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The Yoruba Concept of *Ola* in African Society: A Historical Overview

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of wealth among the Yoruba people in southwestern Nigeria. There is yet to be a historical appraisal of the understanding of the phenomenon of growth in wealth in African cultures. This paper therefore fills these obvious gap with an explanation of how Africans construe wealth within the domain of Yoruba society: the significance of wealth, the sources of acquiring wealth in Africa and how wealth has been used by the people throughout the ages from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period of the Yoruba history in Nigeria. The paper concludes that the historical experience of slave trade, palm oil production, trading, land ownership, agricultural production and competition for power are the symbolic and characteristic features of wealth as an important component of livelihood of the Yoruba people of Africa. Finally, some directions for future research are suggested.

Keywords: Wealth, Yoruba, Culture, Africa, Power

INTRODUCTION

The Yoruba word *ola* is synonymously associated with wealth in English usage. It is used to illustrate, describe or suggests persons who are honoured and famous in terms of

knowledge, education, rich or wealthy. As will be shown later, Yoruba metaphors explain these traditional ideas about the provenance of honour and the acquisition of fame. In other words, it is used to manifest intent of the individual to achieve greatness in life struggles. In this paper, I wish to examine ideas about the conception of wealth as it is construed in Yoruba culture of Africa. I provide an explanation of Yoruba ideas about wealth considered in close relation to their life experiences and validated within the socio-cultural context of the Yoruba people in Nigeria. Structurally, the paper is divided into five parts: the first section, which is the introductory session, sets the tone of the entire study. The second section examines the Yoruba conception of wealth in African culture. The aim of doing this is to provide an explanation on what the Yoruba people perceived as “wealth” in African society. The third section highlights the impact of wealth in Yoruba society, it expounds the usage of wealth in either a negative or positive purpose in different socio-context or circumstances. The fourth section discusses the indicators of wealth in Yoruba tradition and heritage while the fifth section concludes the study with a summary of ideas on how the Yoruba people conceptualized wealth.

Ola: Wealth in Yoruba Culture

Among the Yoruba of Africa, wealth is an attribute of success and achievement in the society. It is variously described as *olola*, i.e, someone who is wealthy or rich in status financially and famous among fellow men or women in the community. It is generally believed among the people that not many people born into the world have opportunity to become wealthy, and that this depends on the circumstances and situations in which they find themselves. However, it is also thought that luck, otherwise known as *asayanmo* (destiny) determines whether a person will prosper or not. In Yoruba mythology, Aje is the orisa and the goddess associated with wealth and prosperity⁽¹⁾.

During the pre-colonial period in Yoruba society, the wealthy people included the ruling aristocratic class, comprised of the kings, princes, quarter chiefs and military leaders. These groups of persons used their power, prestige, fame and position to acquire land, and labour (i.e., slaves and pawn) to acquire wealth. According to Toyin Falola, and Demola Babalola, a historian and Sociologists, the land tenure system was an important factor that assisted the kings, village heads and ruling elites to pursue opportunities for becoming wealthy in the community. This is because of the role they performed as guardians of the family and communal lands belonging to the family⁽²⁾. In theory and practice, the possession of wealth is in the hands of the kings, elders and chiefs in the community. Among the Fulani groups of Sub-Saharan Africa, wealth is counted by how large the herd of cattle is. The cattle is the most treasured animal of the Fulani and the cows are very special to them⁽³⁾.

In addition, the rulers of kingdoms with imperial status such as Ife, Oyo, Ijesha, Ibadan, Ilorin and Egba usually collect annual tributes from provinces and vassal states. These tributes were paid in form of food crops, and the surplus was sold to generate cash. More importantly, the tribute received from vassal towns constituted the main source of wealth that provided the initial capital invested to generate more wealth⁽⁴⁾. In practice and action, the societal expectation of those who possessed wealth was that they were to provide good leadership during peace and wartime, and everyone also expected the *olola* to dress well⁽⁵⁾. Bascom, a British Anthropologist, in his classic study of wealth in the Yoruba culture of Ife, classified wealth among the Yoruba into different strata, these includes the wealthy man who has the greatest amount of property (*Oloro*). The rich man (*Olola*) or man of money (*Olowo*). The

man of principle (*eniyānPataki*); The man of the people (*gbajumo*); The lucky man (*Olorirere*); The good hearted man (*Oninurere*)⁽⁶⁾.

The *oloro* and *olowo* in this context are used interchangeably among the Yoruba people. To become an *olowo* or *oloro* among the people, it is believed that one could attain this through trade in farm crops, selling of slaves, clothes, ornaments and landowners⁽⁷⁾. Commenting on the notion of wealth in Yoruba proverb, *Iselogun Ise* translated “By labour comes wealth. The implication of this proverb in Yoruba culture is an admonition that when you work, you may become wealthy. In addition, there is a popular Yoruba proverb that goes thus, ‘*Bi a bari eni basepo ola kiya*’⁽⁸⁾ In English this translates as: ‘If you don’t relate with someone you may not become wealthy quickly’). This point illustrates the fact that you may likely become a wealthy person quickly if you relate with the powerful members of the society. Among the Yoruba, an individual may become wealthy due to inheritance, trading in goods and services, selling of lands and agricultural produce such as cocoa, kolanuts and cashew nuts, to mention a few means toward wealth.

