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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DECL	ARA	TT	ON

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.

Kehinde Olumuyiwa Olabimtan September 21, 2009 To

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

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the cultural and the religious formation of Rev. Samuel Johnson and his response to the changing environment of West Africa, particularly Yorubaland, in the nineteenth century. Divided into two parts, the first part looks at the biography of the man, paying attention to his formative environment and his response to it as a Yoruba evangelist in the service of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The second part explores the issues that were involved in his response to his changing milieu of ministry—encounter with Yoruba religions and Islam, the search for peace in the Yoruba country, and historical consciousness.

The first chapter, which is introductory, sets the pace for the research by looking at the academic use to which the missionary archives have been put, from the 1950s, to unravel Africa's past. While the approaches of historians and anthropologists have been shaped by broad themes, this chapter makes a case for the study of the past from biographical perspectives. Following the lead that has been provided in recent years on the African evangelists by Adrian Hastings, Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, and John Peel the chapter presents Samuel Johnson, an agent of the CMS in the nineteenth century Yoruba country, as a model worthy of the study of indigenous response to the rapid change that swept through West Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Chapter two explores the antecedents to the emergence of Johnson in Sierra Leone and appreciates the nexus of his family history and that of the Yoruba nation in the century of rapid change. The implosion of the Oyo Empire in the second decade of the nineteenth century as a result of internal dissension opened the country to unrestrained violence that boosted the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Sierra Leone offering a safe haven for some of the rescued victims of the trade, "Erugunjimi" Henry Johnson, was rehabilitated under the benevolence of the CMS. At Hastings, where the Basel trained missionary Ulrich Graf exercised a dominant influence, Henry Johnson raised his family until he returned with them to the Yoruba country in 1858 as a scripture reader. The Colony of Sierra Leone, however, was in contrast to the culturally monolithic Yoruba country. Cosmopolitan, with Christianity having the monopoly of legitimacy, the colony gave Samuel and his siblings their early religious and cultural orientations.

According to chapter three, Johnson and his parents arrived at their new context of life and service at Ibadan two years before the outbreak of the war between Ibadan and

Ijaye. The complications that attended the war marked their long initiation into the brutal life of the country where Samuel shared the Hinderers' domestic front with the other children boarded in their mission station. In his eventual resumption of studies at Abeokuta in January 1863, Samuel came under the intellectual influence of Göttlieb Friedrich Bühler, another Basel trained German missionary in the service of the CMS. The years at Abeokuta gave Samuel his final berth as a Yoruba Christian convert of the pietist strand. Moreover, they gave him the final intellectual reorientation to Yoruba life at a time his former Creole mates in Sierra Leone were moving into an era of disillusionment with their former benefactors, the British government.

Ibadan also offered Johnson his early environment of service with the CMS from 1866, first as a schoolmaster and then as a catechist. Chapter four explores his evangelistic and pastoral activities, which brought him into regular contact with the people as he commended Christianity to them for personal and social transformation of the country from the culture of war to one of peace. His engagements with the people also show his full grasp of the Yoruba art of communication which he deployed to bring the Christian message home to his hearers. In this he evinced a successful cultural reorientation from his Sierra Leone Creole identity to Yoruba. He was, however, not left unthreatened by the social realism of the age in a personal vendetta directed at him.

Following his ordination in 1886 into the Deacon Order, Johnson was transferred to Oyo, the seat of Yoruba culture. Chapter five recounts that things looked up for the pastor and his family at Oyo until when, barely a year after his resumption there, he suffered the tragic loss of his wife whom he had married during his days at Ibadan. The marriage to a home grown maiden rather than one retrieved from Sierra Leone underscored Johnson's full integration into Yoruba culture. In spite of the loss, he put to advantage his influence with Oyo royalty to bring stability to the persecuted church. But enrolment for the day school remained an uphill task in a town where Yoruba religions and Islam held sway and Christianity was looked upon with suspicion. Much more, the inimical social environment of Oyo as a result of the overbearing and exploitative tendencies of the princes as well as the competition put up by the Roman Catholic priests for the souls of Oyo children kept him on his toes. His modest gains on this difficult ministry terrain were also jolted by the schism that shook his small congregation in 1893, which, happily, was redressed.

Chapter six traced the two un-complementary trends that came to work in Johnson's life and ministry at Oyo from 1893. His health was failing and the missionary

environment in which he had been schooled over the years was changing from its liberal, culture-sensitive ethos to a conservative and other-worldly mien. Johnson's political activities with the governments at Lagos and Oyo were not favourably looked upon by the new missionaries. His social liberality was also not appreciated. But these years of physical decline also show that he had become fully enamoured with life in the hinterland, even at the cost of his health. The irony of this phase of his life is the completion, in spite of ill-health, of a pet project he had kept from public view over the years, the composition of *The History of the Yorubas*. His untimely death, not long after, brought to an end his lifelong struggle with finance.

Chapter seven opens the second part of the thesis with an exploration of select encounters of Johnson with Yoruba religions and Islam. The service of the evangelist in Yorubaland, especially in Ibadan, brought him into regular encounters with the adherents of these other faiths that preceded Christianity among the people. Although he shared Yoruba utilitarian value of religion and argued the same for Christianity alongside the emphasis on its transcendental value for life hereafter, he exuded confidence in the value of Christianity over and above Yoruba religions and Islam. In this he won many of his disputations with the male adherents of both religions even if they rarely abandoned their known and tested ways. His experiences with the women were, however, a different matter. Having no patience for long discourses, they countered Johnson's confidence in Christianity with theirs in the efficacy of the indigenous cults while they affirmed their fidelity to them as fidelity to their Yoruba identity. Consequently, the eventual adhesion of Christianity to Yoruba land can be attributed to two processes at work in the country: one, the changes that came through the vicissitudes of the people in their wars of attrition and their increasing contact with the wider world of Lagos; two, the patent achievement in the early converts to Christianity of the Yoruba vision of the cultured human personality.

Chapter eight brings to the fore the outworking of nineteenth century mission cultural ideology on Johnson. His religious and cultural formation in the CMS liberal environment of Christianity, commerce and civilization brought him into a deep and extensive involvement with the complex politics of the country in the bid to end the Yoruba war. All entreaties having failed for the animosity and suspicion that existed among the belligerents, Johnson enthusiastically drew from his perceived benevolence of the British colonial authorities in Lagos to end the war and facilitated the eventual declaration of the county as a protectorate of the British government. A man of hybrid

identity with no illusion that the necessary adjustment of the people to the new era would be easy, he expected that under the tutelage of the new power in the country the people would acquire ennobling values that would free them from their lust for power and oppression and regenerate their society.

In chapter nine, the complexity of the identity of the mission agent shines out in his work on Yoruba history. Recounting that history from antiquity to the present, Johnson celebrated the providence that brought his people prosperity while lamenting their decline in the fratricidal wars that negated their achievements. Looking forward to their renewal in the triumph of Christianity where the traditional religions and Islam had failed to sustain past attainments, he was at pain to ensure that the knowledge of the past in all its cultural and historical realities were documented for his less indigenized compatriots and future generations. In this he sought to avoid the complete Anglicisation of his people while, at the same time, he worked for their tutelage under the British colonial power in Lagos. In prescribing Christianity as deserving to hold the ultimate key to the future prosperity of the Yoruba people, Johnson's own self-understanding shows the coterminous relationship between his religious and cultural identities.

The concluding chapter, ten, shows that the ultimate tragedy of Johnson's lifework was the new ethos of the CMS in which the society did not recognize its own creation in his cultural orientation and his laborious work on Yoruba history. Nevertheless, Johnson showed his strength of character when, against all odds, he lived true to his conviction that divine providence was at work in his world. And however his activities might have been negatively assessed by later generations, his critical reading of his times has been vindicated in those who, half a century later, took up the theme of unity he propagated among his people, while the nationalists' fluffy romantic reading of the past has failed to stand the test of post-colonial Africa. Perhaps his relevance at the turn of the twenty-first century is in his model of hybridity, which held in tension the rapidly receding past and a fast encroaching future, discriminating between the elements that must be kept and those that must be allowed to pass away in those processes.

ABBREVIATIONS

BM Basel Mission

CMS Church Missionary Society
CUP Cambridge University Press
EAPH East Africa Publishing House

GL Guildhall Library, London

JACT Journal of African Christian Thought

JAH Journal of African History

JHSN Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria

JTSA Journal of Theology for Southern Africa

NAL National Archives, London

OUP Oxford University Press

RBGK Royal Botanical Garden, Kew, London

WMS Wesleyan Missionary Society

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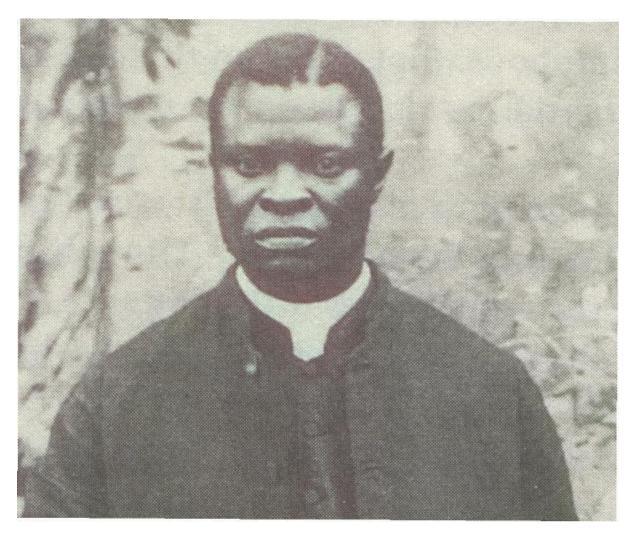
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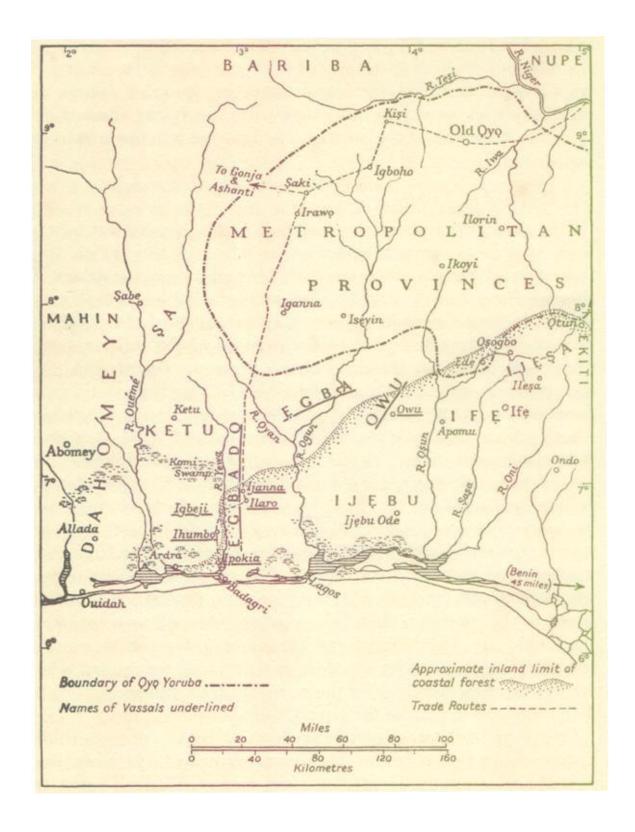
At home, I remain grateful to my ever faithful senior friend Mr. Kola Ejiwunmi whose counsel along the way proved very helpful. His linking me up with Archdeacon Pelu Johnson opened a new vista on the research in February 2007. The archdeacon turned out to be a very strategic informant. I say thank you to both of them. My appreciation still goes to my friends and colleagues at Good News Baptist Church, Lagos, whose prayers and encouragement brought the work to this fruitful end. I am particularly thankful to Rev. John Ojo for standing-in for me when occasions required that I be away for weeks.

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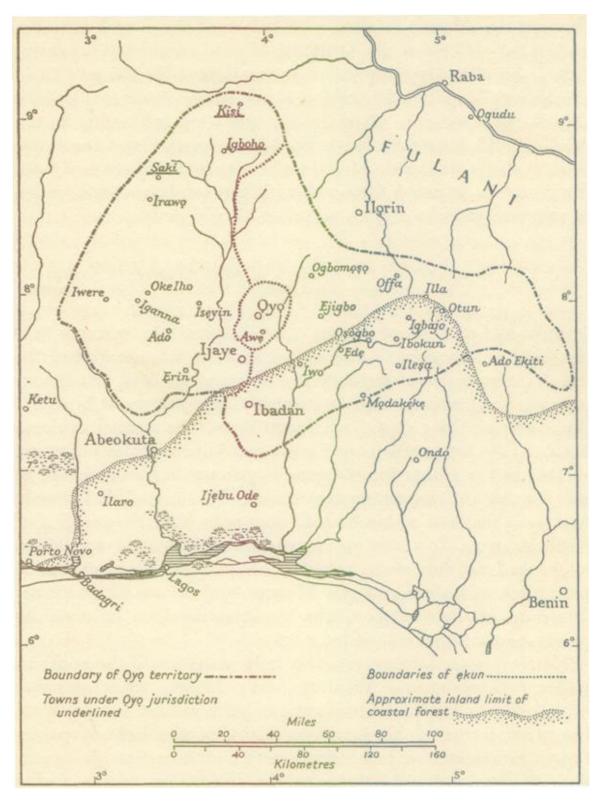
Finally, I acknowledge that I have pursued this research at the expense of some of the resources due to Bose and our children—Bolarinwa, Olumide and Tinuoluwa. Now that "this thing you have been writing since" appears to have come to an end, I hope I can still catch up with some of my responsibilities to which I have hitherto attended poorly. Thank you for your understanding.



The Rev. Samuel Johnson, 1846-1901, (Source: Doortmont 1994)



The Kingdom of Old Oyo and its Neighbours c. 1800 (Source: Morton-Williams, 1967:38)



Territory held by the Oyo Yoruba at the death of Atiba in 1859 (Source: Morton-Williams 1967:47)



Map of Nigeria (Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2007 Electronic Edition)

Chapter 1

Introduction: Unravelling the Past

The exploits of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Yorubaland and, in deed, the entire process of Britain's engagement with the Yoruba people, beginning from the nineteenth century, is as complex as the history of the Yoruba nation itself. From the middle of the second decade of the nineteenth century, when a swift intra-ethnic fury ignited an open rebellion in the old Savannah kingdom of Oyo, till the death of Rev. James Johnson in 1917, the people witnessed a century-long oscillation between hope and despair. As the war that reconfigured the political fortunes and geographical boundaries of the nation ate its way into its social fabric from the north, a crosscurrent mitigating factor in evangelical mission Christianity flowed in from its southern end.

The thrust of this mitigating factor was as profound as the rapid pace at which the political crisis that ushered in the decay proceeded. For the evangelization of Yoruba people in the long century of confusion was marked by a degree of earnestness that matched the restiveness that gave rise to the nation's political travails. In qualifying this eagerness that became a distinctive feature of Yoruba Christianity, Adrian Hastings writes that,

The crucial factor underlying the development of by far the most considerable and confident Christian community in West Africa in the later nineteenth century was the way in which Yoruba from Freetown, Christianized and in a way Anglicized yet not de-Yorubaized, returned through Badagry and Lagos into the interior to promote a style of Christianity which was increasingly their own and something well able to appeal to other Yoruba who had not had the Sierra Leone experience. Nowhere else did this happen to any considerable extent. Even in Sierra Leone—indeed in Sierra Leone most of all—it failed to happen.

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¹ Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 341. The nearest story to the Yoruba mission history occurred in Buganda during the reign of Kabaka Mwanga. Although the evangelization of Baganda people was accompanied by the martyrdom of the converts in a fiery persecution not so experienced in Yorubaland, its evangelization was initiated from the outside by the CMS missionaries. Thereafter, its success story of self-propagation, like the Yoruba experience, was creditably that of the Baganda evangelists. M. Louise Pirouet, *Black Evangelists: The Spread of Christianity in Uganda 1891-1914* (London: Rex Collings, 1978); John V. Taylor, *The Growth of the Church in Buganda: An Attempt at Understanding* (London: SCM, 1958); John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa—An African Church History*, 2nd rev. ed. (Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 1994), 233-244.

The return of the Yoruba exiles in Sierra Leone to their country of birth, from the 1840s, with their new found faith turned out to be the beginning of a process the converts themselves later became ambivalent about. On the one hand, their encounter with Christianity in the cosmopolitan colony, with its attendant culture of western education, elicited in them the hope that their war-torn country could be saved through the spread of Christianity and its life-ennobling values. The benevolent spirit that shaped their first encounter with Europeans in exile inspired them to facilitate among their own people at home the same benefits they derived from this encounter in Sierra Leone. On the other hand, as events later turned out in the century, the trust and the confidence of some of these returnees in the benevolence of Britain towards them gave way to disappointment and frustration. A new attitude had evolved among European nations towards Africa. The race for colonies on the continent had begun, and the new era saw the increasing presence of a new generation of Europeans who had come to establish in Africa the authorities of their governments at home. The racial struggles that marked the beginning of the new era, both in church and state, were the final indication that times had changed.

It was within this reality that the twentieth century dawned on Yorubaland as a protectorate of the British government. But by the middle of the second decade, it had become part of a vast British colonial possession in West Africa called Nigeria. The worldwide political developments of the mid-twentieth century led to the eventual dismantling of colonial structures among subject peoples of the global South and left behind, as their lasting legacy, the new nation states they had bequeathed to the people. The intellectual fermentation that accompanied the process of dismantling British colonialism in Nigeria led to the interest in the role of Christian missions in the emergence of the state.

History and the Study of Mission

In his work *A History of Sierra Leone*, which drew from both colonial records and mission archives, Christopher Fyfe set the pace for the use of missionary records in uncovering West African history.² In it Fyfe documents the social history of Sierra Leone from its pre-colonial past to the emergence of a modern state largely shaped by the international politics of the slave trade, its abolition and the efforts to undo the damage

² Christopher Fyfe, A History of Sierra Leone (London: OUP, 1962).

Africa suffered from the illicit trade. And in a follow-up publication, *Sierra Leone Inheritance*, ³ he puts together snippets of significant developments in the activities of missionary societies in that country. Sierra Leone being the birthplace of modern intellectual movements in West Africa, Christopher Fyfe's publications became a prolegomena to the study of West African societies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In Nigeria, in particular, the environment of political agitation against colonialism gave birth to the use of the archives as a tool for the study of history. In the run-up to the political independence of the new nation state in 1960, the early academic researchers in history fed on the documents of evangelical Christian missions that planted Christianity among Nigerian peoples, beginning from the nineteenth century. This tradition became the hallmark of the Ibadan school of history and can be placed within the larger context of the intellectual and political fermentations at work among colonized peoples of the world in the aftermath of the Second World War. The nineteenth century had brought European countries into close contact with peoples of Southern continents, leading to the political subjugation of the latter at the turn of the twentieth century. By the time the colonial powers were being forced to retreat, half a century later, their adventures in Africa had irreversibly left their imprints on the peoples and the new nation states they had imposed on them. It was therefore logical that as freedom beckoned at the people they should seek to rediscover their past and to understand the dynamic that led to their present situation.

The intellectual attempts at renewed self-understanding and at recovering the past were not limited to the field of history. They gave birth to a vigorous interest in the study of African religions and to a spirited Africanization of the academic study of Christianity.⁴ In this enterprise missionary and colonial archives furnished the fledgling African scholars with materials for understanding the not-too-distant past that ushered Europe into Africa and compromised the primal worldview of its religious, political and intellectual institutions with a differentiated understanding of reality that characterized enlightenment Europe.

³ Christopher Fyfe, *Sierra Leone Inheritance* (London: OUP, 1964).

⁴ For works in this category see Christian G. Baëta (ed.), *Christianity in Tropical Africa* (London: OUP, 1968); E. B. Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba Belief* (London:: Longman, 1962) and *African Traditional Religion—A Definition* (London SCM Press, 1973); John Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978).

Among the earliest works in this respect is Kenneth Dike's Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta. In view of the focus of the work, which he delimited to 1885, it did not rely much on mission resources. ⁶ Biobaku's publication that followed Dike's, *The Egba* and Their Neighbours, which addressed the people's history in the pioneering years of mission, also drew from missionary publications alongside the records of the British Foreign Office and the Colonial Office.⁷

The first full blown use of the archives came in Jacob Ade Ajayi's Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891, which traced the activities of the CMS Mission in what is called Nigeria today from its inception in the disastrous Niger Expedition of 1841 till the death of Bishop Crowther in 1891. The concern of the work can be gleaned from its subtitle, "The Making of a New Elite". In it, Ajayi delineated the cultural impact of Christian missions on the peoples of the area now known as Southern Nigeria, upholding the bishop as the most exemplary African churchman that came out of Western missionary exploits in nineteenth century West Africa.⁹

If Ajayi's concern was the social and intellectual transformations that accompanied Christian missions, Emmanuel Ayandele's The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914 addressed the political reconfiguration that also accompanied them. 10 Again, as he too puts his subtitle, "A Political and Social Analysis", the aim was to uncover the ways missions interacted with the pre-colonial social, political and religious realities of the same people Ajayi studied, from the inception of Christian missions among them till the emergence of the modern Nigerian state in 1914. A distinguishing mark of this work is its portrayal of the energetic exchanges that took place within mission churches, as the indigenous agents perceived racial undertones in their

⁵ K. Onwuka Dike, Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

⁶ The crisis that led to the dissolution of Bishop Crowther's team of the CMS Niger Mission built up from the 1870s. But it took another six years, after 1885, for the mission to unravel from the ruthlessness of the empire builders on the Niger and the new generation of British missionaries. The activities of both groups in the complex interaction of trade, politics and religion in the delta wrecked the mission in 1891. J.F. Ade Ajayi, Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite (Essex: Longman), 238-253; E.A. Ayandele, "Background to the 'Duel' between Crowther and Goldie on the Lower Niger 1857-1885", JH SN 1 (1967): 45-63.
⁷ S.O. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours 1842-1872* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

⁸ J. F. Ade Ajayi, Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite. (Essex: Longman,

⁹ In agreement with Ajayi, Adrian Hastings saw Crowther as the representation of all that Africa could hope for in the missionary age. The Church in Africa 1450-1950. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 340.

¹⁰ E. A. Ayandele, The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis (Essex: Longman, 1966).

European colleagues' attitude towards them and asserted themselves over against their prejudices while the age of mission gradually gave way to the era of colonization.

Still combing mission archives, Ayandele followed up his exploration of the political impact of missions on Southern Nigeria with a biographical work on Rev. James Johnson, titled *Holy Johnson*. Ayandele's effort at seeking to uncover the dynamics that gave birth to the Nigerian state by exploring the biography of one of the African churchmen at the transition of Southern Nigeria from a pre-colonial to colonial society demonstrated an implicit appreciation of the value of biography as an intellectual method for understanding the past. Just as Bishop Crowther represented for Ade Ajayi the summit of missions' cultural achievement, Rev. James Johnson represented in Ayandele's political analysis the most significant person who incarnated the political struggles of his age, ironically, both as a devout churchman and as an intrepid Africanist. Although Ajayi contributed several articles that drew from mission archives subsequent to *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891*, he did not follow up on Crowther as Ayandele did with James Johnson. 12

As if Ayandele had discovered an intellectual method most germane to his African context, he followed on *Holy Johnson* with another biography, this time, of a contemporary of James Johnson and a man of similar temperament. In *A Visionary of the African Church*, Ayandele saw in Mojola Agbebi a more daring African churchman who had no inhibitions in calling the bluff of Western missionaries and in striving energetically for religious and administrative independence from their control. The struggles of Johnson and Agbebi with their missionary organizations, the CMS and the American Southern Baptists respectively, served Ayandele's nationalist historiography. However, by 1973, with the evident failure of the Nigerian state, and ironically, at the height of the continent's post-colonial cultural revival, the nationalists Ayandele had celebrated were not good enough. Characterizing them as collaborators in the political subjugation of their people, his *The Educated Elite in the Nigerian Society* is most acerbic and riddled with uncharitable name calling. In summary, early nationalist historians in West Africa exhibited a wide range of temperaments in their works. In spite of this, however, Falola's fitting description qualifies all of them:

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¹¹ E.A. Ayandele, *Holy Johnson: Pioneer of African Nationalism* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970).

He presented much later a light publication on the bishop, titled *A Patriot to the Core: Bishop Ajayi Crowther* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2001).

¹³ E.A. Ayandele, A Visionary of the African Church: Mojola Agbebi 1860-1917 (Nairobi: EAPH, 1971).

¹⁴ E. A. Avandele, *The Educated Elite in the Nigerian Society*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1974).

Colonialism shaped [their] orientation...by way of the subjects they chose, the arguments they pursued, and the conclusions they reached. They responded to the nationalist impulse of the time that insisted on liberation from the intellectual domination of the West, the search for an African identity, and the use of history to establish the continent in the main stream of world civilization.¹⁵

From the mid1970s the study of missions in West Africa entered another phase. Further research into mission archives was being done with a critical eye on the works of earlier nationalist historians. Godwin Tasie's Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta 1864-1918 belongs to this phase. 16 Although the works of Ajayi and Ayandele have touched on the issues that he would be addressing again, Tasie was more dispassionate about the events and crises in the Niger Delta mission of the CMS, which reached their zenith in the death of Bishop Crowther. Subtly dissenting from Ajayi's thesis of racial ill-feeling towards the African agents of mission by the new generation of European missionaries, he located the roots of the crises in the ethnic and cultural foreign-ness of the CMS agents in the Niger mission. It was significant for him that all of them, being Sierra Leone returnees, did not speak the local languages of the peoples among whom they worked. However, it appears in his reckoning that more tragic than the purge on the Niger and the sudden death of the bishop was the opportunity the mission missed in the coincidence of Rev. James Johnson's disclaimer of Garrick Braide with the colonial regime's apprehensions about his prophet movement, a coincidence that led to the loss of opportunity to indigenize Christianity in the Niger Delta.

Another more recent attempt to use mission archives to delineate the past is Wariboko's *Planting Church-Culture at New Calabar*. The value of this work is in its critical assessment of earlier efforts at interpreting missionary activities in the Niger Delta, particularly exposing the pitfalls inherent in using a rigid interpretive framework to explicate the encounter of missions with indigenous society.¹⁷

¹⁵ Toyin Falola, "West Africa," in *Historiography*, vol. 5 of *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Robin W. Winks and Alaine Low (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 490.

¹⁶ Godwin O. M. Tasie, *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta 1864-1918*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).

¹⁷ Wariboko, Waibinte E. *Planting Church-Culture at New Calabar: Some Neglected Aspects of Missionary Enterprise in the Eastern Niger Delta 1865-1918* (Bethesda,MD: International Scholars Publications,1998).

Equally significant is Robert Addo-Fening's use of Basel Mission archives in uncovering aspects of the social history of the Akyem people of Ghana. Particularly interesting for mission studies in his *Akyem Abuakwa 1700-1943* and his related essays is the controversial role the German mission played, in line with Ade Ajayi's emphasis, in the emergence of a new generation of Gold Coasters of the interior who with their compatriots on the coast primed their society for modern nationhood. And just as Ajayi finds the epitome of the success of the CMS in Bishop Crowther, Addo-Fening identifies Basel Mission's most prized convert in Yaw Boakye, a converted chief of the traditional state of Akyem Abuakwa and the father of *Okyehene* Sir Ofori Ata.

Other works of history, like E. P. T. Crampton's *Christianity in Northern Nigeria* drew from missionary archives to lesser extents than these works, but they too significantly depended on mission archives to delineate the ways Christianity shaped African society. Crampton, for example, explored the religious and political constraints that shaped the evangelization of Northern Nigeria from 1857, when the Niger Mission of the CMS was started by Crowther, till 1975.¹⁹

Although the use to which the discipline of history has put missionary archives in West Africa is significant, memorable publication of missionary journals, correspondence or biographies has been rare, unlike the situation in Southern African Christian history. References have only been made in extant research to the outputs of pioneers like Townsend, Hinderer and Christaller, whose missionary exertions were by no means inferior to those of Robert Moffatt and David Livingstone. It appears those that are available were published in the nineteenth century, a very few of which were reissued only in the 1960s. ²¹

In summary, the intellectual ferment that triggered the interest of African historians, beginning from the 1950s, resulted from the restiveness of colonized peoples worldwide and their quest to understand the dynamic that brought them under European powers. This is not to say that there had not been imperial interpretations of their cultures and histories. It is rather that these Africans, themselves products of Western academies,

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¹⁸ Robert Addo-Fening, *Akyem Abuakwa 1700-1943: From Ofori Panin to Sir Ofori Ata*, (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 1997).

¹⁹ Edmund P.T. Crampton, *Christianity in Northern Nigeria* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975).

²⁰ Matabele Journals of Robert Moffatt and the biographies of David Livingstone and Stewart of Lovedale are among the several Southern African mission resources that have been published.

²¹ Anna Hinderer's Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country (1872), Sarah Tucker's Abbeokuta, or Sunrise within the Tropics (1854) and Jefferson Bowen's Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856 (1857). Bowen's journal was reissued in 1968 with a foreword written by Ayandele.

sought to understand and to express these histories and cultures from their own perspectives as their immediate subjects and, ultimately, as those competent to articulate the experience inherent in the transformation of their society from its primal milieu into the modern cosmopolitan culture.

The Contributions of the Social Sciences

Although the social scientific use of the archives came soon after those of history, they have nonetheless enlarged perspectives in understanding the dynamics at work in the interaction between Christian missions and African societies. Essentially, they bring to the fore the animated exchanges between missionaries and their indigenous prospects, revealing the fact that Africans were no passive recipients of Christianity. Most illuminating in this respect are the conversations between European missionaries and the authority figures of pre-colonial Africa—kings, chiefs, warlords, medicine men, and the priests of the various cults found among the people. In this respect, the social sciences have demonstrated that in the long acquaintanceship that developed between these Africans and their missionary guests, the former responded from within their indigenous intellectual awareness to the missionary message, asserting the logic of their own viewpoints vis-à-vis the viewpoints of the missionaries and their converts. Missionary journals and diaries, published and unpublished, are replete with reports of these encounters which the social sciences have variously interpreted according to the methodological orientations of the various interpreters. Among significant works in this respect are those of P. R. McKenzie, Robin Horton, and John Peel. With the range of concerns they address—private, public, religious, social, familial, political, military, agricultural, vocational—these works underscore the value of mission archives as a veritable source for Africa's social history in the nineteenth century.

Peel's *Religious Encounter* is particularly significant in this genre for its lucid portrayal of the ambivalent and complex interaction between mission Christianity, Yoruba religions and Islam, with Yoruba Saro²² returnees at the centre of this interaction. The pervasiveness of this interaction in the eventual emergence of the pan-Yoruba identity in twentieth century West Africa goes beyond the polemical stance that often characterizes religious interaction. Rather, the activities of these returnee evangelists, beginning from Sierra-Leone under the initiative of Samuel Crowther, threw up different

²² The Yoruba word for Sierra Leone.

kinds of possibilities. These include influences on Bible translation, wherein the translation of the Bible into the Yoruba language was informed by both selective borrowing from and conscious avoidance of the vocabularies of other religions domiciled among the people. The successful transmission of the translation among the factious subethnic groups translated into a subtle but effective tool that eventually aided the forging of a common Yoruba national consciousness in the twentieth century.

It may be noted, however, that a social scientific approach to the use of mission archives varies. If Peel's approach to the materials is informed by the postulates of the faith of the subjects of archival information, Jean and John Comaroff read the materials with arid detachment, using Hegel's dialectical method to interpret the materials. Their method popularized in mission studies the post-modern, discursive approach which takes liberty to read into texts. In fact, they read into the conversations between missionaries and Africans what they consider subversive discourses that lay buried below the layer of verbal expressions. The basic premise of this method is that it considers missionary encounter with Africa as a power encounter in which the heralds of the Christian message and their African prospects, both in verbal and non-verbal conversations, sought to outwit one another. The essential weakness of this "hermeneutic of suspicion", which has been used in interpreting the explosive missionary encounter with societies in East and Southern Africa, lies in their disregard for the content of the message at the heart of missionary encounter with African society. Although their application of scientific theories differs from the rigid use to which modern method of inquiry puts their use in that it allows for flexible reading of the conversations between missionaries and their African prospects, their hermeneutics, in the spirit of post-modernity, trivialises the religious dimension of the encounter.

The Comaroffs' two volumes *Of Revelation and Revolution*²³ are not a systematic application of archival materials in interpreting the past but a fluid application of scientific methods, within a wider philosophical and intellectual agenda, to explicate select encounters of missionaries with African societies in the nineteenth century. The ultimate critiques of the Comaroffs are that they were condescending in their estimate of their African subject of study, the Tswanas, and they exaggerated the role of missionaries

²³ Jean and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, I: *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 1991; II: *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 1997 (Chicago Press); V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

in the emergence of South Africa's political economy.²⁴ Between the two approaches of Peel and the Comaroffs are other social scientists whose methods can be placed somewhere between those of the two interpreters of the encounter of Christian missions with Africa.

However, the exploits of both secular history and the social sciences have their limitations, in spite of the insights they have unearthed in the study of the activities of Western missions in Africa. In the first place they read the archives from particular perspectives or under overarching themes. In this respect Beidelman's *Colonial Evangelism* shows an obsessive search for overarching theory or theories that will explain the interaction among missionaries themselves in their fields of service. ²⁵ Although his sphere of engagement was East Africa, he did not see value in earlier works of mission history, which he considered as a "rather dull form of scissors-and-paste history devoid of the kind of social theory that can make events meaningful, convincing, and relevant to current problems". ²⁶

Identifying overarching themes where they are evident, or arriving at theories to explain aspects of missionary engagements with society where such is possible, are desirable and can be helpful, provided their limits are recognized. This is because social science theories, belonging to the field of empirical sciences as they do, cannot always grapple with all the complexities of missionary engagements with peoples and societies, religious postulates being always subjective and un-amenable to empirical verification. While they may be able to make assertions about the social and political implications of the missionary message, as in the combative situation of Southern Africa, they are not inclined to take seriously the religious dimension of that situation qua religious. The result is that in comparatively irenic encounters, as in West Africa, the tendency to force issues into prefabricated moulds runs high, leading to biased interpretation of texts and misrepresentation of intentions. Seth Quartey's "Andreas Riis—A Lifetime of Colonial Drama", which addressed the activities of the Basel missionary in the first half of the nineteenth century shows this inclination.²⁷

²⁴ Paul. S. Landau, "Hegemony and History in Jean and John L. Comaroff's *Of Revelation and Revolution*," *Africa* 3 (2000): 515

Africa 3 (2000): 515.

T.O. Beidelman, Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

²⁶ T. O. Beidelman, "Social Theory and the Study of Christian Missions in Africa", *Africa* 3 (1974): 237.

Seth Quartey, "Andreas Riis: A Lifetime of Colonial Drama", *Institute of African Studies Research Review*, New Series (Ghana), 1(2005): 29-44.

The problem with the use of social science theories or the rigid use of overarching themes, as in history, is that they tend to be simplistic. Wariboko's *Planting Church*-Culture at New Calabar identifies this problem. Perhaps the value he contributes to the research that have been conducted on the Niger Delta mission is the critique he offers on the rigid frameworks they employed to study the encounter of mission with the people of the region. In explaining their perceived error, Wariboko posits that "faulty causal links have been drawn between economic cum sociopolitical events and socio-religious change at New Calabar." In this regard he draws specific attention to Ayandele's nationalist historiography; Jones,' Tasie's and Sokari-George's "lineage-faction" oriented theory of causation'; and Horton's "four-part schema" founded upon his intellectualist theory. On Ayandele he writes that the Ibadan historian has drawn from his nationalist exaggeration of the influence of Jaja of Opobo to explain the dynamics of response to mission Christianity in New Calabar. The trio of Jones, Tasie and Sokari-George had posited that the response was determined by corporate lineage groups when in fact the response was personal and cut across lineages. For Wariboko, the only group that made a communal response at rejecting Christianity were the devotees of the tutelary deity—Owamekaso and the membership of this group cut across lineages and socio-political factions. As for Horton's explanation for the four-phase response to Christianity in New Calabar, Wariboko says it is too neat and does not adequately reckon with the subtle dynamics of changing colonial policies as they affected trade in the delta and the people's selective response to mission Christianity, factors that were influencing attitudes towards religion, whether traditional or foreign.²⁸

Perhaps Norman Etherington's structural critique of Horton's "explanation-prediction-control" theory raises the larger issue of ambivalent value of social theory in mission studies. For, in his words,

[The theory] lacks historical specificity and is probably inherently unprovable using normal procedures of investigation and verification. None the less, scholars soon realized that it was capable of being applied to mission fields all over the world, and it became a continuing source of stimulation and controversy.²⁹

²⁸ Waibinte E. Wariboko, *Planting Church-Culture at New Calabar*, 4-11, 199-220.

²⁹ Norman Etherington, "Missions and Empire", in *Historiography*, vol. 5 of *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Robin W. Winks and Alaine Low (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 310.

It may be acknowledged, however, that the interpretation of historical information is always tentative as different periods of human consciousness, experience and concern shed new light on different aspects that are most illumined by present concern and awareness. The reason for this is not far to seek as Jonathan Draper aptly puts it: "[T]he meaning of history constantly changes, because the process of writing history is the process of interpreting ourselves."³⁰ By implication, the interpretation of history cannot be divorced from the interpreter's experience. Even in situation where no systematic argument has been advanced for theory or ideology, response to historical reality has been shaped by this dynamic as in the case of Bishop Colenso of Natal, South Africa. For more than a century, and very late into the twentieth century, the official attitude towards the controversial bishop was negative. His spirited defence of the Zulu nation against the fiery onslaught of the British colonists and what was considered as his eccentric interpretation of the Bible in nineteenth century South Africa earned him a place in the official hall of infamy. But in post-apartheid South Africa of the early twenty-first century, new literatures are emerging acknowledging and celebrating Colenso's vision and courage. So total has the official criticism of his liberal disposition been transformed that it now sounds more as a compliment than as a criticism.³¹ What then is the case against the use of theories as an interpretive tool?

Theories in the social sciences, as products of scientific understanding of reality, are premised on the idea that immutable laws govern human conducts as they do natural phenomena. In this they tend to become grand-narratives that claim to provide all-time answers to human dilemma. The problem with them, therefore, is not so much their tentativeness; for history has demonstrated that theories are time bound. It is rather that those who propound them and use them tend to see them as providing empirical and irrefutable clues to all the questions that have to do with the issues at hand. Thus they become too simple in explaining complex realities. Such is the obsession of Biedelmann that he could not see value in the works of those he thinks had no theory to back up their interpretation of history. Perhaps a modest attitude to the application of theories and overarching themes is to accept that, at best, they reflect aspects of complex issues and,

 $^{^{30}}$ Jonathan A. Draper, "Bishop John William Colenso and History as Unfolding Narrative," *JTSA* 117 (2003): 97-105.

³¹ Draper, 103.

³² In a personal discussion I had with Professor Ayandele on December 14, 2005, the historian harped on the validity of his "scientific method" and would not appreciate the limits of his nationalist approach to interpreting history. He was obviously unaware of the critiques that have been brought to bear on his works in recent years.

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

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*. ³⁴

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. 35

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

Louise Pirouet, *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.

³⁵ 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).

success of Bishop Azariah in India was underpinned by the increase in the number of missionaries in the aftermath of his ordination as a bishop.³⁶ *Black Evangelists* gives the lie to Neill's hypothesis.

The path Pirouet charted by recognizing the initiatives of Baganda evangelists in East Africa did not immediately become a popular approach to understanding the evangelization of Africa in the missionary age. But its perspective eventually received a boost in the 1990s when Adrian Hastings in *The Church in Africa 1450-1950* ³⁷ drew together extant works of African Christian history to show the ingenious contributions of Africans to the evangelization of the continent. In his presentation of the triumphs and tragedies that accompanied the process, the struggle to domesticate the gospel, and the ideological tensions—cultural, political and religious—that attended it, Hastings demonstrates the resilience of the gospel through the vicissitudes of Africa, from its mediaeval period to the modern times. This consciously Africanist work has since paved the way for more interest in appreciating the contributions of African agents to the Christian missionary exploits on the continent.

The work of Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, ³⁸ has followed this path with emphasis on how African converts in all walks of life, from the second century CE to the twentieth, have shaped the theology of the church and the spread of Christianity on the continent. From Augustine to Shembe and from Crowther to Lenshina, they show the personal initiatives of significant persons and unknown Africans who, in spite of the various experiences of their people with Europeans, were self-motivated to take the Christian message to them in the nooks and crannies of the continent, otherwise too vast and sometimes unhealthy for the penetration of European missionaries. Although works of history from Hastings, Sundkler and Steed did not draw directly from mission archives as their primary sources, they aptly demonstrate that the history of the church in modern Africa is essentially a mission history that took place in a religiously pluralistic environment and often under repressive political powers, both colonial and nationalist.

The new awareness, from the mid 1970s, of the pivotal role of Africans in the evangelization of the continent opened up, among scholars of religions, interests in their biographies. While their roles were being gradually appreciated in church history, specific

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³⁶ Stephen Neill, *Anglicanism* (London: Penguin Books, 1958), 340-341.

³⁷ Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

³⁸ Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed. A History of the Church in Africa. (Cambridge: CUP, 2000).

attentions were also being given to the activities of a few. In this genre is David Kpobi's *Mission in Chains*, a biographical work on Jacobus Capitein of Elmina.³⁹ Representing the earliest involvement of African returnee slaves from Europe in West African Protestant mission, Capitein's vision for his people at Elmina where he was stationed as a chaplain to the Dutch West India Company could not make the impact he desired to attain among his people. Bound by ecclesiastical rigidity and official apathy to his missionary vision, Capitein's work was impeded by the dissolute lifestyle of the Europeans in Elmina over whom he was sent to exercise spiritual care.

Capitein arrived at Elmina, a growing Gold Coast settlement, with much enthusiasm for ministry among his own people; and the take off of his dream was promising. But the impossible turnout of his relationship with the two masters he was serving, the Classis of Amsterdam and the West India Company, was overwhelming. This was complicated by the rapid turnover of personnel to assist him in his work as a result of high attrition rate among Europeans on the coast. After barely spending five years in Elmina he died in 1747 without accomplishing his dream to bring Christianity to his people, but not before his fame went inland as far as the Kumasi court where the reputation of his school excited the Asantehene. Nana Opoku Ware coveted Capitein's enlightenment for his own subjects and sent him 14 children to train.⁴⁰

The significance of *Mission in Chains* lies in its implicit portrayal of Jacobus Capitein as pioneering, a century ahead, a train of successive West African convertevangelists who would in the nineteenth century serve European church institutions in arduous circumstances. They had to bear the burden of serving masters who did not trust their judgments and who lacked sympathy for the cultural milieu in which they operated among their people. Moreover, the complications associated with their having to work alongside unconverted European traders while carrying out their religious assignments stretched their resolve beyond limit and ended in their despair. From Capitein in mideighteenth century Elmina to Crowther in the late nineteenth century Niger Delta these self-motivated, pioneer African agents of European missions with a common vision of a transformed Africa were assessed by home committees and untested upstarts that had no idea of the mines they had to negotiate in their delicate and unpredictable assignments among their people.

