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YORUBA ÒRÌṢÀ CULTS:
SOME MARGINAL NOTES CONCERNING THEIR
COSMOLOGY AND CONCEPTS OF DEITY * 1

BY

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YORUBA Òrìṣà cults have been receiving attention for a long time now, both singly, and together in more general treatments of Yoruba religion.² But many questions remain. For example: census figures may give an approximate number of non-Christians and non-Muslims in Western Nigeria,³ but the number of òrìṣà cult-groups at any given point in time has never, as far as I know, been ascertained, except in the case of certain towns and cities.⁴

Another question, of some significance, concerns the way the òrìṣà—the Deities—relate to one another in the context of an overall religious cosmology. Much controversy has been aroused over the question of the Supreme Deity,⁵ rather less over the status and interrelationship

* Note on Orthography. Limits have been imposed by the type available, such that e represents both e and ẹ, o represents both o and ọ.

¹ The following was presented for discussion at a meeting of the Africa section of the British Association for the History of Religions in September 1976. Acknowledgement is gladly made of assistance given in the preliminary stages by the Research Board of the University of Leicester.

² Noteworthy examples of these include Leo Frobenius' *Die atlantische Götterlehre* (Jena: E. Diederichs 1926) and *The voice of Africa* (London: Hutchison 1913), and W. R. Bascom's *The sociological role of the Yoruba cult group* (American Anthropological Association, Memoir 63, 1944).

³ 812,000 (7.9%) in 1963.

⁴ Judith Gleason, in her *Orisha: the gods of Yorubaland* (New York: Atheneum 1971, p. 118), speaks of "about forty active orisha in Yorubaland". D. O. Epega (*The basis of Yoruba religion*, Ebutemetta, Nigeria: Ijamido Publishers 1971) lists more than sixty. Wm. Bascom (*The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1969), estimates the number of "white" deities and hill deities alone at more than a hundred.

⁵ Apart from the standard work of E. B. Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba belief* (London: Longman 1962), mention should be made of C. H. Long's *The West African high god: history and religious experience*, *History of Religion* 3, 1963-64, 328-342; Pierre Verger, *The Yoruba high god — a review of the sources*, *Odu* 2, 1966, 19-40; and Robin Horton, *Conference: 'The high god in Africa'*, *idem*, 87-95. (It should be clearly recognized that the notion of a 'High God' has not always proved helpful when applied in an African context.)

of the *òrìṣà*. Just as people have been content to give a notional answer to the question of the number of *òrìṣà*—201, 401 and so on—so too, we have tended to be content with some convenient model of the Yoruba religious cosmology which grouped the *òrìṣà* cults together in some kind of ordered way.

Three kinds of model have assumed some degree of prominence. The first one, and by far the most popular and long-standing—one to which I myself adhered for some years—was roughly triangular in shape. The *òrìṣà* occupied much of the space within the triangle, graded according to their importance and power. Below them were the *ìmàlè*, the spirits, many of whom were unpredictable and dangerous. Above the *òrìṣà* was Olórun-Olódùmarè, the Supreme Deity, whose ‘ministers’ the *òrìṣà* were,⁶ and whose delegated power they deployed as mediators between God and mankind. A second model, outlined by Morton-Williams, to some extent in reaction to the first one,⁷ was more circular or spherical in shape. In the upper hemisphere the scenario was little changed: Olórun-Olódùmarè was still above the greater and lesser *òrìṣà*. But there were two important modifications: two of the *òrìṣà*, Ifá and Èṣù, were placed in a special position to one side; and below the *òrìṣà* was a group of cults more closely related to the earth spirit. These formed the earthly counterpart to the sky deities and Supreme Deity. On the surface it all looks like some kind of Iranian dualism, and it has, in fact, been likened to the latter, but I do not think the author of this model saw the same kind of radical opposition in Yoruba religion at all.

Morton-Williams believed that the revised model accorded better with the cosmology implicit in the praise songs (*oríkì*), chants and prayers of the *òrìṣà* cults themselves, though he did not attempt to substantiate this claim in detail.⁸ Some years previously, however, Pierre Verger, a French scholar, had taken the trouble to collect and publish what is still perhaps the largest single collection of these *oríkì* and chants.⁹ Reflecting on this first-hand material, Verger concluded that the various *òrìṣà* were separate deities in the full sense, juxtaposed

⁶ E. B. Idowu, *op.cit.*, 57ff.

⁷ P. Morton-Williams, An outline of the cosmology and cult organization of the Oyo Yoruba, *Africa* 34, 1964, 243-260.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 243. It does, admittedly, appear to accord rather well with some of the myths, especially the creation myth.

