# Yoruba Religion and Culture

**Louisville lectures**

**(2004- 2005)**

## Baba Wáňdé Abimbólá

**Dr. Ògúnwáňdé Abímbólá**[1]

**Babalawo**

**Awise Agbaye**

**Class Notes:** ***Any errors are my own.***

**Cindy J. Bidwell Glaze**

1The o has an accent below it also. My font set does not have it.

# Yoruba Cosmology

## Olódùmarè

**Supreme God/ess [no gender]**
**"The one who breathed the breath of life into them"**

↕

**Èşù**

↕ ↕

| **Ajogun (Malevolent Beings)**<br>**warlords against humans** | **Benevolent Beings**<br>**400 + 1** |
|---|---|
| **200 + 1**<br>most well known are:<br>Ikú - death<br>Àrùn - disease<br>Òfò - loss<br>Ègbà - paralysis<br>Òràn - big trouble<br>Èpè - curses<br>Èwòn - imprisonment<br>Èşe All other afflictions | Òrìşà (Divinities)<br>**Ajala** - creates Ori,<br>**Èşù /** (Elegua - Cuban) gatekeeper.<br>Ifá (Òrúnmilá) – divination<br>**Obalúayé**<br>Obàtálá<br>Ogún<br>Oşun<br>Şango<br>Oya<br>Obaluaye<br>Yémojá<br>and so on, 400+1 of them.<br><br>Egúngún (Ancestors)<br><br>Orí (Inner Head, personal divinity)<br><br>Ènìyàn (humans)<br><br>Nature<br>Animals, Birds, Trees, Rivers, Hills, Oceans, and so on. |

The Yorùbá cosmology is divided into a right hand side (benevolent) and a left hand side (malevolent). The High God, Olódùmarè, is neither good nor evil. His/Her contact with humans is through the òrìşà, especially Èşù and Ifá. The terms 200+1 and 400+1 does not mean 201 and 401, but add as many as needed by the circumstances.

Èşù communicates with everyone. He talks with humans, the High God, the òrìşà, the Egúngún, and the Ajogun.

The Àjé (Eníyan), also called witches, deal with humans and spirits on both sides of the divide.

# Some Òrìşà

**Aje** ♀ Prosperity (business) òrìşà

**Èşù / Elegua** ♂ gatekeeper. strides between Olódùmarè and all powers, both benevolent and malevolent.

**Ilé** ♀- òrìşà of the Earth/earth? Mother Earth ♀

**Ìwàpèlé**[2] ♀- wife of Ifa. Name means and represents good character.

**Obalúayé**[3] (♂) is King of the Earth. He passes judgment and executes that judgment.

**Obàtálá** -♂ creator, patron of disAbled and different, one of the original 17 Òrìşàs

**Ogún** ♂- the òrìşà of iron & war; technology & surgery; culture builder; destruction & construction (his symbol is the knife) Creates the human skeleton (basic frame)

Orí - inner head, personal divinity, your connection to the Divine

**Òrúnmilá** -♂ the òrìşà of divination. His name means - 'heaven knows those who will be saved' (be prosperous?). Òrúnmilá is over intellectual development, wisdom and literature. Òrúnmilá embodies literature.

**Òşanyìn** ♂ - half- blind, having only one eye. He was also deformed, having one leg and one arm. Òşanyìn had a gift for identifying the properties of plants.

**Oşun** -♀ who brings sacred water, one of the original 17 Òrìşà (only ♀ of original òrìşà) had a son- (changed from daughter before birth by Obàtálá's aşe) **Osetuura**

**Oya**[4] -♀ tempest and strong winds

**Şango** -♂ [you are supposed to stand up when you say his name] òrìşà of thunder and lightning.

**Sùrúrù** - (Patience) Sùrúrù is the first born son of Olódùmarè, the High God.

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2es have accents under them as well

3Obalúayé is also known as Òrìşà Bàbá (old man) which is one explanation for the corruption of it to Babalou in Cuba. The deities are otherwise almost identical.

4O has an accent below it. My font doesn't have this.