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³⁹ David N. A. Kpobi, *Mission in Chains: The Life, Theology and Ministry of the Ex-slave Jacobus E. J. Capitein (1717-1747) with a Translation of His Major Publications.* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1993).

⁴⁰ Kpobi, 151-154.

Biography as a Method for Understanding the Past

From the use to which the resources of mission archives have been put in the fields of history and the social sciences to understand the impact of Christian missions on the African society, it is clear that the approaches have been largely thematic. Nonetheless, a few biographical essays and works that have emerged alongside the themes have also indicated the possibility of using life stories of significant personalities to understand the dynamics of social change. The field of the social sciences, with its proclivity for theories and grand themes, tend to overlook the fact that the changes that are often subjects of analysis are products of people acting in their personal quests for meaning and for the rich, full life. This is in spite of the common values they may share in community and the restraints social institutions may impose on them, which are themselves products of society's corporate quests for survival.

Although when the independent activities of members of a society are aggregated they produce its trends and movements, the fact remains that these trends and movements are often not the fundamental reason for individual actions. They are basically byproducts, essential as they are, of collective human activities perceptible to the discerning observer. And since the inherent diversity in human society places people in different positions that determine the leverage they hold in making their individual impacts on it, it may not be assumed that the impacts of the independent activities of people are even on the social landscape of society. Those whose stations confer on them the privilege to shape the fate of others, for good or for ill, are obviously significant persons whose own personal stories may dovetail into those of their societies. The same reality applies to the disadvantaged members of society who chance upon timely opportunities to register their names among the heroes of a people or, on the other hand, who in their attempt to survive subvert society significantly as to bring about major legislations.

While it may be obvious that their privileged or underprivileged position provided them the opportunity to make significant impacts on their society, it is possible to fail to see that these individuals are, first, products of that same society before they turn out to be major contributors to its movements. It then means that the advance or recession of society is a product of the symbiosis between society itself as a corporate entity and its individual members. Understanding the stories of those significant members may, therefore, hold the key to understanding the societies that yield them and the legacies they intentionally or inadvertently bequeath those societies in return.

What then is the value of using biographies to understand the past? It lies in the details they yield, of which grand narratives and themes tend to be oblivious. Moreover, biographies remind us that it is human beings—in their fears and in their excitements, in their joys and in their sadness, and in their hopes and in their despairs—who make history; not abstract or mechanistic beings that are apathetically resigned to the coercive forces of nature or the grinding wheel of time. Their essence, therefore, is that biographies animate history by keeping in focus the immense possibilities of the human spirit for good or for ill. This view is underscored by the impacts of renowned statesmen and women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries whose self-understanding and vision shaped national and international politics. It was in this recognition of the value of biography for understanding the past that *Time* magazine, in its special countdown editions towards the Year 2000, gave attention to brief biographies of one hundred significant persons worldwide who shaped societies and global culture in the twentieth century. As

As in politics, the Christian mission has thrown up numbers of men and women who, over its two millennial history, contributed to the expansion of Christianity from its first-century, modest beginning in the Middle-East to its present reckoning as a world religion. And because it thrived on individual initiatives over this period of expansion, the field of mission studies is replete with names of persons who at various points provided new impetus, blazed new trails, amplified existing efforts, and instituted turning points. In this regard biographies have illuminated the field of mission studies, and significant volumes of publications— histories, dictionaries, and encyclopaedias— have resulted from this.⁴³

⁴¹ The history of the United States of America offers several examples of individuals who significantly shaped the nation and gave it its character—James Monroe who in the nineteenth century charted the doctrine that forbade further European colonization on the American continent, Woodrow Wilson who imbued the nation's foreign policy with its humane character for much of the twentieth century, and Martin Luther King, Jr., whose experience of the colour bar motivated him to push for a desegregated society. In the same vein, international politics in the second half of the twentieth century may not be fully understood without understanding the person and the role of Adolf Hitler whose ambition as the leader of the German Third Reich led to the Second World War; the emergence of global political, economic and social institutions; the demise of European colonies in the global South; and the consequent emergence of modern nation states among colonized peoples of the world.

⁴² *Time Magazine*, "Leaders and Revolutionaries," April 13, 1998; "Artists and Entertainers," June 18, 1998; "Builders and Titans," December 7, 1998; "Scientists and Thinkers," March 29, 1999; "Heroes and Icons," June 14, 1999; "Person of the Century—Albert Einstein," December 31, 1999; and "The Time 100," April 26, 2004.

⁴³ Among these are Ruth A. Tucker, From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions; and the webbased Dictionary of African Christian Biography. The journal International Bulletin of Missionary

It may still be acknowledged that because Christian missions brought profound changes and mediated new values to peoples and societies everywhere they went, interest in the study of the agents and sponsors of mission went beyond the fields of religion and social history; the modern political history of Africa also profited from mission studies. Such is Robert July's The Origins of Modern African Thought, which explored the intellectual and ideological achievements of some early converts to Christianity and agents of missions in West Africa. In this explicitly biographical approach to understanding Africa's intellectual response to change, July addressed the various strands of patriotic and nationalist feelings that accompanied Christian conversion and shaped the lives and visions of educated Africans who sought to recast their societies into a new mode of thinking while they were anxious to preserve the integrity of those societies.⁴⁴ July's work is particularly significant in its timing in that while it emerged contemporaneously with Ayandele's Holy Johnson in post-independent West Africa it seems to mark with secular historians the end of a positive appreciation of early African converts and agents of missions.

The new wave of African nationalism from the mid-1960s reached its crescendo in the mid-1970s with the 2nd Black Festival of Arts and Culture, FESTAC '77, held in Lagos, Nigeria. The frenzied environment, which coincided with the era of military takeovers across Africa, cast the churchmen in a bad light as persons who aided the subjugation of their peoples by foreign powers. ⁴⁵ This perception, which flourished in the secular social sciences and generally scandalized Western missions, received impetus from Western intellectual affirmation of the struggles of formerly colonized peoples worldwide. It has been the task of historians of religion to salvage the reputation of these indigenous agents of mission with a new awareness of their role in the planting of Christianity in Africa. 46 Apart from individual publications that emerged from the 1970s two major conferences were organized in the 1990s around the activities of mission agents, leading to two publications. The papers of the first conference, which held in

Research regularly features biographical essays of historical mission personnel under the title "Legacy of Mission," and autobiographical articles under its series, "My Pilgrimage in Mission".

⁴⁴ Among the characters whose achievements he addressed were Samuel Crowther, Samuel Johnson, James Kwegir Aggrey, Casserly Hayford, and Edward W. Blyden. Robert July, The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (London: Faber

and Faber, 1968).

45 Ayandele's Educated Elites and Walter Rodney's How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (London: Bogle L'Ouverture, 1972), 252-254, make the same insinuation.

⁴⁶ Works in this range include Piroet's *Black Evangelists*, Hastings' *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, and Sundkler and Steed's A History of the Church in Africa.

Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, were published under the title *The Making of Southern African Clergy*.⁴⁷ The second held in Basle and its proceedings were published under the title *The Recovery of the West African Past*.⁴⁸

Beyond salvaging the reputation of the agents of mission, the renewed appreciation of Africans in the planting of Christianity in Africa drew along with it the approval of the creative initiatives of the prophet movements, 49 the seed of which had earlier been sown by Bengt Sundkler's Bantu Prophets in Southern Africa and Christian Baëta's Prophetism in Ghana.⁵⁰ Adrian Hastings' The Church in Africa makes no distinction between the activities of the agents of mission and the indigenous prophets, and neither did the subsequent work of Sundkler and Steed, A History of the Church in Africa. In the light of this new understanding of the two strands of Christian vocation among African churchmen, that is mission agency and indigenous initiatives, Hastings, Sundkler and Steed saw both groups of African churchmen as sharing a common vision of a redeemed continent even if they proclaimed the Gospel from different cognitive stand points, one from an eclectic European stance⁵¹, the other from the African primal worldview. Works in the latter category include, among others, those on Garrick Sokari Braide of the Niger Delta;⁵² Prophet Wade Harris of Liberia;⁵³ and Dona Beatrice, also known as Kimpa Vinta, of the Kongo.⁵⁴ Although works on the indigenous prophet movement were done from various perspectives—religious, historical and social sciences—they nonetheless indicate that their activities assisted in rooting Christianity in

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⁴⁷ Philippe Denis, ed., *The Making of an Indigenous Clergy in Southern Africa: Proceedings of the International Conference Held at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 25-27 October 1994* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 1995)

⁴⁸ Paul Jenkins, ed., *The Recovery of the West African Past: African Pastors and African History in the Nineteenth Century—C. C. Reindorf & Samuel Johnson* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1998).

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Isichei, ed., *Varieties of Christian Experience in Nigeria* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1982); Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity, The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983).

⁵⁰ Baëta, Christian G, *Prophetism in Ghana* (London: SCM Press, 1962).

⁵¹ This is in reference to the cognitive world of Western missionaries in the nineteenth century, consisting of a combination of English evangelicalism, continental pietism, and select aspect of enlightenment worldview, especially the application of reason in making decision.

Godwin Tasie and Ayandele show in Garrick Sokari Braide the dovetailing of a classical mission order from the West into the new indigenous initiatives. Braide, as a representative religious innovator, functioned in the tension between the two at the turn of the 20th century, sharing the fate that befell many other founders of independent, popular religious movements in the hands of colonial regimes on the continent. G. O. M. Tasie, *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta 1864-1918* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978); "The Prophetic Calling: Garrick Sokari Braide (d. 1918)", in *Varieties of Christian Experience in Nigeria*, ed. Elizabeth Isichei. (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1982), 99-115; Ayandele, *Holy Johnson: Pioneer of African Nationalism, 1836-1917* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), 355-362.

⁵³ David A. Shank, *Prophet Harris, The 'Black Elijah' of West Africa* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

⁵⁴ John K. Thorton, John K. and John Kelly. *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz—Kimpa Vinta and the Anthonian Movement, 1684-1706.* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998).

African consciousness. Moreover, these evangelists made cultural and political impacts on their context of service, the very reason their activities alarmed colonial authorities.

In appreciating the present mass accession to Christianity in Africa and in view of the emergence of the field now known as the new religious movements, attention is currently on the activities of African indigenous evangelists, both of the classical and the Pentecostal-charismatic strands. African agents of Western missions who pioneered Christianity on the African continent remain largely unknown till date. Against this background, the emergence of Peels *Religious Encounter* in 2000 is both a cross-current in the study of religion in Africa and an invitation to explore in more detail the creative geniuses of the African agents of missions. This is necessary to understand the various ways they individually sought to use the Christian faith to bring renewal to their societies and to help them to negotiate the transition from their primal milieu to the present cosmopolitan outlook.

Nevertheless, it appears strange that it took so long for the role of the African evangelists of Western missions to be acknowledged in the study of Christian mission in Africa. And it is puzzling still that while they were hardly objects of study, their successors in the indigenous movements have courted the fascination of the academic study of religions on the continent. Perhaps, among other reasons, this has arisen because they have been shunned by their immediate educated successors who, as it were, were saddled by history to undo the colonial entanglements they supposedly aided and abetted, and their memories have consequently been left to rot among letters and papers in the archives. For if the first seventy five years of the 1900s were something to reckon with politically, the nationalist fervour that drove the quest for political independence of modern African states and the pan-Africanist movement that succeeded it were laden with anti-Western polemics and ideological fermentations that could only have cast agents of Christian mission in a bad light as collaborators in the subjugation of their people. Even those African churchmen who represented the early stage of pan-Africanism did not fair better. In this regard, Ayandele lamented that as early as 1960, the memory of Rev. James Johnson had faded so much that his name was not mentioned throughout the ceremonies that led to the declaration of Nigeria as an independent nation state. His "vault was too deep" for his memory to be recalled.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ E.A. Ayandele, *Holy Johnson*, 11.

Strangely, still, and in the face of the failure of the Nigerian state, Ayandele would turn round in 1973 to label James Johnson's generation with uncomplimentary epithets.⁵⁶ As events turned out, his name-calling was but a prelude to the final tragedy that would befall their memory. A few years after his "proposography" on them, their burial site in the heart of Lagos was dug up, surely to give way to an administrative structure that never rose up there. The question that arises is whether the largely unexplored stories of these early churchmen are relevant at the turn of the twenty-first century when societies worldover have virtually become borderless, social change has become trans-national in scope, and cultures are unravelling. If the vistas opened by Hastings, Peel, Sundkler and Steed are to be explored, what is presently available shows that much still remain untold about them. This dissertation on Samuel Johnson aims at uncovering one of them, taking into account the faith that informed his self-understanding and mission.

To appreciate the value of their stories for Africa in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to be clear about the context in which the agents of Christian missions functioned and the similarities between that environment and the present one. The nineteenth century marked the culmination into full colonization of nearly three centuries of European contact with Africa. In the second half of the century this decisive encounter assumed a rapid dimension as different European nations jostled for colonies on the continent. This new dimension also came with waves of influences, some of which proved detrimental and others redemptive to the people.⁵⁷ From whatever perspectives one looks at this contact, it is obvious that in the face of the Europeans' quest for resources overseas, Africa, like other continents of the world, could not remain to them an unexplored mystery. The forceful opening-up of China by Americans in the century, at least, demonstrated the desperate quest of the powers to penetrate the nooks and crannies of human society worldwide. In view of this reality, one wonders if the earlier entry of mission societies into Africa before the colonists may not be regarded as a providential preparation for the imminent change. 58 The reason is not far to seek.

⁵⁶ E. A. Ayandele, *The Educated Elite in the Nigerian Society* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1974),

⁵⁷ Trades in liquors and slaves proved to be most damaging socially and economically while the attendant benefits of religious innovation through missionary activities in the fields of literacy, medicine, and agriculture improved people's quality of life.

⁵⁸ Brian Stanley has argued the complexity of the relationship between Christian missions and colonial powers, demonstrating that the accusation often levelled against missions do not take into cognizance differences in local peculiarities and changing patterns in the relationship between the two movements from the West. The result is that the religious dimension is often condemned wholesale and taken to be a mischievous method of attaining the predetermined end of colonizing the people. Brian Stanley, The Bible

In the last two decades of the century, the indigenous agents of the CMS Yoruba mission who themselves assisted in facilitating religious and cultural change among their people were discerning enough to recognize when the tempo and the character of the change assumed a political dimension and began to exert ideological pressures on their people. In response, they tried to keep the balance between the values of the old society and those that were making inroads into it with the advent of Christianity and colonization. As people already prepared by the educational institutions established by Christian missions, some Yoruba evangelists responded by reducing to writing oral traditions in history, music, and religious rites to preserve them from being. Others argued coherence in and legitimacy for maligned indigenous beliefs and cults.⁵⁹ Still, others refused in church and state to acquiesce to perceived marginalization and, where opposition proved formidable, charted new courses that affirmed the integrity of aspects of indigenous cultures and exerted efforts to reconcile them to the new faith.⁶⁰ In these and other ways, pioneer African churchmen in the late nineteenth century responded to rapid social change and saved their society from being overrun by indiscriminate westernization. One of these agents who helped to facilitate change, and was at the same time anxious to preserve aspects of the past, was Samuel Johnson, the historian of the Yoruba.

Samuel Johnson in Intellectual Tradition

The wide range of fields in which Johnson's life and work have attracted interest attests to his place in the evolution of modern African intellectual tradition. Fields as wide apart as literature and history, as well as the cognate disciplines of anthropology and sociology have fed on the man, his thought and his style. It was the historians, however, who have had a field day exploring the influences that shaped him and are either affirming or contesting his submissions on Yoruba history. In this respect the earliest writing on him was Ajayi's "Samuel Johnson—Historian of the Yoruba."61 It was a brief biography of the man but significant for the time it was published. Coming from a nationalist historian, albeit a moderate one, the essay may have created the notion that

and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Leicester: Apollos, 1990).

J.F. Ade. Ajayi, "Nineteenth Century Origins of Nigerian Nationalism", JHSN 2 (1961): 208.

⁶⁰ E.A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*, 241-261.

⁶¹ J.F. Ade. Ajavi, "Samuel Johnson—Historian of the Yoruba,": 141-146.

Johnson was a nationalist.⁶² For while the historian of Yoruba was self-consciously patriotic it is very doubtful if he ever saw himself as a nationalist, cultural or ethnic. Certainly he did not see himself in the mould of the late nineteenth century anticolonialists of Lagos or those of mid-twentieth century agitators of independence. Ajayi later presented a more detailed essay on the Yoruba historian, exploring the missionary environments that shaped him and the uniqueness of the depth and scope of his magnum opus *The History of the Yorubas* in the genre of written local histories that emerged in the colonial era.⁶³

In a chapter he titled "The African Historian in West African Thought" while uncovering The Origins of Modern African Thought, Robert July situated Johnson and his West African colleagues from Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast, A. B. C. Sibthorpe and Carl Reindorf respectively, in the nineteenth century tradition that began to reduce Africa's oral histories into writing. According to July, this trend began with Abbé Boilat of Senegal and developed from the 1850s, proceeding in the second half of the century "as an African nationalistic awareness emerged in response to Europe's own historical pretensions."64 For Robert July, among the many efforts exerted in this period, Johnson and his *The History of the Yorubas* was among those that particularly stood out. 65 Evaluating "the moralist as historian" against the background of his missionary training and self-effacing personality, July wrote that Samuel Johnson, "at first sight...might have seemed an unlikely author for the broad panorama of Yoruba history in its social and cultural complexity, its strenuous politics and lusty war-making."66 Elsewhere, Robert July described the CMS agent as "a man whose whole being and career were a refutation of violence."67 "His *History*...became not only a censure of 'the spirit of tribal feelings and petty jealousies now rife among us,' but a bitter commentary on human folly—the absurdity of pride, the exhaustion of the spirit in the face of cruelty and stupidity."68

⁶² Ajayi actually included Samuel Johnson in his list of those he described as cultural nationalists in his 1961 essay, "Nineteenth Century Origins of Nigerian Nationalism": 208.

⁶³ J. F. A. Ajayi, "Samuel Johnson and Yoruba Historiography," in The Recovery of the West African Past: African Pastors and African History in the Nineteenth Century—C. C. Reindorf & Samuel Johnson, ed. Paul Jenkins (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1998), 57-68.

⁶⁴ Robert July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Centuries* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 255.

⁶⁵ The other two were those of Carl Reindorf's *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* and A.B.C. Sibthorpe's *The History of Sierra Leone*. Robert July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought*, 256. ⁶⁶ July, 271.

⁶⁷ Robert July, introduction to the fourth edition of *The History of Sierra Leone* by A.B.C. Sibthorpe (London: Frank Cass, 1970), viii. ⁶⁸ July.

Robin Law engaged more critically in detail Johnson's presentation of Yoruba history. Having himself researched into the history of the defunct empire of Oyo, he made references to The History of the Yorubas at every turn contending the accuracy of Johnson's submissions and comparing them with the works of his contemporaries who also wrote their versions of Yoruba history.⁶⁹ While still contending the veracity and attempting to unravel Johnson's sources in "How Truly Traditional Is Our Traditional History", Law acknowledged that Johnson's History "remains a source of overwhelming importance, and the framework within which we study Yoruba history is still very much that established by Johnson."⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Robin Law drew attention to the gap between oral tradition and written history which readers of Johnson's History may overlook. He argued that the short horizon of oral traditions, being localized, makes it possible for them to exist side by side with variant renditions according to political or ritual needs, because in "an oral society, there is not so much a traditional history as a range of historical traditions...." When Johnson, like any other historian in the literate tradition, reduces them into writing, Law further submitted, the broad range of interested readership makes necessary a consistent and coherent story. That Johnson straightened out the contradicting details in, for examples, the various myths of origin in Yoruba oral tradition⁷² and the chronology of the *Alafin*, Oyo rulers, ⁷³ among various other listings, for Robin Law, raises the question of the extent to which Johnson's version of Yoruba history can be taken as the tradition. Without disputing the possible authenticity and the validity of the judgment he might have exercised in reconciling the various traditions he retrieved from oral sources for his *History*, Law contends that the work may not be as traditional as it may be assumed.

Writing in the field of African literature Ato Quayson employed philosophical and sociological tools to explore in *The History of the Yorubas* "the variety of strategic uses to which oral traditions are put in the context of transitional cultural and historical processes".⁷⁴ Dividing the work into three subject headings—ethnographic background,

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⁶⁹ Robin Law, Oyo Empire c.1600-c.1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade (Oxford: Claredon, 1977).

⁷⁰ Robin Law, "How Truly Traditional Is Our Traditional History? The Case of Samuel Johnson and the Recording of Yoruba Oral Tradition." *History in Africa*, 11 (1984): 195-221.

⁷¹ Robin Law, "How Truly Traditional Is Our Traditional History?" 197.

⁷² Law, 199-205.

⁷³ Law, 205-213.

⁷⁴ Ato Quayson, Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality and History in the work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 20.

narrative history and 'documentary' history—Quayson saw Johnson's literary style as reflecting the transitory milieu, the "nutritive junctures", in which he functioned. In weaving together oral tradition and contemporary history, Johnson's work marked in the Yoruba literary tradition the same complex reality at work in the incorporation of his people into "wider historical processes that were to integrate [them] into a larger nation that was to become Nigeria". Although Quayson's analysis went beyond literary style by drawing from philosophy, sociology and history, his placing Johnson's work side by side with other Nigerian writers in the fiction genre undercut the historicity of the content of *The History of the Yorubas*. 75

In focusing on Johnson as a historian of the Yoruba, John Peel's essay on him engaged his thought on religion and culture. By interpreting him Peel goes beyond the other extant essays, many of which dwelled on the ephemeral aspect of his exploit as a historian. In *Religious Encounter* he sees Johnson as "reveal[ing] himself not through introspection but by the particularity of his outward gaze, which evinces two powerful attachments—to the project of Christian evangelism and to the making...of Yoruba unity and greatness". He goes to say that the historian of the Yoruba did not attempt to reconcile the apparent contradictions between the claims of Christianity and that of Yoruba identity "by any kind of theological argument about what either of them essentially was, but by a narrative of their providential resolution on the terrain of historical practice". To

Michel Doortmont's unpublished dissertation, "Recapturing the Past—Samuel Johnson and the Construction of the History of the Yoruba" is the only extant doctoral work on Johnson. Appreciating his Sierra Leone background, and situating his mature years in the restive environment of the nineteenth century Yorubaland, Doortmont's is an assessment of Johnson as a historian and his role in shaping the emerging colonial dispensation among his Yoruba people. Its concern being Johnson's exploit as a historian, the doctoral essay did not address his thought on religion and culture, which were also part of the change at work among his people and which he himself facilitated as an agent

⁷⁵ Ode Ogede's review of *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing* fell into the error of classifying Johnson's work of history as fiction along with the works of Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka, and Ben Okri. *Africa* 3 (1999): 467.

⁷⁶ John Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 304-305.

⁷⁷ Peel.

⁷⁸ Michel R. Doortmont, "Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History" (PhD diss., Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 1994).

of Christian mission. This dissertation aims at filling this gap by exploring further the vista Peel opens up in *Religious Encounter*.

To this end, the same archival materials will be reread from a theological point of view with the aim to appreciate Johnson's own self-understanding in the midst of change. The dissertation will also place the man in the wider context of the engagement of African societies with mission Christianity in the nineteenth century by comparing him with agents of mission in other rapidly changing African societies in the nineteenth century. As a man of many engagements— teacher, evangelist, pastor, diplomat and historian—Johnson's life story shows how an agent appropriated Christianity in a changing environment, deviating from the narrow and rigid expectations of his mission society in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Sources and Method

The primary source material for this dissertation is the archives of the Church Mission Society at the University of Birmingham, supplemented with those of the Colonial Office at the National Archives in London (NAL). The attempt to unravel Johnson's family background also led to a visit to the archives of the Royal Botanical Garden and Guildhall Library, both in London. Materials of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, were also consulted. But the hard copies of the letters and reports were not available for reading. The microfiche copies are not legible enough and the documents captured on them are not properly sequenced. The papers of the ministers of the Anglican Church in London were also consulted at the Guildhall Library, London. The ordination papers of Henry Johnson, Jr., at the library were particularly useful in dating the family life of the patriarch, Henry Johnson, Sr.

These archival materials have been read against the background of the character of pre-missionary Yoruba society that was lacking in a culture of literacy, hence lacking in written records. The oral historical data that found their way into missionary journals and letters have therefore been critically evaluated where there are extant written literature with which to compare their assertions. As an example, Johnson's information that Mungo Park knew Alafin Abiodun does not stand alongside the account of the travels of

the English explorer who died at Bussa and never visited Oyo. This information, which would have been in oral circulation, could be a confusion of Hugh Clapperton who reached the old metropolis of Oyo on January 23, 1826, before the final collapse of the kingdom of the Alafin. 80

Peel has drawn attention to the gap that exists between the realities on the ground and the reports forwarded to the Parent Committee. This could result from the perspective, the priority, and the aim of the agents in reporting on issues. Hence, the interests of the writers determined what was to be reported, what was not to be reported, and how best to present the information being reported. It has been an advantage in this respect that Johnson was profuse in his report of the events around him till 1887 when, following his lone journal from Oyo, he stopped submitting period accounts of his activities apart from his annual reports. Yet, it is a great disadvantage in studying him that he was stoically silent about himself. He made scanty references to his domestic affairs, and when he did he was too brief. On the day he married, he simply wrote, "Today I was coupled. May she truly prove an help meet. May we both be enabled to adorn our profession by our example, and also be enabled as long as life permit [sic] to labour in the vineyard". 81 This shortfall in Johnson's personal information is obviated by the availability of the journals of those he worked with, especially at Ibadan where the Society had at least five other agents apart from him. Olubi's journals particularly shed light on him.

Finally, the integrity of the materials was established by comparing the different reports of the various agents who worked with Johnson where they reported the same events. The papers of the European agents were generally candid and sometimes communicated vigorous viewpoints about their work, about one another, and the people among whom they worked. In this they appreciated the sensitivity of the information they were sending home and their potential repercussions on their work if they were published. This is demonstrated by the insertion in their letters of the words "Not to be published" which can be found on several correspondence of Rev. J.B. Wood to London. The phrase itself does not guarantee the authenticity of content; but where other correspondence relating to the issue being reported exist, they were compared.

⁷⁹ Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (Ware, UK: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 383-388.

⁸⁰ Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccattoo* (London: John Murray, 1829), 35.

⁸¹ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, January 19, 1875, CMS G3/A2/O58.

In the course of my fieldwork at Ibadan and Lagos, I had the opportunity to visit the two churches—St. Peter's, Aremo and St. David's, Kudeti, both in Ibadan. My informant in Lagos, Archdeacon Pelu Johnson, a fifth generation churchman and great-grandson of Henry Johnson, Sr., drew my attention to the epitaph of the patriarch and his wife at Kudeti churchyard, Ibadan. The information contained therein is helpful in understanding the family roots of Henry Johnson, Sr., in the old Oyo metropolis.

The archival materials were read with an eye on the Sierra Leone experience of the agents of mission, for those who had it, but more on realities that were impinging on Yorubaland in the nineteenth century. At the turn of the twenty-first century, and in view of the massive failure of modern African states after much sanguine hope at independence, nationalist reading of the present into the past has become anachronistic. Its historiography has ceased to exert influence from the late 1970s and has been overtaken by a new awareness of global community in which differences are no longer affirmed in polemical relationships. Rather, they are being subsumed in an emerging global cosmopolitanism where they either dissolve and fizzle out or find propagation and wider appropriation. The factors that determine the fates of cultures in this new development are beyond the discussion here.

The post-modern approach, with its hermeneutic of suspicion, will not do to interpret Johnson. In the first place it does not recognize the intrinsic value of religion, the principal factor at the heart of Johnson's self-understanding and activities as a mission agent and peacemaker. Secondly, if his relationship with the powers is something to reckon with, it was too trusting. An interpretive tool that discountenances that trust will be disregarding a major factor that determined his response to the changes going on around him.

In the light of the inadequacy of nationalist historiography and the post-modern discursive method to interpret Johnson, the methodological consideration being employed here is contextual. Johnson's life story and vocation evolved from an environment of rapid social change, which was facilitated by factors both internal and external to Yorubaland. Internally, the civil wars led to the emergence of new centres of power dominated by warlords. But the authority exercised by these warlords was not merely temporal; at times, it undercut the authority of traditional religious cults. In extreme

⁸² A form of Islam remains belligerent.

⁸³ Robert Schreiter offers a succinct but helpful description of globalization in his *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997).

situations such as that in Ijaye where Kurunmi combined martial and cultic authorities, a warlord can appropriate the prerogatives of the divinities. In a milder circumstance as Atiba's recreation of tradition at Ago Oja, an appreciation of the changing times could bring about liberal cultural modifications in the country. In a social landscape where order had broken down and ambition ran high among the warlords, their clash of interests remained sources of social trauma and equally prolonged and intensified the historical changes at work. These furnished Johnson with his political engagement as an ambassador of peace.

Externally, the overflow of Europe abroad in the two processes of mission Christianity and the gradual advance of the fledgling British Empire into Yorubaland introduced another set of change which defined Johnson's missionary career. These twin forces of change, along with those already at work among the people through the wars, actively impacted on Johnson and his world, and he himself rode on them to establish himself as a churchman and as a historian.

These socio-political, cultural and religious changes that were at work in the nineteenth century Yoruba country have been generally acknowledged in the various academic works that had been undertaken hitherto. An aspect that appears to have been largely neglected is the change that gradually took place in the CMS mission itself in the last decade of the century when new recruits from British universities entered the field. This change is implicit in Ade Ajayi's reading of the crisis in the Niger Delta Mission. All In the Yoruba Mission, it found expression in the jettisoning of the old missionary ethos of Christianity, commerce and civilization for the propagation of a brand of Christianity that exclusively placed premium on the transcendent value of the faith for its African converts. This change had a far-reaching implication for Johnson's vocation in the closing years of his life. The changing context is therefore considered as holding the key to understanding the man and his times.

This dissertation employs both narrative and analytical methods of presentation, setting Johnson's experience against the background of the religious, social and political dynamics at work in his world. This includes the colonial environment from which he emerged in Sierra Leone and in which he received his early formation as a Creole. It also includes the indigenous environment of the Yoruba country, which, in contrast to the colonial environment of Sierra Leone, set the agenda for the missionary Society in which

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⁸⁴ J.F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891*, 238-253.

he continued his religious, intellectual and cultural formation and later functioned as an agent of mission. This is particularly relevant to understanding Johnson's thought, frustrations and breakthroughs with Yoruba religions and his Ibadan social environment where indigenous institutions held the sway.

Johnson's perspectives on culture and nationhood are also set in the context of the missionary environment of his religious formation. The influence of the Basel elements in this formation is taken as the source of his later orientation towards Yoruba tradition over against the tendency towards modernity as it was encroaching on the Yoruba people in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. From this perspective it will be seen that Johnson was more complex than he appears at a cursory glance and that his missionary and literary activities were products of the providential historiography that was at the roots of the worldwide protestant missionary movement of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 2

The Nexus of a National and a Family History, 1830-1857

In describing medieval Africa, Adrian Hastings observed that,

The balance of life, physical, social, spiritual, was well constructed in principle but easily disturbed in practice. It was not a golden world in which generations passed without undue pain, crisis, or history. The rains failed. Children died unexpectedly. Men fought over women and murdered one another in anger. More powerful neighbours seized one's cattle or invaded one's ancestral holding. But most such tragedies, millions of times as they occurred, left no trace whatever beyond the memory of one or two generations in the story of humankind. They were small-scale. They were never recorded in writing. Life went on. People forgave, moved their dwellings, bore other children, recognized new lords and new gods.... Then as now the human heart had more than enough to endure, but upon all sides it was...endurance within a context of micro-concern but macro-powerlessness.¹

In these succinct statements Hastings illustrates the history of pre-colonial Africa as having been largely shaped, in its ebb and flow, by the uncertainties that afflict nature and humanity. This characterization was not peculiar to Africa but common to many pre-modern societies and ancient civilizations where nations survived and empires rose at the expense of one another. Hastings' characterization, by virtue of its succinctness, appears, however, to undervalue, even gloss over the magnitude of the misery that accompanied the wars and the uncertainties that consequently plagued pre-colonial Africa. And it remains for him to identify the safety valve that kept the situation under control so that it did not assume a larger-than-life dimension but made recovery possible after destruction. For it appears that from the nineteenth century the safety valve could no longer hold the pressure being generated in the heart of Africa. The Yoruba wars in West Africa and the Zulu wars, the *Mfecane*, in Southern Africa, as examples of a new dimension in African warfare, became protracted wars of attrition.

¹ Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.53.

² The contest for survival among ancient Greek city states and the history of medieval Europe were no less violent. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1955) and Gregory of Tours' *The History of the Franks*, translated. by Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1974) go back to pre-Christian Europe to recount the conquests that were typical of its primal societies.

The century dawned on the Yoruba country with its Oyo suzerainty straining and tottering along to keep its hard-worn vast territory that stretched from the River Niger in the north to Porto Novo, perched on the edge of the inland waterways that emptied into the Atlantic Ocean in the south. Its travail was not occasioned by external agencies as much as it was primarily by its internal devices and misadventures. The empire of the *Alafins* ³ had risen gradually but steadily in the last two centuries from a distant mythical past into a present imperial reckoning in an era when pre-colonial African states derived wealth and prosperity from trading in human beings. ⁴ By the middle of the eighteenth century it had attained the zenith of its power and reach over the vast territory bounded by the River Niger and Borgu in the north and the lands of Aja, Ewe and Fon speaking peoples in the west. Its eastern and southern limits were defined by the territories of consanguineous peoples. The Igbomina, Yagba, Ijesha, and Ekiti were in the east. The Egba and Awori peoples occupying the rain forest and the contiguous wetlands of the Atlantic Ocean set its southern limits. From this vast territory, the Alafins exacted tributes and received the homage of vassal kingdoms.

While the empire was on the rise the seat of government at the Oyo metropolis was witnessing, from about 1690, a contrary development that would eventually dissolve the empire a century later. Robin Law identifies this development as the rivalry between the office of the Alafin and its advisory council, the *Oyo Mesi* under the leadership of successive prime ministers, the *Bashoruns*. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the crisis had reached its peak as the balance of power shifted in favour of the Bashorun who by constitutional provision commanded the elite army at the capital. The emergence of Bashorun Gaha in this influential office ensured that the military class at the capital dominated state politics at the expense of the Alafins. So unstable was the metropolitan politics of Oyo at this time that the royal office eventually lost its paramountcy to the prime minister, Gaha, whose notoriety has become a classical reference point in Yoruba

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³ "Alafin" is the official title of the kings who ruled the empire from the metropolis, *Oyo Ile*.

⁴ Robin Law, Oyo Empire c.1600-c.1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

⁵ Law fixed the beginning of this decline at 1690, being the year the Alafin's advisory council, the Oyo Mesi, began to exercise the authority of their office vis-à-vis the conduct and temperament of their royal lord, some of whom in quick succession were judged despotic and deposed, beginning from that year. "The Constitutional Troubles of Oyo in the Eighteenth century", *JAH* 1 (1971): 31.

⁶ The advisory council was made up of titled chieftains: the Bashorun, the Agbakin, the Samu, the Alapini, the Laguna, the Akiniku and the Asipa. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas—From the Earliest Times to the beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: CSS Bookshops, 1921), 70.

social history.⁷ According to Johnson, Gaha acted with impunity as the sole kingmaker, installing and deposing successive Alafins at will. He also took over the collection of the tributes accruing to the royal office by appointing his own children as the *ajele*, royal ambassadors at the courts of tributary chiefs, throughout the empire. ⁸ For twenty years the Bashorun dominated politics at the capital, until his attempt to get rid of Alafin Abiodun led to the intrigue that ended in his cruel demise and those of his children.

Abiodun reigned from about 1774 till about 1789 and consolidated the economic gains of the empire after successfully getting rid of the Bashorun, but the highhandedness with which he subdued him set the precedence for the chaos that eventually overtook the empire in the nineteenth century. For he drew the provinces into his strategy for eliminating his enemy and, unwittingly, "let out the 'secret of empire', that the balance of military power lay with the provinces against the capital". Thus realizing how delicate the balance of power was at the seat of government and how strategic they themselves were to the political fortunes of the empire, the provinces served, from 1796 into the nineteenth century, the interests and ambitions of the prime ministers and the warlords against those of the Alafin.

Akinjogbin contends that Abiodun's success in eliminating the Bashorun "had no immediate weakening effect on the Oyo Empire," and this is "shown by the way in which [he] maintained a large part of the empire intact until he died". On the contrary, it prospered economically. He locates its eventual demise in Abiodun's priority of economic expansion over military consolidation, which resulted in a weak army. The consequence of this began to unfold during his reign in the successful revolts of some of the vassal kingdoms whose armies gallantly routed the Alafin's prostrate force, beginning from 1783. It follows, then, that however economically successful Yoruba popular

⁷ Johnson, *The History of the Yoruba*, 185.

⁸ Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 178-182.

⁹ Robin Law, "The Constitutional Troubles of Oyo in the Eighteenth Century": 43.

¹⁰ Akinjogbin sees the change from Gaha to Abiodun as more than a mere change from militarism to commercialism. Abiodun effectively returned power to the princes after a century of marginalization by the military class. The latter, though not effectively assuming the office of Alafin, successfully manipulated it. Johnson, however, saw the weakening of the office of the Alafin as resulting from the "unchecked despotism, unrestrained licence, insatiable greed and wanton voluptuousness" of successive office holders at this time. I.A. Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century—A Reassessment." *JHSN* 3 (1966): 457, 458; Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 177.

¹¹Akinjogbin identifies Bariba and Egba as the first vassals to revolt against the Alafin while Morton-Williams identifies Nupe as the first state to do so. What is clear from Johnson is that both Bariba and Nupe were among the kingdoms that early profited from the military weakness of

history assesses Abiodun,¹² his era initiated the festering of the incipient weakness from the centre to the peripheries and the eventual collapse of the empire. Subsequent events from 1796 opened the floodgates of rebellion against his successors.¹³

The earliest significant written record, from first-hand observers, and which offer glimpses into what life was like in the defunct empire, came from the Lander brothers and Hugh Clapperton, British explorers of Africa in the 1820s. ¹⁴ It may be noted that authentic as their observations about the empire may be, they were carried out in the years of decline when the entire political structure was already unravelling. Nevertheless, at this sunset, Clapperton could still glowingly and with relish describe his experience in travelling through the country:

I cannot omit bearing testimony to the singular and perhaps unprecedented fact, that we have already travelled sixty miles in eight days, with a numerous and heavy baggage, and about ten different relays of carriers, without losing so much as the value of a shilling public or private; a circumstance evincing not only somewhat more than common honesty in the inhabitants, but a degree of subordination and regular government which could not have been supposed to exist amongst a people hitherto considered barbarians. ¹⁵

This observation offers a window into the nature of the society governed by the Alafin and the quality of the social life that persisted among the people even when the centre was already giving way to dissolution. The decades that followed the observation of Hugh Clapperton would reverse this order as the chaos at the centre rapidly sprawled to the peripheries and engulfed the entire country.

Abiodun's Oyo Empire. Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century": 458; Peter Morton-Williams, "The Oyo Yoruba and the Atlantic Trade, 1670-1830", *JHSN* 1 (1964): 34; Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 187.

The reversal in the fortune of the empire in the years after Alafin Abiodun's reign found expression in the popular Oyo song, *Laiye Abiodun l'afi igba won 'wo. Laiye Awole l'adi adikale;* meaning: In Abiodun's day we weighed our money in calabashes; in Awole's reign we packed up and fled. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas,* 188; Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba,* 3rd ed. (London: James Currey, 1988), 113.

¹³ Robin Law, "The Constitutional Troubles of Oyo in the Eighteenth Century": 43; Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century": 457, 458.

¹⁴ Until the advent of the three known explorers, scattered references to Oyo were only available from the records of traders and travellers on the coast. These have been compiled in Robin Law, *Contemporary Source Material for the History of the Old Oyo Empire 1627-1824* (Ibadan: Institute of African Studies, 1992).

¹⁵ Hugh Clapperton, Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccattoo (London: John Murray, 1829), 13.

The Slave Trade

One of the significant fallouts of the dissolution of the Yoruba country in the early decades of the nineteenth century was the shipment of the people abroad in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Slavery had long existed as an institution among the various subethnic groups of the Yoruba until its trans-Atlantic dimension steadily brought prosperity to Oyo in the last two centuries preceding the wars of attrition. The empire of the Alafins procured many of these slaves from the annual contributions of vassal states, from the expansionist wars that were waged against peoples, and from the punitive expeditions against rebellious kingdoms. 16 It is not impossible, as was the norm in the nineteenth century Ibadan, that grievous offenders against state laws were also sold away as slaves. However, there were social controls that outlawed indiscriminate slave dealing by arbitrarily laying hand on people. But then, the wars of the nineteenth century effectively neutralized whatever social controls were in place for this order. They created a new environment where only the fittest survived and made the country a place where might was right. Soldiers of fortune, constituted by a coalition of Ife, Oyo, Ijebu and Egba marauders, preyed on their own people and made them slaves to work their fields. Others they sold as commodities for overseas export.

In the south the routs were not only as devastating as they were in the north. They were also shorter, sharper, bloodier and even sacrilegious. Like a blitzkrieg, Egba ancestral homes were flattened in less than five years, between 1826 and1830. What made the difference was the Ijebus' new acquisition: firearms. With this acquisition from their Portuguese trading partners on the coast they devoted more efforts to slave trading than to the other legitimate trades in cloth and local wares, which dated back to the sixteenth century. Slaves became the prime export commodity of the day, making easy wealth possible. This cupidity sustained the Yoruba wars for most part of the nineteenth

¹⁶ I.A. Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century": 457; Peter Morton-Williams, "The Oyo Yoruba and the Atlantic Trade, 1670-1830", *JHSN* 1 (1964): 25-27.

¹⁷ Robin Law, "Trade and Politics Behind the Slave Coast: The Lagoon Traffic and the Rise of Lagos, 1500-1800," *JAH* 24, (1983): 325.

The dominance and pride of Ijebu people in the slave trade is evident in their conceit in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Johnson recorded his conversation with the son of one of their chiefs, the Balogun, who told him, "Afi Oyinbo afi Ijebu, dede aye dede eru ni won. Ko si oja ti a ita Oyinbo, ko si oja ti a ita Ijebu". That is to say, "Except the white man and the Ijebus the whole world besides are slaves: there is no market in which a white man may be sold and none where [an] Ijebu may be sold". Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yoruba*, 610.

century and fuelled the distress that eventually led to external interventions. ¹⁹ They came, first, in the intensification of the crusade against slavery in far away England. Second, it came in the 1851 bombardment of Lagos by John Beecroft, British consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra, and in the consequent deposition of its pro-slave trade king, Kosoko. The deposition of Kosoko was the first step in a half century process of absorbing the Yoruba people and land into what became Britain's worldwide empire at the turn of the twentieth century. ²⁰

From the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the attention of the anti-slavery movement in England was drawn to the west coast of Africa, from Senegal to Angola, where a mass export of people to the West Indies and North America was taking place. The trade in human being surged in the third decade of the nineteenth century in consequence of the Yoruba wars, despite the movement's crusade which had drawn in the naval resources of British government. The result was the dominant presence of the people in the Sierra Leone colony from the 1820s, following the rescue operations of the naval squadron patrolling the coast. But the unrelenting situation of human misery tasked the resources of the abolitionist movement in England, particularly in the years between the 1820s and the 1840s when the Yoruba wars were unabatedly claiming their victims in the trans-Atlantic slavery.²¹

A New Start with an Old Heart

Along with the emergence of three new centres of belligerence—Abeokuta, Ibadan, and Ijaye— following the dissolution of the empire of the Alafin, the demography and the cultural map of the Yoruba country were reconfigured. The mass retreat of people fleeing the horrors of war occasioned the settling at Oshogbo, an Ijesha town, of Oyo

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¹⁹ The depredation of Ibadan warriors and the later belligerence of Ijebu against the intervention of British colonial government in the wars were results of the easy wealth that were accruing to them. Ibadan was accumulating wealth through slave-raiding and the Ijebu people were unwilling to give up their monopoly of the trade between the coast and the hinterland.