⁹ P. Verger, *Notes sur le culte des Orisha et Vodun à Bahia, la Baie de tous les Saints, au Brésil et à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves en Afrique*, Dakar I.F.A.N., 1957.

theisms, perhaps even juxtaposed monotheisms.¹⁰ What was common was the secret and sacred power (*aṣẹ̀*), a “non-anthropomorphic form of theism”, which was experienced in the course of the rituals of the cult-groups.¹¹ Verger’s model, then, simply placed the *òrìṣà* side by side, and avoided altogether arranging them under the Supreme Deity, as lesser deities, or divinities.

Each of the three models outlined has advantages and disadvantages. The first is strong in terms of the unity and continuity of divine power, something which is certainly felt in Yoruba religion. Moreover it caters for the ‘macrocosm’ as well as the ‘microcosm’, to use terms made popular by Robin Horton some years back.¹² There is the strong tendency in this model to take account of theological speculation within the cult-groups in the direction of a more rationalised universalist monotheism. More importantly, for our purpose, it sometimes appears to have the effect of jeopardising the integrity of the individual *òrìṣà* cults by narrowing the true profile of attributes of the *òrìṣà* themselves.¹³ Thus the microcosm may be sacrificed too much to the interests of the macrocosm. Morton-Williams’ revision goes some distance towards correcting the imbalance. It restores an independent position to Onilè, the earth goddess, whose cult may well have antedated those of the *òrìṣà* associated with the sky. It also recognizes the special position of Èṣù and Ifá for members of all the cult groups. However it is probably true to say that the ‘sky’ *òrìṣà*, e.g. Ògún and even Ṣàngó, have also strong links with the earth.¹⁴ Verger would doubtless say that all the *òrìṣà* cults are really earth cults.¹⁵ Also, Ifá and Èṣù are not the only *òrìṣà* that offer services to members of other cult-groups.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11, and Verger, *The Yoruba high god...* (1966), p. 24.

¹¹ Verger, *Notes sur le culte...* (1957), 29f; and *The Yoruba high god* (1966), 35-40.

¹² First, in *Man*, 1962, Art. no. 219, 137-140; later in *African conversion*, *Africa* 41, 1971, 101ff.

¹³ Examination of the praise-songs addressed to the *òrìṣà* reveals a wide range of attributes. It is not the case, thus, that Ògún is simply a “god of iron and war”. He is also a god of fertility and the earth. Similarly with respect to their subordination to Olórún-Olódúmarè. We find, as early as 1848, that followers of Idagbe (Dāngbe) near Badagry hasten to assure the Sierra Leonian William Marsh, who has reproached them concerning the ‘vanity’ of worshipping ‘idols’, that their intention was ‘to worship the Almighty God through Idagbe’ (CMS CA2/067 W. Marsh, *Jnl. Q.E.* 25.9.1848).

¹⁴ Ògún, for instance, is called Master of the World and Owner of the Earth (Òrìṣà Onilè) in an Ishèdè chant (Verger, *Notes sur le culte*, 196-198). The ‘active’ *òrìṣà* clearly tend to accumulate attributes.

¹⁵ P. Verger, *The Yoruba high god...* (1966), pp. 34f.

Şàngó, Ògùn and other *òrìṣà* do the same.¹⁶ Apart from these specific features, one has the feeling that the second model is almost as tightly enclosed as the first one.

Verger's loose juxtaposition of different cult-groups, linked by the common belief in the power of medicinal substances conveying *aṣẹ̀*, is attractive in a number of ways: it at least gives the *òrìṣà* cults an independent status. Perhaps it over-values the importance of *aṣẹ̀*, though this does form apparently a widespread feature of the Yoruba cults.¹⁷ Perhaps, too, it under-values the inter-relatedness of the cults and the specialization of particular cult-groups, such as Ifá and Èṣù. But it has the merit of providing a useful base-line for following up the suggestion put forward by Morton-Williams: namely, to look at the extent to which the *oriki* and chants of *òrìṣà* cults support a given cosmological model: in particular, how often they mention other *òrìṣà* as well, and also Olórun-Olódùmarè, the Supreme Deity, or Onílè, the earth goddess. The assumption is that these *oriki* and chants are speaking of what is important to the members of the particular *òrìṣà* tradition concerned. Or—to use the German proverb—*Wes' das Herz voll ist, des' geht der Mund über*.¹⁸ If the answer should be strongly positive, this should tend to argue for a more unified cosmological model of the triangular or circular pattern. If not, then we shall have to think in terms of Verger's or some variant of this.

I should like to begin with a brief reference to my own—admittedly limited—experience in 1972 and 1975 of cult celebrations of Şàngó and Onílè, two *òrìṣà* associated with the sky and earth respectively.¹⁹ (Further contacts with the cult-groups of Egúngún, Òrìṣà-Oko and Òkè-Orírí, Hill Divinity at Iwo,²⁰ do not alter the general picture

¹⁶ Şàngó priests are concerned with all places struck by lightning; Ògùn's importance in war becomes infinite; and Frobenius discerned long ago the fundamental importance for all *òrìṣà* cult members of Osanyin, the *òrìṣà* of healing with medicinal leaves.