Wealth in Yoruba society like in some other African countries may be acquired through legal or illegal way. I conceptualize the term ‘legal wealth’ in this study as income earned through a legitimate source. It is usually in terms of financial reward or payment for services from one individual to another, the income earned as wages and salaries or the income earned through buying and selling of goods. On the other hand, wealth may be considered as illegal when the source through which the wealth is acquired is not a socially approved means by the society by the law regulating the behaviour of people. For example, wealth acquired through all forms of fraudulent activity like stealing, padding of budget by government agencies, tax evasion, diversion of public funds originally earmarked for specific purpose for personal enrichment, diversion of workers salary for personal gain and interest. Others include selling government subsidized products at exorbitant prices and indiscriminate charging of unapproved fees in the public service.

I will give two examples to buttress this point. one, the federal governments has a policy for sustainable food security in Nigeria. In this policy, it is expected that states government are to distribute fertilizers to peasant farmers but what is observed over the years is that, these fertilizers do not get to the farmers at all and when it gets to them, they will be charged with exorbitant fees in which case, most farmers cannot afford. Sometimes, these fertilizers are being diverted to personal farms estate owned by powerful representatives of the state like serving and retired governors, senators, and president of the country. Two, in making payment for your vehicle renewal license, you pay outrageous amount that are not written on the receipt issued to you after payment by the government licensing office in charge. For instance, if you make payment of 4000 Naira, what may be issued to you as receipt will be 3000 Naira. The extra 1000 naira made will be shared among the government officials in the establishment. This is what I describe as illegitimate source of wealth.

Wealth in African Culture: A Conceptual Framework

The term ‘wealth’ refers to the abundance of valuable material possessions or resources. These include property that has money value or an exchangeable value, material objects that have utility that is useful goods that have economic value. Examples of these include money, gold, ivory, silver, diamond, farm estate, precious stones and cowries, as well as ornamental art objects, including sculpture, painting, ceramics and textiles, which are beneficial to people

in human communities. Other goods of value include woolen and silk cloth, copper, beads, cowries and salt⁽⁹⁾.

An ethnographic survey of the word 'wealth'; suggests that it falls into differing indigenous categorizations from one African society to another. In Southern Cameroun, Akuma is literally translated to mean wealth-It consists primarily of wives, indigenous currencies and livestock. In Igbo culture wealth is known as 'uba' variously defined as 'increase' of 'plenitude'-- that is the abundance of self -replicating entities such as crops and livestock. Among the Tiv in Central Nigeria wealth is described as 'Shagba', in Ebira, *Onyekhin*, in Idoma, *olodu* and Hausa, Chad and Sudan as *ariziki*⁽¹⁰⁾. Wealth in Africa, like other societies of the world, has been unequally dispersed. Among the traditional Africans, the Aristocrats, princes, princess, and the chiefs in the community who owned landed properties, large farm estates and slaves are those regarded as being wealthy. These statesmen, aristocrats, and chiefs use their wealth to create and continue to take advantages in the society at the expense of the middle and lower classes of the society⁽¹¹⁾.

Wealth, as a concept, is an integral part of Yoruba social thought and livelihood. It is various constructs as Olola: The wealthy person, Onimo: The knowledgeable person in craft and technology, *ojogbon*, (a professor,) *omowe*, (a brilliant person educated to the highest level of western education) *ologbon*: The wise person, *olowo*: the person that has plenty of money and *oninurere* the one that is kind hearted and a cheerful giver. Within Yoruba society, wealth is understood as inherent in the character, attitudes and behaviours of persons within a social kin group or clan. Persons believed in the Yoruba social context to have wealth in the society are those who have formal and informal education⁽¹²⁾.

Formal education in this sense refers to western or Islamic education acquired through the classroom, while informal education covers skills acquired through apprenticeship training or vocations in the art of trading, sculpture, carpentering, blacksmith, pottery or metal artworks. The skills acquired through this media were exploited to enhance their income and livelihood⁽¹³⁾. In addition to these, other people regarded as wealthy included people who had large number of slaves and large acres of land purposively used for farming of agricultural produce to be sold on periodic market days within the town⁽¹⁴⁾.

According to Jane Guyer, an Anthropologists wealth embodied in the possession of individuals lies closely at the centre of economic activity in the Yoruba cultural and economic history in Africa. The economic impact of slave trade, pawnship⁽¹⁵⁾, farming, trading in goods and agricultural products, trade by barter are examples of economic engagements of people who possess wealth within the Yoruba social worlds⁽¹⁶⁾.

Significance of Wealth in Yoruba Culture and Society

Becoming wealthy in Yoruba culture is of significance, given the important benefits of wealth in the society. This is what many people wish to attain in their life time at one point or the other. People prefer to become wealthy for several reasons. Among these reasons, include to have the status of power and authority, becoming popular and respected among other members of the society, being revered and honored by the commoners, cheating and snatching another man's wife due to the inability of the husband to provide for the woman needs and wants and opportunity to become favored as the popular candidate to contest for elective positions. In modern democracy in Nigeria, how wealthy you are may likely determine your opportunity of becoming a traditional ruler of a town or the flag bearer of a political party to contest gubernatorial, presidential or House of Assembly elections in Nigeria⁽¹⁷⁾.

Wealth is a symbol of fame, power and authority. Spending of money on women is configured in many contexts as a sign used by men to gain attraction of married or unmarried women in the society. The amount spend varies from one Yoruba society to another depending on whether it is an urban or rural settlements. The money spend in this instance is not fixed, it implies making provision for the needs of dependants such as wife/wives, children, family relatives and in-laws within family household. This demonstrate the methods used in Yoruba culture to determine whether a husband is prosperous or wealthy in monetary terms and a measure of wealth. In this sense, people who have money have the means to make social actions possible as much as it may constrain or prevent them. In other words, those who have money usually ‘express their terms of negotiation’ in a given social setting that requires both constraints and enablement⁽¹⁸⁾. This practice has been a traditional idea. It is greatly inclined by civilization in the course of acculturation with western values and foreign religious orientations. The German social theorist Jurgen Habermas calls this “colonization of the life word,” i.e. when economic gains creep into determining marital and familial arrangements⁽¹⁹⁾. For example, husband in close and sexually gratifying relationships often influences the wife by providing cash or other necessary valuables for his spouse in other for the wife to allow the husband to have sexual relations with her.. The principle of husband-wife relationship in Yoruba society is based on the wife’s dependence on the man to meet her social needs in terms of clothing, accommodation and feeding⁽²⁰⁾.

