The essays below are from ODÛ: Journal of Yoruba and Related Studies, 1955, No. 2.

Drawings Of Pagan Ceremonies By A Christian Boy From Ora

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JESUAMBI, the artist who created these drawings, is a young boy in the earlier stages of puberty. He is from Ora, a forest country bordering on Benin and Yorubaland and subjected to cultural influences from both. The boy thinks of Benin as the political overlord and can recite an old poem which describes how the great juju of his tribe was won by the Qba of Benin, who is still deriving his power from it.

Jesuambi was actually born in a Yoruba town where his parents were trading. His mother seems to have been hysterical and his father a restless man, changing from one religion to another. He always complained that his mother preferred his younger brothers to him, and once attributed this to the fact that he was the reincarnation of his paternal grandfather with whom the mother had never been on good terms.

As a very small child he was sent to stay with his grandfather in his native village and he remained with him for seven years. The old man was an important specialist in hunting magic and the personal doctor of the native chief.

Jesuambi attended many ceremonies during these years and watched magical rituals that frightened and fascinated him at the same time. The father on the other hand had changed from Islam to Christianity and the boy must have heard confused ideas about these other religions from him. He seems to believe that while Christianity still permits the use of certain traditional medicines, Islam is absolutely intolerant 'and aggressive.

Jesuambi's imagination and emotions were greatly excited during the time he shared the intense life of his grandfather. But while the old man was alive he felt safe and secure. Suddenly the grandfather died and Jesuambi, still a young boy, was sent to work on the farm. He did not like this and ran away to Ibadan, to live with a senior brother who was a lorry driver. For a time he followed him about, hoping to become a lorry driver himself, but the brother found him too nervous and dissuaded him. The brother was successful, became a lorry owner and built an 'upstair house' in Ibadan. Jesuambi now lived

as a servant in his house, admired the new bourgeois way of life and—led by his relatives—frequented the Catholic Church.

For a time he found himself a job in a large European household, but he was dismissed—wrongly he claims—for alleged thefts.

It was at this stage that the charming and intelligent boy was brought to our house. He found some difficulty in realising that he was not to be treated like a servant wearing a uniform, but rather as a member of the family. He had already absorbed much of the mentality of the servant whose pride depends largely on the amount of money spent by his master. Of course, he was still a child and in need of love, and he responded to it. But at bottom he was always a little disappointed that he did not find the glamorous white man's world in our house.

He felt very ashamed because he was illiterate, while all his younger brothers had been to school. He liked to dress like a schoolboy and was constantly afraid of being found out. I tried to teach him to read and write—but in vain. It was clear that this highly intelligent boy had developed a complex about learning to read and write, because he subconsciously associated his lack of schooling with the neglect on the part of his mother.

One day I tried out a new method of teaching: I wrote down short words with small pictures beside them to show the meaning. He soon began to draw little pictures himself. After some time he completely forgot about his original purpose of learning to write and spent many hours every day painting and drawing. During this period he was more balanced and settled than ever before. I suggested that he should learn a craft. He chose weaving and excelled in it, making his master wonder, who had never seen such a talented boy before. He was now seriously considering returning home and settling as a weaver.

But he was unfortunately unsettled again when he became interested in girls. His old complex led him to court schoolgirls. He began to associate with much bigger boys who were drivers, clerks and stewards. He stopped weaving and I soon realized that he wanted to leave our house. I let him go, and he hinted that he would go to Ibadan to find a job with a 'real master'.

It was necessary to give this lengthy description of the young artist, in order to make it quite clear that the drawings and commentaries are not an authentic description of Ora customs and rituals but that they represent Je-suambi's own personal conception of Ora traditions.

It is the conception of a boy who is typical of a whole unfortunate group: the victims of culture contact. While being sufficiently influenced by new ideas to be unsettled in his traditional way of life, he had on the other hand no chance to take any real part in the modern way of life.

Although a convinced Catholic, the old Gods of Africa were still quite real to him. He believed in Christ 'because he was so kind and healed so many people'. But coming home from church, he might excitedly report on

an Egungun he had seen on the road, and who was real enough to him. The co-existence of the two religions in his head often forced him to indulge in dangerous 'double-think'. His confused conscience worked both ways and sometimes created fear of both the old and the new. The so-called 'fear of the unknown', so much talked about by superficial European writers on Africa, does not in fact exist in real pagans. It is rather a symptom of a new type of neurosis and the result of culture contact.

An examination of the drawings will show that the faces have a tormented and protesting grin that indicates the restless mind of the artist. There is an atmosphere of devilish joy about his representation of sacrifices which is clearly the mark of a bad conscience. It is an expression which is, by the way, never found in genuine pagan art.

The picture showing the sacrifices for the dead hunter (which is so touching through the helpless despair on the faces of the animals) features a little boy who seems to have no function to fulfil during the ceremony but who watches it with fiendish delight. No doubt Jesuambi has unconsciously portrayed himself.

