

THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF *ILÈ DÍDÀ* – COVENANT BREAKING IN THE CONTEMPORARY YORÙBÁ SOCIETY

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Abstract

*Ìmùlẹ̀ – covenant - is one of the tools, mechanisms and techniques used in the olden days in Yorùbáland to run various spheres of life in the society. These spheres of life include economy, politics religion. Through Ìmùlẹ̀, friendship, brotherly love, trust, justice and confidence are entrenched. However, in the society today, it is rare to find those things mentioned above. Brotherly love has been replaced with hatred, spouses no longer trust themselves, justice is perverted, and people do not have confidence even in things spiritual. Promises are no longer kept as oath- taking has become mere window dressing. One no longer knows who is a friend or who is an enemy. The society is in disarray all because people no longer stick to Ìmùlẹ̀. Failure or refusal to keep to any Ìmùlẹ̀ entered into is what the Yorùbá call “*Ilẹ̀ dídà*.” – breaking of covenant. *Ilẹ̀ dídà* is a sacrilegious among the people. This paper addressed Ìmùlẹ̀ (making of covenant) and *Ilẹ̀ dídà* (breaking of covenant) as understood by the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Ìmùlẹ̀, Ilẹ̀ dídà, Yorùbá, covenant, religion, consequences.*

Introduction

Ìmùlẹ̀ is a covenant or an agreement between two or more friends, groups, communities, or countries. However, there are times that when Ìmùlẹ̀ can be made by only one person. This is a situation whereby one resolved within himself or herself that one would do or would not do certain things regardless of any situation or under the pressure one might find oneself although this may not involve the use of items like kola nuts, blood, water, etc. It may not also involve making the resolution in a shrine before any image of a deity. It is just a resolution within oneself to do or not to do certain things again. There are times it

may involve actions like movements or speech. Once this is done while standing, sitting, walking, or done on the ground, it has become an *ìmùlẹ̀*. As said above, *ìmùlẹ̀* can be between two or more friends. In fact, friendships were sometimes sealed by *ìmùlẹ̀* in the days of old. This is the reason why in those days, there were always *òrẹ̀ ìmùlẹ̀* – covenant friends. *Odù Ọ̀sé Méjì*¹ confirms this assertion

<i>K'ámá sèké ọ̀rẹ̀</i>	let not friends be untrue to friends
<i>Èmì ọ̀rẹ̀ nìmùlẹ̀</i>	for you and I are in friendship, bound to truth
<i>Bínú tìrẹ̀ tí rí</i>	the state of your heart
<i>Tèmi ọ̀ rí bẹ̀ẹ̀</i>	differs from mine
<i>Kì bá rí bẹ̀ ẹ̀,</i>	If we had the same heart
<i>À bá tí jà lááláé</i>	we wouldn't ever quarrel
<i>A dífá fún ọ̀kàn lènínwó irúnmọ̀lẹ̀</i>	as exemplified by the case of four hundred and one divinities
<i>Wọ̀n nọ̀ rẹ̀ẹ̀ bọ̀rìsà mulẹ̀.</i>	they were coming to make pledge with Orisanla.
Again, <i>Odù Èjì Ogbè</i> ² ,	according to an Ifa priest, also affirms that,
<i>Ọ̀rẹ̀ tá a bá mulẹ̀ tí kò dani</i>	A friend that keeps covenant made with him,
<i>Awo eni ní sẹ̀,</i>	Is one's true confidant.
<i>Ọ̀rẹ̀ tá a bá mulẹ̀ tó sì dani,</i>	Also, a friend that broke a covenant made with him

¹ Adewale Akintola, 1999, *Yoruba Ethics and Metaphysics*, Ogbomosho: Valour Publishing Ventures Limited, pp143-144

² Falodun Akorede, Babalawo -Ifa Priest, *Oral Interview*, Ijelu Ekiti, June 2015.

Awo eni ní se Is ones one's confidant,
Òrò mí ni ò ní gbó mó He would not hear another word.

Still, an *Ifá* verse in the same *Eji Ogbè*³ has this to say about a good and joyous friendship.

Pónrínpon ògìdí ní sawo inú igbó – Ponripón sigidi is the priest in the forest

Ògògòrò lawo ijámò – Ogogoro is the priest of ijamo
Bóré bá dùn ládùnjù – If friendship is so sweet
A dàbí iyèkan eni - It will be like family ties
A dífá fún Ọrúnmilà – Cast divination for Ọrúnmilà.
Tó nlo bá ẹ̀sù dolùkù – Who was going into friends with Ẹ̀sù
A kílì bẹ̀sù dolùkù – We do not make friend with Ẹ̀sù
Kójú owó ó pón ni – And lack money
Ẹ̀sù se ni mo wá bá ọ dolùkù – Ẹ̀sù, I came to make friend with you
A kílì bẹ̀sù dolùkù - We do not make friends with Ẹ̀sù
Kójú aya ó pón ni - And lack a wife
Ẹ̀sù seni mo wá bá ọ dolùkù - Ẹ̀sù I have come to make friends with you
A kílì bẹ̀sù dolùkù - We do not make friends with Ẹ̀sù

³ William Bascom, 1969, *Ifá Divination, Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa*, London: Indiana University Press, p154

Kójú ọmọ o pọn ni – and lack children

Ẹsù, seni mo wá bá ọ dolùkù - Ẹsù, I have come to make friendship with you.