¹⁷ One of Şàngó's praise names is "leaves are profitable indeed" (D. A. Adeniji and P. R. McKenzie, *Funeral Rite of a Şàngó Priestess* (manuscript), Chant 28c).

¹⁸ It was pointed out in discussion that the *oriki*, being traditional in form, may not represent the present beliefs of the *olòrìṣà*; but this does not detract from their normative character for the cult-group as such. The advantage of the *oriki* and chants over other statements by the people about their cosmology is that the *oriki*, being traditional 'survivals' from an earlier day are less affected by the pressures of the macrocosm.

¹⁹ D. A. Adeniji and P. R. McKenzie, *op.cit.*, and also: *The annual festival of a Şàngó compound* (1972) and *The secret rite of the Ogbóni Cult* (1975), both in manuscript.

²⁰ In August-September 1974.

found with these two *òrìṣà*.) At the time, and afterwards as I studied the text of the *oriki* and chants, it became plain that Ṣàngó was himself the object of devotion in his own right, and that Onílè was equally the object of devotion in her cult-group as well. No other *òrìṣà* received attention to any great extent. In the case of the Ṣàngó festivals, there were references, as we might expect, to Ifá and Èṣù. There was a comparison of Ṣàngó's power with that of Ògún, and at the end of one of the festivals, there was an *oriki* to Yemoja, the goddess of waters, in mythology the mother of Ṣàngó. The purpose of this was, doubtless, to define Ṣàngó's place in the *Urzeit*, and to exert a "cooling" effect on rituals which might tend to get dangerously overheated with a "hard" or "hot" deity like Ṣàngó. There was however no reference at all to Olódumarè or to Onílè. In the case of the Ogboni ritual, the theme throughout was simply "Hail to the Earth Deity (*Hèèépa Málè*)". There were brief references to Ògún, Ṣàngó, Ṣòpònnà and Ìròkò (a dendromorphic *òrìṣà*), that they should not harm cult members of Onílè. But there was no reference to Olódumarè.

The concept of deity reflected in the cult celebrations of these two *òrìṣà* in Oyo state may perhaps best be described by a term used by Friedrich Heiler, namely *subjective theism*.²¹ However, as other *òrìṣà* were mentioned in the *oriki* it is important to go on to qualify the kind of subjective theism of the *òrìṣà* in the light of other collections of *oriki* and chants.

First, let us look at Verger's collection, drawn from many different parts of Yorubaland. In this truly great work,²² Verger studied twenty-six *òrìṣà* cults, plus the figure of Olórun. For nine of these and also for Olórun he has included *no oriki*, so these we shall have to leave out of account. Of the remaining eighteen *òrìṣà*, no fewer than half are themselves the *sole* objects of devotion, no other *òrìṣà* being mentioned. Such include the *oriki* addressed to Èṣù, Odùdúwà, Òṣumarè and Yemoja. Seven of the remaining nine have *oriki* that contain references to between one and three other *òrìṣà*. In some cases these are in any case usually associated, and are cited by way of defining the position of the *òrìṣà* concerned. The seven include Ògún, Orányàn, Òṣun, Oya and Ṣòpònnà. The last two *òrìṣà*, Obátálá and Ṣàngó, stand out from the rest in that they are associated with no fewer than eight and twelve other *òrìṣà* respectively. These two have clearly a special

²¹ F. Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961.

²² P. Verger, *Notes sur le culte ...* (1957).

status as heads of a cluster of associated deities. Olódùmarè by contrast is referred to only once in an *oriki* of Şàngó, one of the very few instances recorded in *all* the *oriki*. Onílè also does not appear in any way to have the kind of status ascribed to her by Morton-Williams.

