troubles was already evoking some serious thought among the people about the message of the preachers. He remarked with optimism,

[W]e believe that even these war troubles are preparing the way for the reception of the gospel in a wider scale. Many do make this confession; “If we had listened to you, we would not have been involved in such a war, and might escape this trouble.” This gives us a text to tell them of the moral good they have lost by rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ which teaches peace and concord, and brotherly unity as a temporal good, and hereafter the salvation of the soul from eternal death.<sup>34</sup>

His response, seemingly matching violence with violence, was therefore a hammering of the red-hot iron on the anvil of difficult times. He knew that Ibadan would not easily be won over to settle down peacefully; but in its hour of deep anguish its attention could be drawn to the possibility of attaining this end. Had Johnson backed away from his preaching plan for the day because of the reprimand, he would have missed the opportunity offered by the distress to let the people know that their situation could be worse if they did not opt for better social values.

Still, if some were indifferent to Johnson’s message, and others fascinated by its novelty, still others were disturbed by its content and did not know what to make of his vocation. A conversation with a young warrior reveals another aspect of Christianity the people perceived to be strange.

In course of conversation he asked how are we getting our livelihood, who are not known as traders or farmers! I explained to him, how associations

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<sup>32</sup> D. Hinderer to H. Venn, May 25, 1856, CMS C/A2/O49/28.

<sup>33</sup> D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 19, 1860, CMS C/A2/O49/40.

<sup>34</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, August 14, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/160.

are formed, and money raised by good Christian people in England to support missionaries for their benefit. He again asked, 'What in money or goods do you send to those who are thus contributing yearly to your support?['] I tried to show him that it is the love of God constraining them, to rescue the lost of Adam's race by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to support this cause that they are thus contributing liberally of their money and lives. This is quite foreign to his idea, hence he replied, "I can understand if a man trades with his money and gains, but to let out money without profit I cannot reconcile[']. I then said to him, for instance if it pleased the Lord to change your heart, that might be a gain to those who support the cause of God. Being a young warrior he thought it quite below his dignity to embrace a religion which will render him despicable in the eyes of his companions, and was silent and indifferent.<sup>35</sup>

Indifference, amazement, enthusiasm and fears were various responses Johnson received from his listeners in his itinerant preaching rounds as he addressed ethical issues. It is not clear how many of his numerous listeners joined the Christian community as a result of his street preaching. However, the reality of the unfavourable environment of Ibadan to the values Johnson cherished came vividly to him in the eventual conversion of a notorious neighbour of the mission at Kudeti.

### **The Conversion of Mele**

In 1869, the third year of Johnson's service as a schoolmaster at Kudeti, Mr. and Mrs. Hinderer returned to England. Olubi became the head of the Ibadan Mission with his base at Kudeti after a brief stint at Ogunpa station, now under the leadership of James Okuseinde. William S. Allen was assigned the charge of Aremo. Along with Samuel Johnson who was already engaged at Kudeti under Olubi as schoolmaster, Francis Akiele and Robert Oyebode were respectively assigned to Ogunpa and Aremo as schoolmasters. As the missionary couple was forced out by Mrs. Hinderer's ill health, it was feared that their sudden exit could lead to the collapse of the mission. Hence Mr. Hinderer had to send his wife ahead to England and assign responsibilities before his own exit. Subsequent events in the life of the mission turned out right. Things did not just continue as they were under the Hinderers. In the new dispensation of purely indigenous supervision by Olubi, the mission cut deeper into its relationship with Ibadan chiefs more than Hinderer had done hitherto. Olubi regularly apprised them with developments in the mission and took time to advise them on issues that pertained to their welfare and those of

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<sup>35</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 1, 1877, CMS C/A2/O58/8.

the town.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, he readily organized the agents and the converts to honour them with visits, particularly as significant occasions required.<sup>37</sup> It yielded the mission a good dividend of trust and confidence of the rulers of the town. The leverages of goodwill and influence that accrued to them were also significant for a mission struggling against material poverty and the potential assaults of their unconverted critics.<sup>38</sup> One such assault came early in 1873 from the mission's old and implacable foe at Kudeti, Mele.

By the 1870s, Mele was one of the few survivors of Ibadan's military politics that began early in the 1830s. He had seen the wars that brought many of its great men wealth and influence, and he had savoured the same privileges and pleasures. From the early days of the founding of Ibadan he had taken part valiantly in the stirring events of his time. He rose through the ranks to become, for about twenty years, the second man of authority in the town after the head chief. In the typical pattern of Ibadan's ruthless politics, he fell into bad times after a fire incident destroyed his house. What remained of his property was plundered, and he was banished to the outskirts of town as the law required of those who proved so careless.<sup>39</sup> Thus consigned to the margins of physical and political spaces in a town where he had once been a noble, he continued to grow bitter and insecure by the day.

From its inception in 1853, the mission at Kudeti became the target of Mele's frustration and anger.<sup>40</sup> He had a case against it. His wives were becoming members of the church, and he accused them of defying his authority in consequence. This occasioned a deepening of his insecurity. In a characteristic fit of anger, on Easter Monday 1855, he beat his wife Aina, who was a candidate for baptism, for daring to speak with one of the men at the church. Apparently, Aina had not been a good woman hitherto, but Mr. Hinderer took time to remonstrate with Mele that "her desire to serve God was just what was calculated to make her better". Thus pacified at last, he promised not to beat her

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<sup>36</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entries, August 11 1870, CMS C/A2/O75/26; Journal Entry, July 24, 1872, CMS C/A2/O75/27.

<sup>37</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entries, September 30, October 15, and November 11, 1870, CMS C/A2/O75/26; Journal Entries, October 8 and 9, 1872, CMS C/A2/O75/27.

<sup>38</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, August 11, 1870, CMS C/A2/O75/26; Journal Entry, September 16, 1872, CMS C/A2/O75/27; Journal Entry, June 1, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/28; S. Johnson, Journal Entry, May 23, 1874, CMS C/A2/O58/2.

<sup>39</sup> D. Olubi to J. Maser, March 11, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/11.

<sup>40</sup> D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, Easter Monday, 1855, CMS C/A2/O49/111; D. Olubi, Journal Entry, February 23, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/28.

again.<sup>41</sup> Eighteen years on, Mele found occasion to accuse the mission to the war chief, the *Are Ona Kakanfo*.

Early in February 1873, he laid three charges against the mission. First, he accused them of driving his son Andrew Hethersett Lanionu away to “Oibo country”. Second, he accused the Christians of giving out his daughters in marriage without his consent. His third allegation was that the Christians, particularly Johnson, were trying to take his wife away from him and therefore pleaded with the chief to forbid her from going to church. He then threatened that if the chief did not so forbid his wife he would apply force, attack the Christians, shoot half of them, and thereafter kill himself. He then pleaded again that the chief be pleased to send for his corpse in the tradition of a fallen general.

The mission had an unusual confidant in the *Are*, who did not take Mele. Nevertheless, he sent for Olubi to inform him about the allegations. The head of the mission denied the charges and explained the disconnection of Lanionu from the mission as being a result of his violation of the “seventh commandment”. Lanionu stood for Mele at the marriage of his daughter and all that was given for the marriage was handed over to Mele. He equally refuted the allegation against Johnson. The *Are* then concluded Mele’s action as senility from old age, *Ogbo de Onse aran*. He then promised to tell Mele to allow his people to attend church, “for I cannot forbid any body from going to the house of God.” The following day, the *Are* had “a long but...pleasant conversation with him”: He assured him of the truthfulness of Christianity...and that it is far superior to their Mohammedan religion. He told Mele very seriously that had missionary been here before he became a Mohammedan, he would surely have joined himself to Christianity, as that way is the only true one.”<sup>42</sup> He then urged him to attend church.

A few days after his meeting with the *Are*, Olubi invited Mele to a meeting at which were present Mele’s Christian wife, Johnson, Akiele and two other church women as witnesses. At the meeting Olubi asked him which of the two schoolmasters, Johnson or Akiele, was taking his wife from him.

They say Johnson; he replied; who are they that told you this, I asked. I do not come for that now, but beg my wife not to quarrel with me, he said. That is not hard Mele, I said, but the important point I want to know is the party that told you Johnson is taking away your wife & c. “I must

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<sup>41</sup> D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, Easter Monday, 1855, CMS C/A2/O49/111.

<sup>42</sup> D. Olubi to J. Maser, March 11, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/11.

confess,” he says, “that neither my wife nor yet Johnson is guilty of such crime, and nobody tells me any thing to that effect”. Why then do you lay such a charge on us, and before the head chief? He denied that he ever said such a thing to him. All he can say was that Johnson or his wife is not in any fault whatever; and knowing what sort of a man he is, we begged his wife to have more patience with the poor old man. And before we left one another, we spoke to him seriously about the way of salvation by Jesus Christ the Lord. He was struck at our sincerity and earnest conversation.<sup>43</sup>

The following Sunday, Mele surprised the Christian community at Kudeti when he attended church, “cleanly dressed” and “gently taking his elderly steps to Sunday school.” From then on he regularly attended the Sunday school and the two services.<sup>44</sup> In a later conversation with Olubi, he promised that nothing would keep him from Christian worship. And he made good progress in his new faith. A few weeks after his conversion he publicly renounced and handed over to Olubi the icons of the traditional divinities to whom he had accorded devotion all his life—Ifa, Sango, Osanyin, and Obatala.<sup>45</sup> When Mr. Hinderer visited Ibadan in 1875, six years after his exit, “old Ebenezer Mele” was the jewel convert Olubi presented him for baptism along with Mele’s 18 year old son and ten other adults.<sup>46</sup>

The dynamics behind the conversion of this former inveterate enemy of the Ibadan Mission is interesting when it is set in the context of the events that had taken place between the two neighbours over the years and Mele’s own orientation as a warrior. In the face of these two dynamics, the Are’s notion that the old man was acting out of senility would not hold, for Mele was fully in his right mind seeking to even out with the Christians. His earnest, post-conversion church life aptly shows this soundness of mind. The answer to his drama lies in the dynamics at play.

When in 1853 Mr. Hinderer returned to Ibadan in the company of his newly wedded wife, the new mission at Kudeti became a rehabilitation centre for the child victims of Ibadan’s brutish life.<sup>47</sup> Although the missionary couple intended their school to be the nursery for Christian converts and later agents of the mission, their home became the boarding house for both the children of the chiefs who dared to give up their children for school as well as those they rescued from various debilitating circumstances. The

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<sup>43</sup> D. Olubi to J. Maser, March 11, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/11.

<sup>44</sup> D. Olubi to J. Maser, March 11, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/11.

<sup>45</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, April 2, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/28.

<sup>46</sup> D. Hinderer to H. Wright, July 15, 1875, CMS C/A2/O49/80.

<sup>47</sup> R.B. Hone, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country: Memorials of Anna Hinderer* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1872).

latter group eventually dominated the ranks of these scholars. In the adverse circumstances in which their fortunes were suddenly reversed, Mele's family members made good the opportunity the presence of the mission provided them in their banishment to the periphery of Ibadan's social life. In turning out to be a community of the indigent in a town where power and wealth were the symbols of success, the mission could not have commended itself to the proud mindset of a once influential and prosperous warrior like Mele. He, however, reluctantly allowed his family members to attend church, an institution he increasingly grew insecure of for fear of losing his remaining wives.

Laniyonu was Mele's son the Hinderers succeeded in recruiting from his parents to train in their household. This "clever and lively" fellow made good progress at the mission school as he developed in age.<sup>48</sup> From all indications he subsequently became acquainted with Johnson when he arrived with his parents from Sierra Leone in 1858. From then on their futures appeared to be drawn together. Both of them, along with other bright pupils, received special instructions from Mr. Hinderer in the hope that they would in future become spiritual leaders and guides to their own people. And at his recommendation they both returned with Mr. Bühler to Abeokuta in December 1862 to begin their preparation for the ministry at the Training Institution.<sup>49</sup>

To their missionary teacher at Abeokuta, both Johnson and Laniyonu showed good prospects for service with the Society at the end of their training.<sup>50</sup> At the institution, Johnson had Laniyonu as his prayer partner even though he did not unburden his inner struggles to him.<sup>51</sup> At the end of their training both of them returned to Ibadan and were employed in the service of the mission as schoolmasters in 1866, Johnson at Kudeti and Laniyonu at Ogunpa. The Ogunpa schoolmaster did well and his school increased while he turned many to the Christian faith.<sup>52</sup> All things being equal, both were set to rise together in the service of the mission. This gradual rehabilitation of an aspect of Mele's life through his son must have been gratifying to him even if he was uneasy with his wives' attendance at the church.

But in February 1869, everything fell apart. Laniyonu's success as a schoolmaster was attended by character deficiency in relating with the opposite sex. Over and again he

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<sup>48</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, February 25, 1869, CMS C/A2/O75/23.

<sup>49</sup> F. Buhler, Annual Letter for the Year Ending December 1, 1862, CMS C/A2/O24/52; D. Olubi, Journal Entry, February 25, 1869, CMS C/A2/O75/23.

<sup>50</sup> F. Buhler, Annual Report, December 31, 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/47.

<sup>51</sup> S. Johnson to Secretaries, January 16, 1885, CMS C/A2/O 1885/67.

<sup>52</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, February 25, 1869, CMS C/A2/O75/23.

succumbed to his fleshly desire until “it now broke out in a more disgust[ing] & offensive manner”, and he was dismissed from the mission.<sup>53</sup> He subsequently left Ibadan to search for life’s prospects in Lagos.<sup>54</sup> For Mele it was an abortion of hope, and he waited four years to attempt settling scores with the Christians whom he now mischievously accused of sending his son to “Oibo country”. And who else could he have drawn into his vendetta if not the yet unmarried Samuel Johnson, the colleague of his dismissed son whose presence in the neighbourhood daily reminded him of the opportunity he lost in Laniyonu?

Yet, the vindication of the mission in Mele’s eventual conversion to Christianity must be seen as a result of his regimented military orientation. As one who had lived the prime of his life taking and issuing orders and had become fully orientated into that pattern as the norm of life, he could not respond otherwise to the counsel of the Moslem Are, even at the sunset of life. And he confessed as much,

I was a man of great honour, now I am not, wives, slaves, houses, children & c. but all gone; and the very Bãlẹ (the head chief) to whom I might be ashamed to confess myself a believer, is he that told me though he is a Mohammedan by religion...Oibo way of worshipping God is the only right way; and that religion you Mele must join [sic].<sup>55</sup>

In spite of the apparent strangeness of Mele’s means of conversion, neither the counsel of the Moslem Are nor the compliance of his obedient subject should be seen as unusual. The Are saw himself as the head of all the people in his domain and could not have implicated himself in the rivalry that presently existed in the country between the Christians and the Moslems. Culturally too, as a Yoruba, in the environment of many divinities which the people could adopt simultaneously, Christianity could have represented to him another option among many others in finding solution to life’s problems. At least this is the basic function of religion in Africa. From this point of view, it is understandable that although the Christians claimed that their faith is unique and the Are shared their sincerity, he did not take the plunge to join them. Olubi, in the company of Johnson, followed up this strange success when he returned to thank the Are for

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<sup>53</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, February 25, 1869, CMS C/A2/O75/23.

<sup>54</sup> Laniyonu eventually secured a job in the colonial office in Lagos where in the 1880s he involved himself in the politics of the Yoruba war.

<sup>55</sup> D. Olubi to J. Maser, March 11, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/11

encouraging Mele to embrace Christianity. He addressed him from the story of Nicodemus, but the head chief did not relinquish Islam.<sup>56</sup>

Mele's obedience to the counsel to adopt Christianity also finds antecedents among European primal peoples who, in the environment of brutish wars and conquests, dared not embrace the Christian faith without the consent of their fellow generals.<sup>57</sup> And the fact that he begged the Are, in his threat against the Christians, to send for his corpse after he would have fallen valiantly by taking his own life shows the liveliness of his military orientation in spite of his adverse circumstances. Evidently his mind was clear in all his antics; he desperately needed an anchor in the quicksand he found himself and the mission was the nearest one available.

Significant as the event turned out, and amazing as it was, it could only entrench Christianity in Ibadan as a vocation for the down-and-out.<sup>58</sup> In this respect, the activities of Johnson and his colleagues in the mission turned out not only in the classical tradition of a spiritual rescue mission at the heart of Christianity but also as an institution of rehabilitation in a volatile environment. Future vocational opportunities as the catechist in charge of Aremo station, from 1875, would provide Johnson another set of challenges in his missionary activities.

### **An Upward Call**

The church at Aremo grew out of the self-initiative of the converts in that part of the town, who considered it necessary to start something for themselves, Kudeti being far away for effective participation in church life during the week. From the beginning, they showed earnestness by staying from morning till evening for the two services on Sundays at Kudeti, bringing with them their lunch. Between the Sunday school hours the older and slower ones among them would coax the school children and sit with them in front of the mission house on the lawn for extra lessons to acquire the art of reading. On returning home, they would meet at the home of one of their company, a communicant, for prayers before they dispersed to their individual homes.<sup>59</sup>

In the subsequent turn of events—including the donation of land to the mission in their district, Hinderer's introduction of weekday service during the Ijaye war, the prayer

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<sup>56</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, April 3, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/28.

<sup>57</sup> The conversion of King Edwin shows this. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. by Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin Books, 1955), 2.13.

<sup>58</sup> This is one of the imports of Chinua Achebe's famous novel *Things Fall Apart*.

<sup>59</sup> D. Hinderer to Secretaries, September 24, 1858, CMS C/A2/O49/36.

meetings and visitation they organized among themselves, and their self-initiative in erecting a building structure for their activities—Aremo emerged as another station of Ibadan mission in 1865.<sup>60</sup> And here Mr. W. S. Allen was assigned in 1869 as the catechist in charge as Mr. Hinderer prepared to return to England with his wife. But he did not rise to the challenge of the assignment. When Mr. Hinderer visited Ibadan in 1875 from his new base at Lekki, he was impressed with the progress he witnessed under Olubi at Kudeti and Okuseinde at Ogunpa, being particularly affected by the “good moral tone, & unity & brotherly love” that marked their congregations.<sup>61</sup> In fact, Ogunpa was a miracle of revival. In the few months prior to Hinderer’s arrival, the congregation witnessed “a spiritual stir with...much persecution” which transformed the station from “a hard place...which formerly under Mr. Allen had almost to be given up” until Olubi was temporarily assigned there in 1868.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, Aremo, which had over the years shown brighter prospects, had under Allen fallen into bad times. The church building was decrepit and factions had emerged in the congregation as a result of Allen’s indiscretion in managing the people. His underlying problem was distraction into the cotton business which now engaged his attention. The business led him away from the disciplines agents of the mission had been structured into under Mr. Hinderer.<sup>63</sup>

In consequence of his neglect, but particularly for his business interest and slaveholding, Allen officially quitted the mission in May 1875. With the scarcity of personnel, Mr. Hinderer had to devise a plan for the station:

We have now to repair & partly build anew the station, when I hope Samuel Johnson the only available man here, who will have to take the station, will do a better work; indeed I have no doubt he will prove faithful & industrious. He will have hard work at first for Allen had partly created a radical faction in some of the young men by the side of the conservative & faithful body of that congregation.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> D. Hinderer to Secretaries, September 24, 1858, CMS C/A2/O49/36; D. Hinderer to H. Venn, November 15, 1864, CMS C/A2/O49/65; D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 30, 1865, CMS C/A2/O49/66.

<sup>61</sup> The two men were home trained for the ministry under Mr. Hinderer. Both of them started with him at Abeokuta, Olubi as his servant and Okuseinde, first, as his groom, taking care of his horse and, then, as his cook. D. Hinderer to H. Wright, July 15, 1875, CMS C/A2/O49/80.

<sup>62</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, March 10, 1868, CMS C/A2/O75/21.

<sup>63</sup> He procured a slave boy to assist him in his cotton business, who on finding the work uninteresting planned to escape. Allen sold him away before he made good his plan. Allen’s inconsistencies in service appear, again, like the uncanny fate that seemed to dog Sierra Leone colony-born young men and agents of the mission. D. Hinderer to H. Wright, July 15, 1875, CMS C/A2/O49/80.

<sup>64</sup> D. Hinderer to H. Wright, July 15, 1875, CMS C/A2/O49/80.

Allen remained in Ibadan, and appears to have continued in the service of the mission,<sup>65</sup> but one can only imagine Johnson's initial clumsiness in the "big shoe" he was now shod having to replace his father's colleague in the service of the mission. At all events, he took up the challenge and worked the Aremo station to its potential as a viable outreach post of the mission.

In 1877, two years after taking charge of the station, and himself having now taken full residence there for a year,<sup>66</sup> Johnson devised a means of harnessing the energy of the congregation for mission work. He adopted the model into which he was born at the church in Hastings and organized his members into Christian visitors and preachers. He formed them into three divisions and assigned the first division to Ojõ, a farm village 8 miles north of Ibadan. The second division he assigned to Abã, another farm village and large market place 10 miles east of the town. He retained the third division at home as district visitors equally "apportioned between the five different bands of both sexes". The male sex had two bands while the female three. These divisions and bands became Johnson's arrowheads in his missionary exploits at Aremo from 1877.<sup>67</sup> His evangelistic thrusts, pastoral activities, and chance encounters brought him into verbal and active contention with adherents of Yoruba religions and Islam during these years. While the encounters were diverse, three of the cults—Ifa, Sango and *Obàtála*—featured prominently for their pervasive influence among the people. Johnson's response to these encounters shows how he perceived local religions at this stage of his vocation.

While his evangelistic thrusts at home were kept alive by his appointed preachers and visitors, from 1881 Johnson became involved in active search for peace in the country. This took him out of his station for months and necessitated his travels in the country. This brought him into contact with the principal authorities in the country and marked another phase of his life vocation. This regular and long absence from home

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<sup>65</sup> Mr. W.S. Allen removed to a dwelling just outside the mission station from where he continued to participate in the life of the Ibadan Mission. In fact he joined Rev. James Johnson, the Superintendent of the Yoruba Mission who visited Ibadan in 1877, in his pastoral visits to the elders of the Aremo church in the company of Samuel Johnson. It is not clear whether the Finance Committee accepted his resignation. Whatever his status was with the mission after his supposed disconnection, his continuous submission of periodic journals suggests that he continued to contribute to mission activities in Ibadan after his removal as the catechist in charge of the Aremo station. S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 10, 1977, CMS C/A2/O58/8, Journal Entry, September 29, 1883, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>66</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, July 18, 1876, CMS C/A2/O58/7.

<sup>67</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Extract, July 4, 1877, CMS C/A2/O58/9.

became a feature of his last six years in Ibadan at the end of which he was transferred to Oyo in 1887.

Samuel Johnson's services as a teacher and evangelist in Ibadan took place in an environment of suspicion and reluctance of parents to send their children to school. His audience at his itinerant preaching also offered diverse responses to his preaching, but many considered it incongruent with their aspiration for wealth, fame and pleasure. However, the converts he did not gain for the mission in his street preaching accrued to it in an awkward circumstance. A new opportunity opened up for him in 1875 to lead the congregation at Oke Aremo. As things turned out for him, his experience of churchmanship at Ibadan set the pace for his leadership of the church at Oyo.

## Chapter 5

### Ministering at Oyo, 1887-1893

In 1884, the Finance Committee of the CMS Yoruba Mission came to the conclusion that it was becoming increasingly difficult for Mr. Olubi to continue to supervise the wide field of the Ibadan Mission. His physical health was slowing down, and they considered that he would not be able to continue to oversee the work in places like Oyo, Iseyin, Ogbomosho and Ilesha. Consequently, in May, the Finance Committee recommended Samuel Johnson for ordination as a deacon.<sup>1</sup> In so recommending him to the Parent Committee, Mr. Maser drew from his working relationship with Mr. Olubi, from his personal quality, and from Mr. Hinderer's earlier proposal to the Society:

Mr. Olubi is getting old and he can no more travel as formerly, he requires a helper to go to Ogbomosho, Oyo & Isehin for ministerial purposes. I understand that Mr. Hinderer proposed him [i.e. Johnson] for ordination some time ago. You have seen from his journals lately sent home that he is a diligent & intelligent worker. He has also the entire confidence of the chiefs, who call him to the camp for the purpose of sending letters to the government of Lagos.<sup>2</sup>

Following his fulfilling the requisite conditions for ordination, Johnson was admitted to the Deacon Order at St. Paul's Church, Breadfruit, Lagos, on Epiphany, Wednesday, January 6, 1886, by the Bishop of Sierra Leone.<sup>3</sup> He was however not going to be resident in Ibadan after his ordination as the Finance Committee had recommended to the Parent Committee in September 1885 that he be stationed at Oyo.<sup>4</sup> From mid 1884 when Johnson accompanied Mr. Wood on his trip to the battlefield at Kiriji, until his ordination in January 1886, he was rarely at his base in Ibadan. He was often on the road carrying messages between the Colonial administration in Lagos and the authorities in the interior. His availability for ministry at Ibadan did not improve after his ordination. First, Archdeacon Hamilton requested his services at Christ Church, Lagos, pending the return

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<sup>1</sup> Finance Committee, Resolution by Correspondence, May 23, 1884, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/134.

<sup>2</sup> J. Maser to R. Lang, June 5, 1884, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/133.

<sup>3</sup> J. Hamilton to R. Lang, January 18, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/40.

<sup>4</sup> Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, September 4, 1885, CMS G3/A2/O(1885)/152. The committee also decided that "Should the state of the country permit it...Mr. Luke be stationed at Ilesa."

of Mr. Harding to his duties there.<sup>5</sup> Second, Governor Alfred Moloney also needed his services to renew negotiation with the chiefs in the interior on how to end the wars.<sup>6</sup>

In December 1886, Johnson sent some requests to the Finance Committee in Lagos. In view of the expected visit of the Bishop to the Yoruba Mission early in 1887, he asked to be allowed to spend time in Lagos to prepare for Priests Orders. He also asked for a grant of £15 to repair the mission house at Oyo and “that he be allowed to draw £1 a quarter if necessary for keeping the premises in order.” The committee granted the two requests about his residence at Oyo but turned down the request for a stay in Lagos to prepare for Priests Orders. The Roman Catholics and the Wesleyans were making their inroads into the country and the Finance Committee were concerned that the agents presently located at Oyo would not match their drive there. The minutes of their meeting carries a sense of urgency which Johnson could not have missed:

[T]he exigencies of Oyo are such the Roman Catholics & the Wesleyans both being actively at work there, while our agent is old and feeble, that Mr. Johnson ought without delay to get to his Station, and the Secretary was directed to request him to do so as soon as the new year as possible [sic].<sup>7</sup>

### **The Politics of Johnson’s Transfer to Oyo**

Johnson’s place of service after his ordination was of interest to Mr. Hinderer, as the Ibadan Mission continued to receive his attention after his exit from the country. He was very much alive to the proceedings there and particularly regretted Johnson’s posting out of Ibadan. His regret arose from his consideration that he was the only experienced, and fully trained hand in the mission. Olubi and Okuseinde, the eldest of the lot, were his domestics whom he had trained in his home, but they had no formal education. Oyebode and Akiele, who were catechists, had attended the Training Institution at Abeokuta and had been withdrawn untimely by Hinderer himself. In comparison, Johnson studied under him prior to his going to Abeokuta institution where he completed formal training for the Christian ministry. After this, he also served under his supervision in the first three years on his return to Ibadan. Judging from these advantages and his consistency over the years,

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<sup>5</sup> Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, December 29, 1885, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/42.

<sup>6</sup> His availability at Ibadan did not improve after the decamping of the combatants at Kiriji that year; rather, much of his time was taken up, till 1893, in the peace negotiations to end hostilities at Offa and Modakeke as well as to pacify the Egba and Ijebu peoples who shut their countries against interior peoples.

<sup>7</sup> Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, December 9, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/10.



to Oyo was only being used as a camouflage by Ijebu authorities for their dissatisfaction with the new development that was not in their economic interest.