²⁰ Dosunmu ceded Lagos to the English crown in 1861, making it part of the expanding British possession in West Africa. This firm footing was the first step in the gradual colonisation of what would eventually become Nigeria in the second decade of the twentieth century.

²¹ An attempt to address this was Thomas Fowell Buxton's publication of 1840, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*, which motivated the ill-fated Niger Expedition of 1841. In the publication, Buxton recommended to the British parliament that the illicit export in slaves be replaced with legitimate trade in agricultural exports from Africa. To this end, he encouraged Britain to explore the possibility of setting up agricultural settlements in the interior of Africa. For the inability of the largely European members of the team to endure the inclement weather of West Africa, the 1841 exploratory mission ended in disaster. Samuel Crowther, "Journal of 1841 Niger Expedition", CMS C/A1/O79/32.

refugees whose large number significantly changed the character of the town from its Ijesha milieu to that of Oyo.²²

Abeokuta emerged as a new town led by Sodeke, a onetime Egba pro-coalition warrior. Kurunmi, a former Balogun of Esiele, built his stronghold on the remains of Ijaye, an Egba settlement to the north, deserted at the outbreak of confusion. The coalition forces on the spree that destroyed Owu and Egbaland found Ibadan, the insignificant town belonging to Egba Gbagura, commodious to relish their loots. And so the military camp of the predatory agglomeration of Ife, Ijebu, Oyo and renegade Egba warriors became *Ilu Asala*, city of refuge. It grew with the continuous accretion of refugees from the wars in the north to become the largest town in West Africa at the close of the century. And although its first leader was an Ife chief, Okunade the Maye, with the influx of large contingents of Oyo refugees, he was deposed following some disagreements and was replaced by Oluyole, an Oyo warlord.²³

Perhaps nowhere was the impotence of the successive Alafins of post-imperial Oyo more visible than in their inability to end the wars. They could only plead for compromise among the warlords on sensitive issues over which they might disagree. Where such compromises proved impossible, as in the case of the disagreement between Ibadan and Ijaye over Atiba's reforms at Oyo, they could only watch one neutralize the other. Nevertheless, the three major urban settlements that emerged from the consequences of the wars—Abeokuta, Ijaye, and Ibadan—played significant roles in post-empire Yorubaland. And although the pattern of government in these new towns varied, they turned out to be new cauldrons from which brewed humanity's ancient perplexities—death and destruction.

The Cross-current of Mission

Ibadan was establishing itself as a new territorial power when mission arrived there in 1853. Its restless warriors were busy with the defensive war being fought against

²² R.S. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*. 3rd ed. (London: James Currey, 1988), 121.

²³ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 238-240; D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, December 15, 1854, CMS C/A2/O49/110.

²⁴ It was in the interest of Oyo that none of the two powers neutralized the other as the triumph of one over the other could lead to the ambition of the victor to subdue Oyo as well. Atiba maintained the "precarious peaceful relations" between them until his death in 1859. But his son, Adelu, watched Ibadan destroy Ijaye three years later. Peter Morton-Williams, "The Yoruba Kingdom of Oyo," in *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Daryll Forde and P.M. Kabbery (London: OUP, 1967), 65-66.

the army at Ilorin and with those of their imperial ambition being prosecuted eastward into Ijesha and Ekiti lands.²⁵ Ironically, it was the unsettled nature of the country that hastened mission to the city where Yoruba traditional religions and Islam already held sway.²⁶

Hinderer's exploratory visit of 1851 and subsequent experience as a resident missionary impressed on him the environment in which he would be functioning. Midnineteenth century Ibadan was an immensely large settlement under a "military aristocracy" that looked down on the working class. 27 But life among members of this aristocracy could be precarious. The mutual intrigues and treacheries that brought down the old empire continued to influence their relationships, sometimes leading to murder, banishments, sacking of households, or permanent demotion and consignment to irrelevance and poverty. Social criminals as well as domestic offenders, depending on the considered severity of their offences, were punished with highhandedness.

While man-stealing was the order of the day in the fledgling city, Ibadan had an additional feature which gave it its uniqueness among Yoruba towns of the first half of the nineteenth century. 28 Expectedly, Yoruba religions were thriving there, but religious sacrifices were not acceptable in public places, and so they were restricted to the various family compounds.²⁹ If this signifies a strong influence of Islam in Ibadan, the unsuccessful attempt of its preachers to stop Mr. Hinderer's mission in the city indicated its limits. Isolated, maligned and surrounded by enemies it had made for itself by its rapine, Ibadan coveted for itself not the gospel of peace Mr Hinderer was bringing but the

²⁵ In 1852, while Mr. Hinderer was away to England, Ibadan warriors "engaged extensively in war" in the Ijesha country. The missionary reported that the "expedition was considered a...failure, for they only brought about 5000 captives, & lost no less than 2000 of their warriors". D. Hinderer, Journal for the Quarter Ending March 25, 1853. CMS C/A2/O49/105.

²⁶ The precarious situation of Abeokuta, following the vigorous but unsuccessful attempt of Dahomey to sack the town in March 1851 made Townsend to look further afield for missionary extension. The fate of the CMS mission in Zululand, which was shut down in 1838 because of the endemic war between the people and the Boers, was instructive for the leader of the mission at Abeokuta. H. Townsend to Missionaries, July 3, 1851, C.M.S. C/A2/M2(1848-1854)/279-283; J.E. Carlyle, South Africa and Its Mission Fields (London: James Nisbet and Company, 1878), 226-229; J. Du Plessis, A History of Christian Missions in South Africa (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1911), 221-229. Max Warren, Unfolding Purpose—An Interpretation of the *Living Tradition Which is C.M.S.* (N.p.: CMS, 1950), pp. 12, 13 ²⁷ D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, October 3, 1851, CMS C/A2/O49/104.

²⁸ Johnson added that "So bad were those days at Ibadan and so callous had the people become that if a woman or a child was heard to cry out 'E gba mi, won mu mi o' (O help me, I am taken) the usual answer from indoors was 'Maha ba a lo' (You can go along with him). Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, p. 246.

²⁹ D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, October 3, 1851, CMS C/A2/O49/104.

prestige of having a white man in its midst like Abeokuta and Badagry.³⁰ Much more, however, its warlords, having lots of money and slaves at hand but unable to convert them to European articles, desperately wanted powder, guns and swords.³¹ They got the wrong type of white man in the pacifist German missionary. Yet when the adherents of Islam sought to misrepresent him to the local authorities, influential war chiefs considered them as stretching their luck too far. They did not hesitate to let them know that they were not deceived by their antics.³²

From the perspective of the anti-slave trade stance of mission, the ground was fertile for Hinderer's perceived opponents. One of the influential chiefs, the *Seriki*, misconstrued his visit to be an exploration for trade and was nauseated that he had not come to facilitate Ibadan's only export to the outside world: slaves. In fact the Seriki was alarmed to hear that "English people" were stopping the flow of the only "commodity" Ibadan warlords considered as capable of fetching them money to maintain their prestige, local products of agriculture and industry being too cheap to serve the purpose. This potential source of opposition, which he must have envisaged his "Mahomedan" opponents could also exploit, gave the missionary reason for a discreet move in his plan to do mission in Ibadan.

The mutual jealousies among the various towns of the Yoruba country also called for discretion on the part of the missionary, as further movement into the interior when he had not fully gained the confidence of the powers in the land might be misinterpreted. In his carefulness not to be misunderstood, Hinderer momentarily shared the predicament of nineteenth century Yorubaland: fear. The commoners feared being kidnapped in the field and sold into slavery; the powerful warlords feared falling into bad times and getting consigned to poverty; and now the missionary feared being misunderstood and taken for a spy!³⁴

With the influential presence of Islam and the people's desire for the prestige of having a white man among them Ibadan offered an ambivalent response to missionary presence. There were no want of detractors at Mr. Hinderer's heel. The Islamic clerics played on the notion, though unsuccessfully, that the presence of the white man in the

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³⁰ D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, May 21, 1851, CMS C/A2/O49/103.

³¹ D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, June 2, 1851, CMS C/A2/O49/103.

³² D. Hinderer to H. Venn, July 16, 1851, CMS. C/A2/O49/5.

³³ D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, June 2, 1851, CMS C/A2/O49/103; Journal Entry, October 4, 1851, CMS C/A2/O49/104.

³⁴ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, July 16, 1851, CMS C/A2/O49/5.

town was a bad omen. The chiefs and the war boys, though thrilled by the novelty of having him around, were indifferent to his message. But he found a friend in Olunloyo, a young war chief who gave him two of his children to train—Akielle and Yejide—and the land on which the mission settled. Olunloyo himself did not embrace the faith but died untimely at war.³⁵ The missionary couple's early converts came from the rank of women and the children boarded in their home and managed by Mrs Hinderer. As the missionary couple gained the confidence of the chiefs and the need arose for more hands to assist in the work, Mr. Hinderer reached for Sierra Leone to recruit staff from its pool of Yoruba recaptives who had converted to Christianity. This search took him to the village of Hastings in 1857.

Hastings, Sierra Leone

The first agent of the CMS to be stationed at Hastings was James Lisk who served as the first school master for about a year in 1820.³⁶ For the next six years not much was done in terms of placing personnel in the village to organize the school or the church. And although the village had significant population, the people did not receive much attention from the Liberated African Department. From 1827 to 1831 the mission had intermittent presence there through its schoolmasters and ministers whose length of service was often short.³⁷ The most prominent agent in this period was John Weeks.

Like his predecessors, Weeks' stay in Hastings lasted only one year; but more than any of them, he came to a first hand knowledge of the pervasiveness of Yoruba religions in the village. The divinities had seemingly served the spiritual needs of the people where mission had not been forthcoming with personnel to meet their needs. The governor set the stage for the revelation when in August 1831 he issued a circular forbidding anyone in the colony from sacrificing to idols. The constable of the village thereafter arrested six persons for flouting the order and brought them to Mr. Weeks as the "Justice of the Peace." They had killed several fowls and offered them to "Headon," a

³⁵ R.B. Hone, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country: Memorials of Anna Hinderer* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1872), 69-70.

³⁶ The CMS Sierra Leone Call List C/A1/O138 identifies him as having been stationed there by this date.

William Tamba, serving 1827-1828, and John Gerber, serving 1829-1830, were the only two agents of the CMS who spent more that a year in their assignments in Hastings between 1827 and 1831. Tamba was not resident in the village as he was not assigned there exclusively; he attended to it along with John Pierce in 1827 and John Gerber in 1828. CMS Sierra Leone Call List C/A1/O174; W. Tamba, Report of Hastings for June 25, 1828, CMS C/A1/M5(1828-1831)/8.

Yoruba divinity said to be in charge of the prosperity, preservation, and comfort of twin children and their parents.³⁸

While the missionary was still expressing "sorrow and pity for these...people," the constable told him "there were plenty Greegrees in Hastings." Weeks immediately ordered that all the idols to which people sacrificed be brought to him. He had more that enough as four baskets, full of these religious icons, were deposited in his premises by the evening. His call for the persons from whom they had been confiscated yielded, the following morning, an attendance of about 150 persons who flocked his courtyard; "they were all of the Aku nation". He gave them a long lecture on how they were indebted to the English government for their freedom and privileges in the colony and therefore had the obligation to "conform themselves to the English laws, and to the laws of the great God…." He thereafter explained to them the governor's circular with regard to the matter. They were pardoned for claiming ignorance of it, and they promised not to indulge in sacrificing to idols again.

But before he allowed them to depart, Weeks made enquiries about the divinities and took from the people some lectures on the functions of some of the cults. Fagboo (Fagbure?), one of their priests, educated him on Shango, the god of thunder; Elegbara, the trickster who aids in concealing mischief; and Oshun, the river goddess. They were all meant to prosper and protect from evil those who consulted them. Over the years the various cults functioned in the village at the grassroots level and their priests were careful to maintain their invincibility to the government until the constable exposed them. Mr. Weeks' closing sermon, in which he castigated their gods and read to them Psalm 115, ended with their promise to attend his church.⁴⁰ It did not solve any problem as later developments showed that the gods were only driven underground.⁴¹

Edun is a specie of the primates indigenous to Yorubaland. Their agility and the fact that they are born in twins may have commended them to the people as *Orisa Ibeji*, tutelary deity of twins. Mr. Weeks described the image of Edun brought to him as "a rough figure made of wood tattuded [sic] all around the head, the hands are fastened to its side, its height about 18 inches". J. Weeks, Report for the Quarter Ending September 25, 1831, CMS C/A1/O219/44.

³⁹ "Aku," derived from the Yoruba's manner of greeting one another, was the name by which they were first called as a group in the Colony of Sierra Leone.

⁴⁰ J. Weeks, Report for the Quarter Ending September 25, 1831, CMS C/A1/O219/44.

⁴¹ The occasionally prodigious sacrifices and their economic implications in a colony that was struggling to generate funds for its survival might have been the reason behind the ban on sacrifices to "idols". The desperate economic situation of the colony can be appreciated from the data requested in the censuses of 1831 and 1833, which included information on the livestock in possession of each household. The economic rationalization behind the ban on sacrifices could

Weeks soon left Hastings, and for the next four years no minister or schoolmaster was assigned to the village. However, about the time Mr Weeks was serving in Hastings, Henry Johnson, a young man from Gbagere Compound, Oyo Ile, ⁴² arrived in the village, adopting the English name of his Susu apprenticeship master. ⁴³ There were many Johnsons in Sierra Leone at this time, and Hastings had many of them with Henry as their first name. They all derived the name from the CMS missionary William A. B. Johnson whose missionary exertions in Regents, Sierra Leone, brought the village to early renown in the colony. The lasting memorial liberated Africans erected in his honour and for his

not have weighed with a people whose essence is founded on a religious understanding of life and its accompanying propitiatory sacrifices. NAL CO267/111 and NAL CO267/127.

⁴² Referring to the claim of the Archdeacon Henry Johnson, Ade Ajayi wrote that Henry Johnson, Sr., descended from the family of Alafin Abiodun "through a daughter who married into an Ilorin family". Another son of the patriarch, Samuel, sustained the Ilorin connection, but he did not make anything of the royal connection. The monument erected to mark his and Sarah's graves at the Kudeti Church, Ibadan, shows that he hailed from Gbagere Compound and probably belonged to a noble Oyo family, that of the Basorun Yamba. My informant, Archdeacon Pelu Johnson, hinted that the monument was erected by yet another son of Henry Johnson, Sr., Dr. Obadiah Johnson, in 1910. J.F.A. Ajayi, "Samuel Johnson—Historian of the Yoruba," *Nigeria Magazine*, 81 (1964): 142; Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 519.

⁴³ A schoolmaster by name Henry Johnson was in Hastings in 1828; his name not being on the Sierra Leone call list of the mission, he might have been in the service of the colony's administration. Another Henry Johnson appended his name to the letter written in 1846 to the "Home Committee" of the CMS by "Native Assistants and Schoolmasters", asking for standardization and increase in the salaries of the native agents of the Society. Neither of these two Henry Johnsons is in view here as the one in view was an oral person. The census of 1831 yields a third Henry Johnson, an unmarried Susu labourer who had with him two liberated Africans as apprentices resident in Hastings. In the census of 1833, the name occurred again but the data did not include ethnic identities of the residents and the Henry Johnson listed was single and had no apprentice. The Yoruba recaptive Henry Johnson who lived in Hastings in the first half of the nineteenth century is being taken as one of the apprentices under the Henry Johnson of the Susu ethnic group. This conclusion derives from three criteria: One, according to Christopher Fyfe, "There was not much wholesale renaming of adults" among recaptives. Since the adoption of English names was the norm among young recaptives the Henry Johnson in view in this research was likely to have arrived in the colony as a young man. Two, his profile as an oral person may underscore his apprenticeship as having taken place under the unlettered Susu labourer. And three, his non-literate profile may still indicate that although he was a young man he was grown enough to find studying tedious like many other adult recaptives who were not enthused with book-learning. The Henry Johnson in focus here might then have arrived in the colony latest by 1831 as a young adult of about 20 years—young enough to adopt an English name and old enough not to be enthused with book learning. That he started raising a family in 1840 further confirms this. For then he would have been about thirty years, an age which, taking the vicissitudes of slavery into reckoning, indicates he suffered a set back of about five years in starting to raise a family, in comparison with what was on the average obtainable among Yoruba young men in their country. W. Tamba, Report of Hastings, June 25, 1828, C.M.S. C/A1/M5(1828-1831)/8; Native Assistants and Schoolmasters to Home Committee, January 31, 1846, CMS C/A1/M12(1846-1846)/398; Census of the Population of Hastings, 1831, NAL CO 267/111; Census of the Population of Hastings, 1833, NAL CO 267/251; Christopher Fyfe, A History of Sierra Leone, p.170.

exertion was the adoption of his name, especially the first and the last names.⁴⁴ Henry Johnson later married Sarah,⁴⁵ another Yoruba recaptive by whom he had seven surviving children, the first son, Henry, Jr., being born in October 1840.⁴⁶

A Turning Point

In 1815 a missionary organization with the same vision as the CMS was organized in Basel, Switzerland. Basel Mission, *Evangelische Missionnsgesellschaft in Basel*, was established as an ecumenical and non-denominational initiative to train intending German missionaries for service overseas. When the mission entered into partnership with the CMS, the Society was relieved of its burden of recruiting agents for its overseas work.

The formative character of Basel Mission was shaped by Christian G. Blumhardt, its first inspector from 1816 who opened the seminary that drew much of its support and students from South Germany and German-speaking areas of Switzerland and Austria. Blumhardt stated the organization's understanding of mission as the facilitation of "a beneficent civilization and propagation of the Gospel of peace to various areas of the pagan world', He clarified the implications of this when the mission was sending out its missionaries to Africa in 1827, as a sensitive engagement with indigenous societies with the aim to understand their peoples' languages and traditions. Along with founding churches, missionaries were to work at improving the material culture of the people among whom they served. An evident influence of CMS on Basel Mission at this beginning stage was the understanding of mission as doing reparation, wierdergutmachung, to Africa for the ills European nations meted out to its peoples in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Sharing this common vision, Basel Mission supplied CMS

⁴⁴ The adoption of English names by the recaptives did not follow any particular pattern. Some chose the name of the officers of the Liberated African Department, governors, colonial secretaries, village managers, missionaries. Others inherited these names from the masters under whom they served their apprenticeship. Some adopted the names wholesale, others the first names or the surnames only. Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, (London: OUP, 1962), 170; *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, October 1901: 807.

⁴⁵ Sarah might have been apprenticed to Mary Weeks, wife of Mr. John Weeks, the CMS schoolmaster formerly in charge of Hastings but still resident there at the time of the 1833 census. NAL CO 267/244.

⁴⁶ Baptismal Certificate, GLL 10326-282.

⁴⁷ Karl Rennstich, "The Understanding of Mission, Civilization and Colonialism in the Basel Mission," in *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era: 1880-1920*, ed. Torben Christensen and R. Hutchison (Aarhus C, Denmark: Aros, 1982), 94.

⁴⁸ Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society* (London: CMS, 1899), 99; Karl Rennstich, "The Understanding of Mission, Civilization and Colonialism in the Basel Mission," 95.

the much needed personnel for its overseas fields and made up for the lack of English volunteers in the early years of its partner organization. John Fredrick Schön was one of such early Basel trained missionaries who served with the CMS. He served as the agent in charge of Hastings for two years from 1835. But the agent who shaped the church at Hastings and exerted the strongest influence on the young people there was Johan Ulrich Graf.

John Ulrich Graf

A native of Grub, Germany, John Graf arrived in Sierra Leone in 1836 after his post-Basel orientation at the Church Missionary College, London. His first year in the colony was spent at Fourah Bay where he assisted Rev. G.A. Kissling in the various departments of the work at the parishes of St. George's, Freetown, and St. Patrick, Kissy. He also assisted him in the chaplaincy of the military Gibraltar Chapel and in the running of the Christian Institution at Fourah Bay.

Graf took over the parish of St. Thomas, Hastings, from Schön in December 1837, having just returned from England with his newly wedded wife. They arrived at a time the congregation was still in shock from the sudden death of Mrs. Schön. ⁴⁹ Her death was soon followed by that of the new minister's wife, four months later, in March 1838. ⁵⁰ Graf braced up under the experience and set out in May to erect a new building to serve the church and its school. As he carried out his ministerial duties he observed closely the issues that prevailed among the general populace and the church members in particular. He quickly identified tension between couples and general laxity of conjugal relationships. Some of these issues became apparent during interviews with intending candidates for baptism. ⁵¹ But those who were involved in illegal relationships kept away from the church, except a few of them who occasionally had reasons to approach him. The men in particular often kept a safe distance unless situations forced them to meet with him. One of such occasions arose in September 1838.

The Liberated African Department had some persons to assign as apprentices to capable hands among the settled residents of the colony. It was necessary that those who would like to take such people under their care be endorsed by a recognized authority like

⁴⁹ J. Graf, Journal Entry, December 9, 1837, CMS C/A1/O105/28a.

⁵⁰ J. Graf, Journal Entry, March 7, 1838, CMS C/A1/O105/28b.

⁵¹ J. Graf, Journal Entry, April 17, 1838, CMS C/A1/O105/29a.

a Christian minister. Many people in the village flocked to Graf's residence requesting him to endorse their applications. He wrote that,

...most of them were total strangers to me, and many of those I knew, I knew at the same time to be characters which I could by no means recommend. These last persons got rather angry at me; but when I gave them the advice to send forthwith those females away which they kept unlawfully in their houses and that I would be more disposed to recommend them next time, they declared boldly that they would not do such a thing. This is one of the most prevailing sins at Hastings: headmen, constables, & c are guilty of it and then set a choking example to the whole population. It is a sad fact that dozens of persons of this stamp have come under my notice during less than a fortnight.⁵²

Ten years later the colony-wide culture of cohabitation without marriage and extra-marital relationships received a shock in Hastings at the death of one of the men who indulged in the practice. The wealthy man lived with a woman who was not his wife. On his deathbed he rationalized that the woman he was staying with was not his lawful wife and therefore was not entitled to his property. Shortly before his death, the man shrewdly distributed what he had to those he thought had the rights to inherit his wealth, leaving the woman an old, leaky hut for a house. The womenfolk in the village were alarmed at the fate that befell one of them and which could be theirs too. One after the other they decided to settle the issue; many approached the church to have their bans published, and some became active in the church. The men in turn were frightened by the proceedings among the women and quickly entered into agreement with their extra women to stem the unfavourable tide. Their measure proved successful and quickly restored the status quo.⁵³

The culture of impunity was another problem that was rife among the recaptives. Graf particularly identified this deficiency among the people of Hastings. They often exhibited the "irresistible inclination to cheat, defraud, impose upon the ignorant, to break word and written agreement, hardly believing there might be some harm in it." ⁵⁴ But he perceived this problem, like those that were associated with family life, as features of heathenism and argued that,

⁵² J. Graf, Journal Entry, September 21, 1838, CMS C/A1/O105/30.

⁵³ J. Graf, Journal Entry, June 17, 1848, CMS C/A1/O105/52a.

⁵⁴ J. Graf, Journal Entry, April 17, 1838, CMS C/A1/O105/29a.

Integrity is a plant not growing on the heathenish ground, and even when a heathen apparently fulfils his promise or forbears defrauding, it is only because there is some greater advantage to be gained thereby or because he is afraid to be served the same way. I have often been deeply affected during this quarter, having witnessed, more than ever before, the frightful degree to which this is practiced in this place.⁵⁵

The culture of fraud may explain why the Elegbara cult was one of the prominent Yoruba religions that thrived in Hastings. From the description of Fagboo to Mr. Weeks in 1831, "all those who worship and trust in [this divinity], believe he will make them wise to do evil, and at the same time prevent any one detecting them in their wicked practices." The popularity of such a cult among the recaptives may indicate the bent of character that had resulted from the social violence of their uprooted-ness.

Religious Encounter in a Colonial Environment

Hastings, as indeed the entire colony of Sierra Leone, from the 1820s presented a matrix of religious interaction between mission Christianity and Yoruba religions. The dominant presence of "Aku" people in the colony from those years onward and their successful re-creation of their traditional religious cults in exile could not be assailed by the 1831 edict of the governor. And although the cults were functioning in a colonial environment in which mission Christianity held the legitimacy, some of the people who professed the faith of the church did not totally abandon their old faiths. The reason is clear. Life in the colony was precarious and beset by diseases and debilities. Life expectancy was low as there was always one form of threat or another to life. ⁵⁷ The problem of social violence among the various peoples and nationalities, indigenous and settlers, was particularly not uncommon. ⁵⁸ This precarious existence naturally provided

⁵⁵ J. Graf, Journal Entry, April 17, 1838, CMS C/A1/O105/29a.

⁵⁶ J. Weeks, Report for the Quarter Ending September 25, 1831, CMS C/A1/O219/44.

⁵⁷ The case of a woman going from Wellington to Waterloo who collapsed and died at the outskirt of Hastings may be revealing in this respect. When the coroner failed to appear after 42 hours she was buried on the order of a jury that conducted an inquest without the coroner. Such anonymous persons like her, without vital connections in the colony, were vulnerable to its harsh physical environment as well as its moral, economic and social violence. J. Graf, Journal Entry, May 23, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/48a.

As an example, Hastings was in a state of excitement in January 1851 when the Aku boys decided to submit no longer to "the oppressive and unprincipled conduct of the Government Overseer". They opposed him and his supporters--the disbanded soldiers and the other nine ethnic groups represented in the village--and war was only averted when the factions were broken up and the overseer dismissed following the governor's intervention. J. Graf, Journal Entries, January 13-22, 1851, CMS C/A1/O105/57b.

the legitimacy for protection, the very function of Yoruba divinities. In Sierra Leone, the ministers of the CMS did not understand how deeply this need for protection was ingrained in their converts. And all through his time in Hastings Mr. Graf had only tirades against the practice of charms, fighting them on all fronts.

The votaries of indigenous religions were not indifferent to the war being waged against them by the missionary. While they lacked political legitimacy and were ideologically disadvantaged in a foreign land, they subverted the church with their own explanation of events or created prejudice against the church's institutions. The rite of baptism was one of such institutions, the service of which, at Hastings, often drew large attendance from the public such that they tended to be rowdy and many often returned home because the church could not contain them.⁵⁹ A successful subversion of such a significant and popular institution would certainly ensure that the votaries of traditional religions remained in business. Hence, just as the Capuchin missionaries in seventeenth century Kongo were assailed for their success in mass baptism by their unconverted traditionalist critics, adherents of Yoruba religions devised the rumour that baptized children died sooner than those that were not baptized. 60 They were careful not to allege that baptism in itself killed children as both Christian and non-Christian parents in the colony struggled against the problem of infant mortality. It would be difficult to substantiate such assertion. But linking it, nevertheless, with the problem as a cause for accelerating infant mortality would be enough to roundly discredit it. Thus they would ensure their own survival. It appears they had a measure of success in this. 61 When in 1839 one of the candidates on the roll for baptism suffered insanity they attributed his sickness to his following the "white man's fashion". His recovery, following some medication given him by Graf, was what the missionary needed to silence his detractors.⁶²

By the mid 1840s, votaries of traditional religions in Hastings have been very much subdued. With a law against the practice of sacrifice, though apparently unenforced, and pressures from sustained and active missionary presence from the days of Mr. Schön, they had to content themselves with quiet verbal warfare and limit their

⁵⁹ J. Schön, Journal Entry, November 7, 1836, CMS C/A1/O195/49a; J. Graf, Journal Entry, February 27, 1842, CMS C/A1/O105/36b.

⁶⁰ Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 54; J. Graf, Journal Entry, January 16, 1839, CMS C/A1/O105/32a.

⁶¹ J. Graf, Journal Entry, January 16, 1839, CMS C/A1/O/105/32a.

⁶² J. Graf, Journal Entry, July 28, 1839, CMS C/A1/O105/34.

activities to households and nearby forests as their hideouts.⁶³ William Marsh, another agent of the mission captured the mood of the village, which made it exceptional among all the villages in the colony,

Comparatively speaking, order and decency are growing gradually; heathens who are fond of making noise publickly...are ashamed of themselves and their practices. Fortune tellers...are ashamed of carrying on their ...practices openly and publickly. Among those who are living as if there were no God, no heaven, no hell, no soul to save, and are as it were dead, some are now stirred up to a concern of their immortal souls. The station is so particularly favoured, as there is a disunion between those who have come forward at the invitation of the Gospel, and those who continued in the general and old way....⁶⁴

The "general and old way" continued, but in this westernizing, colonial environment where church and school held the secrets to the emerging future, its travellers were being overwhelmed and could only function as underdogs. On the other hand their loss was the gain of St. Thomas Parish, which grew in number as the grip of traditional religions on the people weakened. But not all the people who acceded to the church could fully appropriate the church's means of grace. Compromises and illicit relationships that undermined family life and Graf's critical attitude towards the behaviour were major deterrents. The situation was an early indication of the tension that would inevitably develop between the church and its converts coming from the African traditional milieu. On the day one of such persons who had compromised his family life but had for years participated in the Sunday school, the Bible class, and regular church attendance approached Graf, the missionary wrote,

It has often been a matter of astonishment to me why so many intelligent persons (especially men) were so punctual in coming to Church and so intensely attentive when there, without yet expressing any wish to join the Church. The fact is that most of them are living, well known to me, in some notorious sin, whilst others manage to escape the public eye, until at last their sinful ways come to light. Under these circumstances, they know very well that they could not be admitted as candidates or members of the Church. But what astonishes me is that they have not been preached out of

⁶³ Joseph Bartholomew, a Nupe recaptive and CMS schoolmaster at Hastings (1847-1850) chanced upon Sango worshippers in one of their hideouts in the village. They promised to attend church if he attended their Friday weekly gatherings at their hideout. J. Bartholomew, Journal Entry, January 8, 1847, CMS C/A1/M13(1846-1848)/292, 293.

⁶⁴ W. Marsh, Journal for the Quarter Ending September 25, 1844, CMS C/A1/M11(1843-1845)/550.

Church, as I often address to them (especially) the most searching appeals. In private life they appear rather shy, fearing lest they should hear the Baptist's "it is not lawful for thee"! but treat me invariably with respect. 65

What Graf made of these "bruised reeds" and "smoking flaxes" is not clear, but the parallel functioning of the Yoruba religious cults in Hastings and their fearful prognostications remained a present temptation to the converts. Although Graf stampeded them out of public glare, their votaries could live with their fate by subsisting on the peripheries of Hastings' public life.

The Shape of Things to Come

In January 1839 the minister of St. Thomas Parish introduced an innovation into his management of the church at Hastings. The population was increasing, and it was clear that two Europeans could not effectively manage the situation. To make "the labours of Europeans more extended and at the same time more energetic in this populous place", he appointed from among his most consistent church members thirteen men and four women as district visitors. The innovation was the shape of things to come. He assigned them to separate districts of the parish "for the purpose of inducing their respective inhabitants, by frequent visits and by such means as they may find best suited to their country-men, to avail themselves of the public means of grace."

Beyond the vastness of the population, which justified his innovation, it would seem Graf intuitively felt his limitations as a European seeking to communicate a new faith and value orientation to his African parishioners. Although he never showed any flagging disposition in his vehemence against the traditional religions and was not disposed to compromise with them, he knew there was still a safe and tolerable threshold he could not cross in spite of his goodwill. But those he had won over, who were familiar with the cognitive world of their compatriots, could cross it and resonate with the aspirations of their unconverted kinsmen and women. At this threshold his trusted converts must now be allowed, as the critical mass, to identify and employ "such means ...best suited to their country-men."

By this innovation, Graf unleashed the potentials of the congregation by employing his members to fill the need. It would seem he had unwittingly struck a chord

⁶⁵ J. Graf, Journal Entry, October 15, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/50a.

⁶⁶ J. Graf, Journal Extract for the Quarter Ending March 25, 1839, CMS C/A1/O105/32a.

⁶⁷ J. Graf, Journal Extract for the Quarter Ending March 25, 1839, CMS C/A1/O105/32a.

that would make his missionary efforts to reverberate when some of his parishioners would begin the exodus that would take mission back to their Yoruba homeland. While the innovation was an unobtrusive penetration of the village with Christianity, Graf's strategy at conserving the gains of mission in Hastings was a heavy blow on the people.

The Church Relief Company

At the end of the first quarter of 1840 Graf was away to England for nineteen months. He was deeply affected by the welcome he received from the people, church members and non-members, when he returned with his newly married wife in October 1841. He observed that "even those...otherwise indifferent in matters of religion" appeared to be willing to see him again at his post. Some of the people took good advantage of his absence to enrol for membership in the church and some were baptized who, otherwise, would have remained longer on instruction. There was also a "steady increase in the number of religious inquirers" while some "indifferent characters" were now connected with the church. And what else could give the missionary more sense of accomplishment than to see young people of both sexes, the future of the church, coming forward to enlist as participants in the life of the church as Sunday scholars, with many of them reading the Bible fluently?

If his absence paved the way for the unthreatened entry of intimidated enquirers and hesitant prospects of the church, it also softened the environment for the church members to warm up to their non-Christian compatriots. The latter development gave Graf anxiety as he lamented "the formation of a set of clubs (called here companies) and a degree of adherence to them on the part of our people, which did not exist to such an extent before." He observed that:

These companies ...not only bring our people into close contact with the very worst character and consequently into very great temptations, but also form bodies of the worst of men, whose proceedings tend to set church discipline at defiance and undermine the very spirit of godliness.⁷¹

⁶⁸ J. Graf, Journal Entry, December 23, 1841, CMS C/A1/O105/36a.

⁶⁹ J. Graf, Journal of the Quarter Ending March 25, 1842, CMS C/A1/O105/36b.

⁷⁰ J. Graf, Journal of the Quarter Ending March 25, 1842, CMS C/A1/O105/36b.

⁷¹ J. Graf, Journal Extracts for the Quarter Ending March 25, 1842, CMS C/A1/O105/36b. C. A. Gollmer made the same observation in Bathurst. Journal Entry, August 19, 1843, CMS C/A1/M11(1843-1845)/85.

After ascertaining the state of public feeling with regard to them he made his move, with "firmness and suddenness", "for the speedy abolition of the dangerous connection". At a gathering of the church members called for this purpose, "I enlarged, I admonished, I expostulated, entreated and warned for hours together, taking my bold stand on the plain declarations of Scripture which they could not gainsay..." At length, with fear and trepidation, they agreed to sever their connections with the various companies to which they were in league but on Graf's promise that he would establish for them an alternative church based company to which he himself would subscribe liberally, "Hastings' Church Relief Company". Graf confronted the opposition that arose from outside the church with the threat to prosecute according to law if the church members were harassed by the protagonists of the village companies. The scheme succeeded, and Graf's fellow missionaries and church members subscribed to it.

It was not the end of vital connection of the people with their non-Christian compatriots. For Graf, the peril constituted by traditional birth attendants must be avoided if mothers would not in future be tempted to go in the way of "heathenish" traditions. At the advice of the missionary pastor, the women of the church appointed two of their members as birth attendants to serve the congregation and were paid from the church's relief fund. Graf expressed his sense of gratification when he wrote that by these decisions "one little social improvement after another is introduced which proceeding from and directed by right principles, cannot fail to minister to their moral and social well being."⁷⁴ Ten months after this decision, while Graf was away in England, Sarah Johnson had her third baby boy on June 24, 1846. ⁷⁵ She and Henry named him Samuel.

Samuel's Early Environment of Socialization

Towards the end of the 1830s, a wave of migration hit the Colony of Sierra Leone. Young people in search of better job prospects emigrated to the West Indies. Others, particularly many Egba speaking people of the colony, but chiefly in Hastings, migrated back to their homeland at Abeokuta. Graf's plan for those members of his congregation who remained behind, families like that of Henry Johnson, unfolded in the midst of a controversy his journal report generated in 1845. The controversy can be understood against the background of two dynamics that were at work in the Sierra Leone Mission of

⁷² J. Graf, Journal Extracts for the Quarter Ending June 25, 1842, CMS C/A1/O105/37b.

⁷³ J. Graf, Journal Extracts for the Quarter Ending June 25, 1842, CMS C/A1/O105/37b.

⁷⁴ J. Graf, Journal Entry, August 2, 1845, C.M.S. C/A1/O105/49.

⁷⁵ S. Johnson to Secretaries, January 16, 1885, CMS C/A2/O 1885/67.

that the mission was functioning as a viable nursery for raising young Christian converts who would spearhead the evangelization of Africa. The second was the contrary, inimical development that had been taking place among the rising generation of colony-born young people. Graf's journal reports of 1845 exposed this contradiction to the dismay of his mission secretary. The panacea of the missionary at Hastings for the issues involved may be gleaned from his intellectual resonance with Thomas Fowell Buxton on the remedy for the African condition.

In the late 1830s, while Sierra Leone was still receiving fresh arrivals of recaptives, a new generation of young people, colony born, were rising with a distinctive subculture. Some of them had been through church schools but many had not taken advantage of missionary liberality in this respect. In many villages, the schools recorded enrolments that were far below their capacity to provide learning opportunity for both the liberated and the colony-born children. In Hastings, in particular, the popular prejudice of parents, the frequent movement of schoolmasters, and the lack of decent learning environment retarded the growth of the school. Situation began to improve when the new building that served as church and school was opened on June 2, 1839.⁷⁶ After eight years of consistent presence of ministers and school teachers among them, a rare privilege in the colony, many parents in Hastings still did not see the need to send their children to school. John Müller reported that, without any intention to do so, they would promise to send their children to school when asked why they had not done so.

Some who enrolled their children at school were not mindful to ensure their consistent attendance while the children were also often held back by ill health. Graf, however, paid attention to the development of those enrolled in his school. He was particularly concerned about the influences the schoolmasters exercised on them. He once suspended and requested the removal of the unrepentant assistant schoolmaster, Charles Nelson, for his "inveterate and conceited habit of severely flogging the school children". The habit led to complaints from parents and withdrawal of some children from the school.

⁷⁶ Journal Extracts for the Quarter Ending June 25, 1839, CMS C/A1/O105/33.

⁷⁷ J. Graf, Journal Entry, August 20, 1849, CMS C/A1/O105/54a; J. Graf to J. Warburton, August 21, 1849, CMS C/A1/M14(1848-1852)/211-213.

The missionary was also interested in their developing musical ability.⁷⁸ This interest may be seen as part of his ongoing effort at improving the intellectual and spiritual life of the church as a model he would wish the people to follow. After opening for worship and school the new church building funded by the government through the CMS, he encouraged the people to contribute money for the bell.⁷⁹ While making arrangement for the purchase of the bell, he was also making arrangement for resources to develop the music at worship, and this he apparently hoped to achieve through the school. Requesting training material in this regard, he wrote,

I should feel extremely glad if I could get Mr. Hallal's [?] system of music as taught at Exeter Hall. As that, however, is pretty familiar to me, I should prefer his Choral time book of sacred music viz. as far as I can see the advertisements here, Class A. B. C. which are said to contain sacred and secular music together, should the first be printed separately, I would not care for the other. Choral times, as used all over the Continent of Europe (the French Psalmody included) have the great advantages of uniting extreme simplicity and easiness of performance, slowness and fullness of harmony, which renders them peculiarly adapted for solemn Church music, and for such poor musical scholars as our grown people here are [sic].⁸⁰

In spite of the effort of the Society to use the school system as a tool for evangelizing the young people and for developing them intellectually and spiritually, many of those who passed through the schools did not turn out right. For example, in a religious conversation with her schoolmaster a big girl in the school at Hastings said "me like to be so as me am" Many of the mature pupils like her were not often interested in religious talk, and they constituted management problem for Mr. Graf at Hastings CMS day school. In consequence of this, Graf graduated them early to avoid their exercising bad influence on the younger children. John Müller partly attributed the poor quality of the school at Hastings to this supposed dissipation of capacity,

...[W]e were obliged to supply their places with young boys and girls who were as yet unqualified to be teachers; and this had, and always has a most injurious effect, both upon them and upon the whole school. As long as

⁷⁸ W. Marsh, Journal for the Quarter Ending June 25, 1844, C.M.S. C/A1/M11(1843-1845)/480.

⁷⁹ J. Graf to Secretaries, March 25, 1843, C.M.S. C/A1/O105.

⁸⁰ J. Graf to Secretaries, March 25, 1843, C.M.S. C/A1/O105.

⁸¹ J. Müller, Report of Hastings, September 20, 1843, C.M.S. C/A1/M11(1843-1845)/107.

Mr. Graf's plan in this respect is to be carried out, so long I have no hope whatever that the Hastings school will improve. 82

Before the arrival of Graf in Hastings in 1837 the church community also ran a sewing school which Mrs Schön superintended for a year before her untimely death that year. Two years later Graf formally constituted it into the "Female Sewing Association for the Promotion of Industry among the Female Sex and for the Help of the Poor in Hastings". With specific schedule of meeting, the association was led by two women communicants who had skills in needlework. The main agenda was to train young women in the church to acquire skills in sewing and making clothes for those children in the church school whose parents were poor. Under the management of Mrs Graf, from 1841, the girls showed remarkable progress and skills such that she could boast, "some of her girls would vie in neatness with any seamstress in England in button hole making, backstitching and hemming". A Graf wished they could be so in mending as well since many of their clients were poor people. The dour missionary wrote,

I have nothing to report of their fancy work, as I consider most of it, such as stitching figures on Stretched canvass with coloured wools & silks— as mere thrash for these poor Africans, whose conceit and vanity is already but too fast overcoming the bounds of simple usefulness. 85

Eighteen months later he reported closing down the school after several fruitless remonstrance to the girls for disorderliness and disobedience. The seriousness of the matter soon dawned on them when Graf would not open the school weeks after the closure and their parents had to plead with him to reopen it. It was only after the "bigger girls" came to plead and promised to be of better manners that he opened the school again. But long before he closed the school he had succeeded in removing "fancy work" and "Showy Bazaar" from their training programme and had given priority to "plain,

⁸² Graf's difficulty with managing the matured pupils' impudence can be appreciated in their planning to beat up Charles Nelson, the teacher he reported as having "a morbid predilection for flogging the children". J. Müller, Journal for the Quarter Ending June 25, 1846, C.M.S. C/A1/M12(1845-1846)/565; J. Graf to J. Warburton, August 21, 1849, CMS C/A1/M14(1848-

<sup>1852)/211-213.