In addition, names are very important to identify people and use in the interactions of persons in the society. At birth, naming is very symbolic ritual in African context⁽²¹⁾. The Yoruba, like many other ethnic groups in Nigeria and Africa as a whole, welcome the newly born into the society with names associated with wealth for both male and female children. These names are intended to appreciate the gift of the womb into a family with the blessing of a child. Thus, names are believed in Yoruba culture as a source and indicator of wealth in cultural practices of the people. Examples of such names includes ‘Adebola’ (the crown has met wealth), ‘Afolabi’ (born into wealth), ‘Mojisola’ (wake up to wealth), ‘Olabode’ (wealth has return home), ‘Olamide’ (my wealth has arrived), ‘Olamilekan’ (my wealth is increased), ‘Olanrewaju’ (my wealth is moving forward), ‘Olayinka’ (wealth surrounds me), ‘Olufumilola’ (God gives me wealth), ‘Oluwakanyinsola’ (God has added sweetness to my wealth), ‘Omobolanle’ (a child who meets wealth at home), ‘Ayoola’ (the happiness of wealth), ‘Oladapo’ (wealth joins us), ‘Olaoluwa’ (the wealth and blessing from God) and ‘Olawale’ (wealth has come home)⁽²²⁾. The following examples given demonstrate the importance and attachment given to wealth in the Yoruba cultural communities in Southwestern Nigeria namely Oyo, Lagos, Ogun, Ekiti, Ondo and Osun state respectively in both urban and rural areas. Although, there may be little differences and variations on what the considered as wealth. This is based on the high cost of maintaining standard of living in urban cities when compared to rural communities.

More so, my own name ‘Oladiti’ (wealth that is packed), It connotes metaphorically a packaged wealth that is intact and cannot be destroyed by destiny twisters. Similarly, ‘Babalola’ someone that has father has wealth. The name Babalola is metaphorically interpreted in Yoruba to capture the importance and essence of a father in the life of a child. It implied that an individual who has father will protect his child from any trouble of life that may affect the child from achieving its destined positive glory in life. Fathers commonly in Yoruba society patronized the Babalawo to securing protection of the child against destiny twisters so that the child can attain his glorious height in life unhindered. ‘Falola’ (Ifa is my

wealth) or (am proud successor of Ifa) metaphorically, the name Falola explains the prime importance the Yoruba attached to Ifa. Ifa is regarded as a repository of knowledge which ultimately will bring wealth to the individual. ‘Olatunji’ implies that your wealth has return. It is understood in Yoruba society that ones misfortune such as infertility have finally return as the birth of the child signify into the family. The name is attached with high hopes for greater wealth in the family.

Wealth bestowed prestige and influence on an individual. But, more importantly, it enabled the individual to offer hospitality to his people, give loans to his relatives and organize feasts for the community⁽²³⁾. It was recognized that once in a while, there would be people in the community who would need assistance from the rich or wealthy people in the society, especially in the form of food. Wealth was, therefore, measured in terms of livestock for the pastoralists, grain for the agriculturalists, and both livestock and grain for mixed farmers. Success in warfare served as a means to gaining wealth, and also bestowed prestige on the individual. In general, the person who led a successful raid for cattle ended up getting the lion's share of the war booty. In addition, the more successful the warrior, the more prestige he acquired among his people. Traditional societies and cultures in Africa recognized the value of wealth as one of the basic ingredients of good leadership⁽²⁴⁾. Thus, unless one is wealthy, one does not stand a chance of becoming a leader.

Changing Meaning of Wealth in Yoruba tradition and Culture

Under different periods in Yoruba history, the people perceived wealth from various perspectives. For example, during the pre-colonial period, wealth was recognized among the people according to various indices ranging from slave raiding, trading in large quantity of farm produce, number of wives, number of children, royal background of the family and the ability to feed an accommodate oneself under a roof. In the words of Bascom, slaves (*eru*), pawn (*iwofa*) and the number of women married as wives and children accounts to greatly determined whether an individual is wealthy or not. Slavery is, indeed, recognized as a source or wealth among the Yoruba people, because it was a source of economic income and livelihood for rich the men and women in the society. Slaves are usually used for farming and producing agricultural crops that are being sold in the market for public consumption. Pawns served as debtors to the rich there work or services rendered to the rich person (*olowo*) serve as interest until the loan is repaid. Women represented the investment paid by a husband to the woman's father as “bridewealth”⁽²⁵⁾. Polygyny in Yoruba society is achieved through the display of wealth during feasts and ceremonial functions. It is regarded as the desire of every family household to associate in familial social ties with people that are known to have status, wealth and power in the society. This is considered as a means towards achieving opportunities of acquisition of material wealth. In addition, men who marry such women usually can afford the resources needed for the maintenance and upkeep of the wives and in-laws to the husband. This point explains how polygyny is used as a measure of success and prosperity.

