Water Symbolism in Yorùbá Folklore and Culture¹

George Olusola Ajibade
Department of Linguistics and African Languages
Obáfemi Awolowo University
Ilé-Ife,
Nigeria.
solajibade@yahoo.com
ajibadeb@oauife.edu.ng

Abstract

Water is not only a physical substance; it is also an intrinsic part of peoples' identity, cultural perception, religious beliefs and worldviews. Water is a relevant and a significant variable that is also germane to the understanding of Yorùbá peoples' identity, culture and religion. Hence, this ethnographical and literary study examines the image of water in Yorùbá cosmology using folklore (oral texts) of the people as paradigms. It uses a field investigative method of research to elicit primary data from the people on the uses of water in diverse spheres of life. It supplements oral data with secondary data in the form of books, journal articles and archival materials. The data collected was analysed from the lenses of a hermeneutical-anthropological approach. The study found that water constitutes and creates cultural, social and religious identities among the Yorùbá people of southwestern Nigeria. In addition, it concludes that water represents one of the several ways through which the Yorùbá society can be best understood.

1 I am very grateful to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Bonn, Germany that sponsored the research from which I obtained the data I analyzed in this article in 2007 among the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria.

Introduction

Folklore is not to be conceived any longer as disembodied “text” but rather a rich convergence of performer, situation, setting, audience, and society. Bauman (1986: 2) remarks that we must:

recognize that the symbolic forms we call folklore have their primary existence in the action of people and their roots in social and cultural life. The texts we are accustomed to viewing as the raw materials of oral literature are merely the thin and partial record of deeply situated human behavior. My concern has been to go beyond a conception of oral literature as disembodied super-organic stuff and to view it contextually and ethnographically, in order to discover the individual, social, and cultural factors that give it shape and meaning in the conduct of social life.

Bauman’s observation and perception about folklore is crucial, in that it x-rays the role of folklore in understanding the people and their worldview about a particular subject or theme from where such folklore emerges. Hymes (1975: 345) describes folklore as:

Concern with the aesthetic and expressive aspects of culture; concern with traditions and traditional life of one’s own society; enjoyment of, and caring for, what one studies; often, craftsman-like participation in the tradition studied; concern for accuracy and objectivity, insight and explanation, that manages by and large not to contort what one studies with procrustean methodology, or to conceal it behind a mask of theoretic.

Water is an indispensable matter in every sphere of life of the African people and culture as it might be to other people in the globe. The space of water in Yoruba cosmology makes it to occupy a central place in the folklore of the people. Water is an intrinsic part of the most spiritual beliefs of the Yorùbá people with its spiritual and healing properties evident in rites and rituals. Black (2004: 12) also remarks that, “Since earliest times people have honoured water, worshipped water, granting (it) a special place in their language, myth and rituals”. While writing about religion and ecology, Roger (2006: 274) says, “water is an ambivalent matter and resource in the history, culture, geography, and social life of the African people”. In this paper, text and contexts are explored to have better understanding of the folklore of the Yoruba people in regard to water. Without context, texts are insubstantial from the reality of their performance event and are thus incomplete and less meaningful. A text is usually woven together from the situation of a given performance, the audience, details of an individual performer, and knowledge and understanding

of the social group and culture of the performer and the audience. Karl Kroeber opines that context of folklore is also germane to the understanding of the folklore beyond the textual component. Kroeber (1986: 9) reveals that:

In constructing hypothetical relations between their texture, text, and context, we can only *improve* and *extend* our appreciation of the art of the writers and enrich our understanding of the cultures from which their works emerge.

This indicates that paying a critical attention to form and many systems of interrelationship between the text and multiple contexts of performance helps to expose its artfulness, subtleties, and meaning. Richard Bauman suggests we need an approach based upon a similar emergent and fluid notion of “truth,” and also an awareness of the connection between the “stuff” we collect and the community and people from which it comes. In his words, Bauman (1983: 362) says:

If we are to understand what folklore is, we must go beyond a conception of it as disembodied super-organic stuff and view it contextually, in terms of the individual, social, and cultural factors that give it shape, meaning, existence. This reorientation in turn requires us to broaden the scope of our fieldwork: a contextual perspective on folklore makes the enterprise much more ramified and complex than the simple butterfly-collecting approach – the collecting of anachronistic antiquities – that often passes for fieldwork in folklore.

Bauman (1983: 362) stresses further that:

What remains essential is a basic conception of folklore as situated in a web of interrelationships, a frame of reference which may allow for the pursuit of specific connections and patterns, depending upon the investigator’s interests and resources, while keeping in view the broader range of relevant factors as well.

Bauman’s observations about people’s folklore is germane to this study in that several factors need to be put into consideration while discussing water symbolism among the Yoruba people. Water needs to be discussed from various aspects of the people’s lives and praxes, ranging from ordinary to religious, social, economic and political.

Folklore is the grand repository of our dreams and desires and fears, of our longing for meaning and justice and redemption, of our yearning for intimacy

and community and solitude, of our unquenchable pursuit of beauty. The great aim of literature is to render in words the nobility and majesty of life.

Like water itself, folklore's depictions of water are mutable and sublime, offering a metaphor through which humans attempt to better understand their own lives. That images of water should play such a prominent and recurrent role as a metaphor in folklore is hardly surprising, given the indispensable place of water in life itself. Water is, of course, mutable and sublime, sustaining and destructive, and throughout folklore water serves as a representation not only of birth but of death, not merely of placidity but of violence. Water holds the promise both of freedom and of enslavement, its shimmering surface inviting, and its depths mysterious and daunting.

Research Methodology

This paper emanates from ethnographic research on Ọṣun, a popular river deity among the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria between 1996 and 2004 for my doctoral thesis, and in 2007 on the performance of oral literature by Yorùbá women in every sphere of the society. The data collection in 2007 was mainly sponsored by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Bonn, Germany. It was a research designed on "Unveiling Hidden Voices: Construction of Identity and Social Reality of Yorùbá Women in Oral Art". The study relies mostly on participant observation and cultural immersion, informal interviewing (asking questions in Yorùbá, my native language to get at the etic and emic), ethno-history and linguistic analysis. Hence, the primary data used in this study resulted from a variety of inter-subjective encounters, ranging from direct observation and varying degrees of participation and personal interviews with purposively selected people (mainly the traditionalists). I also benefit greatly from my personal experience with my late father who was a traditional healer (*Oníṣẹ̀gùn ibílẹ̀*). The translation of data was done as a linguist and a native speaker of the language, in a way to preserve the essence, meaning and understanding. Library search was used in addition to the collected primary data where relevant secondary materials were elicited from books, journals and archival materials. The data were analyzed using hermeneutical-anthropological approach to explicate the plural cultural institutionalisations and perceptions of water in Yorùbá folklore and culture.