# October 2004

Àbá = ideas

**Àjé :** powerful woman

**Aşe =** power or spirit

Awò = clairvoyance (or Middle World divination)

**Egúngún** - ancestors

**Oşun**- only female of the original 17 Òrìşà

**Àjé** = powerful woman

I) Àjé are witches (white or black)
II) Àjé stand at the border between maleficent and benevolent spirits.
III) Àjé are shapeshifters
  A) usually (always?) At night
  B) into birds only (particular kind?)
IV) also called **Eníyan** - person of power
V) also called **Eleye** - bird women
VI) Àjé have lots of aşe
VII) in Yoruba, Àjé are definitely female / in other countries they can be either
VIII) eaters of the dead (eaters of corpses)
  B) eater of raw liver without vomiting
  C) before they die they have to list all the people they killed
  D) sometimes the list of people killed includes those who died before the Àjé was born
  E) can be a form of pathology (neurosis?)
  F) when identified, Àjé are stoned or burned alive
IX) you can never know who is Àjé, therefore husbands must respect their wives

Humans just want to marry, have kids and be happy.
Powerful humans/ Eníyan (created second) just want to ruin all the normal human's attempt to do so.

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## **Obàtálá** was one of the original 17 Òrìşàs

Obàtálá holds the horn of aşe in his left hand and the horn of àbá in his right hand.

Àbá = ideas
Aşe = spirit or power to make it so

Obàtálá is the only Òrìşà to have both àşe and àbá

When àşe and àbá are held together, the bearer can generate ideas, which then come to pass. Also, a new power forms, that of awò, which is clairvoyance (or Middle World divination)

**Olódùmarè** told Obàtálá to separate the land from the sea, but he got drunk on palm wine and fell asleep.

Later, Olódùmarè told him to make humans. He did fine for a while, but then started making mistakes (drunk again) and made 'special people' the albino's, blind, deaf, lame etc. All such people are said to have a lot of aşe. They can be used as a direct line to Olódùmarè and aşe.

The Yorùbá cosmology is divided into a right hand side (benevolent) and a left hand side (malevolent).

Humans were created to be good. Even witches (eníyan) are able to be either good or bad. The word for human breaks down into ènì- people and yàn- to choose. All humans are chosen people, [we are chosen to be good] Humans are given everything we need in order to bring good into the universe (intelligence, hands, emotions).

*The highest blessing an Òrìşà can bestow is "s/he rides on a horse"*
*The only sin is when you do evil to objects, nature or humans.*

The human body secretly houses the divine spark. Humans are almost divine. The human body is the sacred house for Orí and our divine selves.

Humans have been empowered by Olódùmarè to be important and good. Humans are meant to be good to <u>all</u>. Trees and the like are supposed to be our friends. We exchange breath (between trees and humans).

**Oya**[5] - Òrìşà of tempest and strong winds. Her foods are white hominy and she goat.

Olódùmarè is a power in the universe, but humans are also powerful.

Òrúnmilá's name means - heaven knows those who will be saved (be prosperous?). Òrúnmilá is over intellectual development, wisdom and literature. Òrúnmilá embodies literature.

There is no hierarchy of òrìşà, but of the "original" 17, Obàtálá led them from heaven.

Thought and faith are different, and use different parts of the body.

5NB the O has an accent below it. My font set doesn't have it

Olódùmarè is the creator. He delegates the creation of humans to:

**Ogún,** who creates the skeleton (basic frame)

**Obàtálá**, who creates the body

**Oşun**, who brings sacred water and

**Ajala,** who creates the orí.

Before birth, the person (soul? personality?) Journeys to **Ajala**. Ajala, the heavenly porter, lives with Olódùmarè. Ajala is an incorrigible drunkard and debtor. He is always there to borrow your money and drink your wine, but don't look for him when you want your loan repaid. He molds the inner head (Orí). When he is sober (rarely) he makes perfectly balanced Orí. Usually, however, he forgets to fire them and they are too big and very brittle. Sometimes he over-fires them, and they crack. The edges of an over large Orí peel off during birth, because there isn't enough room in the birth canal for all of it. Over fired Orí look fine (decorated even) but can't think straight. I can't remember what happens if the Orí is too small.

Each person picks his/her own Orí, but we are not necessarily instructed in how to choose before we get there. By choosing your head, you predestine yourself. Predestination, however, can be mended by sacrifice. An Ifá (diviner) is the only one who can tell you what sacrifices to make and to whom.

We are all struggling with our Orí, because there are not many who get good heads (Orí).

When you meet someone and say "I know you from somewhere" but you can't find a place you have both been, it is possible you met "in another world" or on your way to pick up your Orí.