The immediate result of the treaty that led to the breaking up of the camps at Kiriji and Modakeke was the resumption of trade between interior peoples, on the one hand, and Ijebu and Egba peoples who controlled the roads to the coast, on the other. In the new development, Ibadan was no longer perceived as an enemy state but as an ally. And because they perceived the Alafin as insincere in his search for peace, wishing Ibadan to be worsted in their wars,<sup>11</sup> anyone who pitched his tent with him could easily be smeared as serving his interest and consequently regarded as an accomplice in his plot. Johnson's removal from Ibadan to Oyo by the Finance Committee perfectly fitted this prejudice and was the basis for the first allegation. It is an irony that Johnson who did so much to bring about the rapprochement between former enemies would be its intending victim.

On the second allegation, it may be recalled that the church at Oyo had not been adequately staffed over the years, and Johnson was the first ordained priest to be sent there. Expectedly, the facilities there were wanting, hence the approval of funds by the Finance Committee for him to rebuild and maintain the available residence and the church there. As a matter of fact, because of the rampant activities of incendiary elements in Oyo and Iseyin, some of whom had twice set the church building ablaze when they had altercations with persons in the congregation, the Finance Committee saw reason for Johnson's new residence to be roofed with corrugated iron sheets rather than the usual thatching.<sup>12</sup> The ensuing construction was taken to be a project Johnson was undertaking for the Alafin who was against peace.

The third allegation seems to have been raked up by the Egba. About a year before the "fatwa", Johnson sent some of his goods from Lagos to Abeokuta for onward transmission to Oyo. But they were to be left at Abeokuta until he would be able to ascertain his return journey into the interior. The superintendent of the Interior Mission, Mr. Wood, reported from Abeokuta that,

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<sup>11</sup> Successive Alafins at the new Oyo town, beginning with Atiba who reinstated the royal traditions of the fallen Oyo Ile, were not comfortable at Ibadan's military might and the challenges some of their war chiefs openly or subtly posed to them. The war initiated by Are Latosa in 1877 opened up this wound and Alafin Adeyemi sought to use it to break the might of his insubordinate subjects. It was therefore in his interest that they be kept at war, perhaps until their power be worn out, rather than their chiefs being at comfortable home contending issues with him.

<sup>12</sup> J. Wood to R. Lang, May 10, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/103.

Some busybody in Lagos, learnt that the loads contained some cartridges & a gun, (cartridges there are in the loads I know, but only such as Mr. J. has for his private use) has sent up information to the authorities here of the articles being in the loads. Guns & powder, or anything of the kind, the Egbas have been stringently forbidden to pass up the country. So this is made to wear the appearance of being an attempt at law-breaking.... I don't blame Mr. J. I doubt if he knew, or at any rate, if he at all remembered that the Egbas still maintained the prohibitions alluded to.<sup>13</sup>

This event was another evidence that Johnson's association with the Colonial administration of Lagos, with whom the Egba had a love-hate relationship, was unacceptable to some Lagos elements, and the occasion of including firearms in his loads to Abeokuta provided them an opportunity to accuse him of gun-running. For these aggrieved persons in Lagos, Abeokuta and Ijebu, the allegation was a useful tool to restrain his political activities.

Johnson expected that the reader of this account in his work *The History of the Yorubas* would have better judgment not to believe the first allegation, and so he did not make any comment on it. The second allegation he placed in its proper context as a misunderstanding of his building work at his new place of missionary assignment. But, strangely, he did not respond to the third allegation. Although it would seem he was guided in this by the same reason why he did not deem it necessary to respond to the first allegation, the third allegation was more grievous. Could he have been embarrassed by the interpretation the Egba authorities gave his conveyance of a forbidden weapon through their territory and so would rather be silent on it than open up explanations that could further be misinterpreted by his readers? This issue has been brought to the fore to show the dangers and the risks to reputation which accompanied Johnson's work of peacemaking, along with the rigours of his many travels. It is not clear how much this misrepresentation goaded him, but his silence was loud enough to show that he would rather not bring it to the awareness of future generations who may not understand the much ado his critics were making about his personal possession of a firearm.

Johnson was of the view that the Awujale easily believed these allegations because he did not speak to the governor's commissioners on his behalf to kill Ogunsigun in 1886, when they were going to Kiriji and Modakeke to disperse the combatants. Ogunsigun was the Seriki of Ijebu-Igbo and a friend of the deposed and deceased

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<sup>13</sup> J. Wood to R. Lang, May 24, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/116.

Awujale who was a rival of the present one on the throne.<sup>14</sup> He had been stationed at Isoya with Ijebu soldiers by the deceased Awujale in alliance with Derin of Oke-Igbo to defend Ife cause in their war against Modakeke, Ibadan's ally. The request of the Awujale shows the incongruence between the ruthless politics of survival that held the sway in the land and the new one now being fostered by the growing presence of a European power among the people. It was as difficult for Johnson to convince the Awujale that members of the peace mission would not accede to such contrivance as it was for the Ijebu king to understand why Johnson would not help him to eliminate his enemy. He, however, seized the opportunity of the journey of the Methodist minister at Oyo to Lagos through Ijebu territory to educate the Awujale on why he moved from Ibadan to Oyo. But his own passage through the Ijebu country about a year later shows that the Awujale had not accepted his explanation; his conversation with him shows how some of the principal men in the country now perceived him.

He had occasion to visit Lagos in March 1888, and he decided to pass through the Ijebu country to clear himself of the charges against him. As a *persona non grata* in Ijebu land, he was advised at Oru to send to the Balogun Nofowokan, his elderly friend, to intimate him of his arrival in the country and his intention to pass over to Lagos. The Balogun advised him to proceed to Ijebu Ode at dusk for reason of safety; but in the meantime he, the Balogun, was pleading with the Awujale to give Johnson the opportunity to explain himself. The king eventually received him at about 8.00pm and the following conversation ensued:

“Ajose” (i.e. Johnson) said the Awujale, “Is that you? I heard that you are no more for peace but have joined the ALAFIN in his intrigues.” “No sir,” was the reply. My going to Oyo to reside was not of my choice, but as an obedient servant I went where I was sent.... Who am I to have a voice of my own in these great political matters? My calling is of a different kind and not political.<sup>15</sup>

The Awujale interrupted him:

“Don't you say so; your words have gained the ears of kings and mighty warriors lately, so you cannot think so meanly of yourself. I was so angry with you that I never intended to see your face any more, but thanks to the Balogun who vigorously pleaded your cause.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, p. 569.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson.

Johnson then passed on to Lagos the following morning, but not without two escorts from the Balogun. His return journey through Ijebu Ode on May 26 showed that the Awujale was not done with him on his taking residence at Oyo as he remonstrated with him again: “Ajose, the whole Ijebu nation love and respect you, but you will lose that love and respect if you do not reconsider your appointment to Oyo”.<sup>17</sup> Johnson was not in the position to effect changes in his posting to Oyo, even if it was desirable to do so, and he could only have been perplexed by his inability to convince the Awujale of that reality. All the same, he continued to use the road through the Ijebu country in his shuttles between Oyo and Lagos unmolested.

In spite of this episode of misrepresentation by the Ijebu and the threat they made over his life, Johnson maintained a magnanimous attitude towards the people. This is evident in his perception of the atrocities Ijebu young men were committing against travellers through their country at this time. For several decades, during the wars, they monopolised the trade between the coast and the interior, ensuring that traders from the interior disposed their goods at Oru where they exchanged their local products for European manufactures the Ijebu brought from their trading ports on the lagoon where they did business with Europeans. At the cessation of hostilities at Kiriji in 1886, and according to the treaty they signed with neighbouring kings and chiefs, they were obliged to keep open for trade the roads from the interior to the coast through their country. This had barely started when Ijebu youths became incensed that their country was becoming a thoroughfare for outsiders. It was a development hitherto unimagined by these people who boasted that strangers never entered their land.

As a result, they insisted on reinstating the old order of marketing at Oru and seized the goods of those who ventured to trade directly between Lagos and the interior. Sometimes, according to Johnson, they enslaved their victims and sold them to Benin. They spared no person of their assault and once collected a £4 toll fee from the newly appointed European superintendent of the CMS Yoruba Mission, Rev. Tom Harding, before he was allowed to pass to Ibadan. A freed slave returnee from Brazil was also deprived of his property and murdered in his bid to return to his people at Iwo.<sup>18</sup> Johnson commented on these atrocities that,

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<sup>17</sup> Johnson, 570.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, 567-568.

It should be made clear...that the motives actuating the Ijebus to these proceedings, mistaken though they be, were not only the determination of being the middle men between the coast and the interior, but also (as they thought) in order to prevent the country from being taken by white men. A report of what was called, “The scramble for Africa,” then going on reached them in one form or another, and they were but safe-guarding the national interests.<sup>19</sup>

The reason for this liberal, if not indulgent, thinking may not be hard to seek. The Ijebu people, especially through their traders, had had a long association with Ibadan Mission from the days of David Hinderer. The founder of the mission had himself visited the Remo District of Ijebu land and had kept a small band of Christians there. In fact he once advised the occupation of Ijebu land by the Society, having established a rapport with the authorities at Ofin during his visit with Dr. E.G. Irving to the country in 1854.<sup>20</sup> The visit was then motivated by their search for a shorter route to Lagos from Ibadan, but the Ijebu country was at the time closed against foreigners, be they Europeans or any of the neighbouring peoples. The Finance committee assigned an agent to the place but the environment was not yet ripe for mission occupation and the work fizzled out. Ijebu's time to embrace Christianity or to appropriate any form of foreign tradition would not come until their painful encounter with British military might in the 1892 expedition to Ijebu Ode. But Johnson's liberal perception of the people can be traced to the rapport that had long existed between the mission community at Kudeti, Ibadan, and the Ijebu traders many of whom were their neighbours.<sup>21</sup>

However, this liberal explanation of the outrages being committed by Ijebu youths is problematic. If their action could be explained away as “safe-guarding the [Ijebu] national interests”, how did Johnson understand his own peacemaking activities hand in hand with the empire builders the youths were supposedly opposing through their violent activities? For it appears his explanation was blind to the contradiction between their activities and the colonial direction his own activities were leading the country.

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<sup>19</sup> Johnson, 570-571.

<sup>20</sup> D. Hinderer to the Yoruba Mission Local Committee, March 1855, CMS C/A2/O49/110.

<sup>21</sup> Hinderer's attitude may not be unconnected with his dissatisfaction with his fellow missionaries' biased image-making for the Egba whom they represented to England as symbolizing light and progress over against Ibadan's poor image as war mongers. His search for a route to Lagos that would bypass Abeokuta may not be unconnected with this dissatisfaction. Consequently, he was generously disposed towards Ijebu Remo whose territory was strategic to his desire for an alternative route to Lagos and who, incidentally from the 1830s, had been repeated victims of the unvoiced pillage of the Egba from their Abeokuta base.

On the other hand, the explanation may be a result of retrospection years after he himself had settled into his work at Oyo, and the colonial spirit was well under way, claiming its victims both in church and state. This is particularly so as Johnson did not finish writing *The History* until 1897, five years after these outrages of the Ijebu youths were quelled with the superior fire power of the colonial regime in Lagos. This period was the high water mark of colonialism when racial consciousness created tension in the fledgling colonial civil service and in the CMS Mission. Johnson was not completely untouched by this development which imperilled Bishop Crowther’s Niger Mission and claimed his elder bother, Henry Johnson, as one of its victims. Again, one wonders if this explanation of the outrages of the youths was not Johnson’s own modest way of expressing what his contemporaries in Lagos were expressing with venom and anger against the colonial administration.

### **The Origins of the Church at Oyo**

After Ibadan brokered peace between Alafin Atiba and Are Kurunmi in 1855, people visiting Ibadan repeatedly informed Hinderer that the Alafin was “very much hurt” that white people took residence in many towns in his country, but they seemed to avoid him and his town. Since the conditions of peace now placed territories to the north of the country, hitherto under Kurunmi, under the Alafin, and the mission was planning expansion in that direction, it became necessary to first address the feelings of the Oyo monarch before venturing to occupy any town tributary to him. To this end Hinderer visited Oyo in January 1856 to arrange matters with Atiba, promising to write England to send a European teacher to reside at his capital.<sup>22</sup> In anticipating the arrival of his desired guest, Atiba gave the mission “an extensive piece of ground within the town wall, very eligible...for a station, he gave...moreover a convenient native compound not far from the palace for the white man to occupy until he has built a house of his own”.<sup>23</sup> In returning to Ibadan, Hinderer left in Oyo a CMS Christian visitor who was then with him at Ibadan, Hardesty, to manage the repair of the compound, the king having also given materials and men to effect it. He was also to commence teaching until a permanent arrangement could be made for the place.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> D. Hinderer to H. Venn, February 27, 1856, CMS C/A2/O49/26.

<sup>23</sup> D. Hinderer to H. Venn, February 27, 1856, CMS C/A2/O49/26.

<sup>24</sup> D. Hinderer to H. Venn, February 27, 1856, CMS C/A2/O49/26.

Hardesty was soon relieved by Olubi who managed the new station till May 1856.<sup>25</sup> At his second visit at the end of May, during which he was accompanied by his wife, Hinderer introduced George Williams to the Alafin as the substantive agent who would nurse the mission until the arrival of the European missionary. In the presence of the missionary couple, the king requested his chiefs to express their pleasure at his invitation to white men to reside in his domain and teach their people. The king subtly cautioned Hinderer that the consent they expressed did not imply that the mission would have a smooth operation among his people. The missionary activities of Hardesty and Olubi in four months appear to have sent unpleasant signals to some of them. And it seems the king's request from his counsellors in the presence of the Hinderers was calculated to moderate the imminent opposition to missionary activities in the town, for the young mission was making good progress in a short time. Hinderer reported on this visit that:

My two services at Sunday, which we had under the roof of the house the king gave us for a temporary dwelling were attended by about twenty attentive hearers of the town, besides our own people. And my teacher who was there for about ten weeks [that is Olubi], told me there were more or less regular attendants every Sunday of his little services...<sup>26</sup>

Some of these people, including four Sierra Leone emigrants, made progress in acquiring literacy skills. But the ultimate challenge Christianity posed to the town was the calibre of people acceding to the mission. Hinderer noted that, "...some young people belonging to the king's head servant's house, & two women, one of whom a priestess, had already thrown away her idols".<sup>27</sup> Such conversion among the elite courtiers and indigenous religious lights could be provocative.

George Williams was joined by George Meakin in 1857, an English agent from Sudbury, Derbyshire. He did not stay there for more than three years for reason of poor health.<sup>28</sup> Andrew Wilhelm from Abeokuta joined them in 1859 as the schoolmaster and his work was well appreciated by the people. But the birth of the mission seems untimely, for soon after the death of the king in 1859, the war between Ijaye and Ibadan broke out, drawing Abeokuta into the fray. The disturbed state of the country meant that missionary

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<sup>25</sup> D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, May 28, 1856, CMS C/A2/O49/114.

<sup>26</sup> D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, May 28, 1856, CMS C/A2/O49/114.

<sup>27</sup> D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, May 28, 1856, CMS C/A2/O49/114; G. Bühler to H. Venn, January 5, 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/20.

<sup>28</sup> H. Townsend to H. Venn, January 8, 1858, CMS C/A2/O85/266.

work could not proceed unimpeded. Communication between Abeokuta and the Yoruba towns of Ibadan and Oyo became particularly difficult because of the war. But the agents acquitted themselves despite their difficult circumstances. When Bühler accompanied Mr. Lamb and Captain Davies to Ibadan in December 1862, he remarked that:

I was struck with the esteem in which our agents & more especially Andrew Wilhelm stands among all classes; he is everywhere known as the “teacher”; he possesses more influence than I ever expected a native would obtain in such a town like Oyo.<sup>29</sup>

Although the missionary party on visit to Ibadan were only in transit through Oyo, the agents presented them six candidates for baptism. After “full enquiry into their conduct and after a close examination”, they were found satisfactory. They were baptized along with Mr. Williams’ child as the first fruit of the Oyo church. But the visit also revealed that the initial momentum of the mission was not sustained. Oyo people had grown cynical of Christianity. At the open air preaching Bühler conducted in front of the palace on the second day he and his party arrived, many people gathered before him, “but only few were really attentive— others mocked” as Meakin had earlier described them to Bühler.<sup>30</sup> From Ibadan, Johnson would later accompany Bühler back to Abeokuta through Oyo to begin his training under the German teacher.

Not much is known about the church after the passage of the party from Lagos and Abeokuta until 1867, the year of housebreaking at Abeokuta, after which Egba authorities outlawed Europeans from the interior. That year, Hinderer accompanied Lieutenant Gerrard to Oyo to see Alafin Adelu; he was on a mission from the Governor of Lagos to Ibadan and Oyo and Hinderer had accompanied him at the request of the governor.<sup>31</sup> By then the church in Oyo remained a small band and without an agent of the CMS. On the Sunday he spent there Hinderer “gathered the few people together who used to assemble there for divine worship. They are very anxious not to be forsaken by the Church Missionary Society...”.<sup>32</sup> The king also expressed the same plea as the small congregation but added that he was dissatisfied with the agents who had been managing the work. Short of asking Hinderer himself to quit Ibadan and pitch his tent with him at Oyo, the Alafin told him:

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<sup>29</sup> G. Bühler to H. Venn, January 5, 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/20.

<sup>30</sup> G. Bühler to H. Venn, January 5, 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/20.

<sup>31</sup> D. Hinderer to Secretaries, June 25, 1867, CMS C/A2/O24/119.

<sup>32</sup> D. Hinderer to Secretaries, June 25, 1867, CMS C/A2/O24/119.

[T]hat he is tired of such unsatisfactory natives, as we and the Baptists had there especially on account of the woman palavers, and as to a European he expressed a wish for a man who was used to the country, & understood some thing of the ways and language of the country to be able to control his people.<sup>33</sup>

The problem of the church in Oyo was the accusation of insubordination which the men folk made against their women converts to Christianity. The environment of Oyo eventually became hostile to missionary activities, and it appears the exits of the agents were necessitated by this. Hinderer could only promise to send occasionally some of his catechists and scripture readers in Ibadan to visit the church for fortnights. In the absence of agents, the small band of Christians was led by persons among themselves.<sup>34</sup> The accusation against the women continued with the years and their aggrieved husbands felt they were being encouraged in their conduct by the agents and local leaders of the mission. Shortly before the death of Alafin Adelu on October 23, 1875, they set the chapel ablaze in reprisal. Another one erected by one of the local leaders, Mr. Lasite, was served the same way the following year.<sup>35</sup>

In 1876 after his ordination into Priests' Orders, Olubi decided that Oyo and Ogbomoso be reoccupied as mission outposts. In March, he travelled to both places and placed at Oyo, as the scripture reader, Thomas Williams, Johnson's former partner in itinerant evangelism in Ibadan.<sup>36</sup> On that trip he conducted a marriage ceremony for Jonathan Ojelabi, one of the young men under the tutelage of Mr. Adolphus Mann at Ijaye before the town was destroyed by Ibadan in 1862. Ojelabi had relocated to Oyo as a result of the war and had lapsed from the faith. For many years he lived as a polygamist, and on Olubi's visit he told the superintendent of Ibadan Mission that he had amended his ways.<sup>37</sup> Ojelabi subsequently became enmeshed in the high politics of Oyo, sometimes bringing trouble to the church. Johnson's first taste of his scheming was in January 1883, when he supplanted him as the Alafin's representative to the governor, and he continued to be a source of concern to the Oyo church community.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> D. Hinderer to Secretaries, June 25, 1867, CMS C/A2/O24/119.

<sup>34</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, March 2, 1876, CMS C/A2/O75/33.

<sup>35</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, March 2, 1876, CMS C/A2/O75/33.

<sup>36</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, February 29, 1876, CMS C/A2/O75/33.

<sup>37</sup> D. Olubi to H. Wright, April 17, 1876, CMS C/A2/O75/7.

<sup>38</sup> D. Olubi to J. Maser, January 29, 1884, G3/A2/O(1884)/66.

## **In the New Sphere of Service**

Oyo was a much different environment from Ibadan where Johnson had hitherto spent his years in the service of the Society. In Ibadan he could count on Olubi for the immediate needs that arose in the course of his duties. He could also count on the support of the mission community there to resist overt and covert oppositions to his work among the people. Moreover, with converts already accrued to the church in a town where there were no rival mission societies, Ibadan people had reconciled themselves to the presence of Christianity in their town. Now in Oyo, Johnson must be responsible for the life of the distressed Christian community in a town where converts to Christianity were facing stiff opposition and other missions were seeking to plant their feet.

His first year there was by no means dull. With incendiary elements on the prowl, poverty written all over the people, and the challenge to service the insatiable appetites of the princes for gifts, Johnson was in for a challenging ministry in the royal city. He must move circumspectly, brace up for financial challenges, and be ready to gratify members of the royal family in order to gain their hearing for the good of his mission. He did not have to look far to diagnose the maladies at the roots of the people's poverty. The activities of the royalty and its princes were simply insupportable. They drove the people to desperation and made them incendiaries, developments which did not relieve their situation but further deepened their impoverishment.

The consequence of this systemic impoverishment was the institution of pawning as Johnson observed: "It is a very common thing for a man to pawn himself in 4 or 5 places at a time. In order to marry a wife, bury a dead, or to make yearly sacrifices, men pawned themselves, and served every fifth day in the Pawnee's farm."<sup>39</sup> An early sign of the consequent indigence of the congregation at Oyo was evident when in December 1883 Olubi asked the Alafin to loan Thomas Williams, the agent there, 20 bags of cowries to enable him to repair his house.<sup>40</sup> Johnson had to function within the context of this reality for the rest of his service with the Society.

## ***The Early Days***

Johnson arrived at Oyo in February 1887 with his family, accompanied by his church members at Aremo. He had married on January 19, 1875, Lydia Okuseinde, the

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<sup>39</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, March 7, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/112.

<sup>40</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entries, November 30 and December 2, 1883, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/100.

daughter of the catechist at Ogunpa Station.<sup>41</sup> This marriage is also significant for Johnson's cultural itinerary as a Saro returnee to the Yoruba country. If his relocation from Hastings to Ibadan was a movement from the cosmopolitan to the provincial, or, rather, from the modern to the pre-modern, a process that received intellectual reinforcement at the Abeokuta Training Institution, his marriage to the daughter of the Egba agent was the definitive stroke that underscored his cultural conversion. For it was not uncommon for the returnees to reach back to colonial Sierra Leone, as his brother Nathaniel did in 1872, to seek for wives among the people with whom they shared mental, social and cultural affinities. By opting for a home bred maiden, the self-effacing agent eschewed whatever remained in his identity of such pretension to sophistication. Moving to Oyo, the Yoruba capital of culture, was therefore a welcome development in the direction providence had been leading. For there, away from the major theatres of his Society's activities—Lagos, Abeokuta and Ibadan—he could have lesser distractions as he focused on his extra-curricular interest which time later unveiled, the writing of Yoruba history and culture.

Samuel and Lydia arrived at Oyo, with their two daughters,<sup>42</sup> to lead a church that was struggling to find its feet in a hostile and competitive environment. Along with the presence of Islam and Yoruba religions, the Roman Catholics, the Wesleyans and the American Baptists were also seeking to carve out their own niches among the people. But the immediate challenge Johnson addressed was to seek after those who had lapsed from the faith. One had married a non-Christian man;<sup>43</sup> an inquirer had lapsed into polygamy and traditional religions;<sup>44</sup> others were, in his words, simply "delinquent".<sup>45</sup> He resolved immediately to "try my utmost in reclaiming those who have gone back, taking it hand in hand with aggressive work among the heathens".<sup>46</sup> To this end he employed the tested method of sharing responsibility in pastoral and evangelistic work with his steady church members. He appointed leaders and district voluntary preachers.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, January 19, 1875, CMS C/A2/O58/4.

<sup>42</sup> Their first daughter was born on December 6, 1875. A second child, a boy, soon followed; but Geoffrey Emmanuel succumbed to infant mortality "after a repeated attack of convulsion" at 12 months 12 days. They had another girl before leaving Ibadan for Oyo. S. Johnson, Journal Entry, December 6, 1875, CMS C/A2/O58/5; S. Johnson, Journal Entry, October 5, 1879, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/160.

<sup>43</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 12, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/212.

<sup>44</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, March 10, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/212.

<sup>45</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 14 and March 11, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/212.

<sup>46</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 14, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/212.

<sup>47</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 14, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/212.

Johnson used extensively this team that was largely composed of women. They preached on the streets and visited family compounds for evangelism and pastoral care. The courage and boldness of the women were particularly remarkable as they extended their evangelistic overtures to anyone within their reach, almost winning over a priest of the court. They were not restrained in telling their prospects that “the gods of wood and stone cannot save them”.<sup>48</sup> Johnson’s scripture reader, Mr. Moseri, was also earnest as he took the Christian message to nearby towns—Awe, Akinmorin and Ilora. It was at Awe, however, that the church recorded significant successes as inquirers came forward and an Ifa priest abandoned his trade to preach the faith of the church to his former clients, traditional believers and Moslems.<sup>49</sup> Another priest of Orisa-Oko, Odeku, relinquished his ancestral faith, with all the privileges that pertained thereto, to accede to the church with nearly all the members of his household.<sup>50</sup>

Johnson derived another advantage from composing this lay evangelistic and pastoral teams. It allowed him the freedom to continue his political errands, which did not end with the attainment of peace between Ibadan and the allied forces of Ijesha and Ekiti armies at Kiriji in 1886. With Ibadan still locked in antagonism with Ilorin at Offa and other complicated matters to be resolved between Modakeke and Ife, his peacemaking task was not done. Through the activities of the teams, the life of the church continued in spite of Johnson’s sometimes long absences from his station.

Another problem Johnson identified on his arrival at Oyo in 1887 was the poor literacy level of the church members. He observed that only about half a dozen people could read while “of the rest scarcely any one made an advance beyond their alphabet.” There was no doubt in the mind of the pietist churchman where also to direct his early effort: “if we expect any impression to be made upon the people, they must be able to read the word of God for themselves.” Presently Johnson attributed their “gross ignorance” and “want of spiritual life and activity” to this deficiency in literacy. Consequently, he reported, “An uphill work is evidently before us. We are devoting a quarter of an hour in the afternoon school in teaching Watts I Catechism in Yoruba”.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> S. Johnson, “Report”, in *The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner*, November 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1892)/7.

<sup>49</sup> S. Johnson, “Report”, in *The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner*, November 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1892)/7.

<sup>50</sup> S. Johnson, “Report”, in *The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner*, December 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1893)/42.

<sup>51</sup> Johnson also adopted Mr. Hinderer’s method of continuous training for the agents under his charge. He devoted part of the morning and evening, from Monday till Thursday, to reading with

Restarting the day school was also part of the effort at renewing the life of the church at Oyo in 1887. It had stopped functioning when Johnson arrived. After a year residence he was able to return in his statistical report for the school, four boys and nine girls.<sup>52</sup> Most of them were children of Christian parents. Recruiting the children of non-converts was as difficult as keeping them regular at school. The parents considered themselves as doing Johnson a favour in giving up their children for instruction and so expected gifts from him. A father once told him, “Do not tell me any more of future advantage[;] we have only to do with the present. If my child could go to gather a few faggots for firewood, that is enough for me.”<sup>53</sup>

In another case, the grandmother of a two year old child kept in Johnson’s care also complained of not getting anything from him. The child’s father had entrusted him to the pastor, his mother having gone blind from the attack of smallpox. Because the child was young, Johnson had to engage someone to nurse him, but the grandmother who claimed to have nursed the child from infancy was not satisfied. Someone secretly informed Johnson about her dissatisfaction and complaint that:

“The padres...were blaming her for not bringing the child to them, and from me she got nothing, excepting the grand-father who had had a present from me[”]. My kind adviser begged me to satisfy her because she was offended, and truly she shewed her offence by not stopping [at] my place to see the child.”<sup>54</sup>

Johnson attributed to ignorance the attitude of these non-Christian parents towards school, and the result was low enrolment. “...[U]ntil we can support all the children we have under our care, and give dashes to the parents, our school will continue to be poor. Ignorance reigns here supreme and children given to us for education are considered by the parents as thrown away.”<sup>55</sup>

At other times, one of the parents of a child might not be disposed towards his or her being sent to school. Pleas were made to the king; to the Bashorun, his prime

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the agents. The subject of reading depended on the need and interest of the individual agent. S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 13, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/212; S. Johnson, “Report”, *The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner*, December 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1893)/42.