83</sup> J. Schön, Journal Entry, November 7, 1836, CMS C/A1/O/195/49a.

⁸⁴ J. Graf, Journal for the Quarter Ending June 25, 1844, CMS C/A1/O105/44.

⁸⁵ J. Graf, Journal for the Quarter Ending June 25, 1844, CMS C/A1/O105/44.

useful work, such as can make them useful seamstresses after leaving school". 86 It earned him the charge of being narrow-minded.

In his crusade to enforce the maxim, "cleanliness is next to godliness", he carried out weekly inspection of the day school. He often sent home poorly dressed pupils to change their dirty and torn dresses for better ones and to bring to the sewing school those that needed mending. In this way the school furnished the sewing school the material for learning how to mend dresses.⁸⁷

A Generational Crisis

If in their evaluation of the day school at Hastings Graf's assistants were of the view that his injudicious management of the bigger students contributed to its poor quality, the missionary too was disappointed that many of these former pupils did not make progress after leaving school.

It generally happens that the bigger children gradually leave school without giving us an opportunity of following them with a watchful eye to their future sphere. Some go to other towns among strangers, others fall into bad company at home and never seldom visit a place of worship: and thus we are mostly left with a set of new children.⁸⁸

Graf remarked that these children, with the exception of a few,

present a mass of unsanctified intellect....Some boldly abuse and despise their parents; others, too idle to work, live by hawking, thieving, imposition. Some spend their talents out of the Colony at merchants' factories in dirty concubinage or else help trading in the neighbouring rivers in the midst of various vices....⁸⁹

In the wave of migrations to the West Indies, many of these young people with poor prospects at home travelled out in search of better opportunities. But Graf remarked that the source of the crises replenished them,

...[T]heir number is increased whenever one of those little beings is born whom the liberated parents fondly call a "creole" and respect as an "Englishman". The candidates for shop-keeping go begging in numbers,

⁸⁹ J. Graf, Journal Entry, March 23, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/47.

⁸⁶ J. Graf, Journal for the Quarter Ending December 25, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/50b.

⁸⁷ J. Graf, Journal for the Quarter Ending December 25, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/50b.

⁸⁸ J. Graf, Journal Entry, March 23, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/47.

whilst the cultivation of the ground is left to the lower cast of apprentices and their own despised sires, the liberated Africans.—This is knowledge without grace; crude unrestrained intellect, that leaves the propensities of the human heart without the wholesome restraints necessary to make a man a useful member of society. ⁹⁰

Almost a year before Graf expressed his view of the colony-born young people, his assistant teacher at the school William Marsh made a similar observation which indicted parents for indulging their children. He wrote then:

They countenance anything either good or bad in them, without regard to the final ruin of the children.... Checks and reproofs by schoolmasters are considered...as envy and malice for many parents believe that their children know more or are superior to the Schoolmasters in point of knowledge. The last mentioned evil prevails among parents in this village and probably elsewhere in this Colony.⁹¹

It was Graf's remark, however, that jolted the Society in Sierra Leone, evoking a flurry of exchanges and hardening of positions between him and the secretary of the mission, Mr. Warburton. The secretary had "called into question [his submission] in a paragraph appended to his journal a few minutes after he had heard the statement." When the secretary would not comply with the advice of a special meeting that looked into the matter, Graf astutely defended his view and backed it with statistics. 93 Much more, he exposed what he construed as the reason behind the perceived embarrassment his submission caused the Sierra Leone Mission:

If it be thought that this statement reflects unfavourably on the labours of the missionaries, I need only compare the missionary to a fowler who may think himself well off by having caught some newly hatched birds whom he attends carefully: the time soon comes when they take wings and fly off: The only bearing which it can have on missionary labours generally as

⁹⁰ J. Graf, Journal Entry, March 23, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/47.

⁹¹ W. Marsh, Journal for the Quarter Ending June 25, 1844, CMS C/A1/M11(1843-1845)/481.

⁹² Graf agreed to modify his statement, as suggested by a special meeting of the Local Committee, if Mr. Warburton agreed to withdraw his counter statement. With his refusal Graf also refused to modify his statement. J. Graf, Journal for the Quarter Ending June 25, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/48a.

⁹³ Graf argued that the colony-born young men in particular did not show interest in the life of the church like their female counterparts. He laid out statistics that showed that out of the total number of 2,103 communicants from eight congregations in the colony, including Freetown, only 6 were colony born young men. Of the remaining 2.097 there were 59 colony-born women. The rest were liberated Africans. J. Graf, Journal for the Quarter Ending, June 25, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/48a.

carried on in this Colony, is perhaps the inference that hitherto too little has been done for Freetown with a view to collect the Colony born population.⁹⁴

On the other hand Graf saw his submission as a challenge to address the problem at hand and realize the popular expectations at home concerning the future of Christian mission in Africa:

If it be considered that such statements, because they give an unfavourable aspect of our Colony, are injudicious, I beg to say that, palpably true & correct as they are in my opinion, they appear to be peculiarly opportune at a time when Christian public at home seem to be under the impression that the main strength of our churches and our brightest prospects for the future lie in a body of vigorous and zealous Colony born Christians, out of which we had but to choose at pleasure the most promising ones to send forth as an active, upright and intelligent "Native Agency" over the length and breadth of Africa. 95

In this regard, Graf identified three social and economic realities that was militating against the colony born youths, which the Society needed to address if its hopes for Africa would be realized. These are,

[W]ant of additional respectable employment suitable for the advanced intellect of the Colony born populat^{n.} besides mere agriculture...want of proper incentives to industry and encouragement to improved plans of agriculture...[and] want of the introduction of various arts and sciences...to serve as a rational employment for the vacant hours of the day: in one word we want civilization (as a handmaid of religion) as a barrier against temptation and vice. ⁹⁶

The contention about what was true or not and what should be said or should not be said about the colony-born young people remained within missionary circle of the CMS. Although the secretary of the Local Committee indicated his objection to Graf's remarks, no one contested the issue with him, and the missionary at Hastings continued to do his analysis of the situation on ground. At the end of the first quarter 1846, he made another trip to England, thereby giving the people some respite as his trip from 1840 to 1841 did. As it happened then, the outcome of this temporary exit indicated that the

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⁹⁴ J. Graf, Journal for the Quarter Ending, June 25, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/48a.

⁹⁵ J. Graf, Journal for the Quarter Ending, June 25, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/48a.

⁹⁶ J. Graf, Journal for the Quarter Ending, June 25, 1845, CMS C/A1/O105/48b.

colony-born young people might have been scared away from the church by his severity. For no sooner had he left than they began to accede to the church as in the past. John Müller, who came from the same pietist tradition and was relieving Graf at Hastings as a catechist wrote about these young people with satisfaction,

I am happy to say, that our colony-born young men, who have been always justly considered to belong to the most corrupt class of people at Hastings, at least, have of late made up their mind to attend Church and Sunday Schools regularly, which they formerly used to neglect and despise. I have found these young men of late very attentive both at school and at church.... So much is certain, that these colony-born young men lead a more moral life, than they used to do even a few months ago. ⁹⁷

And this was not a fluke. For after his usual lamentation about the young men, having returned to the colony in December 1847, Graf could see the difference in their rank so that he could write six months later, "about half a dozen of the worst and leading members of the number are caught in the Gospel net: their company broken up; their drums laid aside; their riotous habits forsaken...". He attributed this to "the simple Gospel searchingly & pointedly brought to their consciences in public & private, accompanied by God's Spirit & God's providence". But it was more than that; he had preached the same Gospel "searchingly and pointedly" for more than a decade in the village. It would seem some additional act on his part, which he did not connect with the change, also played a part in this transformation.

In his analysis of the crises facing the colony-born children, Graf had argued that one of the reasons for their attitude was the "want of the introduction of various arts and sciences...to serve as a rational employment for the vacant hours of the day". When he was returning in 1847 he brought back to Hastings some literature to start a lending library which would afford young people the opportunity to loan a book at a penny for two weeks. Twenty of them subscribed to the initiative, but their enthusiasm soon waned and only a few kept up their subscription. The reason, according to Graf, was that although the books were written in simple English and for leisure reading, they were "written for the capacity of European children". 99 And so it was not a very successful venture.

⁹⁷ J. Müller, Journal for the Quarter Ending June 25, 1846, CMS C/A1/M12(1845-1846)/565.

⁹⁸ J. Graf, Journal Entry, June 6, 1848, CMS C/A1/O105/52a.

⁹⁹ J. Graf, Journal for the Quarter Ending March 25, 1848, CMS C/A1/O105/51.

But it would seem this initiative spoke volumes to the young people about their minister, more than his many sermons over the years, and sustained the trend of their accession to the church in his absence. Although Graf failed to recognise this fact as responsible for the change he perceived in their attitude towards the church, there is no doubt that the initiative bridged the critical disconnect between him and these young people and warmed their heart towards the church. It is amazing that the intrepid missionary did not connect this simple initiative with the spiritual transformation that began in his absence among the colony-born young people.

Critical and, perhaps, harsh as Graf was in his evaluation of the young people, it may be observed that the earnestness he exercised in Hastings, which began to bear this fruit of redeemed colony-born youths from 1848, was not found in other villages of the colony. His sharp criticism of the fledgling Creoledom was only disputed by his mission secretary, but it was not taken as the early warning signal against the crises ahead.

The irony of the saga of the rising generation of colony-born youths of the midnineteenth century Sierra Leone is that only three years before Graf's unsettling criticism, a British Parliamentary Committee on the colony praised the educational achievements of missionary societies there. What was not recognized then was that the education being offered by the missionary societies, for its lack of "local content," carried with it temptations whose consequences began to unfold in the second half of the century. It inadvertently created a social and cultural dysfunction in which its beneficiaries, particularly the colony-born children, could neither grapple with their African roots nor fully resonate with the values inherent in that education.

Graf himself, for all his critical reading of the situation, did not appreciate the need to imbue his school's programme with Africans' wholesome values that would make them educated, and not necessarily westernized, Africans. His unsuccessful experiment at providing intellectual occupation for the youths through his lending library was an indication that there was a chasm between their innate personalities as Africans, even if they themselves did not realize it, and the cosmopolitan culture being fostered around them in the colony. His realizing that his imported literature could not sustain their interest because they were designed for the capacity of European children was a deflected indication of this predicament. But Graf was too western-science oriented to appreciate

¹⁰⁰ Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, vol.1, 336.

the values inherent in Africans' seemingly less sophisticated and traditional-religionpervaded culture in which these young people basically lived, moved and had their being.

The consequence was that a crisis of identity, created by this omission, dogged generations of the children of the recaptives whose parents did not return to the traditional societies from where they were violently torn by wars and slavery. By the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, especially as the tide of western imperialism reached its high watermarks and the benevolent ethos of mission gave way to paternalism, the prospects of the "Black Europeans" in Sierra Leone diminished. Perennially at war with the indigenous peoples in the hinterland and loathed by the new colonists for their pretensions to equality with the white man, the Creole community fell into bad times from which its members never gained the leadership they thought was theirs by privilege of western education and citizenship in a British colony. 101 Truly, like the Athenians, as Gordon Hewitt observed, they toyed with the novelties that came their way—education, print media, fashion and social luxuries; 102 but they did not stamp them with Africanness. They despised manual labour but prized white collar jobs which were not sufficiently available and for which many of them had no qualifications. In the end unfavourable colonial policies destroyed their modest achievements as merchants and retailers. Feelings of betrayal and frustrations led to bitter but unsuccessful ideological struggles with the colonial government. 103

Meanwhile, in this inimical social environment of mid-nineteenth century Colony of Sierra Leone, where the fledgling Creole culture was beset by moral contradictions, cultural misunderstanding, and spiritual apathy, "Erugunjimi" Henry Johnson raised his seven children—five boys and two girls. His deep involvement with the church as Hastings under the management of the austere missionary Ulrich Graf shows the quality of his conversion to Christianity. Perhaps, this may account for his success in bringing up his children with Christian values, three of whom later took up the Christian ministry as life vocation. Without discountenancing the place of heredity, the secret of his success can be gleaned from a short window opened by his son Samuel in his autobiography when he was requesting for ordination in 1885. He wrote then that,

¹⁰¹ Leo Spitzer, *The Creoles of Sierra Leone— Responses to Colonialism*, 1870-1945 (Ile-Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press, 1975).

¹⁰² Gordon Hewitt, *The Problem of Success: A History of the Church Missionary Society 1910-1942*, vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1971), 8.

¹⁰³ Leo Spitzer, *The Creoles of Sierra Leone*.

As to my religious impression, being born of Christian parents, and brought up strictly religious, I can say I have my religious impressions from infancy. I was early taught to read and write, and as we [the children] are to reproduce sermons every Lord's day for our parents (for which I used to collect slips of paper to write in aid of my memory) by one way or the other I receive[d] my religious impression. 104

The dissolution of the Yoruba country, beginning from the second decade of the nineteenth century brought many of its people to the Colony of Sierra Leone. There, many of them sought to continue their religious traditions by recreating the local divinities of their home country, a practice disapproved by the government of the colony. On the other hand, the colony-born young people took pride in belonging to a new cultural value system being espoused by the cosmopolitan environment of the colony. In Hastings, both groups respectively came under the strong criticism of Mr. Graf. Samuel Johnson was born in the midst of this contradiction. However, under the religious influence of his parents who had embraced Christianity, he was guided against the moral and cultural predicaments of his fellow colony-born youths. Such a man who could give effective religious guidance to his family in the ambivalent environment of Sierra Leone was the person Mr. David Hinderer was looking for when he visited Hastings in December 1857 to recruit additional hands for the young mission at Ibadan. Erugunjimi's consequent relocation to the Yoruba country with his family marked the end of the first phase of the emergence and the religio-cultural formation of his son, Samuel.

¹⁰⁴ S. Johnson to Secretaries, January 16, 1885, CMS C/A2/O 1885/67.

Chapter 3

Cultural Reorientation and Theological Formation, 1858-1865

From the closing years of the 1840s, following the change in the policies of the British government towards the settling of recaptives in Sierra Leone, the influx of liberated slaves into the colony reduced. The weakening of the resolve of the government may be attributed to the unrelenting political assaults of the West India interest in British politics. The scheme of emigration to the Sugar-producing colonies, which was being promoted in Sierra Leone, was not yielding the desired voluntary workforce still required on the plantations. But the opponents of the anti-slave trade blockade of West African coasts adduced as their arguments against it, "its expensiveness, its uselessness, and the increased horrors of the middle passage consequent on the employment of force for its suppression". As a result of the cumulative effect of the unstable policies of the government, the confidence of the recaptives in their benefactors was badly shaken. The disastrous economic downturn that attended the near withdrawal of the Mixed Commission from Freetown in the late 1820s was still fresh in their memory. The governor's notice and proclamation of July 1844, with their note of finality, were all the people needed to draw the conclusion that the British government was no longer interested in their welfare. They were, thereafter, on edge as to what would follow.

However, with the declining accretion of the existing population, the colony lost the excitement that often attended new arrivals. Population stability and the consequent inertia, especially outside Freetown, followed the apparent withdrawal of the liberality of English people towards the colony. The religious scene was not unaffected. Graf wrote from Hastings,

From this circumstance we must expect the number of our Communicants & Candidates increasingly less rapidly than hitherto [sic].—On the other hand the old inhabitants who hitherto have joined no Church appear chiefly composed either of "Stale Idley" or determined old sinners long

¹ H. Townsend to Captain Trotter, January 31, 1849, CMS C/A2/O85/1.

² Sierra Leone, Government Notice, July 12, 1844, CMS C/A/M11(1843-1845)/388, 389.

³ The rumour was afloat in Hastings in October 1849 that the British government had handed over the colony to the French or the Spaniards, claiming that "all Europeans connected with England (missionaries included) had received orders to leave the place". It rumour created a stir in Hastings and was only discredited by Mr. Graf who had been away to Freetown when the false information got to the village. J. Graf, Journal Entry, October 6, 1849, CMS C/A1/O105/55a.

since hardened. Ours is becoming more the state of Christian lands: Conversions will be fewer, & those that take place will have a greater struggle.⁴

In the emerging dispensation of the 1850s, the CMS Sierra Leone Mission gradually mutated into a settled church structure with Bishop Vidal's creation of the two archdeaconries of Sierra Leone and Abeokuta. Meanwhile, Sierra Leone had emerged in the 1843 homeward migration of Egba converts as the seedbed of indigenous mission agents for the CMS in West Africa. Drawing from this reality, David Hinderer visited the colony on his way back from England in November1857 to recruit more hands for the missionary occupation of the Yoruba hinterland. He arrived in Freetown not knowing what to make of the colony, but he was certainly disappointed with Christianity at the seat of government. "Freetown Christianity is certainly not what it ought to be," he wrote. "I am afraid not what it is generally believed to be", he continued. But he had been told that "things are much better in the villages."

No sooner had Hinderer arrived than he was deluged with applications for employment as teachers for the Yoruba country, most of which came from Hastings.⁷ This development indicates that in the dwindling fortunes of the colony many of the remnants of the people from the Yoruba country were desirous of returning home if their prospects there could be guaranteed. It could only have been so considering that many of these people had been away for several years and many of their towns had been destroyed. For the non-Egba recaptives, in particular, the wars were still raging fiercely in the interior of the country, life remained precarious as ever, and the passing of years could only deepen their sense of despair with regard to reuniting with their families. In spite of their availability, Hinderer was ready to recruit only two persons according to the instructions of the Parent Committee. He however tried to "induce" the several willing hands to return to their country on their own, promising to help them get land to grow cotton. It did not take Hinderer much time to know that Sierra Leone was not the place to recruit such people, as he confessed: "I fear I shall not succeed in getting a man for that here".8 The patience to cultivate cotton was not one of the attributes to come by in the nineteenth century Colony of Sierra Leone.

⁴ J. Graf, Journal Entry, October 15, 1849, CMS C/A1/O105/55b.

⁵ The Lord Bishop to J. Graf, September 30, 1853, CMS C/A1/O105.

⁶ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, November 19, 1857, CMS C/A2/O49/30.

⁷ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, November 19, 1857, CMS C/A2/O49/30.

⁸ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, November 19, 1857, CMS C/A2/O49/30.

It is noteworthy that Hinderer addressed his search particularly to Hastings among the several villages of the colony. On the one hand, this may indicate that the missionary activities of the Society in the village had emerged, perhaps, as the most successful and a veritable nursery for indigenous missionary agency in the colony. Henry Johnson, Jr., Samuel's brother who was also born and bred in Hastings and later became a missionary of the CMS, attested to this as the outcome of Graf's missionary exertion in the village. On the other hand, Hinderer's singular concentration on Hastings may indicate an earlier briefing by his senior Basel trained colleague, Ulrich Graf, with whom he travelled back to West Africa from England in 1852. They had time together again when Graf visited the Ibadan Mission in the company of Bishop Vidal in November 1854. In giving his report of the trip to the Yoruba country, Graf drew from his experience of the use of Christian visitors in Hastings and reinforced his idea of training pious church people as Scripture readers for missionary purposes. He argued,

The whole system of Schools and Superior Educational establishments is of very trifling importance in the Yoruba Mission for the present. The simple agency of Scripture readers, only versed but well versed in the Bible plan of Salvation, with its collateral truth, is abundantly sufficient for the conversion of the nation....These three agencies [Scripture readers/Christian visitors, the Bible, and open air preaching] abundantly supplied and judiciously worked by the missionaries are equal, under God, to work a total transformation of the Yoruba nation at no very distant period. 12

Hinderer's apparently easy choice of Henry Johnson, Graf's trusted church member and now leader of the congregation at Hastings, betrays earlier briefing and connection with Graf in making his choices at Hastings. Whatever else informed them, he succeeded in recruiting for his work in the Yoruba country Henry Johnson and William Allen, a younger colony-born Yoruba schoolmaster in the village.¹³

Hinderer and his wife arrived in Lagos early January 1858 with the two families he had recruited for mission in the hinterland. The missionary couple set out for Ibadan on January 6 with the two couples and their six children, including Samuel Johnson. They all arrived at Ibadan to a rousing welcome. Hinderer purposed to station his two agents in

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⁹ H. Johnson, Jr., to E. Hutchinson, January 1877, CMS C/A2/O55.

¹⁰ "Exhortation of the Committee of the CMS to Rev. J. U. Graf...Rev. D. Hinderer..." CMS C/A1/L5(1854-1859)/2.

¹¹ J. Graf, Report of Visit to Yoruba Mission in 1854, CMS C/A1/O105/63.

¹² J. Graf, Report of Visit to Yoruba Mission in 1854, CMS C/A1/O105/63.

¹³ D. Hinderer to H. Straith, April 23, 1861, CMS C/A2/O49/50.

towns or villages in the interior, but he decided to give them some training before assigning them out to preach among the people.¹⁴ It meant that they and their families would settle outside Ibadan. While the training was going on, their children also became part of the Hinderers' household, receiving education under Mrs Hinderer. Here Samuel Johnson, now almost twelve, met new friends and began to develop acquaintanceships that would be part of his life vocation—Daniel Olubi, James Okuseinde, and Francis Akiele. Hinderer's plan to settle the new agents outside Ibadan did not materialise.

Within five months of returning to Ibadan, Mrs Hinderer's health broke down, giving Mr. Hinderer the concern that it might be necessary for her to return home while he continued his missionary work. 15 While this concern was being addressed and the entire household was anxious about what could result from it, James Berber, Hinderer's highly valued catechist, died suddenly in the streets of Ibadan on June 21.16 Soon after, the uncooperative Sierra Leone returnee Scripture reader Puddicombe was transferred out. Hinderer recommended him to be posted to Ikorodu, as his wife was also unwilling to live in the interior. 17 Besides, Puddicombe himself considered Mr. Hinderer too austere for his liking. The missionary had in 1854 firmly declined his proposal to "redeem" a slave girl recently kidnapped and brought to Ibadan by the warriors. Mr Hinderer refused the proposal on the grounds that "it was not only against English law but would also injure our character as missionaries & make us to appear as encouraging war and manstealing [sic]." His assistant then called him a "hard taskmaster" for refusing him the opportunity to secure a helper for his wife. 18 His eventual exit from the Ibadan Mission in 1858 was the culmination of many of such disagreements. With an infirm wife at hand and the exit of two helpers in quick succession, Hinderer had to retain the duo of Henry Johnson and William Allen in Ibadan. Happily he found comfort in the new spirit of cordiality they brought into the mission as he wrote with delight,

For the two men...I am very thankful...they go on very nicely together with my young school master [Daniel Olubi], & we enjoy peace in the station, they work with me, & have no separate interest from that of the

¹⁴ D. Hinderer to Secretaries, February 25, 1858, CMS C/A2/O49/32.

¹⁵ D. Hinderer to Secretaries, May 31, 1858, CMS C/A2/O49/33.

¹⁶ D. Hinderer to Secretaries, June 29, 1858, CMS C/A2/O49/35.

¹⁷ D. Hinderer to Secretaries, September 24, 1858, CMS C/A2/O49/36.

¹⁸ Mr. Puddicombe alleged on the occasion that Mr. Hinderer was not "allowing him what others in the mission were allowed to do. The question, who was allowed to do so? was never answered & I thought best to drop the matter as the means to get the little storm pass quickly." D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, July 24, 1854, CMS C/A2/O49/109.

mission. Johnson is excellent in character, Allen more clever, but not so industrious, he is colony born. ¹⁹

Early Years in Ibadan, 1858—1862

What contrast could have been evident to a preadolescent boy like Samuel Johnson as he moved with his parents from Hastings to Ibadan? Perhaps there was not much difference in the rustic physical environment of both places. But he would have noticed the contrast in the demographic situations, the colony being populated by persons from the various ethnic groups of Western Africa whereas Ibadan was ethnically homogenous. Consequently, in the new environment, he must gradually trade off for the Yoruba language and culture the accretions of the fledgling Sierra Leone creoledom that accompanied him to Ibadan. *The History of the Yorubas*, which he produced almost forty years later, shows how successfully he did this over the years.

It may be observed in this respect that Samuel's eldest brother, Henry Johnson, Jr., who was seventeen when their parents left Sierra Leone for Ibadan, remained behind in the service of the CMS. Although he visited the Yoruba Mission in 1871, his later residence in Lagos and Lokoja was only as a result of his transfer to Lagos and subsequent appointment as an archdeacon of the Upper Niger. He returned to Sierra Leone, following the controversies that wrecked the CMS Niger Mission in 1890 and his consequent disengagement from the Society. He remained there till his death in October 1901. ²¹

Samuel's immediate elder brother, Nathaniel, who also came with their parents to Ibadan in 1858 returned to Sierra Leone from the Grammar School in Lagos to take a wife in July 1872, after nearly fifteen years of absence from there.²² His younger brothers, Obadiah and Adolphus, also at various times returned to Sierra Leone.²³ Obviously

¹⁹ D. Hinderer to Secretaries, September 24, 1858, CMS C/A2/O49/36.

²⁰ H. Johnson to H. Venn, May 1871, CMS C/A1/O122/12; H. Johnson to E. Hutchison, January 1877, CMS C/A2/O55/3.

²¹ The Church Missionary Intelligencer, October 1901, 807.

²² He married "Miss Eliza Z. Philippi, the protégé of Mr. and Mrs Lamb." H. Johnson to H. Venn, September 23, 1872, CMS C/A1/O122/17b.

²³ Adolphus returned with Henry, Jr., to Sierra Leone after his visit to the Yoruba Mission in 1871 while Obadiah, according to Michel Doortmont, enrolled at the Fourah Bay Institution in 1876. H. Johnson to H. Venn, May 1871, CMS C/A1/O122/12; Michel Doortmont, "Recapturing the Past—Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History" (PhD diss., Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 1994), 29.

Samuel's siblings were not completely detached from Sierra Leone, thus making him unique in remaining in Yorubaland for the rest of his life.

It is not clear how sensitive Samuel was to his new environment at Ibadan. But it is well known that mid-nineteenth century Ibadan was a violent society. His first observation of this came in the death, in September 1858, of the Bale, the head-chief of Ibadan. He had been sick for two months, during which he suffered twice a paralytic stroke. But when he died, it was rumoured among the people that he was poisoned by the "Mahomedans", and the tension that arose nearly led to a civil war in the town. The rumour actually asserted that the Moslems were planning to kill the first three chiefs so that the fourth, being a Moslem, would become the head-chief.²⁴ The matter was eventually resolved peacefully, but it indicated early to young Samuel the suspicion that existed between the adherents of the two most popular religious traditions in midnineteenth century Ibadan—Islam and the Yoruba religions. Moreover, it showed the unstable nature of the new society in which he would be functioning. But it would take only a few weeks after this incident for the synthesis that exists between the two religions to become manifest in connection with the town's principal divinity, Oke'badan, literally, "Ibadan hill".²⁵

The Ijaye War

Johnson's final but long "initiation" into the mission community in the Yoruba country occurred at the outbreak of the Ijaye war, in its consequences for the station, and in its aftermath for the whole country. At the outbreak of hostilities in January 1860, the missionary party in Ibadan had the apprehension that the consequences of the war for the country and their own welfare could be grave. With Ibadan young warriors' determination to effect a final solution to Kurunmi's long-standing intransigence, and the old warlord of Ijaye equally bent on war, the country was at a point of no return. All the rhetoric of no-more-war among Yoruba that was fanned barely five years earlier dissolved into thin air. Kidnapping on the roads that led to both towns began in earnest, making exit dangerous. The Egba joined the fray ostensibly to defend Ijaye but actually to make some gains from the quarrel between the two towns. In Ilorin also made pretensions

²⁴ D. Hinderer to Secretaries, September 24, 1858, CMS C/A2/O49/36.

²⁵ Ibadan town is founded among several hills.

²⁶ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 19, 1860, CMS C/A2/O49/40.

²⁷ Biobaku explained the war from the viewpoint of one of the American missionaries stationed at Ijaye before it broke out. According to him, Ogunmola's plan was to neutralise the other powers

to be on the side of the *Are*, the generalissimo of Ibadan army.²⁸ The missionaries at Ibadan were shut in as the road to Abeokuta was closed to traffic and the safety of the one that led through Remo to Lagos could not be ascertained. Hinderer wrote,

Things look altogether dark & angry in the Yoruba country, & it may be we are on the eve of another general Yoruba war, but our trust is in the Lord of hosts....We do not think that any of us will be in personal danger from these wars, but it is distressing to contemplate the sin & sorrow[,] the misery and degradation it may plunge those again, who only now tried to emerge from it, yet even if the worst come, I have no doubt it will at last work for the good of Christ's cause, I have often thought & said the Yorubas will yet want afflictions, before they can receive the humble gospel now offered to them.²⁹

After the initial fireworks from behind Ijaye walls and Ibadan responded with equal force, war proceedings stalemated. But when the Egba warriors appeared on the scene against Ibadan, it became clear that there were other interested parties in the war. People in the town were absorbed with concern about what its outcome would be, fearing it would spread throughout the country again as in the past. Except the converts that had accrued to the mission already, nine of whom were baptized on August 26, 1860, the people were generally not interested in heavenly matters; the earth had enough on hand.³⁰

Worse still, mutual recriminations between the two mission stations, Abeokuta and Ibadan, brought about a breach in communication between them and generated spirited defence of the roles of each town by its resident European missionary, Townsend at Abeokuta and Hinderer at Ibadan. Biobaku summarises the dynamics at play: "Events in Yorubaland had placed missionaries under the protection of chiefs who were at strife with one another and they tended to support their particular protectors". ³¹ Having been so

in the land, beginning with Ijaye. Thereafter he would, in alliance with Dahomey, go after Abeokuta, and, with the deposed King Kosoko, drive the British from the coast to revive the slave trade. This explanation is too grand and conjectural. G.F. Bühler, resident at Abeokuta during the war, reported that the objective of the Egba in the Ijaye war was "to drive away Ibadans from Ibadan", their ancestral homeland. In this vein, the Alake, at a meeting with the missionaries in Abeokuta in 1861, expressed his disappointment with the British government for not helping the Egba towards this end. This reason seems plausible as the Egba predictably would want to reclaim their lost territories, and an occasion of disaffection between brothers who had usurped their inheritance would seem most auspicious. S.O. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours 1842-1872* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), 64; G.F. Bühler to H. Venn, September 6, 1861, CMS C/A2/O24/15.

²⁸ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 19, 1860, CMS C/A2/O49/40.

²⁹ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 19, 1860, CMS C/A2/O49/40.

³⁰ D. Hinderer to the Secretaries, October 18, 1860, CMS C/A2/O49/44.

³¹ S. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours 1842-1872*, 70.

sucked into the vortex through their sentiments, the missionaries inevitably influenced the positions of their converts and agents.

While the war was raging and street preaching became inauspicious, Hinderer's health began to fail, thus confining him indoors. He therefore employed his energy in translating into the Yoruba language Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, employing the services of Mr. Henry Johnson.³² The returnee agent had also on arrival from Sierra Leone in 1858 thought of finding for his grown up boys, Nathaniel and Samuel, suitable trades to learn. But he was discouraged from doing so by Mr. Hinderer who proposed that they be sent to the Training Institution at Abeokuta. Nathaniel resumed there in August 1858, but Samuel who could have followed in 1860 had to wait until the war abated.³³ Waiting at home while the war lasted meant sharing in the deprivations that the missionary household suffered during the war. In the long run, however, it turned out to be a blessing when, in the closing decades of the century, Samuel Johnson considered it worthwhile to write *The History of the Yorubas*. For from this time he began to witness live aspects of the war-filled account of contemporary Yoruba history.

The prediction of famine for Ibadan by the "anti-Yoruba" pessimists in Hinderer's mission never came to reality in the Ijaye war years as the farms to the north and to the east of the town were still being cultivated. Ibadan's food production continued unimpeded in spite of the war, but the cowries to purchase them grew scarcer with time. As Hinderer's food store grew empty and the prospects of getting cowries grew dimmer, hunger became a present danger. The missionaries at Abeokuta wanted the Europeans in Ibadan, Mr. and Mrs Hinderer and Mr. Jefferies, to relocate to Abeokuta with the permission of the Alake, but the Egba king refused. Hinderer wrote, "I am thankful he has refused, for that would have been just the ruin of the Ibadan mission & of all the smaller beginnings in the interior." It meant that he must continue to bear the burden of providing for the seventy persons under his charge, including the agents of the mission and the children under their care. 35

³² D. Hinderer to the Secretaries, October 18, 1860, CMS C/A2/O49/44.

³³ N. Johnson to Secretaries, May 10, 1875, CMS C/A2/O57; S. Johnson to Secretaries, January 16, 1885, CMS C/A2/O 1885/67.

³⁴ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, April 23, 1861, CMS C/A2/O49/52.

³⁵ It was made up of eight native agents and their families, four in Ibadan and another four in the interior (Oyo, Oshogbo, Ife and Modakeke). Others were the children in the boarder and those in the Hinderers' household, and Mr. Jefferies, a European assistant stationed at Ogunpa.

Hinderer felt compelled to approach the war chiefs in the camp.³⁶ But for a few individual gifts from some of them, the long wait for their response yielded nothing, the chiefs claiming that "their war expenses are great & they do not know how long it will last".³⁷ But while the wait for cowry assistance from the chiefs lasted, and it was becoming clear that the war too was going to "last, unless God signally interposes", Hinderer risked a journey to Lagos, through an enemy territory, Ijebuland, in search for assistance.³⁸ The journey, undertaken in the company of two of his school boys, was one risk too many.³⁹ Ibadan's enemies at Ijebu Ode, the king in particular, hearing of his venturesome thoroughfare sent his messengers to waylay him on his return. He was providentially spared, but he lost much of what he got.⁴⁰

In 1860, at the outbreak of the war, Hinderer unsuccessfully applied to the Finance Committee at Abeokuta for increment in the salaries of three of his native agents in Ibadan—Johnson, Allen and Olubi. The two Sierra Leone recruited agents, Allen and Johnson, had followed him to the Yoruba country with the expectation that their salary of 6 dollars per month would be increased "in a few years if they [approved] themselves". Having been satisfied with their performance, and observing that they earned the same amount as their colleagues in the interior whose performance did not measure up to theirs, Hinderer repeated his request in 1861, but to no avail. During his dangerous trip to Lagos for cowries to purchase food in Ibadan, he petitioned the Parent Committee to intervene in the matter. He argued that "they have a just claim for more" and lamented that "it has often gone against my conscience lately when giving out their monthly wages." And what is more "lately they have not been able to purchase cowries". The material wellbeing of

³⁶ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, January 4, 1861, CMS C/A2/O49/47.

³⁷ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, August 2, 1861, CMS C/A2/O49/55.

³⁸ The Ijebu people at home and their government were at variance with Ibadan at this time while some of them who were resident in Ibadan as traders, even when they did not embrace Christianity, were on friendly terms with their mission neighbours at Kudeti.

³⁹ The Ijebu Remo were friendly to Ibadan and saw no reason for their involvement in the war between Ibadan and Egba, especially as they had borne the brunt of Egbas' retaliations against Ijebu for their involvement in the destruction of their ancestral homes in the wars of the 1820s. But Ijebu Ode chiefs and their king were allied to the Egba cause in the Ijaye war. The Remo alleged that the chiefs had been bribed by the Egba to join the war against Ibadan; their role was to blockade them from having intercourse with the coast. With the cooperation of the Remo, however, Hinderer passed and returned safe to Ibadan.

⁴⁰ Hinderer was cautious not carry on himself the material supports he got from the Society in Lagos. Nevertheless, the first consignments of provisions he sent through the caravan going from Lagos to Ibadan were lost when the Ijebu attacked the caravan, killed members of the convoy, and looted their goods. They had expected Hinderer to be in the train. The money he had given to the Ijebu trader to change for cowries deliverable to him in Ibadan also did not get him. D. Hinderer to H. Venn, August 2, 1861, CMS C/A2/O49/55.

Henry Johnson's large family was particularly under threat as Hinderer indicated that if the situation continued they "will have hardly enough for food & respectable clothing". 41

The Parent Committee sanctioned the request, but the local politics of the war in the Finance Committee generated another controversy. The Finance Committee's accountant stood against it. Then, apparently to neutralize Hinderer's success with the Parent Committee, the Finance Committee decided to give a general raise to all the agents in the interior. The decision was not agreeable to Hinderer and could only have further estranged the two missions.⁴²

Ijaye eventually fell to Ibadan's onslaught in March 1862, and it was believed in Ibadan that matters had been finally concluded with the war. But the aftermath was still to bring the mission to its extremity. The capture of the agents at Ijaye and Awaye by Ibadan warriors and the need to redeem them further put pressure on their indigent condition. Mr. Roper, a new European missionary who graciously volunteered to stand in for Adolphus Mann at Ijaye, was captured by Ogunmola the Otun who insisted on keeping his captive until he received a prohibitive price in exchange. At length, through the intervention of the Alafin, Roper was freed. But the two cases of James Roberts and his son in Ijaye and Mr. Williams, the Scripture reader at Awaye, and his wife and two children brought much trouble. For weeks, the agents of Ibadan Mission went searching for them with the aim to prevent their being sold as slaves. When they were found, the mission pleaded with their relatives to effect their redemption, and they did, leaving the mission to redeem only Mr. Williams' eleven year old daughter. 43 That still proved most difficult for them to do. Her captor was only pacified when he was given a down payment of cowries squeezed from the Johnson family. The principal was to be paid when the situation of the mission improved, but the respite proved to be a short one.

After the fall of Ijaye, the Egba and their Ijebu allies renewed battle at Remo in their belligerence against Ibadan. Then the captor of Mr. William's daughter suddenly burst on the mission asking for full ransom for his captive "as he must go to the Jebu war, & must therefore have some more of the cowries, or the girl herself to sell her somewhere else". About the time, a convert who had learned of the difficulties of the mission sent them one bag of cowries (20,000) specifically to buy meat for their home consumption. Under pressure from the warrior, they had to let go the money to retain the girl. For once

⁴¹ D. Hinderer to H. Straith, April 23,1861, CMS C/A2/O49/50.

⁴² D. Hinderer to H. Straith, December 30,1861, CMS C/A2/O49/57.

⁴³ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 10, 1863, CMS C/A2/O49/61; G. Buhler to H. Venn, January 5, 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/20.

Hinderer lamented the callousness of the country, "how hard & bitter that was to swallow! To pull out as it were the very food from our mouths to redeem a Sierra Leone born child! Oh cursed country!"⁴⁴

When it became clear that the war between Ibadan and the peoples of Ijebu and Egba had moved into a new phase with an unforeseeable end, the CMS Mission in Lagos, at the initiative of Mr Lamb, organized a relief and reconciliation party to Ibadan and Abeokuta. The relief materials of "cowries and substantial provisions" for the Ibadan Mission reached Abeokuta, but the missionaries and their agents stopped their onward transmission. They claimed that "no carriers could be got for any load". The development did not go down well with Hinderer who considered the conduct at Abeokuta as malicious. 45 In another effort to relieve the mission, the team of Mr. Lamb and Captain J.P.L. Davies were joined by Mr. G. F. Buhler of the Training Institution, Abeokuta. They headed for Ibadan, arriving there in the third week of December 1862. They left Ibadan on December 31, recording success neither in reconciling the Egba and Ibadan nor relieving Ibadan Mission. 46 But it was the opportunity the teenage Samuel Johnson had been waiting for to make the trip to Abeokuta for his training. Mr. Bühler's presence in that team brought his long wait and first seasoning in the Yoruba country to an end. He and Andrew Laniyonu Hethersett, another pupil in the mission household, returned with him to Abeokuta, arriving there on January 2, 1863.⁴⁷ In the years to come, he would look back at those early days of acculturation and subtle clannish partisanship under Hinderer's roof as "[m]y youthful days...that I have nothing to boast about" when "youthful depravity" was only restrained by "home influence." 48

Theological Formation

Abeokuta, for its proximity to the coast and its military dominance over the minor groups immediately around, was a better situated country than Ibadan. It meant that it could not be completely shut in and its people deprived like Ibadan. But the people lived

⁴⁴ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 10, 1863, CMS C/A2/O49/61.

⁴⁵ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 10, 1863, CMS C/A2/O49/61.

⁴⁶ Captain Davies, a member of the party, came with several Creole boys and their servants, all of them about 40. Hinderer reported that "they all carried something but what is not for me to tell, but all they brought to us was "Eau de Cologne, a few bottles of sweet meats prunes [sic] & a box of figs, a doz. of wine & some shoes…foolish luxuries we never had in the best of times". D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 10, 1863, CMS C/A2/O49/6.

⁴⁷ G. Buhler to H. Venn, January 5, 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/20; S. Johnson to Secretaries, January 16, 1885, CMS C/A2/O 1885/67.

⁴⁸ S. Johnson to Secretaries, January 16, 1885, CMS C/A2/O 1885/67.

in fear of Dahomey, which created occasional distress for the town. The issue in Johnson's years at Abeokuta was, however, not the military upheaval of the age. It was his spiritual and intellectual formation for life's vocation under the continuous influence of German pietism. Hitherto, that tradition had been mediated to him under the influences of the missionary exertions of Ulrich Graf and David Hinderer at Hastings and Ibadan respectively. Now under the influence of the training programme crafted by Göttlieb Friedrich Bühler at the Training Institution, Johnson would learn to make meaning out of the chaos from which he had emerged and in which he was functioning as a colony born Yoruba returnee from Sierra Leone.

Göttlieb Friedrich Bühler

Born in 1829 into a large Christian family at Adelberg in Württenberg, Germany, Bühler trained first as a schoolmaster and had brief stints as a teacher in various institutions in his homeland before enrolling in the Missionary College at Basel. His decision to turn to mission might have been influenced by his elder brother who had trained at the college and was presently serving in India. ⁴⁹ The college was undergoing a period of ideological change when Bühler enrolled there in the 1850s. From the inception of the college in 1816, Christian Blumhardt's liberal ethos that affirmed cultural sensitivity towards indigenous peoples in the missionary encounter held the sway. Blumhardt's philosophy of mission was a product of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century German thought on language and nationality, especially as posited by Johann Gottfried Herder and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Since, according to them, whatever is conceived in one language cannot be exactly duplicated in another, national identity is rooted in people's language, thought and culture. They should, therefore, not only be preserved as their genius but should also be cultivated and nurtured for increasing self understanding and national vocation. ⁵⁰

As the nineteenth century wore on, and as Germany joined other European powers in exploring lands overseas in the spirit of the age, Blumhardt's mission philosophy came under attack from the growing rank of German colonists. These adventurers, aware that

⁴⁹ G. Möricke, "Bühler's Biography", CMS C/A2/O24.

⁵⁰ Klaus Fiedler, *Christianity and African culture: Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania, 1900-1914* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 14-17. The philosophy was subsequently corrupted by using it to advance German racial superiority over other peoples, the ultimate disaster of which resulted in the political ideology of the Third Reich under the Kaiser, Adolf Hilter.

the missionaries were in the vanguard of overseas enterprises, sought to win them over. They achieved their quest for a new direction in mission philosophy when Blumhardt was succeeded in 1850 by Joseph Josenhans who led the Missionary College till 1879.⁵¹ Under the new leadership the underlying philosophy of missionary formation at Basel changed from facilitating beneficent civilization to propagating German-Swabian civilization. Economic aid and transfer of German material culture through trade became an integral part of mission. Moreover, Western civilization, particularly as represented by the German culture, was seen not only as a tool for communicating mission; to do mission was to civilize.⁵²

The new mission direction at Basel could not have become fully operational in the years of Bühler's enrollment. And whatever accretion he brought to Islington of Basel's new way of seeing indigenous cultures in relation to those of Europeans could only have shrivelled under Henry Venn's pro-Blumhardt mission philosophy that affirmed indigenous cultures. Yet, as his training programme at Abeokuta would unfold from 1858, Bühler had taken the best of both Blumhardt and Josenhans and would use them eclectically to shape the minds of his students.

