

# The Responsibilities of the Babaláwo-*Ifá* Priests in the Political Activities and Judicial Administration in Ancient Yorùbá Society: Lessons for Contemporary Nigeria

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## Abstract

Babaláwo (Ifá priests) are considered as the fathers of secrets/mysteries; they are initiated to be the Custodians of Ifá (an epitome of wisdom, knowledge and power) who leads other deities. Hence, they are in charge of worship, devotions and administration of ẹbọ (sacrifice) to maintain peace and order in every community. This makes a Babaláwo to occupy a strategic position and thereby plays a significant role in the political activities and administration of any community in Yorùbáland. In addition to these responsibilities, Babaláwo serve as check and balance for the kings and their subjects in ancient Yorùbá society; they were the custodians and enforcers of ethical codes. Therefore, they ensure proper political and administration of justice so as to make the then society free from corruption, nepotism, favoritism and all sorts of social vices that characterise the modern Yorùbá society. It is on this note that this paper re-examines the responsibilities of Babaláwo in the political and administration of the ancient Yorùbá society so as to draw some lessons for the present generation. Twenty Babaláwo were interviewed and their opinions were

content analysed with a view of gaining insight into the political and justice administration in the ancient Yorùbá society.

**Key words:** Babaláwo-Ifá priests, political activities, judicial administration, ancient Yorùbá society, Contemporary Nigeria.

## Introduction

Babaláwo (*Ifá* priests) played significant roles in the life of the ancient Yorùbá as the representatives of the gods or intermediaries between Olódùmarè and the people. The roles which they still play in some quarters, particularly in the areas of offering Èbọ- sacrifice for the peace and harmony of the land, and in choosing credible candidates for Obaship. In abnormal situations such as war and epidemics, it is their duty to consult the oracle on behalf of the people to normalize the situation by offering the right sacrifice to right all the wrongs. They counsel the king and the chiefs on important issues relating to the whole affairs of the town and on personal matters. They acted as what can be likening to today's personal physicians' to the kings and the chiefs' regarding their health, their families and their total wellbeing. On crucial matters that are delicate to take decision on such as murder cases, they are always there to assist the kings and their subjects. These were some of the administrative duties they performed then. In the old Òyó Empire, the roles of Babaláwo were not lacking in ensuring that the right candidate was chosen as king, and when the king is finally chosen, they ensured that his reign is favourably disposed to his people by assisting in seeking the face of the gods for their favour through the offering of sacrifice at all times to appease them. They also assisted during and after the war through constant offerings. No festival is done without the consent of Ifa that they represented. They give counsel through the help of *Ifá* in crucial matters like murder, land, property and marriage issues. Their roles are enormous in the administrative system of the Yorùbá land in general, and Òyó Empire in particular. These are some of what this paper tried to explain. In addition to how *Ifá* worship was introduced to Òyó Empire through Arugba *Ifá*, an Òtá woman during the reign of Oba Onígogí, and the roles *Ifá* had been playing in the Empire till today.

## The Babaláwo and His Roles in Yorùbá Kingdoms

A Babaláwo is a well-trained *Ifá* diviner and consultant of *Ifá* Oracle. He is the mediator between man and his god. He is the middle man between the client in the physical world and the world of the spiritual. Thus, according to Falola<sup>1</sup>, the esoteric nature of the *Ifá* cult is anchored on the African

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1 Toyin Falola, 2022, *African Spirituality, Politics, and Knowledge Systems*, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 27.

traditional belief system, religion and belief in the existence of supernatural beings which include Olódùmarè the Supreme Being, the divinities and other spiritual agents. They are the one that know what *Ifá*, or any deity will take and when they will take it. Among other positions a good Babaláwo can be found as; as a healer and an herbalist. By this, he attends to both the physical as well as the spiritual life of his clients to give holistic healing. The healing works of a Babaláwo is clearly noticeable where there is an outbreak of an epidemic in the community, serious illness or when a woman is under labour pain. As a local genius and repositories of knowledge in the area where they live, they give advice and guidance, especially to the constituted authority in pre-colonial Yorùbá society. Even up till now, their advisory roles can not be over emphasised. Therefore, throughout the Yorùbá kingdom, the Babaláwo are indispensable tools in the hands of the Oba, their chiefs and the general populace. They are consulted on several instances on matters arising and every dealings of life from birth to death. A Babaláwo is always; generous, faithful, knowledgeable and good traditional counselor to the members of his community.

Since they are centre of attraction in the society, their world is built on checks and balances; they are not expected to misbehave. They therefore, constituted part of the judicial system in every Yorùbá kingdom<sup>2</sup>. In fact, in the past, it is the duty of the Babaláwo to divine for the king and his household on daily basis to ascertain the will of Olodumare and other Orisa on him, his household and the entire kingdom. McClelland<sup>3</sup> has claimed that apart from occupying an important place in the society, they are always revered. However, by taking a critical look at the Babaláwo's position in the Yorùbá society, one would discover that McClelland's assertion is an understatement because, Babaláwo in the Yorùbá society act like kings in their own capacity. Therefore, they are to be respected and accorded same honours given to the kings. Besides, when dressed in their regalia, they are not expected to prostrate for anyone (even the king). Rather, they can take a bow to show their respect and whatever they say on an issue is always the final. This is the reason why kings and leaders in Yorùbá society cannot do without their counsel both on private and public matter. As a result, a Babaláwo must present himself worthy of that position he occupies.

As part of their duties, a good Babaláwo must be a keeper of morals, ethics and ethos. Therefore, he must be able to reflect the moral teachings of *Ifá* in his personal life and all virtues of an upright man must be found in him.

2 Ayo Salami, 2008, *Yoruba Theology and Tradition, The Worship*, Lagos: NIDD Limited (Publishers), 575.

3 E. McClelland, 1982, *The Cult of Ifa among the Yoruba, Folk Practices and the Art*, Britain: Ethnographical Ltd, 86.

Babaláwo's position is a unique one in Yorùbá kingdom. This is so because it is not an honorary title nor hereditary. Rather, it is a position acquired after many years of rigorous training and experience.