Verger records no *oriki* and chants for the Ifá cult group, but William Bascom more than makes up for this lack with his superb collection of verses from the Ifá corpus, likewise drawn from a very wide area.²³ He lists in full 186 'verses', some of them running into several pages each, from about one fifth of the 256 different figures of the *odù*. These verses contain besides a certain amount of folk-lore, references to many of the *òrìṣà* studied by Verger, and others besides. (Ten of Verger's *òrìṣà* are incidentally, not mentioned at all in Bascom's verses.) The concern with other *òrìṣà* is to be expected in a divination cult serving members of other cult-groups. What is surprising is the extent to which many *òrìṣà* are hardly mentioned at all. No fewer than nine are mentioned only once, including Orò, Òşun, Oya, Obàlùfòn and Ọramfẹ; six more are only mentioned twice, including Òşanyìn and Olóşà; a similar number occur three times, including Şàngó, Sòpònnà, the Ogbóni and Ògún. Obàtálá, Olókun and Ògún feature twice as prominently again, as do the evil spirits and the dangerous earth spirits. Then there is an enormous jump to a group of three; Òrunmilà, the *òrìṣà* of the Ifá cult-group itself, who appears more than forty times, and a little less in evidence, Èşù and Olórun-Olódùmarè. These rough statistics more than bear out Bascom's claim that for the Ifá cult-group Òrunmilà, Èşù and Olódùmarè form a kind of trinity, or preferably, triad, in their dealings with the individual, his destiny and his ancestral guardian soul. Olódùmarè is master of that destiny, with his home in the sky. Òrunmilà knows the divine order, Èşù the divine unpredictability; together they complement the Sky Deity forming a triangle which indeed encloses the individual and his destiny on earth, and even his pre-existence and post-existence.²⁴ But while this Ifá *òrìṣà*-triad assumes a special form, the other *òrìṣà* and their cults seem not to be very closely related to it; many indeed seem to be marginal, or to be ignored altogether.

²³ W. R. Bascom, *Ifa divination: communication between gods and men in West Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1969.

²⁴ Olódùmarè is referred to by Bascom as the 'God of Destiny' (*The Yoruba*, p. 79). In the *oriki* there appears to be little reference to the general belief that *in extremis* members of all the cult groups turn to Olórun-Olódùmarè. Such a belief would tend to be reinforced by the influence of Olórun-Alà (Christian and Muslim concepts) though to what extent is not clear.

Another observer of the *òrìṣà* cults who has reported on their festivals in a particular area of Oyo state, is the Austrian Ulli Beier. At Èdé between 1952 and 1956 he found that the festivals of three cult groups were no longer observed, nine others he was able to describe.²⁵ On the whole the festivals were separate, but in one case, dancers from another cult-group played a part in the entertainment. In another case two other *òrìṣà* were referred to in the *oriki* verses quoted. In the second town, Ilobu,²⁶ the *òrìṣà* cults were similarly separate for the most part. The *oriki* extract for Erinlè, the town's most important *òrìṣà*, was addressed solely to the hunting divinity himself. Oya was, however, seen in association with Şàngó, a feature we should expect since she is his consort. Then, in addition to Èṣù and Ifá, the Ibéjì cult of twins seemed to be represented among the other cults, not so much in the *oriki* verses as in the form of visual images. The Egúngún cult group seemed to be the most open in membership at Ilobu and also at Oşogbo, numbering among its members Muslims and Christians as well. Another feature found at Ilobu was the festival of the images, which provided an opportunity for an ecumenical gathering of members of the nine cult groups of the town which had images in their shrines. Ọşun, Ọgún and Obàtálá were not included.²⁷ If there is a connection between artistic and religious vitality, Ulli Beier found in this one small Yoruba town in the 1950s no fewer than nine flourishing cult-groups.

Ulli Beier discusses the cult-groups and the *òrìṣà* at Oşogbo, not far from Ilobu, in a recent work, *The Return of the Gods*.²⁸ This study is concerned with the interesting and controversial attempt by Susanne Wenger, a convert to the *òrìṣà*, to provide homes (shrines and images) for the *òrìṣà* to settle in, after a long period of uprootedness. Susanne, an Ogbóni elder and a priestess of Obàtálá, has also done much for the official cult of Oşogbo, Ọşun. She has given support to the *òrìṣà* not only by encouraging astonishing works of art, but also by formulating a kind of universalist *òrìṣà* doctrine. Her cosmology appears to be a kind of pantheism or panentheism, with Olódùmarè as the total of the All including the *òrìṣà*, and with each *òrìṣà* a personalization of the

²⁵ Ulli Beier, *A year of sacred festivals in one Yoruba town*. *Nigeria Magazine*, Lagos, special issue 1959.

²⁶ Ulli Beier, *The story of sacred wood carvings in one small Yoruba town*. *Nigeria Magazine*, Lagos, special issue, July 1957.

²⁷ Ulli Beier, Festival of the Images, *Nigeria Magazine* no. 45, 1954, 14-20.