Bühler arrived in Lagos at the end of 1855 and was stationed at Abeokuta till August 1856 when, in the company of Mr. Hoch, he went to Ibadan to relieve Mr Hinderer. He was moved to Lagos the following year after his stint at Ibadan. In 1858, he finally returned to Abeokuta to take charge of the Training Institution from Mr. Maser. The society had been struggling to establish it since 1853 but had had to contend with the twin forces of Townsend's prejudice against liberal education for Africans and the untimely death of European agents sent out to establish it. Although he reluctantly accepted the assignment, the need to train personnel for the mission was glaring. According to him, Imyself saw how necessary it was to instruct the young men who were waiting almost 2 years for regular instruction. We want more agents; there is no

⁵¹ K. Rennstich, "The Understanding of Mission, Civilization and Colonialism in the Basel Mission", in *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era*, eds. T. Christensen and W.R. Hutchison (Aarhus C, Denmark: Forlaget Aros, 1982), 96.

⁵² K. Rennstich.

⁵³ G. Bühler, Journal Entry, July 6, 1856, CMS C/A2/O24/37.

⁵⁴ G. Bühler, Journal Entry, May 7, 1857, CMS C/A2/O24/37.

⁵⁵ G. Bühler to H. Venn, May 1, 1858, CMS C/A2/O24/7.

⁵⁶ J.F.A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891— The Making of a New Elite* (Essex: Longman, 1965), 150-151.

want of young men, they only want to be instructed". ⁵⁷ At Ake, Abeokuta, where he was stationed, he ran the institution and also assisted in the church work.

Bühler's training programme evolved and expanded with years and his thought shows that he appreciated the need to situate the minds of his students in both the immediate and the wider contexts of their vocation. Recognizing the immediate context of culture and ministry, and the fact that some of the students did not understand English, he began teaching scripture history in the Yoruba language to the enrolled 13 pupils in April 1858.⁵⁸ To this end, among his early requests for teaching materials was *Pinnock's Analysis of Scripture History* in both the Old and the New Testaments. Six months into his new assignment he reported with satisfaction that, "In my teaching I laid particular stress upon Scripture History to give them a good & practical knowledge of it & they, to my great delight showed a great increasing interest".⁵⁹ His emphasis on the scripture is a recognition of the pivotal nature of the Bible to their calling as ministers. But in teaching the subject in Yoruba, Bühler was meeting the need to situate learning also in the context of the pupils' culture. His regret was that much of the Bible had not yet been translated into the Yoruba language.

When in 1861 the supervision of the day schools in Abeokuta was added to his responsibility, Bühler was disappointed with several aspects of the method of instructing the children. He particularly considered it "a great disadvantage" in the mission that there was "too much teaching in the [English] language which retards the progress considerably it being for most of the children an unknown tongue". Moreover, he reported,

Reading & numbering in engl. confuses them & they [the monitors] read them what they do not understand. The consequence is that they also read Yoruba without thinking. But the worst is that it takes them an enormous time four, five & even 6 years [sic] before they can read their own tongue fluently. I have now commenced at working out a plan for our schools in which I intend to lay down as a rule not to teach engl. until they can read their own language....Scripture history should always be given in their own Mother Tongue, otherwise I am afraid the result will never be so satisfactory as might be expected. 60

In the meantime Bühler had been adding other branches of knowledge to his training programme at the institution. Within the first six months he arrived he added

⁵⁸ G. Bühler to H. Venn, September 30, 1858, CMS C/A2/O24/8.

⁵⁷ G. Bühler to H. Venn, May 1, 1858, CMS C/A2/O24/7.

⁵⁹ G. Bühler, Report of Training Institution, September 30, 1858, CMS C/A2/O24/42.

⁶⁰ G. Bühler, Half Yearly Report of Training Institution, January-July 1861, CMS C/A2/O24/44.

"Catechising, Reading (English and Yoruba) & Writing, Geography, especially biblical Geography, history, & the Art of teaching...". In another six month he had expanded the programme,

In general history we had the history of Rome to Constantin.., for Geography, Europe, in Bibl. Geography Paul's Missionary journeys. In Natur. Philosophy— the rudiments; In Natur. History— the animal kingdom. In Arithmetic, fractions & applications thereof. In reading translating of verses, portions or whole chapters from engl. into Yoruba & from Yoruba into engl. was frequently practiced... [sic]. 62

Two years later, he could still report that he had added the histories of Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, the Jews and Alexander the Great to his general history, and his geography lesson now incorporated Africa. He had also introduced new subjects in the sciences— elementary astronomy, electricity, "mammalia"— and in the arts— singing, calligraphy & orthography and "a small beginning ...in playing the harmonium". He even ordered for a machine to demonstrate the principle of electricity to his pupils, who came from "this country where the god of thunder & lightening is worshipped". ⁶³ If Bühler's teaching of scripture history in the mother tongue could be said to be consistent with Blumhardt and the CMS's missionary ethos, his continuous introduction of liberal arts and aspects of the growing physical sciences of European civilization would qualify as the expression of the civilizing mission of Josenhans. In this interaction, the latter could not but restrain the romantic tendencies of the former while the former served as the control valve for the ideological pressure the latter might seek to exert.

But the introduction of the liberal arts, in particular, has a deeper significance. Bühler's 1859 introduction of these subjects into the training programme of the institution was an implicit recognition of the wider context that shaped the faith now being bequeathed to the pupils. But more than this, and in the face of the growing expansion of Europe through the activities of the missionaries themselves and the colonists already at work on the coast, Bühler needed to help his pupils to appreciate the antecedents to the world presently encroaching on their primal society. As agents of change in the making, this was a necessary preparation for their service with the Society. For in another two years the process of colonization would burst on them in the 1861 annexation of Lagos to

⁶¹ G. Bühler, Report of Training Institution, September 30, 1858, CMS C/A2/O24/42.

⁶² G. Bühler, Report of Training Institution, April 1859, CMS C/A2/O24/43.

⁶³ G. Bühler, Report of Training Institution for Half Year Ending December 31, 1861, CMS C/A2/O24/45.

the expanding British possessions in West Africa, with all its complexities and unsettling challenges. Perhaps more than the teacher himself realized, these future agents of the Society needed this enlargement of perspective to be able to function in the emerging cultural environment where they would carry out Christian ministry. In this light, the whole process of what Bühler was doing could only have been providential, for it was going to be a short window that would soon close in his premature exit from the scene; yet, not until Samuel Johnson arrived in January 1863 to drink from his fountain.

Bühler's training programme did not proceed without the disapproval of its content by Mr. Townsend, the head of the mission at Abeokuta. The Englishman from Exeter, as some other English missionaries of the CMS later demonstrated, 64 did not value much book learning for African converts and agents of mission. In Sierra Leone, he had seen the supposed baneful effects of book learning among the colony born young people and had, apparently, concluded that anything that exposed Africans to European values, made them proud. 65 Bühler himself was not unaware of the peril that accompanied his teaching as he acknowledged that "[t]here is much temptation for them [i.e. his pupils] to pride, on account of their acquiring more knowledge than many of their companions, & the other temptation is to leave missionary work & to engage in trade which seems to offer much more profits" 66 Three years later, in 1861, experience at home continued to impress upon him the pitfalls inherent in his training programme and the "much evil" that is inadvertently introduced with civilisation:

Privileges which others do not enjoy, superior knowledge, the prospect of becoming the teachers and leaders of the people, to be looked upon as wiser, more pious, in more favourable circumstances...is quite sufficient to upset a Christian young man at home, why not much more here where they have fewer equals and where by far the majority are inferior, at least in knowledge. When I therefore rejoice I rejoice with trembling.⁶⁷

In this awareness of the potential dangers in his training programme he was one with Townsend. But the dangers were not valid enough to keep the pupils ignorant of

⁶⁴ The Training Institution was later removed from Abeokuta to Lagos and later to Oyo in 1896. At Oyo, under Melville Jones, the institution's training programme became activitistic. The students spent more time in evangelistic tours than in acquiring spiritual and intellectual formation for ministry.

⁶⁵ Townsend did not believe that even his "best behaved youth" would not be lost to him if he sent him to London to learn printing. H. Townsend to H. Venn, February 28, 1960, CMS C/A2/O85/75.

⁶⁶ G. Bühler, Report on Training Institution, September 30, 1858, CMS C/A2/O24/42.

⁶⁷ G. Bühler, Report of Training Institution for Half Year Ending December 31, 1861, CMS C/A2/O24/45.

knowledge that could prove beneficial to their service. The prospects were more encouraging than gloomy. 68 And what is more, there are means of grace available to the conscientious to withstand the temptations; he wrote:

On the whole I am thankful to say that there is unmistakable evidence of progress in their studies as well as in their moral tone.... In the majority an important work of the Holy Spirit is going on whilst some of them, I may confidently say, are pious young men who live in prayer & carry on a good warfare. This is a great encouragement for me as well as for the future prospect of our Mission.⁶⁹

In addition to this movement of the Spirit among his pupils, Bühler himself sought to exert his influence on them through his "friendly, fatherly appeal to their conscience". Townsend's problem with the training was not just the danger of giving the pupils too much knowledge. Ulrich Graf, with whom he worked briefly in Hastings, visited the Yoruba mission in 1854. It was at a time the Society was in need of expertise to translate the Bible into Yoruba. The process became mired in controversy as the missionaries could not agree on the convention to guide the process. Graf observed Townsend's skill in the Yoruba language and said of him,

Mr. Townsend is decidedly...the best speaker of the native language, he possessing a native instinctive tact in finding out the genius of the language; but being unaccustomed to scientific researches he is incapable to point out the Rules and Principles.... [He] knows not "why" or "wherefore". 71

Graf's observation, by extension, placed the finger on the source of Bühler's problem. He was carrying out his training program under the shadow of a man who had no aptitude for theorization. Apparently considering that his colleague was indulging in superfluities because he had not enough to engage him, Townsend organized his posting and that of his institution from Ake to Igbein Station in February 1863. Igbein was a problematic congregation where, Townsend must have thought, Bühler would not be no wanting of quarrels to settle and be better occupied.⁷²

⁶⁸ G. Bühler, Report of Training Institution for Half Year Ending December 31, 1861, CMS

⁶⁹ G. Bühler, Half Yearly Report of Training Institution, January-July 1861, CMS C/A2/O24/44.

⁷⁰ G. Bühler, Report of Training Institution for Half Year Ending December 31, 1861, CMS C/A2/O24/45.

⁷¹ J. Graf, "Report of Visit to the Yoruba Mission", C/A1/O105/63.

⁷² G. Bühler to H. Venn, December 2, 1862, CMS C/A2/O24/19; Annual Report, Igbein Station, December 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/47.

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, ⁷³ 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, ⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵

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.⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷

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⁷³ 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.

⁷⁴ 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.

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

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

⁷⁷ 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. 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. ⁷⁹

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

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

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

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. To his ministry encounter with Ibadan social environment we may now turn.

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⁸⁰ "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. 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". In the pioneering days of mission in the town, the people performed these ceremonies for nine days if the deceased was a man and

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

² 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. Oyebode, 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.³

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. 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

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

⁴ 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.⁵

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. 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.⁷

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

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

⁷ 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. 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. 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. Johnson found the experience interesting and soon indicated his willingness to be part of the itinerating team. 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

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

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

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

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

Aremo 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. 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 $B\tilde{a}le$. Johnson was aware of this history and saw them as "a very superstitious, wild, and obdurate set of people." 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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¹² 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.

¹³ 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.¹⁴

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, Atere. Atere 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 Atere's replies to be more reasonable and seized the opportunity to accompany him home and further impressed the message on him.

¹⁴ 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 gbo*. (I hear)¹⁵

It would appear that the discussion with Atere 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. Atere 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, Atere 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 was being 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". Atere 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. ¹⁶

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

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

¹⁶ 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 coveteous [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.¹⁷

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. 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

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

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

Christian scriptures, but from one of their local sayings: *Ori iba mọ 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". 19

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, "*Ẽsu yio ję*, *ẽsu yio mu*, *ẽsu 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

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

inimical to it". ²⁰ 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". ²¹ 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.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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. *Õto ni*, *õto ni*, (tis true, tis true) they said, and one of them promised to come to listen at our services.²²

²² 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 Qsin, 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.²³

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. ²⁴

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".

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

²³ 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.²⁵ 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". 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.²⁷

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. 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 Bãle. 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

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

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

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

²⁸ 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.²⁹

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. 30

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,

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

³⁰ 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.³¹

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

³¹ 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.³² 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".³³ 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. "It was a support of the soul from eternal death."

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

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

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

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

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. ³⁵

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

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

the town.³⁶ Moreover, he readily organized the agents and the converts to honour them with visits, particularly as significant occasions required.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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. 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

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

³⁷ 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.

³⁸ 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.

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

⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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 Laniyonu 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 Laniyonu from the mission as being a result of his violation of the "seventh commandment". Laniyonu 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." ⁴² 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

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

⁴² 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. ⁴³

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. ⁴⁴ 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. ⁴⁵ 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. ⁴⁶

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. ⁴⁷ 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

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

D. Olubi to J. Maser, March 11, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/11.
 D. Olubi, Journal Entry, April 2, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/28.

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

⁴⁷ 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. 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.

To their missionary teacher at Abeokuta, both Johnson and Laniyonu showed good prospects for service with the Society at the end of their training.⁵⁰ At the institution, Johnson had Laniyonu as his prayer partner even though he did not unburden his inner struggles to him.⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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

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

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⁴⁹ 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.

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

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

⁵² 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.⁵³ He subsequently left Ibadan to search for life's prospects in Lagos.⁵⁴ 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 Bãle (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].⁵⁵

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

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

⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶

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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

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

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

⁵⁷ 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.

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

⁵⁹ 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. 60 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. 61 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. 62 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. 63

In consequence of his neglect, but particularly for his business interest and slave-holding, 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. ⁶⁴

⁶⁰ 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.

⁶¹ 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.

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

⁶³ 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.

⁶⁴ 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, ⁶⁵ 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, ⁶⁶ 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 Qjõ, 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 1877.⁶⁷ 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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⁶⁵ 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.

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

⁶⁷ 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 divers 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, Ogbomoso and Ilesha. Consequently, in May, the Finance Committee recommended Samuel Johnson for ordination as a deacon. 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.²

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.³ 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.⁴ 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

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

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

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

⁴ 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.⁵ Second, Governor Alfred Moloney also needed his services to renew negotiation with the chiefs in the interior on how to end the wars.⁶

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].⁷

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,

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

⁶ 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.

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

Hinderer commented that he "has the best abilities of all while also in spirituality he is not behind." He then confessed that "On him in fact I had placed some future hope for Ibadan, but to my regret he was after his ordination appointed for Oyo".⁸ At any rate, the Finance committee abided by their decision to station Johnson at Oyo, and he left Lagos in January 1887 to resume his pastoral work there.⁹

Still, Johnson's posting to the royal city was not without its political interpretation among the Ijebu. He had become intricately involved in the negotiation for peace among the various sub-ethnic groups, with their diverse and irreconcilable clannish interests, such that it was impossible for his motive not to be misinterpreted by one party or another. The gradual relaxation of passage through the countries of the Egba and Ijebu as a result of the treaty signed at Kiriji and Modakeke in 1886 made the roads through these places available to Johnson on his many shuttles between the interior and Lagos. However, in May 1887, he received an unexpected message at his new base, Oyo, from the friendly Balogun Nofowokan. He had been declared an outlaw in Ijebu land and could be killed by anyone.

Three allegations were made against him, all having to do with his posting to Oyo. First, he was accused of no longer being on the side of peace but war. Second, he was accused of building a house for the Alafin whom, his detractors argued, everyone knew was not for peace but for the continuation of the war. And third, he was alleged to be supplying the Alafin weapons of precision and ammunitions to pass on to the Ilorin army so that they could destroy Ibadan. The development was a dangerous outcome of Johnson's own achievement in the peace effort. Its boomerang in death threat shows the dangerous politics that gave the Yoruba wars their dynamics. In reality, Johnson's posting

⁸ D. Hinderer to R. Lang, November 22, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/173.

⁹ Johnson was refused passage through Ijebuland by the Awujale who sent him back to Lagos with his messengers to request the governor to intervene in the outrages being committed by the son of the late Awujale from his base at Epe against his government at Ijebu Ode. The young man, Ogunlake, was protesting against the reigning king by claiming the right to the throne at Ijebu Ode. He kidnapped and executed the Awujale's toll keepers at the Ijebu ports of trade at Ejirin, Agbowa, Ikosi, Mojoda and Ito Ikin. The Awujale had earlier in November 1886 officially protested these atrocities to the governor through Johnson, but he seemed not to have acted on the matter. The Awujale now thought the only way to get his attention was to refuse Johnson, well known to him, a passage. His method worked and the governor proceeded to Epe where he resolved the matter and Johnson proceeded to Oyo through Ibadan. S. Johnson, Message from Awujale to the Governor, November 3, 1886, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/11; J. Hamilton to R. Lang, January 6, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/20; J. Hamilton to R. Lang, January 13, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/26; J. Hamilton to R. Lang, February 3, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/36; S. Johnson to J. Hamilton, January 23, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1887)/37.

¹⁰ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas—From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: CMS, 1921), 568.

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, ¹¹ 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. 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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¹¹ Successive Alafins at the new Oyo town, beginning with Atiba who reinstituted 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.

¹² 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. 13

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

 $^{^{13}}$ 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. 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.¹⁵

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." ¹⁶

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¹⁴ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, p. 569.

¹⁵ Johnson.

¹⁶ 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". 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. 18 Johnson commented on these atrocities that.

¹⁷ Johnson, 570.

¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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. 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.

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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¹⁹ Johnson, 570-571.

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

²¹ 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.²² 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". 23 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.²⁴

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

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

²⁴ 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 1856.²⁵ 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...²⁶

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

D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, May 28, 1856, CMS C/A2/O49/114.
 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.

²⁸ 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. ²⁹

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. 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. 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..." 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:

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

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

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

³² 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.³³

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.³⁴ 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.³⁵

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. 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. 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.

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

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

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

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

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

³⁸ 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."³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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 February1887 with his family, accompanied by his church members at Aremo. He had married on January 19, 1875, Lydia Okuseinde, the

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

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

daughter of the catechist at Ogunpa Station. 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, ⁴² 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; ⁴³ an inquirer had lapsed into polygamy and traditional religions; ⁴⁴ others were, in his words, simply "delinquent". ⁴⁵ 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". ⁴⁶ 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. ⁴⁷

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

⁴² 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.

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

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

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

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

⁴⁷ 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". As 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. 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.

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". ⁵¹

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

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

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

⁵¹ 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. Most of them were children of Christian parents. Recruiting the children of nonconverts 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." 53

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.⁵⁴

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."55

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

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.

⁵² 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.

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

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

⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶

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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ "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

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

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

⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

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". 60

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

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

⁶⁰ 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?"⁶¹

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. ⁶²

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". 63

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

⁶² S. Johnson, "The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner", March 15, 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1892)/155.

⁶¹ S. Johnson, "The Yoruba and Niger Church Missionary Gleaner", March 15, 1892, CMS G3/A2/O(1892)/155.

⁶³ 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...". ⁶⁴ 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". 65

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 August1892. 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]. 66

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

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

⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷

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". ⁶⁸

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

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

⁶⁸ 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. ⁶⁹ 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 Isevin 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. 70 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.⁷¹ 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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⁶⁹ 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.

⁷⁰ 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.

⁷¹ 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. 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".

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

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

⁷³ 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."

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.⁷⁵

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 breech [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. ⁷⁶

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:

⁷⁵ S. Johnson, "Oyo" in *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/91.

⁷⁴ S. Johnson, "Oyo" in *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/91.

⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷

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.⁷⁸

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. 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. 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.

⁷⁷ S. Johnson, "Oyo" in *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/91.

⁷⁸ S. Johnson, "Oyo" in *The Yoruba Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/91.

⁷⁹ 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*, 2nd rev. ed. (Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 1994), 149.

Baur, 145.

81 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. 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.

Shanahan in the first two decades of the 20th 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.

⁸² 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. ¹

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.² 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".³ 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.

¹ 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.

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

³ 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 Alaafin and officials had indeed deteriorated". 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. 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

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

⁵ 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.⁶

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. 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.

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

⁷ 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. 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.9 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. And he soon returned to Oyo much improved. 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

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

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

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

¹¹ "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. ¹² The committee granted the request and expressed their pleasure at the development. ¹³ The marriage took place in Lagos on June 20, 1895. ¹⁴

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". 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

¹² 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.

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

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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. 16

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. 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."

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". 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. 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. ²¹ 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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¹⁶ S. Farrow to F. Baylis, April 5, 1894, CMS G3/A2/O(1894)/84.

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

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

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

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

²¹ 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.²²

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.²³ 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.²⁴

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

²³ 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.

²⁴ 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

However, with the shortage of personnel to meet Jones' request for a tutor to assist him at the Training Institution, the Finance Committee advised Johnson to cooperate with the principal as he would arrange. He ville Jones did not use Johnson for teaching. He only needed his church to join hands with the institution in church planting. Johnson readily moved his church elders to do that and a church was started at Awe. He also once assisted in obtaining confessions from two students from Ibadan who were later disciplined for moral indiscretion. Although the Training institution was "directly evangelical" and "avoided working for Government Exams" as the new missionaries desired, the institution was neither "industrial" nor "economical". It was far removed from the training emphases and methods that informed Johnson's training under Bühler—emphasis on mother-tongue, appreciation for indigenous culture and history, and the enlightenment of science.

But Johnson could not have been very useful to Jones in teaching. Missionaries generally had no faith in the abilities of their indigenous agents to handle such a sensitive responsibility as ministerial formation. Those who arrived on the field in the closing decade of the nineteenth century did not fare better. Yet, Melville Jones, being unable to teach in the vernacular, carried on his training programme in English until a critique of the foreign-ness of church form and worship was offered at the CMS conference that held in Lagos in February 1897. Instead of employing local hands that were competent in the knowledge of the language and culture of the country, he only lamented:

I am exceedingly sorry that at present I am unable to take my classes in Yoruba. I quite feel the force of the arguments urged & hope as time goes on we may do less English teaching. This makes it all the more important to get a capable native tutor.²⁹

A more than "capable native tutor" was actually living in the same premises with him, but he would not show up uninvited. The times and the spirit of mission had changed, and

out, however, proved useful when the colonial government in Lagos decided to intervene in 1886. Johnson certainly found a soul mate in the elderly missionary, the last of the mid-nineteenth century European missionary patriarchs in the Yoruba mission field.

²⁷ T. Harding to F. Baylis, October 26, 1896, CMS G3/A2/O(1896)/179.

²⁵ Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, July 27, 1896, CMS G3/A2/O(1896)/151.

²⁶ M. Jones, "The T.Y.E. in Oyo", CMS G3/A2/O(1897)/75.

²⁸ Incidentally, it was Samuel's brother, Nathaniel, who offered the critique. T. Harding to F. Baylis, February 23, 1897, CMS G3/A2/O(1897)/29.

²⁹ This was in reaction to the conference that held in February 1897. M. Jones, Report for the Year 1896, CMS G3/A2/O(1897)/34.

Jones might have been oblivious of Johnson's capability. It was a missed opportunity for the institution and its students.

Still, as a missionary who belonged to the new age, Jones was one of those European agents who saw no value in higher education for indigenous converts. The Pauline text to the Corinthians, "...I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart... (1Cor. 1:18-25, RSV)" appealed to his anti-intellectual orientation, and he made this much known about himself at the February 1897 conference. Two years later, he would affirm the same position by expressing the doubt "whether higher education could be made an evangelistic agency in this country as it was in India, because the heathen did not value it". If the heathen did not value "higher education" and he could not teach them in a language that would engage the realities of their culture, Jones' training programme at Oyo raises the question, what education was he giving his students and for what purpose? He may not be wrong to have observed that his students did not appreciate too much book learning even if he too was being true to the anti-intellectual missionary spirit of his age; but he could, at the least, have found a way around the challenge to instruct them in the language of their genius.

The Pastor's Full Conversion

Johnson's explanation to the Finance Committee on the host in his house is interesting, for it shows how much he had settled into life at Oyo. It is puzzling that in spite of his social status and hard economic circumstances there he could surround himself with such number of people, comprising his personal employees and members of his extended family who could not but draw from him some expenses. In fact, his sense of filial obligation to Ashabi may indicate the extent to which he had recovered his Yoruba identity and had integrated himself to his roots. He had met his father's relations at Ibadan while he was there as a schoolmaster and catechist. And he had taken a brief time to visit his paternal grandmother's grave at Ilorin while visiting the place with Charles Philip during their search for peace in 1886.³² But at Oyo he brought some of these blood relations closer to himself. In doing so with his meagre resources, Johnson was adopting

³⁰ T. Harding to F. Baylis, February 23, 1897, CMS G3/A2/O(1897)/29.

Report of CMS Conference of Clergy held in Ibadan from January 23-26, 1899, CMS G3/A2/O(1899)/75.

³² S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: CSS Bookshop, 1921), 519.

the Yoruba family value which places high premium on kinship rather than convenience. How he reconciled this with his Saro identity is another issue.

In a way, his marriage to Martha in 1895 was a partial closing of the distance he had maintained towards his Saro elite communities in Lagos and Sierra Leone. At a cursory glance, this second marriage appears counter-current to the trend Johnson's life had followed through the years he had spent in the country. Culturally, he had traded off his Saro identity for Yoruba one; and geographically, he had moved further into the interior where, from all indications, he had glad-heartedly reconciled himself with his indigenous Yoruba roots. But this marriage brought him back to his first social constituency as a Sierra Leone returnee. The fact is that although he had kept a very low profile by fully identifying with his ancestral kinsmen and women in the interior, Johnson did not completely detach himself from his social connection with Lagos. This is evident, not so much in his visits to his brothers there, but more by his maintaining membership at Nathaniel's congregation at the Palm Church, Aroloya, Lagos. As an auxiliary member of the Lagos Native Pastorate Association, he paid his subscriptions through this church.³³

Nevertheless, understanding Johnson's social and cultural oscillations between his Saro and Yoruba identities becomes perplexing in the face of his pleading ill health when he was called to relieve Rev. James Johnson at the Breadfruit Church, Lagos, in 1899.³⁴ It is true that he had been granted time out to see a doctor in Lagos, the previous year, to take care of his deteriorating health condition suspected to be connected with his brain.³⁵ One wonders if his unwillingness is not an indication that he had become irrevocably harnessed to his indigenous Yoruba roots. His reluctance could also have resulted from the consideration that a period of service in Lagos would put more demand on his failing health. Yet, it was equally possible that a fairly long residence in Lagos would have offered him better opportunities to manage it. It is difficult to fully account for his lack of enthusiasm for Lagos in view of the fact that the Breadfruit Church was the family church of the Garbers, his in-laws.³⁶

Perhaps a plausible explanation for his disinclination may be found in his pietist religious orientation, which loathed the social permissiveness of urban life while

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³³ The Tenth Annual Report of the Lagos Native Pastorate Auxiliary Association for the Year 1884-1885, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/114/63. It is not clear whether he kept up this subscription after he moved to Oyo where the church had its own Native Pastorate Fund.

³⁴ H. Tugwell to F. Baylis, March 4, 1899, CMS G3/A2/O(1899)/60.

³⁵ Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, February 1, 1898, CMS G3/A2/O(1898)/46.

³⁶ The Tenth Annual Report of the Lagos Native Pastorate Auxiliary Association for the Year 1884-1885, CMS G3/A2/O(1886)/114/59.

adulating the simplicity of folkishness. This fully resonated with his recovery of his Yoruba identity as Bishop Oluwole testified of him, having toured the Ibolo district of the Yoruba country with him in January 1896. In closing his report on the journey, the Bishop acknowledged "the purity of his Yoruba, his thorough knowledge of the manners and customs of the people, their character, religious rites and ceremonies" all of which enhanced their communication with the people in a way the bishop from Lagos could not have done by himself.³⁷ When this adds to his choice of retreating to "a village a few hours from Oyo" to recuperate his health, contrary to his superintendent's advice to come over to Ibadan where he could be attended to by a medical doctor, it becomes clear that his confidence in Yoruba culture was complete.³⁸

Whatever might have informed Johnson's decision to remain at Oyo, he certainly found in Martha an unusual Lagos urbanite who was ready to leave behind the glitter and the glamour of the city for the rustic life of Oyo. And she was not idle there as she readily joined hands with her husband who, for once, reported on the involvement of his wife in his mission work:

We have different bands of workers who go out once a week to disseminate the Word of Life. Of the female workers a few, under the leadership of Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Moseri, besides holding open-air preaching in the town, once a week go either to Akinmorin or Ilora villages, almost an hour's distance from Oyo....³⁹

It is revealing of her character that after four years of Spartan life at the seat of Yoruba tradition Martha remained with her austere husband who refused the lifeline that a movement to Lagos, even if temporary, would have offered them. In a way, her resolve too was unique; for not all the wives of the Saro agents of the mission valued living in the rustic environment of the hinterland.⁴⁰

³⁷ I. Oluwole, A Brief Report of an Itinerancy by Bishop Oluwole and the Rev. S. Johnson ... from January 14-21, 1896, CMS G3/A2/O(1896)/74.

³⁸ T. Harding, "Half Yearly Report, 1901", CMS G3/A2/O(1901)/113.

³⁹ S. Johnson, Annual Letters of the Missionaries for the Year 1998, 264.

⁴⁰ The wife of Puddicombe, Hinderer's agent at Ibadan, declared that she would never go further into the interior should her husband be posted there. She preferred to live in Lagos, and Hinderer had to recommend them for Ikorodu in 1858. They ended up at the Breadfruit Church in the heart of Lagos. D. Hinderer to the Secretaries, September 24, 1858, CMS C/A2/O49/36.

The Sunset

As in Ibadan, Johnson's years of service at Oyo were not without their interruptions by political exigencies that arose in the country. But the defection of members of his congregation to the Roman Catholic faith and their eventual return to his fold marked the last significant event in his ministry there. His political activities would not be done with until the following year, 1895, in Captain Bower's military assault against Oyo. But his most significant undertaking would still follow all these when he completed *The History of the Yorubas* in 1897. Thereafter, as if his life's vocation was done, his health condition deteriorated rapidly.

Early in 1901 he suffered from dysentery. His condition worsened in spite of the medical help he received from his brother, Obadiah, who evacuated him to Lagos from Oyo. He died there on April 29, survived by his wife and three daughters, the eldest of whom had married an agent, T.A.J. Ogunbiyi, on December 23, 1898. He left behind a debt of £37.3.11½, being sundry contributions of the church, which he accounted for as being in his hand. He had evidently spent the money "without the consent or knowledge of his Church Come". His wife claimed not to know anything about it, but Obadiah Johnson promised to refund it. The debt was the final culmination of long years of financial struggles to carry out ministry at Oyo and to effect what he perceived as his own role in regenerating the country through the search for peace.

The last eight years of Johnson's work at Oyo, following the declaration of the country as a protectorate of the British government, were not by any means blissful as he could, perhaps, have desired. The changing environment of missionary spirit and the movement of the base of his Society into the country brought his ministry and domestic activities under a close scrutiny of the new missionaries of the last decade of the nineteenth century. With this spirit, the Training Institution at Oyo missed the advantage that could have accrued to it with the presence of Johnson at Oyo. But his severest

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⁴¹ T. Harding, Half Yearly Report, 1901, G3/A2/O(1901)/113.

Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, January 30 to February 7, 1899, CMS G3/A2/O(1899)/49.

⁴³ T. Harding to F. Baylis, May 2, 1901, CMS G3/A2/O(1901)/87, August 21, 1901, CMS G3/A2/O(1901)/112;.

⁴⁴ Getting funds from the Finance Committee for the erection and maintenance of buildings for the church at Oyo and funding his travels on behalf of the colonial government exerted tremendous pressure on Johnson. The overbearing demands of the princes also did not help matters. Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, October 8, 1889, CMS G3/A2/O(1889)/153; S. Johnson to J. Wood, November 8, 1887, CMS G3/A2/O(1888)/9.

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 Effon, 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 masquerades¹ 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.²

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 screeming [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.³

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

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

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

⁴ 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.⁵ 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

⁵ 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.⁶

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.

⁶ 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 *Qbàtála*—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 Qjō, who reported a favourable reception by the Bãle 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.⁷

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

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

wretched slavery. Alas! another is pending now, and is this the way Ejiògbè is redeeming the world? He was speechless.⁸

Since Ejiògbè was presently acknowledged in the country as the mediator between God and the human race, the present failure of society became for Johnson an indisputable evidence of his inability to redeem the world, hence the inefficacy of its institution. This functional understanding of religion is at the heart of Yoruba religiosity, and Johnson knew this. Hence, he was not caught unawares by the old man's objection as he readily found answer to it in the immediate social environment. He followed up his success in outwitting him by stressing to the people "their hopeless condition" if they did not know "the true saviour of mankind." Some of his listeners could not but promise to visit his church to hear more of this new doctrine when they visit town.⁹

It may be observed from this exchange that along with the transcendental understanding of salvation at the heart of Christianity, Johnson shared with his unconverted compatriots the understanding of religion as a means of achieving a better temporal end for society. As the imperial age rapidly dawned from the 1880s, this functionalist understanding of religion would become entrenched, not only in Johnson's religious ideology, but in those of the other agents of the mission. The increasing value they would place on it would bring them into deep conflict with the new generation of missionaries who would emphasize solely the salvation of the soul. With this understanding, and having lived the prime of his life among his people, Johnson would argue in his last testament to them the prime place Christianity deserved in Yorubaland, the other faiths having had their day but failing to guarantee life and prosperity for the people.¹⁰

Obàtála

The local congregation of the catechist at Aremo was no less exciting in his encounter with Yoruba religions. His pastoral work had to respond to the problem of conversion in non-Christian families where the indigenous cults held sway. Solutions did not come easily although Johnson could privately embolden victims for verbal defence. Such was the case with a sixteen year old girl who was staying with her Christian relative who lived near the church. Her father, who lived in another part of the town, was the head

S. Johnson, Journal Entry, June 17, 1877, CMS C/A2/O58/8.
 S. Johnson, Journal Entry, June 17, 1877, CMS C/A2/O58/8.

¹⁰ S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, p. 642.

of the Qbàtála cult who feasted all the devotees of that religion for seven days during their annual festivals. In 1880, having been exposed to Christianity, the girl began to test from the edges and by degrees the waters of conversion. Since she was forbidden to taste palm wine, according to the taboo of Qbàtála cult, she ventured to taste it and feared that death would follow as proof of the anger of the divinity. When nothing adverse followed, she took a larger draught and waited for the consequence. Seeing that nothing still happened to her, she bought a brass ring, also forbidden for Qbàtála worshippers to wear. She was then suspected of betraying her faith and was reproved. That year she did not attend the annual festival that her father hosted, and her relatives threatened her if she embraced Christianity.

The following year, 1881, she determined again not to attend the festival but to declare publicly her belief in Christianity. A fortnight before the festival her mother and relatives warned her about the punishment that awaited her if she failed to attend the festival that year. She made good her decision and the devotees of the cult were enraged. One of them, according to Johnson, "an inveterate enemy of Christianity," confronted her father. He said, "It is very unbecoming for your daughter to make light of your god, to the disgust of all the devotees". The parents were stirred, and they sent for her. She immediately ran to Johnson for fear that a summons might ensue. Johnson reported,

I said to her, It is written— "Fear not their faces," and again, "We ought to obey God rather than man". And as for your answer, Christ hath said, "take no thought how or what ye shall speak & c". She went to them straight from my place; and before she got there the second and third messengers were sent to hasten her. "Why," said they, "we thought you run [sic] away?" She replied, "Why should I? since I am not guilty of theft or any heinous crime?" The question was then put, "Why did you not attend the festival this year?" She replied, "From my birth I have been a worshipper of your god; but the Lord has called me and I will worship it no longer."

They were unprepared for the girl's bold response, and, in perplexity, they could not carry out their intention to send her unceremoniously to her suitor's house. They rather decided to suspend their plan until her cousin's husband returned from his journey. Weeks after, while Johnson was away to Lagos on the Alafin's errand to the governor, they carried out their threat. Meanwhile, the women neighbours in their frustration unleashed their anger on the mission and destroyed some of its property and those of the

S. Johnson, Journal Extract, September 8, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/076.
 S. Johnson, Journal Extract, January 8, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/076.

people residing there. There was no arbitration as the church community did not press for charges against their assailants. Ironically, two years later, the Christians at Aremo who had suffered this violent reprisal from a cult with a rigorous moral and social ethics would successfully ride the storm generated in their contention with the unabashedly vicious cult of Sango.

Sango

In the night of September 29, 1883, destructive lightening struck and set ablaze the Aremo mission house and uncovered the tension between Yoruba religions and Christianity. So far, the verbal exchanges between Johnson and his prospects in his evangelistic activities had been taking place at the cerebral level. Now the struggles and the political clouts that attended the exchanges between the Christians at Aremo station and Sango worshippers on this occasion brought the encounter to the physical plane.

It was the tradition of the country for Sango priests to carry out their prohibitive rituals after lightening had struck a house. They were not going to spare the mission compound on this occasion that saw Johnson and his family nearly killed and their house consumed in the ensuing inferno. As friends and neighbours made frantic efforts to salvage whatever they could and the fire raged, the Sango worshippers jubilantly beat their drums and made haste to the site of the disaster for plunder. The Christians resisted vehemently and threatened to shoot them. They had hardly made the threat when the cartridges of Johnson's gun in the inferno gave off several explosions, and they fled quickly thinking the Christians were making good their threat. It was not the end of the matter.

Sango worshippers continued their demand the following day, threatening but to no avail. They then employed persuasion that it was the tradition of the country, and that when it happened in the Alafin's compound his majesty complied with the tradition. The appeal to the universal acknowledgement of their rituals in the country did not move Johnson. He rather entered into a verbal exchange with them, telling them to mind their own business as the Christians did theirs.

We asked them, "Who do perform any ceremony in civilized countries when such accident occurs? It is no strange thing with us, it is the cause of nature. Sango was not the king of any country in Europe nor in any other countries of Africa but the Yorubas, and yet...such accidents happens every where." They replied, "If we were in civilized countries, we might ask you what is to be done! But you are in the Yoruba country, and we are

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. ¹³

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. ¹⁴ 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

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

¹⁴ D. Olubi, Jounal Entry, June 1, 1873, CMS C/A2/O75/28.

divulging the secret of Sango mysteries as visitors were trouping in and out to congratulate him and his family for surviving the near fatal incident.

...[Both] to the ignorant and bigoted we are explaining the problem of electricity. The history of Sango are [sic] only known to the Priests, and this the common people were also made to know, and the cruel deceit of the Priests exposed by us to their shame. "Don't divulge our secrets" one of them said to one of our Christians. He was told, "We shall not expose you if you behave yourselves, but if you continue to give us trouble, we shall not shut our mouths." Our Christians were never so bold in defence of their religion, and in their outcry against idolatry. 15

The successful defiance of Sango cult, perhaps for the first time in the country, marked a significant moment of triumph for the Christian community in Ibadan. And it proved to be a threat not to that cult alone but, apparently, to the widely celebrated traditional cults. When, a few days after the matter had been resolved, the Egungun masquerades had their outing, one of the principal ones went to Oje quarter and pleaded for permission to approach the Aremo station to offer his traditional worship on its ground. The Sebaloju warned him, "Sango mysteries have been divulged to common people, and so will be the Egungun secrecy if you venture". The Egungun man thereafter made no further demand. The Christians, to their ideological advantage, had gained the reputation of demystifying local cults with no threats to themselves or to the powers that be. It was a rarity in the encounter of Christianity with African religions in nineteenth century West African states where traditional authorities ruled. The country was a supplied to the country was a first provided to the country was a first provided to the country with African religions in nineteenth century West African states where traditional authorities ruled.

Encountering Islam

After the long but fruitless effort to stop the propagation of Christianity in Ibadan, Yoruba Moslems reconciled themselves to the presence of the faith as another belief

¹⁵ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, October 1, 1883, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

¹⁶ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, October 1, 1883, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

¹⁷ The 1849 persecution of Christian converts at Abeokuta, the violence that attended the ruthless exposure of the cult of Nananom in the Fante country in 1852, and the problem of the conversion to Christianity of slaves and state officials in Akyem Abuakwa in the then Gold Coast, in the 1870s, were celebrated cases of social tension that attended the encounter of Christianity with indigenous societies in West Africa. The incident in the Fante country is particularly significant in that it took place in a colonial environment where the colonial authorities had to adjudicate. P.R. McKenzie, *Inter-Religious Encounters in West Africa: Samuel Ajayi Crowther's Attitude to African Traditional Religion and Islam* (Leicester: Leicester Studies in Religion, 1976), 26-30; F.L. Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 55-59; R. Addo-Fening, *Akyem Abuakwa 1700-1943: From Ofori Panin to Sir Ofori Ata* (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 1997), pp. 63-75.

system that had come to domicile among the people. In the long and sometimes mutually suspicious interaction between the two religions, some Moslems converted to Christianity, among whom was James Oderinde who had earlier jettisoned Yoruba traditional religions to embrace Islam. One of the first fruits of Ibadan Mission, Oderinde became the headman of Aremo Church although his religious background in Yoruba religions and Islam impinged on his understanding of the Christian idea of salvation. He had over the years, in the search for the true faith, developed a highly scrupulous ethics in dealing with his clients as a dressmaker. Having invested so much rigour in his religious itinerary, he struggled with the Christian notion of salvation by faith rather than by personal merit as taught in Islam and as implicit in Yoruba religions. ¹⁸

Other converts from Islam took their plunge for the new faith by degrees. An inquirer joined the baptismal class and pleaded that his two boys to whom he had given Moslem names be accepted for baptism, along with his infant daughter, now that he had enrolled them at school. Olubi having been satisfied with his sincerity spoke to his headstrong wife who at last decided to pitch her tent with her husband and children in their new faith.¹⁹

Still, another Moslem acquaintance of Johnson who admired Christianity could not take the decision to embrace the new faith. This man, to whom Johnson had spoken about the Christian faith on several occasions, acknowledged his admiration for Christianity and enrolled at the Aremo school where he learned to scribble a few words as well as read for comprehension. Johnson wrote of him,

At first he was ashamed to be seen with his book, but he has now overcomed [sic] the shame, and his companions, heathens or Mohammedans often met him reading. I met him today reading the Yoruba edition of Dr. Bath's Bible Stories; and I promised him the Scriptures and advised him to read it with prayer and the Holy Spirit will enlighten him more and enable him to choose the right way.²⁰

This man, with more than one wife, had started observing the Sabbath by keeping away from work on Sundays, but he was also observing the Ramadan fast and attended the public lectures of the season. His hesitation was not without reason. His friends were watching and asking if he meant to convert to Christianity. He also had another wife betrothed to him, and he intended to decide on what to do with Christianity after marrying

¹⁸ S. Johnson, Journal Entries, February 2 and March 17, 1877, CMS C/A2/O58/8.