The more wives a man is able to possess, the greater his importance in the eyes of his friends. Wives, pawns, slaves and children formed the basic unit of economic production among the Yoruba. These were headed, in theory, by husbands. There was the division of labour among these various categories of people. For example, on the farm, the males cleared the forest, burned the bush and tilled the soil. They also hunted and gathered palm nuts. While the females helped with the harvest, processed food crops traded agricultural surplus and

performed domestic labour. The slaves worked in the farm, market or home. Wives were an important economic asset because they both worked themselves and reproduced labour by bearing and rearing children. Only the richest elders and chiefs of the community had the power and influence to marry up to ten wives at a time.

Generally speaking, the Yoruba people believed that wives and children created more opportunities to create wealth and enhanced power⁽²⁶⁾. At this point, the question may be asked, How is wealth created and demonstrated? Wealth is measured and created in Yoruba societies in different ways under pre-colonial, colonial and the post colonial state system. Under the pre-colonial system, there was no legal distinction between the privy purse of the rulers and the state treasury. The rulers were not paid fixed stipends. They derived their revenue or income from various sources offered to them by their subjects as tributes, gifts and agricultural farm produce during harvests. Whatever they so derived, they expend it on it in the upkeep of their households and the service of the people- entertaining, sponsoring festivals, doling out gifts, other largess and contributing to the purchase of fighting equipment when the need arose⁽²⁷⁾.

The ruler were not expected to give regular accounts of their income and expenditure to their people. It was enough to keep them to perform the duties of their office by maintaining peaceful co-existence, social justice and maintaining law and order in the land. Under colonialism, wealth was created and measure in terms of the metropolitan influence of the British hegemony and the introduction of currency. While in the post-colonial period, there is distinction between the privy and the public purse!. This point shows how wealth is created for the privilege state officials. In addition, the post-colonial state by law created special financial benefits for the leaders either as ‘governor’ of a state or ‘president’ of the country. However, it is instructive to note that politicians in post-colonial Yoruba societies rather than using state resources for the development of the state sometimes divert funds budgetary allocations of government expenditure to individual privy purse with or without the knowledge of the state. When such wealth are diverted and stolen from the public treasury, the loot becomes a measure to creating wealth to the leader or head of the state. Unfortunately, the values of the citizens have eroded due to non-existence of social welfare scheme in improving the life of the people. The citizens now sing sung of praises to glorify “rogues” who call themselves leaders in high places, so long as the crumbs fall to them!⁽²⁸⁾. This kind of wealth in this particular is described according to the Yoruba people as a privy means to having wealth and sometimes may be described as illegitimate source of wealth due to the fact that it is the collective resources of the state that is been diverted to creating wealth for the privilege governor or president of the country.

William Bascom, study in 1951 was one of the oldest and classic academic discourse on wealth among the Yoruba people of Ile- Ife. He observed that individual differences and wealth are two important factors that influence people to gain social position. His study analyzes the relationship of individual differences and wealth to social status ascribed on the basis of birth. He mentioned that having wealth is a means of increasing one’s rank within the social stratum of birth and raising his own and his family position to the stratum of *modewa* that is a high ranking political officials of the town in Ile-Ife from which the palace chiefs are chosen. As classical as this study is, it has not examined the dynamics and the varieties of the manifestation of wealth among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria⁽²⁹⁾. This paper filled this gap by cataloguing the contextual and metaphorical interpretation of *ola* as not just in its material and monetary sense but all encompassing in Yoruba cosmology.

With the influence of western civilization, the abolition of slave trade and the emergence of colonial rule, the Yoruba redefined their conception of wealth. William Bascom, an Anthropologist, noted that wealth was acquired through trading in cocoa, the principal cash crop under colonialism. During this period, wives, clothing, domestic animals, trucks or motor Lorries have appeared as a new form of investment. None of these, however, is considered as a reliable measure of wealth as the house in which a man lives. A wealthy person is recognized with the type of building he or she possess⁽³⁰⁾. Usually, buildings built as story buildings with bricks, corrugated roofing sheets and rafters of *iroko* planks are regarded as index to determine someone who is wealthy. These houses are characterized with an airy space for ventilation, and they are nice looking, neatly kept and have European furniture at least in the parlour downstairs. Only the wealthy few in the society can afford to provide this kind of building for themselves. The most common types of building were made with thatched roofs, mud walls, while the “pan” roofs of the poor rested on bamboo rafters. During this period, the type of house you can afford is an important indication to measure wealth⁽³¹⁾.

Furthermore, inheritance of property is also an important indication of wealth in the Yoruba culture. Inheritance is link between the family development cycle and intergenerational transfer of property and farmlands. This transfer is commonly described as inter-vivos, (transfer of property among living persons). The transfer was often instigated at the time of marriage, retirement or sudden death of the owner of the property⁽³²⁾. Among the Yoruba, inheritance of property is divided among all children regardless of age or gender. The eldest son in the family is made the “dawodu”, or family head with responsibilities as trustee of the family property. In situations where there is no male child, the eldest daughter can assume the responsibility. In this context wealth is transferred to the younger generation. This form of transfer may be in material assets, social capital or physical assets. This may include land, livestock and other productive assets e.g. farm equipment, houses or tool implements used in vocational chores⁽³³⁾.

According to Isaac Olawale Albert, in Yoruba tradition, the property of the deceased person is shared among his or her heirs shortly after his or her death. The most dominant principles followed in the sharing of property of a dead person are the *oriojori* and the *Idi Igi*. The *oriojori* principle requires the person sharing the property to give some part of the property to be shared among the number of wives of the deceased, based on the number of the children of the wife. While the *Idi igi* principle makes it mandatory for the property to be shared according to the number of wives with no consideration for the number of children⁽³⁴⁾.