<sup>52</sup> Compare “Statistics of the Yoruba Mission for 1887”, CMS G3/A2/O(1888)/45, and the same for 1888, CMS G3/A2/O(1889)/38.

<sup>53</sup> S. Johnson, “Report”, in *The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner*, December 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1893)/42.

<sup>54</sup> S. Johnson, “Report”, in *The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner*, December 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1893)/42.

<sup>55</sup> S. Johnson, “Report”, in *The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner*, December 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1893)/42.

minister; and to the princes to send their wards to school. But the prejudice against it ran deep in the people's mind. And although the king was well disposed to the school, he would not risk being accused by his wives of selling their children for money. Johnson thought that the eventual solution to the state of affairs would be the spread of Christianity and civilization.<sup>56</sup>

The first year of Samuel Johnson's pastoral work ended with the tragic death of Lydia on February 29, 1888. Samuel, who at the time had his brother Nathaniel with him on a visit, sent for his father-in-law at Ibadan a few days before her demise, as her illness took a turn for the worse. She passed on soon after her father's arrival, and her remains were interred by Nathaniel Johnson at the Oyo cemetery. The widower pastor later sent his daughters to his parents-in-law at Ibadan.<sup>57</sup> On his return journey from Lagos in May, he stopped at Ibadan where he preached from Psalm 124 at the communion service arranged for the three congregations.<sup>58</sup> "If the LORD had not been on our side" was a fitting text for the pastor who was passing through severe challenges with his difficult context of ministry, funding, and family life.

### ***Conserving Gains***

The greatest challenge to Johnson's effort at growing the church at Oyo was the persecution the converts had to face on the domestic front. While it was limited to households, there was hardly any conversion that was not opposed by family members of the convert. One of such persecutions occurred as soon as Johnson arrived at Oyo in 1887 at the conversion of Adeyemi who was captured during the Ijaye war and was redeemed by his aunt. Adeyemi subsequently married and was living in Oyo when his wife took ill. As a convert to Christianity, he refused to consult his Ifa oracle on her behalf. Her eventual death was then attributed to his negligence and his in-laws, by tradition, were going to hold him responsible for it. But Jonathan Ojelabi, being related to the woman, saved him from the consequences of his inaction, such offence being punishable with a heavy fine and the death penalty. But Ojelabi's intervention was not the end of the matter for the poor convert. His in-laws instigated his cousins against him, and now they demanded a refund of the money their mother paid for his ransom. At the same time they accused him before his landlady, who was one of the king's wives, and who also

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<sup>56</sup> S. Johnson, "Report", in *The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner*, December 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1893)/42.

<sup>57</sup> J. Okuseinde, Journal Entries, February 27 to March 9, 1888, CMS G3/A2/O(1889)/128.

<sup>58</sup> F. Akiele, Journal Entries, May 31 and June 10, 1888, CMS G3/A2/O(1889)/130.

threatened him if he continued in Christianity. As a new minister of the persecuted faith, who was also in the process of finding his feet among the people, Johnson could only comfort him with his prayers.<sup>59</sup>

With time, Johnson himself could exercise his clout to bring relief to the persecuted converts. In his annual report for 1891, he recounted one such occasion involving a woman inquirer who abandoned her “twin gods” for Christianity. A wife of one of the king’s Ilari, she could not summon the courage to tell her husband that she was embracing Christianity. However, her husband visited Johnson at the church one of the evenings while he was taking the class meeting. He did not know that his wife was among the women sitting in the class until his little daughter, who had accompanied her mother to church, rushed at him in a warm embrace. And so by chance it became known to him that his wife had been attending church. She later denied any intention to become a Christian but continued to attend church with the knowledge of her husband. Soon she became an object of scorn and ridicule among the other women in her compound. But her husband merely shrugged off their muffled criticism.

When he proved indifferent to her going to church, the head of the compound interrogated her:

“Do you mean to embrace Christianity?” “Yes,” she replied. “Why, what about your orisas?” She replied “more than anyone in this compound, I was a most devoted worshipper of idols, and for which I have spent my all to no purpose, and now I intend giving myself to God.” In order to touch her, he said to her, “my remonstrating with you is because of your children. You know how many children you have lost by death, and the surviving ones are the gift of the gods to you; and if you neglect their worship what must you expect? I am only anxious about your children on your behalf.” “Thank you for your kind consideration” she replied “but I am resolved to serve God”.<sup>60</sup>

Johnson was offended at the headman’s action as he was his middleman to the king. He sent for Obaosetan, the Ilari next in rank to him in that compound, and through him warned the head of the compound to desist from discouraging people, otherwise he would report him to the king.

“Why” said I “is he not the very man who used to take us to the king when we wanted him to interfere in cases of persecution? And was it not in his

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<sup>59</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, June 7, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/212.

<sup>60</sup> S. Johnson, “The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner”, March 15, 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1892)/155.

presence the king used to say that he granted liberty of conscience to all? How is it then that he dared to remonstrate with anyone in his house who wished to embrace Christianity?”<sup>61</sup>

Obaosetan brought the headman’s apology to Johnson, after which he called the woman’s husband and repeated to him the message he sent to the head of his compound. The husband’s reply could only have satisfied the pastor,

[A]s for himself, he was rather glad that his wife embraced Christianity, because it was his late father who had the charge of the Missionaries. As to what the headmen [sic] said to his wife, he said I should take no notice of that, but only to look to him. If the woman’s grown up son has no objection to it, no one could prevent her.<sup>62</sup>

When her son returned from his trip, members of the household put pressure on him to restrain his mother from embracing Christianity. But the young man had had wider exposures to Lagos and Abeokuta where he had seen many Christians of different denominations. He was particularly intrigued by the school children he had seen in those parts and asked his mother “why his little sister was not attending school”. He rather encouraged her mother to follow the dictate of her conscience while her old mother-in-law also encouraged her in her new found faith. She advised her, “Take the back way if they will taunt you if you go by the front gate”.<sup>63</sup>

This woman was one of the two women converts the church won over from the same compound occupied by the king’s Ilari in 1891. And as in the process by which the hard ground of Ibadan thawed for Christianity to make its home among the people, her son’s reinforcement of her conversion shows again the relentless secularising influence penetrating Yoruba society in the nineteenth century. Evidently, it was a traditional belief that children were gifts from the gods and any act of disloyalty could be avenged by being withdrawn through death. The implication was that since their existence depended on their mother’s loyalty to the gods, children had the prerogative to sanction or restrict maternal religious affiliations. For this woman, her son’s experience at Lagos and Abeokuta provided the necessary reinforcement and shield for her conversion. The liberalizing effects of secularism on such widely travelled young people, as vectors of a

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<sup>61</sup> S. Johnson, “The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner”, March 15, 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1892)/155.

<sup>62</sup> S. Johnson, “The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner”, March 15, 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1892)/155.

<sup>63</sup> S. Johnson, “The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner”, March 15, 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1892)/155.

new culture, may be seen as the early harbinger of a new order that would open up their society to religious change.

It is strange that Michel Doormont concluded that in using a proxy to approach the king, Johnson's political career, "[a]s pastor in Oyo...had finished, although he himself wished it were otherwise..."<sup>64</sup> This is not true. Johnson's reference to "the very man who used to take us to the king" is simply a reference to court protocol. For no one, not even Daniel Olubi when he was sent for by the Alafin, could walk straight into the palace without the mediation of one of the king's Ilari, court messengers, one of whom was the man in question here. And the fact that the man attempted to discourage a convert by stealth, only to apologize later, is an evidence that he knew the clout the pastor wielded with the authorities. In fact, his reprimand of the court messenger underscores that clout.

Nevertheless, Johnson's growing confidence in Oyo became manifest when at the end of that year he showcased at Christmas and New Year festivities the modest gains the Christian community had recorded in the town. He organized a street procession with the younger members of the church and the school children with banners flying. Many were astonished at the number and wondered, "Are there so many Christians at Oyo?" According to him, their perception of Christianity was that it is "a dull, drowsy religion, only fit for poor people".<sup>65</sup>

Although the number of Christians in Oyo was insignificant when compared to the population of the town, numbered among the modest gain of Johnson's congregation were women from the elite families of the Ilaris. Perhaps this reality and the public show of the strength of the Christian community in the town at the turn of 1892 was responsible for the alarm created among the people when Harding organized an open-air preaching at the market place during his visit to Oyo in August 1892. Before the open air preaching, he held two exhibitions of the Magic Lantern. The first was held at the king's palace where,

[A] great number of his...wives saw the pictures and heard the gospel, together with about a thousand other people, princes, chiefs and slaves. At the end of the exhibition, I told them that Jesus...was knocking at the door of every heart here, and if they would open the door of their hearts to Him, He would enter in and save them. Immediately they all cried out "Jesus save me." "Jesus save me!" [sic].<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Michel Doormont, "Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History" (PhD diss., Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 1994), 25.

<sup>65</sup> S. Johnson, "The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner", March 15, 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1892)/155.

<sup>66</sup> T. Harding to the Secretaries, September 30, 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1892)/192.

The second Magic Lantern show took place at the mission house. This drew many people and Johnson explained the pictures to them. This increasing visibility of the Christians, beginning with the processions at Christmas and the New Year celebrations, came to a head when Harding organized the open air preaching:

[F]or two hours we were singing and preaching the way to Jesus. This caused some opposition as some people went to the king to complain that the white man and the Christians were in the market telling the people to leave their idols. The king asked if we were using clubs to make people believe? And being told that we were using no force he said whoever wishes to become a Christian let him do so.<sup>67</sup>

Although more women acceded to the church at Oyo than men, they too could be a source of trouble for their husbands if they embraced Christianity. To avoid such difficulty, an affluent man with two wives, a friend of the mission, sent forward his two wives to the church with the aim that they might embrace Christianity. He anticipated that they would be of help to him if their conversion preceded his. It is not clear if his method worked, but Johnson hoped “that he may soon make an open confession of his faith, and pray God to send us more like-minded men”.<sup>68</sup>

The apprehensive critics of Christianity at Oyo, male and female, understood the implication of the growing confidence of the Christian community in a town where they had been repressed for years. With their successful thrust into the families of the elite courtiers and the favourable disposition of the king to their activities, events were unfolding too rapidly. And when Christians had the unusual privilege of preaching a faith that was contemptuous of the divinities at the citadel of tradition, they could not but be alarmed at the undertone of the changes creeping upon them. Unlike Ibadan which was surrounded by enemies and needed friends to do their public relations with the outside world, Oyo had no reason not to manifest the public persecution Christian converts experienced at Abeokuta in 1849. That it did not happen can be attributed to the power and influence of the Alafin. It was also a result of Johnson’s intimate association with him, having run his diplomatic errands before coming to reside at Oyo as a senior agent of the CMS. Ironically, while Johnson’s congregation appeared immune to the possibility

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<sup>67</sup> T. Harding to the Secretaries, September 30, 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1892)/192.

<sup>68</sup> S. Johnson, “Report”, *The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner*, December 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1893)/42.

of a visible offensive from the traditional society, the challenge that threatened the CMS church at Oyo came from within the congregation.

### ***“Demas Has Forsaken Me”***

Along with the slow but steady growth of the small congregation Johnson took up in 1887, the CMS work at Oyo enjoyed a healthy work relationship with the other two protestant missions in the town, the Wesleyans and the Baptists. The Wesleyan missionaries Revs. A.N. Cole and J.H. Samuel were among Johnson’s friends, and their church members together with members of his congregation constituted in the town the British and Foreign Bible Society in the last decade of the century.<sup>69</sup> He also found a soul mate in the American Baptist missionary S.G. Pinnock who would nurse him during his illness in his final days at Oyo.

But Johnson’s ecumenical spirit did not include the Roman Catholics for reasons not hard to find. Catholic and Protestant missionaries from Europe in the nineteenth century were in mutual rivalry. Johnson, like other African converts in both traditions, inherited this prejudice. The padres who visited Oyo to prospect for mission in 1884 did not help matters. After preaching at the CMS chapels at Iseyin and Oyo on a Sunday morning, they went hunting for birds in the wild. This seeming lack of regard for the “Lord’s day” was offensive to the sensibility of the Christians at Oyo.<sup>70</sup> When in August 1887 they took their seat at the Egungun festival hosted by the Alapini, the official head of the Egungun cult in Oyo, and invited the masquerades to come over and play for them at their station, their ultra-liberal attitude towards indigenous tradition was too much for Johnson. It was especially so in view of the deaths that followed the violent fisticuffs that erupted between two rival Egungun masquerades at the padres’ residence. This seeming indiscretion, along with the stiff rivalry they put up against the other missions in contending for the souls of Oyo children, did not endear them to Johnson. He saw their activities as counterproductive to mission.<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately for him, one of the most trying moments in his service at Oyo came, in 1893, from their quarter through the headman of his church, Jonathan Ojelabi.

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<sup>69</sup> S. Johnson, “Oyo” in *The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner*, January 1893, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/49; S. Johnson, “Oyo” in *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/91.

<sup>70</sup> The agents of the CMS at Oyo and Iseyin were warned never to allow the padres to occupy their pulpits again. J. Wood to Secretaries, May 28, 1884, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/145.

<sup>71</sup> S. Johnson to J. Wood, November 8, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1888)/9; F. Akiele, Journal Entry, January 25, 1888, CMS G3/A2/O(1889)/130.

Ojelabi's association with the padres in Oyo dated back to January 1884 when he lodged at his residence the two Roman Catholic priests who visited Oyo from Abeokuta. They had come through Iseyin where Abraham Foster, the CMS agent there, had instructed them to lodge with Ojelabi. The instruction was a violation of protocol, as the Alafin's European guests were customarily lodged with one of his officers at Oke Esinele. The action provoked jealousy and Ojelabi's house was set on fire the night the priests arrived. The fire destroyed everything, including the gifts the padres brought for the king.

The incident led to mutual recriminations between "*Omo Alawiye*", that is Ojelabi, and the Apeka; and the rumour came afloat that Ojelabi was preparing to set aflame the residence of the Are and the Otun Efa. These officers of the Alafin evacuated their homes for fear that the rumour might be true. Thomas Williams, the agent then in charge of the Oyo station, also feared that the activities of Foster and Ojelabi would destroy the church. Ojelabi was known to be always critical of the church. Williams therefore frantically sent letters to Olubi at Ibadan as the Apeka was asking for his presence at Oyo.<sup>72</sup> Olubi, seeing the development as the culmination of his restlessness and dangerous politics, lamented that "Ojelabi is really a thorn on our side in the royal city. 'Only he who now letteth will let until he (in his wise providence) be taken out of the way'".<sup>73</sup>

Years followed and Omo Alawiye was not taken out of the way. But he simmered down and proved stable. He even became the headman of the church helping Johnson to douse the fire of domestic persecutions as in the case of Adeyemi. He did much more. After the annual *Oro* festival of June 1892, Johnson organized a special treat for pupils and teachers of the day school and the Sunday school. Ojelabi hosted them at his farm, which was not far from the town. He generously organized a sumptuous meal for them, which they all enjoyed. In spite of his antecedents, everything seemed to be going on well between the headman and the church, and Johnson enjoyed his cooperation. But things changed in June 1893 after the anniversary meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society, which Oyo Christians held on June 12. Through the influence of his son, Ojelabi seceded with some other members of the church to the Roman Catholic Church.

On the Sunday following the anniversary, he attended the Catholic Church; and when Johnson went visiting the Sunday after, Ojelabi was not found at home. Apparently

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<sup>72</sup> T. Williams to D. Olubi, January 23, 1884 and January 27, 1884, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/65.

<sup>73</sup> D. Olubi to J. Maser, January 29, 1884, G3/A2/O(1884)/66.

in a bid to avoid his former pastor, he went into the forest for five weeks to saw boards. Johnson reported:

During this time, the Church elders visited him in a body twice. He raked up some foolish complaints, which he could not prove, and at length he said “My eyes are open and I cannot shut them. I have read, and read until I have found the right way.” He was asked to show them the book he read, which enlightened him, but he could not. Being a very influential man we feared his influence would tell. He was too far gone to reclaim; he himself said to us, “I have given my word to the Padres, and cannot prove a liar in 2 places at the same time.”<sup>74</sup>

Johnson had his own explanation for this unexpected exit from his congregation:

The real fact of the case was that he was promised money, and his son has biased his mind by telling him that in the Protestant communion, you have to be bothered with paying subscriptions again and again, but in the Catholic you have to receive instead. Little did we believe that a man of so comparatively wide experience, who has had intercourse with nearly all the old missionaries, Mann and Hinderer especially, and also blessed with moderate means, could...be so easily drawn away.<sup>75</sup>

Johnson felt Ojelabi inflicted a deep wound on him. And in another rare moment of openly expressing grief, he could not hold back from writing that:

What depressed me much body and mind was the lot of people, (the fruits of our labour) in this place and at Awe which he took over, coolly and quickly to the Catholic Church. They are all his dependents. Including himself, we have lost 21 members young and old. That must have been a sad breach [sic] in our small communion of Christians.—I can assure you that it depressed my spirit greatly. It was all like a dream to me.<sup>76</sup>

If it all seemed like a dream to Johnson and depressed him, he and those left behind were much more perplexed by the development that brought a breach into Ojelabi’s own family too:

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<sup>74</sup> S. Johnson, “Oyo” in *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/91.

<sup>75</sup> S. Johnson, “Oyo” in *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/91.

<sup>76</sup> S. Johnson, “Oyo” in *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/91.

What puzzled us most in the matter was, that he was previously the greatest declaimer of the Roman Catholic faith, and the women who waited on him at home, put this to his face. On the whole, I think I practically understand the feelings of the Apostle when he says Demas has forsaken me, because he loved this present world. [He] is not satisfied with those he has taken over, but he is trying his best with the rest of his people who refused to go over with him. His wife with all her [C]hristian relatives remained with us, and 4 of [his] own cousins and a sister. He shook all of them by threats, and by persecution, but they stood firm.<sup>77</sup>

While the church was still reeling from this shock, an epidemic with frightful mortality swept Oyo and its part of the Yoruba country. Johnson survived it after eight weeks of indisposition, having been helped by the medication offered by the missionary S.S. Farrow who, on his way to Ilorin, passed and returned through Oyo while the epidemic raged.<sup>78</sup>

It may be noted that the plight of the church at Oyo took place at the time the Holy Ghost Fathers were making their incursion into Eastern Nigeria. The Niger Mission of the CMS, launched by Bishop Crowther in 1857, was then in a crisis that led to the disconnection of several agents of the Society and the enforcement of “stricter discipline” in the mission. But whereas the CMS agents at Oyo were warned in 1884 not to fraternize with the padres, the bishop extended a hand of fellowship to this Catholic mission effort at Onitsha by giving them their first plot of land from where they started their work in 1885.<sup>79</sup> As a late arrival in the Yoruba country, Roman Catholic Christianity could not make a headway among the people, three Protestant Christian missions having already berthed there and were presently jostling for converts among a people committed to their indigenous religions and Islam.<sup>80</sup> It is therefore understandable that the padres were vigorous in their effort to establish a foothold in the country, even if it meant breaking into the ranks of the existing missions.<sup>81</sup> In the end their success with Ojelabi was

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<sup>77</sup> S. Johnson, “Oyo” in *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/91.

<sup>78</sup> S. Johnson, “Oyo” in *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/91.

<sup>79</sup> John Baur comments that “The Bishop handed over the piece of land with the words: ‘I acquired this land for the cause of God; take it.’ It is a pity that this act of kindness by the black Bishop did not augur a better relationship between the two missions. It was followed by one of the most bitter denominational competitions in Africa.” *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 1994), 149.

<sup>80</sup> Baur, 145.

<sup>81</sup> The less cultivated field across the Niger offered the Catholics a vast sphere of opportunity at this time. They had no difficulties attracting pupils and members from the CMS schools and churches weakened by the crisis in the mission. Their work received fresh impetus through Father

tempered by the eventual return of some of those he harassed to their fold. These formed the majority among the 16 candidates that were given the rite of confirmation when Bishop Isaac Oluwole visited Oyo on an episcopal visit on December 2, 1894.<sup>82</sup> How Johnson must have been comforted by this pleasant reversal of his loss.

In coming to Oyo to assume ministerial responsibility for the CMS congregation, Johnson found himself in a political predicament with the coastal peoples of Ijebu and Egba. With time, this was resolved amicably. But the greatest challenge was building a congregation in a town where poverty abounded, persecution attended conversion, and three other Christian missions were vying for converts among the same people. His modest success after six years was tested by the schism in his congregation led by the headman. This was also largely resolved in the eventual return of some among the schismatic elements. The next eight years would be full of other challenges that would test his health and his relationship with his European supervisors.

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Shanahan in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when he penetrated the Igbo country with his “bush schools” after the British expedition of 1901 destroyed the Long Juju of Arochukwu. Baur, 149.

<sup>82</sup> I. Oluwole to F. Baylis, March 6, 1895, CMS G3/A2/O(1895)/57.

## Chapter 6

### A Long Sunset in a Changing Milieu, 1893-1901

From 1893, some processes that were not complementary to life and ministry came to work in Johnson's life at Oyo. It appears as if the long itineration he undertook on behalf of the Alafin and the Governor of Lagos Colony had taken their toll on his health. At the same time, the emerging CMS mission ethos was proving unfavourable, and administrative concerns were threatening his continuous stay in the royal city. New and younger recruits were entering the service of the Society who did not share the vision of the old culturally engaging mission practice of Christianity, commerce and civilization, in which the Johnson family had been groomed from their days in Hastings, Sierra Leone.<sup>1</sup>

The first sign of Samuel's diminishing vigour became evident in the second half of 1893, when he was out of work for eight weeks and subsequently showed repeated signs of ill health.<sup>2</sup> Soon after this, at the December meeting of the Finance Committee, Johnson's superintendent, Rev. Harding, moved for a swap of stations between him and Rev. D.O. Williams of Ake, Abeokuta, if the proposal was acceptable to Rev. J.B. Wood. Harding was of the opinion that Johnson's influence in the royal city "has been impaired by his employment at different times as a representative of the British Government".<sup>3</sup> To Johnson's advantage, the discussion that followed stalemated the proposal.

Charles Philips, Johnson's colleague with whom he ran the peace errands on behalf of the government in 1886, now a bishop, objected to the proposal on the grounds that the pastor at Oyo and the authorities at Abeokuta were "not on good terms". Rev. James Johnson also expressed the opinion that "the Rev. D.O. Williams would not be acceptable to the people of Oyo in as much as he is an Egba". The matter was left to be discussed between the superintendent, Bishop Oluwole and Daniel Olubi at Ibadan in January. The matter ended there.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Johnson Sr., Samuel's father, was a beneficiary of a training programme organized between the CMS Sierra Leone Mission and the Parent Committee in London. It was part of the missionary agenda of Christianity, commerce and civilization aimed at improving the economic and social condition of Africa. The programme took Henry Johnson to Kew Gardens in 1853 to learn horticulture. H. Venn to W. Hooker, July 15, 1853, RBGK DC33/425; H. Venn to H. Johnson, October 22, 1853, CMS C/A1/L5(1854-1857)/142-145.

<sup>2</sup> "Oyo", *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/91.

<sup>3</sup> Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, December 21, 1893, G3/A2/O(1894)/24.

Michel Doortmont has suggested that from Johnson's report of the proceedings at Oyo, he was "not very enthusiastic" about the government and that, at this time, "it is possible that his relationship with the Alafin and officials had indeed deteriorated".<sup>4</sup> He buttressed his conjecture with Ayandele's submission that from 1892 it was S.G. Pinnock of the American Southern Baptist Mission who acted as the secretary to the Alafin in his correspondence with the Lagos government. Doortmont's suggestion appears like a misreading of Johnson's journal entry of March 7, 1887, and his letter to his superintendent, J.B. Wood, dated November 8, 1887. In the journal entry, he was setting in context, in his characteristic style, the case of a fire alarm that occurred that day and distracted everyone's attention as usual. In doing so, he held the royalty responsible for the social menace of incendiarism. And in the letter to his superintendent, Mr. Wood, he was making a case for better remuneration for himself in view of the expensive and exploitative environment of Oyo.<sup>5</sup> Nothing in those journals and letters actually implies a deteriorated relationship with the Oyo government. And, at any rate, these were his early days of residence in the town.

The key to understanding the politics involved in the proposal for transfer Johnson can be found in the discussion that followed it. First, Harding appears ignorant of the process that drew Johnson into the politics of the country as much as he was unaware of the reach and the controversial nature of his involvement. It would have sounded more appropriate if Johnson's problem was that he was too close to the court such that his effectiveness as a minister was being impaired, if that was the case indeed. But it was not so; as a matter of fact, his involvement with state functionaries could only be an advantage to the efforts of the Society in a town where Christianity was seeking acceptance among the people, both high and low.

On the other hand, Johnson having in the first instance been introduced to the colonial government while running the Alafin's errand, the royalty could only have counted it an advantage to have him reside in Oyo. This is more so when it is remembered that the royal office at Oyo had, since 1876, requested from the Society an agent who would double as the Alafin's secretary. The Finance Committee had on that occasion considered for the assignment Nathaniel Johnson, Samuel's elder brother; but the scarcity

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Doortmont, "Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History" (PhD diss., Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 1994), 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, March 7, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1997)/212; S. Johnson to J. Wood, November 8, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1888)/9

of personnel rendered it impossible. The committee then suggested that the agent at Iseyin or at Ogbomosho should assist the king with his correspondence.<sup>6</sup>

But the jettisoning of Johnson as Alafin's secretary from 1892 did not necessarily imply a deterioration in relationship with the court. It can be attributed to the local calculation that communication would be better facilitated if a European mediated their interest with his people. After all, the misconception that informed the use of the agents at Ibadan to communicate with the government on the coast in the early 1880s was that they spoke the same language with Europeans. Now finding a white man residing in Oyo, the local authorities could only have thought that they would get better deals by using him to handle their communication with his people. The proposal to transfer Johnson had nothing to do with his standing with Oyo authorities.

Second, Harding's negative perception of Johnson's involvement with the colonial government vis-à-vis Oyo, erroneous though it was, reflects the spirit at work among the new generation of missionaries in the late nineteenth century Yoruba land. Whereas the first generation saw as part of their task the facilitation of the benevolence of their government, at home and overseas, for the good of the people as Townsend did at Abeokuta and Hinderer at Ibadan, the new missionaries preferred to keep a distance from their governments. Even the generation that followed the pioneer one, like James Hamilton's, had no problem cooperating with the colonial regime in Lagos to resolve the crisis in the interior.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Maser even drew from his perceived familiarity of Johnson with the authorities in the country, among other arguments, to advance the case for his ordination into the Deacon's Order. Obviously, he reckoned with the advantage such connection could bring the mission in the interior if he could be admitted into the ministry of the CMS.

But the new missionary spirit, from the late 1880s, loathed such association, and Harding's proposal for Johnson's transfer may be seen as an enactment of the new transcript of non-involvement with temporal powers. In his own reckoning, Johnson was being distracted from his pastoral and evangelistic assignments by the *other* Europeans on the coast who were there for a secular agenda. The remedy, he thought, was to cut him off them by his transfer to Abeokuta where the indigenous authorities were ill-disposed towards the colonial administration in Lagos and Johnson would thereby be irrelevant to both parties.

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<sup>6</sup> Finance Committee, Resolution by Correspondence, June 9, 1876, CMS C/A2/O1.

<sup>7</sup> J. Hamilton to R. Lang, March 3, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/67.