Water, Mythology and Creation in Yorùbá Cosmology

It has been noted by Bogue (2006: 11) that:

Myths and symbols are fundamentally necessary to human beings and through them are expressed man's imagination and symbolism. They

enable man to face the key issues of life, death, and afterlife and questions of what is profane or sacred, forbidden or permitted. Water is often their vector and interpreter through innumerable approaches such as religious perception, by way of beliefs, spiritual calendars, rites and prayers.

Most Yorùbá mythologies integrate the pre-existent traditions that sometimes date far back into man's history. There are various mythology accounts of creation among the Yorùbá people of southwestern Nigeria and even in the diaspora. Interestingly, there is something very common and highly significant in the space occupied by water in humanity, as seen in all Yorùbá creation myths. Of all Yorùbá myths of creation, two are prominent. One has it that in the beginning was only the sky above, water and marshland below and they are similar. The chief God, Olódùmarè ruled the sky, and the goddess Olókun ruled what was below. In order to make adequate use of the below, God ordered Ọbàtálá, the arch divinity to settle on the water and make the place habitable for other living things that would be created. He came as directed by Olódùmarè and that was how he used the materials given to him such as sand, chameleon and white rooster. He formed human beings and sought the permission of Olódùmarè for the moulded beings to receive breath of life. All other deities were happy with Ọbàtálá for what he had done except Olókun; because her territory had been tampered with. Prior to this period of Ọbàtálá's intrusion into her kingdom she was contented and happy. On this, Rosenberg (1986: 403) has noted that:

In the beginning the universe consisted only of the sky above and the water and wild marshland below. Olorun, the god who possessed the most power and the greatest knowledge, ruled the sky, while the goddess Olokun ruled the endless waters and wild marshes. Olokun was content with her kingdom, even though it contained neither vegetation nor animals nor human beings.

The second Yorùbá myth of creation is similar to this except that the mythical figure of Ọbàtálá was substituted for *Odùduwà*. This mythology was coined for the purpose of creating a *Odùduwà* hegemony as the founder of Yorùbá. The first mythology is widespread and accepted by the majority of Yorùbá people. The subject of discussion in this small piece is not about the validity of any of the myths but it is to enable philosophical thought and reveal the symbolism of water among the Yorùbá people.² Informingly, the

2 For more on Yorùbá myths of creation see Idowu, E. Bolaji (1962: 21 ff). *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longmans; Rosenberg (1986). *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics*. Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Company.

world was created upon water, which happened to be a female gender. This thus portends that water represents the ultimate power over life and death. “Water seems to have a special role in all these legends, indicating that life would not have been possible without the basic element of water. This is also the basis for the Yoruba beliefs that consider water to be a vital and sacred origin of life-page” (Rinne 2001: 41).

Among the Yorùbá people water is regarded as the abode of evil spirits that are considered inimical to human existence. Whenever the Yorùbá (mainly men) see any pretty lady, such lady is referred to as “*Ọmọge omi*”—daughters of water. This idea has the link with *Olókun* as a godmother to pretty ladies who come to stay with humans, and even get married to men. These sets of women are considered to brandish their powers from their spiritual godmother-*Olókun*. This idea is not unconnected with the creation mythology when *Olókun* was unhappy with *Ọbàtálá*’s encroachment on her territory, which made her to summon the great waves of her vast seas to drown some of the human beings created by *Ọbàtálá*. It is the belief of the traditional Yorùbá people that these sets of people are still living with *Olókun* in her world (underworld) up till today. It is amazing that the effects of this mythology still pervade the Yorùbá society in the contemporary times as evidences are available in the reaction of various brands of African Indigenous Churches (AICs) among the Yorùbá towards *Ọmọge omi* (daughters of water), also known as Mami Water spirit.³ This belief is discernible in some of their revival songs. An example of such is seen below:

Jesus power, superpower,
Emèrè power; powerless power.⁴
 Mami waterpower; powerless power,
Àjé power; powerless power.⁵

But Jesus power, superpower.

3 *Mami Wata* (Mummy water) is a widespread belief in water spirit among the people of coastal regions of Nigeria, especially in Cross River state. For more on this, see Sidney L. Kasfir (1982) “Anjenu: Sculpture for Idoma Water Spirit”, *African Arts*, 15 (4):47-92.

4 *Emèrè* is the name given to spirit-born children who die prematurely after they have been born. They are believed to belong to a society in the spirit world where they decide where each one will go to be borne by a woman in the world. For more on this, see Ajibade (2005b).

5 *Àjé*, witches, are traditionally believed to have the ability to transform themselves into varieties of things—animate and inanimate—in order to perpetrate evils. Although, their activities are mainly nocturnal, their activities manifest anywhere and at any time.

Singing against these spirit beings and idea of reposing confidence in their church members are insignia of their (church) recognition of these powers and that they (spirit beings) constitute great threat to the success of human beings. This in turn validates the Yorùbá mythology of creation that there is spirit inhabiting water.

To the Yorùbá just like the ancient Greece, water of the river separates the world of the living from the world of the dead. This belief is encapsulated in a folktale (*àlò*) among the Yorùbá. The summary of this folktale is that a mysterious being came into the world of men and turned into a beautiful woman. She came to a blacksmith to buy a hoe. When the blacksmith saw her, he was fascinated by her extreme beauty and proposed marriage to her. The spirit-woman told the blacksmith that she cannot marry him but the man was adamant and refused to deflect from his will to marry this spirit-woman. This woman left the man and the blacksmith abandoned what he was doing and followed the woman. The woman then used the song below to inform and warn the man to desist, but the man would not listen:

*Dẹ̀yìn ọ̀lọ́kọ́, dẹ̀yìn
 Bó ò bá dẹ̀yìn o ó kandò kan aró
 Dẹ̀yìn ọ̀lọ́kọ́, dẹ̀yìn
 Bó ò bá dẹ̀yìn o ó kandò kan ẹ̀jẹ̀
 Dẹ̀yìn ọ̀lọ́kọ́, dẹ̀yìn*

Go back the blacksmith of hoe
 If you refuse to go back you will meet a river of dye
 Go back the blacksmith of hoe
 If you refuse to go back you will meet a river of dye
 Go back the blacksmith of hoe.