The marked difference in these two types of inheritance in Yoruba culture is that the *oriojori* will favour the woman with many children. This is due to the fact that each of the children will have their own share of the inheritance of the deceased. Implicitly, they will have more benefit than the wife who does not have more children. The *idi-Igi* on the other hand, the inheritance will be shared equally, invariably the wife that have few children will also benefit from it due to the fact that they will have more to share among themselves. This is unlike the latter that will share equal inheritance among many children. Through these two main types of inheritance scheme wealth may be transmitted to the children of the deceased as well as the wives of the family⁽³⁵⁾.

The Yoruba also attached economic value to children, as an index of wealth in Yoruba culture. The Yoruba love to have many children, because it profits them financially⁽³⁶⁾. In the pre-colonial period and even till date, children contribute to family income by hawking, trading and assisting their parents during farming seasons. Children contribute substantively

to family subsistence by the age of five to six. Sometimes the school fees paid by parents were generated by the children to supplement school fees of children. Having more children invariably means having more labour to work on the farm and producing more agricultural products to sell on market days⁽³⁷⁾. Knowledge is highly prized and cherished among the Yoruba people. The need for knowledge is premised on the fact that knowledge is viewed as an opportunity to have or create wealth and improves the social status and well-being of individuals within the community. The knowledge acquired through vocations, trading, farm practice and western education are acquired purposively to advance the people social and economic status in the community⁽³⁸⁾.

Polygyny, the practice of marrying more than one wife, is also an integral part of the Yoruba and African culture in general. It is considered as one of the means of showing wealth, acquiring prestige and fame among people during the pre-colonial period. In recent times, this belief has been gradually fading due to the influence of Christianity, western education and economic hardship for its citizenry⁽³⁹⁾. Polygynous men in traditional Yoruba society usually have more wives in the family to enable them manage their scattered landholdings in which traditionally both the wives and children will be part of the labour to farm for their father. This consequently assisted to improve the overall production of farmers in their yields in the farm to increase their wealth. The more men have more wives, the more cheap labour they acquire to increase their wealth. Not having many wives can lead to a man being considered lazy or a never-do-well due to his inability to marry more than one wife⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Other things related to wealth in Yoruba culture include large cultivated farm estate where agricultural food items like maize, yams, guinea corn, vegetables and cocoa are produced and consequently sold in the market for traders and other consumers. Between 1850-1920, commercial activities in non-food products, popularly called 'cash crops', began and expanded. By the late 1920s, cocoa, timber, palm oil and peanut production became attractive with the introduction of new currency. The colonial influence on the exportation of these products into Europe greatly increased the interest of farmers into cash crop production due to attractive remunerative benefits⁽⁴¹⁾.

During this period, cultivation of food crops declined given the low prices of food crops. According to Olatunji Ojo, a historian, the change of attitude of the Yoruba from food crop to cash crop production was a response to the profits that were anticipated with colonial patronage of their cash crops as well as the newly introduced British currency that was used as a medium of exchange in the market economy created by the British imperial authority⁽⁴²⁾. Due to the awareness of the potential income believed to be made by the Yoruba people through the cash crops many people opted for the vocation of farming in cocoa in Ibadan, Ondo and Ijesa as a means to increase their wealth and status in the society. Furthermore, the ability to feed and provide accommodation for oneself and family is also recognized in Yoruba culture as a symbol of wealth. Persons whom could not afford to feed, pay their rent or provide accommodation for themselves are regarded as *olosi*, in English usage, (the poor). Other characteristics that describe the individual as being wealthy in traditional Yoruba society include stoutness of the physical appearance of a person⁽⁴³⁾.

Royal background of a family is also a symbol associated with wealth in traditional Yoruba society. Persons from royal background accrue wealth through various sources of wealth through (*Isakole*) that is, taxes accrued from cash, and foodstuffs⁽⁴⁴⁾. Other wealth guaranteeing benefits for the King is the sale of land to prospective vendors who needed land for farming and building of their houses. Children from the royal family also receive noble

birth. Kings, especially, are accorded the respect on account of their fathers position and wealth within the society. This logically made people in the society to assume that children of kings are also rich⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Being wealthy in Yoruba society is an important indication of someone doing well in the society irrespective of the means through which it is achieved. The ownership of farm estate or a big house in the community is not in itself sufficient enough to win prestige and social status. The man or woman who has appreciable wealth in property is expected to spend money (na-owo), the Yoruba attached so much importance in spending money to acquire prestige and honour within the neighbourhood⁽⁴⁶⁾. An individual who is wealthy is expected to spend money in buying clothes, so that he or she can be well dressed. He/she is likely to spend money entertaining guests at the time of annual religious ceremony in the town and contribute generously to the ceremonies and funerals of his close relatives by birth and marriage, and entertain his guests and the members of his club in a manner befitting his means⁽⁴⁷⁾.

Bascom's opinion that a principal rule of Yoruba hospitality is that the individual or person must offer food and drink according to his means to anyone who comes for a visit. If the reverse is the case rich person would be labeled as being stingy or a "miser" (alaroro). He is described even worse than the poor person, whom no one respects in the community. A stingy person is also known as (ahun) someone who does not give or share with others. He is described as someone who goes from one house to another to eat and celebrates with friends when they are performing religious ceremonies, but never entertains guests when he performs his own. He may have money, but keeps it buried in a pot; or he may own a great deal of property, but lives in a poor house, and dresses in old clothes⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Stingy persons who are wealthy are rare, perhaps, this is because if he/she is unwilling to spend the money, they lose their honour and prestige accorded to them on account of their wealth, and they will have few friends and no danger of quarrelling with someone which might end up in court. The individual who spend money earned respects of the public⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Many people are attracted to him as members of his club (*egbe*) or as followers. Whenever he attends a ceremonial function during religious, funeral, wedding feast or any other important event, a large crowd dressed in fine clothes popularly known as (*Asoebi*) follows him or her when he moves on the street⁽⁵⁰⁾.