*Orí* - its symbol is a conical form, within a conical form, both of leather, and both sewn with many cowrie shells (300-1000 for a simple one, over 20,000 for a complex one). at the back of the pointed come, there is a drape, also sewn with cowries. The smaller cone is then inserted into the larger cone, and the drapes /sunshade thing on the same side. It needs to be built by a Baba (who knows leather working).

*Prayer "clothe us in your wisdom"*

Of the Divine body parts, only Orí is worshiped. You don't sacrifice to the rest, although they are divine. They are revered, but not worshiped.

Orí directs you in the way you are supposed to go. If your Orí is defective, it may lead you wrongly.

Ifà is the wider name for wisdom Ifà / Òrúnmilá and his instruments. The instruments are chants, divination, divination tools. It includes the person of Ifà / Òrúnmilá.

Ifà / Òrúnmilá wanted a wife. He went to the marketplace to consult a diviner. The diviner said, marry Èmí [SEE DIVINE BODY] He took care of Èmí, his wife. He encased his daughter Èmí in our hearts. A person is dead when breath stops.

The òrìşà cannot follow their devotees, but Orí can. Only Orí can follow without having his/her attention turning aside to deal with something/someone else. That is why the diviner / baba, must place his hand on the head of the client / supplicant, to get permission of the client's Orí to divine or sacrifice for the person.

It is a sin when you do evil to nature, either persons, places or things.

The human body secretly houses the divine spark. It (human body) is the sacred house for the soul and the divine selves.

## Divine parts of the body

**Orí** - divine guardian or soul

**Èmí** - divine breath (held in the hearts of humans). A person is not alive until they take their first breath, and is not dead until they breath their last. There is no “Brain Dead”, If the individual breathes, he/she is alive. [NB the E has an accent below as well as the one above. my font set doesn’t have it] The divine breath is the daughter of Olódùmarè [??]

**Àyà** - chest, symbol of love & friendship. Friendship (òré[6]) is the highest relationship in Yorùbá thought. A mother and child relationship does not top it unless it is also a friendship. Same with spouse. Friendship has no boundaries. A friend will help you gain riches, relations try to squander riches. Friendship is a divinity. DO NOT betray a friend.

**Owò** - hand, symbol of self-help [NB the O has an accent below it. The o, has an added accent below it. My font set doesn’t have them] Owò is the main difference between us and other mammals.

**Ẹsè** - leg, symbol of struggle. [NB the E has an accent below it. The e, has an added accent below it. My font set doesn’t have them] Nobody makes a successful ANYTHING with out esè.

**Inú** - stomach, symbol of deep thought and meditation. [“ruminate on it a while” “It will take me a while to digest that thought”] {the brain holds the embers of thought and memory}

**Ìdí** - buttocks, symbol of firm placement (grounding) you need to be grounded somewhere in order to employ your other parts, ori or inú

6O has an accent below it. my font doesn’t have it.

I asked the Question:

"When Obàtálá creates a person, that person is sometimes disAbled or different. Do individuals born without hands or legs lack owò[7] or ęsè?

Doctor Wáňdé Abimbólá appeared to have not thought about this before, but was able to reply from his tradition. He gave two answers.

His first answer was that a baby born without hands or legs is an indication that boundaries have been crossed that should not have been crossed. He then brought up the thalamine babies and other instances of a people doing wrong in ignorance or carelessness.

The second answer, later in the lecture, after he was able to think on it for a bit, is that even if the baby (child/adult) has no hands or legs, s/he still has owò and ęsè. They are "in the mind of the body". The individual therefore has the ability to help themselves [owò] and to struggle to gain what they want [ęsè]. Although in Yorùbán thought "Nobody becomes successful without legs." The individual without physical legs still has the ęsè and therefore the chance to struggle.

7In the word Owò, the O has an accent below it. The o, has an added accent below it.

# November 2004 Notes

Twins are respected by the Yoruba people. Because they have been breeding for twins (twins are preferred mates), there are more twins born per capita in Yorubaland than in any other area. Twins are given a special high-protein diet of àkàrà (a fried blend of palm oil and black eyed pea flour, like a biscuit). This was true traditionally, before protein was known about. It was known that these foods were liked by and good for a small baby. Twins are usually under-weight even in developed cultures.