¹⁹ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, May 8, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1882)/23.

²⁰ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, September 7, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

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". ²¹ 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 *Lemonu*²² of the Moslem community with respect to the Christian faith. ²³

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.²⁴ It was significant for Johnson that this woman had lived in Lagos where, according to her, she became acquainted with Christians.²⁵

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 itinerary 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. ²⁶

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

²² Johnson often referred to the Lemomu as the Bishop of the Moslem community.

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²¹ Acts 24:24-26.

 ²³ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, August 9, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.
 ²⁴ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 13, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/161; Journal Entry,

September 30, 1883, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.
²⁵ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 13, 1880, CMS G3/A2/O(1880)/161

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

to show for their exploits when they met the man who had listened to part of their message for the day. Johnson reported,

This man was a while under our address and he left us unnoticed. When we were returning home he met us, and he saluted us so warmly, and shook hands with us, then he asked whether his message was delivered to us? [sic] We answered in the negative, and expressed a desire to know what that message was and wonderful to say, he began in this way as it will be seen. "My friends, allow me to repeat again what I had once told you. I really sympathize with you for your unwearied labours—but I fear it will be unsuccessful; nobody will believe you, nobody will join you, because you preach nothing but the truth, and this can not do. I ask now, what have you got for to-day's address; nothing we replied [sic]. He then opened his bag for us to see and there were no less than 50 strings [of cowries]. I am a Mahommedan priest he continued, here is my Koran; and these are the cowries which I got by deceit and lies; and as I have wife and children, surely what I have got now cannot support them for three days, and therefore I must go about again to deceive people, for no one will give any thing for the truth. Nevertheless I advise you to go on perseveringly do not listen to abuse, turn away your ears from those who will scorn and curse you, labour on quietly, patiently, and God will touch and open the hearts of those who will be saved. As for the others who would be deceiving, and being deceived, they will perish with us (the Mahommedans) for at the great day of judgement, we the Mahommedans shall rise first, and the question shall be asked of us by God "Who are ye?" The reply will be, ["]we are Mahommedans["]. In a moment he will put us all to death again. But as for you, you are the children of the resurrection whom God will receive because of your faithfulness. You have believed and confessed what many can not be made to believe["]....I then urged him now to choose the better part, the one he knew so well.²⁷

If this unusual conversation gratified Johnson, it was at the intellectual level that he had animated encounters with Islam through its Lemomu. Johnson was on his way to the monthly prayer meeting at Ogunpa when he passed through the street of the Moslem cleric who was sitting on the hide with parchments of the Koran by his side. What was meant to be a casual greeting became a contest between two faiths:

I passed to salute him and said I am [sic] hastening on for prayers. "Wait," he said, "and I will read you some of my prayers," at the same time, loosing [sic] the bundle, searched and took out a parchment. I turned round and called my boy, and opening my bag of books I handed him my bible, and said that mine is also as near. When opening the bag he...said, "Two alufa (Priests) will oppose each other and I shall see who will overcome in the contest["]. He was struck with admiration at the guild [sic] edges of my bible, and taking it in his hand he could not help exclaiming to his friends,

²⁷ S. Johnson, in D. Olubi, Journal Entry, November 20, 1870, CMS C/A2/O75/26.

"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. ²⁸

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

²⁸ 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 Lemonu'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.²⁹

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."

But if the Lemonu 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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²⁹ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, August 9, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

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

requested that the matter be dropped.³¹ 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.³² 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^{ndly} [sic] To show that the Holy Scripture is the word of God.... He had no patience to continue

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

³² 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 Lemonu 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.³³

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,³⁴ 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

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

³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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",³⁷ 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

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ 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].³⁸

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". ³⁹ 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". 40

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.⁴¹

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

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

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

⁴¹ 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, 42 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 Modernity⁴³

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

⁴² 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.

⁴³ 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. 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". 45

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. ⁴⁶

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 Zacheus.

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

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

⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

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?["]⁴⁸

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

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

⁴⁸ 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'...."⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰

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". 51

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. Oyebode. They were visiting a lapsed

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

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

⁵¹ 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." ⁵²

Oya, who is believed in Yoruba mythology as the female consort of Sango, was regarded as a goddess capable of vicious fury. 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.

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

⁵³ 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. ⁵⁴

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. ⁵⁵ 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

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

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

than to leave the town to a distant place". ⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷

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".⁵⁸ 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 faired 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.⁵⁹

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

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

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

⁵⁹ 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 Obàtála 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 chalenging [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." ⁶⁰

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 Obàtála 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 Obàtála cult upholds at heart Christianity's value of purity and temperance. That neither the Christians, especially pietistic Johnson, nor the devotees of Obàtála 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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 $^{^{60}}$ 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. 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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⁶¹ 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.⁶²

True to this prognostication, after thirty years of missionary activities in Ibadan, the people and their chiefs had seen enough to give "Oyinbo" 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. He are alternative rounded to this desire by sending a trade mission to Ibadan. 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. 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.⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ Although some cynically taunt them in song,

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

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

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

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

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

⁶⁷ 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.

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

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

"Gbogbo re lese fun Onigbagbo" — 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. 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. 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….⁷³

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

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

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.

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

⁷³ 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. 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. 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.

¹ J. Graf, "Civilization in Africa", CMS C/A1/O105/61.

² 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.³

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".

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. 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. 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.

³ 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.

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

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

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

Generally, Johnson was not alone in this unavoidable opposition to the anticolonial 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. Meanwhile, in a letter to the governor, Johnson wrote down the proceedings that led to his embassy from the Alafin. 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.

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

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

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

⁹ 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.¹⁰

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". 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.¹²

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." Unaware of the damages being done to his mission

W. Griffith to S. Rowe, December 31, 1881, NAL CO 147/47, Despatch 16(3434), Enclosure 1.
 S. Johnson, Journal Entry, December 1, 1881, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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." 14

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.¹⁵

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. 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

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

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

¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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. 18 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.¹⁹

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

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

¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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.²¹

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. 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. 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.

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

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.

²² 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

²³ 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.²⁴

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. Meanwhile, at the interposition of Haastrup and Akitonde, one of Derin's attendants, the Oni-elect pardoned the supposed infraction. ²⁶

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". 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

²⁴ 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

²⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, p. 464, 467.

S. Johnson to W. Griffith, January 23, 1882, NAL CO 147/48, Despatch 48(6672), Enclosure 5.
 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". 28 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 Onielect. 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.²⁹ 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.³⁰

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

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

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

³⁰ 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". 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. 32

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

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

³² 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".³³ 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.³⁴

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. ³⁵

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. ³⁶

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

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

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

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

³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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".³⁹

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

³⁷ 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.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ 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. 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, ⁴¹ 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. ⁴² 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.⁴³ 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

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

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⁴¹ 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).

⁴² 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.

⁴³ 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. 44 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". 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". 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,

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

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

⁴⁶ 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." ⁴⁷

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. 48 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. 49

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". 50

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.⁵¹ 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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⁴⁷ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 4, 1882, CMS G3/A2/O(1884)/101.

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

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

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

⁵¹ 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. ⁵² 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.⁵³

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⁵² 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 antholes.'" One can only imagine how thankful Mr. Wood would have been to the Providence that made Ogedengbe 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.

⁵³ 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. ⁵⁴

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

⁵⁴ 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. 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. 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. 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. It was therefore providential that he came into office at a time he found a soul-mate in the CMS Mission,

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

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

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

⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

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. Now in his new capacity as the governor-inchief, 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. ⁶¹ 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. ⁶² 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. ⁶³

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. 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

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

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

⁵⁹ The phrase, "interior question" was invented by Governor Moloney. NAL CO 147/55, Despatch 179(13447).

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

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

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

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

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?⁶⁶

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". 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", ⁶⁸ he agued that:

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

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

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

⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹

Doortmont harped on Johnson's uncritical disposition towards the Alafin 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". 70

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 Alafin 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".⁷¹

⁶⁹ Michel Doortmont, "Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History" (PhD diss., Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 1994), 107.

⁷⁰ 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.

⁷¹ 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 Alafin 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 Alafin (i.e. the king of Oyo) as existed formerly if it is wished. The Owa regards the Alafin 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.⁷² 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". The 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. 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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⁷² 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.

⁷³ Samuel Johnson, The History of the Yorubas, 497.

⁷⁴ 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,⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶

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.⁷⁷

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". Ron 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, 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.

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

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

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

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

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

^{20(3122).} 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.

⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹

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. 82

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

⁸² 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. 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. ⁸⁴ 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.

⁸³ 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.

⁸⁴ "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?⁸⁵

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:

⁸⁵ 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. ⁸⁶

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.⁸⁷

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". 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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⁸⁶ Johnson.

⁸⁷ Johnson, 575.

⁸⁸ 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, Moseri—as the witness.89 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". 90 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

⁸⁹ Moseri literally means "The child who was a witness".

⁹⁰ T. Barter to Lord Knutsford, July 3, 1892, NAL CO 147/88, Despatch 2285.

peace mission of 1890 to gather for their use intelligence on the demographic situation and economic potentials of the country. A corresponding member of the Manchester Geographical Society, Millson addressed members of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce in June 1891 on the wealth of trade exchange that awaited Yoruba and English traders provided the British government dislodged the Ijebu people from their monopoly of the trade between the fertile and populous interior and the coast. 91 The Colonial Office only responded to the overtures from the chambers of commerce after the successful military expedition to Ijebu Ode in May 1892. Until then, the request of the chambers was foolish to some of the officers at the Colonial Office. 92

The Ijebu excesses in their unbending resolve to monopolize the trade between interior peoples and the coast gave reason for the expedition. But its success was not so much in its subduing them and removing their menace from the country. It was more in the popular appreciation of the relief, both social and economic, it would engender for the entire country and the dread of the foreign power it evoked among interior peoples.⁹³ Consequently, the government of Governor Gilbert Carter, who had replaced retired Governor Moloney, became emboldened to reach out to peoples in the interior as the governor himself toured the hinterland from January 1893, going as far as Ilorin.

Accompanied by Captain Bower, Hausa soldiers and the Maxim gun all the way, Carter signed treaties with the governments at Abeokuta and Oyo and dispersed the combatants at Offa and Ikirun. 94 Ibadan refused to be stampeded into a treaty with the governor; but they eventually complied after settling down to governance after sixteen years at war. The final pacification of the country was followed by the appointment of Captain Bower as the Resident Officer at Ibadan to supervise post-war proceedings. It was a significant development whose implications were hardly appreciated by the people. But for Johnson, it was a new dawn he had longed for.

The Treaties

The greatest concern the people in the hinterland entertained in their relationship with the all-powerful white men on the coast was the fear that their lands could be annexed to the Colony of Lagos. They considered it the greatest threat to their autonomy;

⁹¹ A. Millson to Manchester Chamber of Commerce, June 5, 1891, NAL CO 147/85, Despatch 168(12745).

⁹² NAL CO 147/88, Despatch 2285.

⁹³ Archdeacon James Johnson was the most prominent Lagos resident to oppose the expedition.

⁹⁴ S. Johnson, The History of the Yoruba, 626-628.

and they were assured on this in the treaties at every stage, from the "mild" one of 1890 to the ones signed under the glare of the Maxim gun in 1893, that it would not be done. But there were provisions in the treaties which indicated that more was at stake than the people imagined. Generally, their tenor shows that a new value orientation was intended to dictate life and order in the country. Two provisions were most radical in this respect, one of which was particularly subtle but all encompassing.

At Abeokuta and Oyo, and by extension Ibadan, the people undertook to abolish human sacrifices. Human sacrifice was a religious practice in some of the cults of Yoruba indigenous religions. It is enough that this provision intended to bring radical alteration to the religious practices of the people; but as events unfolded, the underlying concern of the new European friends in the country was not just about the indigenous religions and their practices. Behind it was the European cultural idea of human dignity, which, barring cases of criminal offence, must not be violated. The Yoruba country did not have such understanding of the human person. In not understanding this, the people underestimated the force of that provision. Nevertheless, in appending his signature to it, the Alafin, who by force of office had the power of life and death over his subjects, inadvertently whittled down his power. It would take only two years for Oyo to realize the cultural incubus in which they found themselves.

How much Johnson influenced the crafting of the treaty at Oyo is not clear except to acknowledge that the provision that the Alafin "will afford complete protection and every assistance and encouragement to all ministers of the Christian religion" could have resulted from his influence or that of S.G. Pinnock, the Baptist missionary in Oyo. But there is no doubt that the proscription of human sacrifices would have gratified him. This practice was to missionaries, European and indigenous, one of the most loathsome practices in the country. Charles Phillips, Johnson's colleague with whom he ran the governor's errands in 1886, spent time and energy to prevail on the Government of Lagos to put pressure on the authorities at Ode-Ondo to do away with it. In Ibadan, in spite of its warriors penchant for rapine and pillage, the state often shrank back from human sacrifices except there need to appease Oranyan before the standard of war led the soldiers into battle. But some of Oyo's many religious festivals and the burial ceremonies of the Alafins required human sacrifices, and Johnson must have viewed this with disapproval although he lacked the power to restrain them. In the final analysis, the

⁹⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 653.

provision that restrained human immolation could only have been to him a welcome development.

Perhaps the most implicating provision in the treaty was the ultimate judicial power ascribed to the governor of the Colony of Lagos. The ninth clause in the treaty signed at Oyo reads:

It is hereby agreed that all disputes that may arise between the parties to this Treaty shall be inquired into and adjusted by two arbitrators, the one appointed by the Governor of Lagos, the other by the ALAFIN of OYO, and in any case, when the arbitrators so appointed shall not agree, the matter in dispute shall be referred to the Governor of Lagos, whose decision shall be final.⁹⁶

This provision, which was also stated in Ibadan's treaty of August 15, 1893, effectively made the governor the supreme judge in the land.

The Alafin and his officers were intelligent enough to understand its implication as wresting from him the power of life and death, which was germane to his office from time immemorial. But the sharp lesson their new friend taught the Ijebu had driven fear into the traditional rulers in the country. It meant that with the cessation of war in the country, a new power had entered the arena of politics. It all began in 1881 when Daniel Olubi advised the Alafin to ask for the assistance of the governor in ending the war. It proceeded with Johnson's twelve year diplomatic shuttle between the country and Lagos. It ended on August 15, 1893, when Ibadan finally signed the treaty with the Government of Lagos. For Johnson, it marked the end of the fourth period of Yoruba history while ushering in the fifth period.⁹⁷ The country had entered a new and more rapid phase in its journey into modernity, which began with the advent of mission Christianity at Abeokuta in 1846.

The Aftermath—A Clash of Civilizations

In the years following the successful removal of the Ijebu and Egba blockades of the interior country, the meeting of the two cultures of English and Yoruba peoples was unavoidably attended by suspicion on the part of the indigenous rulers and their new "friends". Cultural differences, particularly with respect to the administration of justice,

⁹⁶ Johnson.

⁹⁷ Johnson, 641.

soon became evident and created anxious moments that jolted the Yoruba country. One of such moments occurred when Captain Bower shelled Oyo in 1895.

A tradition of the Yoruba country stipulated that men who committed grievous offences against their kings be sent to the Alafin to be emasculated and made his eunuch. The Aseyin sent such a person to the Alafin in 1895 and he was dealt with accordingly. Moreover, an Ilari was sent from the court at Oyo to attend to an incident at Okeho. The British resident officer in the country, Captain Bower, heard of these matters and considered their proceedings unacceptable. Apparently, in his reckoning, they violated the principle of humanity enshrined in the treaty signed with the governor in 1893. He arrived at Oyo with a detachment of his soldiers on November 8, 1895, asking that Kufo, the Ilari sent to Okeho, and the mutilated man be given up and that the Alafin apologize publicly for the supposed inhumanity. The impossible dialogue that ensued between the captain and the Oyo authorities, through Johnson and the European mission agents as the gobetween, led to Bower's military assault on Oyo. In Johnson's words, as

...the first gun was fired, and the town was bombarded—You can only imagine the fear, the consternation, the confusion in the town. The whole town was in an uproar, every one flying away for his life—The sick people were being carried as the cannon was booming, and the maxim gun rattling. A shell passed over our house, but did no harm—All our people rushed to my house for safety—All the heathens filled my house, out houses, & not a corner of the yard was not filled up by thousands of people. The heat in my house was so intense, that our perspiration was profuse. 98

While the people took cover from the bombardment,

The Captain marched up his troops to the palace, cleared off the people with the maxim gun, and fired the palace, the Aremo's house, Baba kekere's, the Otun wefa's, Sairo's, & some of the houses of the king's slaves. One half of the town was fired by the wild soldiery who went about the town looting, and shooting down people....⁹⁹

Captain Bower proclaimed peace after his punitive action during which a ricochet hit the king. But the king and his chiefs would not believe Johnson that it was all over and would not come out of their places of retreat until he facilitated communication between

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⁹⁸ S. Johnson to J. Wood, November 11, 1895, CMS G3/A2/O(1895)/188.

⁹⁹ S. Johnson to J. Wood, November 11, 1895, CMS G3/A2/O(1895)/188.

them and the captain. He at last spoke kindly to them and advised them to settle down peacefully to good governance. By this humbling episode, the king and his people knew that the culture of impunity that had prevailed thus far was out of step with the new era. The treaties of friendship they signed, first in 1888 and again in 1893, were not between equals. They were between a subject people and a higher power, and it required their seeing governance in a new light and practising it in a new spirit.

The relevance of Johnson to Oyo traditional authorities, contrary to the hypothesis of Ayandele and Doortmont, is vividly demonstrated in his mediatory role while tension lasted and afterwards. It is strange that Doortmont refers to Johnson's active mediatory role in this episode as "of a rather passive nature"! Pinnock might have been the writer of Alafin's letters to the governor on the coast, but in a distressing circumstance like Bower's onslaught against Oyo, the authorities knew who would be more readily available to mediate their cause to a powerful assailant. And this is by no means to discount the mediation of Pinnock and the Roman Catholic father. But as one who had his feet planted in both the traditional and the emerging cosmopolitan orders, Johnson was better positioned to provide the necessary anchorage for the traumatised people. Given that sooner or later, with the rapid expansion of Europe southward, Africa's indigenous societies could no longer remain insular to the worldwide trend in colonization, Johnson's presence and social versatility during the crisis may be reckoned as an advantage to Oyo. Unfortunately, where his old mentors would have commended his mediatory role, Tom Harding, his superintendent, saw distraction. But how did Johnson himself see this disturbance?

In his typical modesty, he did not express any value judgement on the episode; but if his delight in the removal of the Ijebu impediment in 1892 is anything to go by, he was certainly gratified that the oppression at the seat of Yoruba tradition was by this incident dealt a fatal blow. Two years later, while concluding his writing of Yoruba history, as if he were reflecting on his role through the twelve years of negotiation for peace and for the establishment of the protectorate, he pensively wrote that, "What the distinguishing feature of this new era will be, and how long it will last, are questions which only the future can answer". ¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, he was cautiously optimistic, as one recalling the past in Bower's attack on Oyo, and wrote that:

¹⁰⁰ Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 641.

When we have allowed for all the difficulties of a transition stage, the disadvantages that must of necessity arise by the application of rules and ideas of a highly civilized people to one of another race, degree of civilization, and of different ideas, we should hope the net result will be a distinct gain to the country. 101

This is Johnson's own way of saying that the episode at Oyo was a problem of adjustment the Yoruba must experience in the process of learning how to do things with higher ethical values. And he had in view here the nineteenth century Victorian social ethics of self restraint, public decency and fair play, which he believed Christianity bequeathed the home countries of European missionaries. 102 He believed that in the same way Christianity and civilization would do their work of transforming the war weary land into one in which everyone could pursue his or her avocation unmolested and the golden age of Alafin Abiodun restored.

At this turn of the twenty-first century, Johnson's social involvement in the facilitation of a new culture of order and transformation of Yoruba land can be classed as representing the praxis model of Stephen Bevans' six models of contextual theology. 103 According to Bevans,

The praxis model is a way of doing theology that is formed by knowledge at its most intense level—the level of reflective action. It is also about discerning the meaning and contributing to the course of social change, and so it takes its inspiration from neither classic texts nor classic behavior but from present realities and future possibilities. 104

In the late eighteenth and in the first half of the nineteenth century when the antislavery movement emerged in Britain and its protagonists were prodding the establishment, they did not argue a systematic theological basis for their activities. As a lay movement they were simply motivated by religious intuition, but they pursued their goal with vigour. When the movement transmuted into the CMS missionary movement, their ideological tripod of Christianity, commerce, and civilization was equally based on social philanthropy. As one who had been schooled in the tradition, the persistence of this vision of reconstruction in the activities of Samuel Johnson flowed from the same

¹⁰¹ Johnson, 641, 642.

¹⁰² S. Johnson, Journal Entry, November 15, 1876, CMS C/A2/O58/7.

¹⁰³ The other models are the translation, the anthropological, the synthetic, the transcendental and the countercultural models. Stephen B Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002).

¹⁰⁴ Bevans, 70.

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. ¹⁰⁵

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.

¹⁰⁵ Bevans, 75.

Chapter 9

Historical Consciousness as Identity

Samuel Johnson's magisterial output in his declining years *The History of the Yorubas* has courted the attention of academics from the years of Nigeria's political independence as much as it has immortalized his person. It is an irony of history that, perhaps after Samuel Crowther, the self-effacing pastor of Oyo would be the most celebrated Yoruba churchman among his fellow Sierra Leone returnee agents of the mission because of this publication. Not even the intrepid Africanist, James Johnson, who was more influential in Lagos for his nationalist struggle at the turn of the twentieth century, commanded the interest Johnson has evoked in local and international academic circles in the last half a century since Ade Ajayi drew attention to him.¹

If this development runs against the temperament of the man, it is still confounding that Samuel, in the words of Robert July, should be the "author for the broad panorama of Yoruba history in its social and cultural complexity, its strenuous politics and lusty war-making." It is more so when this outcome of his effort is weighed against his own confession that he was not motivated to write the history for the reason of an inordinate desire to appear in print. It is still paradoxical that the work came to its final conclusion in the years of his rapidly declining health and in a missionary environment that had no value for such things as cultural regeneration and intellectually informed Christian spirituality in Africa. It is therefore understandable that it took nearly another half a century after its eventual publication for the effort to be vindicated.³

The Knowledge of History as a Social Anchor

If Johnson was an unlikely personality to write such a work, the question arises: What dynamics motivated him to it? In answering this question, it may be necessary to situate Johnson in the broader context of the second half of the nineteenth century when local history writing became a trend among Christian converts and agents of mission in

¹ J. F. Ade Ajayi, "Samuel Johnson—Historian of the Yoruba," *Nigeria Magazine*, 81 (1964): 141-146.

² Robert July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Centuries* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 271.

³ Ajavi's 1964 article opened the intellectual vista on Johnson's work of history.

West Africa.⁴ Apart from those who assisted in the translation of the Bible into mother-tongues, the culture of putting oral histories into writing appears to be the earliest self-motivated endeavour to which these people directed their new found skill in literacy. And as colonialism became brazen, others directed theirs at writing apologias that argued the coherence and logic of indigenous cults. Both movements were generally inspired by a sense of *kairos* that must be seized as rapid change swept over the continent. Nevertheless, the motivation that drew these people into these movements varied. In this respect, one can compare Johnson and Carl Christian Reindorf, the Ga historian of the Gold Coast who completed his work of history in 1890.

Johnson and Reindorf had similar European influence as African agents of Western missions. The Basel Mission being active in the Gold Coast and its missionaries also serving with the CMS in Sierra Leone and in the Yoruba country, both agents appear to have been influenced to write their peoples' history by the primacy Germans place on national peculiarities. Moreover, Johnson having being born in the cosmopolitan environment of Sierra Leone Colony, he shared a liberal beginning with Reindorf who descended from a Danish ancestry and was brought up in the increasingly cosmopolitan coastal settlements of the Gold Coast.

In thought, they also shared a similar understanding of the changes taking place around them. Like Johnson's regret of the false elitism of his fellow returnees from Sierra Leone, Reindorf lamented the evil influences of the European merchants of his days on the indigenous peoples on the coast and their consequent neglect of agricultural production in favour of trading. And the women's 'want of principle' was no less disconcerting to him.⁵ Still, like his Yoruba counterpart, Reindorf was very much at home with his African upbringing and saw the advent of missionary activities in the Gold Coast as a timely intervention; in this he had praises for the missionaries. In their attitudes toward the cultures and religions of their peoples, both agents were similar. Like Johnson, Reindorf distinguished one from the other, and both of them were critical of the grip the religions held on their adherents, consequently impeding their embrace of Christianity.⁶

However, in spite of their many similarities, both agents had their differences. While the Yoruba historian proved to be the compliant type under the tutelage of his

⁴ Robert July, introduction to *The History of Sierra Leone*, by A.B.C. Sibthorpe, (London: Frank Cass, 1970), vi; Robin Law, "Early Yoruba Historiography," *History in Africa* 3 (1976): 70-73.

⁵ Carl Reindorf, *The History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, 2nd ed. (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1966), 271-274.

⁶ Reindorf, 221-222.

missionary trainers, the Ga historian was self-willed and could be uncompromising.⁷ Where Johnson readily saw virtue in learning in his mother-tongue and would commend its genius to his fellow returnees from Sierra Leone, Reindorf joined his colleagues in 1850 to quit the Basel school when "Johannes Zimmermann arrived at Osu and initiated the policy of teaching in the Ga vernacular rather than in English".⁸ And where Johnson was reflective and cautiously hopeful that the declaration of the British protectorate over his people would work out for their eventual prosperity, Reindorf was sure that the late nineteenth century growing British imperialism in the Gold Coast would usher in a new dispensation of 'justice, love, and peace' and prepare the ground for an unimpeded advance of Christianity in the land.⁹ He, in fact, triumphantly celebrated the emergence of the British Gold Coast Colony and urged on the new power, "Rule Britannia!"

With regard to their works of history, Reindorf traced his early inspiration to his grandmother to whom he was entrusted at the age of six. According to him,

My worthy grandmother Okako Asase, as duty bound to her children and grandchildren, used to relate the traditions of the country to her people when they sat around her in the evenings. My education and calling separated me from home, and prevented me from completing the series of these lessons in native tradition. ¹⁰

There is no evidence that Johnson had such formation at the domestic front as the Yoruba value for social history is largely confined to communal functions where they serve various political and cultural agenda. He took his own private lessons from the survivors of the wars that decimated the country and from the royal bard, the *Arokin*, at Oyo who were the official custodians of the country's oral history. But history writing as a regional trend does not in itself fully explain the source of Johnson's motivation to put Yoruba history into writing.

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⁷ Reindorf's uncompromising position in favour of domestic slavery, over against the decision of the Basel Mission in the 1860s, is very revealing of the man. Peter Haenger, "Reindorf and the Basel Mission in the 1860s. A Young Man Stands up to Mission Pressure," in *The Recovery of the West African Past: African Pastors and African History in the Nineteenth Century—C. C. Reindorf & Samuel Johnson*, ed. Paul Jenkins (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1998), 19-29. ⁸ John Parker, "*Mankraloi*, Merchants and Mulattos—Carl Reindorf and the Politics of "Race" in Early Colonial Accra," in *The Recovery of the West African Past: African Pastors and African History in the Nineteenth Century—C. C. Reindorf & Samuel Johnson*, ed. Paul Jenkins (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1998), 39.

⁹ Carl Reindorf, *The History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, 335.

¹⁰ Carl Reindorf, ix.

Part of the answer that has been given is that his liberal studies under Göttlieb Friedrich Bühler at Abeokuta influenced him. Doormont has suggested that, judged from his detailed portrayal of the Yoruba wars, Johnson was influenced by the Greek classics which he came into contact with under Bühler. Important as his time under the German teacher was, this too does not appear sufficient. Although Bühler's emphasis on scripture history would have fascinated the future historian of the Yoruba, it appears his source of inspiration went beyond his teacher at Abeokuta. And his dedication of *The History* to "the revered memory of The Rev. David Hinderer" may have something to say in this regard.

The earliest expression of the idea of documenting the Yoruba wars, a subject which dominated Johnson's work, came from the journal of the pioneer missionary to Ibadan, the people he referred to as "Yoruba Proper". Hinderer had in December 1854 set out with Dr. Edward Irvin for the Ijebu country to prospect for missionary opportunity as well as to find a shorter and direct route from Ibadan to Lagos via Ikorodu. Passing through the old ruins of Egba villages and by the side of the historic hill on which was waged the war that saw the control of Ibadan wrested from Chief Maye of Ife, the Gbanamu war, he thought that, "From the little tales which one gathers I believe a book full of touching interest might be written on the late Yoruba and Egba wars...". If his dedication of the work to Mr. Hinderer is something to go by, this self-confessed former pupil of the missionary from Weisbuch might have received his early promptings from him while residing with his missionary family in the early years of his arrival from Sierra Leone. And so the formal environment of the Training Institution at Abeokuta, under the tutelage of Bühler, can be regarded as an enlarging of perspective and fanning the flames in him of Yoruba history.

Nevertheless, Johnson's own reason for writing *The History* has its own value in understanding his motivation. In his preface to the work, having denied vain ambition as his motivation, he adduced his exploit to "a purely patriotic motive, that the history of our fatherland might not be lost in oblivion, especially as our old sires are fast dying out". Here is the evidence that Johnson had an acute awareness of the rapid change that was at work in his world, from Sierra Leone where he had his innocent beginning to Oyo where in adulthood he completed the facilitation of that change among his people in the

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¹¹ Samuel Johnson, The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate (Lagos: CSS Bookshops Limited, 1921), iii.

¹² D. Hinderer, Journal Entry, December 15, 1854, C.M.S. C/A2/O/49/110.

¹³ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, vii.

establishment of the British Protectorate. His parents had seen the glories of the empire of the Alafin from which slavery violently tore them as young people. In Yorubaland, he saw how the gold had become dim in the systematic attrition of the country under the rapacity of Ibadan warriors who, ironically, were the bulwark of the country against the onslaught of the Fulani empire builders to the north. But if in the aftermaths of these experiences redemption could follow disaster, what remedy could there be when those survivors of the horrific past perished without bequeathing their successors their knowledge of that past? In other words, deaths and changing times add ontological dimension to Johnson's decision to write the history of his people. And in doing so, he set out to rescue their fading memory, thereby complementing his active effort to see that history redeemed.

This is presaged in his verbal reference to the Nunc Dimitis when he acknowledged the presence of one of his aged informants, David Kukomi, at the first ordination service held in Ibadan on January 6, 1895. The patriarch of Ibadan church had arrived at the occasion in a hammock to witness the ordination into the Deacon's Order of his son and Johnson's former schoolmaster at Aremo, Robert Scott Ovebode. 14 As Kukomi took his seat to witness the historic occasion, Johnson saw in him the biblical Simeon who had waited for the revelation of Israel's salvation. The venerable old man whom Johnson described as "a young man in the days of King Abiodun" and whose "fortune (or misfortune)" it was "to take part in the wars and other national movements of the period as a common soldier" had seen it all—the glories of the defunct empire and the scramble for its wreckage. But he had also seen its deliverance in the cessation of hostility and plunder with the establishment of the British Protectorate among them. As a living centenarian, he was a link between the past and the present, and his diminishing physique indicated that he would soon pass away. Isaac Oluwole, the bishop who took charge of the occasion, reported that Johnson, who preached an impressive sermon on the occasion, "alluded to the presence of the old man in a touching manner: Our father whom we are glad to see this morning with us...may well declare today in the language of the aged Simeon 'Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace'". 16

Arnold Toynbee's theological perspective on history brings home this existential dimension of human succession in a changing world when he wrote that:

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¹⁴ I. Oluwole to F. Baylis, March 6, 1895, CMS G3/A2/O(1895)/57.

¹⁵ Johnson, vii.

¹⁶ I. Oluwole to F. Baylis, March 6, 1895, CMS G3/A2/O(1895)/57.

Ever since mankind became conscious [of the rhythm of life]...our joy in the birth of a new generation is tempered on the human level by our grief at the death of their elders; and this grief is aggravated by a bewilderment at the discrepancy between the brevity of human life and our endowment with gifts of intellect and will whose potentialities so far out-range the staying power of our physique. The dismay that this tragic discrepancy inspires in us is magnified when we face the truth that mortality is the fate, not only of individual men and women, but of mankind's supra-personal collective achievements....¹⁷

Viewed from this perspective, the continuous attrition of David Kukomi's generation represents a dynamic that gave Johnson his profound consciousness of Yoruba national history, which mortality and rapidly changing times were about to wash away. For the pastor of Oyo, this shared memory of the nation must not be lost if the appropriation of the future that was rushing in would not lead to cultural amnesia.

The second reason, complementary to the first, which motivated him to write the history shows that Johnson had observed an inimical trend of false elitism among his fellow returnees from Sierra Leone. In his own words,

Educated natives of Yoruba are well acquainted with the history of England and with that of Rome and Greece, but of the history of their own country they know nothing whatever! This reproach it is one of the author's object to remove.¹⁸

It may be observed here that Johnson, though without any ostentation, exudes confidence in possessing knowledge that he wanted to disseminate among his culturally puerile compatriots. This is interesting in that it contrasts with the way the residents of Lagos, where many of these people lived, perceived their compatriots in the hinterland whom they derogatorily refer to as *Ara oke*; that is, country people. Although Johnson belongs to the rank of these Lagos residents in that he shared many of their experiences as a returnee from Sierra Leone, as a convert to Christianity, and as having been educated in the missionary environment, his being enamoured with life in the hinterland could not but carry with it a tinge of being an *Ara oke*, however superficially their ways might have influenced him. Bishop Oluwole's observations on him in January 1896, says much about

¹⁷ Arnold Toynbee, "The Christian understanding of history" in *God, History, and Historians: An Anthology of Modern Christian Views of History*, ed. C.T. McIntire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 183-184.

¹⁸ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, vii.

this. As one who lived in Lagos himself, the bishop noticed "the purity of his Yoruba", which was in contrast to the laissez faire way the language was spoken in Lagos.

It is still interesting that Johnson considered it a reproach that his educated fellows lacked the knowledge of their own history while they went about, perhaps vaingloriously, flaunting their knowledge of European history. He himself had been reproached in 1874 at Atadi, near Abeokuta, when in an encounter with an elderly woman he received a lecture on Yoruba myth of human origin, the knowledge of which she considered his foreign birth to have deprived him. ¹⁹ In now considering the ignorance of his fellow returnees as a reproach, Johnson took on the perspective of interior peoples on his primary constituency. For while they marvelled at their knowledge of the mystery of reading and writing, interior peoples were baffled by the hybridized life of the Sierra Leone returnees, especially with regard to their religious orientation towards Christianity over against their ancestral religions. Johnson's concern shows how he had become integrated into the life and cultural perspectives of the hinterland and that he had no apology for this orientation. This educated *Ara oke* was confident that he had something beneficial to tell his brothers and sisters about their past.

If the growing tension between the Lagos elite and the colonial regime there in the late nineteenth century was an indication of the struggle that was ahead, Johnson seems to be saying that the struggle must be waged with a knowledge of the self. Uninformed rhetoric of cultural pride, change of personal names from English to Yoruba and putting on traditional Yoruba apparels as a strategy to counter the racial pretensions of their British overlords would not be enough to survive the future that was opening up in the worldwide colonial project. Neither would the pretensions to erudite knowledge of the history of the colonists avail much. The battle for self preservation in the midst of unsettling change must be fought in the quiet confidence of self-knowledge. In writing the history of his people, Johnson seems to be saying that the knowledge of national idiosyncrasies and itinerary through time and space, that is culture and history respectively, is germane to this confident self-understanding. It was a road he himself had travelled and now beckoned at his people to come along.

Viewed from another perspective, Johnson did not seem to be pleased with the indiscriminate Anglicization going on among his kinsmen and women in Lagos. While he was certain of the cultural elevation that could result among them from the interaction

¹⁹ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, November 7, 1874, CMS C/A2/O58/3.

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 Buhler'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

were drawn from them. His habit of setting events in their historical contexts while reporting them in his journals is an early precursor of his interest in history. He had cultivated this style as early as 1870 when he began to report his evangelistic efforts at the Onikoyi quarter in Ibadan. His journal entry of February 15, 1875, also shows that by this time he was already observing Ibadan's military activities.²⁰ In the same vein, his active interest in culture could be seen when, in 1879, he was invited to help in nailing the coffin of the deceased Balogun Ajayi Ogboriefon. He took advantage of the occasion to observe a Yoruba traditional burial ceremony of a war chief, which he fully described in his journal for the day.²¹ In giving attention to both culture and history, Johnson implicitly recognized the symbiosis between the two.

Yoruba Ethnography

The structure and content of Johnson's *History* shows that they were designed to serve the cultural formation need of his less indigenized brothers and sisters in Lagos. Divided into two parts, the first part documents ethnographical information about his people—origin, religion, government and social system—while the second part recounts the history of the nation from its mythological past till its present vicissitudes in the nineteenth century. But these were actually preceded by a thirty-three page explanation of the structure and grammar of the Yoruba language, perhaps suggesting that some members of Johnson's target audience lacked skill in the language. Nothing in Yoruba institutions that gave the people their distinct cultural identity, including facial marks, was too trivial for Johnson's Yoruba ethnography. Of particular interest in this respect is his description of Yoruba religions. And here Johnson was not contented with merely documenting tradition for its own sake or to entertain. He added his value judgments as he deemed fit, as when he concluded to be "tricks systematically played upon [people's] credulity" traditional Sango ritual for placating the god of thunder whenever he struck.²² Later, while recounting the stories of the founders of the Yoruba nation and he came to recount the "legend of Moremi and her son," which, from its content, may have been adapted from a remote contact with Judeo-Christian tradition, he concluded it as a

²⁰ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 15, 1875, CMS C/A2/O58.

²¹ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, April 7, 1879, CMS C/A2/O58.

²² Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 36.

"confused idea of the story of Jephtha, and that of the Blessed Virgin and her Son perverted." ²³

In *The History*, where Johnson in his mature years was looking back and was now reflecting outside the field of combat with the votaries of Yoruba religions, one can perceive his dispassionate stance on the ancient religions. The combative nature of his evangelistic encounters with adherents of Yoruba religions has shown his conviction that they were no longer relevant to post-war Yoruba land and the future that was opening up before the people. Now in his dispassionate mood his appreciation for the religious sensibility of his people shone out. This appears to have been incipient over the years, as demonstrated in his comment on the woman making supplication to the god Sopona when the smallpox epidemic ravaged Ibadan in 1874.²⁴ In *The History*, this appreciation becomes more apparent as he took note of the Yoruba high conception of God as the Wholly Other, distinct from the lesser divinities of *Orisa*, which are conceived as intermediaries between Him and mortal men and women.²⁵

He also acknowledged some congruence between Yoruba religious vision and Christianity, such as implicit beliefs in the immortality of the soul and the life hereafter. While he was critical of the cults, Johnson appreciated the sense of transcendence that pervaded Yoruba religiosity, which dovetailed into the social and political systems of the nation. This was particularly visible in the celebration of festivals and the coronation of their kings. And although the cult rituals might have been overtaken by recent political upheavals, Johnson implicitly recognized them as representing a stage in Yoruba religious itinerary. If they had served the people's religious and moral needs hitherto, they could not be discountenanced as valueless. After all, in his evaluation, irreligious defiance of the divinities was one of the problems at the roots of the malady that afflicted the nation in the nineteenth century. Johnson's attitude towards Yoruba religious cults may then be seen as a critical backward glance at changing times rather than a wholesale dismissal or blind and sentimental endorsement of an institution that had had its own day. A dismissal

²³ Johnson 148

²⁴ S. Johnson, Journal Entry, February 26, 1874, CMS C/A2/O58/2.

²⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 26.

²⁶ Johnson.

²⁷ Johnson, 188.

would have made him an iconoclast and an unqualified endorsement an ideologue. Neither is true to the temperament of *The History*. ²⁸

Yoruba History

On the history proper, it is clear that Johnson was taking the Oyo perspective on the events that took place in the country as handed down by the "Royal bards in the [defunct] Metropolis" as well as from the eye witnesses' accounts of those who took part in the stirring events of the age.²⁹ And although Ibadan became the successor empire to the old Oyo and its military activities dominated Johnson's work of history, The History of the Yorubas must be read from the comprehensive Oyo perspective that included Ibadan. This is particularly so because Johnson's colleagues from Ibadan, Oyebode and Laniyonu, held a more partisan position in favour of Ibadan authorities over against the Alafin's during the search for peace, whereas he saw no need for such dichotomy. And this creates the impression that they were working at cross purposes with him. In this regard also, Michele Doortmont fails to understand Ibadan as the new expression of Oyo hegemony in the country when he alleges that Johnson's work breathes a bias on every page in favour of Ibadan. Consequently, he criticizes him for not being critical of the Alafin where others condemned his duplicity.³⁰ A larger perspective, however, shows that Johnson's vision included Ibadan as the Alafin's standing army, hence his not making much ado about the rivalry between its chiefs and the Oyo monarch. But clarifying the relationship between Ibadan and the new Oyo has always been a perennial problem and Johnson himself acknowledged it when he wrote that "foreigners ignorant of the history of the country are apt to consider Ibadan of more importance than Oyo especially when by the destruction of Ijaye the former claimed the overlordship of the territories formerly under Ijaye".31

At any rate, Johnson was aware that the Oyo or Ibadan perspective was only a part of the whole story. He says this much when he wrote that:

²⁸ With his untimely death in 1901, Johnson did not live into the period when nationalist fervour changed the tide among the indigenous agents of the CMS on their perception of their ancestral religions. Rev. James Johnson and Rev. Moses Lijadu, among others, were churchmen who developed a positive attitude towards Yoruba religions.

²⁹ Samuel Johnson, The History of the Yorubas, vii.

³⁰ Michele Doortmont, "Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History" (PhD diss., Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 1994), 107.

³¹ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 283.

The histories of all nations present many phases and diverse features, which are brought out by various writers in the lines in which each is interested; the same method we hope will be pursued by writers in this country until we become possessed of a fuller History of the Yorubas [sic].³²

Viewed from this expectation, the spate of reaction that the eventual publication of the work generated among the other groups of the Yoruba nation may have no basis.³³

The reactions to correct supposed biases themselves may indicate that times had changed and the Yoruba identity was already being taken for granted as having been part of the experience of all the people who claimed Ile-Ife as their origin, whereas it originally distinguished Oyo people from their Oduduwa siblings.³⁴ The title, at a cursory glance, could therefore be easily misunderstood as to give the impression that it was meant to be a comprehensive history of all the Oduduwa clans. Nevertheless, Johnson himself seems to be struggling in *The History* with the problem of whether he was writing the history of Oyo people, that is "Yoruba Proper" or he was writing an aspect of the history of all the peoples who had started coming under the pan-Yoruba identity. Effectively, The History of the Yorubas fulfils the former, but when he let open the possibility of further contributions from other "writers...until we become possessed of a fuller History of the Yorubas", he became ambiguous. Who were the writers he had in mind? Were they from among the Egba, Ijebu, Ijesha, Ekiti, Ife and other clans of Oduduwa? It is not clear.