Third, the political talk that stalemated the proposal shows how the mission and its agents were circumscribed by the clannish spirit at work in the country. More than at any other station of the Society in the Yoruba country, Christian missionary work was closest to state functionaries at Abeokuta. Egba Christians also did not draw a line between their loyalty to the church and their loyalty to the temporal powers at Abeokuta. They did not seem to see the need for such dichotomy. With Townsend's close involvement with the authorities of the town in his days, they could not have seen the need for that. The complications that arose at Abeokuta, from 1879, with respect to the decision of the Parent Committee to prohibit their agents from keeping domestic slaves is an evidence of this lack of discrimination of Egba Christians. Townsend himself indulged Egba Christians' participation in the war between Ijaye and Ibadan.<sup>8</sup> The result was that Egba chiefs did not consider anything sacrosanct about the indigenous agents of the Society. And so when Johnson apparently ran foul of their interest, he became a *persona non grata* at Abeokuta. His offence was twofold. He was in the vanguard of the penetration of the interior by the colonial government. Mr. Wood had indicated in his letter in 1885 that Egba authorities did not wish to see the government on the coast exercise influence in the interior as it might give them a foothold there.<sup>9</sup> Johnson's association with the government's peace efforts in the interior, therefore, made him liable for the foothold they had now gained. This added to the standing accusation against him that he was taking firearms into the country when Egba authorities had prohibited their conveyance into the interior.

About a year after his first protracted illness, and the matter of transfer having been closed, Johnson arrived at Lagos on September 18, 1894, still to attend to his health problem.<sup>10</sup> And he soon returned to Oyo much improved.<sup>11</sup> Not long after, he applied to the Finance Committee for a four month leave of absence, stating that "he had been unwell, had suffered much from bodily weakness, he had had medical advice, & had been ordered to have a change of locality for a time, & rest". At the same time he informed the committee of his engagement to Miss Martha Garber, a teacher at the Girls' Seminary in

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<sup>8</sup> H. Townsend to Secretaries, July 5, 1860, CMS C/A2/O85/77.

<sup>9</sup> J. Wood to R. Lang, August 19, 1885, CMS G3/A2/O(1885)/153.

<sup>10</sup> T. Harding to F. Baylis, October 3, 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/169; Finance Committee, Minutes, October 17, 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/163.

<sup>11</sup> "The Month", *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, October 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1895)/3.

Lagos, and his plan to be married to her before the end of the leave.<sup>12</sup> The committee granted the request and expressed their pleasure at the development.<sup>13</sup> The marriage took place in Lagos on June 20, 1895.<sup>14</sup>

While Johnson's health declined in the 1890s another trend emerged in the CMS Yoruba Mission from 1893. With the subjugation of the Ijebu in 1892, the consequent opening up of the country, and the breaking of the Ibadan and Ilorin war camps, the mission decided to occupy the vast interior that had been untouched by Christianity. To this end, the Finance Committee decided, in 1893, to mandate the pastor at Oyo to prospect the occupation of Ejigbo, Iwo, Ikirun, Ede and Oshogbo. He was "to report to the Committee suitable openings for missionary work; and that where possible suitable sites for mission stations should be obtained".<sup>15</sup> This rural pull exerted tremendous pressure on the new generation of missionaries in Lagos who were tired of the routine administrative work they were engaged in at the institutions and at the bookshop. As in their attitude of detachment towards the state, the pull reinforced their conservative spirit and fanned their criticism of their present engagements in Lagos.

Clearly articulated by the missionary Stephen S. Farrow, the new missionary spirit concluded that the work in Lagos—running of schools and bookshop—was not missionary enough and that it should be relinquished to the "natives" entirely. The Training Institution, according to Farrow's critique, was no longer serving the purpose of evangelistic work; its curriculum of study had become almost "entirely secular". In fact, the moderating influence of the government was considered a disadvantage to mission work. Farrow concluded with the indication that he was speaking for the missionary community:

I think we all long for the day when the C.M.S. will leave Lagos. The Training Institution would be much better in an interior town where it could be an evangelistic agency,—& the curriculum of study more Scriptural & Theological. The Secretariat might be removed to Abeokuta

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<sup>12</sup> This romance might have been facilitated by Johnson's sister-in-law Zenobia Johnson, the wife of his elder brother, Nathaniel. Mrs. Johnson was then working at the Girls' Seminary with Miss Garber.

<sup>13</sup> Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, January 21, 1895, CMS G3/A2/O(1895)/53.

<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to Michel R. Doortmont for this information which he retrieved from *Lagos Weekly Record*, June 22, 1895. "Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History", 27.

<sup>15</sup> Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, March 21, 1893, CMS G3/A2/O(1895)/53. The assignment might not be unconnected with Johnson's own vision of the occupation of those places, which he expressed during his first trip to Ibadan war camp in 1882.

or Ibadan especially as we have now a post office in this town & a weekly mail.<sup>16</sup>

This dissatisfaction was total, for the new spirit of mission had no value for the affirmation and elevation of indigenous cultures as much as it was critical of European colonial ambitions and formal Christianity. Missionaries therefore made itinerating journeys into the interior while their rank swelled with women missionaries who were stationed at Ibadan and Oyo to work respectively with young girls and the women in the king's harem.<sup>17</sup> The proposal of the newly consecrated Bishop Tugwell for the movement of the secretariat to Ibadan also "commended itself" to the Finance Committee, "provided someone were stationed in Lagos, duly qualified to take charge of such accounts as required to be settled on the spot."<sup>18</sup>

Oyo proved favourable for the relocation of the Training Institution. "The object of removal among other things [being] to make it more directly evangelical, industrial, economical & to avoid working for Government Exams".<sup>19</sup> From April 1896 when Mr. Melville Jones inaugurated the institution at the royal city, Oyo gradually became another significant centre of European missionary activities in Yorubaland.<sup>20</sup> Missionary occupation of the hinterland brought the European agents to Oyo on their way to and from the Upper Niger, Ogbomoso and Oshogbo. The result was that the renewed activities of European missionaries in the interior brought Ibadan and Oyo under a regular surveillance of the new missionaries. The liberal management of the mission premises was the first to suffer their attack.

At Ibadan, Iseyin and Ilesha, the indigenous agents were told to secure the exits of those persons who were allowed to live on the mission premises but who were not in the service of the Society, latest by the end of 1895.<sup>21</sup> Bishop Tugwell was in the vanguard of getting rid of these persons at the various stations. Four years later, he brought the case of Oyo before the Finance Committee "complaining of the many people living in the Rev. S. Johnson's house, & compound, especially of a woman named Ashabi who he understood was a person of immoral character, & was trading; & also of a woman named Adegun, who was trading at Mr. Johnson's house".

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<sup>16</sup> S. Farrow to F. Baylis, April 5, 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/84.

<sup>17</sup> T. Harding to F. Baylis, October 3, 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/169.

<sup>18</sup> Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, June 7, 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/112.

<sup>19</sup> Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, July 12, 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/134.

<sup>20</sup> M. Jones to F. Baylis, March 22, 1896, CMS G3/A2/O(1896)/85.

<sup>21</sup> Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, February 11, 1895, CMS G3/A2/O(1895)/53.

The Secretary of the Finance Committee, Mr. Harding, investigated the matter soon after the bishop made his observation and read a letter from Johnson explaining:

[T]hat Ashabi was a relation of his & only on a visit to him after the death of her child, that what she was selling were a few odds & ends she had brought with her to buy food with on her return; that Adegun was under his guardianship and whenever she was not well which was very often she stayed with him, but did not bring her trading things to his house. That the young men living there were his horseman & mailman; the third man who was sometimes employed by him about the premises had found lodgings outside.<sup>22</sup>

The Finance Committee were satisfied with the explanation and the matter ended there, but one wonders how Johnson felt about this intrusion.

For its detachment from the social and cultural transformation of people and society, the new missionary spirit could not have commended itself to Johnson who had been schooled in the century long association of Christianity with civilization. The formality that largely shaped the relationship between these new missionaries and the indigenous agents of the Society proceeded from this new missionary spirit. And although it was not in any way malicious, Johnson did not experience in his relationship with the younger missionaries, particularly Harding, the fraternity and solidarity he enjoyed with Hinderer and Wood who exemplified the old, patriarchal missionary tradition.<sup>23</sup> It is no wonder then that in his most anxious moment at Oyo, during Captain Bower's bombardment of the royal city, he did not deem it fit to report the incident to Harding, his superintendent then, who was close by at Ibadan. He was not interested in the political life of the country after all. Rather, he wrote to Mr. Wood who was further away at Abeokuta and held no office in the Finance Committee, giving him detailed information on the proceedings, the uncertainty, and the panic that had seized the whole town.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, January 20-February 3, 1899, CMS G3/A2/O(1899)/49.

<sup>23</sup> This came out vividly when Captain Bower bombarded Oyo in 1895. Johnson did not report the tense situation to his superintendent, Tom Harding, who was much nearer at Ibadan. Rather, he reported detailed proceedings to Mr. J.B. Wood at Abeokuta. S. Johnson to J. Wood, November 11 and 14, 1895, CMS G3/A2/O(1895)/188.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson developed a close friendship with Wood when he accompanied him to the war camp at Kiriji in September 1884 in his, that is Mr. Wood's, personal attempt to broker peace between Ibadan and the confederate army of Ijesha and Ekiti. The journey that lasted four weeks nearly brought about a rapprochement between the belligerents, but it turned out unsuccessful as there was no army at hand to supervise decamping. His repeated attempt the following year when he visited the camps again through the Ondo country also ended futile. The negotiations he carried











challenges were ill-health and finance, both of which revealed how enamoured he had become with his indigenous Yoruba roots.

## Chapter 7

### Encountering the Faiths of the Ancestors

The Yoruba country into which mission came in the nineteenth century was a field already saturated with various religious cults. The many expressions of indigenous Yoruba religions functioned alongside Islam, a monotheistic faith that had domiciled among the people from the days of their prosperity as an empire. Over the centuries of their interaction, and well before the advent of mission, the two traditions coexisted among the people in a syncretistic relationship. The people seem to have received Islam as another faith whose divinity they could give a place in their pantheon. Hence, the syncretistic relationship between the two appears, as it were, to have been taken for granted by the people for whom religious devotion is a means for solving the many problems of human existence.

Johnson's earliest observation of the leverage Yoruba religions held in the country occurred on his arrival from Sierra Leone in 1858. The religious situation in his new environment was in utter contrast to what was happening in Sierra Leone, especially in Hastings, where the cults had been stampeded out of public glare by Mr. Graf who personally enforced the extant edict against religious sacrifices in the colony.

At the end of October, that year, some residents of the town reported hearing some sounds of groaning, sighing and distress from the hill. When it was inquired what the matter was, the Oke'badan deity complained that its worship had been neglected for many years. An enquiry was then made into what the spirit desired. It demanded "three horses, three laws, three human beings" and "a number of other creatures", as well as a large quantity of cowries. Collection was then made in the town for the cowries and the required sacrifices were carried out, the result of which was that Oke'badan issued the following edicts. First, Ibadan had become largely populated by the other Yoruba people whose towns and settlements had been destroyed by its warriors. These victims were to return to their towns and villages, rebuild them, and reoccupy them. Second, the town contained too many strange people brought there as slaves, the war boys having just returned from the destruction of Efon, that is Ekiti, country and other towns in its direction. The warriors must now stop their activities in that direction, lest any increase in

their number bring destruction upon the town. Third, the Egungun masquerades<sup>1</sup> were no longer to operate in the town. Fourth, an ultimatum was given that all the pigs in the town be removed, and none were to be seen roaming about it again.<sup>2</sup>

The last edict, demanding the destruction of pigs, was a hard one on the people and they never believed it would be carried out. When, however, the town authorities ordered their wholesale destruction at the expiration of the ultimatum,

there was a running, a catching, a selling, a killing, a cutting to pieces of these poor...animals, such as few people ever beheld, add to which the screaming [sic] of hundreds of them from every quarter of the town, as they were running & fumbling over one another together with the hallooing & bellowing of their female owners quarrelling with their persecuters [sic], & the uproar & confusion of the town was complete.<sup>3</sup>

As for the sacrifices, the three human beings demanded by Oke'badan were not immolated as the deity was not interested in eating people. It simply asked for these people to be dedicated to its welfare while at the same time, like everyone else, cultivate their fields.

Hinderer easily identified the utilitarian nature of the people's religion through the dynamics behind Oke'badan's edicts. Like the Agbakin who facilitated his acceptance as a missionary to Ibadan in 1851, the first war-chief, Balogun Ibikunle, had in recent years been "peacefully inclined". As the health of the late Bale continued to decline, and as the next in line to the highest civil office of the town, Ibikunle waxed bolder in his venture for peace, ordering some of the destroyed towns to be rebuilt and resettled by their displaced inhabitants. His initiative did not go down well with the second war-chief, Ogunmola, who curbed the move. In the context of this clash of interests, Hinderer understood the invocation of the long-neglected cult of Oke'badan as a religious attempt to attain the same end sought by Ibikunle, his personal inclination having been checked by a belligerent colleague.<sup>4</sup> Such an interpretation of a town-wide event could not have escaped members of Hinderer's household. And the rationalization would later become part of Samuel Johnson whose young mind was getting attuned to his new environment prevalent with religions other than Christianity in contrast to what obtained in the Colony of Sierra Leone.

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<sup>1</sup> These are supposed "heavenly denizens" who visit Yoruba communities during the annual celebration of the cult of ancestors.

<sup>2</sup> D. Hinderer, Half Yearly Report of Ibadan Station Ending April 1859, CMS C/A2/O49/116.

<sup>3</sup> D. Hinderer, Half Yearly Report of Ibadan Station Ending April 1859, CMS C/A2/O49/116.

<sup>4</sup> D. Hinderer, Half Yearly Report of Ibadan Station Ending April 1859, CMS C/A2/O49/116.

What Hinderer’s interpretation missed out was the influence of Islam in the demands of Oke’badan. Islam had long been among Yoruba people before the wars of attrition that broke out in the second decade of the century. Over the years, it had been domesticated in syncretistic union with Yoruba religions. In the present dispensation wherein the wars brought about the founding of new towns and the need for protection against the vicissitudes of the times became rife, Yoruba Islam enjoyed the patronage of the masses of the people for its protective charms.<sup>5</sup> It became connected with the chiefs, even if many of them did not claim adherence to it. Where they did, they practiced it alongside the traditional religions. Nevertheless, the people had not forgotten the role of Moslems in the destruction of their country and still looked at them with suspicion. Yoruba Moslems too were not satisfied with their second rate position in the country. They wanted for their faith the primacy enjoyed by traditional religions, hence the insinuation in 1858 that they planned to kill the first three chiefs in order that the fourth, who was a Moslem, could become the Bale of Ibadan.

The fact of the matter is also that Yoruba Moslems, in spite of their religious syncretism, loathe some practices in Yoruba religions and social life, apart from the placing of sacrifices, *ebo*, at street junctions, *orita*. The rearing of pigs, especially within towns, was also offensive to their religious sensibility. But the most irritating to them is the cult of the ancestors, Egungun, which they considered satanic. While they succeeded in influencing the culture of limiting the offering of sacrifices to family compounds in Ibadan, the pigs could, unimpeded, scavenge all over town, and the Egungun masquerades continued to roam about freely in their season. While the personality of the priest who divined the wishes of Oke’badan is not clear, the attempt to outlaw the Egungun and to forbid the free foraging of pigs in the town was certainly an Islamic agenda, for both were practices most appalling to Yoruba Moslems. On the one hand, the edicts of Oke’badan demonstrated the syncretistic unity between Islam and Yoruba religions and culture. On the other, the episode showed Islam’s present loathing of some aspects of Yoruba institutions so much as to want to ride on their back to purge them

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<sup>5</sup> This is to make clear the difference between Islam in Yorubaland and its expression in Ilorin where it is essentially legalistic, political and vigorously expansionist. At Iseyin, from where the Fulani raiders of the western flank of the country established their base at the collapse of the old empire, the two strands of Yoruba and Fulani Islam blended together and actually dominated that section of the country as far as “a day’s journey from Abeokuta”, according to Hinderer. Their fortunes in that sector suffered reversal under Kurunmi’s uncompromising overthrow of their regime to establish himself as the master of that flank. D. Hinderer to Secretaries, September 24, 1858, CMS C/A2/O49/36.

from the people's traditions. Johnson, in these early years in Ibadan, would have observed the legitimacy and the dominance Yoruba religions commanded as state religion in contrast to what obtained at Hastings where Christianity, the faith of the colonists, held sway. And as he grew to become one of the purveyors of Christianity in Ibadan, he could not have missed in his later years the significance of this Oke'badan episode as evidence of the reformist agenda of Islam and the subtle tension inherent in the relationship between the two faiths that preceded Christianity among his people.

In the same year the Bale died, the pretensions of Yoruba Moslems to sack at will the fledgling Christian community in Ibadan gave the vulnerable band concern, even if Mr. Hinderer was confident of their political powerlessness. From 1851 when he made his exploratory visit, they had unsuccessfully sought to exclude Christianity from Ibadan. When, in 1858, the news of the massacre in Jeddah reached Ibadan "through messengers from Mecca", it renewed their resolve to see white men and their followers dispatched from the country. A group of Moslems threatened one of the newly recruited Scripture readers from Sierra Leone in the streets of Ibadan that "his days were numbered". They claimed that "they had just heard that God had given a command to them according to which they shall have to cut off the heads of all the white men in this country, then theirs, i.e. our African teachers, & then all the peoples who follow us...". Although the threat came to nought, it entrenched Hinderer in his belief that it was providential that "heathen rulers" were in power in the Yoruba country and not Islamic powers as in Ilorin.<sup>6</sup>

The advent, however, of mission Christianity in the country became a challenge to Yorubas' proclivity for religious syncretism. For the missionaries came insisting that syncretism cannot be taken for granted as a legitimate response to religious pluralism and, in fact, undesirable in the practice of Christianity. Hence, the faith of the church would not coalesce with Yoruba religions. Rather, its purveyors would argue over and again its uniqueness and its discontinuity with religious traditions already prevailing in the country. Nevertheless, the agents of mission could not avoid contact with the two traditions. For Samuel Johnson, evangelistic, pastoral and social encounters with the people furnished the ground for lively interaction between Christianity, on the one hand, and Yoruba religions and Islam on the other.

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<sup>6</sup> D. Hinderer to Secretaries, September 24, 1858, CMS C/A2/O49/36.

### **Personal Encounters with Yoruba Religions**

From 1877, after inaugurating his evangelistic bands at Aremo, Johnson's evangelistic thrusts, pastoral activities, and chance meetings brought him into verbal and active contention with adherents of Yoruba religions and Islam. While the encounters were diverse, three of the cults—*Ifa*, *Sango* and *Ọbàtála*—featured prominently for their pervasive influence among the people. Johnson's response to these encounters shows how the minister perceived local religions. And in contrast to the situation in the colonial environments of Hastings and Lagos, the power advantage rested with the traditional cults as state religions.

#### *Ifa*

After several weeks of visits by the Christian visitors assigned to Ọjǒ, who reported a favourable reception by the Bǎle of the village, Johnson decided to visit the people. For the sermon of the day, he took his text from Acts 17:30 and elaborated on “the love of God in the gift of his son to redeem the world from sin.” After the sermon, an old man made a long speech in which he disputed Johnson's claim that Jesus is the mediator between God and man. The man said:

I was taught that after the world was made, sin entered to spoil God's work as you have said, and that there was a great counsel in heaven in which Ejiògbè (Ifá) was deputed, & commissioned to settle the affairs of the world, and since he was sent, any case can be settled by consulting him. Ejiògbè, and not Christ is the Redeemer of the world.<sup>7</sup>

The man understood the mediatory function of divinities in religion and Johnson's sermon was not difficult for him to comprehend. But he contended his assertion of Jesus as the mediator; and instead of Jesus he argued that Ejiògbè is the redeemer of the world. Johnson launched a counter-offensive by preparing a functionalist ground of religion into which he drew his opponent:

I then asked him, What is the creed of the Yoruba country? “Ejiògbè,” he replied. Take then for example the late Ijaye war which was a civil war between kindred tribe [sic], the many thousands that perished and since then, of their yearly expeditions which send thousands to eternity, and rendered hundreds of thousands of families miserable, bringing them into a

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<sup>7</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, June 17, 1877, CMS C/A2/O58/8.







to perform the ceremony.” They were told first to go and perform the ceremonies in the woods, where large trees are struck by the lightening, but even then, nothing could be done here for our ground is a holy ground.<sup>13</sup>

Between Johnson and Sango worshippers, the issue at stake moved to the debate between the civilized and the uncivilized, between nature and religion, and between universal phenomenon and territorial claim. The arguments were fuelled by mutual religious bellicosity, Christianity versus indigenous religion; and both parties knew this. But they proceeded from two different planes of consciousness—Johnson’s progress-thinking that drew from western science and Sango worshippers’ conservative orientation rigidly anchored on Yoruba primal tradition. The catechist knew there would be no success as long as both of them remained fixed in their irreconcilable positions. He then did two things. First, to end the debate, he impugned their motive of easy gain by directing their attention to the wilderness where their rituals would bring them no material advantage. At the same time he affirmed the sanctity of the ground on which the mission station stood over against the indiscriminate territorial claim of his opponents. Second, Johnson widened the field of contest to the political plane by drawing the chiefs into the matter through his superior at Kudeti, Daniel Olubi.

The Kudeti station enjoyed privileges with the chiefs in that quarter, and there was an understanding between the head of Sango worshippers there and the mission that they would not operate in the vicinity of the mission.<sup>14</sup> In the present circumstances Olubi must extend this privilege to Aremo; he therefore sent to the highest ranking chief in town, Tājo, who promised to protect the mission from Sango worshippers. A thanksgiving service that drew attendance from the three stations in Ibadan was organized immediately. It would seem to be equally calculated to make clear to Sango worshippers the strength of the Christian constituency in the town in contrast to the vulnerable number they appeared to command at Aremo. But Sango’s people would not relent. They reminded Johnson that the Are was at the battlefield and tradition forbade him from offering battle until Sango was appeased. Recourse was made to Olubi the second time, and his sterner message to the authorities was taken seriously and a public meeting was fixed at which the matter was finally laid to rest. Meanwhile, Johnson was publicly

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<sup>13</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, September 30, 1883, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>14</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, June 1, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/28.





her. From all indications, he did not progress beyond being a prospect and Johnson could only hope that his repentance was not “like that of Felix”.<sup>21</sup> But he was of some value to Johnson. In trying to compare the truths of both faiths and seeking to clarify from the catechist their points of departure, he became his informant on the teachings of the *Lemomu*<sup>22</sup> of the Moslem community with respect to the Christian faith.<sup>23</sup>

A few Moslem women who did not convert to Christianity, particularly two of the Are’s principal wives and another woman relative, held the Christian community in high esteem and were generous to the vulnerable band. Johnson particularly lamented the death in 1880 of this relative of the Are. A wealthy woman and a long standing friend of the mission, she came to the assistance of Mr. and Mrs Hinderer during the Ijaye war when the mission was shut in. At the exit of the missionary couple, she remained an astute defender of the Christians against mischievous elements in the town.<sup>24</sup> It was significant for Johnson that this woman had lived in Lagos where, according to her, she became acquainted with Christians.<sup>25</sup>

If Johnson responded with sensitivity and appreciation in his social and pastoral contacts with adherents of Islam, his contact with the faith early in his itinerant preaching could be combative. In his early preaching days at Ikoyi quarter “a proud Mohammedan” opposed him, arguing the superiority of Islam to Christianity. He advised Johnson and his colleague, as people with “superior knowledge”, like Moslems, “not to preach any longer to the heathens, for...they are destined for hell”. In response, Johnson sharply rebuked him.

Finding that he will only disturb, “holding the key, and would not enter, neither allow others to enter,” I turned to him, and showed him that they are not a whit better than the heathens whom they despise; and that with all their religious observances they are worse than the idolaters.<sup>26</sup>

A few months after berating his opponent, he had an unusual conversation, apparently, with the same man who was in fact a Moslem priest. If the conversation reveals anything, it is nothing but the cynicism of the age. He and Thomas Williams were returning from their preaching engagement on a day they had nothing but discouragement

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<sup>21</sup> Acts 24:24-26.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson often referred to the *Lemomu* as the Bishop of the Moslem community.

<sup>23</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, August 9, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>24</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 13, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/161; Journal Entry, September 30, 1883, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>25</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 13, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/161

<sup>26</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 3, 1870, CMS C/A2/O58/1.



“God alone is above them and knows the secret of their wisdom.” But having the presence of mind to find that he was betraying himself, he said to me, “but you have all your glories in this world, and none in the world to come.” I then said to him, the fact that God honoureth us with great blessings here disproves your argument.... Is God unrighteous to reward us with evil hereafter if we faithfully serve him here, and reward with good those who are unfaithful? He was speechless, and smiling at me promised to give me a kola nut if I call[ed] on him on my return.<sup>28</sup>

Both priests did not discuss the subject that evoked their discussion—prayer in their religious traditions; they were rather distracted by the Moslem cleric’s overwhelming admiration of the European material achievement that accompanied Christianity into the country. But Johnson refused his opponent the solace he sought in what he considered an impossible theology. Rather than accept the fatalistic conclusion that the privileges of the present life have been apportioned to Christians while those of the world to come have been reserved for Moslems, Johnson countered with the logic of divine consistency and human responsibility: those whom God honours in the present life could not be dishonoured in the world to come simply because they have been honoured in this life. On the contrary, merit in the world to come will be a product of faithful service in the present existence. Although he was dumbfounded by Johnson’s logic, the Lemomu could not have missed Johnson’s insinuation that Christians are “those who are faithful” and the Moslems are “those who are unfaithful”.

This encounter shows again the incongruence between the presupposition underlying Johnson’s argument and those of his opponents in his evangelistic encounters. The Moslem cleric, drawing his argument from Yoruba Islamic fatalism, conjectured that it would be unfair for people to have the best of both worlds, here and hereafter. To him, those who have been destined to have the best in the world should not expect to have it as good in the world to come; rather, it should be the turn of those who have been disadvantaged in the present existence to have the bliss of the world to come, for only so could Fate be just. But for Johnson, human eternal destiny was not a rigid but a fluid matter, depending on what individuals have made of the present life. And although it is implicit in his argument that Christians are the faithful ones, his conditional phrase, “if we faithfully serve him here”, shows that, for Johnson, the eternal destiny of Christians is also contingent on their consistency in living true to their religious vocation in the world. This is evangelical mission Christianity, premised on both God’s provision of salvation

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<sup>28</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, August 7, 1876, CMS C/A2/O58/7.

through the person of Jesus of Nazareth and human responsibility to respond to it in obedience. In the context of the social realities of the time, nineteenth century mission Christianity concluded this combination of divine and human activities as the outworking of providence. As it will be shown later, this providential historiography provided Johnson the interpretive framework for all that was happening in and around him.

The Lemomu's experience with Johnson and his fear that some members of his congregation were being attracted to Christianity did not leave him without a concern for his flock. Being aware that contact with the growing band of Christians in the town was unavoidable, he repeatedly addressed the matter during his Ramadan lectures of 1882. He advised his people:

To draw near, and be conversant with the Christians, learn pure morality from them, and to have an accurate knowledge of their bible; but strictly charged them, not to hold any controversy with them, lest we will convince them by sound arguments and they be led to renounce Mohammedanism.<sup>29</sup>

The Moslem preacher acknowledged something he and his people could learn from their Christian counterparts, but he was also aware of the peril of engaging them in intellectual argument, an enterprise in which the Christians had shown themselves to be more versatile. Yet he seems to underestimate the effect on his people of gleaning "accurate knowledge of their bible". But in Johnson's reckoning, it was a desirable development as the advice inadvertently amounted to advancing the mission of the Christians:

The...testimony from a Mohammedan Priest is encouraging and we sincerely hope that they obey the lecturer, for who could resist the spirit of God? Let them come for head knowledge, "Saul went to seek his father's asses and found a kingdom."<sup>30</sup>

But if the Lemomu shot himself in the foot, the unrealistic nature of his advice to his flock not to join issues with the Christians in religious debates also came to light only a few days after the lectures. One of his followers engaged Johnson and his schoolmaster at Aremo, R. S. Oyebode, in an argument over which of the scriptures should be regarded as the word of God, the Bible or the Koran. Overwhelmed by the two agents, the Moslem

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<sup>29</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, August 9, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>30</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, August 9, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

requested that the matter be dropped.<sup>31</sup> But it was only a temporary reprieve as the matter came up again between Johnson and another member of the Moslem community.