²⁸ Ulli Beier, *The return of the gods: the sacred art of Susanne Wenger*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975.

universe, a kind of *Verdichtung*, condensation, of the forces of the universe at a certain place, seen from a certain angle.²⁹ Olódùmarè is multiple Deity or Being, one at all times and places, but accessible through òrìṣà devotion. In the only *oriki* cited, the subjective theism of òrìṣà devotion would appear to be linked with her view of inclusive, multiple Deity. I mention Susanne's views in this way since she has been enabled through her aesthetic sensitivity to penetrate more deeply than any other European known to me into the religious experience of the olóṣìṣà, the one who 'makes òrìṣà'.³⁰

Finally, I would briefly mention the evidence from the fragments of *oriki* and chants of festivals reported on by different observers during the past twenty-five years in the *Nigeria Magazine*.³¹ More than a dozen different òrìṣà are directly addressed and celebrated in the festivals recorded. Of two further festivals of sacred kings, one contains little or no mention of deities; the other, at Ondo, concerned with royal ancestors at Ondo and Ifè including Oramfe, only mentions two other òrìṣà. Turning to the òrìṣà venerated directly at annual festivals, five have apparently no other associates. The account of a sixth, Şàngó, at Oşogbo, refers only in a myth to Oya and Òşun as his wives. Similarly at Ifè, Òrìṣà-ńlá (Obàtálá), is associated explicitly only with Yemoja and Ifá. In the case of Ògún in Ekiti, two òrìṣà and also Olórun-Olódùmarè are referred to in myths. At Ede, Obàtálá's festival is clearly associated in well-known myths with four other òrìṣà and with Olódùmarè. One tutelary divinity, Orí-Òkè, at Iragbeji is associated with five other òrìṣà. The Òşun festival at Oşogbo includes some attention given to seven other òrìṣà but no explicit reference to Olódùmarè. Finally, Agemo in Ijebuland stands alone and supreme, having nothing to do with the northern Yoruba òrìṣà.³²

We have perhaps included enough evidence to see that with more and more material the picture could be continually filled out at some point. But I believe a kind of basic pattern is emerging, though it should be left very much open-ended. We have the basic subjective

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33f.

³⁰ Cf. Susanne Wenger-Alarape, interview in the *Nigerian Observer*, 7 March 1969.

³¹ See Nos. 40, 45, 47, 49, 50, 52, 53, 56, 58, 70, 71, 77, 82, 84, 85, 86, 87, 90, 95, 99, 100, 107, 108, 109 and 114. Cf. Bibliography (Ceremonies), in S. O. Biobaku, *Sources in Yoruba history*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973, 254f. It should be noted that Ulli Beier has also contributed many of the accounts of festivals in this series.

³² Oyin Ogunba, The Agemo Cult in Yorubaland, *Nigeria Magazine* no. 86, September 1965, 176-186.

theism of the individual *òrìṣà*. We have the uniqueness of each *òrìṣà*. We have clusters of *òrìṣà* round a few prominent ones. We have the special cosmology of the Ifá cult-group. At one point we have Agemo, virtually eclipsing Olódùmarè as national or Supreme Deity in Ijebu-land. Finally hovering in the background we have myths and legends of the *òrìṣà* in interaction, which we have barely hinted at, and whose complexity seems impossible to fathom. Looking back to the tidy models of Yoruba cosmology we must ask, How much of them is it possible to retain?

Let us begin again with the individual *òrìṣà*. The extraordinary richness of Yoruba religion lies in the profusion of its *òrìṣà*, in the facility with which in the past an *òrìṣà* has formed and gathered about itself a cult-group. (Aiyélála, is a fairly recent example.³³) There follows in each case inevitably, the entry into relationships with other *òrìṣà*, the division into different *òrìṣà*, or the coalescing with other *òrìṣà* (Ṣàngó and Jákúta).³⁴ It is subjective theism, with, objectively, Deity particularized and concretized in two directions: a link on the one hand with the natural and impersonal world—hills, trees, rivers, earth, sky; and on the other with the human and personal sphere—societies, historical events, cultural and economic activities, war, farming, healing, founding of cities and towns, kings, culture-heroes, ancestors, peace-makers, down to the individual's spirit double (*orí*). It is impossible to do justice to the whole range of *òrìṣà* but they, and even Olódùmarè and Agemo do seem to have this double aspect, the natural and the socio-historical. Examples are Olórun, linked with the sky and with the individual's destiny, or Ṣàngó, associated with thunder and storms, and the royal ancestor of the Oyo kings. The picture is further complicated by the movements of peoples bringing their own *òrìṣà*, the expansion of empires, and above all the flexibility of the Yoruba social system which allows for a considerable element of choice for the individual, and for his being called to serve an *òrìṣà* other than that of his father or mother or his compound.³⁵

In all these factors, there are, I believe, two underlying forces: those making for theistic particularity (*Götterspaltung*) and those making

³³ J. O. Awolalu, Aiyélála — a guardian of social morality, *Orita*, 2, 1968, 79-89.

³⁴ E. B. Idowu, *Olódùmarè*, 92f.