What we can obtain from the above folktale is that the Yorùbá people opine that there is a gulf between the worlds of the living and that of the dead, which is separated by river water. Also, it corroborates the Yorùbá mythology about *Olókun* as the deity or spirit that resides in water with other human beings that are considered more powerful than those on land. In addition, it shows that women are synonymous to water as they occupy the abode of water in the above folklore of the people.

Similarly, the above shows that water in many instances is used as a sort of geographical marker to delineate law from outlaw. Water is used to represent the border between two different worlds and is a way to purge oneself from the now distant dystopia. In this sense, river has been used as a symbolic passageway from the mundane world into the abyss of spirit beings.

Water is Medicine and Medicine is Water

To the traditional Yorùbá, water pollution is not all that regarded as dangerous and poisonous to people's health especially where there is no alternative drinking water. This is encapsulated in the proverb, "*ègbín omi/odò kílí pání*"—dirt inside water/a brook does not kill a person. Nonetheless, deliberate pollution of certain (brook/river) water is considered evil and abnormal. For example, the water of Òṣun River is considered sacred, hence, it is forbidden to spit, urinate, pass faeces, throw dirty things or wash hands into it for fear of blemishing the sacredness of the water. The sacredness attached to this water is reflected in the peoples' belief in its healing potentials. During the worship of this deity, especially in Òṣogbo, which is one of the studied communities, the adherents sing songs to show their faith and fate in the sacred water of this goddess as seen below.

Omi ni olóògùn /3x

Kò sèni tíí ṣòògùn láìjúbá omi

Omi ni olóògùn.

Water is medicine /3x

There is no medicine man who will not pay homage to water when preparing medicine

Water is medicine.

The above song reveals not only the people's belief in the potency of Òṣun water; it also shows that the worshippers acknowledge the supremacy of water (spirits) over the medicine men. Also, the song shows that the medicine men draw their healing powers from river water. In other words, water is highly significant to the success of the medicine men among the Yorùbá people of south-western Nigeria. To the Yorùbá, water has ambivalence nature both as creative and destructive principles. Similarly, the chant below was collected from the Òṣun priestess in Òṣogbo when she was praying for a woman who came to collect Òṣun water for ritual purpose. The woman that was prayed for was suffering from barrenness and due to her faith in the healing power of Òṣun water, she came to the priestess and the latter prayed to the water thus:

Òṣun mo pè ọ o

Àkààki

Bá mi jáwé olóore sómi

Àkààki

Òṣun I call you
 A strong concoction.
 Help me put a beneficial leaf into the water
 A strong concoction.

This is the practice in the cult of *Olómitútù* (*Òṣun*) which is a form of healing practice within the religious group. Concoction (*Àgbo*) is a form of Yorùbá traditional medicine where herbs and roots of certain plants are collected and soaked into water, dry gin (*Ògógóró*) or any prescribed liquid by the traditional doctor. It is believed that *Òṣun* water is no longer ordinary once the above prayer has been said to it; by the *Òṣun* priestess (*Ìyá Òṣun*); it has become concoction that will cure the woman's barrenness. "Beneficial leaf-*ewé olóore*" refers to the invisible power of *Òṣun* which she (priestess) puts into the water for the client. The water of *Òṣun* is regarded as sacred, it is habitually put into a small pot (*Orù*) by the adherents; it is believed to be the cure of all diseases. *Àgbo* has the power to neutralize the effect of a poison (e.g. a snake bite, scorpion bite, etc) the same way that water is used to put down on fire (Simpson 1994: 103). The power of *àgbo* cannot be overemphasized in the Yoruba healing process. It protects people from many kinds of diseases or misfortunes caused by evil spirits, and also from diseases by natural causes (Buckley 1985: 43; Pearce 1993: 152). The use of *àgbo* to cure various body diseases hinges on the instructions of the healer (Buckley 1985: 43; Pearce 1993: 152.)

It is also employed in certain circumstances by various traditional communities to ward off bane forces that are regarded as inimical to such communities.

The healing power of water is not limited to solving the problem of barrenness; it also cures all manners of paediatric illness. This is equally discernible from the praise poetry and songs of *Òṣun* below as chanted and sung respectively in her worship in *Òṣogbo* community:

(5) *Onígbòṣé àbíkú*
Onígbòṣé àrùn-
Òrómi tútù ṣòdògùn àbíkú
Òrómi tútù ṣòdògùn àrùn
Yèyè alágbò tí ò léwé nínú
Alágbò àwòyè, alágbò àìkú

The-one-who has the capacity to handle *àbíkú* cases,
 The-one-who has the capacity to cure/heal diseases,
 The-one-who-uses-ritualised-cold-water to cure *àbíkú*.
 The-one-who-uses-ritualised-cold-water to cure diseases.

The mother who owns concoction without leaves
 The one who has concoction that heals and prevents death

(6) *Sélèrú àgbo*
Àgbàrá àgbo
L'Òṣun fí ń womọ rè
Kí dókítà ó tó dé
A-bímọ-má-dáná-sílẹ̀
Òṣun là ń fẹ̀yí kí

Spring is concoction
 Torrent is concoction
 These are what *Òṣun* has been using to cure her children
 Before the advent of modern medical doctors
 The one who gives birth without having fire at home
 We are using this to pay homage to *Òṣun*.

The first chant above (number 5) shows the role of *Òṣun*, the water deity that is present in many of the Yorùbá communities in the global nexus of healing. This deity is regarded as an expert paediatrician whose water (cold water) possesses the power to heal. The next song (number 6) is one of the popular songs that the adherents of this water deity sing in praises of the deity to project her power and prowess. It is sung to show that before the advent of orthodox medicine, *Òṣun* has been actively involved in the healing system among the Yorùbá people of south-western Nigeria and in the offshore (Mei Mei and Sanford, 2001). The above shows clearly that the Yorùbá see healing and health as social and religious matter. The roles of their various deities in their total well-being, especially the water deities cannot be underrated. Thus, hydrotherapy is a common practice among them. This explains why people, especially the worshippers wash themselves in the *Òṣun* water during the annual celebration of the deity.