The other possibility is that he could be referring to other writers of the same history of Oyo Yoruba who might wish to contribute to the same story from other perspectives. But this seems far from his intention. If his aim then was to be inclusive in his conception of Yoruba identity, the controversy that followed the eventual publication amounts to reliving the old clannish spirit which the work sought to bring to an end by recounting to future generations its costly woes. Obviously, the emergence of the pan-Yoruba identity, which received its impetus from the translation of the Bible into the Oyo dialect and from the enabling environment of the Pax-Britannica, was already in process

³² Johnson, viii.

³³ J.F. Ade Ajayi, J. F. A. Ajayi, "Samuel Johnson and Yoruba Historiography," in *The Recovery* of the West African Past: African Pastors and African History in the Nineteenth Century—C. C. Reindorf & Samuel Johnson, ed. Paul Jenkins (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1998), 65. ³⁴ In their days at Ibadan, Mr. and Mrs. Hinderer made efforts to instil in their friends at home that the people among whom they were serving were Yoruba and not Egba. It mattered to them that their identities were being confused. A. Hinderer to J. Ridgeway, April 19, 1855, CMS C/A2/M3/356.

in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Consequently, in *The History of the Yorubas* Johnson seems to be struggling at this early stage with delimiting Yoruba identity, hence the occasional need to qualify some of his references to Oyo people as "Yoruba Proper".

Johnson divided Yoruba history into four periods. While he had earlier recounted their myth of origin, which linked them to the East, he did not make much of it in the history proper, unlike Reindorf who began his *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* with a tenuous link to the Mediterranean world. According to Johnson, the first period of Yoruba history began with the "mythological kings and deified heroes" of the nation. It is noteworthy that he immediately took his Oyo point of departure after he had linked Oranyan, the alleged founder of its dynasty, to Oduduwa and the Ile-Ife origin of the nation. And it is remarkable that from this early beginning Oranyan's restiveness and warlike spirit set the pace for the history of Oyo. As earlier inferred above, this would seem to explain the eventual emergence of Oyo hegemony over the other states of Yoruba peoples. Equally significant was the value the people placed at this early beginning on martial grip on power by the mythological kings and heroes. This made peaceful demeanour a vice that led to the termination of Ajaka's first reign by his more bellicose brother, Sango Olufiran.³⁵ Evaluating the myths associated with the beginning of Oyo, Johnson was of the view that "the reign of the mythological heroes abound[s] in garbled forms of scriptural stories, showing...that the ancestors of the Yorubas were acquainted with Christianity in the land of their origin". 36 Could this repeated references to Christianity in his evaluation be an evidence that scripture history, and not the Greek classics, informed his method?

The second period was marked by growth and prosperity as well as despotic rules of the successive Alafin. It marked also the beginning of historical kings in Aganju, as distinct from the mythological ones, but ended with Abiodun. Johnson observed that with him ended "an important epoch in Yoruba history". "He was the last of the Kings that held the different parts of the Kingdom together in one universal sway and with him ended the tranquillity and prosperity of the Yoruba country". "What Johnson did not acknowledge was his role in weakening the military prowess of the state and the

³⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 148-149.

³⁶ Johnson, 154.

³⁷ Johnson, 155-187.

consequent pace he set for the eventual dissolution of the empire. Akinjogbin has filled that gap for him.³⁸

The third period, which Johnson captioned "Revolutionary Wars and Disruption" commenced from the reign of Abiodun's successor, Aole, who was "probably took weak and mild for the times". It ended with the death of Alafin Oluewu and his Bariba ally, Eleduwe, in the fourth Ilorin campaign and the desertion of the great metropolis of old Oyo or Katunga in the 1830s. And during the interregnum that followed, Abemo and its "generous and merciful" chief Ayo were destroyed at the onslaught of the coalition forces of Oluyole of Ibadan and Kurunmi of Ijaye. The character of an age that had no place for the weak and mild and would destroy the generous and the merciful was not lost on the historian of the Yoruba, hence his ultimately locating in irreligion the dissolution of the realm:

The cup of iniquity of the nation was full; cruelty, usurpation, and treachery were rife, especially in the capital; and the provinces were groaning under the yoke of oppression. Confiscation and slavery for the slightest offence became matter of daily occurrence, and the tyranny, exactions, and lawlessness of the Princes and other members of the royal family, were simply insupportable. Oaths were no more taken in the name of the gods, who were now considered too lenient and indifferent; but rather in the name of the King who was more dreaded. "Ida Oba ni yio je mi" (may the King's sword destroy me) was the new form of oath!

This period, which witnessed the first appearance of Europeans in the Yoruba country in the visit of Hugh Clapperton to old Oyo in 1826,⁴² lasted for not more than forty years, from the death of Alafin Abiodun in c.1796 till the desertion of old Oyo in the 1830s. But Johnson's 86 page account of its story, 188-273, covered the first section of the war-filled account of the nineteenth century Yoruba history.

The fourth period, "Arrest of Disintegration", witnessed the scramble for the wreckage of the empire in the mutual intrigues, jealousies, and betrayals among the emergent warlords and their city states. It ended with the declaration of the British Protectorate over the country following the final subjugation of Ijebu in 1892. Much of

³⁸ I.A. Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century—A Reassessment," *JHSN* 3 (1966): 457-460

³⁹ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 188.

⁴⁰ Johnson, 269-273.

⁴¹ Johnson

⁴² Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccattoo* (London: John Murray, 1829), 35.

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...". 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", 44 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.⁴⁵

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'. 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

⁴³ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 246.

⁴⁴ John Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 307.

⁴⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 246.

⁴⁶ Johnson, 245.

only to regret the carnage that attended his victory against the Egba at the Iperu war.⁴⁷ His eulogy of Chief Elepo is particularly outstanding: "In no other man was power ever seen so combined with humility, loyalty, and devotion as was characteristic of [him]. He was remarkable for simplicity of manners, and could not be distinguished among his common soldiers by dress or any futile accessories".⁴⁸

Johnson did not leave out the villainous and the treacherous among the warlords. On the list of infamy, Kurunmi of Ijaye and Oluyole, his rival at Ibadan, stood out. But Are Latosa, with whom Johnson had several personal contacts at Ibadan and at the war camp at Igbajo, belonged to a different class. An embodiment of contradictions that nearly brought Ibadan to ruin during the sixteen year war of 1877 to 1893, he was ruthless in pursuing his ambition. He set for himself the object both to eliminate living threats as well as to obliterate the social memory of his military predecessors by supplanting their children. Yet, the nineteenth century Ibadan Mission of the CMS may not have had a more reliable confidant in the government of the town than Latosa who professed Islam and was instrumental to the conversion to Christianity of the mission's most inveterate neighbour and enemy, Mele. Encouraged by this noble role, Olubi and Johnson approached him to bring him to the faith of the church, but he could not see any difference between Islam and Christianity to warrant such a change.

Peel has called *Realpolitik* the relationship between the Ibadan Mission and the man Latosa. In one instance Johnson held him responsible for the cold murder of Madam Efunseta, but he joined his colleagues to congratulate him for riding the storm it generated. In another instance he described the benefactor of the Christian community as "a good chief of kindly action". Peel resolves the seeming contradiction, stating that:

In *History of the Yorubas*, with benefit of distance and hindsight, Johnson is able to make a more measured judgement of Latosisa. The moral condemnation of many of his actions is still strongly present, but it is offset, not by facile plaudits for his favours to the Christians, but by an understanding of his actions in Yoruba historical categories....So while Johnson judges [him] as a Christian, he explains his action as Yoruba. 49

⁴⁷ Johnson, 254-255.

⁴⁸ Johnson, 302

⁴⁹ John Peel, "Two Pastors and their Histories, Samuel Johnson and C.C. Reindorf", in Paul Jenkins, *The Recovery of the West African Past: African Pastors and African History in the Nineteenth Century—C.C. Reindorf and Samuel Johnson* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1998), 80.

The explanation may not have completely explained the double personality of the man who plunged the entire country into a long war of attrition, even if it very well explains Johnson's dilemma about him. Perhaps Johnson's historical method may explain Latosa's struggle. Following the account of his successful elimination of the war chiefs, Aijenku and Iyapo, Johnson concluded that "His chief motive was a selfish one, to immortalize his own name and exalt his family never taking into account what providence may have decreed for him." Hence, Latosa's problem was that he could not rein in, with his religious awareness and sensitivity, his lust for immortality in the social memory of Ibadan. But in him met both the meanness that characterized many of the Yoruba warlords of the nineteenth century and a contradictory deference for the monotheistic faiths of Islam and Christianity. It may be that he was being survivalist in the latter as Peel suggests. ⁵¹

Johnson's tendency to interpret events from the objective perspective could also favour Ibadan. When Governor Carter took it upon himself to tour the country in 1893 to effect the final solution to the Fulani menace at Offa as well as to receive the endorsement of his proposed treaties of friendship between the British government and the Yoruba rulers in the hinterland, Johnson sided with Ibadan's refusal to be stampeded into the matter until they had recomposed state offices after years at war. They equally rejected the idea of stationing a European Resident among them. The governor was stung by the Balogun's terse statement in this regard: "You have said you were sent from home to separate us, then you go home again and tell your masters you have carried out your mission". When at a banquet given in Lagos in honour of the governor for his successful trip to the interior and he expressed the regret that the only disappointment he encountered was at the last port of call where he least expected difficulties, Johnson was surprised at the reaction of Governor Carter to the Ibadan scene.

To anyone with an open mind the Governor's words sounded very strange indeed; it could only be attributed to an imperfect knowledge of the people. His Excellency might have allowed to such men as could govern a town like Ibadan and all its dependencies some credit of knowing their own minds and not be swayed by a mere clerk in his office.

But what people anywhere in Africa, nay, in the whole world, would readily and speedily fall in with the view of a foreign garrison in

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⁵⁰ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 419.

⁵¹ Peel, "Two Pastors and their Histories, Samuel Johnson and C.C. Reindorf", 80.

their midst if they could help it? Besides, the argument advanced by the chiefs seemed reasonable enough. ⁵³

The "mere clerk" in Governor Carter's office was Andrew Laniyonu Hethersett, Johnson's erstwhile friend and rival at the Ibadan Mission who was biased towards Ibadan against the Alafin during the search for peace in 1882. He was in the entourage although the governor's office was aware of his political bias towards his people. Johnson was quiet about Laniyonu and it is hard to imagine his relationship with his former prayer partner at Abeokuta Training Institution after the abrupt termination of his appointment with the CMS mission in 1869. His only reference to him after the incident was in his 1885 autobiography to the Parent Committee as part of the requirements towards the ordained ministry. But if Johnson's scathing reference to him as "mere clerk" and Laniyonu's subversion of his mission to the governor from the Alafin in 1882 are something to go by, their relationship was not as cordial as it was at Abeokuta. At any rate, Ibadan signed the treaty on August 15, 1893, after clarifying its details.

The treaties that signalled the end of hostility among the warring peoples and instituted their friendship with Britain marked the end of the fourth period and opened the fifth. Johnson's remark that "What the distinguishing feature of this new era will be, and how long it will last, are questions which only the future can answer" obviously implies that, for the historian of the Yoruba, the new era of protectorate government in the country was also a stage that would not last forever even if its trajectory were not discernible at that time. But the Oyo imbroglio of 1895 when Captain Bower shelled the royal city, had enough to caution his optimism about the new period.

Theological Framework

At a cursory glance, *The History* is a cultural document even though Johnson coloured it sparingly with his own religious convictions. Michel Doormont has traced the influence of Bühler's curriculum on Johnson's work of history, but his argument on the place of the classics in shaping its content seems overdrawn. The Greek classics might have been in circulation in the missionary training institutions in Sierra Leone and Yorubaland, but if Bühler's own record is something to go by, Johnson missed out on the Greek language at Abeokuta. There is no evidence to authenticate whether or not he later developed himself in the classics. But scripture history was a systematic staple in the

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⁵³ Johnson, 632.

CMS educational curriculum and Bühler made much of it in his training program. From this perspective, it would seem the Old Testament component, with its epic warfare and Israel's vicissitudes in the Promised Land, exerted its influence on Johnson's reading of the Yoruba wars that were dominant in his work.

But much more than his occasional religious evaluation, the periodization of the history has its own structural significance. John Peel has suggested that of the four modes of emplotment that Hayden White applied to nineteenth century historiography, Johnson's *History* is a Romance. In this vein, Peel submits that *The History* is to be read against the background of White's characterization of the Romantic motif which is "a drama of self-identification symbolised by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, and his final liberation from it,...a drama of the triumph of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness...[a] a drama of redemption". ⁵⁴ He goes on to submit that of the four modes, "Romance is the only one with a Christian, rather than a Classical, source". ⁵⁵ From the Romantic perspective and in light of Peel's reading of Johnson's work, the Yoruba people are the hero of *The History*.

If the Romantic emplotment gives *The History* it literary genre, providential historiography gave it its theological method. This theological foundation on which Johnson laid his work is a product of the mid-nineteenth century evangelicalism and pietism at work in the CMS missionary environment in which he was formed. The missionary ethos of the period was undergirded by a certain religio-historical consciousness that saw as divine activity the then unfolding global drama in which societies were opening up and nations were coming into contact with one another as never before. Missionaries and their agencies saw as providential this opening-up, which they themselves occasionally facilitated. This understanding of history saw events as unfolding within the limits and bounds of a divine intelligence that overrules positive or negative human activities and guides them towards unforeseeable better ends.

Sir Herbert Butterfield, writing in the middle of the twentieth century when Europe was writhing in pain at the devastating wars that seemed intent on reversing "progress," articulates it as "that kind of history-making which goes on so to speak over our heads, now deflecting the results of our actions, now taking our purposes out of our

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⁵⁴ The other modes are Tragedy, Comedy and Satire. John Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 305.

⁵⁵ Peel.

hands, and now turning our endeavors to ends not realised." More intently, Sir Herbert affirmed that

[T]there is a Providence that we must regard as lying in the very constitution of things. Whether we are Christians or not, whether we believe in a Divine Providence or not, we are liable to serious technical error if we do not regard ourselves as born into a providential order, and not by any means in a position to recreate it to the heart's desire."⁵⁷

This understanding, derived from Judeo-Christian tradition, was the dominant theological framework of the missionary movement in the nineteenth century, and it set the pace for missionary activities on both sides of the Atlantic.

Providential historiography was not unique to the missionary movement. It was the staple of European society up till the eighteenth century.⁵⁸ But while it gradually assumed a secularist flavour in the larger European society at the increasing onslaught of the Enlightenment, the missionary movement continued to uphold it as a lens for reading and interpreting reality, especially the rapidly changing times of the nineteenth century. It particularly evoked among them the sense of urgency to appropriate in the evangelization of the world the challenges and opportunities beckoning at them in the opening-up of societies. This evangelistic understanding of "the call of Providence" finds one of its most articulate expressions in the American mission administrator, Rufus Anderson, who asked his generation, rhetorically,

Now how do you account for all this [opening up of societies]? What does it mean? Why within the memory of many now living has the world been thus strangely opened and made accessible, as by a stupendous miracle? And why has such a vast systematic organization grown up as in a day, of associations at home and missions abroad, with the specific and declared design of publishing the gospel to every creature? Was there ever such a thing before? *Why* has the great and blessed God crowded so many of such stupendous results into our day[sic]?⁵⁹

In such a missionary environment that derived inspiration from the perceived workings of Divine Providence, the reflective Johnson could not have missed interpreting

⁵⁶ Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (London: G. Bells and Sons, 1949), 94.

⁵⁷ Butterfield, 95, 96.

⁵⁸ Butterfield, 101.

⁵⁹ R. Pierce Beaver, ed., *To Advance the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Rufus Anderson* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 68.

his family's experience as having been providentially spared the fatal horror that consumed many of their compatriots in the trade in human beings. Not only had the family been spared, it had also returned home as part of the team providentially called to mediate healing and salvation to the "remnants" in the land. Here then is the identification between Johnson's family history and that of his Yoruba nation: A people that had been decimated by self-inflicted woes were now being providentially redeemed, as his family had been, in the nick of time that coincided with the emergence of redemptive missionary movements among them. But it was from among the same people that were being led as sheep to the slaughter that this Providence had ordained a group that included Johnson himself and his family to take back home the message of hope and deliverance much needed by their distressed nation. This is a keen awareness of a personal history that was coterminous with a national history and fanned to flame in the CMS missionary, educational and vocational environments of the nineteenth century Yoruba land.

It is important to factor into Johnson's thought in *The History* the effect of this mindset of providential historiography, for he did not write in the fashion of a modern academic for whom detached objectivity is a virtue. Rather, he interspersed his work with his religious value judgment of a Divine Providence that rewards virtue and punishes sin, as when he wrote of the lawlessness and irreligion that brought the Yoruba nation on its knees in the first instance: "The cup of iniquity of the nation was full...The nation was ripe for judgment, and the impending wrath of God was about to fall upon it; hence trouble from every quarter, one after another."

The same Providence destined unscrupulous Ibadan for its redemptive role in the vicissitudes of the country. It was equally at work when "light began to dawn on the Yoruba country from the south [through the missionaries at Abeokuta], when there was nothing but darkness, idolatry, superstition, blood shedding and slave hunting all over the rest of the country". ⁶¹ Providence ensured that the first invasion of the country by locusts took place before the planting season of cereals so that famine would not finish off survivors of the 1844 Batedo war between Ibadan and Ijaye. ⁶² Providence "destined Sodeke for a great position in life" and he attained it in that "he eventually became the renowned leader of the Egba to Abeokuta" after being a slave boy of Dekun, the Alafin's

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⁶⁰ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 188.

⁶¹ Johnson, 296.

⁶² Johnson, 301.

renegade Ilari at Ijana.⁶³ It also smiled on Ogedemgbe to become the deliverer of his Ijesha people from the unbearable yoke of Ibadan after he and his fellow wild colleagues had been rejected by the Odoli at Ilesha, only to acquire under their adversaries the military skill to undo them.⁶⁴

Providence also set its bounds for towns and peoples. It requited Ijaye in its destruction by Ibadan for "the enormities being committed there in the years before the war". Et allowed Dahomey to devastate the old western province of the defunct empire and the Oke Ogun districts "until a higher power decreed 'Thus far shalt thou go, and no further." It was also at work in the temporary dissolution of Modakeke when "Providence, who ordereth and controlleth all things, saw that it was time Modakeke should cease to exist after they had nobly done their part in shaping the history of the Yoruba country."

Neither were the steps of the agents beyond the guidance of Providence which timely brought Edward Roper to Ibadan at the fall of Ijaye to take over the work of George Jeffries, his dying European colleague at Ogunpa station. And Johnson himself was a beneficiary of the grace of Providence which spared him from the untimely death that could have followed a near-fatal discharge aimed at him at Kiriji in 1884. For Johnson, therefore, Providence was at work in Yoruba history, through its emergence from a mythical past, in its prosperity as an empire, in its vicissitudes in the nineteenth century, and in its redemption under the twin dynamics of mission Christianity and the expanding British possessions in the late nineteenth century West Africa. Over and again, it is evident that a providential understanding of history gave Johnson his theological method and the freedom to exercise value judgment in *The History of the Yorubas*.

However, the pervasive theme of Providence in *The History* does not obviate the problem of evil and suffering in Yoruba historical experience. For it would seem in this environment where might was right, the powerful hounded the weak to death while friends betrayed loyalty to secure themselves in power, and many of these villains passed away, as it were, without dire consequence to themselves. That Johnson did not seem to

⁶³ Johnson, 228.

⁶⁴ Johnson, 368-369, 377.

⁶⁵ Johnson, 354.

⁶⁶ Johnson, 363.

⁶⁷ Johnson, 648. Events that followed since have shown, however, that Modakeke was not yet done with. It remains till today.

⁶⁸ Johnson, 353.

⁶⁹ Johnson, 496.

see difficulty in this may be attributed to his pietist-evangelical heritage of the redemptive value of suffering. Arnold Toynbee's Christian understanding of history grounds this belief in the doctrine of incarnation, which to him "guarantee[s] that the tragedy of human life on Earth has a value for the human actors in it likewise". 70

The influence of German pietism may, particularly, have set the pace for Johnson in this attitude to suffering. For he was well acquainted with the Hinderer couple who passed much of their days in Ibadan under debilitating illnesses that brought them, at various times, to the brink of death. Their stoical attitude towards their privation during the Ijaye war of 1860-1862 was also not lost on the future historian of Yoruba. Beyond the Hinderer couple, the heroism of the several missionaries who literally lost their lives in the bid to bring the Christian message to the country was also instructive for Johnson. Evangelical Christianity is very much at home with the perceived redemptive value of such tragedies.

These add to his experiences of suffering at the domestic front. First, his father had interpreted his experience of slavery and its providential reversal for good as redemption and in recognition of this had taken as his middle name *Erugunjimi*, meaning "Perfected slavery worked for my good". Second, the untimely losses he suffered in the death of his son Geoffrey Emmanuel in 1879, which for once brought him to open grief, and later his wife in 1888 were experiences at which evangelical Christianity would acquiesce in the belief that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18, NIV). And third, his arduous travels in the peace making efforts of 1881 to 1884 and 1886 to 1890 and the financial difficulties that presently dogged his work as the senior agent in charge of the church at Oyo could not have been interpreted otherwise. He seems to have factored these experiences of others and himself into a theology of hope that suffering may, after all, be redemptive for his people. And he did not need to look far to justify the hope. Their experience of forced exile had brought them the Christian message and the advent of the Christian faith in the country was already yielding its dividend of restoring them to peaceful coexistence among themselves. In the face of these redemptive analogies, there was no reason to despair that the sufferings of the Yoruba in the wars of the nineteenth century would not be atoned in the full redemption of their history.

 $^{^{70}}$ Arnold Toynbee, "The Christian understanding of history", 183.

It may be recalled, in this respect, that Mr. Hinderer envisaged in 1860 that boastful and complacent Yoruba, represented by Ibadan, may remain impervious to the Christian message of peace until its people be brought low by affliction and made amenable to the better life its maniacal warriors very much loathed. Johnson, as a member of his household at the time, was undoubtedly acquainted with this view and could not have missed the fulfilment of this prognostication when he first visited the war camp in 1882 and found them in the deadly entanglement of a war they could neither win nor withdraw from without a wholesale destruction of their army. Obviously to the mission community at Ibadan, it was a necessary experience of suffering which eventually brought them on their knees in the search for salvation that came from external political intervention and eventually paved the way for the triumph of the Christian message among the people.

For Johnson, therefore, the new era that opened before the people demanded a conscious commitment to the renewal of the Yoruba nation, and the key to this, he stated unambiguously, was Christianity:

But that peace should reign universally, with prosperity and advancement, and that the disjointed units should all be once more welded into one under one head from the Niger to the coast as in the happy days of ABIODUN, so dear to our fathers, that clannish sprit disappear, and above all that Christianity should be the principal religion in the land—paganism and Mohammedanism having had their full trial—should be the wish and prayer of every true son of Yoruba.⁷²

In his identifying Christianity as the means to attaining social wholeness again in the Yoruba country, Johnson took on the popular view that Alafin Abiodun's reign marked the golden age of the Yoruba nation. By implication his era had become the canon by which the people assessed their quality of life under his successors. Johnson particularly faulted a local ditty that eulogized Abiodun and disparaged his immediate successor Aole as failure, arguing that "there was nothing more in his [i.e. Aole's] actions than in those of his predecessors to warrant [it]". He only lacked the personality required for his time.⁷³ But Johnson could not get away from the reality that the people had set

⁷¹ D. Hinderer to H. Venn, March 19, 1860, CMS C/A2/O49/40.

⁷² Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 642.

⁷³ Johnson, 188

Alafin Abiodun as their own measuring standard for evaluating the regimes of their rulers, hence his being drawn to it unavoidably.

It could not have been otherwise. For in recounting the history of the second period which he titled "Growth, Prosperity and Oppression", Johnson gave priority attention to the political intrigues of the age and did not pay attention to how the people attained their growth and prosperity. Akinjogbin and Morton-Williams have supplied the clue to this in the involvement of the Oyo monarchy in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The golden age, which was actually attained long before Abiodun's reign but which he inadvertently brought to an end in demilitarizing the state, was attained through the sales of slaves captured in the expansionist wars waged against vulnerable peoples and those supplied as part of the periodic tributes from vassal kingdoms. In essence, the Oyo Empire prospered at the violence its monarchy meted out to its subject peoples and vulnerable neighbours.⁷⁴ Its eventual collapse in the violence it directed at itself may indicate that the permissible culture of violence that made slave trade a legitimate state business was equally damaging to the oppressor.

However, it can be concluded that although Johnson could not get away from the popular canon by which the people measured their prosperity, he believed that the new age of post-war Yorubaland under the protectorate government would bring about the desired national rebirth and prosperity. With the continuous leavening process of evangelical Christianity and its vision of legitimate commerce and civilization, the new prosperity would be founded on lasting values.

Johnson's hope, therefore, made necessary a case for the unimpeded, in fact unrivalled, advance of Christianity in Yoruba land. The logic is that the role of Christian mission in ending the Yoruba wars offers the faith of the church the credibility it needed to justify its entry into the country. For where the indigenous cults and Islam had failed to sustain the golden attainment of the past and had proved impotent in ending the wars, the faith of the church had persevered to usher in a new day of hope and renewal. For that reason, in Johnson's reckoning, this achievement of Christianity must elicit in every true Yoruba the desire for its triumph in the country. In essence the historical vindication of Christianity through the vicissitudes of the Yoruba nation in the nineteenth century qualified it to become fully identified with Yoruba identity. To be an authentic Yoruba

⁷⁴ I.A. Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century—A Reassessment." *JHSN* 3 (1966): 457; Peter Morton-Williams, "The Oyo Yoruba and the Atlantic Trade, 1670-1830", *JHSN* 1 (1964): 25-27.

should be to follow the faith of the church, hence Yoruba identity deserved to be coterminous with Christian identity. The mutuality of cultural awareness and religious conversion cannot be more complete.

Johnson's arrival at this "nutritive juncture". is the final culmination of years of tutelage in the CMS missionary environment that placed premium on national peculiarity and sought to make Christian converts who, in spite of their embracing the faith of the church, authentically embodied their indigenous cultures. Certainly in this embodiment, it was expected that old things—values and practices that are inimical to the abundant life—would pass away and all things would become new. While Johnson was not the only convert to attain this goal of Christian religio-cultural formation, it would seem no agent of the CMS in the nineteenth century Yoruba Mission, especially among the returnees from Sierra Leone, articulated it so confidently and unambiguously in word and in deed. Although he did not attain a high ecclesiastical position within the Yoruba church as Samuel Crowther and James Johnson did, he may well be regarded as a symbol of the success of CMS missionary ethos of Christianity, commerce and civilization; but unfortunately that ethos had changed dramatically in the 1890s when he was articulating his view and was living out his conviction as the senior agent in charge of the church at Oyo.

The History of the Yorubas can be regarded as Johnson's testament to his first constituency, the Saro community that was largely based in Lagos in the second half of the nineteenth century. Covering their historical itinerary from antiquity till modern times, he discerned the Providence that was at work in their emergence as a nation, in their growth and attainment of economic prosperity, and in their difficulties in the nineteenth century. As beneficiaries of the workings of this Providence in that, through evangelical Christianity, they had been restored to their country and to their people, Johnson looked forward to their full restoration in authentic cultural reengagement with their people, in the prosperity and unity of the country, and in the eventual triumph of Christianity there. The next chapter, the conclusion of his story, evaluates the man Samuel Johnson, his times and his legacy.

⁷⁵ Ato Quayson, Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality and History in the Work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 20-43.

Chapter 10

Conclusion: The Making of a Mission Agent

Earlier research into Samuel Johnson and his activities has shown that the major problem he presents is the inscrutability of his personality. Michel Doortmont has been able to identify the character poise of his siblings—Henry, Nathaniel, Obadiah and Adolphus—but Samuel remains an enigma. Ajayi is of the view that he "will remain enigmatic as long as we rely solely on the evidence of his official Journals and the Minutes of the British missionaries in the CMS Finance Committee in Lagos". The reason is because "He deliberately shielded his personal life from those resources". However, his close association at Oyo with Samuel George Pinnock, the British Wesleyan missionary turned Southern Baptist missionary may indicate something about his person. This is because certain aspects of Johnson's character dimly shine out from the missionary records, and his association with Pinnock whose character is well known gives them force as revealing of his personality.

First, his involvement in brokering peace in the war-torn Yoruba country shows that he was not a recluse even if he was self-effacing. Moreover, his work on Yoruba history shows that he was capable of being critical of the activities of his fellow agents. He demonstrated this when he roundly condemned as "rambling talks of peace" the feeble initiative of the elite of Lagos exercised to end the Yoruba war.³ Among these people was James Johnson, his superior in the CMS mission and under whose auspices the group exerted its unfruitful effort. Samuel was familiar enough with Yoruba niceties to know that such documented criticism of the activity of a superior is not culturally acceptable among his people.

His activities also show that he could pursue his conviction with determination in spite of the contrary feelings of his European supervisors. This tenacity shows in his remaining unmoved by the disinclination of the new missionaries in the field towards the people's cultural development alongside their religious transformation. Thus he pursued

¹ Michel Doortmont, "Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History," (PhD diss., Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 1994), 37

² J.F.Ade Ajayi, "Samuel Johnson and Yoruba Historiography," in *The Recovery of the West African Past: African Pastors and African History in the Nineteenth Century—C. C. Reindorf & Samuel Johnson*, ed. Paul Jenkins (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1998), 68.

³ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas—From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: CMS, 1921), 480-483.

his political engagements with the colonial government as well as with the local administration at Oyo. He did not flag either in his commitment to his project of history writing in spite of his rapidly declining health in the second half of the 1890s. Even the Finance Committee's criticism of his administration of the church development funds at his disposal shows that Johnson had his own mind about how things should be done in the hostile environment of the royal city. And so, rather than pander to the dictates of some armchair administrators miles away from the grinding poverty of his people and the heat of oppression turned on them by a roguish establishment, he exercised his prerogatives in applying the funds. He did this even if it meant employing arm-twisting stratagem to get more funds from the committee. When these add to his cutting remarks to votaries of Yoruba religions and his unabashed criticism of their ordinary adherents, the records show that there is enough in his journals and in *The History*, in spite of their subdued tones, to show that Johnson was a strong-willed person.

Two reasons account for the difficulty in seeing Johnson as strong a personality as Pinnock. First, the CMS environment in which he functioned was a conservative one that eschewed open confrontation with indigenous society. This unobtrusive ethos of the CMS, which Olubi took to the level of intimacy with the indigenous society at Ibadan, moderated Johnson's exterior manners. On the other hand, Pinnock, as a Wesleyan cum Baptist had no such restraints; he did not mask those of his activities that undermined the tyranny of royalty over the people.⁵ His mission also felt the sting of his crusade in his support for the indigenous agents of the Baptist mission. Very much like Johnson, Pinnock exercised personal initiatives in administering mission funds at his disposal. To the dismay of his mission, he paid the serving indigenous agents over and above the official recommendation. Still, he was not apologetic for his liberal attitude towards Yoruba culture as he waged a long battle with the mission on the issue of polygamy,

⁴ Johnson once "misapplied" the fund assigned to him for plastering the exterior of the mission house he was erecting for the Society at Oyo by using the same to plaster the interior. The Finance Committee had no intention to finish the interior of the structure as elegantly as Johnson wanted. With the rains threatening to damage the walls from outside, he alerted the committee and applied for funds again to now protect the building from outside. They granted the requested £5 from their Oyo Contingency Fund but with "their strong disapprobation of Mr. Johnson's indifference to instruction". Finance Committee, Minutes of Meeting, April 8, 1891, CMS G3/A2/O(1891)/88.

⁵ Pinnock was eventually expelled from Oyo in 1909 by Alafin Lawani who succeeded Adeyemi. Samuel Pinnock, *The Romance of Missions in Nigeria*, (Richmond, Va.: Southern Baptist Convention, 1917), 82-83.

refusing to accede to the negative position of his colleagues in the Baptist Mission. His appreciation for Yoruba culture was very much like Johnson's.

Second, beyond the general environment of the CMS, Johnson's religious formation, being pietist, saw virtue in self-effacement. Socially, pietism attaches value to courtesy, humility and deference towards established authority and promotes them in daily social relationships. Such tact in his interactions with the ruling powers in the country and with the government of Lagos gave him headway with them. In contrast, Pinnock's religious orientation was too radical for such courtesy to moderate his relationship with the oppressive regimes of both indigenous and missionary establishments among which he functioned. What these imply is that although Pinnock and Johnson exhibited different outward temperaments towards the realities in which they both functioned at Oyo, they were both strong personalities who shared liberal views of Yoruba culture and solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. It is therefore understandable that they proved to be soul mates.

Johnson as an Embodiment of Mission's Cultural Achievement

Perhaps the most acute dilemma Samuel Johnson offers research is the wide chasm between his external mien as a pietist mission agent and his cultural achievement in writing Yoruba history, detailing its restiveness in "strenuous politics and lusty warmaking".⁶ It will require the understanding of the outworking of missions' cultural ideology on this character to resolve the dilemma. John Peel has drawn attention to a subtle tension at work in the nineteenth century Yoruba Mission of the CMS.⁷ Paul Jenkins attributes this tension to the dichotomy between its British origin and its being largely staffed by German personnel for the greater part of the century.⁸ But he also cautions against the possibility of reading too much into the differences between the two mission organizations and thereby lose sight of "the evangelical, pietist activist heritage

⁶ July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Centuries* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 271.

⁷ Peel's sociological interpretation contrasts the spatial location of the centres of mission activities in Abeokuta and Ibadan with respect to the seat of political power. He suggests that the peripheral location of mission points in Ibadan away from the city's political centre drew from Hinderer's Basel pietism while Townsend's Anglicanism influenced its contiguous location to the very seat of power at Abeokuta. John Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 136, 137, 272.

⁸ Paul Jenkins, "The Church Missionary Society and the Basel Mission: An Early Experiment in Inter-European Cooperation," in *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity*, 1799-1999, ed. Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing/Richmond (UK): Curzon Press, 2000), 47.

that they had in common." In the same work in which he presented a contrast between the missionary strategies of David Hinderer and Henry Townsend, Peel goes on to trace the nineteenth century origins of the patriotic and nationalist sentiments among Nigerians to the influence of Christianity through Western missions, particularly the CMS. ¹⁰ Peter Williams has developed more elaborately this cultural ideology that underpinned the mission of the CMS in the mid-nineteenth century under the secretaryship of Henry Venn. ¹¹ What has not been stressed is that the religious understanding of ethnic nationality as a divine endowment to be nurtured and developed into full nationhood by peoples within the providential order of reality was not limited to the CMS. It was a cornerstone belief in German missionary endeavours too. In fact, the Germans took the ideology to climax with their dominant emphasis on the centrality of the mother-tongue to ethno-cultural identity. And this they backed with their unparalleled skill in linguistics through which they exercised tremendous influence in the reduction of African languages into writing.

In the light of Jenkins' caution, it is possible to overlook the commonality of this religio-cultural anthropology to both missions, along with their shared spiritual tenor. Although the development of their understanding of the primacy of national peculiarities in evangelizing the peoples of the world would not lead the two European missions to exactly the same strategy in mission, as Peel observed, it was there nonetheless. And, much more, it was at the heart of their ventures in the nineteenth century wherever they propagated Christianity together. And despite the differences in strategies, Johnson well

⁹ Jenkins, 56. The caution may not be out of place as some of the missionary methods displayed on the field resulted from either personal idiosyncrasies or the religious orientation of the individual missionaries; these do not necessarily reflect the policies of the home committees. In fact, the opposite was often the case. Peter Williams, "Not Transplanting," 148.

¹⁰ John Peel, Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba, 281-282.

¹¹ 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: William B. Eerdmans Publishing/Richmond (UK): Curzon Press, 2000), 147-172.

The CMS' evangelical understanding moved towards creating churches that were coterminous with the traditional state. Basel's pietist understanding tended to steer away from this; but, against the background influence of German philosophers and theologians, Basel Mission held a high view of the mother-tongue as the ultimate factor in national peculiarity. Klaus Fiedler has traced the development of *Volkstum* (folkhood) in nineteenth century German understanding of mission and its relationship to English understanding while Karl Rennstich explored the changing understanding of mission in the Basel Mission. Klaus Fiedler, *Christianity and African Culture: Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania, 1900-1940* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 12-27; Karl Rennstich, "The Understanding of Mission and Colonialism in the Basel Mission," in *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era: 1880-1920—Papers from the Durham Consultation*,

understood this common vision of the place of national peculiarities in the providential order of reality and held on to it in the rapidly changing times he lived as a virtue to be cultivated intellectually and in social action. The *History of the Yorubas* is the evidence; but then it caught the CMS establishment unawares when its manuscript arrived at their office in London in 1898.

Henry Johnson had on behalf of his brother Samuel sought the assistance of the Society in London to fund the publishing of the work, which, according to him, "contains much useful information of a kind that will not be available after a few years owing to the rapid changes now going on in the country". ¹³ Unfortunately, R.N. Cust, the immediate recipient of the manuscript on behalf of the society, was ambivalent about it. In his words,

It speaks volumes in favour of the degree of culture to which Negro missionaries have obtained, when they can compose in so complete and orderly manner such a gigantic work. I look at it with admiration—no native convert of India [sic] could produce such work: unluckily it is so very prolix, and the subject matter so very unimportant both from a secular and religiou's [sic] point of view, that I know not what to recommend....The SPCK would not look at such work: the book would not sell: the whole subject is painful to me, as I feel for the author. 14

Cust, who had "expected a small manuscript for a pamphlet" acknowledged that he had not attempted to read the voluminous work due to his busy schedule, but what followed shows that the English missionary society, by treating the document as inconsequential to its half a century exertion among the Yoruba, failed to recognize its own moment of success. Johnson, a Yoruba convert and beneficiary of the CMS exploit that sought to do reparation for Africa's suffering in the trans-Atlantic slave trade by transforming its peoples through Christianity, commerce and civilization, had internalised deeply and had vindicated the cultural ideology that informed the CMS missionary activities for the greater part of the nineteenth century. This failure of the CMS establishment and its timing depict something about Johnson and the Society.

First, the work's emphasis on Yoruba culture and realities proves the dominant influence of the Basel elements on Johnson than that of their English colleagues in the mission. It could not have been otherwise, Johnson having been shaped under their

^{1981,} ed. Torben Christensen and William R. Hutchinson (Aarhus C, Denmark: Forlaget Aros, 1982), 94-103.

¹³ R. Cust to the Secretaries, January 3, 1899, CMS G3/A2/O(1899)/3.

¹⁴ R. Cust to the Secretaries, January 3, 1899, CMS G3/A2/O(1899)/3.

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. 15 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". 16 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 democratised knowledge and positioned,

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¹⁵ The History of the Church Missionary Society—Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work, vol.1 (London: CMS, 1899).

¹⁶ Lamin Sanneh, "Christian Missions and the Western Guilt Complex", *The Christian Century*, April 8, 1987, 331-334.

though inadvertently, those who came under their tutelage for their eventual attainment of political independence for their people.¹⁷

Still, when viewed from another perspective, the emergence of Johnson's work of history should have laid to rest the perennial comparison of Africa with India in the CMS missionary circle, as if African converts were incapable of original response to the evangelization of their people. On a positive note, Mr. Chapman, a member of the Parent Committee, perceived African converts as possessing the intellectual capacity necessary for the Christian ministry as their Indian counterparts who were coming to Christianity from a literate culture. This appears to be the reason for nudging Bühler to introduce the classical languages into his teaching programme at Abeokuta in 1863. On the other hand are those, like Townsend at Abeokuta in the 1860s and Melville Jones in the 1890s who do not see Africans as profiting from a liberal education; and there seems to be more English missionaries in this latter group.

Stephen Neill re-echoed this negative view of the ability of the African convert-evangelists when he criticized, in the 1950s, Henry Venn's vision of the indigenous church. For him, Crowther's consecration was "ill-conceived and ill-conducted", hence its failure. But the Indian model wherein Bishop Azariah was supported by "three exceptionally able European archdeacons and a very strong missionary staff" was, to him, a better model that could have helped the mission in the Niger Delta to plant Christianity, or rather Anglicanism, among the indigenous people. Happily, the African evangelists were not educated to replicate Canterbury among their people, but to assist in planting indigenous churches among them, albeit in communion with the church worldwide. Yet, it is significant that Johnson's work of history, among other expressions of indigenous appropriation of Christianity in Africa, demonstrates the creative use to which the African evangelists could put Christian conversion. Beyond the new missionaries'

¹⁷ Sanneh developed this theme of missions' cultural achievements in Africa in his article "Christian Missions and the Western Guilt Complex", stressing the pleasant yet paradoxical consequences of missionary engagement with African cultures and the power the missionaries unleashed through their converts in dislodging the colonial enterprise in Africa.

¹⁸ G. Bühler to I. Chapman, January 30, 1863, CMS C/A2/O24/21.

¹⁹ Stephen Neill, Anglicanism (London: Penguin Books, 1958), 341.

²⁰ Neill.

rigid emphasis on its transcendent value for the world to come, the converts saw present value in Christianity for their people. And it is noteworthy that through Johnson's manuscript, Robert Cust, a member of the CMS committee, could see things in a new light even if he did not know what to do with the unexpected that confronted him in it. In this perplexity, Johnson's intellectual exploit through *The History of the Yorubas* shows that the CMS overachieved itself.²¹

A Patriot or a Colonial Front?

On one end of the broad spectrum of the local responses to colonial presence in Lagos and its imminent extension into the country were the overt and covert oppositions of the Lagos elites and those of the Egba and Ijebu peoples. In running cheerfully and with commitment the political errands of the Alafin and, later, the colonial government, Johnson placed himself on the opposite end of the spectrum. And he was as suspicious of the Lagos elements, in particular, as much as they were of him. But he justified his action on the basis of the necessity that drew him into facilitating communication between the Yoruba indigenous order and the colonial one on the coast. In his words,

...[T]he interior at that time was so little known that people living at ease and security at Lagos had no idea of those arduous circumstances of life that moved men resolute and brave to protect their interests by the sinews of their own right arms. Probably there were not half a dozen men in all Lagos, certainly not among the "influential" personages—so called—who knew the exact state of things prevailing in the interior....²²

Evidently, Johnson saw himself as better informed about the situation in the interior, hence his insistence that "nothing less than an armed intervention could prevail upon the belligerents to decamp". ²³ But no one had the military might to so intervene other than the colonial government, and he considered the situation desperate enough to justify his pragmatic response rather than indulge in the morbid fear of the extension of colonial rule into the country.

²¹ The worldwide readership and the appreciation *The History of the Yorubas* has attracted in academic circles do not only vindicate the impression of R.N. Cust on the quality of the work but also prove erroneous his hasty conclusion that the book would not sell.

²² Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 482.

²³ Johnson.