³⁵ See Frobenius, *op.cit.*, 1913 and 1926; and Bascom, *op.cit.*, 1944 and 1969, for details. The social context of the cults is obviously important in establishing a clear picture of current practices.

for theistic reunification (*Göttervereinigung*).³⁶ We can see already in the *oriki* and chants how these opposing tendencies operate. The *oriki* exalts the particular *òrìṣà*, and yet the more it is exalted, the more is the tendency for the accretion of further attributes, including those of other *òrìṣà* (by *communicatio idiomatum*, to use the term coined by Lutheran Orthodoxy). Differing shades and nuances, historical particularity and uniqueness preserve the individuality of the *òrìṣà*, but most come with time to the position of being able to confer all things upon their devotees: healing, fertility of crops, children, wealth and position, solution of life's problems, fulfilment of personal destiny, and so on. (There are of course other *òrìṣà* who are so to speak consultant specialists to be called upon if necessary, such as Ifá, Èṣù, Òsanyìn, Ṣàngó, etc.) Thus, most if not all of the *òrìṣà* combine in one way or another elements of *tremendum* and *fascinosum*. They are regarded by devotees as Deity in the full sense,³⁷ Deity original, not borrowed, inherent not ministerial. All are Deities. The corpus of myths documents the "worldly" interaction of the *òrìṣà* and illustrates the forces making for theistic particularity and reunification.³⁸

But there is doubtless another law, which the *òrìṣà* are affected by, that of growth and decline. Perhaps we should say this is a law of the *òrìṣà* cults rather than the *òrìṣà* themselves, who as divine beings can never die. The *òrìṣà* grow by specialization, in providing services for others, in the case of Ifá and Egúngún, even for Muslims and Christians. General festivals of images (*ère*) and—more importantly today—participation in one another's festivals also tend to foster the growth of the cults. Finally, expansion of the *òrìṣà* cults into the areas of other religions and cultures, leads to the preservation of the *òrìṣà* under syncretistic forms: in Dahomey under the Vodun, and in Brazil, Cuba and Trinidad, under the forms of the Apostles and Saints. Opposed to all this, of course, is the massive onslaught of Islam, Christianity and Modernity.

Summing up: what we see with the *òrìṣà* is a series of Deities subjected to the operation of an ever changing and dynamic configuration of forces making for particularity and for unity. The triangular cosmological model, reflecting the work of theological speculation, stimulated

³⁶ Cf. A. Bertholet's *Götterspaltung und Göttervereinigung* (Tübingen: Mohr 1933); also F. Heiler, *op.cit.*

³⁷ Cf. C. A. Long, *op.cit.*, 337.

³⁸ Cf. H. Courlander, *Tales of Yoruba gods and heroes*, New York: Crown Publishers 1973.

from without, cannot hope to provide an adequate picture. Even the revised model is too static. We can, I believe, go farther than Verger's juxtaposed theisms, by admitting to special forms of Deity, clusters of *òrìṣà*, partial uniformities, but not to any complete cosmological picture. We can speak, with C. A. Long, of monotheism as "an enduring structure of the religious experience itself",³⁹ but we ought not to begin—as Long and so many others do—from 'above', with the result that a complete metaphysical superstructure is tacitly assumed. Rather we must begin from 'below' with the experience of the *òrìṣà* cults themselves; and content ourselves meanwhile with 'open-ended' theisms, clusters, partial configurations and above all different *theologies* within Yoruba traditional religious cults themselves. Some of these will want to include, and work down from, the Supreme Deity, as a fruit of theological speculation from within, others will proceed in other directions, notably by raising the *òrìṣà* to a more and more exalted position.

³⁹ C. A. Long, *op.cit.*, 342.

APPENDIX A
A short list of Yoruba Deities
(Those Deities mentioned in the article are asterisked)

Name of Deity	Brief Characterization	Group Number	Name of Deity	Brief Characterization	Group Number
Abikú	family cult	8	*Egúngún - see Amaiyeḡun	masked cult	6
Adimún Òriṣà	Aworí town	6,7	Èlà - see Ifá	paralysis	5,12
Agbàláàḡba	'white' òrìṣà	4	Éléékò - see Egbé	masks, Ekiti	5,6
*Agemo	Ijebu deity	4(1)	Eléédá - see Olódùmaré	river, Ilobu	7
*Aiyélála	Social morality	5	Èlúkú	river, Ikale	7
Aájá	Healing arts	5	Èminalé	with Odúúwà	4
Ajé-ṣalúḡá	Trade	5	Epa	bush spirit	8
Akérún	River, Ikalaland	7	*Erinlè	fertility + life	5,6
Akoko	Tree spirit	7	Eriworé	tutelary spirit	7,8
*Amaiyeḡun	Egúngún	6	Èsìdalé	of twins	4(1)
Aràbà	Tree spirit	7	*Èṣù (Eléḡbàrà)	order + wisdom	7
Arìbèjí	Ilaḡe Orò	6	Ewèlè	bush spirit	6
Aròni	herbal med.	8(5)	Gèlèdè	Nupe Egún	4
Atòri	Tree spirit	7	*Ibèjí	earth goddess	4
Ayón	Tree spirit	7	*Ifá (Òruú milà)	associate of	4
Ayón - see (Òrìṣà) Ilù	'white' òrìṣà	4	Igbó	Obàtálá	4
Baba Agbà	forensic deity	12	Iḡun .nukun	earth goddess	2
Babaláiyé - see Ṣòpòmà			Ijèsù	òrìṣà of drums	5
Baba Sigrídi			Ijugebe	guardian soul	10
Bàyànni - see Dàda				soul in stomach	10
Bükú	Abeokuta	7		òrìṣà in toes	10
Dàda	n. born babies	5	*Ilè (Omílè)		
*Dāḡbe	Afr. python	5	Ilù		
Egbé	Winn's Egúngún	6	Ìpín		
Egbére	Children's spirits	8	Ìpín Ìjeun		
Eḡún - see Aràbà			Ìpórí		