Family ties, whether immediate or extended, are regarded as natural *ìmùlẹ*. Wherever such family members meet, far or near, it is believed that “*ẹjẹ máa rùn kan ra kanra wọn*” – the fact that they are bound by blood ties, the blood will make them realize that they have a family relationship. This is also applicable to children of the same father or mother, close and immediate family members. It is also regarded as *ìmùlẹ*. As a result of these facts, one of the most terrible curses that a Yoruba man will try to avoid is *ẹpẹ alájobí* - curse of blood relation. In the olden days, a Yoruba man would try at all cost to avoid being told “*Alájobí yíó da fún ọ* – blood relation will judge you.” Sometimes, sharing of foods and drinks together could be regarded as *ìmùlẹ*. Whether one is related or not does not matter. Thus, “*epo mi, iyò mi, ata mi tó jẹ á bi é* - my oil, salt and pepper which you ate will ask” is another curse that a Yoruba man will try to avoid as far as *ìmùlẹ* is concerned.

To achieve this, a survey research method was adopted. In-depth interview was conducted with thirty purposely selected respondents between the ages of 40- 60 years, which cut across traditional, Christians, Muslims worshippers male and female and business men and women with a view to knowing their understanding of *ìmùlẹ* and *ilẹ didà*. Salient points were written down while others were tape recorded and their views were contextually analysed. Findings of this study provides opportunity to know that *imule* and *ile dida* are very good tools that can be used to move our nation forward, particularly those who are at the helms of affairs of the nation and other organisations in the country.

ILẸ DÍDÀ – What Breaking of Covenant means to the Yorùbá

Ilẹ didà is the breach of a covenant, promise or agreement made. This may happen when two or more people agree to do certain things but at the end of the day, only one or two of the party involved play his part while the other refused to do his or when somebody did what is not supposed to be done. Either party may label the other *ọdàlẹ* – covenant

breaker. The judgment on who is truly the *òdàlẹ̀* sometimes depends on the perspective from which the society or the general populace looks at the matter. As a matter of fact, information gathered reveals that a lot of people have implicated themselves through breach of trust and draw the attention of *Ẹ̀sù* to their affairs. This is because *Ẹ̀sù* is the most trusted and straightforward of the *òrìṣà*. He sticks to the truth at all times. Also, *Ẹ̀sù* as a police officer and representative of all the *òrìṣà* in matters relating to *Ẹ̀bọ̀*- offering, *ètùtù*- appeasement and *ìpèsè*-provision, does not forget things easily. This makes it dangerous for his (*Ẹ̀sù*) attention to be drawn to any unpleasant matters like breach of agreements, promise, or covenant because if one makes any covenant with anybody or *Òrìṣà* and one refuses to keep to the covenant or one breaches the agreement, or promise, if one has forgotten, *Ẹ̀sù* will not forget. *Ẹ̀sù* will go and remind the person or the *Òrìṣà* with whom one made the covenant. This is the reason the Yorùbá always praise and chant *oriki Ẹ̀sù*⁴ as,

<i>Láàlú ògiri òkò</i>	–	laalu ogiri oko
<i>Ò kiri oko</i>	-	he goes round the farm
<i>Ò bélékún níbi tó ti nsunkún</i>	-	he met somebody crying
<i>Ó məkún sun jẹlékún lọ</i>	-	he cried more than the person crying
<i>Ẹlékún nsunkún</i>	–	the person was shedding tears
<i>Láaróyè ns'èjè</i>	-	láaróyè was shedding blood
<i>Ó bá onímí níbi tó ti nsumí</i>	-	he met somebody defecating
<i>Ó mọmí ṣu jonímí lọ</i>		he defecated more than the defecator
<i>Onímí un ṣumí</i>	–	somebody was passing out faeces

⁴P. Ade Dopamu, 1986, *Esu, the Inevitable foe of Man*, Ijebu Ode: Sebiotimo Publications, p 74

Láaróyè nṣùfun - *láaróyè* was defecating his intestine

Ó bónímímí kẹ̀rù ó bonímímí – his breathing surpasses that of the one with whom he empathises

Onímímí n fimú mí – Somebody was breathing through the nose

Láaróyè ní fi gbogbo ara mí bí ajere – *láaróyè* was breathing with his whole body like a sieve.

Esu is portrayed as a fearful *Òrìṣà* by early writers like E.G.Parinder, E.B.Idowu, Omosade Awolalu, and a host of others who were greatly influenced by the foreign religion (Christianity) they came in contact with before their writings where *Èṣù* is equated with the devil or Satan of the Bible who does nothing besides evil. Later writers too followed their footsteps in which they never saw anything good to attribute to *Èṣù*. However, a closer look at the activities of *Èṣù* of the Yorùbá will show that he is quite distinct from that of the Bible because *Èṣù* of the Yorùbá can sometimes do good things and sometimes do bad things like every other deity. For instance, if one wants to incur the wrath of these divinities, then disobey their laid down rules and regulations or give them foods they detest. *Ṣangó* likes eating bitter kola, fowl and ram. If you want to see his other side, therefore, give *Ṣangó* kola nut.⁵ In human nature, too, we have both positive and negative sides that we can portray at any time.