Belief system associated with wealth in Yoruba tradition.

The people's belief system played a major role in their social thought and actions in the society. The Yoruba belief in the Supreme Being who manifests his essence in a variety of spirits and natural phenomena. Ajayi and Fadipe hint that each individual family in Yoruba society has its own *orisa* deity which was worshipped and deified. The *orisa* in Yoruba culture are regarded as the ministers of the supreme God, who is the creator, the final arbiter of heavenly and worldly affairs. Omniscient, immortal and pure, he is the source of all benefits to mankind. The number of *orisa* is very large, and they range in importance from those worshipped by only a single descent group in a single town to those whose cult is found throughout the area⁽⁵¹⁾.

The nature and symbols of these *orisa* varied from one Yoruba town to another. Some are personifications of natural features such as hills, rivers or natural forces. For instance, the Yoruba *orisa* associated with wealth is *olokun* (beads) and *Aje* (cowries) were gotten from rivers and oceans. *Aje* is an Orisa goddess associated with wealth and economic prosperity,

this *orisa* aid the accumulation of wealth and prevent dwindling of one's economic growth, Aje olokunseniade, omonbibinu olokunni (Aje is a daughter of olokun) Aje is an extremely paramount *orisa* that anybody who really want wealth and economic prosperity and growth and maintenance of wealth should have in his or her possession. Aje is the spiritual energy that responsible for the control of wealth, trade, economic growth, prosperity, and any type of currency, anybody who have consecrated Aje and appease it or propitiate well will never lack behind in any form of trade he or she is involved in⁽⁵²⁾.

The Yoruba people attend to the problems of life with rituals aimed at improving the social conditions of the people by placating the deities or spirits capable of causing misfortunes. The Yoruba were accustomed to invoking divine aid in achieving such ends as health, fertility and prosperity. The quest for achievements, success, or the 'good things of life' is concerned with economic fortunes that could be translated into abundance of all the good things of life. As mentioned earlier, children, money and wives, the desire for good health, peace of mind and long life are regarded as some of the virtues of good life⁽⁵³⁾.

The myth and tradition surrounding the Yoruba *orisa* is concerned with one aspect of nature or another. The Yoruba devotees tend to pray to them for assistance. It is necessary to stress that Ifa control life events implicitly. Explicitly, it is a repository of knowledge that can proffer solutions to diverse challenges of life. This is exemplified in the Yoruba (oriki) cognomen, "akere finu sogbon ni won pe, Ifa adani ni moran bi iye kan eni" (more with bundle of knowledge and wisdom is the one referred to as Ifa, that gives advise as a relation). Ifa is widely resorted to because of its reputation as an oracle and an *Orisa* in its own right. It is supposed to meet all the desires of its devotees⁽⁵⁴⁾. It also generally directs those who consult it to go and pay their respects to one or the other *orisa* or to revive the worship of an *orisa* which was once worshipped in the family but had been forgotten or neglected. Ifa is consulted on every important event, private as well as public. It is one of the most unifying traditions. Ifa is the oracle through which the divinities work in consonance with one another. Whenever there is problem, the people usually consult an ifa diviner to know their status of becoming wealthy in their life time, to seek help on what sacrifices to offer to make them become rich or wealthy and have information on what to do to return wealth to an individual family household⁽⁵⁵⁾. Examples of some of these Ifa verse used for the aforementioned purpose are as follows

A) Ese Ifa linked with knowing the status of becoming wealthy

Oworin Iwori A⁽⁵⁶⁾

- 1) Eleyiun ti sise sise Ifa pe yio la, sugbon isee re ee se ise ikanju o.
Nnkan ti eleyiun o ta solaje nnkan tawon eeyan o moo sun meyin,
to won o mooju kuro nbe".

Translation

Ifa says this person has labored and struggled without success. He would be rich in life but his source of wealth is going to be an article which people will ignore⁽⁵⁷⁾.

The example 1, given above in the Ifa verse *Oworin Iwori A* suggest the quest or inquiry on whether a person would become rich or wealthy (name not mentioned), the response of the

babalawo or diviner after the process of divination says to the inquirer that this person have worked and labored severely without anything to show for it. Says the diviner, the person would be rich in life but the source of his wealth will come from an unexpected article of trade which many people may ignore. This statement shows that the inquirer is seeking to know whether he/she will ever become wealthy in life. While the diviner assured him that he/she would become successful if he does something that many other people have neglected as a means to generate wealth.

Oworin Iwori A

- 2) “Awon le la layeawon bi?
Won niki won rubo
Won ni bi on batirubo
Won niise tan.....”

Translation

“Would we be rich in life at all’? They inquired
They were asked to perform sacrifice
They were told that immediately the sacrifice was performed
Poverty is finished⁽⁵⁸⁾”.

The second example in this Ifa verse, *Oworin Iwori A*, shows an inquirer seeking information from the diviner on the possibility of becoming wealthy. After the inquiry from Ifa, the diviner says you were asked to make sacrifice, and you were informed that after the sacrifice is completed then there is no more poverty in your life. The aforementioned example(1b) demonstrate the quest from an inquirer to know whether their family may ever become well-to-do. After consultation with Ifa oracle, the family was advised on what to do to make them become rich. The diviner advise that they should make sacrifice and that would bring an end to poverty in their life.