Water as Deities in the Yorùbá Pantheon

Water serves as a tangible manifestation of divine essence (Disanayaka 2000: 138) and in many beliefs systems water is held to have miraculous properties (Black 2004: 100). The Yorùbá people see natural phenomena as the abode of various apparitions and spirits and that these natural phenomena are not themselves the objects of worship. From our ethnographical survey in Yorubaland, we have found out that it is rare to see any settlement in Yorubaland without a communal river deity. We have various river goddesses such

as Òkun (Sea), Òsà (Ocean),⁶ Òṣun, Qbà, Aasà, Yèyémóólú, Yemoja, Qya, Òtín iyá Onijàbè, Òsàrà (the goddess of the lagoon), an offspring of Yemoja, Ajé, the goddess of money and wealth, Olókun, the goddess of sea, to mention a few. At times, some communities in Yorubaland have more than a goddess as the community's goddess. For example, Ilé-Ifè, the acclaimed source of Yorùbá ethnic group, has Olókun, Yemòó, Òsàrà and Òṣun, and all of them are given prominence in the religious space in this community. Although not directly referring to Yorùbá, it tallies with their view about the sea; Brown (2009) refers to John Fowles' idea about the sea thus:⁷

The sea's moods and uses sex it," the British novelist John Fowles has written. "It is the great creatrix, feeder, womb and vagina, place of pleasure; the gentlest thing on earth, the most maternal; the most seductive whore, and handsomely the most faithless. It has the attributes of all women, and men too. It can be subtle and noble, brave and energetic; and far crueller than the meanest, most sadistic human king who ever ruled...In its rages we admire the total lack of reason and justice, the blindness to all but the laws of its own nature.

The Yorùbá believe in the supernatural power of Òkun. They opine that it has healing power, as shown in one of their historical accounts about Odùduwà and his children. The legend has it that Odùduwà, the progenitor of the Yorùbá race, was blind at a time and he was told through Ifá divination that the only thing that could heal his blindness is the sea water (*omi òkun*). All his children declined to go and fetch the sea water except the Qwá Ajíbógun, the founder of the present day Ijèsà land. He went as promised and fetched the water that cured the blindness of his father and since then he has been given the chieftaincy title Obòkun, meaning, the one who fetched Òkun water.

There is also an Ifá myth, which reveals a conjugal relationship between Ifá with Olókun, the sea goddess. In that mythology, when Ifá had domestic problems with one of his children, Qlówò, he migrated to reside permanently with Olókun; and the latter took exclusive possession of him. Hence the saying, "Ifá relé Olókun kò wálé mó, ó ní ẹni ẹ bá ti rí ẹ sá máa pè é ní ba-ba-Ifá has gone to the house of Olókun, he is no more coming home, he said

6 There is also a folkloric song among the Yorùbá people to show the supremacy of sea water over the ocean. The song goes thus: *Láàngbàsà, òkun lolórí omi Láàngbàsà*, sea is the prime of water.

7 Brown, G. George. 2009. "Water and Literature" in *H2O - The Mystery, Art and Science of Water*, A Sweet Briar College Learning Resource, <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/water/religionchina.html>, retrieved on 17 April 2009.

that whosoever you see you shall regard him your father". This myth explicates the power of goddess Olókun to make exclusive possession of Ọ̀rúnmìlà. In the above mythology, a woman represents a refuge for a man as eternal wanderer, tired with the world. She symbolises the eternal feminine as home and refuge, especially for man. Many of the Yorùbá people generally believe that goddesses are pretty women. There is even another myth that this same Ọ̀rúnmìlà married Ọ̀ṣun, another river deity; and that it was Ọ̀rúnmìlà that taught divination to her. As a matter of mythological fact, Ọ̀ṣun is regarded as the elegant deity of wealth, power and femininity (Badejo 1996). Thus, river/water "represents the space and place where woman inevitably belongs; a place where woman is usually to be found-a bond that is one of belonging" (Knotkova-Capkova, 2006: 158).

Almost all river deities in Yorubaland are regarded as women. This portends that water is synonymous to women; although this is contestable from the lenses of social construction. Sequel to this is the observation of Bart (2009), who links water to women in the following sense:

As water is fluid, so are the social constructions which shape each individual woman's life; gender, class, ethnicity and personal experiences flow into and out of one another, shaping the river of women's lives, first one way, then another. From birth out of water, healthcare of children the sick and elderly, work in agriculture, feeding of families and the inevitability of death, the basic element of water is an apt material from which to come to a basic understanding of the variety of ways "women's" lives are constructed across categories.

The above shows that Bart opines that women could be linked to water. This idea tallies with the Yoruba's view of women as possessing complex characters and prowess.

To the adherents, these deities play important roles not only in their lives but also in various communities where they are worshipped. In most cases, due to their territorial services and support for their adherents, they are worshipped and propitiated. In certain instances, they offer both material and verbal sacrifices to these deities to appreciate them and to repose more confidence in the hearts of the worshippers. For example, Ọ̀ṣun is usually praised to show her tremendous task in the salvation of her adherents. An example of such is seen below:

(7) *Omi ñ wó yanrìn gerere /3x*
Omi ò lápá
Omi ò lẹ̀sẹ̀

Omi ñ wó yanrìn gẹrẹ

Water is carrying the sand /3x
 Water has no hand
 Water has no leg
 Water is carrying the sand.

The above is a metaphoric depiction of the deliverance act of this water deity among the Yorùbá of Òsogbo community in the southwestern Nigeria. It is an imaginary depiction of the way erosion carries sand; equating it with the way Òṣun will deal with the enemies of her faithful. There is no limit to where water can carry the sand; hence, there is no extent that Òṣun cannot fight for her followers. “Water has no hand” and “Water has no leg” is to show that the power that water (Òṣun) uses is invisible, yet it performs wonders.

Similarly, water reminds us to go with the flow no matter what the situation. It has no hand and leg and nothing stops it from moving. It means river or water is a symbol of inevitability. A river picks its path and there’s nothing individuals can do to stop it from running its course. This same goddess, Òṣun, is also praised thus:

(8) *Ô-wô-rùrú-fara-lùko*
Omi tí wólé ọ̀dàlẹ̀
Omi tí wólé èké

The one who moves snake-likely and hits the river palm tree
 The water that destroy the house of saboteur
 The water that destroy the house of traitors.