Contrary to the general belief of people, information gathered reveals that *Ilẹ̀ dídà* is not limited to the breaking of covenant made with material things like kola nut, water, wine, and iron, exchange of drinks, food items and blood alone. It is not even a must that it should be made in a secret place. A word of mouth, a promise made to somebody is equally *ìmùlẹ̀* that must not be broken. For instance, a business partner gives one money to purchase goods for them from a distant land. One collects the money and truly buys the goods but rather than give the goods to the partners one gives the goods to

⁵ Olu Daramola ati Adebayo Jeje, 1975, *Awon Asa ati Orisa Ile Yoruba*, Ibadan: Onibon-oje Press and Book Industries (Nig) Ltd, p 287.

different people entirely order to make a greater profit One then tells the original owners of the goods lies that the goods are yet to come and quite a while, they neither get their goods nor their money. In this kind of situation, one has broken a covenant. A lecturer who promised, or gave his or her students area of concentration in his or her course for an examination but did not include questions in those areas has broken a covenant.

Whenever applicants to public offices are earnestly seeking for votes, they stoop to conquer. Afterwards, they become drunk with power, and tarry. They may think that they have cheated the people and outsmart them. They may even think that the people cannot do anything. But *Ẹ̀sù* is always there to assist at the appropriate time because as the matter is paining the cheated people, so also it is paining *Ẹ̀sù*, even more than the people they cheated. If the people cheated forgot, *Ẹ̀sù* will not forget. Rather than for *Ẹ̀sù* to forget, *Ẹ̀sù* will report the matter to *Ẹ̀san* (The Spirit of just recompense) the begotten son of *Olódùmarè*. This is the reason *Ifá.*, in *Ọ̀yèkú Méjì*⁶ says,

Olóòótó tí n bẹ̀ láyẹ̀ ò pógún – faithful people on earth are not up to twenty.

Ẹ̀kà ẹ̀kà ibẹ̀ wọ̀n ò mọ̀ níwọ̀n egbẹ̀fà; - the bad ones are more than one thousand two hundred

Ẹ̀gbọ̀n ojo ẹ̀san ò lo tíí– but the day of recompense is not far

Kò jẹ̀ kọ̀ràn ó dun ni – makes matters not painful

One of the resource persons also cited *odù Ọ̀túrá Méjì*⁷ to further buttress the above point raised. Therein *Ifá* says,

Ọ̀túrá dára kò dára – Whether otura is good or not

Akòótó ràjò kò bò – Akooto travelled but did not come back

⁶ Wande Abimbola, 2009, *Awon Oju Odu Mereerindinlogun*, Ibadan: University Press PLC, pp14-15.

⁷ Ageje Ajayi, An Ifa Priest, *Oral Interview*, Ijelu Ekiti, June 2015.

- Òtító lájékù* - Otito has a left over
- Ó yóni ó ju óúnjẹ lọ* - Satisfies better than food
- A dífá fún àgbààgbà mèrìndínlógún* – Cast divination for sixteen elders
- Wọ́n fẹ́ mumi òtító lótuufẹ* – They were going to Ifẹ to drink the water of truth.

The question is, Out of these sixteen elders that wanted to drink the water of truth, how many of them could drink it? *Òtító ti dọjà ó kùtà, irọ́ dọjà a dọwọ́n gógó* –truth becomes cheap in the market while lie is expensive. Breaking of covenant is grossly trivialized nowadays. Many have joined friends and relations to establish business outfits but at the end of the day, betrayal ended the businesses. There are so many occasions when apprentices go behind their masters business. Many have been helped to secure employment, after assuming office, how to send their benefactors packing would be their next plan. The Yorùbá know no other name for this type of behaviour than *Ilẹ́ dídà* and whoever betrays or breaks ties with the land cannot escape the consequence. This, according to *Ifa* priests, is responsible for the death of young ones.–It is a known fact that “*ení dalẹ́ á bálẹ́ lọ*”. This is the reason why *Ifá*.⁸ says

- Èké ní perú* – Unfaithfulness will kill a slave
- Èpẹ ní polẹ* – Curses will kill a thief
- Ilẹ́ dídà. ní pòrẹ* – Betrayal of covenant kills a friend
- Alájobí ní payẹkan tó bá ẹbi* – Family ties will always kill any member that does evil
- A dífá fún àkùkọ gágàrà* - Cast divination for a cock
- Èyí tó nbékòlọ sòrẹ* – Who was befriending earth worm

⁸ Wande Abimbola, 2009, *Awon Oju Odu Mereerindinlogun*, Ibadan: University Press PLC, P 4.

Njè èké ge wélé wélé – Deceit cut it into pieces

Òdàlè ge wélé wélé – Deceit cut it into pieces

Some of the deadliest curses in Yorùbáland are “*Olórun á da*” – God will judge and “*o ó kan ónitire*” – that is, you shall meet somebody that will give your due negative reward. When it has come to that level in a relationship, friendship or business, then problem is approaching gradually. One may be thinking that it is a mere joke and does not take it seriously, but we should realize that result of any curse does not come within a day. It takes a while before curses come to pass. It is like a Yorùbá proverb that says *omodé búròókò ó bojú wèyìn, òòjò kó lolúwéré nwó pani*- A child abused Ìròkò tree and looked back, it is not in a day that a tree will fall and kill.

According to the belief of the Yorùbá, the effect of any curse usually enters the body of a cursed person through the hairs of the body. From the hair, it penetrates the body and from the body to the bloodstream. The curse would not manifest until some years later. This is the reason such a curse could be visited on the generations of children yet unborn. If we look at this and what the Bible says in Exodus 20 v5, we shall discover that the belief of the Yoruba on this matter is not far away from the truth and has biblical backing. Although this is not to say that without Bible, truth cannot be established. Rather, it assists in establishing the truth.