When a woman has twins in Yorubaland, the first one born is called Táíwò, from Tay-é-wo or Tó-ayé-wò which means “first person to taste the world”. If Táíwò tastes the world and everything is alright, it cries to tell its sibling it’s OK. If Táíwò doesn’t cry, the second twin will know that the world is not right and be prepared.

The next twin to be born is considered the senior twin, who sent the first twin out to scout. This senior twin is called Kéhìndé, from Kun-ehin or Èyìn-dé which means “person who comes behind”.

Once a woman has a set of twins, her baby’s names are set for some time[8]. Any babies prior to the twins can have apparently random names. with twins and later births the names are fixed, with no gender distinction. [boys and girls both have the name based on birth order, not gender] The twins are called Táíwò and Kéhìndé. The next child is called:

| | |
|---|---|
| | Ìdòwù |
| then | Àlàbá |
| then | Ìdògbé |
| then | Ìdoha |
| then | Kòkòrúgúdú |

That assumes a woman has only one set of twins. If a number of sets of twins are born, the names start over again. All twins are named Táíwò and Kéhìndé. The next child after twins is always called Ìdòwù. Therefore a women could have ten children, each called Táíwò or Kéhìndé. Or ten children called Táíwò, Kéhìndé, Ìdòwù, Táíwò, Kéhìndé, Ìdòwù, Àlàbá, Táíwò, Kéhìndé and Ìdòwù.

The story of why twins are sacred in Yoruba culture, rather than killed as they are in neighboring cultures is the myth of the Edun, also told on November 4th. An abridgement follows.

8This is for children of one mother. Father is immaterial.

## The story

At one time, the king of Ife went into the forest (against the advice of his advisors and kin). His only son was ill and none of the diviners/healers was able to cure him. The king went looking for a particular tree he thought would cure his son. He went where he remembered it, but it wasn't there. He then went to another place he thought it was, but nothing looked familiar. Before long he was lost.

Earlier, the òrìşà Ifa (Òrúnmilá) had twin children called **Ędun**. (Ifá's 21st children?) One was male, one female. They were humans but they had tails. Their mother, Pèrègúnlèlè[9], had many husbands, and had children with each of them. Ifa taught them (the Ędun) how to make medicine. They weren't particularly happy with the humans, because the people mocked them because of their tails. When they were of age, Ędun went into the bush (the forest?).

Back to the king. Ędun saw the king, lost in the forest and exclaimed "the source of good character is lost". This sounds like the cry of the colobus monkey. They asked the king, "Why are you here?". He replied, "I am lost in the forest. I don't know the way back to town.". Ędun brought water to the king and he drank. Then Ędun told the king to mount on their back. they traveled rapidly, tree to tree back to the edge of the city. They asked if he could find his way home from there and he said "yes". Then Ędun left and the king called all his advisors and kin and said he would not go to the palace until the whole world had a chance to celebrate his return. The invitation to the party, called Oşìn[10], was sent to everyone.

There are 18 apartments in the royal palace. The King lives in the farthest back apartment, the 18th. The 17th apartment is for the diviners. There are 16 royal diviners who are, after initiation and election/appointment(?), kings in their own right.

Then Ędun (the colobus monkey) went. They were warned about the rudeness and shame found by the other animals but they were human and had helped the king. They also knocked on the door at Ìlèkùn Olà. The response was the same. The Ędun replied "When the king was lost, we brought him back. When he was thirsty we gave him water to drink. How can you keep us out?" The king heard them and replied, "That is true, open the door and let them in." Ędun said "No, you don't need to open the door, we will open it." The people inside tried to open it, but were unsuccessful. Ędun then used their àşe, or their medicine, learned from Ifa himself, to open the door. They then became one of the Awo Oòni, diviner kings in the 17th apartment of the royal palace. ***Because of Ędun, twin children are revered (or worshiped) as Ìbejì.***

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9The e's after the l's have accents underneath them as well. My font doesn't have this.
10The O has an accent below it. My font doesn't have that.

Ìwà pèlé* means good (or gentle) character.

"Doing things by force has spoiled the world.
Dewdrops come and make repairs.
Dewdrops come and make amendment." repeat

The mark of a baba is to be gentle, easy going.
"An Ifa never hurries. The weight of the knowledge, and the weight of what you don't know humbles you."
If you are gentle, you will live to a ripe old [healthy] age.