With the advantage of hindsight in post-colonial Africa, Johnson's implicit faith in the beneficent value of British colonialism to Yoruba nation and his role as the principal facilitator in the declaration of Yoruba country as its protectorate appears erroneous. It has been suggested that, writing from an anterior position to the colonial order, he did not foresee the unsolicited incorporation of the protectorate he worked for into the new nation state of Nigeria. Worse still, he did not envisage the eventual political subjugation of his people to the Islamic power from the north at the exit of the colonial regime. ²⁴ This observation comes into a sharper focus against the background that in spite of the internal struggle for dominance among the Yoruba people, Ibadan fought hard to defend the country against the aggression of the Islamic power in the north. And what is more? Johnson believed that Divine Providence assigned this role to Ibadan.

But it may not be assumed that Johnson uncritically contemplated a benevolent rule of the colonialists over his people. In the first place, he knew that Yoruba people had lost "their absolute independence" in consequence of their wars and the intervention of the British government on the coast.²⁵ He lived to see the difficult beginning of the contact between interior peoples and the colonial agents there; but he considered the development as an unavoidable experience that, hopefully, would pass away as the country settled into the new dispensation. In the second place, and as a living witness to the confusion and destruction going on in the country, he had no misgivings that the Yoruba peoples in the interior had lost their internal resources to quell the rampage going on among them. Even those who appeared to be far away from the theatres of war had been drawn in and were prejudiced, hence unqualified to intervene with effect. For Johnson, then, a viable solution was in the synergy of the sane minds in the country with the assumed benevolent power of the colonial authorities on the coast. This is at one level.

At another level, in contrast to Lagos elites, Johnson held a view that was popular among English people at home and abroad as well as among CMS returnee agents in Yoruba land at the time. The view was that Britain had a spiritual, political and moral responsibility to spread its perceived noble civilization and the benevolent grace of

²⁴ J. F. Ade Ajayi, "Samuel Johnson and Yoruba Historiography," 65; John Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 311.

²⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 403.

Christianity in Africa. This mindset evolved from among the abolitionists in the first half of the century. But it attained a fever pitch in the second half of the century in response to David Livingstone's relentless urge on the British government to colonize Africa. His aim was that through its African colonies, Britain would offer to Africans its benevolent civilization and legitimate commerce in replacement of the evils of the East African slave trade, "the open sore of the continent."

Although Britain had hitherto reluctantly joined in the scramble for Africa in a "fit of absent mindedness," it became a matter of popular pressure at home for the European power to step forward with its perceived noble civilization along with Christianity being proclaimed by its missionary agencies. Johnson had this in mind when he prayed and hoped that after the wars, "peace should reign universally, with prosperity and advancement, and that the disjointed units should all be once more welded into one...that clannish spirit disappear, and above all that Christianity should be the principal religion in the land..."

It is therefore evident that Johnson did not see the British colonial order encroaching on the beleaguered nineteenth century Yoruba land as a threat to the future of the people. Rather, he saw it as a local manifestation of a universal providence at work, reshaping the world as benevolent forces of good bring nations together in a universal commonweal through the triumph of Christianity, colonialism being a vehicle in the process just as the missionary movement had earlier been in the vanguard. This is underscored by his triumphantly reporting, where Rev. James Johnson was protesting, the 1892 military expedition of the colonial government against the Ijebu, people whom Johnson considered as most belligerent to the end, marginal in origin to "Yoruba proper" and as hitherto "most exclusive and inhospitable". Samuel Johnson's graphic

²⁶ Carl Reindorf's celebration of the ascendancy of British colonial order in the Gold Coast may be seen in this respect also. *The History of the Gold Coast and Asante*. 2nd ed. (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1966), 335.

²⁷ Tim Jeal, *Livingstone* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 370-384.

²⁸ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 642.

²⁹ The role of the Ijebu during the century long crisis in Yorubaland varied with the people's circumstances as their alliances formed and dissolved with the tides and ebbs of their interests and circumstances, perhaps like any other group that was involved. But the crucial nature of their involvement in the stirring events of the period derived from their strategic location between the coast and the Yoruba interior. Against this background, they were the first belligerent party to use gunpowder in the wars, as early as in the sack of Owu in the 1820s. Ibadan also had an unsavoury taste of Ijebu's location advantage when, in alliance with Egba, its people deprived Ibadan forces access to modern weapons which their adversaries at Kiriji had in abundance. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 18-20, 210, 452- 454, 608-622.

description of the immediate effect of the expedition carries a tinge of solemnity one cannot miss after going through the preceding account of the sharp but short expedition. He wrote that:

The taking of Ijebu Ode sent a shock of surprise and alarm throughout the whole land. The people felt instinctively that a new era was about to dawn on them. A new and foreign power had entered into the arena of active politics in the country, and everyone was exercised in mind as to how the country would be affected by it. Combatants suspended hostilities and all of them together turned their faces coastwards. ³⁰

Thereafter the pastor-storyteller recounts the immediate, beneficial result of quelling the wars as free movement of goods and services, freedom of worship, and security of life and property, all of which made the country to heave a sigh of relief. Particularly in Ijebuland, Christianity became a lawful religion as the few converts among the people, who until then were resident in Lagos and dared not profess their faith at home, pledged their "loyalty and patriotic devotion" to the traditional authorities.³¹

But was Johnson right in reading imminent renewal and progress into the late nineteenth century Yoruba country through the involvement of the British colonial power? The answer to this question may still be located in his intellectual framework of providential historiography, which, in Sir Herbert's conception, is "that kind of history-making which goes on...over our heads...deflecting the results of our actions... taking our purposes out of our hands, and...turning our endeavors to ends not realised". Yet, this is not by vague chance but by a Divine ordering which human beings are "not by any means in a position to recreate...to the heart's desire." Explicitly, this is a perception of history as an unfolding reality that transcends human will although human beings are its active participants as objects and subjects of its processes. Seen in this light, the outcome of Johnson's vision of a Yoruba nation with "the disjointed units...once more welded into one under one head from the Niger to the coast" may not have been all voided by the turn of events in the colonial era as it may appear at a cursory glance. A Rather, it may be reckoned as having been absorbed into the emergent history of the people in this period and subsequently. And this is no less under the guardianship of the Providence that earlier

³⁰ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 623-625.

³¹ Johnson.

³² Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (London: G. Bells and Sons, 1949), 94-96.

³³ Herbert Butterfield.

³⁴ J. F. Ade Ajayi, Samuel Johnson and Yoruba Historiography", 65-66.

brought them unprecedented prosperity "in the happy days of Abiodun", restrained their frenzied self-dissolution through a foreign anti-slavery movement, led Christian missions into their country, brought their wars to an end and so redeemed them from their destruction. Two historical evidences further confirm this redemptive process.

The first is the social transformation of Ijebu land and its people after the 1892 British punitive expedition to Ijebu Ode. Ayandele has lucidly traced the socio-political and economic development of Ijebu people from the closing years of their self-imposed isolation to their emergence as one of the most dynamic peoples in mid-twentieth century Nigeria. Their transformation began in their zealously embracing Christianity and civilization through the school system in consequence of the expedition. The revolutionary outcome of this volt face can be appreciated against the background of their opening up their country to external influences nearly half a century after their Egba and Yoruba compatriots had received Christian missions. For by the middle of the twentieth century, they had attained the same intellectual prowess and business acumen as their Egba neighbours while completely outstripping in all departments of social transformation their compatriots in the hinterland who, after a century long missionary presence among them, were yet to wake up to the advantages of the new era. In the pleasant transformation of the Ijebu state from being a roguish power between interior peoples and the coast, the first became the last and the last the first.

The second evidence of the providential realization of Johnson's vision for Yoruba land is the emergence of the pan-Yoruba consciousness among the former rivals during the colonial era. This brought about the integration of the Ijebu and the easternmost and southernmost peoples of Ijesha, Ekiti, Ondo, Ikale, and Ilaje, into the Yoruba identity. So complete was this integration that two prominent sons of the once implacable Ijebu became the foremost leaders and advocates of Yoruba people's interests in the turbulent politics of the Nigerian state at independence and afterwards. Obafemi Awolowo, 1909-1987, from Ikenne, emerged as one of the most versatile and visionary politicians of the Nigerian state in the second half of the twentieth century. With his development programme, particularly in the field of education from the 1950s, Awolowo intensified the advantage of the head start Christian missions gave Yoruba people in the emergent Nigerian state. In spite of their restive politics, this further positioned them for decisive political and economic leverages in the Nigerian state after independence.

³⁵ E.A. Ayandele, *The Ijebu of Yorubaland, 1850-1950: Politics, Economy and Society* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books).

Hubert Ogunde, 1916-1991, from Ososa near Ijebu-Ode, was a pioneer professional theatre artist who used his plays to critique the rivalry that erupted again among Yoruba peoples at the end of the colonial period. His "Yoruba Ronu", "Yoruba, Reflect!", staged in the early 1960s, and in the mould of Johnson's vision for the Yoruba nation, was a clarion call to the people to remember their great past and break from their cycle of bitter politics of treachery and self-negation, especially in the competitive and pluralist environment of Nigeria.

However Johnson's political activities may be interpreted, it may be observed that neither his experience of nor response to change was exotic. Far away in Southern Africa, while he was still learning the alphabets of Christian ministry under Bühler at Abeokuta, early in the 1860s, Tiyo Soga was already wrestling with the same reality Johnson would soon be engaging in Yoruba land among his own people.

An Excursus: Tiyo Soga of Xhosaland

Tiyo Soga was born in 1829 on the Eastern frontier of the Cape Colony. By parentage he was of a noble birth as his father was "a leading counsellor" to Ngqika, the paramount chief of the amaXhosa. His formative years were marked by frontier wars generated by the systematic dispossession of Southern African indigenous peoples of their land by the white settlers. At the same time, Western missions were making their inroads into the country, establishing mission stations from where they introduced to the people elements of Western civilization. Young Soga grew in this ambivalent environment, but his future tilted in the direction of the missions, his father having embraced Christianity through the influence of Ntsikana. Ntsikana was a prophet-like convert to Christianity who very early indigenized Christianity among his Xhosa people with the hymns he composed for their worship.

In comparison with his younger West African colleague, Samuel Johnson, who was born in a cosmopolitan colony, Tiyo Soga was born into an indigenous society whose insularity to the outside world was fast breaking down. The same forces that were opening up the society—the politics of the territorial expansion of the Cape Colony and the activities of Christian missions—would later shape young Soga's Christian vocation. Guided by the interest the Scottish missionary William Chalmers took in him, Tiyo Soga

³⁶ Donovan Williams, *Umfundisi—A Biography of Toyo Soga 1829-1871* (Lovedale, SA: Lovedale Press, 1978), 1.

³⁷ Williams, 5.

was educated at the mission school after which he proceeded to the Lovedale Seminary. The missionary eventually sponsored him for further training in Scotland, an experience that broadened his horizon and deepened his growing westernization. His marriage to Janet Burnside, a Scot, before he returned home completed that process.³⁸ But the marriage to the European woman became a social burden in a country where racial ill-feeling was endemic.

Soga returned to South Africa in April 1857 to work at the Mgwali mission station, located where the 1856-57 Cattle Killing took place. Although it was a well endowed country, it was a melancholic community when Soga arrived there. The people had responded in obedience to the divination of Nongqause³⁹ and her uncle that "the ancient Xhosa chiefs...commanded the people to destroy their cattle and corn. If they did so, the Whites would be swept into the sea and the cattle and corn would magically reappear." Nothing followed their obedience to the injunction but starvation, death and migration. The experience evoked in Soga a commitment to the enlightenment of his people. He pursued this while he grew to resent the colonial policy of indiscriminately displacing them from their ancestral lands and resettling them on those of others.⁴¹

This early model of an educated "Kaffir" worked amicably with his European colleagues in the mission and he believed in the value of the Christian message they brought to his people. In this he too joined them to discourage in the converts at the mission stations the practice of indigenous rites of passage. Consequently, as it was with other African peoples, the advance of Christianity in Xhosaland almost always brought the converts on a collision course with the indigenous society. Tiyo Soga had no problem with this conflict. He himself considered it a revolt when some of the young people living at the Mgwali station resorted to traditional values. Indeed Soga did not find it easy making the way for Christianity among his people and the experience took a toll on his health. Before he moved to Tutura where he had difficulty establishing the mission "he described it as a place 'where midnight darkness covers the people'". 43 Yet, like

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³⁸ Williams, 26.

³⁹ Nongquase was a young lady traditional-prophet who, with her uncle "communed with the spirits of the ancient Xhosa chiefs". She was one of the local figures that emerged from among the people in response to the social trauma created by the invasion of Xhosaland by European settlers. Williams, 59.

⁴⁰ Williams.

⁴¹ Williams, 94, 95.

⁴² The young people "circumcised themselves, painted themselves white and retired into a hut to observe the customary period of seclusion". Williams, 84.

⁴³ Williams, 86.

Johnson's move from Ibadan to Oyo, David Atwell sees in Soga's move from Mgwali to work among the Gcaleka at Tutura, "in the heart of Xhosaland", as "a symbolic one, for it drew him closer to traditional society, as if he were trying to heal one of the contradictions of his life". 44

But, Soga's active interests in the Xhosa's cultural heritage (stories, fables, legends, customs, anecdotes and history of the clans) during his years at Tutura were more confident than something coming from a subdued man. He spent valuable time to write down these identity issues of his people, and he rejoiced at the emergence of the newspaper *Indaba* in 1862, seeing it as the means through which they would be preserved. In his article celebrating the emergence of the paper, he set the agenda for the documentation of Xhosa history and traditions, encouraging the subscribers to bind together, at the end of the year, the copies that were issued. For him, these volumes would serve as documented history and traditions of his people. Here again is the manifestation of the perennial ambivalence of African mission agents towards their society. In explaining it in Tiyo Soga, Donovan Williams seems to offer some glimpses into the dynamic involved in their response to change:

The enthusiasm with which [he] sought to preserve the history of his people was worthy of a true nationalist. Instinctively, he responded to the pull of patriotism with an emotional appeal to the past, its heroes and their achievements. Equally, explanations of the origins of present rites and customs would enrich his people. Thus he was inadvertently attempting to strengthen the cake of custom which was so often an obstacle to the progress of Christianity and civilisation. If Tiyo Soga did not realise that he was doing so, it was because he was a man of two worlds, unable to detach himself completely from either. Determined to free his people from the tyranny of obnoxious tribal rites and customs which should crumble with the advance of Christianity and civilisation, he nevertheless saw tribal society as worthy of preservation because it was different from western societies and their mores. And nationalism, even in diluted form, feeds on the uniqueness of societies.⁴⁶

The tension between "the pull of patriotism" and the determination "to free his people from obnoxious ...rites and customs" is the result of the two worlds over which the nineteenth century African evangelist stood astride.

⁴⁴ David Attwell, The Transculturation of Enlightenment—The Exemplary Case of the Rev Tiyo Soga, African Nationalist, in Philippe Denis, ed., *The Making of an Indigenous Clergy in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, SA: Cluster Publications, 1995), 56.

⁴⁵ Williams, *Umfundisi*, 98.

⁴⁶ Williams, 99.

Soga's cultural and historical papers did not survive, but his translation of Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress* did. It was only in this that his literary genius survived. Yet, in a way Tiyo Soga shows a broader vision of his African identity. This aspect of his African-ness was stirred awake when in 1865 his European, albeit partially Africanized, colleague in the mission John Chalmers wrote in *Indaba* a defamatory article, "What is the Destiny of the Kaffir Race?" More than the taunt he had endured from the unconverted Europeans in the colony for marrying a white woman, Soga was jolted from his innocence, and he responded to the article with all the intellectual resources at his disposal.

Chalmers' article was a result of the poor progress the Scottish Mission had made among the Xhosa and must be seen in the same light as the frustration Basel missionaries felt in the same period for the poor progress they made among the Akyem people of the Gold Coast. The difference is that while the former proceeded in an environment of systematic disempowerment that had commenced from the closing decades of the eighteenth century and had weakened Xhosa indigenous society, the latter was between an underdog missionary society and a thriving society whose institutions were still intact. Hence, in Akyem Abuakwa, the ensuing crisis lasted for nearly two decades, and the Basel Mission only survived it by drawing from the judicial intervention of the British colonial power at Cape Coast. But in Xhosa land, it was Tiyo Soga who rose to the intellectual challenge his long-time associate threw. It brought out of him in midnineteenth century South Africa Black-consciousness.

Here it may be observed that unlike Johnson who was born and who lived only his early years in the cosmopolitan environment of Sierra Leone, Soga had his own experience of cosmopolitanism in his mature years and he was able to assimilate more the ideas that came to him in consequence of it. Particularly in Scotland, his horizon was broadened in his contact, not only with the Whites among whom he schooled but also, with Africans in the diaspora, one of whom he was to be married to.⁴⁷ Soga drew from this experience to argue the bright future prospect of Africans, not just of those at the Southern end of the continent, but also those in the other parts and in the diaspora.⁴⁸ Williams has assessed Soga's reference to the Blacks in America, in his rejoinder to Chalmers, as "the first evidence of Africa-consciousness on the part of a Black in

⁴⁷ Donovan Williams wrote that Tiyo Soga "almost married Stella, a black girl who, with her uncle, the Rev. David Garnet from America, was visiting Scotland. However, she died shortly after leaving for home". *Umfundisi*, 26.

⁴⁸ Williams, 95-97.

southern Africa" and sees it as "his unique contribution to the origins of Black nationalism." Although it is contestable that his Black-consciousness is original to him, his vision was no doubt continental. This is because the critique to which he was responding was not merely local in implication; being racial, it was wider in scope.

Soga's life story, like those of his West African counterparts, shows the intrinsic nature of ethno-cultural identity to the African agents of missions. While their evangelistic activities give the impression, on the surface, that that identity was not important to them, realities that are both internal and external to them did spring them to action. Whether they were moving from the cosmopolitan to the provincial, like Johnson, or they were moving from the provincial to the cosmopolitan, like Soga, they often returned to their roots enamoured with their traditions. In this, change, expressed in time and existence, has proved to be the principal ingredient in their transformation and motivation to preserve those traditions.

The Legacy of Johnson

In spite of the traumatic experience of his fellow agents in the hand of the new Europeans entering the service of the CMS in the late 1880s and the consequent collapse of Bishop Crowther's Niger Mission in which his own elder brother Henry suffered, Samuel Johnson resolutely focused on the positive side of missionary activities among his people. For him, the triad of Christianity, commerce and civilization were doing their quiet work of transformation in the midst of decay. Indeed time had changed and the outcome of the revolutionary events in the country had shown that no institution of the people could remain sacrosanct. Traditions might have been re-established, but they had also been consciously adapted to the changing times by the institution that was their ultimate custodian, the Alafin. In the face of this conscious adaptation, the country continued to run out of internal resources to extricate itself from its crushing predicaments. In such a strait, his support for the Alafin's request for the intervention of an external power may not be uncircumspect even if the king was not sincere. When his efforts are viewed from the reality he encountered and those still unfolding around him in

⁴⁹ Williams

⁵⁰ From the intimation that Tiyo Soga had a deep contact with Africans in Scotland, it may not be far-fetched to attribute the source of his pan-African consciousness to his contact with them, just as the Ethiopian movement in the sub-continent issued from the influences of the Africans in North America. Erhard Kamphausen, "Unknown Heroes—The Founding Fathers of the Ethiopian Movement in South Africa", in Philippe Denis, ed., *The Making of an Indigenous Clergy in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, SA: Cluster Publications, 1995), 83-101.

the encroachment of British colonial interest whose outcome was then too premature to predict, Johnson appears as one facilitating resource sharing in crisis management. And this is not surprising. His birth in the cosmopolitan environment of Sierra Leone and his upbringing in the liberal, cross-cultural missionary environment of Yorubaland both created in the man a cosmopolitan personality that had no misgivings about the common humanity of all nations and the common destiny they share in the world. Alarming as colonialism became in the twentieth century and insolent in its brazenness as the twenty-first century now looks back at it, it is questionable logic to query those who lived on the other side of its unfolding narrative, as Ayandele did in his "proposography". And more positively, the object of Johnson's diplomacy—that is, drawing from external sources to resolve local crises—has become the present norm in conflict management, world over, as nations rise to the assistance of one another in situations of social, economic and political distresses.

Johnson's facilitation of the declaration of the Yoruba country as a British Protectorate may also be viewed against the background of his documenting the ethnographic details of his people as part of their cultural history and identity worth preserving. In this Johnson demonstrated that he was not an uncritical enthusiast of the change creeping on Yoruba people. Hence, rather than consign their cultural identity and religious ingenuity to the ash heap of history, he gave them a critical presentation that recognized their intrinsic value. And although for him, the changing times and their attendant light justified the modifications introduced while re-establishing tradition at Oyo and required that the traditional cults yield the ground to the new faith of Christianity, they deserved to be remembered as having sustained the Yoruba nation through its youth. This he seems to be saying in documenting them. Implicitly as he looked back on the Yoruba past with critical assessment, he looked forward with cautious hope that the emerging dispensation would not usher in a crisis of identity and state of anomie, but rather that it would proceed with sensitivity to the past.

The emergence of the Yoruba Aladura movement, barely two decades after Johnson's demise, vindicated this quiet hope, even if it is not certain how he would have responded to the movement. For in it, the intrinsic religious effervescence of Yoruba people refused to be satisfied with the melancholic niche to which mission Christianity sought to consign it. Rather, it detonated the newfound faith with the vitality reminiscent

of its Palestinian beginning.⁵¹ It is, therefore, not far-fetched to conclude that, in his cultural sensitivity as he stared at the future with its rapid change, Johnson intuitively knew that "[t]he unification of societies [as to blur their distinctions and peculiarities] is not in itself a good thing. The value of universal history depends on the good it serves and the goal towards which it is directed."⁵² Perhaps this is the criteria by which the opening up of Africa and other southern continents to European influence may be dispassionately evaluated. When it was being facilitated in the mid-nineteenth century by British abolitionist movements and Christian missions, the aim was to speed up the religious and economic regeneration of Africa.⁵³ Johnson knew this, and, along with it, he could not have lost sight of the value his mission attached to preserving the distinctive peculiarities of indigenous peoples, at least until there emerged a new ethos in the mission. It is in this light also that his liberal disposition towards the expansion of the British Empire into Yoruba land finds meaning. Not that the Yoruba people might become fully anglicized, but that they might take the best from a civilization that had been generous to them, first in Sierra Leone and now in their country, and use it to strengthen their weaknesses.

This rationale may not be surprising. For to the extent that the establishment of the British Empire in Africa was originally conceived by its religious protagonists as a benevolent mission, it held the potential for good and so received the approval of those who were concerned at home about Africa and its predicaments. But it is another thing that it went awry in many respects in the hand of unscrupulous managers.⁵⁴ Yet this does not detract from the fact that it was originally conceived to the end that it might serve the good of the people. Viewed from this perspective, Johnson was neither arbitrary nor naïve in his perception of the dynamics at work around him. On the contrary, he made an

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⁵¹ The Aladura (Prayer People) movement erupted in Yoruba land in the wake of the worldwide influenza epidemic of 1918.

⁵² World Council of Churches, "God in Nature and History" in *God, History, and Historians: An Anthology of Modern Christian Views of History*, ed. C. T. McIntire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 321.

David Livingstone, who proved more influential in death than in life, served the congregational London Missionary Society and campaigned for Africa's regeneration through colonization. His thinking may have been a product of the European Christendom mindset of his age, but his influence cut across the nineteenth century British society. It may be recalled also that the missionary ethos of the CMS until the third quarter of the nineteenth century was still being officially guided by Henry Venn's sensitivity to the indigenous peculiarities of the peoples being evangelized. In that case, the idea of the "British Protectorate," which the CMS missionaries in Yorubaland favoured did not imply their working for the subjugation of the country. Ironically, the eventual declaration of the country as a protectorate did not take place during the service. It took place when younger missionaries came on the scene who had no sympathy for the intercourse between mission and even their own country.

⁵⁴ Johnson witnessed some of these effects. *The History of the Yorubas*, 643, 644.

informed choice, even if he himself did not know how long the new phase of established protectorate, which became a colony, would last among his people. And the issue here is not whether he took a right or wrong decision, for that is a matter of individual opinion. The issue is that he was conscious of the change at work in his world and would not fold his hand hoping that things would turn out right. He responded with confidence in the transformation he believed Christianity would bring his people. On this, Sir Herbert Butterfield's comment is to the point:

Our final interpretation of history is the most sovereign decision we can take, and it is clear that every one of us, as standing alone in the universe, has to take it for himself. It is our decision about religion, about our total attitude to things, and about the way we will appropriate life. And it is inseparable from our decision about the role we are going to play ourselves in that very drama of history.⁵⁵

Johnson made his decision in the confidence that a Divine Providence was at work in his world and, particularly, in the history of the Yoruba nation. He discerned the steps of this Providence in his own critical reading of that history. Much more, he followed intently in its trail as one in its service to redeem the history. In thus seeking to resolve for his people the polar tension between the rapidly receding past and the speedily encroaching future, he may prove relevant again to Africa and its Christianity in the twenty-first century under the twin forces of internal conflicts and a new cultural flow called globalization. Certainly neither in the encouragement to indiscriminately imbibe everything in the flow of globalization nor in a blind ideological resistance to it. Rather, his complex hybrid identity, informed by his upbringing and his choice to remain true to his Yoruba roots while open to the beneficial values in other cultures, may be instructive. ⁵⁶

Yoruba Studies and Politics after Johnson

The eventual mutation of the British Protectorate in the Yoruba country into a full colony proved the fears of the nationalists in Lagos who had been its bugbear in the coastal settlement and had watched with foreboding its imminent extension into the

⁵⁵ Herbert Butterfield, "Historical Scholarship and Its Relation to Life" in *God, History, and Historians: An Anthology of Modern Christian Views of History,* ed. C. T. McIntire (New York: OUP, 1977), 372.

⁵⁶ Robert Schreiter has developed the theme of hybridity in his work, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997). 74-78. He noted, particularly, that "Hybridity may be a fact of the globalized world, celebrating the diversity it creates. But all are not sure that this celebration of hybridity should be done uncritically", 77.

hinterland. It is an acknowledged fact that the role of the early nationalists—churchmen and their ordinary members—in the criticism of colonial policy was not so much a questioning of the validity of Christianity in their country. They had received the faith as part of their identity, but they loathed the racial pretensions of their colonial overlords in church and state. The emergence of Herbert Macaulay, Samuel Crowther's grandson, as the foremost leader of the pack from the 1920s speaks of the calibre of people who took the frontline in the new nationalist fervour of the early twentieth century.⁵⁷

Whereas Johnson kept his cultural nationalism at the intellectual level, his son-in-law Theophilus Ogunbiyi in 1914 brought it into the CMS Yoruba church as the politics of self-affirmation in the face of European racism became more brazen. The movement of Egba Christians towards the Ogboni institution had started at Abeokuta by the 1850s, and it had since been a controversial issue within the CMS Yoruba Mission whether a Christian could belong to such an institution with all its traditional rituals. Early in the twentieth century, this Egba churchman, Ogunbiyi, established the Reformed Ogboni Fraternity (ROF) among his fellow ministers in Lagos as a Yoruba form of the European Freemasonry, distinct from the one his fellow Egba ministers had been associating with in the nineteenth century. With time it drew membership from across the other professions like medicine and law, and, in spite of general scepticism that dogged it from the beginning, it spread among the Yoruba elites until the late 1970s when public opinion that labelled it a secret cult weighed against it heavily. The Nigerian government then forbade its civil servants from taking up membership in the fraternity, and some churches did the same with their ministers and members.

Nevertheless, the apparent bonding that took place in the body politic of the Yoruba country under the *Pax Britannica* also became evident in the renewed confidence of Yoruba intellectuals at the end of what Johnson considered as the fifth period of

⁵⁷ The "new" here refers to the colonial creation of the political entity called Nigeria in contrast to the indigenous and independent cultural entities of the pre-colonial era. The nationalist struggle of the churchmen like Rev. James Johnson and Mojola Agbebi (of the Baptists) was not in the defence of the former, that is the artificial nation state, but the indigenous ones in which they functioned and championed for much of their careers with their missions. James Johnson, for example, only lived to see the dawn of the new nation state in 1914 with the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates. With his death in 1917, he did not live to see the new trauma created by the coerced fusion of the two protectorates.

⁵⁸ John Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 269-271.

⁵⁹ In pre-colonial Yorubaland, the *Ogboni* was the council of ruling elders who took high level decisions in their conclaves. Among the Egba people, they decided cases that involved the death penalty. For many years, membership in the ROF spread among Yoruba elites and gained the notoriety of being a secret cult that perverted justice.

Yoruba history. It is another irony that at the end of that period emerged Bolaji Idowu, another Yoruba churchman of the Methodist strand whose views on Yoruba religions stood at the opposite end of Johnson's. In fact, Idowu indicted the advent of Christianity among his people. The thought of the Professor of African religion at the University of Ibadan is worth exploring, if only briefly.

Bolaji Idowu was an early beneficiary of the new perception of African religions that emerged among European missionary teachers who came to Africa as from the 1940s. ⁶⁰ Under Geoffrey Parrinder, he profited from this new awareness and eventually produced under his supervision at the University of London an apologetic for Yoruba religions, which he titled *Olodumare*, *God in Yoruba Belief* (1962). It was a pioneering work on the religious genius of the African people. In the closing chapter, which had the title "Change or Decay", Idowu assessed the changes that had overtaken Yoruba religions and came up with the view that the advent of Islam and Christianity in Yorubaland were disruptions that contributed to the moral crisis in Yoruba society in the twentieth century. In his words.

Christianity, by a miscarriage of purpose, makes its own contribution to the detrimental changes in moral values. Somehow, it has replaced the old fear of the divinities with the relieving but harmful notion of a God Who is a sentimental Old Man, ever ready to forgive perhaps even more than man is prone to sin, the God in whom 'goodness and severity' have been put asunder.⁶¹

As an academic, this was his first critique of the missionary religions.

Then as a churchman, he continued this critique of Christianity in Nigeria when he published his radio lectures in 1965 under the title, *Towards the Indigenous Church*. Here, in the nationalist spirit of the age, he contended for the indigenization of the structures of mission churches, which had become anglicized during the colonial period. In his words:

[T]he Church in Nigeria is on trial: she is being called upon to justify her existence in the country; to answer in precise terms the question as to whether her purpose in Nigeria is to serve as an effective tool of imperialism, a veritable means of softening up Nigerians for the purpose of

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⁶⁰ Andrew Walls, "Geoffrey Parrinder (1910) and the Study of Religion in West Africa", in *European Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*, ed. Frieder Ludwig and Afe Adogame (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 207-208.

⁶¹ Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare—God in Yoruba Belief*, rev. ed. (Ikeja, Nigeria: Longman, 1996), 227.

convenient exploitation by Europeans...whether the aim of the religious educator in Nigeria was to make Christians or to 'Westernize' Nigerians; whether in fact, Christianity and 'Westernism' are not synonyms in their evangelistic vocabulary...whether what we have in Nigeria today is in fact Christianity, and not in fact only transplantation from a European cult the various ramifications of which are designated Methodist, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist and so forth.⁶²

In a way, this critique is similar to what Johnson did when he berated the Yoruba elite for their ignorance of their indigenous culture while they boasted of their knowledge of European history. But if Idowu's ardent approach appears like a muted objection to the presence of Christianity in Yorubaland, his African Traditional Religion (1973) was his ultimate stroke that made clear his view on Christianity and other "foreign" or "imported" religions vis-à-vis African religions. In it he addressed the popular notion that African religions are polytheistic by arguing the unity of their many divinities as intermediaries between human beings and the Supreme God. Hence he called "diffused monotheism" what was being regarded as polytheism. In closing the work, he submitted that:

The main emphasis [of his time] is a total condemnation of the adoption of any 'foreign' or 'imported' religion by Africans: Africa must recover her soul; she must give the first and supreme position to her own Godappointed prophets [diviners, shamans, rainmakers, and others?]. With 'Goddianism' in mind, it is now permissible...to appropriate the best element in any culture or religion for the enrichment of the African culture and beliefs; but always, African traditional Religion *must* [his emphasis] be the religion of every African.⁶³

The problem with Idowu is that he does not appear to be consistent in his view on the status of Christianity in Africa and what should be its relationship with African religions. His struggle may be attributed to his dual role as an academic and as a churchman between which he was seeking to maintain a balance. But by the 1970s, with pan-Africanism at its all time zenith, he could not but cast his lot with the nationalists, hence his fully exemplifying in African Traditional Religion the spirit of the age that argued for the primacy of African religion in the life of its peoples. Idowu's indictment of Christianity's supposed permissiveness appears to indicate something about him and his times.

⁶² Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an indigenous Church* (London: OUP, 1965), 1.

⁶³ Bolaji Idowu, African Traditional Religion — A Definition (London: SCM Press, 1973), 207.

First, it seems to indicate among the Yoruba elites of the colonial period a social loss of memory of the upheavals that tormented their people in the nineteenth century. Or it may indicate, in the spirit of his times, Idowu's brazen refusal to come to terms with the past. Either way, he did not appear to be mindful of the irreligion that attended Yoruba prosperity in their pre-Christian past and which, in Johnson's view, paved the way for the decadence and disintegration of the country in the century-long wars of attrition. This loss of memory was entrenched by the pan-Yoruba consciousness that evolved during the half century of colonialism. The depth of this consciousness is seen in the fact that the various sub-ethnic groups of the nation could, by the 1950s, take Yoruba identity for granted while they were still conscious of their differences.

Second, Idowu's triumphalism also shows the weakness inherent in nationalist intellectual fervour that attended Africa's immediate, post-colonial response to the past. It was too bellicose and laden with ideological polemics to be self-critical and reflective to learn from that past in order to chart a viable course for the future. Here also the implication was far reaching. Lost in the euphoria of the moment, this blind nationalism did not address itself to the complexity of the new nation states bequeathed the continent by colonialism. And although it received intellectual affirmation from the global North, its romantic reading of Africa's past shows that it was too fixated on that past and could neither see nor address the fault lines of intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic tensions that colonialism forcefully prevented from giving way. Looking back, with a lost social memory and uncritical nationalism, the eruption of the old prejudices among Yoruba subethnic groups immediately after political independence could not have been otherwise. For from the 1950s when it became clear that the restraining factor of colonial influence was easing its grip on the new nation state, those prejudices came alive again and later found expression in renewed political upheavals that tormented south-western Nigeria immediately after independence. This was the context of the rebirth of Johnson's vision in Hubert Ogunde's play, "Yoruba Ronu!"64

However, Idowu's advocacy had already been practically taken up by the Aladura movement when Yoruba converts to Christianity fused their religious sensibility with Christianity in 1918. But because the linchpins of the movement were lacking in western

⁶⁴ The crisis in post-colonial Yorubaland was not totally unconnected with the eventual military take-over of Nigeria in 1966 and the civil war that followed from 1967 till 1970. When the ban on party politics was lifted in 1978, Ogunde attempted to stage his play again. It was banned by the military government of Olusegun Obasanjo, the Yoruba head of state from Owu quarter at Abeokuta.

education, they did not give their intuitive appropriation of Christianity the clearly articulated theology Idowu called for. Yet, they were present in oral form and in their spontaneous worship. In spite of their intellectual shortfall, however, the movement served the ideological need of the advocates of political independence. As an indigenous movement that had had a taste of colonial repression, they were handy in Africans' self-affirmation over against the prejudice of European colonialists in church and state. This was all the ideological purpose they could serve for their inability to intellectually resonate with the task of nation building after independence.⁶⁵

It may be stated that, like Idowu, very few Yoruba intellectuals in the second half of the twentieth century factored into the post-independent predicaments of their people the Achilles' heel of mutual rivalry between the sub-ethnic groups. But in recounting the recent political experience of the Nigerian state, from the failed attempt of the military class to handover power to civilians in 1993 till early 2000, Karl Maier identified this problem and came to the conclusion that "historically the Yorubas had been at times their own worst enemy". 66 He recalled their nineteenth century history to underscore the submission of Gani Fawehinmi, a Yoruba lawyer and civil rights activist, who expressed the view that "The bane of the Yoruba people is that you can hardly get them to speak with one voice...." Internal divisions have often opened the door to external manipulation.'67 This manipulation troubled them immediately after independence and was successfully re-enacted during the electioneering campaign for national election in 1983. That year, the rift between Ogbomosho and the other Yoruba people, which dated back to the early 1960s, ⁶⁸ and the much entrenched one between Ife and Modakeke were reopened by the government of Shehu Shagari. The renewal of hostilities in the campaign trail of the Fulani civilian president plagued these Yoruba communities, especially the Ife and Modakeke whose intermittent but wanton destruction of life and property lasted for nearly two decades. The old fault lines still remain, but the saving grace of the Yoruba

⁶⁵ Johns Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa—An African Church History*, 2nd rev. ed. (Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 1994), 490.

⁶⁶ Karl Maier, *This House Has Fallen* (London: The Penguin Press, 2001), 232.

⁶⁷ Major 232

⁶⁸ This feud was a product of the disagreement between Obafemi Awolowo, from Ikenne in the Ijebu Remo, and Ladoke Akintola, from Ogbomosho in the Yoruba hinterland. The disagreement was essentially the opening up of the old and complex feud between the Ijebu, who had made progress by leaps and bounds during the colonial era, and Yoruba peoples in the western and central districts of the hinterland, who by then were still largely uneducated for their prejudice against western education.

seems to be the pluralist Nigerian state in which the people are subsumed and whose impossible politics presently restrains the outbreak of mutual hostility among them.⁶⁹

Finally, Ade Ajayi has qualified as cultural nationalism the nineteenth century patriotic zeal of the early Yoruba converts in exile and later at home. These early Yoruba Christians sought for their country the same transformation Christianity, commerce and civilization bequeathed the peoples among whom they were carried away by the slave trade. And at home they responded to the fledgling colonial establishment with a critical eye on its activities while they were anxious to preserve and defend their culture. This is the background that qualified Ajayi's inclusion of Samuel Johnson in the list of those churchmen he regarded as cultural nationalists. Taking this inclusion as valid, the character of Yoruba cultural nationalism at the turn of the twenty-first century has changed dramatically. Karl Maier has also shown this in his recent work on the Nigerian state.

Whereas the educated elite—churchmen and other beneficiaries of missionary education—led the pack in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and valued the enlightenment Christian mission ushered in among their people, the present Yoruba cultural nationalism is of a different brand. Although it was initiated by an educated Yoruba medical doctor, Fredrick Fasheun, as the Odua Peoples Congress, OPC, its cause is essentially championed by a mass of uneducated and semi-educated country folks in the urban and rural Yoruba land. As the living evidence of the failure of the Nigerian state, this grassroots movement exudes confidence in Yoruba magic. Its militant demand for justice to the Yoruba people for the annulment of the 1993 presidential election allegedly won by Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba man from Abeokuta, has become the albatross of the Nigerian state. Across the country, it evoked the emergence of similar ethnic militias among the other major nationalities who resent the present arrangement in

⁶⁹ During my fieldwork in 2006, I came to appreciate this more vividly in two separate encounters at Ibadan. It came in the form of a revisionist history of the explosive disagreement between Obafemi Awolowo and Ladoke Akintola, which was at the roots of the "Operation *Wetie* (that is, Operation wet it)" in which political opponents set one another ablaze with gasoline across the region. The revised history of the crisis, though in oral form, attributed the achievement of Awolowo's government to Akintola. It was a distortion of history, which, ordinarily, had no value but for the prejudice inherent in it and which younger generations of Yoruba are being fed to stoke up the fire of intra-ethnic feud.

⁷⁰ J.F. Ade Ajayi, "Nineteenth Century Origins of Nigerian Nationalism", *JHSN* 2 (1961): 208.

⁷¹ Karl Maier, *This House has Fallen*, 227-249.

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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A. Sierra Leone Mission

(i) The Original Incoming Papers filed in the name of the agents:

CA1/O79: Samuel Crowther
CA1/O94: Christian Frey
CA1/O200: Samuel Spain
CA1/O105: Ulrich Graf
CA1/O112: Thomas Harding
CA1/O219: John Weeks

CA1/O122: Henry Johnson

(ii) Letter Books (L Series) and Mission Books (M Series):

CA1/L1(1854-1859) CA1/M11(1843-1845) CA1/L4(1846-1852) CA1/M12(1845-1846) CA1/L5(1854-1859) CA1/M13(1846-1848) CA1/M5(1828-1831) CA1/M14(1848-1852) CA1/M6(1831-1834) CA1/M15(1852-1857)

CA1/M10(1842-1843)

B. Yoruba Mission

(i) The Original Incoming Papers filed in the name of the agents up till 1879:

CA2/O24: Friedrich Bühler
CA2/O49: David Hinderer
CA2/O49: Edward Irving
CA2/O52: Edward Irving
CA2/O53: George Jefferies
CA2/O55: Henry Johnson
CA2/O56: James Johnson
CA2/O56: Jonathan Wood

CA2/O57: Nathaniel Johnson

(ii) The Original Incoming papers filed chronologically as they arrived in London, beginning from 1880:

G3/A2/O(1880)	G3/A2/O(1892)
G3/A2/O(1881)	G3/A2/O(1893)
G3/A2/O(1882)	G3/A2/O(1894)
G3/A2/O(1883)	G3/A2/O(1895)
G3/A2/O(1884)	G3/A2/O(1896)
G3/A2/O(1885)	G3/A2/O(1897)
G3/A2/O(1886)	G3/A2/O(1898)
G3/A2/O(1887)	G3/A2/O(1899)

G3/A2/O(1888) G3/A2/O(1900) G3/A2/O(1889) G3/A2/O(1901) G3/A2/O(1890) G3/A2/O(1902)

(iii) Letter Books (L Series) and Mission Books (M Series):

CA2/L4(1867-1880)

CA2/M3(1854-1857)

CA2/M4(1857-1862)

CA2/M5(1862)

CA2/M11(1879-1880)

G3/A2/L7(1892-1901)

2. The Records of the Colonial Office, National Archives, London

A. The Gold Coast

CO 96/149 (1883)

B. Sierra Leone

CO 267/111 (1831)

CO 267/127 (1833)

C. Lagos

CO 147/46 (1881)	CO 147/85 (1892)
CO 147/47 (1882)	CO 147/86 (1892)
CO 147/48 (1882)	CO 147/87 (1892)
CO 147/49 (1882)	CO 147/88 (1892)
CO 147/50 (1882)	CO 147/96 (1894)
CO 147/55 (1886)	CO 147/97 (1894)
CO 147/56 (1886)	CO 147/98 (1895)
CO 147/58 (1887)	

3. Royal Botanical Garden, Kew, London

The materials here are letters from Mr. Henry Venn to Mr. William Hooker on the cooperation between the CMS and the Botanical Garden with respect to the Society's programme of economic transformation in their West African mission fields.

DC 33/1853

DC 34/1854

DC 35/1855

DC 36/1855

DC 37/1857

4. Guildhall Library, London

Henry Johnson Ordination Papers

10326/282

10326/284

5. Others Archival Resources

Some other local CMS materials (CMS/Y) were consulted at the National Archives, Ibadan, and at the Special Collection Section of Kenneth Dike Library,

University of Ibadan. Among these, at the university library, are Bishop S.C. Philips' Collection; Bishop A.B. Akinyele's Collection and Oba Isaac Akinyele's Collection.

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C. Unpublished Dissertation

Doortmont, Michel R. "Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History." PhD diss., Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 1994.