Again, *Ẹsan*- i.e. reward neither fights nor reminds *òdàlè*-covenant breaker when the person still has power to fight back. I mean when he/she is still very strong. Rather, *Ẹsan* comes visiting when one believes one has attained to the peak of life, business, or a career and one feels it is time to rest from all labours. Besides *Ẹsan*, there is also *èèwò* – taboo which the Yorùbá believe anybody that breaches or breaks covenants has committed a grievous taboo and it is always there to ask and reward any violator of taboos, too. It is the belief of the Yorùbá that every human being that engages in betraying a fellow or cheats others has broken a covenant and it is a taboo. This is the reason *Ifá* warns that:

<i>Ká má sèké òrẹ</i> ⁹	–	We should not deceive friends
<i>Èmi rẹ nìmùlè.</i>	-	We both have covenant together
<i>Bínú tìrẹ se rí</i>	-	The way your mind is,
<i>Tèmi kò rí bẹ̀ẹ̀</i>	–	Mine is not like that
<i>Kì bá rí bẹ̀ẹ̀</i>	–	Had it been like that
<i>À á bá ti jà láé láé</i>	–	We wouldn't have fought
<i>A dífá. fún igba eni</i>	-	Cast divination for two hundred people
<i>Tí wón n jà ròdò Olódùmarè</i>	-	Who fought and went to Olodumare

In Yorùbá cosmology, it is believed that the world is standing on an agreement or a covenant. This is the reason *ilẹ̀ dídà* is an *èèwò*- (a taboo). Let us look at it this way; *àyájó* which is translated to mean incantations in English are powerful words that are used based on agreement, promise and covenant. It is this covenant agreed on that makes it effective. What the users do when incantation is in use is to remind the party involved in the covenant that was made. For instance, one the respondents said whenever a snake bites someone, this *àyájó*-incantation can be recited to remind the snake of the covenant it made with *Òrìṣà* when the power to kill with poison was first given to the snake at the beginning of the world. Once the snake bites, it has broken the covenant it entered with *òrìṣà*. Therefore, the snake either dies & wherever the chanting of the *àyájó* meets it, or it walks to where someone will kill it at that moment and this will neutralize the poison of the snake.

*Ejò olójú idẹ*¹⁰ – Snake with brass eyes (3tms),

⁹ Adewale Akintola, 1999, *Yoruba Ethics and Metaphysics*, Ogbomoso: Valour Publishing Ventures Limited, p140

¹⁰ Olaleye Samuel Kayode, 2005, *Significance of Ofo (Potent Speech) in Ifa Divination*, Unpublished Dissertation in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, p 138

Abéré òrìsà lówà lénú ẹ – You have Òrìsà's needle in your mouth

Ọjọ tí òrìsà fi fún ọ – On the day Òrìsà gave them to you

Ọ ní kí ọ máfi bu ọmọ òun je – He said you should not use them to bite his children

Ọmọ òrìsà lo fi bùje yíí – You have bitten the child of Òrìsà now

Wéré wéré kí ọ má a pọ oróre – Remove your poison immediately.
Or this;

Òrúnmìlà ní alágbède mi¹¹– Òrúnmìlà. is my blacksmith

Abẹ dígf ní írọ - He makes glass knife

Òun ló fi rọ ẹnu fọjó - He uses it to make mouth for the rain

Tó ní kò gbọdò fenu rẹ ,sẹjẹ- That says it should not use the mouth to rain blood

Òun náà ló fi rọ ẹnu àwa èniyàn - He also used it to make mouth for man

Tó ní a kò gbọdò fenu òún ,sẹpè- He says we should not use our mouths to curse

Níjọ ògèdè bá ,sẹpè- On the day plantain uses its mouth to curse

Ní jọ náà ní lanu - It will open mouth

¹¹ Olaleye Samuel Kayode, 2005, *Significance of Ofo (Potent Speech) in Ifa Divination*, Unpublished Dissertation in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, p 138

According to information gathered, the world belongs to the witches. The question of who handed over the world to them is unnecessary here now; it is a subject of another debate. What is clear is that the world belongs to the witches. One of the respondents explained that the power that witches use was given to them by Olódùmarè when they were going for a war with a promise that they would return it to Him. However, after they had won the war, they refused to return the power to Olódùmarè. They broke the covenant made with the Creator and the consequence is that they cannot boldly come out in the open again. All the *Irúnmalè* too derived their powers from Olódùmarè with a promise that they will not misuse any of them. *Okanran Meji*¹² attests to this fact by saying;

<i>Jínípè jínípè</i>	-	Jinipe jinni pe
<i>A dífá. fún Sàngó</i>	-	Cast divination for Sàngó
<i>Ọmọ ògbojò</i>	-	Child of ogbojo
<i>Nígbà tí nbẹ láárín òtá</i>	-	When he was in the mist of enemies
<i>Wón ní ó kàkì molè</i>	-	They said he should make haste
<i>Ó jàre ebọ ni ó se</i>	-	And offer ebo (sacrifice)
<i>Wón ní ó rú òpòlópò òkò-</i>	-	He was asked to offer a lot of stones
<i>Kó rú tánganran kan</i>	-	And offer plate
<i>Àti jígí</i>	-	And a mirror
<i>Ó rúbọ tán</i>	-	He offered the ebo
<i>Wón se ifá fun</i>	-	Ifá was made for him