Oworin Iwori A

- 3) “Adia fun OwonrinOmoAsegilowo
won nikoruboyoo la laye
won niti o batirubo
won niise tan”

Translation

“Cast divination for Owonrin the child of Asegilowo
He was asked to perform sacrifice
He was assured that he would be rich in life”

The third example in this Ifa verse an Ifa divination performed for Owonrin the child of Asegilowo, in which the diviner asked him to perform sacrifice and advised that after he has performed the sacrifice he would become rich in life. Above all, the three examples given shows that the Yoruba people usually consult the Ifa oracle to seek information on knowing their status of becoming wealthy. Once a new baby is born into the family such inquiry are

made, and if an individual is not doing well financially, such inquiries are made with a view to know what to do to avert the situation.

B) Ese Ifa related with seeking help on what to do to become wealthy

Oworin Iworin B⁽⁵⁹⁾

- 4) “Ifa pe eleyiun o la laye. Eboolanikoru.
Nnkan e o niisonu”

Translation

“Ifa says this person would be rich in life;
He should make a sacrifice for wealth.
His good tidings would not elude him”⁽⁶⁰⁾.

In this fourth example in the Ifa verse *Oworin Iwori B*, the oracle told the client upon inquiry of his status of becoming wealthy. The Ifa oracle informed him that he will be successful in life. Ifa advises him to make a sacrifice for wealth. Ifa prays that the good things of life would be with him. This Ifa verse tries to explain what the individual should do as a way to increase his wealth. It advises the person to offer a sacrifice for wealth, so that he would become a prosperous, wealthy and great in life. This statement presupposes the fact that the Yoruba people have a culture of seeking help through the Ifa divinity on what to do to become wealthy. The Ifa verse also prayed that the good things of life will not get away from him. This is a prayer of Ifa for the inquirer to sustain the riches of the individual.

Oworin Odi B⁽⁶¹⁾

- 5) Ifape ka rubo, aye eleyiun o daa.
O nsunkunaje n sunkunomo, yoorii,
Ifapeko moo peOun.
Gbogbonnkantieleyiunbagbeke
le niko moo kepe:

Translation

Ifa asks this person to offer sacrifice; life would please him.
This person had ever been in search of wealth, children;
He would get it. But he should call on Ifa relentlessly.
Whatever he believes in, he should also cry too incessantly⁽⁶²⁾.

The Ifa verse *Oworin Odi B* in this example gives an admonition that the person should offer sacrifice for him to have a good life. Ifa say this person is crying for wealth, prosperity and children. Ifa assures the person that he will get it. But, he should also pray and cry fervently to Ifa or in whatever other ritual deities, or foreign religion (Islam or Christianity) he believes in. The advice by the Ifa oracle confirms an indication of assurance for the client that he would be prosperous in life with children and abundant wealth. The oracle provided advice that crying fervently and praying to Ifa may placate his misfortune in becoming wealthy and having children. This point attests to the fact the Yoruba belief that prayer and crying for the

favour of Olohun through the Ifa is a potent factor that may be useful to attain wealth and having children.

C) Ese Ifa associated with the return of wealth to a family

Oworin Irosun A⁽⁶³⁾

- 6) Ifapeounpe ire fun eleyiun.
Ire re o niibo; aye o si ye e.
Ki eleyiun o ma ja
kinnkanodidi o mo baa
bosonulowo e.

Translation

Ifa wishes this person well. Ifa says his good fortunes would not get lost. Life would be pleasant with him. Ifa enjoins him not to keep malice such That a whole bunch of goodies would not depart him⁽⁶⁴⁾.

The Ifa verse *Oworin Irosun A*, pointed out in example 6, features a client seeking for help to become wealthy, The Ifa oracle passes on good wishes that goodness shall follow the client. The oracle prays that the client will not mislay his or her success and that the person will become great. The Ifa oracle follows this with an admonition that for all these to come to reality, the person should not spite others, so that eventual success will not shift away. From the explanation given above, it is clear that clients seeking help to become wealthy usually patronized diviners to know what to do. In this instance, the diviner told the client that for his success to come to pass, then the client should not keep malice or fight with anyone. This is a command that if the client follows the advice, then bounties and many good things of life will not shift away.

Oworin Obara A⁽⁶⁵⁾

- 7) Ifapeorokan to jeti baba won kan to tikoja
lo n be nlenibi o tiwalatijatijo.
Ifapeoronaa o niisonu.
Yoodaa fun eleyiun.

Translation

Ifa says wealth belonging to their father exist somewhere, where it had been for long. Ifa says the wealth would not get lost. It is well with the person⁽⁶⁶⁾.

In the Ifa verse *Oworin Obara A* in example 7, a client goes to the diviner for help. The oracle advises the client that material goods belonging to the client's father exist somewhere and have been there for a long time. The Ifa oracle advises the client that the belongings owned by their father will not be lost. The oracle prays that all is well with the client. The explanation given in this example shows that, a client is seeking divine

intervention to return wealth to the family. The oracle, in this instance, disclosed information that was not known to the client before—namely, that the the client's father has had riches somewhere for a long time. The Ifa diviner assured the client that the possession of their father will not get lost, and prayed that all would be well. The prayer in this example, figuratively is a sign of that the client will become successful in life.

Oworin Obara B

- 8) Ojuomoponeleyiun. Ko bi Ifaleereko si ruboomo.
Ifapeniiluodikejinikieleyiun o gbe lo obo Ifaa re.
Eleda o nijekiogun o ja a.
Ola n be fun eleyiunniluodikeji

Translation

Ifa says this person is experiencing the death of children.
He should ask from Ifa the contents of the sacrifice of children and perform it.
He advise that he should go to the neighbouring city to perform his sacrifice.
His creator would not let him see bad things.
There is plenty of wealth for him⁽⁶⁷⁾.