Bade Ajayi<sup>4</sup> was able to identify two categories of Babaláwo. These are: *Awo Èlégán* and *Awo Olódù*. *Awo Èlégán*, according to him, are the Babaláwo who are not fully engaged in *Ifá* divination. He however divided this *Awo Èlégán* into two. They are *Agbàmótè* and *Şawoşèşègùn*. He described *Agbàmótè* as a Babaláwo, particularly trained in the act of *Ifá* divination but not initiated into *Ifá* cult. Therefore, they are not commercial *Ifá* diviners. They only used divination for their own purpose and for the purpose of their family members. The *Şawoşèşègùn* are the set of Babaláwo that combined divination with healing. They are known for their healing than divination. They only make use of divination experience when things are not going well with their healing applications.

The second category identified by Bade Ajayi is the Babaláwo *Olódù* who are the devoted *Ifá* diviners. They are the most recognised and most knowledgeable class among the Babaláwo. They pass through all the stages of *Ifá* divination to be qualified. They entered *igbódù* and see *igbádù*, thus were exposed to the secret of *Odù* which only a qualified Babaláwo in all ramifications can see. This is the category of Babaláwo this paper tries to address.

However, William Bascom<sup>5</sup> identified four different categories of Babaláwo as against that of Bade Ajayi, particularly, in Ilé-Ifè. These are Babaláwo *Èlégán* which he believes is the lowest grade and not always expensive. They are also sometime called or referred to as *Omọ ajárimádi* – those who shave their head but do not tie their hair. The second category, according to him, is Babaláwo *Adóşù* – those who create a tuft of hair. To be a diviner of this category, such a diviner must belong to a compound that has *òrigín* – a mound of earth built in front of the compound containing secret materials. While the third category is Babaláwo *Olódù*, which is the most popular among them as said above. The last category is *Awo Oòni* of which all of them must be *Olódù* and they are headed by *Aràba*, followed by *Agbongbòn* and fourteen other individual titles. This is the third categories of people called *Àwòrò* by Adeoye<sup>6</sup> that were assisting Olófin Odùdúwà in his government in pre-colonial Yorùbá kingdom. However, regardless of any categories a Babaláwo may belong to, they are banded together by the same code of conduct.

4 Bade Ajayi 2002, *Ifá Divination: its Practices among the Yoruba of Nigeria*, Ijebu-Ode: Shebiotimo Publications, 4.

5 William Bascom, 1969, *Ifá Divination, Communication between Gods and Man in West Africa*, London: Indiana University Press, 82-85.

6 C. L. Adeoye, 1979, *Asa ati Ise Yoruba*, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 277.

## Judicial System of the Pre-colonial Yorùbá Government and Administration in General

The Yorùbá had a well-organised political system right from the pre-colonial era to the extent that even when the Europeans came, they built their own government on the existing structure in Yorùbá kingdom. According to Raji and Danmole<sup>7</sup>, Yorùbá political system was monarchical in nature. Thus, the Ọba was the head of state and government and the process of succession was hereditary.

Generally speaking, in Yorùbá land, government begins from individual homes where the *Baálé* is the head. Then, there is the extended family where *Eléébí* or *Mógàjí* is the head. There is also *Ádúgbò* – a quarter headed by a chief, and there are villages where they have *Baálè* as their heads<sup>8</sup>. Finally, there is town where Ọba is the head. The Ọba is also assisted by *Mọdèwá* – they are chiefs that seat with the king on daily basis to help the king settle quarrel among his people and also assist in whatever things that the Ọba wishes to do in the town every day. In other words, they are the group that primarily executes the king's order. There are also the *Ígbimò*, or the *Ìwàràfàs*, or the *Ọyó Mèsì*. They are high chiefs who have the power to install and remove the king on the throne if he misbehaved<sup>9</sup>. Then, there are the *Babaláwo* whose duty among others is to secure the community against epidemic, act as a spiritual father to the king and the entire community, and offer sacrifice for the smooth running of the community. They are in charge of worship, devotions and administration of *ẹbọ*-sacrifice for the peace of their communities. As part of the judicial system, Babaláwo mediated between man, particularly the king, and the Supreme God on how to ensure a successful administration. Whatever the priests pronounced was always the final. Also, they served as checks and balances on the kings and their subjects.

This clearly shows that the Pre-colonial Yorùbá system, where the *Ifá* Priests were the custodians and enforcers of ethical codes, is a model system where corruption, nepotism, favoritism and all sorts of social vices that characterise the modern society was at its barest minimum. For instance, in *Èkítì* kingdoms, the head of the *Babaláwo* in each town is called *Àmèèkú* who is always with the king to offer useful advice to the king. He and the *Emigun* – herbalists always team up together to make sure that the above duties are discharged appropriately. Although *Àmèèkán* do not go to *Ibodè* – the council

7 A.O.Y. Raji and H.O. Danmole, 2004, *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*, Edited by Nike S. Lawal, Mathew N.O. Sadiku and Ade Dopamu, Eritrea: Africa World Press Inc., 260.

8 Olu Daramola ati A, Jeje, 1975, *Awon Asa ati Orisa Ile Yoruba*, Ibadan: Onibonje Press and Books Industries, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 279.

9 C. L. Adeoye, 1979, *Asa ati Ise Yoruba*, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 279.

of High chiefs meeting (among which are *Ìwàràfà*), due to the virtue of his position as a king in his own domain who enjoyed same privilege with the king, who must not prostrate or bow to the king and whose order is carried out through the king in whatever he says because he takes directive from *Ifá*. Despite the fact that they do not go to such meetings, they are always with the king to direct his affairs aright. It is however possible that the king may have his own personal Babaláwo since *Àmèèkú* is the head of *Ifá* cult of his town or community. More importantly, it may not be the current king that installed him there, thus, the king cannot remove him and if they are not in good term with each other, it is necessary therefore for such a king to have his own private or personal Babaláwo that would be assisting him in that regard (such was the case of those Babaláwo mentioned in this paper). However, that does not indicate that the *Àmèèkú* will not discharge his duty as well and in a good faith since he is not representing the king alone, but the whole community.