¹² Wande Abimbola, 2009, *Awon Oju Odu Mereerindinlogun*, Ibadan: University Press PLC, p 50

<i>Ó ṣégun s'ótún</i>	-	He won to the right side
<i>Ó ṣégun s'ósi-</i>	-	He won to the left side
<i>Bóbáti síjú yàn àn-</i>	-	Wherever he opens his eyes
<i>Gbogbo ayé ní tú ú ká-</i>	-	Everybody will disperse
<i>Ifá wá kílò fun un pé-</i>	-	Ifá warned him
<i>Kò gbódò bá àwọn ọmọ òun jà-</i>	-	That he should not fight his children
<i>Ó ya ẹnu kótó</i>	-	He opened s his month
<i>Orin awo ló bọ si lẹnu</i>	-	He was singing
<i>Ó dọwọ rẹ ò Àrìrà</i>	-	It depends on you, Arira
<i>Ilé awo dọwọ rẹ àrìrà</i>	-	Awos house is in your hands, Arira
<i>Àfèké ò</i>	-	It is only the unfaithful
<i>Àfòdàlẹ</i>	-	It is only the covenant breaker
<i>Bí Sàngó bá pawo</i>	-	If Sàngó kills an initiate
<i>Ilẹ ló dà</i>	-	He has broken covenant

Different classifications of ìmùlẹ

There are basically two types of *ìmùlẹ* in Yorùbáland. This could also be so in the whole world today. The two types of *ìmùlẹ* are the formal and the informal types. Formal *ìmùlẹ* is the type found in the jurisdiction of religion and the so called secret cults. The informal *ìmùlẹ* is found in the areas of our social lives and our dealings with other fellow beings. For instance, a promise made to friends, family members colleagues in the office, business partners, etc are all *ìmùlẹ* but because they involve non-material things like kola nut, bitter kola, and water and so on,

people don't regard such promises as *ìmùlẹ̀*. This is where we have got it wrong.

Formal or *ìmùlẹ̀* in connection with religious belief: This is the type of *ìmùlẹ̀* that is common among the traditional religious functionaries. Priests, priestesses and devotees of any particular divinity always have agreements, covenants with their *Òrìṣà* that must not be broken. Breaking them always has dire consequences. For instance, *ògbèrì ò gbòdò fojú kodù*- a novice must not see *odù*. *Odù* is the secret of *Ifá* that must not be made open or known to non-initiates. According to information gathered, even if a person is an *Ifá* priest, but has not been initiated into the secrets of *odù*, he dares not try to see it. If otherwise, he or she may become blind forever. This corroborates what *Ifá* says in *Odù Òràngún méjì*¹³;

<i>Ọmọdẹ ò fojú bodù lásán-</i>	-	A child does not see odu without a consequence
<i>Àgbà ò fojú bodù lófẹ</i>	-	An elder does not see odu at no cost
<i>Eni tíó fojú bodù</i>	-	He who wants to see odu
<i>Yóó mọdí awo</i>	-	Must know the secret

Again, a devotee, or priest of *Òrìṣà nlá* must not drink palm wine. If he does, he would incur the wrath of the *Òrìṣà*. Every devotee, a priest or a priestess of any divinity is in agreement with the do's and don'ts of such a divinity. Therefore, a devotee of *Ẹsù* will not take palm kernel oil near the shrine of *Ẹsù*. If he does, he will incur the wrath of *Ẹsù*. *Ogboni, oro egungun, Aje, Elere, or Abiku, Agemo, Imalẹ, Àdimù, Ẹlúkú, Ẹyò, Gèlèdẹ, Ìgunnukó, Òpá, Magbò, Igbódù Ifá* and many other so called secret cults in Yoruba land belong to this formal *ìmùlẹ̀* group.¹⁴ Some of the above named groups perform some social functions in their respective larger societies but their religious functions are

¹³ Wande Abimbola, 2009, *Awon Oju Odu Mereerindinlogun*, Ibadan: University Press PLC, p 94.

¹⁴ Ayo Salami, 2008, *Yoruba Theology and Tradition, The Worship*, Lagos: NIDD Limited (Publishers) p121

immense, especially in matters of installation of a new *oba*, offering of *ebò* – sacrifices to sustain peace, or getting rid of epidemic from the society and annual festivals.

However, contrary to people's assumption that all the above mentioned societies are secret cults, research has revealed that many of them are just disciplined societies that know how to keep to their words. They are open-minded people that rely on one another, trust one another and also believe in one cause. They are professionals in various fields of life. They are law abiding citizens in the society. They have their rules and regulations guiding them that the governments of their environments are aware of and approve of their activities. Therefore, the cult is a group of people with same mind that trusts one another and is ready to keep the secret of their members at all times¹⁵. Societies like *Ogboni*, *oro*, *egungun*, *Agemo*, *Imalè*, *Àdìmù*, *Èlúkú*, *Èyò*, *Gèlèdè*, *Ìgunnukó*, *Òpá*, *Magbò*, *Igbódù Ifá*, hunters guides, and so on fall under this category. Though they are known societies, yet they keep to their rules and regulations, and they do not divulge flippanantly, especially to non-members. This is one of the reasons they were, according to an informant, labelled "secret cults" by non-members because they could not penetrate or see their activities. Whereas, if we look at the activities of other organized groups in the society, or government of any given society, too, there is always some element of secrecy in their activities. Or what is cabinet decision?¹⁶ Besides, there are secret files in government offices in which even the carrier of such files must not open if not authorized to do so and these files are not under lock and key. In the society where these cults are operated in Yorùbá land, they are found in the areas of the economic, social and political as well as the religious life of the society. In fact, in the olden days, they assisted kings in ruling, especially the *Ògbóni*. In actual sense, they constitute the king makers. They are the *iwàrèfà*. They are always there to checkmate the king's excesses, judge the criminals and *orò*, the executive arms of *ògbóni*, execute the judgment. Again, if there are any rituals to be performed for the wellbeing of the society, it is the duty of these societies, especially the *egúngún*, to take charge