### **Authenticity and Episteme as Grounds for Legitimacy**

Johnson visited another Moslem “acquaintance” during the Islamic festival of fire-throwing; the festival marks Noah’s and his fellow survivors’ disembarkation from the ark after the flood.<sup>32</sup> Johnson met his friend in the company of other Moslems where one of them was instructing the company on the symbolic meaning of the occasion. According to Johnson’s report of the lecture, the teacher told the gathering:

Noah was only 6 months in the ark, including the landing of the ark and his exit. “The ark...having rested on a mount, those 70 lives saved by Noah with him in the ark went to him with torches in their hands, (for it was in the night they quitted the ark, and it was dark) to congratulate Noah on their safe landing[”].

Using the Genesis account of the Bible, Johnson contested the teaching of the instructor, but the Islamic teacher insisted on the correctness of his version of the story. The controversy led to a disputation on which of the scriptures is the word of God, the Bible or the Koran.

Maintaining that the Koran is the word of God, I asked him to prove it? [sic] He said that Mohammed gave an account of 5 generations prior to his birth, and on this ground he is a prophet. That is a weak argument I said to him, for I can now tell you the names and histories of the Kings of Yoruba, since it was a Kingdom, generations before King Abiodun, am I therefore a Prophet? The Yoruba proverb is, “If a child cannot be an eye witness of past events, he is capable of hearing past events.” “But Musa,” (Moses) he said, “predicts of Mohammed, that a Prophet shall be raised after him, like unto him, him shall ye hear.” “Yes,” I said to him, “but that prediction of Moses does not refer to Mohammed, for Mohammed was no Yehudi, (Jew) but was born in Arbáwá. (Arabia) This he admitted. Now then, the full prediction was, “A prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren” & c. I then proceed [sic] in our argument to give my own proof 1. To show him that the Koran cannot be the word of God and 2<sup>ndly</sup> [sic] To show that the Holy Scripture is the word of God.... He had no patience to continue

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<sup>31</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, August 30, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson appears to refer to all Moslem festivals as Ramadan. Obviously the 30-day month of Ramadan could not have stretched from August, when the Lemomu presented his lectures, till November when Johnson would be arguing with another Moslem on the story of the Noah and the flood.

the argument, and promised to call on me to hear the ...proof that the Scripture is the word of God.<sup>33</sup>

The subject of contention between Johnson and his Moslem counterpart concerned the authenticity of sacred texts. Since both religions are those of inspired, written texts that provide precepts for their respective followers, it is understandable that whoever could prove which of the scriptures is the word of God established the authenticity of his faith. For the Moslem the mark of authenticity was the accuracy of the prediction of the Prophet Mohammed—an argument he could not sustain in the face of Johnson's critique. Neither would the catechist agree to his hermeneutics on the Mosaic promise to Israel of a prophet to succeed him.

It is remarkable that while the Moslems took for granted the accuracy of their religious apology, Johnson liberally drew from the local corpus of wisdom and the obvious fact of disparity between the Prophet Mohammed's identity and the Jewish nation. In a way, these contrasting approaches to knowledge between Johnson and his Moslem counterparts show that while Islam in pre-Christian Yoruba land readily fused with the indigenous religions in a syncretistic union, its practitioners did not make much of the local corpus of wisdom, either to legitimise their faith or instruct their people. But this is understandable. Its unchallenged entry into and unchallenging presence in the country made it unnecessary.

On the other hand, while mission Christianity eschewed organic syncretism with Yoruba religions,<sup>34</sup> its agents did not hesitate to draw from indigenous wisdom to legitimise their mission among the people. The new faith needed to justify its entry as not superfluous, especially since Islam, another monotheistic faith, had already taken root among the people. Still, its uncompromising stance towards the existing religious traditions and cults required the justification. As this could only take place within the worldview of the people, the Christian evangelists found the keys to their mind in their corpus of truth.

Nevertheless, it appears as if at the roots of Islam's and Christianity's contrasting attitudes towards Yoruba traditions were the equally contrasting epistemologies

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<sup>33</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, November 16, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>34</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, September 9, 1879, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/160; Journal Entry, June 17, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/161.

underlying their traditions.<sup>35</sup> As cultural and political changes continued to encroach on the Yoruba people in the nineteenth century, mission Christianity's heritage of liberal thinking, mediated through western education, commensurately carved out the desired niche for the faith of the church among the people. In the same age, Islam and the presence it had taken for granted in the country came under unrelenting challenge from Christianity.<sup>36</sup> And although Horton critiqued mission Christianity as "never being content to play the catalyst [of change]" among the Yoruba but "has been rigid in its insistence on the individual's total acceptance of official doctrines",<sup>37</sup> its legacy of a rational approach to faith and life through the school system it introduced into the country eventually placed its converts in a relative position of advantage in the new cosmopolitan order begun under British colonialism in the country. The resultant intellectual enlightenment and upward mobility that accompanied conversion to Christianity were in accord with the utilitarian aim of religious devotion among the Yoruba and they set the converts on the path to what they had always sought for in their ancestral faiths: life in its abundance.

While Yoruba religions make no exclusive claim to authenticity as Islam and Christianity do, their advocates were not wanting in arguing their legitimacy. Hence, the Ifa worshipper claimed Ejiògbè as *the* divinely commissioned arbiter to settle human disputes. Although their strength to claim authenticity lay in what western science classifies as magic—the ability to manipulate phenomena for the salvation of persons and society—the votaries of Yoruba religion did not challenge Johnson with it. Rather, they were unwary to join issues with him verbally when they had no force of argument to match his skill.

The weakness of the votaries of Yoruba religions to argue their legitimacy also found expression in their inability to authenticate their knowledge in their encounter with the evangelist. Johnson's experience with an Agberi brought to the fore again the contest

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<sup>35</sup> Islam in Yorubaland was virtually a religion of the heart; devotion provided it its compass. To chart its own course, mission Christianity combined the heart and the head; devotion and rational thinking were employed hand in hand.

<sup>36</sup> It was in Ijebuland especially, in the aftermath of the British government's military expedition of May 1892, that Moslems realized their position of disadvantage in the emerging order as some of their children were converting to Christianity through the school system that speedily sprang up in the Ijebu country. But Islam appears to have eventually profited more than Christianity in the conversions to the missionary faiths. E. A. Ayandele, *The Ijebu of Yorubaland, 1850-1950: Politics, Economy and Society* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1992), 233-234, 268; John Peel, "Religious Change in Yorubaland," *Africa* 3 (1967): 304.

<sup>37</sup> Robin Horton, "African Conversion", *Africa* 41 (1971), 105.

between the faiths to affirm legitimacy for themselves through their claims to superior knowledge. The evangelist approached this prospect, steeped in ancient tradition, and introduced to him the object of his visit. In a quick recoil, the diviner retorted:

Oh...that is not a message for me. I am of the Agberi descent, and I am too enlightened to be taught by you, as spirits from the invissible [sic] world reveal deep things to me. I am a diviner, and with my enchantment I can show you Sango, Oya, the maker [*Eleda*], and your own guardian angel. The Spirit also show[s] me man's fortune, good or bad [sic].<sup>38</sup>

He spoke loftily of his vocation, and at length looked into Johnson's face, as if to hypnotise him, and said "I see now that within three days, you shall have such a good fortune enough and to spare".<sup>39</sup> Johnson would not have more of his antics as he replied:

If you are dealing with the world of spirits, I am glad you will be the more ready to hear from me errand from the invissible [sic] world, for I can boast of superior knowledge, and not by divination. The Son of God himself brought to us the message, and it is a message of salvation, which with all you[r] divination you cannot see. If you will listen to me, I will enlighten you in quite another way".<sup>40</sup>

As his listener became eager to know about this superior knowledge, the evangelist lost no time in educating him about the biblical condemnation of enchantment and every pretension to know about the future. Knowing that he had overwhelmed his prospect Johnson asked, "With all your supernatural knowledge does the spirit ever reveal to you the way of bettering your condition in life? for people of your profession looks [sic] generally very wretched." The Agberi's negative answer emboldened Johnson to ask another, "Does it tell you of your future state after this life?" At the same negative response, Johnson declared his message: "...I am going to tell you something of that. Jesus the Son of God came down on earth 1800 years ago and revealed this to us."

Here I commenced and preached unto him "Jesus and Him crucified." He rose and prostrated before me, and said, "Truly you have a superior knowledge and I will come to your house to hear more for they are good and valuable words, and of more worth than a present of two thousand bags of cowries (£1,000)[?]. I invited him to the house of God three days hence, to hear more of this way."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, July 4, 1879, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/160.

<sup>39</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, July 4, 1879, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/160.

<sup>40</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, July 4, 1879, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/160.

<sup>41</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, July 4, 1879, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/160.

It is not clear what exactly impressed Johnson's prospect and led him to acknowledge his superiority,<sup>42</sup> but such teachings at the core of evangelical Christianity—the sinfulness of humanity, the breach between humanity and its creator, the reconciliation and atonement effected through the vicarious suffering of a scapegoat—are religious ideas Yoruba people are very much at home with. But the evangelist's conquest followed the usual pattern. The Agberi prepared the ground of contest to esoteric knowledge. But Johnson responded with a method at dissonance with his prospect's; while the Agberi was coming from the primal worldview that feels at home with supernatural knowledge, Johnson responded with a rational-historical method. But as the evangelist's confident declaration of such a religious knowledge was an exclusive preserve of religious votaries in the country, the Agberi seems unprepared for his challenge and the metaphysical content of his message, "Jesus and Him crucified".

At the roots of Johnson's evangelistic, verbal conquests with votaries of Yoruba religions was his advantage of education. This privilege set him and other agents of the mission apart as people mediating to the country a new religious tradition and social values. But much more, Johnson's strength lay in his knowledge of the traditions and history of the country, which enabled him to discern the presuppositions underlying the arguments and objections of his prospects. Such power advantage fascinated his male prospects, Moslems and adherents of Yoruba religions alike, and often left them vanquished. With the women, however, Johnson would not have it so easy.

### **Defenders of the Gods, Malcontents of Modernity<sup>43</sup>**

Apart from the exceptional cases of the women relatives of the Are who were favourably disposed to the mission at Ibadan, the women generally proved to be the most belligerent defenders of Yoruba religions. Not given to long debates, they made no pretensions of interest in Johnson's views on their faiths. The catechist himself could be fascinated with their devotion to and trust in the efficacy of their cults even if he was contemptuous of their objects of adoration. An instance of this occurred during the small-pox epidemic that ravaged Ibadan, early in 1874, and provided Johnson an opportunity to

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<sup>42</sup> In the age-graded society of the Yoruba, prostration signifies the acknowledgement of the superiority of the elder over the younger. In adopting this gesture the Agberi, who was older than Johnson, explicitly acknowledged him as having a superior knowledge of religious mystery.

<sup>43</sup> The phrase, "Malcontents of Modernity" is adapted from the title of the edited work of Jean and John Comaroff, *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

witness the ardent supplication of a woman appeasing the god *Sopona*. The town was badly ravaged by the epidemic that affected every household, sparing but a few families its fatal scourge.<sup>44</sup> While making his pastoral rounds Johnson saw this woman, who evidently had suffered much from the scourge, leave her house carrying in her hands two earthen pots, one containing “a sauce of greens” and the other water. “The woman prostrated, and was evidently imploring pardon and pity [from the god *Sopona*], as she was muttering a low but earnest prayers”. Her intense concentration on the business at hand left Johnson no room to break into her solemn hour, but he confessed being “deeply impressed” with her devotion and “was forcibly reminded of our great responsibility”.<sup>45</sup>

Seven months after this affective experience, the evangelist was on his way to Lagos, via Abeokuta, to spend his leave. At Atadi, where he and his companion Zachaeus stopped to refresh themselves, the people were amused by the monkey Zachaeus was taking with him on the journey. From curiosity they were attracted to its tricks and funny gestures. Although they did not offer it worship, some called the creature their brother while others called it their father and brought it presents of fruits. But a woman gave Johnson reason to address the people:

After her repeated kindness to the creature, I noticed her, an old woman with hoary locks, come with water, and respectfully presented it to the creature, saying, “Father, drink.” I asked her reason for saying so, as I cannot imagine how an irrational being can be the progenitor of a rational. She said she pitied my ignorance, and as an elderly person of experience she wished to tell me a story which my foreign birth had deprived me the advantage of knowing.<sup>46</sup>

She lectured the evangelist on a Yoruba myth of human origin that linked the monkey to the human specie as sharing the same origin with them. Johnson continued to ask questions on the link between rational and irrational beings and the logic of worshipping a creature that is hunted for food. But the woman responded with a question to Johnson on the existence of “powerful Sango”, which the evangelist typically explained away. At length she disregarded the ignorance of the foreign preacher and directed her severest rebuke at Zachaeus.

...[S]he was enraged at [him], turning to him she accused him of ingratitude, for after feeding him his monkey [sic], he would also preach to

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<sup>44</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 26, 1874, CMS C/A2/O58/2.

<sup>45</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 2, 1874, CMS C/A2/O58/2.

<sup>46</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, November 7, 1874, CMS C/A2/O58/3.

her, who like herself was once a worshipper of these gods, and who besides, as he is not a foreigner but a native of Abeokuta should know better. She would not part with her notion, and was glad to get rid of us.<sup>47</sup>

Johnson's opponent premised her argument on her perceived foreignness of his identity, to which she attributed his ignorance. She could not convince Johnson to make him appreciate her reason for treating the creature with such deference, neither could the evangelist change her position. She held her head high as one with superior knowledge and experience which she thought the untested young preachers would do well to respect and follow.

Another encounter in 1879 brought the catechist into confrontation with a votary of Yoruba religion. He was on his usual pastoral round when he met an "orisa woman" who stopped by the shed of a Christian woman with whom Johnson was visiting. Dressed in her priestly best as one coming from a religious festival, "she considered herself worthy of respect, and above every remonstrations [sic] to give up the worship of what she so much valued". She was irritated by the Christian woman's testimony that she had been in the indigenous religions but had left them to embrace Christianity when "God mercifully opened her eyes and led her to the saviour".

She could not bear her words but tauntingly replied "If the worship of idols is of no profit to you, to me it is a source of great blessings." Confounding us with the Mohammedans she said, "For many years I forsook my idols, and was a believer at Ilorin, and took a Mohammedan name; but adverse circumstances showed me my mistake. At Lagos I was the wife of one like you, but who practiced all you are now forbidding as sinful, and even robbed me of all my things: but since I returned to my former religion, my circumstances became easy, and now I am better off than then: how say you then that idolatry is not a true religion?[""]<sup>48</sup>

Johnson attempted to refute her argument by trying to show the difference between Christianity and Islam; why Christians rejected Islam, being incapable of answering human spiritual longings; and the irrelevance of dress style to Christianity. By the last point Johnson was refuting the woman's supposed error of associating the English mode of dressing, common among the residents of Lagos, with being a Christian. But the experiences she garnered through her tortuous religious journey and her interpretation of those experiences provided her the force of argument Johnson could not match. He gave up trying to persuade her to embrace Christianity: "From her words I judge[d] of her at

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<sup>47</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, November 7, 1874, CMS C/A2/O58/3.

<sup>48</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, July 1, 1879, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/160.

once to be of an abandoned character; and strongly deprecating such a character as calling forth God's severe judgement, was too cutting a sermon for her. I dropped the conversation when I saw that I was 'casting pearls before swine'....<sup>49</sup>

Another occasion shows that the contrasting values between the Christians and the larger society could provide the basis for rejecting Johnson's message. He was visiting a compound in Aremo when he met a supposedly "good natured" woman upon whom he urged the claims of Christianity. But he soon discovered that her supposed prospect was too "self conceited", in fact deprecating Christianity as being far below her dignity. According to Johnson, she and her well-known but deceased son ranked among the middle class people of Ibadan. The son had left behind two marriageable daughters who, along with his numerous friends, would mourn her when she died. She loathed the simple ceremony of Christian burial and the very fact that Christians bury their dead away from family compounds, as would be the case with her if she embraced Christianity. Johnson reported, "She replied to my remarks with an air of offence":

What! embrace your religion? What will my son's friends and companions think of me? Am I mad? Do you think Christianity was intended for a one like me whose son is so well known? The Are himself I can assure you will strongly reproach me for doing so.<sup>50</sup>

Johnson's attempt to impress on her the uncertainty of life was of no avail. Rather, she took offence at the evangelist and blurted out: "Talk to me about other matters, and not about Christianity." Johnson's neighbour was self confident and satisfied with her social status. What else could she want or expect from life that she would need to exchange her faith for another? Obviously to her, none. And Johnson could only, in frustration, pity his supposed prospect's "ignorance and stubbornness for setting so much value upon vanity".<sup>51</sup>

The circle of women who gave Johnson the most belligerent refutation in the course of his ministerial work was not limited to those outside the Christian community. A few renegade converts to Christianity also did not hesitate to resist his position when they considered it necessary to defend theirs. One of such cases occurred in 1880 when he visited the Nalende quarter in the company of R.S. Oyeboode. They were visiting a lapsed

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<sup>49</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, July 1, 1879, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/160.

<sup>50</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, September 30, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1881)/98.

<sup>51</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, September 30, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1881)/98.

convert of Ogunpa church, the widow of Oyebode's cousin. She understood the motive for their visit and was uncomfortable with their presence. But she could not avoid giving them audience. She mentioned adversity as her reason for returning to her old faith and for creating new religious images. A daughter had been suffering from guinea worm for a long time and another one had been very sick. She was told that relief would come only if she returned to her old divinity.

Johnson and his companion tried to convince her otherwise and reminded her of the vows she made to "the Almighty" at her baptism. Johnson thought she was heart struck by their entreaties but steeled her conscience with the logic, "Since I was not dead after breaking the good faith of the goddess Oya, by my conversion, so nothing will harm me if I renounce Christianity for the goddess." When in frustration the catechist prayed, "May God change your heart", she responded, "I may say Amen."<sup>52</sup>

Oya, who is believed in Yoruba mythology as the female consort of Sango, was regarded as a goddess capable of vicious fury.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, the faith of the church into which the lapsed convert was baptized taught her that God is merciful and patient. In a situation where present realities proved tempting for her to return to her old faith in order to get a relief, her logic was not out of place. If vicious Oya did not strike her dead for deserting her, she might well return to her if it would remedy her anxious concerns, and a merciful God would understand the situation. But Johnson and his companion were not thinking in the category of their former member. To them, as evangelical Christians, religious commitment was to answer a deeper relationship need between humanity and God. For the Yoruba, as with other African peoples, religion is essentially meant to answer human needs in a precarious world. But Johnson's exclusive emphasis on the transcendent value of Christianity rendered him ineffective with his female prospects.

Nevertheless, he also seems to share the view that embracing Christianity would alter the station of its adherents for the better, not metaphysically but through the process of enlightenment. This comes to light in his meeting with a paternal female relation, daughter of an Obatala priestess. After the typical Yoruba exchange of greetings, she complained to Johnson about the hardship of the times which her physical appearance well displayed.

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<sup>52</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, May 13, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/161.

<sup>53</sup> Bolaji Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba belief*, rev. ed. (Ikeja, Nigeria: Longman, 1996), 89.

Observing the 2 twin gods exhibited in front of the calabash on her head, pointing to them I said to her, “This is the secret of your poverty.[?]” I asked her, “Does that resemble in any way your deceased twin children? Does it grow since you had it? and were your children living would they not have been of help to you, as they would have become of age by this time?” “It is true, it is true,” were her only replies, and a passer by who stood all the while listening to what I was saying went away smiling, and she promised to pay me a visit after her return from [the] farm.<sup>54</sup>

In the long century of change in the Yoruba country, converts to Christianity shared the same experience of material deprivation with their unconverted compatriots. And Johnson himself was not known to have lived in plenty all through his years in the country. But with the enlightenment that came with mission and literacy, these converts did not overtly assume their deprivation. And when he pointed at his relation’s “twin gods” as the source of her visibly evident poverty, he was attributing her condition to her embracing of her mother’s religion—Obatala—and refusing to convert to Christianity.<sup>55</sup> Christianity itself would not have transformed her from poverty to wealth, but the enlightenment that accompanied it through literacy would have taught her how to manage her low estate with dignity and make a decent public appearance. There is no evidence that this woman converted to Christianity, and so the encounter proved to be another one in which Johnson simply won a verbal exchange. Still, there were occasional breakthroughs for him with these defenders of tradition when he least expected.

Two young men who had been left out during the baptism that held in December 1880 had come to him during the New Year week of prayers, pleading that they be spared another long wait for the rite. Olubi having accepted their plea, one of them returned to Johnson the following day complaining of his difficulties with his wife and his brother. The woman had no sympathy for Christianity and his brother was using her to make life difficult for him. She took custody of the images of the man’s former religion with the aim to continue their veneration in the same room with her now converted husband. The man could not endure this, but he could also not contemplate separating from his wife. At length he decided to give the matter whatever it would take to resolve the problem, even if it meant separating from her. He therefore gave her the option to choose between him and her religious preference. But the woman insisted that “death only can part them; but if her husband will do it by force regardless of her feelings, there is no alternative for her

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<sup>54</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, September 18, 1883, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>55</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, September 18, 1883, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

than to leave the town to a distant place”.<sup>56</sup> The man was perplexed and the matter became a pastoral issue begging for Johnson’s attention.

Johnson and Oyebode read to him Paul’s opinion in 1Corinthians 7:12-16, a view that placed on him the burden of forbearance with his unconverted wife. But he considered the development a matter of conscience; either she was won over to Christianity or they must part. In consequence, the two agents visited the woman and had “a very serious talk with her”.

...[S]he gave as her reason for refusing to embrace Christianity that she is of no mixed breed, but a pure Yoruba blood; and as such, she should not change her father’s religion. Secondly, that she is fearing her relatives, who out of respect she could not face; and if at all she will embrace Christianity, she wished her husband to go round to inform them: but meanwhile she will give the matter a deep consideration.<sup>57</sup>

Anticipating that her relations would likely refuse her conversion to Christianity, the agents counselled her “not to consult flesh and blood in this all important matter” and prayed for the couple. The woman’s presence at the baptism the following day at Kudeti shows that the man made a quick round among his in-laws, who agreed with him that “a wife should not differ with her husband in any respect, even in religion”.<sup>58</sup> After the ceremony, during which her husband took the name Emmanuel, she went to see her relatives who confirmed to her what they told her husband. With the fear of persecution allayed, her challenge remained learning the truths of a new faith and rising to its demands. It is not clear how she subsequently fared in this, but the intervention of the agents preserved the family.

In another case, a woman’s conversion resulted, not from a preaching encounter with Johnson but through the influence of her children. The woman who lived in a farm had two grown-up children who lived in Lagos. She often visited Johnson when he was at Kudeti station, as her children often communicated with her through the schoolmaster.

They wrote to their mother then to embrace Christianity, as she should know and serve that God whose providence brought them to Lagos, and saved them from death or hopeless slavery. She usually come [sic] then to my place on Saturday, to spend her Sunday at home, returning to farm on Monday.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, January 8, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1882)/23.

<sup>57</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, January 8, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1882)/23.

<sup>58</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, January 9, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1882)/23.

<sup>59</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, May 26, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1882)/23.

When, however, one of her children relocated to Ibadan she returned to her old divinities, Osun and Oya. Her son unsuccessfully admonished her against her returning to her old faith. But at last she grew tired of them and handed over their images to Johnson.

These diverse experiences of Johnson with women in Yoruba religions show that the encounters were not always fully resolved as winning or losing his prospects. There were both evident successes of conversion as well as unyielding refusals of his entreaties; still, in between were cases of inconclusive responses. Nevertheless, a strand runs through the various attitudes of these defenders of tradition towards the invitation to embrace Christianity. Yoruba religions were intrinsic to their identity and they provided them their self-understanding and social rooted-ness. From the old woman who impugned on Johnson's foreign birth, through his indifferent neighbour who prized her social standing more than any religious talk, to the wife of the baptismal candidate who claimed to be of no mixed breed, Yoruba religions provided these women some sense of security. Johnson's conversations with them were, therefore, essentially a probing into their ultimate concerns. And his invitation to them to abandon known ways for the untested was as threatening as exposing them to uncertainties in a precarious world where death and diseases were already wreaking havoc.

But the cases of those who lapsed from Christianity also show the eclectic use to which the women could put religious traditions. For them, as with many of their compatriots, religion must answer life's urgent concerns if it would prove useful. The Ogunpa convert who lapsed back to her Oya divinity to secure healing for her children and the woman who returned to her Osun and Oya divinities after the return of one of her children from Lagos were acting out the same script. Vital resources of the spirit world and their divinities, including those made available by the church, must be summoned to procure and guarantee life and protection for their children. And if no misfortune trailed the movement back and forth between faiths, what could be wrong with such eclecticism, one of them wondered. And it took continuous remonstrance from the son of one of the women to grow tired of Osun and Oya and hand over their icons to Johnson.

The social trails of the successful abandonment of traditional divinities were not always peaceful, although occasional surprises did occur where Johnson himself feared imminent hostility. The most spontaneous case of violence trailed the conversion of the earlier mentioned incident of the daughter of an *Ọ̀bàtá* priest who refused to participate in the religious festival of the cult in 1881. While the parents pondered appropriate action

against the girl, members of the cult unleashed their anger on the Aremo station. Through their children, they found a pretext to violate the security of the mission compound and beat the schoolmaster's boy. Johnson wrote,

Before we could run out to enquire about it, they ran home, and soon returned with their cutlasses, cut down the fence, and began felling the orange tree. All the women in the compound rushed out likewise lavishing on us the most abusive epithets; and each with a piece of stick or whatever they could take hold of, were challenging [sic] our wives to come out and fight. They also rushed furiously to my aunt's blue pot, where she was dyeing cotton, emptied all her water, and dragged the cotton about on the ground, defying any opposer; abusing us at the same time saying "You are great robbers! If you take hold of any of our children, you can never give them up."<sup>60</sup>

Johnson and his people allowed them to spend their anger after which "an elderly and sensible man of the compound" came to mediate and begged him and his people not to be angry, saying, "They are only mischief makers; and if it comes to paying of fine, none of them has a head of cowries." But they later returned one after the other to make excuses for themselves.

It is surprising that in all the cases of provocative conversions and other encounters of Christianity with Yoruba religions in Ibadan the adherents of Ọbàtála were the ones who meted out public, physical violence on the mission. This is because the cult approximated more closely the Christian teaching of holiness and purity. Although its rituals and taboos might be repugnant to the sensibility of mission Christianity, which considered all traditional religious rites as fetishist, the Ọbàtála cult upholds at heart Christianity's value of purity and temperance. That neither the Christians, especially pietistic Johnson, nor the devotees of Ọbàtála could appreciate the other and identify overlaps between their religious ideals indicates the blind ideological contention taking place in the century of rapid change. And really, such mutual appreciation could not have taken place where Christianity was making its uncompromising entry, leaving no stone unturned in an environment where the traditional cults had held undisputed sway over the people. The appreciation of the Christians for the core values of the traditional cults would have to wait a few more decades when nationalist spirit would take hold of the agents of mission and, in the ideological struggle against the narratives of colonial empire, draw from their indigenous religious heritage to silence their detractors. And they

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<sup>60</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Extract, September 8, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

would soon be followed by the Aladura movement that would draw from Yoruba religious sensibilities to practise a new form of Christianity imbued with the power to work miracles. For the time being, the indigenous cults would seem to be left with no choice but to fight for survival, employing all at their disposal. Johnson's experience with the women defenders of the gods shows that they were not wanting in taking this lead.

### **The Context of the Ibadan Religious Change**

The eventual success of rooting Christianity in Ibadan, after its slow and ambivalent beginning may be seen as a further extension of the change already at work in the Yoruba country from the second decade of the nineteenth century. The political destabilisation, the population movements, the recreation and modification of tradition at Ago Oja, now Oyo, and, above all, the perceived failure of the indigenous cults, all instinctively provided the impetus for the opening-up of society. They, therefore, prepared the ground for Christians to both overtly and covertly discredit the existing cults. Moreover, it would seem the cynicism of the age, evident in the larger-than-life deportment of the warrior class over and above the indigenous religious authorities, and the commercialisation of local religions by their priests undermined the people's confidence in them.<sup>61</sup> Even if this was not generally evident, the apathy of the chiefs to the debacle of Sango at Aremo is an evidence that society was reconciling itself to change, among which were those being introduced by mission Christianity.