In the old *Ọ̀yọ́* Empire, the *Ọ̀yọ́ Mèsì* was seven principal councilors of the state led by the *Başòrun* who can be regarded as the prime minister. Other members of the council were the *Àgbàakin*, *Şàmù*, *Alápíni*, *Laguna*, *Akíníkú* and *Asípa* who represented the voice of the people to protect the interest of the entire empire. These were the *bóba şèlús* of the time. The *Aláàfin* was necessary to take advice from them on any important matter that has to do with the state such as waging wars, festivals and some other state issues. Each man had a state duty to perform at the court every morning and afternoon. If any members are to be absent in the palace, they must as a matter of duty sent their representatives. Some of their duties included to act as a check and balance on the powers of *Aláàfin* from being an autocrat. It is the duty of the head of *Ọ̀yọ́ Mèsì*, the *Basorun* to consult the *Ifá* oracle for the approval of the gods (after *Ifá* mysteries had been established in the kingdom) despite the fact that they already known the next king and the *Basorun* had the final say on the nomination of the new *Aláàfin*, and his power rivaling the king himself. They also have the mandate as part of their duties to compel a despotic king to commit suicide if he was becoming too tyrannical. In such a situation, the *Aláàfin*, his eldest son, the *Samu*, his personal counsellor and a member of the *Ọ̀yọ́ Mèsì*, the *Asamu*, all had to commit suicide in order to renew the government all together. The process and the suicide ceremony must take place during the *Orun* festival<sup>10</sup>.

Again, the *Ọ̀yọ́ Mèsì* was not left alone to enjoy an absolute power or influence. The *Ogboni*, who represented the popular opinion backed by the authority of religion, served as checks and balances on the king and the *Ọ̀yọ́ Mèsì* so that none of the parties would arrogate too much power to themselves.

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10 <https://freefacebook.com>, retrieved on 12/09/2018.

As a matter of fact, the Ogboni was a powerful society composed of people from different professions; noted for their age, wisdom and importance in religious and political affairs, and all their members spread across all religious cults and social life of the Yorùbá in general. Aside from their duties in respect to the worship of the earth, they were responsible for judging any case dealing with the spilling of blood. The leader of the Ogboni, the Oluwo, had the unqualified right of direct access to the Aláàfin of Òyó on any matter<sup>11</sup>.

### **The View of *Ifá* on the Judicial Administration in the Old Òyó Empire and other Ancient Yorùbá Kingdoms as found in *Ìrètè Méjì***

As alleged by Bolaji Idowu that the keynote of the life of the Yorùbá is not in the noble ancestry or in the past deed of their heroes but in their religion, may be right to certain level. According to him, in all the circumstances of life, is it joys and troubles, before a child is born, when the child is born, at every state of life puberty, betrothal, marriage, career, and all other things that make up human existence on earth, it is the deity that dictates<sup>12</sup>. The Òyó Empire (which was prominent in pre-colonial period) and other Yoruba kingdoms were not left behind. Before the introduction of the worship of *Ifá*, not every affairs of life were left in the hands of the deity. Particularly, when it comes to choosing of a successor to the throne, the person that would take over the reign among the children would have known himself. Even the entire town would know. Therefore, there was no need of consulting *Ifá* or any deity to ascertain their wishes to do this. While other gods like *Obátálá*, *Òṣun*, *Oya*, *Ṣàngó* were popular and accorded worship and respect, *Ifá* was not. Although there were magic and medicine and great herbalists of repute, but due to the human urge for power, there were no *Ifá* priests. According to Johnson<sup>13</sup>, it was during the reign of *Aláàfin* Onigbogi, one of the sons of *Aláàfin* Olúàṣo who was born to him by *Arugbá Ifá*, an Òtá woman who had left Òyó during the previous reign for her native town of Òtá that introduced *Ifá* worship to Òyó. However, when she heard that her son had been made a king, she came back to Òyó, to assist him in his government, so that he would have a long and prosperous reign. Therefore, she advised him to introduce the worship of *Ifá* into Òyó as a national deity, but the Òyó citizens declined that they could not worship palm nuts. Thus, her advice was turned down. It was Aládó that

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11 <https://historicalforte.blogspot.com>, retrieved 12/09/2018.

12 E Bolaji Idowu, 1989, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*, Nigeria: Longman (Nig.) Publishers, 5.

13 Samuel Johnson, 1969, *The History of the Yoruba*, London; Lowe and Brydone, (Printers) Ltd, 158-159.

*Ifá* mentioned in *Odù Irè Ntegbè* as quoted below that accepted Arugba's idea of *Ifá* worship on her way back to Òtá. Arugbá initiated him (Alado) and conferred on him the right to initiate others into the mysteries of *Ifá* worship. It was this Alado that initiated the Òyós into the mysteries, rites and ceremonies of *Ifá* when they decided to accept *Ifá* worship. However, this kind of system is slightly different from other Yorúbá kingdoms where *Ifá* counsels must be sought before venturing into the business of choosing successors to the throne.