¹⁵ Olufunmiwa Awopeju, 19 67, *Awo tabi Egbe Okunkun*, Ijebu Ode: Sebiotimo Publications, p17

¹⁶ Olufunmiwa Awopeju, 19 67, *Awo tabi Egbe Okunkun*, p18

and perform such rituals. No wonder groups in such an enviable position like this must have strong *ìmùlẹ̀* that will bind them together so that they would be able to discharge their duties well. Again, those societies that can be regarded as secret cults following what an informant says are what the Yorùbá called *májé á gbó*, *májé á mọ́ wá*, *pábé*, *abéjẹ̀*- do not let people hear or know us. Such societies have no written records, laws and they are not supported by the government. Their members will not own up to the society and their meeting places are always unknown to the rest of the society.

The word “secret” is a misconception about these groups because since the creation of the world, there has been secrecy. If we look at the creation story found in the Bible (Genesis 1 v1), we realize that there was an element of secrecy because there were special people that the Creator called to come and partake in the creation of the world. Also in traditional Yorùbá creation stories, *Adéoyè*¹⁷ asserted that out of the many divinities brought forth by Olódùmarè, sixteen principal ones among them took it upon themselves to go and meet Olódùmarè and requested the creation of the world and he granted their request. *Bóláji Ìdòwú*¹⁸ too supported this fact. But people do not look at this direction when talking about secret society. Rather, they focus their attention on the activities of groups like *Ògbóni*, *Orò*, *Egúngún*, *Agẹmọ*, *Imalẹ̀*, *Àdìmù*, *Èlúkú*, *Èyò*, *Gèlèdédé*, *Ìgunnukó*, *Òpá*, *Màgbò*, *Igbódù Ifá.*, *Àbíkú* or *Eléré*, *Àjé* –witches and *Oṣó* –wizards, as places where proper *ìmùlẹ̀* always take place. However, out of these groups mentioned above, we can emphatically say that *Àjé* –witches, *àbíkú* or *eléré* and *Oṣó* -wizards, can be regarded as pure secret cults because their activities are not known or open to the rest of the society. It is only their members that can tell what they do in the dark nights of their secret meetings. All that we can tell about them are hearsay. *Ògbóni*, *Egúngún*, *Imalẹ̀*, *Agẹmọ* and *Igbódù Ifá* are lawful associations of professionals that are recognized by the laws of the land. As a result, they cannot be regarded as secret cults. Some of their activities may not be open to the general populace but that does not qualify them to be secret cults. If one is willing or wishes to know what

¹⁷ C.L. Adeoye, 1985, *Igbagbo ati Esin Yoruba*, Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Ltd, p 12

¹⁸ Bolaji Idowu, 1962, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*, Lagos: Longman Nigeria Limited, p 67

they do in their meetings, one can join any of them to see what they are doing in their meeting places. They have their names and constitutions that guide them and people do see them while going to their meeting places and they can be heard in their discussions at such meetings.

The activities of witches are not known. All that we hear about then are mere hearsay as earlier said. No one can categorically say what goes on in their meetings. No one has ever come out voluntarily to reveal what they do under the cover of their secret meetings. Although there were a few occasions that some would admit or confess to be witches they will never confess what they do in their meetings. Their *Ìmaùlẹ̀* is so powerful, strong and thick that they do not divulge it even at the point of death. *Àbíkú* and *Elérè* are another set of secret cults whose activities are not well known. They are born-to-die children that are believed to have come to the world several times from the spiritual world. However, before coming, we heard that they must have made a covenant in the spiritual world that at a certain time they would die and go back to their groups. The few exceptions that stay beyond their appointed dates among them, or that live up till old age are compelled to do so through the powers and activities of powerful medicine and magic greater than their own and they are frequently not happy when such is done. It is noteworthy that these two sets of cults are not registered cults. Also, their membership is not known. Besides, they operate in the dark and secluded places where they cannot be seen. This is the reason many doubt the authenticity of their existence. Their *Ìmùlẹ̀* involves the use of material things to make the *Ìmùlẹ̀* strong and powerful.

Ilẹ̀- land - is another *Òrìsà* that watches while *Ìmùlẹ̀* is being made. It is believed by all the Yorùbá that *ilẹ̀* is the eye of Olódùmarè that watches everything, including things we do in the secret corners of our homes. This is the reason homage is paid to the land whenever prayers, rituals, offerings, covenants, promise and other activities take place because all *Ìmùlẹ̀* and other things mentioned above are done on *ilẹ̀*. Therefore, *ilẹ̀* will keep on watching until one fulfills or breaks the covenant before *ilẹ̀* reacts.