Nevertheless, the admission of Christianity into this privilege of change, if it may be so called, was neither arbitrary nor accidental. It was a fruit of the long but steady association between the mission and the people, and it provided the Christian community a decisive leverage with the chiefs. For, in fact, the people's perception of the benefit of having the missionary in their midst came sooner than Hinderer himself could imagine. In 1855, while lamenting his health and difficulty in getting the attention of the people, "a most respectable trader & some of his friends" told him,

You speak...as if you thought you had been in Ibadan all for nothing these two years, but had you been here before & seen what was doing, you would judge differently. When you visited Ibadan first you would hear everyday of persons having been stolen in the town, now you hardly hear of such a thing. When you first came Abeokuta road was not safe, Ijebu road was not safe, even Ijaye you could only go in a caravan, now a little

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<sup>61</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, November 20, 1870, CMS C/A2/O75/26; D. Olubi to Parent Committee, June 26, 1871, CMS C/A2/O75/3.

child might walk all these roads by himself. Therefore talk on, but take patience, our fashion is deeply rooted, but let us see yours for some time longer, & ours will wear away.<sup>62</sup>

True to this prognostication, after thirty years of missionary activities in Ibadan, the people and their chiefs had seen enough to give “Oyinbo”<sup>63</sup> and his religion a benefit of the doubt in their town. Hinderer and his successors, by their activities, had acquitted themselves as friends of the people. Aware that Ibadan was in the midst of enemies it had made for itself from round about, they shared the common people’s aspiration for peace and order in the country. They particularly encouraged and worked towards the realisation of their desire to have direct access to Lagos and to do business with the colonial government there.<sup>64</sup> In 1871, the governor responded to this desire by sending a trade mission to Ibadan.<sup>65</sup> When the roads through Ijebu and Abeokuta were shut against the people, the governor created an alternative route, the following year, through the Ondo country via the lagoon east of Lagos.<sup>66</sup> All these were facilitated by the agents of mission and their significance was not lost on the people.

Still, by the 1880s, a few significant persons from the town had visited Lagos, where they could see the cosmopolitan features of the town in utter contrast to their indigenous society.<sup>67</sup> Even Olubi, the head of the Ibadan mission after the exit of Hinderer, could not but be impressed in 1869 with the physical environment of the Lagos Mission, the new English church “elegantly constructed”, the school children “neatly dressed”, and the brick-making technology set up by the mission.<sup>68</sup> These experiences of unfeigned goodwill from the Christian community and elements of progress seen outside added up to the opening of the people to new perspectives on reality.

On the ethical plane, the rigorous yet liberal values for which the Christians were known, in contrast to what the people had perceived in the practice of other faiths among them, commended them to the people.<sup>69</sup> Although some cynically taunted them in song,

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<sup>62</sup> D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, April 18, 1855, C/A2/O49/111.

<sup>63</sup> The term was not used exclusively for the white missionaries but their followers also, especially their Yoruba agents.

<sup>64</sup> D. Hinderer to Secretaries, March 24, 1862, CMS C/A2/O49/58.

<sup>65</sup> D. Olubi, W. Allen, et. al. to Finance Committee, September 13, 1871, CMS C/A2/O75/9.

<sup>66</sup> J. Wood to R. Lang, August 19, 1885, G3/A2/O(1885)/153.

<sup>67</sup> The relations of the Are, particularly the Moslem woman of means who was very sympathetic towards the Christian community, professed to know much about Christians, having lived in Lagos. S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 13, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/161; Journal Entry, September 30, 1883, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>68</sup> D. Olubi to Parent Committee, September 15, 1869, C/A2/O75/1.

<sup>69</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, July 2, 1870, CMS C/A2/O75/26.

“*Gbogbo re lese fun Onigbagbo*”<sup>70</sup>—Everything is sin to the Christians—and some others considered it strange that they prayed for the prosperity of their enemies and for the chiefs at no cost, while yet others marvelled at their helpfulness for no immediate gratification to themselves, they all seem nonetheless to appreciate their sincerity.<sup>71</sup> Strange and unconventional as their altruism appeared to the people, they could recognize that their teachings and practices accorded with the essence of Yoruba religions and culture—the formation of the human person into *Omoluwabi*, that is, quintessential character.<sup>72</sup> A particular incident reported by Johnson from Aremo underscores this.

Two instances we have in this district of heathen parents giving their daughters to the relatives of our members for their sakes. They said that “The Christians are good husbands, and their influence over their relatives will be to our daughters’ benefit, & she [sic] will have a happy home.” Both these brides...have attended our services for several months until they became mothers. I am sorry to say we cannot speak of their conversion, but they have heard the word preached....<sup>73</sup>

Ultimately, it is to this essential correlation between the Yoruba religio-cultural vision of human nurture and the character of the Christian community that one may attribute the inroad Christianity gained into the Yoruba country in the second half of the nineteenth century. This correlation, in a way, shows an inherent overlap in the identity of the indigenous agents of mission and their traditionalist compatriots, even if both parties would not acknowledge this while placing high premiums on their mutually contrasting outward appearances of dress, rituals, and cultural tastes. But in giving Christianity the

<sup>70</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 26, 1879, CMS C/A2/O58/11.

<sup>71</sup> Anna Hinderer’s memoir, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, is replete with tales of rescue and rehabilitation the mission embarked on in a cross-current to the prevailing culture of violence in the country through slavery and callous abandonment. A classical case of breakthrough followed similar generosity of spirit at Ogunpa station when Olubi was temporarily assigned there. The station was almost given up when Hinderer decided to give it another chance under Olubi. Shortly upon his assignment there, Olubi expressed an unsolicited assistance to Bola, the headman of that quarter who was known to be the source of the resistance to the mission at Ogunpa. On his evacuation home, following a serious illness at the war camp against Ilesa, Olubi sent him a mattress to relieve his body pain so that he could sleep. The man fell asleep almost as soon as he lay on the mattress. On waking up he asked his people rhetorically, “*Eyi ko to yi ni lokan pada bayi?*” that is, Is this not enough to change one’s mind? He confessed, “I lay so easy on my side and felt no pain, & I did enjoy my sleep so.” Thereafter, in a sensational public display of change of mind, he let go his people to embrace the faith as they wished. D. Olubi, Journal Entry, May 10, 1868, CMS C/A2/O75/21; Journal Entries, January 3 and April 6, 1869, CMS C/A2/O75/23.

<sup>72</sup> D. Olubi, Journal Entry, December 21, 1869, CMS C/A2/O75/24.

<sup>73</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, July 12, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

leverage it commanded among them, the people embraced the ultimate catalyst that would accelerate the process of change already at work in the country.

Johnson may not have been an effective evangelist, but his itinerant evangelism vividly brought to the fore the inherent lack of methodological resonance between mission Christianity, on the one hand, and Yoruba religions and Islam on the other. Even if mission Christianity, unlike Islam, repudiated any organic syncretistic relationship with Yoruba religions, the activities of the evangelist show that Christianity was more courageous in taking from indigenous Yoruba intellectual and moral traditions to advance its own cause. While this could intrigue Johnson's male opponents and bring them to submission in their debates, the women often proved a hard nut for him to crack; for, more than the men, they had a deep sense of identity to which the indigenous religions were intrinsic. However, the benevolent expression of Christianity as a culturally redemptive faith would later give Johnson the force of argument why Christianity, over and above Yoruba religions and Islam, must become the hallmark of the Yoruba. His contribution to this cultural redemption is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 8

### Redeeming the Yoruba Country

The nineteenth century missionary triad of Christianity, commerce and civilization evolved from the awakening of the social conscience of English people in the second half of the eighteenth century, especially with regard to the involvement of a segment of their people in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This awakening of social conscience through the activities of the anti-slavery movement, later given the misnomer the “Clapham sect”, set the agenda for the CMS when the Society emerged in 1799. As a result, the activities of the CMS in West Africa, for much of the century, were driven overtly and covertly by the urge to transform social structures on which the indigenous societies were established. The colonial environment of Sierra Leone being an agglomeration of recently uprooted peoples, provided the CMS no indigenous structures to be transformed immediately. Rather, the Society cooperated with the government to erect the structures on which the cosmopolitan colony was being governed.

With the persistence of the slave trade, however, the anti-slavery movement explored the possibility of destroying it at its roots through the blueprint offered by Thomas Fowell Buxton in his 1840 publication, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*. It led to the ill-fated Niger expedition of 1841. Five years later, however, Ulrich Graf would take up Buxton’s vision as a remedy against the inimical trend he perceived to be at work in this fledgling Creole society. It led to his rereading the situation of the colony and the issuance of his 1846 memorandum to the Society in London.<sup>1</sup> The following seven years witnessed an intense effort on the part of the Parent Committee, through Mr. Venn, to promote skill acquisition among the settlers in Sierra Leone. Samuel’s father, Henry Johnson, Sr., was a beneficiary of the arrangement that ensued as he was sent to Kew Gardens, London, to learn horticulture.<sup>2</sup> During this period also, the ambitious scheme that was conceived by the London based African Civilization Society (ACS) and its Sierra Leone counterpart, Africa Improvement Society (AIS), to set up a similar garden in Sierra Leone did not materialize.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Graf, “Civilization in Africa”, CMS C/A1/O105/61.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Johnson was already a peasant farmer in Hastings when Mr. Graf recommended him for this training that lasted three months in 1853.

When the CMS extended its activities to the Yoruba country in the mid-1840s, the same consciousness of social transformation came to work at the Yoruba Mission. Here, however, the European missionaries and their African agents functioned under the authority of indigenous rulers and could not be brazen in pursuing their agenda for transformation. Happily, in the 1850s, the promotion of legitimate trade in improved agricultural products and processing, particularly cotton for the British textile industries, caught the fancy of some of the returnees from Sierra Leone at Abeokuta. The introduction of western education that poked into the roots of indigenous society and the expected long term effect of rooting Christianity among the people provided the ideological hatchet to attain the same end of transforming the Yoruba country, albeit unobtrusively. In this way, the whole system of Christianity, commerce and civilization in Yorubaland proceeded as a quiet revolution meant to supplant the perceived inimical processes at work in the country through slave trading, oppression, war, and carnage.

As a remote and as a direct beneficiary of the scheme, Samuel Johnson was at home with this vision of transforming the Yoruba country. His evangelistic and pastoral activities as an agent of the CMS in Ibadan provided him the first leverage with which he could participate in the process. But when in 1881 he was drafted into the political aspect of the crisis in the country, he entered into another phase of the transformation process.

The bellicose Are Latosa, in 1877, plunged the country into a war to end all wars in the Yoruba country. By it, he intended to bring the entire country under Ibadan's suzerainty, in the hope that a central government like that of the defunct Oyo hegemony would hold the factious peoples together. The ambitious project turned out to be unrealistic. In fact, it backfired in the revolt of peoples subject to Ibadan and renewed the hostility between its people and their rivals to the south, the Egba and Ijebu peoples. After four years of intense warfare, during which Dahomey also made devastating incursions into the western province of the country, it became clear that the country was in the throes of self-destruction.

### **Mission and the Politics of War— A Turning Point**

Until 1881, the agents of the CMS in the interior did not exercise significant influence in stopping the wars that had troubled the Yoruba country for several decades. Although their counsel of restraint, as in the Ijaye war and now in Ibadan's stirring of the hornet's nest, were often taken with the usual Yoruba courtesy, they did not restrain the belligerents from going to war. From October 1881, the trend changed as the CMS Ibadan

Mission became involved in the long and tortuous journey to bring the wars to an end through the diplomatic runs committed to Johnson. His involvement began when, in the aftermath of a meeting at Oyo, involving the Alafin and the agents at Ibadan and Iseyin, he was authorised by Olubi to write a letter for the Alafin to the Governor of Lagos Colony and deliver it himself at Lagos.<sup>3</sup>

Setting out in mid-October 1881, Johnson stopped at Oke Igbo to inform Derin, the Oni-elect of Ife, about the substance of his journey to Lagos. The Oni-elect had sent to the agents at Ibadan, as “representatives” of English government in the country, at the same time the Alafin sent for Olubi. He told Olubi that the belligerents had appealed to him as Oni-elect to help bring the war to an end, but he wanted the CMS superintendent at Ibadan to give him the assurance that Ibadan warriors would not fall on him when they were extricated from their difficult circumstances at Kiriji. He also wanted him to give a guarantee that should they attempt to do so, Olubi would move the English government in Lagos to come to his aid. The superintendent of the Ibadan Mission could not guarantee that, but he sent Johnson to Derin on his way to Lagos to inform him about the Alafin’s initiative for peace through the colonial government. Johnson’s mission to Lagos was agreeable to him and he acknowledged that Ibadan was tired of the war but would not decamp first as they wanted “peace on honourable terms”.<sup>4</sup>

Johnson arrived in Lagos on November 24, 1881, in the company of Charles Philips, having been travelling for five weeks because of the disturbances that were raging among the Ikale and Mahin peoples through whose territories he had to pass.<sup>5</sup> By the 1880s, the hostility of the Sierra Leone returnees against Europeans in Lagos and Abeokuta, earlier predicted by Bishop Bowen in 1859, continued to build up.<sup>6</sup> The impunity that saw the CMS church property destroyed at Abeokuta in 1867 at no cost to the vandals was an incentive to continue to stand in opposition to the British colonists on the coast. Johnson knew this, having been a student at Abeokuta shortly before the *Ifole*, that is housebreaking, saga; and he could gauge the attitude of Lagos residents towards their political overlords. By taking up a mission that would advance the interest of these colonists, he inevitably set himself up as belonging to a different camp.

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<sup>3</sup> A. Foster, Journal Entry, October 15, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1881)/147; S. Johnson, Journal Entry, October 15, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>4</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, October 27, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>5</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entries, November 13 to 24, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>6</sup> G. Bühler to H. Venn, July 2, 1859, CMS C/A2/O24/19.

Generally, Johnson was not alone in this unavoidable opposition to the anti-colonial inclination of Lagos residents. Mission agents who were returnees from Sierra Leone favoured the extension of the influence of the colonial government into the interior where they functioned as underdogs and were powerless to effect as quickly as possible the cultural transformation they so much desired to bring to their people. But the incipient nationalist fervour on the coast was a major obstacle, alongside the colonial administration's lack of interest in meddling in the complex affairs of peoples in the hinterland.

### **Lagos Residents and Foreign Mediation in the Hinterland**

Both agents, Johnson and Phillips, delivered their messages to the Secretary of their Mission, Mr. J.B. Wood, and the Lieutenant Governor Griffith. Johnson brought messages from the Alafin on the war between Ibadan and the coalition army of Ijesha and Ekiti peoples. Phillips came down to update the government on Ondo people's decision to abolish human immolation and the outrages going on among the coastal peoples. Both agents were advised by the two recipients of their messages to keep the information confidential to avoid the misinterpretation of their mission by mischievous elements in the city.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, in a letter to the governor, Johnson wrote down the proceedings that led to his embassy from the Alafin.<sup>8</sup> He took advantage of the governor's offer of "freedom of private correspondence to [him] from the interior on any important matter" to offer him his views on the war. The rapidity with which the governor became disposed to the situation in the interior met with Johnson's own enthusiastic inclination to see the government exercise influence there. In this agreement of interests, Johnson soon saw himself not as a passive bearer of the Alafin's message; he earnestly desired to see the influence of the colonial government exerted in bringing the war to an end.<sup>9</sup>

The governor's decision to seek the views of the leaders of the communities of interior peoples in Lagos created a setback for Johnson's mission. While they did not indicate openly any opposition to the intervention of the colonial regime in the wars in the interior, they faulted Johnson's message on technical grounds. They argued the inadequacy of the purported letter from the Alafin. As his traditional mode of communication, he should have sent his Ilari (an official court messenger) with his staff

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<sup>7</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, November 25, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>8</sup> S. Johnson to The Lieutenant Governor, November 26, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1881)/7..

<sup>9</sup> S. Johnson to The Lieutenant Governor, November 29, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1881)/7..

of office. They warned that, as a non-literate chief, it is not certain if he knew the content of the said letter even if he authorised it, and he could deny having sent the same if developments in response to the letter turn out adverse. The lieutenant governor appreciated the modest response of his different guests and decided, following the issues they raised, to send to the Alafin to authenticate the letter. He also widened the circle of potential peace-seekers by requesting the pleasures of the other significant authorities in the country on the desirability of the involvement of the colonial government to bring the war to an end.<sup>10</sup>

A more belligerent attitude was, however, abroad in the city, and Johnson, not being invited to the lieutenant governor's sessions with his select Lagos residents, construed the carefree belligerence he perceived among the people as being unreasonably difficult and fault-finding. In a harsh tone, he attributed the seeming opposition to colonial intervention to the "Ungodly immigrants from Brazil and Sierra Leone [who] are ever fanning the flames in the interior to a blaze".<sup>11</sup> He was not aware that his former colleague, Laniyonu, and his present schoolmaster at home, R.S. Oyebode, were also working at cross-purposes with him. In a private but fiery memorandum to the lieutenant governor, Laniyonu discredited Alafin Adeyemi and his predecessors in a manner none of the residents of Lagos attempted. He wrote:

In his own person, I am sorry to say, he is treachery itself, as were two or three fathers that ruled the kingdom since I became of age; he is highly jealous of the power of his only strength, and the support and stay of the whole Kingdom, the IBADAN—and has secret consultations for the ruin of IBADAN with almost all the belligerents.<sup>12</sup>

The accusation weighed heavily and reinforced the scepticism and reluctance of the colonial office in involving its Lagos administration in an "interference with the quarrels of the tribes in the interior."<sup>13</sup> Unaware of the damages being done to his mission

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<sup>10</sup> W. Griffith to S. Rowe, December 31, 1881, NAL CO 147/47, Despatch 16(3434), Enclosure 1.

<sup>11</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, December 1, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>12</sup> A. Hethersett to W. Griffith, November 30, 1881, NAL CO 147/47, Despatch 16(3434), Enclosure 6. In referring to the Alafins of the new Oyo town, Laniyonu recalled the painful history of the country in which his father Mele actively participated. But he was not mindful that the warlords were at the centre of the crises, and Ibadan produced two among the principal characters: Basorun Oluyole who attempted to subvert Atiba, and Latosa who with indifference asserted his independence of Adeyemi until he found himself trapped in his own devices. Between the two of them was Kunrunmi of Ijaye who defied Adelu and was punished to death by Ibadan warriors.

<sup>13</sup> S. Rowe to the Earl of Kimberly, January 18, 1882, NAL CO 147/47, Despatch 16(3434); Earl of Kimberly, Minute, NAL CO 147/47, Despatch 16(3434).

in Lagos by the deep and far-reaching prejudice of his own colleagues from Ibadan, Johnson directed his attention towards those he thought were shaping the views of Lagos residents as well as commoners whose opinions did not amount to anything with the lieutenant governor:

An influential Yoruba man came to see me, and in the course of conversation he deprecated the idea that the King of Oyo should first sue for peace. I tried to show him the peril the country is suffering under; and that at another raid of the Dahomians in the Oke-Ogun parts, with the war with the Ijebu and Egba, Ilorin and Ekiti, what may likely become of the Yoruba nation? His reply was, "Let them fight, fight, fight." Another said, "It is more honourable if they are conquered than for them to sue for peace."<sup>14</sup>

The lieutenant governor acted on the advice of those he consulted. Happily they nominated to him moderate persons whom he himself trusted would do a good job on his embassy. Charles Wilson and Simeon Kester were to follow Johnson to Ibadan and Oyo and then proceed to the war camp at Igbajo. Jose Meffre and Joseph Haastrup were to represent him to Ilesha and the war camp at Mesi. Among the kings and chiefs to whom they were to deliver his message were the Alafin Adeyemi; the Are of Ibadan, Latosa; the Oni-elect, Derin Ologbenla of Oke-Igbo; the Owa of Ijesha; and Ogedengbe, the generalissimo of the Ijesha and Ekiti confederate army. While the Alafin was being requested to confirm the authenticity of the letter Johnson brought, others were to confirm their interest in the colonial government's intervention. All of them were requested to show their pleasure by sending their full and official credentials to the lieutenant governor.<sup>15</sup>

The two teams passed through Ondo and visited Derin at Oke Igbo from where they parted for their respective spheres of assignment. But embarrassing moments came in this return contact of Johnson with Derin. First, the Oni-elect held a private meeting with the governor's messengers to Ijesha and Ekiti peoples before meeting the two teams together. For Johnson, such partiality showed that he was not neutral but that his sentiment was with the Ijesha and Ekiti cause in the war.<sup>16</sup> However, from the report of Messrs Wilson and Kester, his fellow travellers to Oyo and Ibadan, it appears the subject of that private discussion was the proposed project of Ijesha residents in Lagos to make

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<sup>14</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, December 1, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>15</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, December 1, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>16</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, December 26, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

navigable the Oni River from the Lagos lagoon to the Ijesha country. It appears Derin used the opportunity of this errand to discuss the project with Meffre, one of his subscriber-friends of the project.<sup>17</sup> But even if this was not the case, Johnson's expectation that Derin would be completely neutral in the matter at stake was unrealistic. The reason is not far to seek.

On the one hand, the office of the Oni of Ife was culturally significant to all the parties in the war since Ile-Ife, where he reigns, is regarded as the cradle of all Yoruba peoples. Hence as the Oni-in-waiting, Derin earned and, indeed, treasured his privileged communication with the other kings and chiefs in the country. And by virtue of his imminent enthronement to the most culturally significant office in the country, he was expected to be neutral in the war, hence Johnson's sensitivity to his moves. But, on the other hand, this expectation did not consider his interest. Johnson's Oyo people and Ife neighbours who were in solidarity with Ibadan, the Modakeke, were a present threat to Ile-Ife. They were too powerful and numerous for their former benefactors who gave them the land on which they settled. As the Oni-elect, Derin had stayed his ascendance to the throne, ostensibly waiting for the realization of the proposed improvement of the navigability of the Oni River.<sup>18</sup> But the actual reason was the unsettled nature of the country, the cause of which was Ibadan's military activities, not to mention the threat Modakeke constituted to his imminent seat of government. From this perspective, Derin could not have been completely neutral despite appearances. His pretence could only serve as a front to preserve the honour of the office of the Oni as the father of the bickering children of Oduduwa.

However, more embarrassing to Johnson than the perceived duplicity of Derin was the "red face" the Oni-elect showed him. Derin was incensed to hear from the lieutenant governor's letter read to him that Johnson had with him a letter from the Alafin to the lieutenant governor when he first passed on to Lagos through Oke Igbo, a fact he never disclosed. All attempts made by Johnson to explain himself proved fruitless.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> C. Wilson and S. Kester to W. Griffith, no date, NAL CO 147/48, Despatch 48(6672), Enclosure 2.

<sup>18</sup> C. Wilson and S. Kester to W. Griffith, no date, NAL CO 147/48, Despatch 48(6672), Enclosure 2.

<sup>19</sup> Whatever explanation Johnson had could only have been tenuous. The reality of the matter is that the CMS agents in the interior found themselves operating in a sensitive environment where mutual jealousies and intrigues were widespread among the kings and the chiefs. Caution and discretion were, therefore, of utmost necessity as they were being unavoidably drawn into the search for peace, for each of these powers expected from them nothing short of loyalty to their sentiments. From all indications, Olubi and his agents in Ibadan, being under the rulership of the

Rather, Derin disputed the authenticity of the said letter as, according to him, the Alafin could not have written to the governor without apprising him of it. His repeated emphasis on an ongoing private communication between him and the Alafin made Johnson to wonder if there was something sinister about the politics of the war.<sup>20</sup> With the passage of time he would appreciate the dangerous intrigues going on among his own people, particularly the self-destructive power tussle between the Alafin and the Are.<sup>21</sup>

Derin's ire may be understood in the context of the mutual but subtle rivalries among the ruling powers in the interior. The Oni-elect prized the deference being accorded him by the various powers in the country, particularly the Alafin. He commanded the largest territory and population, including Ibadan whose menacing warlike spirit was the scourge of the country. It suited his pride and material interests that he was being appealed to by the various powers to bring the war to an end, the pleas often being accompanied with material gifts.<sup>22</sup> While he enjoyed this status at home, Derin was also extending his network to the colonial government in Lagos. Well before the Alafin's letter reached the lieutenant governor, he was already in correspondence with him through his nephew in the Ijesha-Ekiti confederate army and through the messenger of the Lieutenant Governor Griffith who shuttled between Ode-Ondo and Lagos.<sup>23</sup> He wanted

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Alafin gave priority of loyalty to their majesty. But because Derin's territory was strategic to their access to Lagos, making contact with him unavoidable, they could not ignore him but had to relate to him with caution. But Johnson's experience on this return trip from Lagos showed that there was no hiding place from the perils of traversing this dangerous terrain of jealousies and intrigues.

<sup>20</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, December 26, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>21</sup> Only a few months before this incident, the Alafin exercised a damage control measure which was kept secret from Ibadan. Are Latosa had appealed to the Alafin to request Derin to give Ibadan access through his country to get gun powder from the coast to continue their prosecution of the war. Rather than making such request, the Alafin told Derin to do the contrary, feigning tiredness with the war. This incident would add to the adversarial activities of the Egba against Yoruba territories within their reach each time the Alafin "appealed" to them to assist in staying war proceedings. Ibadan warriors consequently grew suspicious of the Alafin's moves, for each time he made what appeared like peace move the Yoruba country would experience more difficulties. By the last quarter of 1882, they grew tired of what they perceived as his treachery and would not want to hear his name again. A year later, they made a definite move against him, though it was unsuccessful. W. Griffith to S. Rowe, September 30, 1881, NAL CO 147/46, Despatch 124(1937), Enclosure 1; S. Johnson, Journal Entries, September 30, 1882, and November 2 and 29, 1883, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>22</sup> S. Johnson to W. Griffith, January 23, 1882, NAL CO 147/48, Despatch 48(6672), Enclosure 5; C. Wilson and S. Kester to W. Griffith, no date, NAL CO 147/48, Despatch 48(6672), Enclosure 2; J. Haastrup to W. Griffith, January 16, 1882, NAL CO 147/48, Despatch 48(6672), Enclosure 7.

<sup>23</sup> The lieutenant-governor was then encouraging the Ondo chiefs to abolish human sacrifice.

the colonial government to assist him in bringing the war to an end as all the contending parties were asking for his intervention.<sup>24</sup>

The Oni-elect saw Johnson's courier role between the Alafin and the lieutenant-governor as a threat to his local status as the centre of the search for peace but also as threat to the rapport he was building for himself with the colonial regime on the coast. At this stage, Johnson did not evince any knowledge of the earlier correspondence between Derin and the lieutenant governor and did not seem to appreciate the threat his activity posed to the privileges of the Oni-elect. Fifteen years later, he would attribute Derin's action to his envy of Olubi's recognition by interior peoples as the white man's representative among them and that he would want to be so recognized too. Moreover, the chastened catechist from Ibadan imagined that the Oni-elect inadvertently took the accorded him by the authorities in the interior to denote the cultural significance of Ile Ife. In Johnson's reading of the situation, the strategic nature of the Oke-Igbo road to the interests of all the combatants was the reason for their deference.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, at the interposition of Haastrup and Akitonde, one of Derin's attendants, the Oni-elect pardoned the supposed infraction.<sup>26</sup>

At the eventual setting out of Johnson and his group from Oke-Igbo to Ibadan and Oyo, Derin's son, Amodu, accompanied him a good distance. He used the opportunity to impress on Johnson to advise his superintendent at Ibadan to be earnest in using his good office to bring the war to an end. The young man was repeating his father's earlier request to Olubi, which the latter had been careful not to entertain. Johnson assured him that Olubi would write to his father, but he also tried to make clear the identity of his group: "We are Christian teachers... and as such we never meddle with politics unless necessitated to it".<sup>27</sup> The fact is that interior peoples confused the identities of mission agents and the colonial government on the coast. Neither did they distinguish between the European missionaries and their African agents. Since they all spoke the same language—missionaries, their African agents, and the colonists in Lagos—they belonged to the same *tribe* they called *Oyinbo*. Obviously they must have the same agenda. Why

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<sup>24</sup> W. Griffith to S. Rowe, September 30, 1881, NAL CO 147/46, Despatch 124(1937), Enclosure 1; W. Griffith to S. Rowe, November 26, 1881, NAL CO 147/46, Despatch 125(1938), Enclosure 1.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, p. 464, 467.