*Irokò	tree spirit	7	Olóbà	tutulary <i>òrìṣà</i>	7
*Irunmalé	earth spirits	12		nr. Akuré	
Iwin ilé	earth spirits	11			
Iyá Mápó	goddess of potters	5	*Olódumare	<i>òrìṣà</i> , Ifè	1 (3)
Iyeyè	tree spirit	7	(Olórun)	son, Odùduwà,	7
*Jákúta	early storm deity	4	Olófefura	founder Lagos	4.5
Jó-m-fà	sky deity, Ondo	3	Olófin	hill deity, Ikole	7
Kòrì	<i>òrìṣà</i> of childbirth	5	Olókè	hill deity, Èkítì	7
*Obà	river, wife of	7(4)	Olóókú ta	white deity,	
	Şàngó		*Olóókun	God of the Ocean	4
Oba Bárúgbó - see Obátálá				god of lagoons	4
Oba Igbo - see Obátálá				hill deity, Ekítì	7
*Obàlufón	white <i>òrìṣà</i> of	3.5	Olóòṣà	river deity,	7
	speech, weaving		Olóşunta	Ikaleland	
	etc.		Olúfón - see Obátálá	tree spirit	7
			Olúwa mobi		
Obalúaiyé - see Şòpònmà	elder of Odùduwà,	7	Òmò		
Oba-mèri	Ifè		Omolu - see Şòpònmà		
	Ijebu founder	5	Omon iyá	Ogbóni cult, Ijebu	2
Oba-n-ta	Sky God, Creator	3	Ònà	<i>Òrìṣà</i> of roads	5
*Obátálá	'river' Otajibo	7	Òndófoyi	fnder. goddess,	5
Odo	Creator, fnder.	3.5		Egbado	
*Odùduwà	<i>òrìṣà</i> , Ikaleland	7	*Òràmfé	solar deity, Ifè	4
Ògá-n-lá			Òrangán	son of Yemoja,	4
*Ogbóni - see Ilé	white <i>òrìṣà</i> ,	4.5		King of Ila, air	
Ògunyań	Ejigbo;		*Oran yàn	son, Odùduwà	4
	n. yams		Ore	deity of hunters,	5
	national <i>òrìṣà</i>	4		Ifè	
	iron, war,		Oréliéré	hero, guardian of	5
	hunters			domestic morality,	
	hill deity	7		Ifè	
Òkèbàdàn	hill deity	7	*Orì	personal destiny	10
Òkè Olúmo	hill deity	7		household <i>òrìṣà</i>	
*Òkè-Orífrí	hill deity, Iwo		Orí-Òkè	hill deity,	7
Òkòròbòjò	lake, deity,	7		Iragbeji	
	Okitipupa				

Name of Deity	Brief Characterization	Group Number	Name of Deity	Brief Characterization	Group Number
Òriṣàakò - see Obàtálá (Òkò)					
Òriṣà	white deity	4	Osè	tree spirit (Baobab)	7
Alàṣe (Oluorogbo)			Osé Túrá	carries sacrifices to Olódùmarè	5
Òriṣà Igbo	white deity, Igbo	4	Oṣòòsi	hunters' deity	5
Òriṣà Ìkirè	white deity, Ìkirè	4	*Òṣùmàrè	rainbow serpent of underworld	4
*Òriṣà-ńlá - see Obàtálá			*Òṣun	river deity	7
Òriṣà-Oba	white deity, Ondó	4	Òtin	Oshogbo	7
*Òriṣà-Oko	òrìṣá of agriculture, Irawo, new yams	4(2)		river goddess, Ekoende	
Òriṣà Pópó	white deity, Ogbomoshó	4	*Oya (Odò Oya)	r.Niger, wife Sàngó	4,7
Òriṣà Teko	white deity, Ifè	4	Oyé	harmattan deity	4
*Orò	spirit world deity, Egba	6	Pèrègún	òrìṣá of trees in sacred groves	7
Òrò	tree, river, wind, stillbirths	II	*Sàngó	solar and storm deity	4
Òrò igi	evil forest spirits	12	*Sòpònnà	smallpox, earth goddess, rivers and streams	5,12
Oronfe	fertility deity, Ondo, from Ife	5(7)	*Yemoja		2,6
*Òsanyìn	oracular deity of herbal medicine	4,5	Yèwá	river goddess	7