*Ifá* is a bunch of knowledge and wisdom that talks virtually about everything and all things one can think about here on earth and in heaven. In Makinde's<sup>14</sup> words, "*Ifá*, which is known as a repository of knowledge or infinite source of knowledge (*Ìmò àìmòtán*), is in possession of knowledge consisting of several branches; science of nature (physics), animal (biology), plants (botany), oral incantations (*Ofò*), divination (prediction), medicinal plants (herbalism), and all the sciences associated with healing diseases (medicine)". This does not exclude governance and administration. In fact, Òrúnmilà, the custodian of *Ifá* spent much time attending to the needs of the people including kings in all Yorúbá kingdoms, while on earth to make sure that the kings and his people live a peaceful life right from the time of *Olófin Odùdúwà*. *Ìrètè Òkànràn*<sup>15</sup> attests to this fact thus:

*Ìrètè Òkànràn ni a dá*  
*Nijò tí gbogbo Awo péjò sílè Olófin*

*Nşorò sílè de Òrúnmilà*

*A ní kí Òrúnmilà ó rú ewúré kan*  
*Àti egbèrìndínlógún lèbò àrùni*

*Kí ó má bàá fi ẹnu ara rẹ gba iwọ*  
*jẹ láwùjọ Awo.*  
*Òrúnmilà gbọ,*  
*Ó rúbọ tán, ó fori lé ilé Olófin...*

Irete Okanran was what was casted  
On the day all Awo assembled in  
the house of Olófin

When an Oro was organised for  
Òrúnmilà

Òrúnmilà was asked to offer a goat  
Three thousand eight hundred  
cowries as sacrifice of loss.

So that he would not eat poison  
in the midst of the Awos

Òrúnmilà heard

He offered the sacrifice and went to  
Olófin's house...

14 M. Akin Makinde, 1988 *African Philosophy, Culture and Traditional Medicine*, Athens: University Center for International Studies, 7.

15 A. Lijadu, 1897, *Ifa Mimo Alabalase*, Ado Èkiti: United Star Printers Ltd, 28.



In the same way, *Odù Ìrẹ̀ Ntegbè*<sup>16</sup> explained how *Ológbòjìgòlò*, *Èwí's Ifá* priest later became *Olóyó's Ifá* priest. According to the *Odù*, *Ifá* says:

*Apá Èranlá mbe lówó Lánlošé*

The big hand of elephant is in the hand of Lanlose

*Agò màrìwò mbe lówó Lárùba*

Masquerade costume is in the hand of Laruba

*Mo fògo*

I jumped Ogo

*Mo rògo*

I bought Ogo

*Mo wògbèhìn òràn sun àn sun àn,*

I looked at the end of the matter

*Ló dífá fòba Èwí Adó*

Casts divination for Ewi Ado

*Ológošé, awo wọn lóde Àgéré*

Ologose their priest at Agere town

*Arèrèkosùn, awo òkè Ìjèrò*

Arerekosun their priest on the hill of Ijero

*Ebùrèjègijègi, awo ọ̀rùn èbè*

Eburejegijegi the priest on top of a ridge

*Awo inú pòro oko*

The priest of a ridge in the farm

*Ló dífá fòba lálòde Ọ̀yọ̀*

Casts divination for the king of Ọ̀yọ̀

*Ó dígbà kinní,*

On the first time

*Ọ̀ba lóyọ̀ ngbógun ròde Èwí,*

The king of Ọ̀yọ̀ made a war expedition to Ewi

*Ọ̀wọ̀ dodo o do ló sán bọ̀*

He came with nothing

*Ó dígbà kéjì*

On the second time

*Ọ̀ba lóyọ̀ ngbógun ròde Èwí*

The king of Ọ̀yọ̀ made a war expedition to Ewi

*Ọ̀wọ̀ dodo o do ló sán bọ̀*

He came with nothing

*Àì sí nílẹ̀ Ológbòjìgòlò*

Due to the absence of Ologbojigolo

*Nwọ̀n wá dé orí Eléwí mákoto*

Ewi's head was covered in a calabash

*Òtító lológbò nšawo*

Truly Ologbo was priest

*Ológbòjìgòlò lawo Èwí Adó*

Ologbojigolo was Ewi Ado's priest

*Òtító lológbò nšawo*

Truly Ologbo was priest

*Ó wá dológbòjìgòlò lawo láròde Ọ̀yọ̀-ilé*

Ologbojigolo now became awo in the city of Ọ̀yọ̀

*Òtító lológbò nšawo.*

Truly Ologbo was priest

Although there is a conflicting report on this *Odù* because this story was narrated in *Odù Ogbèwèhìn*<sup>17</sup> with a slight variation where it was explained the reason why Ọ̀yọ̀ people don't eat *Ológbò* – cat till today. According to the story, the event happened between *Àpà* town and *Èlẹ̀yọ̀* town. *Èlẹ̀yọ̀* town

16 Oladipo Yemitan ati Olajide Ogunde, 1970, *Oju Osupa Apa Keji*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 70.

17 Oladipo Yemitan ati Olajide Ogunde, 1985, *Oju Osupa Apa Kinni*, Nigeria: University Press Limited, 49-60.

merged with the present-day Ọyọ town as a result of that incident. We learnt that Ọlọyọ later took over the whole affairs from Ẹlẹyẹ because even before he took over the affairs, every person's taken captive in *Apa* town by Ẹlẹyẹ were sold to Ọlọyọ.

However, it was the same story; same characters but different towns of which one has a link, with Ọyọ. Again, the *Odù* sited in *Ogbèwèhìn* was a fuller and detailed version than the one in *Ìrètẹgbè*. While the major differences in the two stories are; one, in *Ìrètẹgbè*, *Ológbòjìgòlò* was *Awo* to both kings, *Ọlọyọ* and *Eléwí*, while in *Ogbèwèhìn*, he was *Awo* to only *Alápà*. The reason for this was, the moment he discovered the truth, he turned to a cat and escaped through the ceiling. This was responsible for the reason why the Ọyọ people do not eat *Ológbò*- cat till today. There is a belief that if they do, they are eating their in-law. After all, Ọlọyọ's daughter had children for *Ologbojigolo*. However, the story is all about *Ológbòjìgòlò*, who was an *Awo* to a king or some kings, which is the point we are trying to establish. This is how *Ifá* puts the *Odù* in *Ogbèwèhìn*:

<i>Ogbèwèhìn;</i>	Ogbewehinwo
<i>Ẹhìn Ìwà mo wò</i>	I looked at the outcome of character
<i>Mo wò réré,</i>	I looked at the open
<i>Mo wò jọjọ</i>	I looked patiently
<i>A dífá fún Ológbòjìgòlò</i>	Casts divination for <i>Ologbojigolo</i>
<i>Tó nṣawo ròde Àpà</i>	Who was on divination mission to <i>Apa</i>
<i>Nwón ní ẹ má jobì tó gbó</i>	They were told not to eat matured kola nut
<i>Ẹ nje obì tó gbó</i>	They were eating matured kola nut
<i>Ẹyin àgbà,</i>	You elders,
<i>Nwón ní ẹ má láya méjì ní</i>	You were instructed not to marry
<i>rògbà-nrògbà</i>	two wives at once
<i>Ẹyín rẹè láya méjì ní rògbà</i>	You went ahead to marry two wives at once
<i>nrògbà</i>	
<i>Njé tani ò mòràn</i>	Now who is not unwise
<i>Tani ò mète,</i>	Who does not know the trick
<i>Njé tani ò mò pórí Alápà</i>	Who does not know that it is the head of <i>Alapa</i>
<i>Ló mbẹ nínú akoto!</i>	That is inside the bowl

What applied to Ọrúnmílà and *Ológbòjìgòlò* was what happened to all the *Awo* mentioned in *Odù Ìrètẹ Méjì*<sup>18</sup> where the sample of this paper was taken. The *Odù* explained that *Adegorolu*, one of the sons of Ọ̀nì Alà̀nàkànè-súrú was in search of a wife and went to consult some priests. He was told to offer sacrifice to get a wife and for the wife to bear children for him. He

18 Fasina Agboola, 1989, *Ojulowo Oriki Ifa Apa Kinni*, Lagos: Project Publications Limited, 211-213.

made partial offering, got married to Aróhunwè. The woman could not bear children for Adegorolu, she went to consult the oracle and was asked to offer two hundred pieces of kola nut and two hundred cowries. It was where she went to purchase the kola nut in the market that she encountered the Olokun's emissary who were looking for the same item for sacrifice to the same kind of problem. These servants forcefully took the kola nut from Aróhunwè. She cried and ran after them till she got to Olokun's house. It was through this means that she became Olokun's wife. This is how *Ifá* puts it:

<i>Aláásàrèé</i>	Aláásàrèé
<i>Alààsàrè</i>	Alààsàrè
<i>Alààsàsà</i>	Alààsàsà
<i>Àwọn ni wọn sawo tí tí tí</i>	They were the one on divination mission for a long time
<i>Wọn gbapá erinlá</i>	That were given the hand of a cow
<i>Wọn déyìnkùlè àpón</i>	They got to the back of a bachelor
<i>Wọn pòyì biri biri</i>	They made a round turning
<i>A dífá fún Adégorólú</i>	Casts divination for Adegorolu
<i>Ọmọ Ọ̀ṣ̀ni Alà̀nàkan-èsúrú</i>	The son of Ooni Alanakanesuru
<i>Nìjọ̀ tó nsunkán pónun ò lóbìnrin.</i>	On the day he was crying for lack of wife
<i>Wón ní kó káralẹ̀ ẹ̀bọ̀ ní ó ẹ̀se...</i>	He was asked to offer sacrifice...
<i>Àwọn Awo yí nàà ló ẹ̀fá fún Arihunwè</i>	The same Awos divined for Arihunwe
<i>Nìjọ̀ tó nsunkún pónun ò bímọ̀</i>	When she was crying because she had no child
<i>Àwọn ná à ló dífá f'Ólókun</i>	The same Awos divined for Olokun
<i>Nígbà tó ún m̀ékún ojú ẹ̀ráhùn ọ̀mọ̀</i>	When Olokun was crying for lack of children
<i>Wón ní kó nígba ọ̀mọ̀ obì</i>	He was told to offer two hundred pieces of kola nut
<i>Tó so lóri iyá kan nàà</i>	Produced by only one tree
<i>Olókun gbẹ̀bọ̀ nlẹ̀ ó rúbọ̀</i>	Olokun heard and offered the sacrifice
<i>Ọ̀un ló wá bí Iyewájọ̀bì</i>	He was the one that gave birth to Iyewájọ̀bì
<i>Àwọn awo yí nàà ló ẹ̀fá fún Iyewájọ̀bì</i>	This same Awos also divined for Iyewájọ̀bì
<i>Nìjọ̀ tí nsunkún pónun ò níbùdó</i>	When she was crying for lack of settlement
<i>Wón ní kó káralẹ̀, ẹ̀bọ̀ ní o ẹ̀se</i>	She was told to offer sacrifice
<i>Adá-ẹ̀ní-sokó</i>	Adá-ẹ̀ní-sokó
<i>A dífá fún Ọ̀gò-Ọ̀là</i>	Casts divination for Ọ̀gò-Ọ̀là
<i>Èyí tíi ẹ̀sọ̀mọ̀ oba lóyọ̀ ajori</i>	The son of oba OIỌ̀yọ̀ ajori
<i>Nìjọ̀ tí nsunkún pónun ò lóbìnrin.</i>	On the day he was crying for lack of a wife
<i>Wón ní ó kalẹ̀ ẹ̀bọ̀ ní o ẹ̀se</i>	He was asked to offer sacrifice
<i>Ọ̀un ló wá bí Ahánáhánnáméjì</i>	He was the one that gave birth to Ahánáhánnáméjì