The above also shows that Òṣun the goddess detests a saboteur and traitor. She believes in uprightness, honesty and loyalty. While writing about the power of Òṣun, Simpson (1969: 27) maintains that:

She can cause a river to dry up or to overflow its banks, and she may attack people by drowning them when they try to cross a river. By filling a woman’s stomach with water, she can make her look pregnant when she isn’t pregnant, and she can cause difficulty in delivery.

It is not only Òṣun who does the above; they are the attributes of all goddesses in Yorubaland. They are useful in almost everything and at the same time deal ruthlessly with the enemies of their adherents. Water is, of course, mutable and sublime, sustaining and destructive, and throughout literature

water serves as a representation not only of birth but of death, not merely of placidity but of violence. Water transports the hero to his great adventures and carries him home. Water holds the promise both of freedom and of enslavement, its shimmering surface inviting, and its depths mysterious and daunting (Brown 2009).

In most cases, water is stored in clay pots found at the shrine of almost all deities in Yorubaland, and these pots of water stand for the presence of water deities which the Yoruba believed to be women. For example, the pot of water at the shrine of Òrúnmìlà represents Ọṣun, his mythical wife and a goddess. While collecting water from this pot from a priestess, a worshipper prayed thus, *òrìṣà, jé kí omi tútù tán tèmi- òrìṣà*—may your cold water solve my problem. Also, there are usually two water pots in every shrine of Ọbàtálá wherever he is worshipped. These pots must be kept clean and neat, and at times painted white; which symbolises purity. The water inside such pot is changed daily, and only fetched by virgin or women above child bearing age. This portends that there is the need for freshness of power and vigour. The water inside these pots is regarded as medicine, essentially to cure all manners of paediatric illnesses. Part of the praise poem of Ọṣun reveals her glory and power as water. Below is a sample:

(9) Ọṣun, Omi arìn-má-sùn
Olótùútù Èkó
Àpèrè ló fi jòkòó nínú ibú
Onítẹ́ẹ́ tútù

Ọṣun, the water-that-flows-sleeplessly
The one who is responsible for the cool breeze/air of Lagos
The one who sits on a seat in the deeps
The one who has a cool/fresh throne.

There are several names given to children at birth to show the tremendous space occupied by the river deities that are mainly women in Yorùbá culture. Examples can be seen in the following: Omifúnmiké—water has given me this child to nurse; Omirindé—water has flown to this place; Omidínà—water has blocked losing of child; Omidàrà—water has performed wonders/miracle; Omiṣoore—water has done me good; Omiṣolá—water has given me riches; Omiyẹ́lé—water fits this house/family; Ọṣundàrà—Ọṣun has performed wonders/miracle; Ọṣundáàísí—Ọṣun has spared this child from dying, and many other names. It is important to say that these names have various sociological and religious interpretations; but they mainly reveal the role of Yorùbá goddesses in their society, especially in providing women with children. This act

of providing women with children cools women down from their socio-cultural burden of being stigmatised as barren.

Adherents of various deities try to appease the spirits and energy forces that reside in them. Scarcity of water is considered dangerous for any settlement. For example, when Kétu, a community in the south-western Nigeria was badly watered at the initial period of its settlement; their drinking water was miles away from the town; and this experience of the people entered into the canon of Yorùbá proverb thus “*omi doyin ní Kétu*”—water becomes honey in Kétu (Johnson, 1924: 455). In folklore and literature, as in life, cities and towns often spring up on riverbanks, seemingly brought to life by the river’s movement. The source of the river, typically streams, depicts the beginnings of life and vitality. Various experiences of the Yorùbá people in relation to water are discernible from their folklore in diverse forms. Indispensability of water among the Yorùbá has made them to theophanise and sacralise places and spaces where water is found. Whenever there is an outbreak of flood in any community the traditional people regard this as the outburst of conflict between the dwellers in such a community and the river deity in the place. For example, there were incidences of sacrifices and ritual performances to the deity inhabiting River Ògùnpa in Ibadan metropolis and that of River Òpa in Ile-Ife.

Ambivalence Nature of Water in Yorùbá Cosmology

The Yorùbá believe that the cooling effects of water in their cosmology transcend the physical. It includes social, psychological and the likes. There is an aphorism among the Yorùbá that, “*ẹni tí yóò tẹ ilẹ̀ tútú yóò kókó da omi síwájú*”—the person who is going to step or walk on a cool ground must first pour water on the ground (to step upon). The image of water in the above context is coolness; that implies ease, relief, comfort and respite. If the Yorùbá say, “*ara tù ú,*” it means the addressee is comfortable and his or her burden has been removed. In Yorùbá incantation, the image of water as a coolant is well depicted. The following is an example:

(10) *Omi níí poró iná*
Bíná bá rómi á gbàgbé ilé tó fẹ́ jọ
Bètù bá rómi áá gbàgbé ariwo tó fẹ́ pa

It is water that extinguishes the damage of fire
 When fire sees water it forgets the house it wanted to burn (consume).
 When a guinea fowl sees water it forgets the noise it intended to make.

Referring to water as *èrò* (coolant) in Yorùbá has stemmed from the cooling effect of water. This portends that the Yorùbá people believe that water has the capacity to extinguish naked fire combustion and also has the ability to quench thirsts that are a form of internal fire. The properties of water are then employed in the above incantation for impartation; in order to accomplish a desired course. In the traditional Yorùbá society, there are rainmakers. Whenever there is drought and rainfall ceases at the time it supposes to fall, the king usually entreat the rainmakers to perform necessary rituals and sacrifices in order to make rain. This shows the cooling effects of water. Whenever one is thirsty and there is no clean water, it is the belief of the Yorùbá that one should drink the available water to quench the thirst. This idea is encapsulated in the aphorism, “*ègbín omi kìí páníyàn*”—the dirt inside the water does not kill a person. Although this idea is giving way to modernism among them, but the main argument is that water occupies an invaluable space in Yorùbá sociology especially its property of coolness at the physical and metaphysical levels. An adage in Yorùbá buttresses this argument as encapsulated thus, “*omi tútù ló n tẹnu ẹja bọ*”—cool water comes out of fish’s mouth. This coolness transcends the physical realm; it has a wider connotation.