APPENDIX B

A Typology of some Yoruba Deities

(* signifies that the Deity is mentioned in the article)

1. Cosmic, All Deity	2. Great Mother Goddess	3. Celestial Father, Sky Deity, Creator
*Olódùmarè (Olórun)	*Ilè	Jó-m-fà
*(Agemo)	Omon iyá	*Obàlùfòn
*(Èṣù)	*(Òriṣà-Okò)	*Obàtálá
*(Ifá)	*Yemoja	*Odùduwà
		*(Olódùmarè)
4. Great Aspect Deity, or in the cluster of a deity		
*Agemo (Ijebuland)	Òriṣà Ìkirè	*Oba
*Èṣù (Disorder)	Òriṣà-Oba (Ondo)	*Òṣun
*Ifá (Wisdom)	Òriṣà Pópó (Ogbomosho)	*Oya
*(Obàtálá) (white <i>òriṣà</i>)	Òriṣà Teko	*Òràmfè (Ifè)
Àgbaláàgbà	*(Odùduwà)	Ìjèsù (earth)
Baba Àgbà	Èsidalè	*Òriṣà-Okò (new yams)
Ijugbe	Olófin	*Òṣùmàrè (rainbow snake of underworld)
Òginyań	*Orańyàn	* (Yemoja)
*Olóòkun (Ocean)	*Òsanyin	Òrànguń (air space)
Òriṣà Aláṣe	*Òguń (war, iron)	*Olóòṣà (lagoons)
Òriṣà Igbo	*Ṣàngó (solar, storm)	Oyé (harmattan)
	*Jàkúta	

5. Functional and Abstract Deity, Oriṣa-Founder

Drumming : Ìlù	Pottery : Iyá Mápó
Fertility and Children : Dàda Gèlèdé Kòrì Oronfe (Ondó)	Roads : Ònà
Hunting : Ore Oṣóòsì	Sacrifices carried to Olódùmarè : Osè Túrà
Medicine and sickness : Ààjà Àròni Èminalè *Sòpónnà	Speech, Success, Weaving : *Obàlùfòn
Morality : *Aiyélàlá (Okitipupa) Orelúéré (Ifè)	Trade : Ajé-Ṣàlúgà
New Yams : (Òginyań) (Ejigbo)	Òriṣà-Founders : Oba-ń-ta (Ijebu) *(Odùduwà) (Ifè) (Olófin) (Èkó) Ondófoyi (Imàlà)
	Wood carving : Epa (Èkitì)

6. Dying and Rising, Dema, Spirit World Deities

* (Yemoja) Adímún Òriṣà *Amaíyegun (Egúngún) Àribèjì (Ilaje Orò) Egbé	Èlukú (Gèlèdé) Ìgunnukun *Orò *Dǎngbe (Python deity) Epa (masks ère)
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7. Local, tutelary, and place deities

<p>Bush : Igbó</p> <p>Hills : Òkèbàdàn Òkè Olúmo *Òkè Orírí Olókè (Ikole) Olóòkúta (Èkiti) Oloşunta (Ikèrè) Orí-Òkè (Írágbèji)</p> <p>Lake : Òkòròbòjò (Okitipupa)</p> <p>Rivers : Akérún (Ikaleland) *Erinlè (Ilobu) Eriworé (Ikale) *(Obà) Odò (Otajibo) Olúwa Mòbí (Ikaleland) *(Oşun) (Oşogbo) Òtìn (Ekoende) *(Oya) Yèwá</p>	<p>Tree <i>òrìşà</i> : Akòko Àràbà Àtòrì Ayòn *Irokò Ìyeyè Òmò Osè Pèrèguń</p> <p>Towns : Bùkú (Abeokuta) Olóbà (nr. Àküré) Oba-mèrì Olófefúra (Ifè) Ògá-ńlá (Ikaleland)</p> <p>Twins : *Ibèji</p>
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8. Lesser Deities and Spirits	9. Archangels, Angels
<p>Abíkú Egbére Epa Ewèlè</p>	

10. Guardian spirit-double, personal spirits	11. "Puckish", partly negative spirits
Ìpín Ìpín Ìjeun Ìpòrí *Orí	Iwin Ilè Òrò

12. Dangerous, negative forces

Baba Şigidi
Èminalè
*Irunmalè
Òrò Igi
*Sòpònà

Note: Sources consulted for the above lists include the following:

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Responsibility for any mistakes rests with the author.