<sup>26</sup> S. Johnson to W. Griffith, January 23, 1882, NAL CO 147/48, Despatch 48(6672), Enclosure 5.

<sup>27</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, December 29, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

then should there be any complication in the agents' facilitating their wishes with the colonial regime in Lagos?

Before they parted, Johnson too pleaded with Amodu "to use his influence with his father to accelerate the Governor's wish in settling the war, about which [he] wrote expressly to him".<sup>28</sup> It would seem Johnson was not sure Derin had forgiven his (or Alafin's?) purported infraction, which led to the lieutenant governor's letter to the Oni-elect. And he had reason to doubt that Derin would respond positively, because he had cast doubt on the authenticity of the said letter to Lieutenant-Governor Griffith. If Derin disregarded the lieutenant governor's letter to him because he considered the process that gave rise to it as inauthentic or as a slight, the peace process would be endangered and the critics of the initiative, in Lagos, would noise abroad their vindication that the purported letter from the Alafin was spurious. Certainly, Johnson and Amodu needed one another's influences on their superiors. The war was impeding the prospects of mission, for which reason the agents were anxious to see all hands on deck in the restoration of peace to the country. Derin also had decided not to ascend the throne of Ile-Ife as the Oni until the situation improved. Consequently for Amodu the war was an unnecessary delay on the way of his appropriating the privileges of a prince.

### **The Yoruba's Longing for Peace**

Johnson and the messengers of the lieutenant-governor arrived at Oyo in January 1882 through Ibadan and Ijaye where they received a rousing welcome; glaringly, there was no cheer about on their arrival at Oyo. At their conferences with the king, the Alafin confirmed his authorship of the letter delivered to the lieutenant governor by Johnson, narrating again the circumstances that led to his appeal to the colonial government.<sup>29</sup> It must have been a moment of triumph for Johnson and his superintendent, Olubi, who had been accused by the Yoruba National Society in Lagos and Derin of Oke-Igbo as having forged the letter in the name of the Alafin.<sup>30</sup>

With the vindication of his mission to the lieutenant-governor, Johnson's work was done. The Aremo catechist could still have remained on the subsequent team that now officially represented the Alafin to the colonial administration, but Jonathan Ojelabi, a court politician had insinuated himself into the king's new plan of communication with

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<sup>28</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, December 29, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>29</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, January 11, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>30</sup> C. Wilson and S. Kester to W. Griffith, no date, NAL CO 147/48, Despatch 48(6672), Enclosure 2.

the colonial regime. Johnson would no longer represent the king before the lieutenant-governor. But like his counterpart at Ode-Ondo, Charles Phillips, he had become an asset in the scheme of negotiation between the colonial administration and interior peoples. He had established trust with Mr. Griffith; and as a church agent resident in Ibadan witnessing the day-to-day developments in the country, he was preferred to the most moderate Yoruba resident in Lagos. But in spite of these credentials, his involvement in the negotiations for peace could have been suspended as a result of his replacement by Ojelabi. For although the lieutenant-governor expected that he would continue to be relevant in the scheme of things, the basis for his expectation was that he would continue to represent the Alafin to him along with his official messenger.

From the beginning, Johnson's relevance to the peace process was a result of Olubi's decision to involve him. And that he would continue to be relevant after the Alafin's meeting with the messengers of the lieutenant governor may also be credited to his foresight. After more than thirty years of unbroken missionary service in Ibadan, Johnson's superintendent had acquired a deep understanding of the psychology of the people among whom he worked. Perceiving that the mission of the lieutenant-governor to the Are could falter at the presence of the Alafin's Ilari among the messengers, he advised Johnson to continue with them to the war camp at Igbajo. The decision afforded him the opportunity to visit, for the first time, the north-eastern part of the country under Ibadan's administration.

Passing through deserted and partially occupied towns, he took note of the peculiar geography, history, and cultures of the peoples of Arà, Ejigbo, Ilobu, Òba, Ikirun and Ire. At Ikirun he recounted with melancholy the devastation the war had wreaked on the frontier town, tempered only by the joy with which the remnants of the people "hailed the arrival of the messengers as...the benefactors of the country".<sup>31</sup> But he did not fail to notice that the Christian message had not been preached in some of these towns and so imagined the possibility of a chain of mission stations from Modakeke, the Yoruba eastern frontier town with Ife and Ijesha country, to Ede, Ejigbo and Ogbomoso in the west.<sup>32</sup>

The closer Johnson and the messengers approached the camp, the more they witnessed the spectacle of destruction suffered by the frontier towns of Ire, Otan, and Iresi along with Igbajo and Ikirun. Repeated siege and destruction by Ilorin, Ijesha and Ekiti

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<sup>31</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, January 19, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>32</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, January 17, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

confederate armies and their consequent desertion by the inhabitants had reduced their populations and rendered them “overgrown with thick bushes”.<sup>33</sup> But it was Johnson’s description of the situation of the war camp that testifies to his insight into how nature and providence had cooperated to bring the contending armies into a gridlock:

Igbajo and its surroundings are a mountainous country; every where you turn nothing meets your sight but mountains and valleys; and ever since the Ibadan army were there, they had been seeking in vain for a plain, Providence it seems, has brought both contending parties into this defile for punishment. Both camps are upon opposite hills; the one as well as the other could not retreat without a serious disaster or the annihilation of the whole army, except peace is made, and the retreat be in good order.<sup>34</sup>

The Are was not in a hurry to hear the message of the lieutenant-governor. His priority concern was to have a discussion with Johnson. In deed, Olubi’s foresight was vindicated as Ibadan war chiefs were elated by his presence in the team:

...[W]hen they saw me [they] took me to their embrace; this being the first time of our meeting since they left home for the war. They would rather wish that the present embassy was to settle the war. As for their part, they said they are willing but they fear the Ekitis will not agree. They were so happy that I came with the messengers; and they begged me that I should return with them to Lagos as their own representative. Visitors were overwhelming, and the welcome hearty, from the absence of so many years.<sup>35</sup>

At the eventual meeting with the lieutenant-governor’s messengers, the chiefs wanted the messengers to broker peace with their confederate enemy through their counterparts sent to their camp. Although the two groups of messengers had agreed to meet at the battlefield when they were parting at Oke-Igbo, the embassy to Ilesha and Mesi had finished business and had departed three days before the messengers to Oyo and Igbajo came for them. Johnson returned with the team to Lagos, now representing the Ibadan war-chiefs along with their other nominees, Oderinde and Ojeniran.<sup>36</sup>

Johnson returned to Lagos with the representatives of the Alafin and the Ibadan authorities. His team and the one to the confederate army met at Ondo and related their experiences to the Osemawe at his request. The feelings from Ijesha and Ekiti confederacy forebode a failed mission. The people doubted the sincerity of Ibadan while

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<sup>33</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, January 20, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>34</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, January 20, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>35</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, January 20, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>36</sup> M. Latosa to W. Griffith, January 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/63.

the Owa of Ijesha land and Ogedemgbe, the Seriki of Ijesha army, recounted their people's past ordeals at the hands of Ibadan.<sup>37</sup> Either because they did not want to give the lieutenant-governor any adverse report that could dampen his interest in the search for peace, or for the reason of the Osemawe's mature intervention, none of the written reports to the colonial administration gave serious attention to this painful memory which was the Achilles' heel of the exercise

### **Weighing the Option of Intervention**

Lieutenant-Governor Griffith received the official report of his messengers, which showed the interest of the chiefs and kings in his intervention and stated the conditions laid down by the kings of Ijesha and Ekiti to enter into a peace agreement with Ibadan.<sup>38</sup> From all indications, he did not hear directly from the official messengers who returned with them; their presence with the official emblems of their masters was taken as a confirmation of the written reports.

Following the reported outcome of the embassies, Mr. Griffith informed Johnson and the other messengers his willingness to visit the interior personally, if it was possible. He then held open forums, first, with Yoruba residents in Lagos and then the Ijesha residents. The Yoruba were now favourably disposed to the movement for peace and appreciated the lieutenant-governor for his efforts. The Ijesha remained bellicose. They "were for a continuation of the war until the Ibadans be crushed...", a dream Joseph Haastrup warned them against as being unrealizable in the next ten years. At the same time he echoed to his compatriots the popular request of the Yoruba: "Give Ibadans a road for trade and they will give up war".<sup>39</sup>

In a sudden turn of events, the lieutenant-governor took ill and the governor at Accra, who had been overwhelmed with dispatches on the matter, also decided to visit Lagos from Accra to verify the situation himself. Governor Rowe met with the messengers of the kings and chiefs from the interior on his arrival. But shortly before

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<sup>37</sup> Only Johnson's journal sent to the CMS Mission reported the event that took place at the palace of the Osemawe. Jose Meffre, the second messenger to the Ijesha and Ekiti countries, did not sign the report compiled by his colleague Haastrup. It appears the non-inclusion of this episode in the report to the lieutenant-governor or his apparent change of position with regard to peacemaking was responsible for this. S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 6 and 21, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101. See Appendix: Johnson's entries for Feb. 6-17 and 21, 1882.

<sup>38</sup> Haastrup's initial report to the lieutenant-governor from Ondo related to him the conditions laid down by the Ijesha and Ekiti kings for them to accede to peace with Ibadan. J Haastrup to W. Griffith, February 6, 1882, NAL CO 147/48, Despatch 48(6672), Enclosure 6.

<sup>39</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entries, February 20 and 21, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

then, he had a private session with some of the persons Mr. Griffith had earlier sent into the interior to authenticate the request for the involvement of his administration in the search for peace. Johnson and the two representatives to Oyo and Igbajo— Charles Wilson and Simeon Kester— were left out. In their place, the governor invited another Yoruba, Isaac Willoughby. Haastrup was there as well as Jose Meffre, his colleague in the lieutenant-governor's errand to the Ijesha country.<sup>40</sup> The inclusion of Meffre, whose name no longer featured in the correspondence after the private session with Derin of Oke Igbo on their way to the war camps, appears to explain the governor's criteria for choosing persons to privately confer with prior to the open session.

As an Ijesha, Meffre had heard on the trip the gruelling atrocities Ibadan warriors had committed against his people while they were under their lordship. This eye-opening knowledge might actually have begun at Derin's private meeting with the government's embassy to the confederate army's camp. Johnson's earlier complain about it may then have substance. Meffre had, in consequence of his private session with Derin, converted from a peace seeker to a belligerent in sympathy with the confederate army. This is evident in his masterminding a plot that nearly led to the murder of the Are's messenger at Ayesan on the way to Lagos,<sup>41</sup> and he did not sign the report he and Haastrup supposedly put together, that report having glossed over the painful memory of the Ijesha and Ekiti peoples.<sup>42</sup> As a belligerent, Governor Rowe knew that people like him, not Johnson, were the crucial elements in the search for peace, hence his priority to conclude him in a private session.

At the open session, the governor listened out to the messengers from the chiefs and kings in the interior. By hearing directly from the messengers he indicated that he was interested in the specific messages given to the messengers by their kings and chiefs and not just the report of the official embassies to them. He thereafter dismissed them and promised to think over their messages.<sup>43</sup> He would not meet with them again until two weeks later.

The day following the meeting, April 1, Johnson wrote the governor, stating his perspectives on the war and the need for the colonial government to do something about

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<sup>40</sup> S. Rowe to Lord Kimberley, April 3, 1882, NAL CO 147/49, Despatch 61(8089).

<sup>41</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 6 and 21, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101. S. Rowe to The Earl of Kimberly, April 15, 1882, NAL CO 147/49, Despatch 81(9075).

<sup>42</sup> J. Haastrup to W. Griffith, February 6, 1882, NAL CO 147/48, Despatch 48(6672), Enclosure 6 and J. Haastrup to W. Griffith, February 16, 1882, NAL CO 147/48, Despatch 48(6672), Enclosure 7.

<sup>43</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, March 31, 1882, G3/A2/O(1882)/101.

it. He said nothing new in the letter; after all, his correspondence had earlier passed through the governor to London and his interventionist position was well known.<sup>44</sup> Why then did he write the governor? Johnson did not seem to be aware of how far his correspondence with the lieutenant-governor had gone and could be thinking of making his points to the governor, first hand. This is possible since it appears he and the other messengers to the interior did not speak at the open session. He also seems to have felt that he missed an opportunity in his being excluded from the governor's private session with his colleagues before the general meeting with the messengers. The only way to redeem the missed opportunity was to write his view and forward it.

Laniyonu also wrote a sober one to the governor, though still advancing the cause of Ibadan while pointing attention to the Alafin's duplicity. He drew the attention of the governor to the fact that the Alafin was not really ready for peace to be brokered in his country. The evidence is clear. The Ilari sent to the government was *Obakosetan*, meaning "the king is not ready". If he had been sincere in his move for peace he would have sent another, *Obatunayese*, meaning "the king set the world right".<sup>45</sup> Isaac Willoughby who was at the private session also wrote the governor, pressing for intervention. Obviously the Yoruba elements in Lagos were now more earnest for peace.

Governor Rowe's further consultation showed that not all parties to the war were ready for peace. The Ijebu monarch particularly feigned ignorance of the move for peace in the interior but indicated enough to show that he would not cooperate with the colonial regime. In a tacit reference to Ibadan, he sent back to Governor Rowe that "they are cutting down a large tree with a knife, and that they are not in a hurry about it".<sup>46</sup> After weighing the risks involved in intervention and comparing them against the financial improvement its success could reflect on the colony, as some officers in Lagos were suggesting, the governor took his decision.

While the governor's further private consultations were going on and the messengers from the interior waited for his decision, Mr. Griffith left the colony for England. He was, however, courteous to hint Johnson that the expectation of peace seekers would not be realized immediately.

[F]rom what he said to me I had a presentiment that our mission at this time will be a failure. "Tell the chiefs yonder"[,] His Excellency said,

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<sup>44</sup> S. Johnson to S. Rowe, April 1, 1882, NAL CO 147/49, Despatch 71(8507), Enclosure 1.

<sup>45</sup> A. Hethersett to S. Rowe, April 6, 1882, NAL CO 147/49, Despatch 71(8507), Enclosure 4.

<sup>46</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entries, March 3, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

“why nothing could be done at present; and I hope to return within 6 months and I hope to visit you yonder.”<sup>47</sup>

Johnson became desperate. It could be that the letter he wrote on April 1 did not get to the governor; he resent it with a new date, April 4.<sup>48</sup> Mr. Griffith left the colony the same day, but the governor kept the messengers from the interior waiting for another nine days before he disclosed his decision to them. The hesitation of London and his own ambivalence, not Mr. Griffith’s humane considerations for the colony and interior peoples, had decided the matter. The terms of peace requested by the Ijesha and Ekiti confederacy were not acceptable to Her Majesty’s government, as they implied that they were more interested in crushing Ibadan than giving them respite. Their kinsmen in Lagos were particularly bellicose. The Alafin’s duplicity too was evident. On April 13, the governor reconvened the royal messengers from the interior and declared his decision. Johnson wrote:

To our great disappointment His Excellency said that the interior Kings should come to an agreement; and if they cannot settle the war for themselves, they must send again. The Alafin’s Ilari stood up to plead that it will be a great shame cast on his master; but the Governor would not change his resolution.<sup>49</sup>

He sent the messengers back to their kings and chiefs with gifts for them. Johnson’s gruelling six months of travels to broker peace also ended with a £3 gift from the governor “as acknowledgement of good services”.<sup>50</sup>

He proceeded to Oyo to deliver the governor’s message to the Alafin and then to Igbajo to deliver the one to the Are. The Alafin feigned enragement against the Ijesha and promised to use charm to finish what Ibadan’s military power could not achieve. At the camp, Johnson wrote in his journal, “[t]he disappointment of men of all classes cannot be overstated”. They were only comforted that the colonial authority did not castigate them as all the powers around them were doing.<sup>51</sup> The catechist from Aremo finally arrived home in Ibadan on June 1, 1882, and returned to his work; but it was only going to be a short respite.

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<sup>47</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 4, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>48</sup> S. Johnson to S. Rowe, April 4, 1882, NAL CO 147/49, Despatch 71(8507), Enclosure 2.

<sup>49</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 13, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

<sup>50</sup> “Expenses in Connection with Return of Messengers from Ibadan, Ijesa...” NAL CO 147/49, Despatch 81(9075), Enclosure 5.

<sup>51</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, May 22, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

## Other Attempts at Peace

Another initiative at peace was launched by the Finance Committee of the CMS, barely a month after the failure of the first attempt, but it was not as far-reaching. Not even another attempt from Ilesha amounted to anything effectual. A more concerted effort was exerted in 1884 when Mr. J.B. Wood, the superintendent of the Yoruba Mission, visited the war camp at Igbajo and Mesi Ipole to broker peace. He had left Abeokuta in August 1884 with the aim to visit the mission at Ibadan and return to his base at Abeokuta. But in the aftermath of delivering in Ibadan the message entrusted to him by Balogun Ogundipe of Ikija to the Are, he decided to visit the Ibadan commander-in-chief in the camp, accompanied by Daniel Olubi, Samuel Johnson and Abraham Foster. The long and painstaking negotiation in an inclement weather and through treacherous terrains ended in futility as the old problem of who was to decamp first remained unresolved.

The Are of Ibadan and the Yoruba kings in the camp with him were more desperate to see the war brought to an end, hence they acceded to the conditions set by Ogedengbe, the war chief of the Ijesha-Ekiti confederate army. But they feared the ruin that could overtake them if they embarked on decamping first and their enemies reneged on their promise not to pursue them. The confederate army insisted they were in their country and could not decamp first as Ibadan had proved treacherous in the past, and they could not trust their words that they would not pursue them if they decamped first.<sup>52</sup> It was the end of a prospect that many in Ibadan's camp had taken for granted as successful and for which they were packing their belongings in readiness to return home. In fact, information had gone throughout the country as far as Abeokuta, ahead of the agents of peace, that they had successfully brought matters to a close. Mr. Wood summarised the disappointment of his team with the prospect that promised much but proved ineffectual:

I have not the words in which to describe the heart-sadness we experienced when we saw hope after hope crushed down & felt that this most wretched war was again likely to go on, and that all the earnest wishes of tens & hundreds of thousands of persons suffering from it in many ways would be disappointed.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> On his return journey from the camp, the Alafin told Mr Wood, and it was confirmed by several others in the country, "that if Ogedengbe had suffered himself to remove as the Ibadans wished they would certainly have followed him, and would have pursued the Ekitis 'even into ant-holes.'" One can only imagine how thankful Mr. Wood would have been to the Providence that made Ogedemgbe not to yield to his plea to decamp first. He remarked at that shocking revelation that, "The wickedness of people in this land is truly appalling". J. Wood to R. Lang, December 10, 1884, CMS G3/A2/O(1885)/13.

<sup>53</sup> J. Wood to R. Lang, December 10, 1884, CMS G3/A2/O(1885)/13.

They left the camp after three weeks of arduous negotiation and returned to their respective stations through Oyo, but not until Johnson had written four letters for the Ibadan war chiefs—one each to the governor in Lagos, their friends and compatriots in Lagos, Chief Ogundipe at Abeokuta, and Mr. Wood for his efforts. Each of the letters, dictated to Johnson, carried earnest pleas to end the war. Although the Ibadan chiefs could not, for shame, ask Mr. Wood to make further attempts at peace, individuals made the plea. It was at Iwo that the king was most earnest when he pleaded in privacy, that he should do everything in his power to end the war. He drew his attention to what was needed:

What is wanted is some show of material power, a number of soldiers. Try to get the governor of Lagos who has soldiers to take the matter up. Even if you should fail with him go on till you get even your own king to come and help us. Do not leave us. There is not a king in this whole country that is not in some way mixed up in this war, so there is not one who can act as mediator. We can only look to the white man to act for us in this capacity.<sup>54</sup>

Mr. Wood followed up on the situation in the interior with Captain Barrow, the deputy-governor of Lagos, who was ready to go up the country with Hausa escorts, the “material show of power” he lacked in his negotiation. But the governor-in-chief at Accra was ill-disposed to the proposal. Apparently the colonial office was not ready to invest funds and energy in a venture that required much but promised no success as in the failed attempt at peace in 1882. It would seem the iron was not yet red hot for the hammer to strike. The plea for intervention was still coming earnestly from one of the belligerents, the Yoruba army at Igbajo. The Ijesha-Ekiti powers were still mute; but it would not be for much longer.

Mr. Wood visited the mission in the eastern district in March 1885 and could not avoid being drawn again into the matter of the war; he visited the confederate kings of Ijesha and Ekiti who were now anxious to see him effect peace in the country. A visit to their war camp showed that Ogedengbe remained on the position he took when he visited him in September 1884: Ibadan must fulfil the requirements he gave and must decamp first for the war to end. Crossing to the Ibadan camp, Mr. Wood found that the longing for the end of the war was as intense as it had ever been, but the war chiefs had become hardened, in fact more boastful and belligerent. Feeling humiliated in accepting the

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<sup>54</sup> J. Wood to R. Lang, December 10, 1884, CMS G3/A2/O(1885)/13.

conditions of their enemies to no result, they considered it audacious for Ogedengbe to order them to decamp first. The governor in Lagos too had, as it were, snubbed their overtures. Pride would not allow them to openly ask for intervention again.

While hope was giving way to anger among the Ibadan war chiefs, it was softening the position in the confederate camp, motivating them to formally request the intervention of the governor. As Johnson did in the Ibadan camp in 1884, Phillips wrote letters for Ogedengbe and the confederate kings who, from “paternal solicitude”, appealed for the intervention of the government on the coast.<sup>55</sup> The victims of the war in the Ijesha country bypassed their belligerent people in Lagos and took responsibility for their own survival. Unfortunately the events that followed in the colony showed that their request came at a most inauspicious time. Governor Young died at Accra and Governor Griffith, now back in Lagos, had to leave for the Gold Coast.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Ibadan refused to write again for intervention but only evasively professed friendship with the colonial government. Events continued for another year when providence finally intervened.

### **Hot Ready for the Hammer**

In 1886, the British government severed Lagos from the Gold Coast colonial administration and gave it a bona fide status as a colony under the administration of a resident governor-in-chief. The new arrangement meant that developments in and around the colony would receive more attention and better priority than they had hitherto received. It was a moment of opportunity for the melancholic peoples of the interior, and they did not wait for too long for their aspiration for peace to be realized. Events unfolded rapidly as the colonial office appointed as governor-in-chief a former officer who had had a brief stint in Lagos and had been interested in the resolution of the war in the interior.<sup>57</sup> Governor Alfred Moloney arrived in Lagos about February 1886. A liberal Roman Catholic married to a Protestant wife, he had some twenty-five years earlier, as a young officer in the Second West Indian Regiment in Sierra Leone, been on acquaintance of the Secretary of the CMS Mission, Archdeacon James Hamilton.<sup>58</sup> It was therefore providential that he came into office at a time he found a soul-mate in the CMS Mission,

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<sup>55</sup> Owa, King of Ijesha, et.al. to the Governor, March 24, 1885, CMS G3/A2/O(1885)/153.

<sup>56</sup> J. Wood to R. Lang, December 10, 1884, CMS G3/A2/O(1885)/13.

<sup>57</sup> J. Hamilton to R. Lang, March 3, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/67.

<sup>58</sup> J. Hamilton to R. Lang, March 3, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/67.

many of whose principal officers shared his immediate aspiration to see the “interior question” finally resolved.<sup>59</sup>

In line with the condition laid down by Sir Samuel Rowe, Governor Moloney tried in 1882, while serving as the acting governor, to bring the warring parties to terms in the search for peace; but the attempt failed.<sup>60</sup> Now in his new capacity as the governor-in-chief, having been well acquainted with the matter, he lost no time in venturing at peace again. And in this he sought the assistance of the archdeacon. The new move called Johnson to duty again along with his colleague at Ode-Ondo, Charles Phillips.

Johnson was temporarily engaged in Lagos with the archdeacon at Christ Church after his ordination as a deacon on December 6, 1885.<sup>61</sup> The renewed call to peacemaking at the instance of his archdeacon and the governor interrupted his stay and he had to leave for the Ibadan war camp on March 2, 1886. Charles Phillips was also detailed at Ondo to proceed to the war camp at Mesi “with overtures of peace” on behalf of the governor.<sup>62</sup> Happily the negotiations of the superintendent of the Yoruba mission during his visits to the camps in 1884 and 1885 had made their task easier. The conditions for peace had been clearly stated and agreed to by both sides and what was needed was the material show of force to supervise decamping and actualize agreements. Moreover, Ibadan war chiefs having unsuccessfully tried a hard push against the confederate army, following the death of Are Latosa, knew that the only way to be relieved from this unfruitful war was to cooperate with the neutral power.<sup>63</sup>

Success attended the mission this time and the belligerents at Kiriji agreed to the final settlement of the war, although Ilorin rejected the overture to end their war against Ibadan. Sanguine Johnson returned to Lagos on May 19 with the messengers of the Alafin, the Balogun and chiefs of Ibadan and those from the Awujale and the Ijebu chiefs.<sup>64</sup> So gratified that peace would be secured very soon, he reported to the governor:

On the whole my impression is, that the mission is a successful one. The iron is hot ready for the hammer, and I would join the Kings[,] Chiefs and common people to advise the Governor to take advantage of the

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<sup>59</sup> The phrase, “interior question” was invented by Governor Moloney. NAL CO 147/55, Despatch 179(13447).

<sup>60</sup> J. Hamilton to R. Lang, March 3, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/67.

<sup>61</sup> J. Hamilton to R. Lang, January 18, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/40

<sup>62</sup> J. Hamilton to R. Lang, March 3, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/67.

<sup>63</sup> J. Wood to R. Lang, March 17, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/86.

<sup>64</sup> A. Moloney to Earl Granville, July 20, 1886, NAL CO 147/55, Despatch 137(11069).

opportunity to bring about peace at once in the country, which I hope will be a lasting one.<sup>65</sup>

To reinforce the need for immediate intervention of the governor, Johnson recounted the debilitating effects of the war in Ibadan town and on its people—the violent press-ganging of young people to war, the grim exploitation of the masses of the people, the resale of slave wives to procure ammunitions of war, and the scarcity of salt and other basic articles. The mayhem brought Ibadan to the brink of a precipice from which they were salvaged by the timely intervention of a friend, the Balogun Nofowokan of Ijebu, who alerted on the bad reputation the domestic violence could create for the governor, a professed friend. Johnson thus concluded his recommendation to the governor with the observation that belligerent and war-loving Ibadan respected no authority but the governor's. Could he not then strike with the hammer while the iron was red hot so the people be not be disappointed again?<sup>66</sup>

Officers in the Lagos colonial office appreciated the reports of Johnson and Charles Phillips but they were not optimistic that the truce would lead to a permanent solution. They considered the governor's interest "a little over-sanguine, but anyhow it [seemed] a step in the right direction". And in appreciation of the efforts of "the two black divines", they proposed a gratuity of £50 each for them "as a special indulgence, with a hint, however, that these pleasant little outings cannot often be indulged in at the public expense".<sup>67</sup> Only European officers who had never ventured beyond the colony could have described their arduous and perilous journeys as "pleasant little outings". However, at a conference with the governor in Lagos on June 4, 1886, the messengers sent by the kings and chiefs in the interior signed on behalf of their masters the treaty of peace put together by the colonial government of Lagos.

Michel Doortmont has drawn attention to the hierarchical gradation the treaty apparently introduced into the relationship between the Alafin and the Owa of Ijesha land. Referring to the third clause in the treaty, which states that "The ALAFIN and Owa shall stand to each other in the relationship of the elder brother to the younger as before when the Ekiti countries were independent",<sup>68</sup> he argued that:

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<sup>65</sup> S. Johnson to A. Moloney, May 20, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/122.