<i>Ló bía Ahànàhànaànàméjì</i>	He also gave birth to Ahànàhànaànàméjì
<i>Ó bí Arábéjirinómúnálówó</i>	He gave birth to Arábéjirinómúnálówó
<i>Ó bí Èṣùmàrè-ògò-ó béjì-rin ótúmòèjì</i>	Also gave birth to Èṣùmàrè-ògò-ó béjì-rin ótúmòèjì
<i>Ó bí Olábérinjo</i>	He gave birth to Olábérinjo
<i>Tí nṣawo fún wọn lóde Ìsánlú</i>	Who was their diviner at Isanlu
<i>Ó bí Jegúre,</i>	He gave birth to Jegúre,
<i>Tí sawo fún wọn lóde Òtùnmòbà</i>	Who was their diviner at Otunmoba
<i>Ó bí Pátákó</i>	He gave birth to Pátákó
<i>Tí nṣawo fún wọn lóde Ìpóró</i>	Their priest at Iporo
<i>Ó bí Páráfà</i>	He also gave birth to Páráfà
<i>Tí nṣawo fún wọn lóde ÌÈmèrè</i>	Their priest in the city of Lemere
<i>Ó bí Òkánlāwón</i>	He gave birth to Òkánlāwón
<i>Tí nṣawo fún Arèsa Àjèjé</i>	Who was a priest to Aresa Ajeje
<i>Ó wá bí Òrògbòdòṣègùn</i>	He now gave birth to Òrògbòdòṣègùn
<i>Tí nṣawo wọn ní Ìbàribá</i>	Their priest at Ibariba
<i>Omọ asòsándòru</i>	The child of he that turns daylight to darkness
<i>Ó wá bí Ìbò</i>	He then gave birth to Ìbò
<i>Tí borí ayé</i>	That covers the whole world
<i>Ó fi ṣomọ ikéyìn wọn lénje lénje</i>	That was the last born
<i>Njé eni ó bá lówó</i>	Therefore, he who has money
<i>È wá rùbọ fómọ</i>	Come and offer sacrifice for children
<i>Iyewa lọ sòkun ò dé mọ...</i>	Iyewa went to the Atlantic she didn't comeback.

When Yewajobi was of age to get married, *Ifá* was consulted through the same set of people that divined for her mother Arihunwè. She was told to offer two sheeps and four hundred and twenty cowries as sacrifice with a promise that she would get a husband. Out of these two sheep, one was given to her and was instructed that wherever she goes, she must go with the sheep and wherever a ram mate with the sheep, that was where she would get her husband. The *Odù* went further:

<i>Adaenisoko</i> <sup>19</sup>	Adaenisoko
<i>A dá fún Ògò-Olà</i>	Casts divination for Ogo-Ola
<i>Èyí tí Í ṣomọ Oba lóyọ ajori</i>	Who was a child of Oba lóyọ ajori

19 Fasina agboola, 1989, *Ojulowo Oriki Ifa, Apa Kinni*, Lagos: Project Publications Limited, 203-209.

*Nijó tí Nsunkún p'òun ò lóbinrin...*

On the day he was crying for lack  
of wife

Ògò was a son of one of the *Aláàfin* of Òyó (though the name of his father was not mentioned by *Ifá*, but there is the possibility that it could be *Aláàfin* Olúàṣo<sup>20</sup> because it was Olúàṣo that reigned for about 320 years and had 1,460 children (with numerous wives) out of which it was Onigbogi that succeeded him. Again, it could also be *Aláàfin* Onigbogi himself because he was the one who had direct contact with *Arugbá Ifá*, an Òtá woman. However, in Johnson's narration, *Arugbá* could probably be the mother. While *Odù Írètè Méjì* claimed that she was a wife and rendered her name as *Iyewajóbi* that turned to Yewa River till today as a result of what transpired between her and Ògò. She got married to Ògò and bore ten children for him before she left him because none of the children stayed at home with them.

When *Aláàfin*, the father of Ògò died, Ògò was sent for and was made a king. When *Iyewajóbi* heard that her husband had been made a king, she went to Òyó to celebrate with her husband. When she was going, she went with money and valuable things (these valuable things that *Ifá* did not mention could be what Johnson called personification of several common objects used in fetish worship like *Ajé*, which is money, *Opón*-divination tray, *Ajere*- a kind of sieve, *Òsùn*, *Elégbára*- Image of *Èṣù* and *Ìròkè* - a tapper that are related to *Ifá* divination system that accompanied *Arugbá-Ifá* when she was going to Òyó. (Johnson, being a priest of a foreign religion may not be favourably disposed to using *Ifá* in tracing any history and this could be the gap that differentiates the two stories that this paper is trying to link here).

Furthermore, just as Johnson explained that when the citizens of Òyó rejected *Arugbá* god, that is, *Ifá* worship, she returned to Òtá weeping. On the other hand, *Iyewajóbi* also wept on her way back to her place somewhere in Ògùn State, possibly the present-day Yewa, perhaps not on the issue of the rejection of her god, but because her husband Ògò forcefully had intercourse with her in the open in the presence of people and she left weeping. However, before she left, she placed a curse on the king. This curse may have been responsible for the war that broke out shortly after *Iyewajóbi/Arugbá* left Òyó. The war was between Tapa (Nupe) and Òyó Empire. The war made Onigbogi to flee from Òyó to Gbere in the Bariba country where he died in a strange land as narrated by Johnson. (However, whether the two stories are related or not, the institution of *Ifá* had been established in Òyó kingdom till today and currently, it had almost taken over from the rest of the Yorúbá because there is what we regarded as *Ifá* Òyó today).