In the Ifa verse *Oworin Obara B* in example 8, a client goes to a diviner for help. The Ifa oracle divines to the client that he has difficulty in having children. Ifa oracle instructs that he should seek help and also make sacrifice. Ifa advises that he should move to the neighbouring town to go and make sacrifice for the Ifa oracle. The Ifa diviner prays that the creator of human beings will not allow negative things to happen to the client and that bounties of abundant wealth to the client is awaiting the client in the neighbouring town. The detail in this example shows that the client is seeking for help in other to have children in life. A child in this instance is used figuratively as a source of wealth to the client. The Ifa oracle advises the client to offer sacrifice to the Ifa to enable him have children. He instructs the client to go to a neighbouring city to perform the sacrifice. The Ifa diviner prays that the client, will not experience any sad events in his life. The diviner assures him that more prosperity and success awaits him if he moves to the neighbouring town. The diviner and client interactions in this Ifa verse demonstrate the consultation of Ifa for the possibilities of having children and becoming wealthy in Yoruba culture and society.

Oworin Osa A⁽⁶⁸⁾

- 9) Ifapekieleyiun o ruboko le tobilaye
Adie onikamaruunlebo. Bi koba si ri
Adie onikamaruun. Ifagbaadiemaruunlowo
e atieyinkan. Eyinadiiekanyiiyoo lo ri mole nibaluwe
ki won o si gboniyerosunlfa si l lori

Translation

Ifa asks this person to offer sacrifice for him to become great in life.
A cock (male bird especially of domestic fowl). with five toed is the content of the sacrifice.

However, Ifa enjoins that if the person could not get the five-toed hen. Ifa will collect five hens from him with an egg. This egg should be buried in a bathroom and powder sprinkled on it before being covered up with sand⁽⁶⁹⁾.

The Ifa verse *Oworin Osa A* in example 9 demonstrates the interaction of the Ifa diviner and a client seeking help to become wealthy. In this example, the Ifa diviner suggests that the client should make sacrifice for him to become great and fortunate in life. The Ifa diviner admonishes the client to sacrifice a five toed cock, and in case, he could not find it, The Ifa oracle, requires five hens with one egg. This egg should be buried with sprinkled sand from the Ifa tray in the bathroom. The explanation in this example, suggests that the client seeking for help wishes to know what to do for him to become great in life. The Ifa diviner told the client that for him to become great and wealthy in life, he should perform sacrifice with a five-fingered cock or five hens with an egg. The egg is expected to be buried in the bathroom covered with sprinkled sands from the Ifa tray. This point indicates that people in Yoruba society sometimes seek help through the divination process to enable them explore their opportunities for them to become rich and wealthy.

Example 10 In addition, another Ifa verse in example 10 that placate what to do to become wealthy is given below

Obara Meji A⁽⁷⁰⁾

- 10) Ifape ire fun eleyiun. Ori olalori e. yoo la,
Yoo sit obi laye. Osun kan n be niidile e,
bi o ba si Osun, Kabeerenibi won gbe da Ifayii fun un:
kosi loo bo Osun ohuntoriilodo Osun nigbogbo ire ti o
niilayeOtiwa. Omo Osun niohunpaapaa.

Translation

Ifa wishes this person well. His ori (head) is destined
To be wealthy and he would be rich in life. Ifa says,
There exists an Osun spot in his lineage. Ifa direct that
He should ask where the Osun spot could be found for
Him or her to offer sacrifice immediately. This is because
his or her fortunes are rooted in Osun⁽⁷¹⁾.

The aforementioned Ifa verse *Obara Meji A* given in example 10 demonstrate upon inquiry, what a client should do for him or her to become wealthy. The diviner after consultation with Ifa informs the client that Ifa wishes him well. The diviner told the client that his head is destined to be wealthy and rich in life. Ifa orders and direct the client to inquire about the Osun spot in his lineage/ family compound and that the client should offer sacrifice immediately. The diviner advises that the client's fortune is rooted in Osun deity. The instruction inferred through this Ifaverse is that for an individual to become wealthy, he or she is expected to perform sacrifice for the Osun deity

CONCLUSION

It has been established from the foregoing that the Yoruba concept of wealth is dynamic. It is shaped and reshaped by changing cultural beliefs and traditions of the Yoruba society based on social, cultural and religious orientation. Overtime, or at different period in the history of Yoruba wealth is generated through several means such as: slavery, inheritance, and trading in goods through barter exchange. The contact with Europe and the introduction of British currency increased the volume of wealth acquired through cash crop production in cocoa, timber, peanut, and palm kernel for exports. Ultimately, the Yoruba believe in wealth as source of prosperity and thus name their children with deities associated with wealth and propitiate the *orisa* that is believed to be the goddess of wealth. The Ifa oracle is also consulted when seeking to become wealthy or knowing what to do in returning wealth to the family. This practice still exists today, However, most clients usually consult the Ifa diviner in secret. This is important to avoid blemish from western educated and religious fanatic Christians and Muslims who hated the consultation with Ifa diviner due to their new religious belief and orientation. The study of wealth in African culture needs further investigation, especially in the area of comparing wealth among African communities as well as examining the notion of *olosi* (wretched) and *otosi* (poor) as direct opposite to wealth in Yoruba society.

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⁽⁶²⁾ A. Salami. IFA: A Complete Divination. p. 288

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