Whatever your calling in life (farmer, carpenter, king) your ultimate search is for good character.

The issue of fate/destiny is out of your hands (as it is pre-chosen). Good Character however IS in your own hands. You can change your path using ìwà pèlé.* The first Ìwà pèlé* was Ifa's wife. Ìwà pèlé* is daughter of Sùrúrù (Patience). Sùrúrù is the first born son of Olódùmarè, the High God. Therefore, patience is the litmus test of good character.

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Ìwà pèlé* was beautiful and well behaved. Only Ifa knew she had a bad habit. Instead of going to the bush when she needed to urinate or defecate, she did it in the living room. He put up with it, although he asked her not to do so, until he brought guests home and they saw her defecating in the living room. He got mad and told her to go away. Three times she asked "Are you serious?" and three times he answered "yes". She took her things and left. Within three to four days, Ifa began to feel her absence. He had to cook, clean, talk to the neighbors, answer the door and so on. He had no time to study and just reflect on the Odu.

Ifa went to the diviners and asked what he should do. The diviner said he must find her and "beg her to be part of you again"

Ifa made an Egúngún costume. This costume is totally body and face covering. It starts at the top of the head with a kind of figure, often in wood, representing the ancestor (plow for a farmer, fish for a fisherman, et cetera). It carries down in cloth to cover every part of the body, including the feet. It is more flowing than this sounds in my quick description, but the main point here is that nobody could see who was beneath the costume. A second thing about the Egúngún, is that everyone honors and respects them.

Ifa went to all the kings compounds in turn searching for her. He stood outside the compound singing "Ìwà Íwà àń wáo" repeatedly. [WE SANG IT TOGETHER AT THE LECTURE] At each place, the king came out to honor and deal with the Egúngún, not knowing who it was. When Ifa had revealed himself, he was invited in to eat and sleep.

At each compound, the king said, do you see my beautiful wife? Doesn't she cook well? Well she brushes her teeth only once a year; or she bathes only once every three years or some other bad habit. How could you send away your wonderful wife just because she defecated in the living room?"

Finally Èşù told Ifa that Ìwà pèlé* was in heaven. Ifa went to heaven (I don't remember how) and Ìwà pèlé* ran to him and they cried together in their joy in meeting again. When Ifa tried to persuade her how wrong he had been, and please come home, Ìwà pèlé* replied that no one is allowed to go back to earth once they had ascended into heaven. To do so would have people asking for their beloved dead to return, and the cycle would be harmed. They cried, but could not break the taboo.

Ifa returned to the earth, saddened but enlightened. The only way to have her by him was to always think "What would Ìwà pèlé* have done?". He began to think, someone is knocking at the door, What would Ìwà pèlé* have done?". A neighbor greeted him on the street, and he asks "what would Ìwà pèlé* have done?" and doing that thing.

The 'moral' of this story is, partly, that "everyone has at least one bad habit."

If your mate smokes and you don't like it, don't give up on him. Pile up your own good acts to cover them [your and your spouses bad habits]. [I AM MADE UNEASY ABOUT THIS BECAUSE ABUSE IS ENCOURAGED IN THAT KIND OF SYSTEM. SECRECY IS BAD IN MY OPINION, WHEN IT COMES TO EVIL, NOT BAD HABITS.]

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Patience is the litmus test of good character
Anger does not do a good turn for anyone.
Every good trait has a negator, an opposite.
Different acts are good habits in different places.
There is always the possibility of increasing the 200 good habits.
Use other people's bad habits to remind me that I also have bad habits.
When something makes me angry, use that knowledge. Ask yourself what bad habit of your own had triggered the anger.

Ìyà = punishment.
Ìyàìwó = to get married {to be married is to endure punishment / suffering}

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answers to questions

Another wife of Ifa is/was Ààbò.  Ààbò means security/protection. She represents hospitality and guards against death and disease.

The African marketplace (especially in Yoruba) is governed by women.

Orí is predestiny (50% of the substance of what you will be.) You choose your own Orí.

If you search, you can learn from everything and everybody.

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# April 2005 Notes

Due to road conditions, we arrived a half hour into the lecture.

He was talking about the òrìşà Nana when we came in. Nana is also the high god of the Fon ( a neighboring nation) and also part of the Ashanté pantheon.