Informal *Ìmùlẹ̀*

Informal *Ìmùlẹ̀* are the types of *Ìmùlẹ̀* that do not involve the use of any material item. It could be a promise, or an agreement between two or more people that certain things would be done or would not be done. This is the reason why people do not take it seriously whenever it is made. Although it is not materially bonded, yet it always has a negative effect if broken. The reason for this is not far-fetched: The moment it is pronounced or done, it is done or said on *ilẹ̀* - the ground either in a sitting, standing, or whichever position. It is the belief of the Yorùbá that *ilẹ̀*- ground is a witness to whatever we do. This is the reason the Yorùbá believe that *ilé ayé nì'dájọ̀ wà* – judgment is on earth here. Social *Ìmùlẹ̀* is a form of informal *Ìmùlẹ̀*. Under this are friendship and economic *Ìmùlẹ̀* that involve business partners, employee-employer relationship, political *Ìmùlẹ̀* that has to do with governance while education *Ìmùlẹ̀* has to do with student-teacher relationship.

Social *Ìmùlẹ̀*

Social *Ìmùlẹ̀* has to do with our daily interactions with people, friends, relations, people we know and those we do not know. Particularly in this regard is friendship *Ìmùlẹ̀*. Who is a friend in the belief of the Yorùbá? According to the Yorùbá, a friend is an *Òrìṣà* -divinity. Therefore, anyone that breaks covenant with a friend has offended and broken covenant with the land. However, *Àyà* – chest always plays a very significant role in choosing friendship. The Yorùbá believe that *àyà*- chest is what we use to choose friends which is an important factor in man's life. According to *Babawo Fákúnle*¹⁹ a respondent, if one chooses good *orí* -head, if such a person did not use his *àyà*- chest to choose good friends, his matter is not completely settled.

Orí mí àpéré - My precious head

Àyà mi àfobìkàn - My chest that I touched with kola nut

The importance of *àyà* is seen in *Ìwòrì Ìròsùn*²⁰ where *Ifá* says;

¹⁹ Baba Awo Fakunle, an Ifa Priest, Oral Interview, Apete Ibadan: June 2013

²⁰ Ayo Salami, 2002, *Ifa, a Complete Divination*, Lagos: NIDD Publishing and Printing Limited, p115

<i>Ìwòrì gósùn</i>	Iwori pounded cam wood
<i>Gósùn gósùn abọwọ odó poroporo</i>	pounder of cam wood in quick successions
<i>A dífá fún onígbosùn ọmọ Àpọn</i> - cast divination for Onigosun the child of Apon	
<i>Èkún ọmọ ló n sun</i>	she was crying for a child
<i>Òún le bímọ báyíí</i>	can she bear a child she enquired
<i>Wọn ní ó rúbọ</i>	she was asked to offer a sacrifice
<i>Wọn ní kókó osùn méréndínlógún lẹbọ è</i>	she should offer sixteen balls of calm wood
<i>Òpòlópò owó lẹbọ è</i>	she should offer plenty money
<i>Ìgbà tí yóó bá sì rúbọ</i>	whenever she wanted to offer sacrifice
<i>Wọn ní kí wọn ó mó fì ẹbọ kán àn lórí</i>	she was told that they should not touch her head with sacrifice
<i>Ìgbà àyà rẹ ni kí wọn ó má a fẹbọ kán</i>	they should touch her chest with the sacrifice
<i>Wọn lórí i rẹ ti n gbẹbọ</i>	her head had been receiving sacrifices
<i>Àyà a rẹ ni ò gbètùtù</i>	her chest refused to take offering
<i>Kí wọn sì gbẹbọ fún Ẹsu</i>	they should offer sacrifice to Esu
<i>Wọn ní ti è ti dáa</i>	she was declared fortunate

This is to show how important *àyà* is in the offering of *ẹbọ* in Yorùbá religious belief system and to show that its importance cannot be

ignored in friendship and attaining success by man in life. This has reflection in the Yorùbá belief that “*òrẹ ẹni ní bání pilẹ ọrọ, ará ilé ẹni ní bání náà*”- it is one’s friends that assist in planning how one would be rich, it is one’s family members that will enjoy the wealth. Therefore, to succeed quickly in life, a friend would contribute greatly. Those who claim they do not have good *orí* for friendship should be careful, think and reconsider their thoughts. As said earlier, *Òrìsà lẹrẹ-* a friend is *Òrìsà*. This corroborated what one of the informants says where he cited *odù Ọyèkú lógbè*,²¹

<i>Igbó yí ò jọgbó a gbé bími -</i>		The bush does not resemble the bush I was born
<i>Ọdàn yí ò jòdàn ibi a wòmí dàgbà -</i>		This savannah does not resemble the savannah I was brought up
<i>Tá a bá búrìn búrìn</i>	-	When we walk fast
<i>Táa bọrẹ pàdé</i>	-	And met a friend
<i>Wọn á ya jẹni abíní lọ -</i>		They would be better than the ones family you were born with
<i>A dífá fún ọrẹ ẹni</i>	-	Cast divination for one’s friend
<i>A bù fólùkùn ẹni friend</i>	-	Given to ones one’s close friend
<i>Ìyá ẹni kìí fífá hanní</i>	-	One’s mother will not teach one Ifá.
<i>Bàbá ẹni kìí fífá hanní</i>	-	One’s father will not teach one Ifá.
<i>Ọrẹ ẹni ló le fífá hanní</i>	-	One’s friend is the only one that teach one Ifá.
<i>Ohun mo bá rí</i>	-	Whatever I see,

²¹ Babawo Fakunle, an Ifa Priest, Oral Interview, Apete Ibadan: June 2015.