The pictures show an unshaken belief in old symbols and rituals but at the same time a new critical attitude towards them. Jesuambi therefore cannot go back to his forest world. He can never find the settled religious situation of pagan life, where sacrifices can relieve the soul of unbearable wishes and emotions.

The lure of motor parks and the glamour of 'upstairs' hollies draw him on to the big cities. He will have to go through the problems and agonies of puberty unaided by the communal rites of his village. In all this confusion he has to create for himself a synthesis between the old outlook on life and the new.

The educator is immediately concerned with the problem of Jesuambi. The question is whether he can go on telling a child like that that he must brush aside the entire philosophy of his fathers as mere suspicion. Can one wipe out an emotion by calling it non-existent? Can one destroy a belief by calling it a superstition? There is the obvious danger that one would destroy all possibilities of a synthesis of cultures.

What we have to do then is to study traditional culture and philosophy. We must understand why it has the power to influence still people who live apparently modern lives.

We talk much about religious tolerance but we refer merely to Christianity and Islam and not to paganism. If Christianity cannot afford to confront paganism on equal terms and with a spirit of complete tolerance, it is clearly a sign that Christianity is not rooted very deeply in people's minds and that it ought to make a fresh start.

If we are going to drive paganism 'underground', as it were, we shall merely be turning a religion into a superstition.

The time has come when we must give some serious thought to the ancient philosophies and religions of Africa.

After all, the times of superficial rationalism are over, when Europeans used to laugh at 'primitive culture'. With the famous modern discovery that matter and energy are interchangeable, science with a big sweep comes fascinatingly near to the pagan African conception of life.

The captions to the drawings were dictated by Jesuambi.

WITCH HUNT

This is in the middle of night. The drum announces that nobody must go out. One medicine man carries a chicken on his head, specially prepared. He is the one who will 'see' the witch. The second doctor carries the medicine to catch the witch. When the first doctor sees the witch, he calls the second who throws his medicine. The witch tries to change into a monkey but fails. They carry her to the king. They ask him: 'Do you like her?' The king sends her to a special village, where the witches are kept. When he needs their power he will send for them.

DEATH OF A LEOPARD

The Leopard wants to kill the antelope. He does not know that the hunter is near, who has medicine to kill him. When the leopard is dead, the hunter cannot say, 'I killed him'. He runs to the town and cries: 'I see the big hunter fallen to the ground. He is so ill. Go and see him.' The people come and look at him. They 'surprise' and say 'sorry' to the leopard. Three men carry him to the town. 'They take away de cloth' (*they skill him*), they cut off the head, and they cut off the left hand for the king. They carry him round the town. They sacrifice a cock and a dog for him. They cover the leopard's head with white cloth. Seven days they pray for it. They dance and eat the meat of the leopard. Nobody call say who killed the leopard. They just know. After they buried the

head, the hunter finds the medicine in the leopard's body. This will add more power to his juju. He is now allowed to add an iron symbol to his own shrine.

DEATH OF A HUNTER

When a hunter dies the people feast for seven days. After 42 days the son must buy a cock, a dog, a goat and a cow. Each of these will have to be

sacrificed by him with a single stroke! If he fails he must repeat everything after seven days. But the shame will be great. .

The women will stay at home crying. They cannot attend the ceremony.

THE JUJU FOR PIKKIN

If a woman wants to have a 'pikkin' she makes a ceremony in front of the pot. Then a spirit appears. 'He looks like small person.' When he comes the woman will get a child.

There is a big stone in the shrine-it protects children. Any man who builds a house takes a stone and puts it on top of the big stone in the shrine. It will then become the 'small brother of the juju stone.' He will keep this in his house. Whenever his wife has a child he takes a small stone and places it on the stone in his house. 'The small brother of the small brother of the juju stone' will then be buried with the afterbirth.

CEREMONY FOR RAIN

These two men make the ceremony. The man on the right carries medicine in his hand. On his head he has the 'red danger cap.' On the left is the big priest who is 'the first for the ceremony.' In the pot on his head is a snake, a chicken and cowries. He carries a gun. On his cloth are three images. They represent: 'The man who start the country, the woman who has borne the first pikkin and the first pikkin.' He shoots his gun at his second, but he does not kill him, because of the medicine. 'If the gun catch, rain go fall.' When the gun fails no-rain will fall!

Then there are the little girls. They must go and bring water from the river. Then they pour the Water on the ground. Then rain will fall. The people bring yam to prepare a feast.

THE OSU JUJU

The juju is on the body of a tree. A twin palm tree grows from its side. There is a big pot and inside is a snake that never comes out. When a man wants to ask the juju, he gives the priest a cock. The priest holds the cock near the pot. When the juju agrees, the cock dies quickly and without blood. But if it does not die the answer is 'no.'

First drawing. Here is a hunter who wants to know why he has not killed anything for two months. He leaves the gun for seven days in the shrine' to clean it from the bad juju.'

Second drawing. The wife of the priest cooks the cock.

Third drawing. Here they just eat the cock. The children eat the head. 'Only children fit eat head and leg.'