<sup>66</sup> S. Johnson to A. Moloney, May 20, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/122.

<sup>67</sup> NAL CO 147/55, Despatch 179(13447).

<sup>68</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas, The History of the Yorubas—From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: CMS, 1921), 528.

Here we can discover the hand of Samuel Johnson. The ‘brotherhood concept’ introduced here was new. Ilesha had never had any relationship with Oyo other than the traditional common descent from Oduduwa. Now, some kind of subservience of the *Owa* to the *Alaafin* was introduced.<sup>69</sup>

Doortmont harped on Johnson’s uncritical disposition towards the Alaafin where others rated the Oyo monarch “quite low,” and grounded this disposition on Johnson’s clannish interest as an “Oyo-Yoruba” himself who “held a high view that all Yoruba should be politically united under the overlordship of the *Alaafin*”. According to Doortmont, Johnson’s *The History of the Yorubas* “breathes this opinion on every page”.<sup>70</sup>

There is no doubt that Johnson desired to see the defunct empire of Oyo united and prosperous “as in the happy days of ABIODUN”, but it was too early at this point to draw the conclusion that he introduced the hierarchical relationship to realize that end. A more auspicious time would later avail itself for him to enact that agenda. But at this stage, the treaty had only incorporated aspects of the conditions given by Ogedemgbe and the confederate peoples of Ijesa and Ekiti in 1884 at the time Mr. Wood attempted unsuccessfully to broker peace between them and Ibadan. In fact, the treaty crafted by the colonial government played down the subservient position the Owa and his people placed themselves in relation to the Alaafin in the 1884 condition for attaining peace. This is the surprise Doortmont would have expressed, had he taken cognisance of the conditions the confederate states gave for peace to reign at the time. According to Johnson, their own words were “That the Owa, being the ALAFIN’S younger brother, would still acknowledge him by a yearly gift, which is not to be taken for tribute but as a token of respect”.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Michel Doortmont, “Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History” (PhD diss., Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 1994), 107.

<sup>70</sup> Like Doortmont, Robin Law argued that the notion of Oyo having exercised paramountcy in its heydays as an empire over the other Yoruba peoples who claimed Ife as their origin was only a propaganda that had no basis. Robin Law, “The Heritage of Oduduwa: Traditional History and Political Propaganda among the Yoruba,” *JAH* 2 (1973):207-222.

<sup>71</sup> Johnson’s presentation of this clause is a little different from what is contained in Mr. Wood’s report of his efforts at peace. Wood’s report did not include an annual gift, but it also carries the impression that there was a relationship between the Alaafin and the Owa in pre-war Yorubaland. It reads: “The Ekitis are [willing] that the same relations shall exist between the Owa (i.e. the king of the Ijeshas) and the Alaafin (i.e. the king of Oyo) as existed formerly if it is wished. The Owa regards the Alaafin as his elder brother”. S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 497; J. Wood to R. Lang, December 10, 1884, CMS G3/A2/O(1885)/13.

In failing to note this antecedent to the crafting of the treaty of peace by the Government of Lagos, Doortmont failed to reckon with the fact of social gradation among the Yoruba even though he acknowledged that the Ijesha also laid claim to a common myth of origin from Oduduwa. That myth was actually the force that mentally bound the various clans of Oduduwa in the heydays of Oyo's political supremacy when there were statutory boundaries between the different states. The issue here is that along with a shared sense of common origin, even when they existed as independent states, they shared a common value for social hierarchy. For the Yoruba know neither the individualism that existed in stateless, pre-colonial Ibo land in the Niger valley and beyond nor the egalitarianism that presently characterizes western society. Wherever two of them gather, from the smallest domestic front to the grandest state, there must be the elder to be acknowledged by the younger. Therefore the provision in the treaty resulted more from cultural self-understanding than from a mischievous agenda of a clannish mediator. This is one way to see the issue raised by Doortmont.

Another perspective is that this seemingly self-defeating condition laid down by the Ijesha-Ekiti confederacy was actually not as uninformed as it appears on the surface. The people knew who their enemies were. They were the Ibadan, Alafin's impossible subjects who had plundered and decimated their countries and whom the Alafin had with a sleight of hand tied to an endless and punitive war. They knew that the Alafin was actually on their side and not on the side of Ibadan, hence their secret alliance with him to see Ibadan worsted in the war. It was all a transcript, which, if successful executed, would resume the old order of a hierarchical relationship.

Still, it is understandable that the colonial regime in Lagos did not include in the treaty they put together the annual gift to the Alafin even though they retained the hierarchical relationship between him and the Owa; that is, if one goes by Johnson's account of the conditionalities proposed by the confederate states in 1884 and not by Mr. Wood's letter, which did not mention an annual gift. The colonial government might have been closely observing the country at this time. And they might have noted the complications it would create for their upcountry vision of free movement of persons, goods and services if they were to give legitimacy to Alafin's material interests in other peoples. It was, consequently, self-serving to not include in the treaty of peace this provision.

The issue remains to be addressed: Why would the confederate states bind themselves to the obligation of an annual gift to the Alafin? It would seem that was the

ancient practice to pacify the overwhelming power of the savannah kingdom that had outgrown its brothers and sisters in the Oduduwa family. Its vast economic and political reaches, massive population, and formidable cavalry replete with intrepid sharpshooters, all gave Oyo, in its heydays, the hegemony it enjoyed among its Oduduwa siblings.<sup>72</sup> The annual token was, if not an actual bribe, an acknowledgement of this superiority, a means to contain the monarch's temptation to militarily subjugate the lesser powers like it happened to the Egba states that became tributaries to the Alafin. That the confederate states were still willing to retain the old order is an indication that they had not come to terms with the diminished influence of the ancient regime that had retreated to Ago-Oja.

This is shown by the adjustment they made to the fourth clause in their initial demand in 1884. According to Johnson, they demanded then "That they [i.e. the confederate states] would claim Igbajo, Ada, Otan and Iresi for the Owa of Ilesa, those places being his originally".<sup>73</sup> Ibadan responded that the claim was based only on tradition, that presently those towns were occupied by Oyo, hence the people must be given time to evacuate if they wished, and then those parts restored to the Owa. But the confederate states changed their position and gave up those towns to Ibadan. The reason was because they could no longer serve as buffer between the powerful state of Oyo and Ijesha land, having been overwhelmed by refugees from the old capital in their retreat from the war that raged there. To unseat that weight of desperate population that was essentially Oyo, and which they had kept at bay over the centuries, was an impossible task. The Owa knew it would amount to a wild goose chase.<sup>74</sup> The fear of Oyo was, indeed, the beginning of wisdom. The strategy of containment by annual gift must therefore be continued as an expression of enlightened self-interest. One wonders if Ile-Ife could have learned something from this in their struggle with Modakeke.

Following the signing of the treaty by the accredited messengers to the governor, Johnson and Phillips returned to the interior with them to receive the final endorsement of the chiefs and kings. Apparently aware of the false propaganda at Abeokuta that Ibadan

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<sup>72</sup> In this respect, Akinjogbin noted the "peculiar position of Oyo" in the "'Ebi' constitutional arrangement" of the pre-war Yoruba country. According to him, "The capital of a large Empire, with a powerful and efficient army, its monarchy was constitutionally subject to the control of Ife, a small and militarily weak kingdom.... In every action, the Oyo authorities had to look backwards over their shoulders to ensure that the position of Ife was not adversely affected". I.A. Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century—A Reassessment," *JHSN* 3 (1966): 451.

<sup>73</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 497.

<sup>74</sup> Modakeke's refusal to quit their settlement on Ife soil attests to the impossibility of uprooting such a mass of people by persuasion.

had breached the truce at Kiriji,<sup>75</sup> Johnson attested to the success that attended their mission in the faithfulness of the belligerents to the armistice earlier proclaimed,

I am glad to say that we have met all things very favourable and hopeful at Kiji than even we have expected....The messengers are not only meeting at the battlefield, but have arranged to enter each others [sic] camp and these messengers have been always well entertained, and presents in cowries, gowns, clothes & c have been given to them in our absence.<sup>76</sup>

A month after this report, he wrote another one in which he stated that:

[S]uccess has attended us in this our second mission as in the former. The treaty has been signed by all the Kings & Chiefs of the belligerents, & they are expecting the arrival of the Governor or his envoy to disperse them.<sup>77</sup>

The successful proceedings reported by Johnson and Phillips was followed by the visit of the governor's commissioners to the Kiriji camp where, on September 10, 1886, they named the house prepared for them by the belligerents "Flag Staff House".<sup>78</sup> On it they hoisted the Union Jack. It was a significant moment whose import Johnson could not have missed. For it marked the culmination of a chain of events that began with the ascension to the throne of Oyo by Adeyemi,<sup>79</sup> the ruthless ambition of Are Latosa of Ibadan, and the inability of the belligerents to act on their agreed peace terms in mutual trust. The Union Jack, standing at the centre of their theatre of belligerence, and in the heart of Yoruba land, was an omen of the future that was dawning upon the people. But it would take another seven years for it to burst with energy and rapid flux.<sup>80</sup>

### **Towards a Protectorate**

In assisting to end the war at Kiriji, Johnson struck a fatal blow at the root of a malady that had afflicted his family history. But his task was not done. His new sphere of service, Oyo, would show another aspect of the debilitating social values at work in the country. Since he had been visiting Oyo before he was stationed there, Johnson knew the

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<sup>75</sup> J. Wood to R. Lang, June 15, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/128

<sup>76</sup> S. Johnson to T. Harding, July 8, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/139.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in T. Harding to R. Lang, August 12, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/147.

<sup>78</sup> W. Speeding, Journal Entries, August 16 and September 10, 1886. NAL CO 147/58, Despatch 20(3122).

<sup>79</sup> The prognostication of the traditional "*Igba Iwa*", which was usually brought from Ile Ife at the ascension of a new Alafin, revealed that Adeyemi's reign was going to be evil for the country.

<sup>80</sup> The commissioners dispersed the combatants and fired the camps on September 28, 1886. Offa continued to burn with fury while peace moves at Modakeke proved difficult.

social challenges that Oyo presented to any resident in the town. The princes and other members of the royal family were unbearable in their administration of justice. In the first month of his arrival there, he noted in his journal,

The greatest trouble, and anxiety in this town is fire alarm. The government of this place is very arbitrary. Wrongs are redressed but it is to fill the royal coffer. Creditors lose all, in sueing [sic] their debtors at court. If a man is deprived of his wife, and the matter is brought to court for redress, if he asked for the dowry, the court will force it out, but the wronged husband is doomed to lose both his wife and the dowry. The wife became the man's who paid the dowry [sic] and the dowry is paid to fill the royal coffer. This drove the Oyo people to another [expediency], and has made them incendiaries.<sup>81</sup>

Incendiary activities, other than a means to retaliate personal wrongs, did not effect any redress. It only deepened the peoples' anguish and poverty as Johnson further reported:

Incendiarism is tolerated to some extent, as it is a means to fill the royal chest. This is extended to nearly every offence committed; and the greatest incendiaries are the royalists who can commit crimes openly with impunity. This helped to impoverish the country, and hence you can scarcely find a well dressed person at Oyo, except he is a stranger, or a member of the royal family, be he a slave or a Prince. Oppression, taxation, fines, conflagration in which a man sometimes loses his house twice or thrice in a year, and want of trade are great evils at Oyo, which besides other things impoverish the people.<sup>82</sup>

Johnson himself was not immune to the demands of the princes since the power wielded by the royalty was unassailable. The person of the Alafin, and by extension of the princes, was inviolable. The pastor could only resort to his journals and correspondence to make his critical comments and clad with Yoruba niceties his dissatisfaction with the status quo. The expanding colonial influence appeared to be the hopeful remedy to the situation, and when he had the opportunity to facilitate it he did not hesitate to do so. It took three years of his stay at Oyo for the process to begin, another three for the royalty to commit itself to a new culture—which implication it least understood—and another two for the reality of the new day to dawn on them. Meanwhile, the Government of Lagos was not forthcoming about the events in the interior, although Johnson was still involved in

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<sup>81</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, March 7, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/112.

<sup>82</sup> S. Johnson, Journal Entry, March 7, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/112.

minor negotiations on residual issues of the Kiriji war. Three of them were particularly difficult.

First, the war between Ibadan and Ilorin did not abate as the colonial regime in Lagos ignored it. Its consequences at that moment were irrelevant to their interest. Second, the Ijebu were reluctant to open the roads through their country contrary to the agreements reached on the war at Kiriji in 1886. Third, the Egba remained discontented with the policies of the Lagos government over several issues that had developed in a short time.<sup>83</sup> With these developments, especially the matters of Egba and Ijebu, negotiation and pacification had to continue and Johnson proved useful.

The development at Abeokuta was the first incident to jolt the indifference of the Government of Lagos to the disaffection among the Egba. In 1888, the French colonial regime at Porto Novo sent a diplomatic embassy to Abeokuta to negotiate a treaty with the Egba authorities. The embassy and Egba authorities kept their proceedings secret, but the Colonial Office eventually got the details of the agreement although the Egba authorities denied its existence.<sup>84</sup> If the hoisting of the Union Jack at Kiriji in 1886 was a pointer to what was to come, the ambition of the French at Abeokuta energized the negotiation for a British protectorate in the country.

The incursion of the French into what was the backyard of the Colony of Lagos was a vivid demonstration that the scramble had begun. When the rumour came afloat that the French emissaries were on their way to Oyo to establish relations with the Alafin, the administration of Alfred Moloney sprang to action. Johnson was in Lagos about this time to meet with the Finance Committee on his recommendations towards the new mission house to be erected at Oyo. The governor took advantage of his presence to send a letter to the Alafin, accompanied by another document which was a proposed treaty between Alafin Adeyemi and Her Majesty, the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. The tenor of the letter is remarkable for its subtlety.

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<sup>83</sup> The Egba could not retrieve their slaves who escaped to Lagos, where slavery was illegal. They were disaffected with the British government for hoisting their flag at Ilaro and Oke-Odan among the Yewa people who were supposed to be subject to Egbaland. Egba authorities saw it as a violation of the treaty that existed between the two governments and which recognized Egbaland as a sovereign state. They were also disenchanted with the Government of Lagos over their claim to Ebute-metta, a land that was contiguous to Lagos Colony. The colonial government refused to recognize the claim.

<sup>84</sup> "Le Traité Passé Entre La France et Les Egbas", *Journal le Matin*, April 15, 1892, NAL CO147/87 Despatch 8242.

Hitherto, the Government of Lagos had not appreciated the value of the hinterland to its present coastal possession; but, expectedly, they were not comfortable with the advance of the French. The “mild treaty”, as the governor termed it, was meant to oust the ambition of the French from among a people with whom they, the British government, were already engaged in mutual diplomacy. The letter was both patronizing and tantalizing. In its third paragraph, the governor struck a wedge between the Yoruba and the peoples to the west and north of their territory by subtly reminding the Oyo monarch of the uniqueness of the Yoruba people:

As you know, and every Yoruba knows, people to the west and to the north are not Yoruba; they differ in feelings and object from Yorubas. You will have doubtless learnt I always aim at making all Yoruba-speaking peoples one in heart as they are in tongue. Towards such unity I attach much importance to a definite and permanent understanding between these Yoruba-speaking peoples, and this colony which is mainly inhabited by Yorubas. And where should I look first for sympathy and support but to Adeyemi, the ALAFIN of Oyo the titular King of all Yoruba?<sup>85</sup>

The distinction Governor Moloney drew between the Yoruba and the peoples to the west of their territory was to distinguish the Yoruba from their erstwhile subjects. These were now in intercourse with Britain’s archrivals, the French, who were also expanding their territorial possession in the Popo country. It also served the present political calculations of the colonial regime in Lagos to strike the same wedge between Alafin’s people and their Islamic foes to the north who were waging their relentless war against Yorubaland from Ilorin. At the turn of the twentieth century when the need arose to consolidate the colonial project, this second distinction no longer mattered.

Moloney then tantalized the Alafin with a friendly relationship between Yoruba land and the Colony of Lagos, “which no foreign interference should be allowed to influence or disturb”. Should the Alafin forget history, the governor reminded him of the irretrievable loss of Ketu, which was destroyed by the invaders from the territory now in the possession of the French. By implication, proceedings from the west portended destruction and the Alafin had better be wary of the French who were presently thriving there. On the other hand, Moloney argued that:

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<sup>85</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 573.

Without the entertainment of the least desire to meddle with the government of such kingdoms as Yoruba, Egba, or Ijebu, and with the assurance that not one yard of land is coveted by me, in feeling and sympathy for Yoruba union I desire that Lagos take the place of Ketu as the fourth corner.<sup>86</sup>

It is not clear how the governor intended to add a British colonial possession to Yoruba land and make it “the fourth corner”. However, should the Alafin not see any reason for these advances, he reminded him of “what has been done with considerable expense already by Her Majesty’s Government for the Yoruba-speaking countries in connection with the settlement among them in 1886 of what has been known as the Interior War...”. He concluded his letter with his vision of a prosperous Yoruba country while sending the Alafin a sum of £5 and giving him the option of sending his messengers for more discussion if he so desired.

The treaty proper drew from these shrewd considerations of Governor Moloney, but the stroke that ousted the ambition of the French was the seventh article which reads:

It is hereby...agreed that no cession of territory and no other Treaty or Agreement shall be made by me other than the one I have now made without the full understanding and consent of the Governor for the time being of the said Colony of Lagos.<sup>87</sup>

The letter and the treaty were precursors to the declaration of British protectorate over the country. Back to Doortmont’s scruple on the grandiose conception of the Alafin as the “Head of Yoruba-land”, the problem here is not so much that the Alafin was so described, for he was the nominal head of Yorubaland. The problem is rather the delineation of what constituted “Yoruba-land.” If the treaty is read against the background of the rivalry between the two European powers, it will be better understood that this designation of the Alafin needed not be Johnson’s agenda even if it suited his inclination. More importantly, it suited Moloney’s agenda to delineate “the four corners” of the defunct empire of the Alafin “as Egba, Ketu, Jebu and OYO, embracing within its area that inhabited by all Yoruba-speaking peoples”.<sup>88</sup> By including in the treaty Ketu, now in French possession, and Egba, which they aimed at adding to it by sending an embassy to Abeokuta from Porto Novo, Moloney was insinuating that the French

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<sup>86</sup> Johnson.

<sup>87</sup> Johnson, 575.

<sup>88</sup> Johnson, 574.

authorities were encroaching on the Alafin's ancestral lands. This way, he could make the Alafin to see the authorities in Porto Novo as a threat and thereby discourage him from entering into any agreement with them.

By quickly forwarding the treaty to Oyo, the governor meant to exclude the French from the vast territory contiguous to the Colony of Lagos and on which the economy of Lagos depended. A French administration among the Egba, a people that claimed lands as close to the Colony of Lagos as Ebute-metta, would be too close for the comfort of the British colonial regime in Lagos. Johnson did not only carry the letter and the treaty; he facilitated the Alafin's assent to the treaty on July 23, 1888, employing his scripture reader—true to his name, Mosēri—as the witness.<sup>89</sup> It was the first phase in the move towards the protectorate, and it served the interest of both Johnson and the regime in Lagos. For Johnson, it was the beginning of the encroachment of the regime that would institute order in the country. For the colonial regime, it effectively put an end to the ambition of the French regime at Porto Novo.

### ***Enter the Protectorate!***

As the complications of the war between Ibadan and Ilorin filtered southward and undermined the 1886 treaty signed by the authorities in the interior, the Government of Lagos realized the potential harmful effects it could have on the colony. Unable any longer to be indifferent, they made a puny attempt in 1890 to bring about a truce through a process Johnson described as an “ill-conceived, unstatesmanlike mission which sought to intervene between two fierce armies...by means which could scarcely have separated two excited parties in a village riot”. Apart from this mission led by the Colonial Secretary Alvan Millson, the Alafin himself made a lacklustre attempt that also proved futile.

About this time also the British chambers of commerce were mounting pressures at home, pushing for British involvement in the “unappropriated hinterlands of the West African colonies”.<sup>90</sup> The arousal of their interest may not be unconnected with the threats that the ambition of the French posed to their trade with the people. But certainly, British officers serving with the Government of Lagos were in touch with some of the chambers and were giving them intelligence on the proceedings in the British colonies of West Africa. A particular case in point was Alvan Millson's use of the occasion of his ill-fated

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<sup>89</sup> *Mosēri* literally means “The child who was a witness”.

<sup>90</sup> T. Barter to Lord Knutsford, July 3, 1892, NAL CO 147/88, Despatch 2285.













motivation. Yet, when *The History of the Yorubas* is viewed as a product of his “reflective action” on his role and aspiration for the Yoruba through their vicissitudes in the nineteenth century, he was a praxis theologian. This is underscored by Bevans’ further submission that,

A key presupposition of the praxis model is its notion of God’s revelation...[T]he...model understands revelation as the presence of God in history—in the events of everyday life, in social and economic structures, in situations of oppression, in the experience of the poor and the marginalized. The God revealed in history, however, is not just *there*. God’s presence is one of beckoning and invitation, calling men and women of faith to locate God in [his] work of healing, reconciling, liberating.<sup>105</sup>

Johnson’s role in ending the Yoruba wars and in facilitating the declaration of the country as a protectorate of the British government are products of his orientation in the CMS missionary environment. His own experience of living in the country, hence having the immediate knowledge of the misery of the people, led him to the position that saw the necessity of external intervention. His aim was not to blindly ensure the triumph of the Oyo monarchy. It was, rather, for the purpose of redeeming the country from its woes. And if this would involve a punitive expedition to the seat of power to effect this, it was part of the necessary pain of adjustment. Johnson’s thought on these matters are well articulated in his work on Yoruba history.

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<sup>105</sup> Bevans, 75.















between the Yoruba and British people, the reason behind his facilitating the declaration of protectorate over the hinterland, he saw as self-denigrating their posturing as English subjects. And when they looked down on their own people from the interior, their self-deceit was complete.

Although Samuel Johnson never returned to Sierra Leone after his relocation to Yoruba land in 1858, his brothers who resided in Lagos were in regular touch and, in fact, visited their place of birth on several occasions. There is no doubt that through them, at least, he was getting information about the bad times his Creole contemporaries up the coast were facing in their relationship with their British colonial lords. And the racial struggle in its early days in Lagos was pointing in the same direction. *The History of the Yorubas*, in being addressed to the condition of this Yoruba community that seemed to have escaped the cultural incubus of Sierra Leone, was also meant to correct the perceived ill of self-defeating cultural colonialism evident among them.

It is still important to appreciate the historical build-up of the contrast in Johnson's own orientation and that of his larger Saro community in the late nineteenth century Lagos, especially as it was apparent in the disagreement between Bühler and Townsend in the early 1860s at Abeokuta. In fact, Townsend's anti-intellectual reaction to what he regarded as too much book learning in Bühler training programme can be traced to the baneful effects of the education being given the Creole children in Sierra Leone. Without local contents, it rendered its young graduate culturally stranded, neither European nor African in value and social taste. Townsend could not have missed the import of Graf's devastating critique of the lifestyle of these colony born young people in 1845, for he had been Graf's catechist in Hastings before coming over to Abeokuta later that year to pioneer the CMS Yoruba Mission. Yet, if Townsend's opposition to "too much" book-learning for Africans generally was vindicated by Johnson's observation of the development in the rank of the Sierra Leone returnees who were resident in Lagos, his own intellectual development and cultural rooted-ness vindicated Bühler's training programme. It shows that book learning that was culturally edifying in that it took into cognisance its subject's innate cultural orientation may not be baneful after all. The emergence of *The History of the Yorubas* is the evidence of this.

### **Content Analysis**

It is not certain when Johnson began to give thought to the idea of writing Yoruba history, but it is clear from his journals that some of the materials he included in the work













the history here centred on Ibadan, the successor empire to Oyo, which rather than settle into civil life widened the ripples of chaos and violence with the depredation of its warriors. As a living witness to aspects of this phase, beginning from 1858 when he arrived at Ibadan from Sierra Leone, and as an active participant in the attempts to institute order in the country, Johnson devoted 377 pages, 274-650, to this period. On Ibadan, he adopted the ambivalent view of his missionary benefactors and senior colleagues who valued its impedance of the ambition of the Fulani people to overrun the Yoruba country with their Islamic jihad but loathed the predatory tendencies of its warriors. Echoing them, he wrote that the people “were destined by God to play a most important part in the history of the Yorubas, to break the Fulani yoke and save the rest of the country from foreign domination; in short to be a protector as well as a scourge in the land...”.<sup>43</sup> From that point on, Ibadan’s activities commanded the attention of the historian and became the pivot on which Yoruba history rotated in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Johnson’s excuse for Ibadan’s excesses, which were “inimical to the values of missionary Christianity”,<sup>44</sup> softened the ground for this point of departure in *The History* when he wrote that:

A nation born under such strenuous circumstances cannot but leave the impress of its hardihood and warlike spirit on succeeding generations, and so we find it at Ibadan to this day. It being the divine prerogative to use whomsoever He will to effect His Divine purpose, God uses a certain nation or individual as the scourge of another nation and when His purposes are fulfilled He casts the scourge away.<sup>45</sup>

Consequently, Johnson had no problem recounting the war exploits of Ibadan military generals, particularly taking note of the strengths and flaws in the major characters that shaped those exploits. He wrote with fondness about Labosinde, Oluyole’s contemporary and the *Baba Isale* who, against the current of the age, exhibited a genial spirit: “gentle, good natured, and fatherly to all”.<sup>46</sup> He took note of the humility as well as the humanity of Lakanle who was an inspiration to an army that was nearly done in battle

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<sup>43</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 246.

<sup>44</sup> John Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 307.

<sup>45</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 246.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, 245.

































influence from Hastings to Ibadan and Abeokuta. This dominant influence of the Basel elements on him becomes more evident when it is borne in mind that a similar work emerged under their purview in the Gold Coast where they established their own mission. And when the histories of the two publications of Johnson and Reindorf are compared, it becomes evident that the necessary goodwill that should have immediately seen Johnson's work to the press, like Reindorf's in 1890, was not available in the CMS now dominated by English conservative elements. His new superiors were indifferent to his achievement. Johnson in that missionary environment of the 1890s was like a fish out of water while Reindorf was still relishing the culture-sensitive mission environment nurtured by the linguistic and cultural exploits of J.G. Christaller in Bible translation, in the production of the Twi dictionary, and in the compendium of 3,600 Twi proverbs.

Second, the completion of Johnson's work of history in 1897 coincided with the plan of the CMS Committee to publish a history of the Society's activities to commemorate its centenary anniversary. After the initial disappointment with the first writer who was commissioned to do the work, the assignment devolved on Eugene Stock who eventually produced the history.<sup>15</sup> While Johnson's work on Yoruba history was far from answering the Society's need of the moment, the committee missed its timely significance for their cultural achievement on a continent that sceptics at home gave Christianity no chance of flourishing. This blindness persisted in Stephen Neill's criticism of Venn's missionary ideology of the indigenous church, well into the 1950s. And the consequence was far-reaching. For when the western secular disciplines in the humanities began to take sides with indigenous peoples in their ideological struggles from the 1960s by scandalizing missionary movement, they had no answer. Rather, they responded with a loss of verve; and this still degenerated into what Lamin Sanneh calls Western missions' "guilt complex".<sup>16</sup> Yet, as Johnson's work of history shows, missionary activities elevated indigenous societies through their exploits in critically engaging their cultures. This is evident in their skill in linguistics and the liberal education they offered their converts. Moreover, in spite of their human failings, they democratized knowledge and positioned,

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<sup>15</sup> *The History of the Church Missionary Society—Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work*, vol.1 (London: CMS, 1899).

<sup>16</sup> Lamin Sanneh, "Christian Missions and the Western Guilt Complex", *The Christian Century*, April 8, 1987, 331-334.









































which the Moslems from the north of the country dominate power. Each of them, including the OPC, demand for their people political autonomy, which the military class eroded with their long stay in power by centralizing in a unitary system the nation state Britain handed over to the people as a federating unit. While they have been thriving as a part of the Nigerian state, the track record of the Yoruba does not give much to cheer about if the country is balkanized. But the history continues.







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