Obalúayé[11] (♂) is King of the Earth. He passes judgment and executes that judgment just like a king does. He is one of the two òrìşà who can punish people for evil acts. The Yoruba pantheon is in two parts. The left hand side is negative, malicious, and lives to hurt humans. The right hand side, which includes the òrìşà, has nothing at all to do with the left hand side. Therefore they need somebody who can punish. If you get ill, it may be because the evil side hit you (sometimes for doing good, sometimes at random 'shit happens') or because you broke a vow or something like that. If it is because you commit an evil act, Obalúayé is probably the òrìşà responsible for both the judgment that you did wrong and for the bad thing happening to you.

Things that will exact punishment from the òrìşà include acts that disrupt the social norm (incest, greed) or go against the social / religious value system (examples?). If you break a rule, you may shortly (within 7 days) be punished for your act. This is called ìjà òrìşà (fight or punishment of the òrìşà).

The two òrìşà who punish are Obalúayé and Ilé.
Obalúayé has warlords who do the actual punishments. They are called ??òròkó[12].
Ilé has warlords who punish. They are called omo ogun ilè élé
[omo = child / ogun = war / ilèélé = for Ilé]
what or who is Ilé gbí oná?

The only other òrìşà who can punish does so on a larger scale. If an entire nation stops following the path of their ancestors (of the òrìşà) she, Ilé (♀) or Mother Earth, will cause 'natural disasters' with much loss of life and material goods.

The egúngún (ancestors) can punish, but they are not considered òrìşà. This is called ìjà egúngún (punishment of the ancestors). The egúngún warn first, then punish if no ebo and restitution is done. They usually (always?) go to Obalúayé with the problem. [for permission? for Obalúayé to punish?]

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11Obalúayé is also known as Òrìşaa Bàbá (old man) which is one explanation for the corruption of it to Babalou in Cuba. The deities are otherwise almost identical.

12The o's in oroko also have accents underneath them.

Priests

The priests of Obalúayé are clairvoyant/seers. There are not many such priests in modern Yoruba, but they have a very significant reputation. Early Obalúayé priests prophesied airplanes and telephone wires. Once chosen to be a priest, one goes through a 9 month initiation. To act as an Obalúayé priest, the priest goes into a three day (or seven day) possession trance. Others spread (red earth colored/ terra cotta? / rust? dyed with osua a.k.a. camwood) cloths on him as he 'sleeps'. They put his 'implements' around him. When he wakes up, he is clairvoyant, telepathic, precognitive and know what the òrìşà want individuals to do.

Because Obalúayé is also an òrìşà is the usual sense, one can ask for favors, a spouse, money, children, victory and so on, exactly as you would ask the other òrìşà. Obalúayé's favorite foods (and ebo) are he-goats, roasted beans, and beans cooked with maize. The beans cooked with maize is the same dish that is a favorite of Ochose.

Obalúayé has to do with smallpox.

He punishes using smallpox.

He also instituted an early form of vaccination for smallpox. Smallpox was native to Yorubaland as well as Europe, but the Yoruba people found a way to stop epidemics well before the Europeans. A slave in Boston (name?) told her master how to stop it during an epidemic there in the early 1700s. They made an incision in the upper arm of people not yet showing the disease and rubbed in some prepared pus or sweat from a victim. We did not discuss how they prepared it.

He can also cure smallpox.

The salute to Obalúayé is Atótó Arére. When this is heard, everybody stands absolutely still and quiet.

**Random other notes from this lecture**

the mentally ill belong to egbe (or other òrìşà).

the extended family is called ebe
- this can include family of choice as well as blood relations
- meetings of these people are also called ebe

Yoruba religion has the advantage of intertextuality. One type of literature can flow into another type of literature, and a chant to one òrìşà can interweave with chants to other òrìşà. Some baba start all their chants with the AA, Obalúayé's salute, to call for absolute silence.

You drink 'red earth' in a glass of water to make a vow or test for truth. The 'red earth' is especially efficacious if it was recovered when digging a grave. ("can you swear X owed you money while drinking a glass of water with red earth dug from his grave?") The 'red earth' can punish people who break vows made on it or lie over it.

Aáwón - hunter and òrìşà

éwe - young people / children (not to be confused with herbs, different accents)

Kóórì and Kóórì Kónkóto[13] - hunter's wife and òrìşà

olórí akéwe - head of young people . Is not supposed to leave the compound, village, whatever, so that s/he can be easily found in case of need.