Water is a primary building block of life and without water there is no life. Water in Yorùbá cosmology has power to create and destroy. Proper relationship to water determines whether it will impart life or destroy life. During the annual worship of *Ọṣun* in *Ọsogbo* community among the Yorùbá of south-western Nigeria, many of the poetic rendition depict this deity as the one that holds the power of life and death, or better put power of creation and destruction. One of her *oríki* goes thus:

(11) *Omi tí n wólé òdàlẹ̀*
Omi tí n wólé èké
Ò-wọ-rùrù-fara-lùko
Iná- wẹrẹwẹrẹ -tí- n -jómo-nínú
Abánijà-má-tètè-mọ

The water that destroy the house of a saboteur
 The water that destroy the house of a saboteur
 The-one-that-moves-like-snake-to hit-palm
 A gently-glowing-fire-that-devours-a-child-from-belly
 The-one-who-fights-somebody-without-knowing-easily.

The above shows that water is a symbol of transience, elusiveness and destructive mysteriousness. “The water-symbol of mysteriousness and elusiveness appears...what is elusive here is the very concept of female identity which

is disappearing in the womb of water, connoting a return to (unification with) the female divine principle” (Knotkova-Capkova, 2006: 164). Linking women to water, as seen above, is not only depicting the power of water to create and destroy but it also connotes the stereotypic representation of women in Yoruba society. The idea that water flows/crawls like snake links water waves to snake; and snake, like water, in the archetypal mythology is also a symbol of rebirth, and of a fear-including power (Bierdermann 1992: 310-313; Knotkova-Capkova 2006: 169). This portends that water has the power of life and death, and of justice and retribution. This is sequel to the observation that the metaphorization of woman as Water and Earth has a strong essentialist aspect; it points to the symbol of the womb, the mysterious feminine source of life, the “cradle and grave” or “womb and tomb”, “the Great Mother symbolizing circularity of life and death” who also disposes with the ultimate power over life and death. In essence, she anthropomorphizes the female creative and vibrant cosmic energy (Knotková-Čapková 2006:155; Kalnická 2001: 127-144).

Often, the type of water in a story is just as important as the fact that water is used as a symbol. Rivers often represent the flow of life or fertility. Rivers are typically used as symbols by authors because rivers flow; they are constantly moving and they follow a distinct path.

Oceans, on the other hand, because of their scope in relation to the earth, often represent obstacles or abysses from which things emerge or that characters must journey across to reach a destination. Oceans are often symbolically mysterious places that can symbolize overcoming a great obstacle or being dragged down into deep depths by it.

There is a folkloric song among the Yorùbá which goes thus:

(12) *Ayé lòkun*
Èniyàn lèsà
Kò sèni tó le wèkun já
Tẹ bá ń wẹdò ẹ rọra

The world is sea
 Human beings are oceans
 There is no one that can swim to the end of sea
 You must be careful when you are swimming in a river.

In the traditional Yorùbá society, and up till today in many rural settlements, whenever a child is born into a family, water is usually employed to test the soundness of the newly born baby. Cold water will be poured on the roof of the family house (Àkòdì) and the person who holds the baby will put

the back of the baby under the water running down from the roof. If the baby cries very well it is the people's belief that the baby is sound. But if the baby does not cry it is a sign unto the people to take adequate postnatal care to enhance the child's health. I think that this is to test the baby asphyxia.

In naming practices among the Yorùbá, many names were given to water depending on various contexts. For example, there is *Èrò* (coolant/soothing); *Omi ara* (water inside the body or pre-natal fluid/water); *Omi ojú/Omijé* or *Omi ẹkún* (tears); *Omi igi* (water inside tree); *Omi Ọ̀ṣùrù* (blood fluid), etc. The latter shows why a particular child among the Yorùbá, Àjàyí, is praised thus:

(13) Àjàyí Ọ̀gídíolú
 Oní-kànnga-àjípọ̀n
 Ọ̀-bomi-òsùrù-wẹ̀dà

Àjàyí Ọ̀gídíolú

One who owns a well that is fetched at the early hour of the day

One who uses blood fluid to wash his sword.

Water is an essential material used in the traditional naming ceremony among the Yorùbá people. This is the representation of the heavenly mothers (*abiyamọ Ọrun*), the female deities in the naming ceremony and it thus symbolises their support for the newly born child; no wonder the prayer, "*Omi ayé ò ní gbé ọ lẹ*"—you will not be carried away by the water of life. Water is a symbol of plenteous as we have it in the expression, "*Omi í bẹ lámù*"—there is water inside the pot. The above is a literary translation of the expression. Placed within its proper context, it means an individual still has a long way to go in a matter. Also, water is a symbol of fatness, bigness and enjoyment as in, "*Ó lómi lára*"—he/she has water in his/her body. This reveals philosophy of the people that water performs great work in the shaping of an individual's physique.

Water as Ritual Purifier

Water has the potential to serve as a ritual purifier not minding its physical attributes. Using it is a way of waking its latent power and energy (*àṣẹ*) to effect a change, either when used to bath or pray during a particular ritual act. Water washes away impurities and pollutants, it can make an object look as good as new and wipe away any signs of previous defilement. Water does not only purify objects for ritual use, but can make a person clean, outwardly or spiritually, ready to come into the presence of his/her focus of worship. It has been noted that, "Water as purifier is central to the practice of African Religion. A significant aspect of indigenous rituals and practice involves the cleansing of the body, places, and objects with water" (Roger, 2006: 278).

One of the common sayings of Ifá, the Yorùbá deity of knowledge, wisdom and prognostication reveals the essence of water as ritual purifier. The saying goes thus:

(14) *Mo jí mo wẹwọ mi ọ̀tún iténí-iténí*
Mo jí mo wẹwọ mi ọ̀sì itèni-itèni

I woke up and wash my right hand very well
 I woke up and wash my left hand very well.

To the Ifá priests, ritual washing is intended to restore or maintain a state of purity for effective divination and deeper spiritual communion. Hence, water washes away impurities and pollution that can serve as impediment to spiritual heightening of the priests.

There is a Yorùbá folksong that reveals this thought and belief in the potency of certain river water as ritual purifier. The song goes thus:

(15) *Mo fòkun wẹrí o*
Mo tún fọ̀sà wẹ̀sẹ̀
Mo fòkun wẹrí o
Mo tún fọ̀sà wẹ̀sẹ̀
Eni Olórun wẹ̀
Ló mó tọ̀kàntara
Mo fòkun wẹrí

I wash my head with sea water
 I also used sea water to wash my legs.
 I wash my head with sea water
 I also used sea water to wash my legs
 The person that God washes
 is wholly cleansed, soul and body.
 I wash my head with sea water.