20 Samuel Johnson 1969, *The History of the Yorubas*, 158-159.

According to *Odù Irete Meji* mentioned above, Yewájóbí gave birth to eleven children and they were all *Awo* except Ọ̀rògbòdòṣẹ́gun who was a renowned herbalist that settled in the region of Bàrùbá in the present Kwara State. Baruba is a place known for effective and potent medicine till today. It also had a link with the old Ọ̀yọ́ Empire greatly as said earlier. The first four went to the abode of Elédùmarè. After a wonderful performance with their divination, they were begged to stay back, to help in the administration of the abode of Elédùmarè. Ọ̀lábérinjo went to *Ìsánlú*, a town now in Kogi State where he became king's adviser and an administrator. Jegùre went to Ọ̀tùn, a town in Èkìtì State. They all became administrators and members of the government in their respective places they went to. They contributed to the harmony and peaceful co-existence of those places. One can still see the link and traces among these towns mentioned in the *Odù Ifá* and the entire Yorùbá race till today. This is part of what is responsible for the peaceful cohabitation enjoyed among the Yorùbá. As we can see, all the Yorùbá are interrelated, and regardless of any religious affiliation, the Yorùbá will still see themselves as one big family, particularly the indigenous religious people who viewed other religious affiliates as an extension of Yorùbá indigenous religion. Fátóósìn<sup>21</sup> in his observation explained that most contemporary Christians and Muslims had their background in indigenous religions, while some have links with these religions either through their names or family members who are still practicing the religion or that they usually celebrate with during traditional festivals. Olajumoke Adenrele<sup>22</sup> also corroborated this view by claiming that presently two of her children are Christians while another one is married to a Muslim.

Part of the Babaláwo judicial administrative measure is to curtail the excessive use of their powers and positions at the same time instill discipline and the fear of the gods so that they will deal fairly with their subjects. A very good example can be found in *Odù Ọ̀gúndá Fú*<sup>23</sup> where *Ifá* says;

*Fúnmi nkò fún ọ*  
*A kò le jìjà ilèkè d'Ọ̀yọ́*

*Ká dé'le Ọ̀lọ́fin*  
*Bí a bá ti nìjìà ikòkò,*  
*Ijọ́ a bá dé'le ọba làà sòtọ́*

Give me, I will not give you  
One cannot fight over beads till  
he gets to Ọ̀yọ́  
And gets to Ọ̀lọ́fin's house  
If we have been fighting in the secret  
On the day we get to the kings  
palace shall we tell the truth.

21 Awo Fatoosin Awosola, (an Ifa priest) *Oral Interview*, 27th, August, 2018.

22 Olajumoke Adenrele, Osun Priestess *Oral Interview*, 27th, August, 2018.

23 Oladipo Yemitan ati Olajide Ogunde, 1985, *Oju Osupa apa kinni*, Nigeria: University Press Limited, 24-27

<i>A dá f'oba tí a gb'ápò ilèkè fún pamó,</i>	Casts divination for a king that a bag of beads was kept with
<i>Tó şetán tó loun ó fi iwó f'ónilèkè jẹ</i>	That later wanted to poison the owner of the beads
<i>Koun ó le ráyè filèkè şe toun</i>	So that he would make the beads his own

This was an incident that happened in Old Ọyó Empire between the family of a wealthy man, the king and some Babaláwos. The rich man died and his two sons inherited an expensive bead among his property. They both decided to hide the beads from the rest of the family members. However, the eldest son wanted to play a fast game with the beads as a result went again to go and keep the beads with the king. Being expensive beads, the king also wanted to covet it by killing the owner to make the beads his own. However, before he did that, he decided to test his Awos. He kept part of the beads in a covered bowl and call them to come and tell him what he kept in the bowl. Though many of them tried without success, but when Kékeré Awo (the smallest of them all) unravel the secret in the bowl, he ordered the king not to do what he had in mind and also ordered him to pay some fines that included eighty snails to be offered to *Ọrişà Odù*, sixteen goats that would be offered to *Ifá* for attempting to poison the owner of the beads. Again, for Oba not to die as a result of what he wanted to do, he should pay another fine of sixteen thousand cowries, the cloth he was wearing at that moment, the expensive cloth spread on his throne and two maidens that would carry those things to his house. The king obeyed and did everything immediately.

Again, in *Odù Ogbè-Rosùn*<sup>24</sup> otherwise known as *Ogbèmosùn* says;

<i>Ikán Awo orí igi,</i>	Termite, the priest on top of a tree
<i>Jànpèpè Awo ilèélè</i>	Janpepe, the priest on ground
<i>A dífá fún Ọlófin ní kàà kèrindinlógún</i>	Casts divination for Ọlófin in the sixteenth room
<i>Nígbà tó ntògbògbò àrùn nílè</i>	When he was seriously sick
<i>Tó nara aláì le díde.</i>	And could not stand up
<i>Wón ní kó káraálè ebọ lawó ní kó şe</i>	He was asked to offer sacrifice
<i>Èrò Işòpé</i>	People of Işope
<i>È wá wo 'fá Awo kì bí ti nşẹ</i>	Come and see the Ifa chanted as it comes to pass

The Odù explain an incident that happened between Ọrúnmilà the priest of Oba Ọlófin. It was Ọlófin that was sick and Ọrúnmilà consulted the oracle and

ask Ọlọfin to offer a sacrifice of a goat, hen, rat, fish and money. Ọlọfin provided those items and Ọrúnmilà offered the sacrifice with the ears of the animals by burying them in the palace of Ọlọfin and went away with the animals according to the dictate and instruction of Ifa. On the market day, Ọrúnmilà asked his wife to go and sell those animals in the market where Ọlọfin's wife saw her and went home to tell Ọlọfin that Ọrúnmilà had defrauded Ọlọfin by not offering those animals Ọrúnmilà claimed Ifa demanded because she saw Ọrúnmilà's wife in the market selling those animals. Ọrúnmilà was sent for by Ọlọfin to come and explain himself the reason why he should not be punished for the offence he had committed. Ọrúnmilà told Ọlọfin that he offered the animals by burying them in his palace. He went there and chanted *iyere Ifa* by saying;