<i>N ó bórée mi je</i>	-	I will eat with my friend
<i>Olùkù dàdùnjù,</i>	-	Friendship is so exceedingly sweet
<i>Wọn a dàbí iyèkan</i>	-	And look like one's family
<i>Òrìsà lórẹ ọ</i>	-	A friend is an Òrìsà
<i>Emá dalẹ ọré</i>	-	Do not betray a friend
<i>Òrìsà lórẹ</i>	-	A friend is an Òrìsà

One of the respondents narrated a story of two friends who established a company together. The one who actually owned the company invited his friend to come and join him as a partner because the friend had no job then. However, the owner of the company died when the company began to boom. The cause of his death, no one could determine. After the burial, the family of the deceased invited the partner/friend of their son who just died to know the state of things with the company. He explained to the family that the death of his friend had brought calamity and indebtedness to his life and the company. The family of the deceased man told his friend to go and sell the company and pay the debt. Eventually, he sold the company to himself. The younger brother of the deceased friend later discovered that their late brother's friend was unfaithful in what he told the family. As a result, he wanted to fight back to reclaim the company from this unfaithful friend. An elderly woman in the family told the deceased's younger brother that friendship is an *Òrìsà* –divinity, he should not fight back. She assured him that his late brother's property was not lost. But the younger brother of the deceased did not see it that way. He did not understand the meaning of the word *òrìsà lórẹ* either. All he wanted was to take the company back from his brother's friend. This friend that bought the company later became rich and wealthy. He had even established another company, few years later, all that he had gathered in dubious means began to go one after the other. Before he knew it, he became poor again. When he could not feed himself and his family again, he went to consult an *Ifá* priest. It was there that the *Ifá* priest told him that he had betrayed somebody that helped him and that there was

nothing he could do to avert the calamity of the betraying betrayal. He later, died as a result of this matter when there was no way out for him again. The respondent ended the story with one *Ifá* song that goes thus;

<i>Òrìsà lòrẹ́,</i> ²²	-	A friend is a divinity
<i>Kéni má dalẹ̀ òrẹ́</i>	-	Do not betray a friend
<i>Òrìsà lòrẹ́ o</i>	-	A friend is a divinity
<i>Keni ma dale ore</i>	-	Do not betray a friend
<i>Eni tó bá mọ̀rẹ́</i>	-	He who knows a friend
<i>Kẹẹ máṣe d'òrẹ́- òrẹ́</i>	-	should not betray a friend

Economic ìmùlẹ̀

This may be an agreement between two or more friends to establish a company or jointly finance a project. When it eventually comes to the sharing of the proceeds, if one party tries to outsmart the other, which is *ilẹ̀ dídà*. It could also be the case of an employer trying to outsmart the employees by denying his employees some rights they initially agreed upon during the interview.

Political ìmùlẹ̀

Politicians are another set of people that always promise the electorates during their campaigns, that if they were voted in, they would reduce a high mountain to bare floor. But the moment they got what they wanted, they would turn deaf ears. This set of people always end up miserable. There are still some good ones among them who still fulfil any electoral promise made, however. Again, because of the fact that many of these promises are not made under religious influence, or at the shrines or temples of any gods of the land, they are not regarded as *ìmùlẹ̀*. Some of the respondents argued that *ìmùlẹ̀* in this category of informal, cannot be regarded as *ìmùlẹ̀*, rather they are mere promises.

²² Babawo Ajaja Abiodun, an Ifa Priest, Oral Interview, Ikole Ekiti, July 2014.

While this is true, one would be compelled to ask the question, they are regarded as mere promises or agreements, why do they always have bad consequences if these promises and agreements are not kept? Whether we like it or not, whatever we say or do is *Ìmùlẹ̀* because it is said and done on mother earth who is a witness to all our deeds, open or sealed, explicit or implicit.

Conclusion

Anyone who is fond of cheating others, or anyone who makes promises, but fails to fulfil such promises, should have a re-think of his or her actions because everything we do and say are seeds sown into the earth. They will all germinate, grow to maturity, produce further seeds and grow to a ripe and harvesting age. When they do, we shall harvest them fully. Therefore, we should be mindful of our dealings with others at all times particularly leaders in at various levels of the society. Matters are further worsened when public office holders are earnestly seeking for votes during electioneering campaigns. At this time, prospective office holders or politicians promise to do all sort of things for the electorates; at times they can almost promise to give children to barren women, an impossible task they know would be difficult to fulfil. However, because of what they are looking for, they are ready to do anything. Upon getting such powers, however, they become drunk with power, and forget what their promises to the electorates. The ideal is that politicians should promise the electorates what they can fulfil, tell people the truth and not just what people want to hear. This should start with every individual and every home in this country since we believe and hope that charity begins at home. Private and public office holders, particularly, those in management cadre should also emulate this. When this is done, it will surely have a good reflection on the entire country after all, the constituted authority are from individual homes.

Recommendations

Public office holders should work with integrity and honesty of purpose in all they do. Truthfulness to oneself and the public is an important element of success in both public and private lives. Therefore, the rule of let your yes be yes and your no be no should apply to the led and the leaders. Also, the led in our society should learn to imbibe the spirit of

humility, honesty and integrity by not putting unnecessary pressures on leaders for self gratifications and gains from leaders, but to do all they can to hold leaders accountable for their actions while in office. Finally, it is essential for every home to seek to train members of their household the virtue of true morality, honesty and dignity of labour.

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