Olókun is venerated as the ruler of all bodies of water and for the authority over other water deities. Mentioning of head and legs in the above folksong is a form of synecdoche referring to the whole body. This is loaded with meanings. Head and legs are important body parts that the Yorùbá refer to as agents of success, progress and actualisation (Ajibade, 2013). This idea is encapsulated by the Yorùbá in an aphorism thus, “*Ibi tí orí ẹ̀ni bá máa múni dé, kí ẹ̀sẹ̀ má ẹ̀sàìsini débẹ̀ ní*”—wherever one’s head will go, may the legs escort one to that place. This implies the Yorùbá belief in the role of personal head or destiny (*orí inú*-inner head) in whatever one would become in life. The Yorùbá

maintain that individual's destiny lies in the person's choice at the pre-gestation space at the metaphysical level. Anyone who has chosen success is destined to succeed and anyone who has chosen otherwise is destined to become otherwise. The above folkloric song and proverb portend that an individual personal head needs the support of the legs to actualise his pre-gestation's choice, that is otherwise regarded as destiny. Enhancing of the two (head and legs) is the idea of ritual washing and cleansing by sea and ocean water; being regarded as sacred and also embedded the spiritual power to perform such.

It is also a common traditional practice among the Yorùbá people during wedding ceremonies to wash the legs of a new bride with cold water. This ritual practice connotes cleansing the bride from all evils and bad traits associated with her before the time of marriage; and that these must not come with her into her new settlement.

Among the Yorùbá, water does not only purifies the priests and priestesses, it also purifies the ritual objects. As it cleanses person externally and spiritually to prepare him or her for divine communion with his or her focus of worship, it cleanses the ritual objects to make them acceptable by the deities and thus enhance efficient worship or sacrifice. Thus, it brings immortality and purification from sins and transgressions. It is rare seeing any Yorùbá deity that water is not used to purify his or her emblem; although usually combined with other materials. For example, Simpson recorded in 1969 that, "on the evening before the annual ceremony for Qbàtálá, his emblem is washed with water into which *òdúndún*, *tètè*, *rinrin*, and *akòko* leaves have been squeezed and to which palm oil and shear butter have been added" (Simpson, 1969: 4). He also observed the annual Ifá ceremony in Lálúpọ̀n area of Ìbàdàn on 26 September 1964 that:

Sixteen leaves are collected from sixteen different plants representing the sixteen palm-nuts used in Ifá divination. The leaves are arranged on the ground and an Ifá board is placed on them. Pieces of each leaf are cut off and washed in a bowl. The water is then used to wash the objects used in the worship of Òrúnmìlà...Also, the Ifá priest bathes with this water before opening the rites" (Simpson, 1969: 9).⁸

The above shows the potency of water in ritual cleansing among the Yorùbá people of south-western Nigeria. Among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria there are various types of spiritual bathing for people with different sicknesses and diseases. During the worship of Èṣù (the Yoruba trickster

8 Similar rituals are performed for almost every deity in Yorubaland, although with different ingredients. But water is a constant ingredient in the washing of all Òrìṣà among the Yorùbá.

deity) water is highly essential. The priest usually holds kola nut when praying to Èṣù thus, “*Ìrì sé, Bírì bá sé ara á dẹgi oko, èjẹ̀ ní omi obì*”—let there be dew, whenever there is dew the trees in the farm are refreshed, blood is the water of kola nut. This indicates the usefulness of water in the ritual space of Èṣù.

Bathing may take place in specially prepared water, which connotes that such water has been charmed through prayer and or charms (Ogunbile 1997; Koster-Oyekan 1999: 18). This depends on the users and the nature of the sicknesses. It is a common practice among the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) and the Eternal Order of Cherubim and Seraphim church (aka the Aladura). This kind of bathing among the previously mentioned African Indigenous Churches (AIC) usually takes place in a confinement, with special type of sponges, and close to flowing stream or river. It has even been noted that to best gain the attention of the sprits and ancestors, the healers prefer a confluence of rivers or streams, or a flowing stream. In case there is no confluence of streams close by, a road conjunction is an alternative (Buckley 1985: 145 Rinne 2001:57).

In Judaeo-Christian culture, God is regarded as “the Fountains of living waters” (Jeremiah 2:13). The use of water for baptism in most of the African Indigenous Churches (AICs) such as Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), and the Apostolic Church (TAC)⁹ cannot be overemphasised. Among these *Aláḍùúrà* churches, hydrotherapy is the commonest healing method (Omoyajowo 1982; Olayiwola 1989 and Ogunbile 1997). And this method includes drinking of sacred or consecrated water, usually fetched from rivers; sprinkling of holy water in securing certain spaces for fortunes and prosperity. At times, bathing with certain river water or streams for ritual cleansing from misfortune and social stigma (*ààlẹ̀* or *àbùkù*) takes place among the *Aláḍùúrà* as well. In most cases, this ritual bathing takes place at the bank of the selected river or stream. This practice among the AICs shows how they infuse the Yorùbá traditional belief system and practices into their religious praxis. Also, sacred water is used in healing barren wombs. In Òsogbo community among the Yorùbá of South-western Nigeria, certain Muslims and Christians still venerate Ọṣun river deity despite condemnation by the leaders of these two domesticated religions (Ajibade 2005a). Recognition of power inside water is not limited to the traditional Yorùbá. In the contemporary Yorùbá society, some brands of AICs, especially the Divine Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim (DOCS) are tapping the spiritual powers believed to be residing in the Sea for

9 These churches are known as *aláḍùúrà* among the Yorùbá people. This nomenclature was borne out of their practices of using prayers to heal and challenge various problems of humanity.

their spiritual exercises (Hacket 1988:108, Pearce 1993: 155, Ogungbile 1997). It was found out that they come from various parts of Nigeria, holding vigils at the Bar Beach in Lagos. One of my respondents, a founder of a local brand of this denomination, remarked thus:

We usually throw our rods into the sea when the water moves near us and those rods will be taken away by the water. We will wait for our rods to return to us, since individual knows his or her rod. By the time the sea wave returns our rod they have become powerful and we use these rods in various rituals; just like the rod of Moses in Exodus.¹⁰

Also, many youths and adults see the sea water as laden with certain powers that are good for recreational activities. Lovers go to the Bar Beach for camping. One of my respondents even asserts that, "We receive strength and vigour; and we are refreshed at the Bar Beach. The coolness of the Beach is good for the body, it is natural and unpolluted".¹¹ This tally to the observation of Black (2004: 114) that, "water confers beauty on landscape and the sight and sound are a source of spiritual refreshment". Informingly, recreation essence at the riverside could be said to connote a kind of union "with an image of celestial woman, symbolizing desire, or perhaps nostalgia of a lost love" (Knotkova-Capkova, 2006: 158).