<i>Nje oni lo maa mo pe mo toluwo</i>	It is today that you will know that a'm
<i>Ajagunmale</i>	capable of beign Oluwo
<i>K'eti eku ko deku, Ajagunmale</i>	Let the ears of rat become rat, Ajagunmale
<i>K'eti eja ko deja, Ajagunmale</i>	Let the ears of fish become fish, Ajagunmale
<i>K'eti eran ko deran, Ajagunmale</i>	Let the ears of ram become ram, Ajagunmale
<i>K'eti aso ko daso, Ajagunmale</i>	Let the ears of cloth become cloth, Ajagunmale
<i>K'eti eni ko deni, Ajagunmale...</i>	Let the ears of man become man, Ajagunmale

The ears of those animals turned to life animals. As he was doing this, the sickness of Ọlọfin came back and they started begging Ọrúnmilà. Ọrúnmilà said for the sickness to go, Ọlọfin must produce those animals in five places and for him not to die, he must provide another set of items with a lot of money which Ọlọfin gladly did. Ever since then, Ọlọfin never doubted the integrity of Ọrúnmilà and whatever advice he gives, he, Ọlọfin takes.

Another instance could be found in odu *Iwori Irete*<sup>25</sup>. There *Ifá* says;

<i>Orí wobi rere gbémi dé</i>	Head find a suitable place take me to
<i>Èsẹ wobi rere sìnmi rẹ</i>	Leg should find a suitable place lead me to
<i>Ibi orí ngbé mí ì rẹ</i>	Where my head is taking me to,
<i>N ò mọbẹ</i>	I do not know
<i>A dífá fún Sàşórẹ</i>	Casts divination for Sàşórẹ
<i>Èyí tí nọ rẹè bori Èlẹwì...</i>	Who was going to offer sacrifice to the head of Èlẹwì...

25 Ayo Salami, 2002, *Ifa: a Complete Divination*, Lagos: NIDD Publishing and Printing Limited, 139



Every year, whenever Oba Ẹlẹ̀wì wanted to celebrate, he would pray and called Şàşórẹ to come and do the final prayer as his Awo. Şàşórẹ would pray for the king, his house hold, the entire town and Şàşórẹ himself. This was not pleasing to the king. On one occasion like that he planned evil for Şàşórẹ by putting him in a wooden box alive and threw the box into a big river. It was at this time that the king of Benin died and they were looking for a replacement. The oracle was consulted and Ifa says they should go to the river, whatever strange thing they see there should be brought to the palace. They did and the messengers found the box Şàşórẹ was nailed and brought the box to the palace together with Şàşórẹ. Şàşórẹ was made the new oba of Benin of which Ẹlẹ̀wì found out later. However, Şàşórẹ supposed to use his power as a superior king over Ẹlẹ̀wì, but he never did because the evil deed had turned good for him.

There are countless examples that can be cited on this issue. In all the Odu cited above, they all warned that we should be careful particularly when leaders are dealing with their subjects that we should be mindful of the way we deal with them because there is always tomorrow. The position of the Babaláwo in Yorùbá society is almost gone as a result of civilization and foreign religions. Also, some priests are dubious as a result of money influence. They no longer discharge their duties like in the olden days. This notwithstanding, there are still reputable and respected ones among them that still perform their duties credibly. In Yorùbá society today, leaders at every level are not mindful of the way they deal with people of low level. They are insensitive to their plight which is not good enough.

## Conclusion

Babaláwo (*Ifá* priests) and *Ifá* are important in Yorùbá society. In fact, their contributions in the kingdom cannot be underplayed. In the area of giving useful advices to individual, groups and the entire community, the Babaláwo are second to none. It is observed that in the pre-colonial time, no matter how terrible a king might be, he cannot ignore the advice of the *Awo*. If he does, it is to his own peril.

They also pass across moral and ethical values that are gradually eroding in our society today as a result of western education and modernity to the society at large. This is the reason why in the pre-colonial days, when a king comes across any competent and good Babaláwo, they hardly let go of such a rare gem regardless of where he comes from among the towns in Yorùbáland. The king and his people would cling to such Babaláwo to tap from his wisdom. This was exactly what happened in the case of Ọ̀rúnmilà in *Ọ̀sá Méjì*<sup>26</sup>

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26 Fasina Agboola, 1989, *Ojulowo Oriki Ifa*, Lagos: Project Publications Limited, 141.

where Ọ̀rúnmilà was mistook for a native of several towns like *Ìkòlẹ̀*, *Ọ̀fà*, *Ìjèsà*, *Ìjerò*, all in Yorùbáland. According to the *Odù*:

<i>Ifá ní wọn ó kí un mòjòjò</i>	Ifa says he should be greeted mojo mojo
<i>Ifá ní wọn ó kí un mejimeji</i>	Ifa says he should be greeted mejimeji
<i>Ifá pèlẹ̀ mòjòmòjò</i>	Hello Ifa mojo mojo
<i>Ifá pèlẹ̀ mejimeji</i>	Hello Ifa mejimeji
<i>Ifá pèlẹ̀ééé.</i>	Hello Ifa
<i>Omo olónà tó yà réré Adó Èwí</i>	The owner of the road that goes striate to Ado Ewi
<i>Ọ̀rúnmilà lóun kii sàrá Adó Èwí.....</i>	Ọ̀rúnmilà says he was not from Ado Ewi...

Their contributions to the administration of any government is always accosted with peace, love, obedience, harmony and sound moral values. However, it is quite unfortunate that those Babaláwo, though they are on increase in their numbers all over the world particularly in Brazil, Cuba, America and so on, are limited in proportion in Yorùbá or Nigeria. More importantly, they are constantly diminishing in their values due to greed and the pervading influence of modernity, western education and foreign religions that is labeling the religion and the profession of Babaláwo, 'black'. Nevertheless, their positions and values are still felt in Yorùbá society till today, particularly, in the areas of governance. I therefore, recommend that we should look inwardly into some of our culture that we can explore, tap from and make use of, in this modern time. After all, there is no present without the past and the present will definitely determine the future.

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