Conclusion

To the Yorùbá, water is firmly established as the mysterious sacred source of life and its substance and symbolism has been deeply woven into the fabric of their religious belief and practices. Not only this, the space and place that water occupies are discernible in their folklore. Water is vital to the physical life, but it also sustains the mental and spiritual lives of the people. Distinctively, the Yorùbá people respond to water as itself and as a metaphor of itself, and they find enjoyment, satisfaction, and value in both simultaneously. The Yorùbá do not dissociate the physical from either the celestial or the metaphysical; they all have spiritual values. The space and place accord water justified their discoveries of theophanic essence in water in diverse forms. This made them to regard most of their rivers, brooks and their water as sacred, life-givers and protectors. Almost every river among the Yorùbá people is associated with one particular deity or other, and the same is worshipped. Their believers have faith and fate in them, and this reflects in Yorùbá sociology, especially in naming practices and other areas of their lives. The role of water

10 The respondent was interviewed at the Lagos Bar Beach in 2000 and 2004; name withheld.

11 The respondent was interviewed at the Lagos Bar Beach in 2004; name withheld.

and its symbolism has entered into the lexes of Yorùbá folklore due to its importance in the people's worldview.

It has been noted in this study that the incursion of Islam and Christianity does not erode the Yorùbá traditional belief and values from the praxes of the adherents of the above-mentioned domesticated religions; instead, these beliefs and values are duly recognised, enhanced and established in various forms. This is more visible in the religious practices of the African Indigenous Churches where the use of water and river are pronounced in their worships and healing methods.

Water is viewed by the Yorùbá people as a sacred symbol of healing, cleansing, renewal and epitomic symbol for metamorphosis and philosophical recycling. Water washes off the grime and can energetically cleanse us inside and out! The symbolic meaning of water speaks of a **higher wisdom** we may all aspire to mimic.

Bibliography

- Ajibade, G. Olusola. *Negotiating Performance: Òṣun in the Verbal and Visual Metaphors*, Bayreuth: University of Bayreuth African Studies Series, No. 4, 2005a.
- Ajibade, G. Olusola. "A Socio-cultural Study of Àbíkú Songs in Yorùbá land," *Ntama Journal of African Music and Popular Culture*, Germany: Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien, Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz, 2005b.
- Ajibade, G.O. "Theorizing Body in Yoruba Cosmology: A Socio-Cultural and Literary Appraisal" In: *Existentialism, Literature and the Humanities in Africa*, Edited by Uwasomba Chijoke, Adebayo Mosobalaje and Oluwole Coker. Göttingen, Germany: CUVILLIER VERLAG. Pp. 460-478, 2013.
- Badejo, L. Diedre. *Òṣun Sèègèsí: The Elegant deity of Wealth, Power and Femininity*, Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1996.
- Bart, Jodie. "Women and Water" in *H2O - The Mystery, Art and Science of Water*, A Sweet Briar College Learning Resource, <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/water/religionchina.html>, retrieved on 17 April 2009.
- Bauman, Richard. "The Field Study of Folklore in Context" in *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. Richard Dorson. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 362-368, 1983.
- Bauman, Richard. *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Bierdermann, Hans. *Dictionary of Symbolism*. New York: Wordsworth Edition Ltd, 1992.
- Black, Maggie. *Water: Life Force*, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2004.
- Boguerra, L. Mohammed. *Water: Symbolism and Culture*. Paris: Institut Veolia Environnement No 5, 2006.

- Brown, G. George. "Water and Literature" in *H2O - The Mystery, Art and Science of Water*, A Sweet Briar College Learning Resource, <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/water/religionchina.html>, retrieved on 17 April 2009.
- Buckley, A. D. *Yoruba Medicine*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Disanayaka, J. B. *Water Heritage of Sri Lanka*, Sri Lanka: Ministry of Mahaweli Development, Government of Sri Lanka, 2000.
- Hacket, I. J. Rosalind. *Religion in Calabar*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter and Co, 1988.
- Hymes, Dell. "Folklore's Nature and the Sun's Myth" in *Journal of American Folklore*, 88 (1975): 345-369.
- Idowu, E. B. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longmans, 1962.
- Johnson, Samuel. *The History of the Yorubas*, Lagos: CSS Limited, 1921.
- Kalnická Zdeňka. "Woman and Water" In: Wilkoszewska, Krystyna (ed.), *Aesthetics of the Four Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air*. Tilia: University of Ostrava, Tilia Publishers, pp. 127-144, 2001.
- Knotkova-Capkova, Blanka. "Symbols of water and Woman on Selected Examples of Modern Bengali Literature in the Context of Mythological Tradition," *Wagadu*, 3 (2006): 155-169.
- Kroeber, Karl. "An Introduction to the Art of Traditional American Indian Narration" in *Traditional Literatures of the American Indian: Texts and Interpretations*, ed. Karl Kroeber. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 1-24, 1981.
- Ogungbile, O. David. "Meeting Point of Culture and Health: The Case of the Aladura Churches in Nigeria." *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 6.1 (1997): 98-111.
- Olayiwola, O. David. "The Social Impact of New Religious Movements on Contemporary Yoruba Life: The Aladura as a Case in Point". *Africana Marburgensia*, XXII.2 (1989): 40-50.
- Omojayowo, J. Akin. *Cherubim and Seraphim: A History of an African Independent Church*, New York: NOK Publishers, 1982.
- Pearce, T. O. "Lay Medical Knowledge in an African Context". In: *Knowledge, Power and Practice: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life*, S. Lindenbaum and M. Lock (eds.), pp. 150-165. Berkley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Rinne, Eva-Marita. "Water and Healing - Experiences from the Traditional Healers in Ile-Ife, Nigeria," *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 10.1 (2001): 41-65.
- Roger, S. Gottlieb. *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Rosenberg, Donna. *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics*. Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Company 1986.

Sidney L. Kasfir. "Anjenu: Sculpture for Idoma Water Spirit," *African Arts*, 15.4 (1982):47-92.

Simpson, E. George. *Yoruba Religion and Medicine in Ibadan*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1969.