Àgàn-ò-ríbí (agan=mature woman; o-ribi = no children, barren) was a woman who desperately wanted a child. She went to the babaláwo to divine for her and he suggested she was better off without a child. She insisted and he recommended a program of ebo and other rituals. It was long, but she did it all. Eventually she had a child but he had a horn on his head. As he grew up, she also discovered that he was mute. She kept him inside and hid him to keep him safe. [why was he not safe?]

When he became a toddler (5ish) She went to the market one day after telling him not to leave the house. He watched the neighborhood children playing for a while, then went out to join them. The children welcomed him and played with him even though he looked odd and never spoke. When Àgàn-ò-ríbí came home from the market she was horrified. She brought him back into the house and hoped that was the end of it. Wrong. Soon the children in the neighborhood would stand in front of her house calling for "the boy with the horn on his head" to come play with them. Other baba started looking for him. Her baba told her the only way to keep him safe was to leave him in the forest. She did so.

Àgàn-ò-ríbí visited him as often as she could, without leading others to him. One day, she could not find him. She never/soon stopped looking(?). The spirits of the forest were taking care of him. One day a hunter found him. Aáwón, the hunter, asked him how he came to be in the bush. He discovered that the child did not or could not speak. Aáwón took the child to the city and named him Jewésùn (person who eats leaves for supper). He was a good child, who knew the secrets of forest, animals and birds. Aáwón's wife, Kóórì took care of him.

Kóórì was also barren. She went to the baba and he said that she needs to have sex with a very young person in order to ever have children. When she asked who, he said she needed to have sex with the boy with a horn on his head. When she went home, Kóórì made advances on the young man. It took him a while to get the message, but when he did get the message, he declined the honor. [Is child sexual abuse one of those things against social norm or religious values that will get the òrìşà upset at you? or is that my own culture talking?] Kóórì became angry. Here is this stranger who I feed and look after, but he won't help me. She determined to have him sent away.

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Kóórì waited until just before her husband was due to come back from the hunt, and gifted Jewésùn with a ring and persuaded him to wear it. Then she gave him a cloth to sleep with(cover when sleep). When Aáwón came home, he saw Jewésùn wrapped up in the cloth that he and his wife usually slept in. It was only supposed to be used by them.  Kóórì said that Jewésùn was a bad boy. She said he tried to rape me but I resisted. He forced me to give him our ring and took our cloth to sleep in.  Aáwón chased him back into the forest. Jewésùn went back to a natural life. He was familiar with the forest and able to live there without too much problem.

The head of the hunters of the city of Ilérá saw Jewésùn in the forest and persuaded him to come back to the city with him. As they arrived at the city, the king, the Alara of Ilérá had just died. The local babalawos said look for a stranger, a forest dweller to be the new king. The officials asked around and learned that the head of hunters had just brought a stranger into the city. They went to him and found Jewésùn at his house. They brought him back to the palace. When he got there and they tried to clean him up, they discovered the horn on his head and that he was mute. They said they could not have a deformed person as king. The babas said, so find a way to lose the horn and make him able to speak. They did. Jewésùn was a good king.

Meanwhile, Kóórì and Aáwón were having a bad time of it. They had no children, no food and no respect. They asked the local baba to divine for them and he said this was all happening to them because they had ‘done evil to a stranger’. They needed to propitiate Ogun and find Jewésùn to apologize and get him to come back. After they had propitiated Ogun, their problem could be solved. To propitiate Ogun, they had to ask all the hunters in the area to a feast. There was drumming and food and dance.

Towards the end of the feast,  Aáwón was asked why they needed such a large ebo. What had they done that they needed to ask people they had actually never even met to a feast?  Aáwón told the story of Jewésùn and how they had done him evil. The head of the hunters of the city of Ilérá said, “this boy had a horn on his head?” Yes. “This boy was mute?” Yes. The head of the hunters of the city of Ilérá said, I know this boy, but he is king of the city of Ilérá, you cannot persuade him to come away from his city.

Aáwón went to the city of Ilérá. He was taken to the king. Jewésùn asked if he recognized him Aáwón said no. Jewésùn said he had the horn taken off, and now he could speak, but that he was the same person inside as he had been before. Jewésùn told Aáwón that his wife had lied. I never gave in to her advances, so she lied to get me in trouble with you. Aáwón was not happy to hear this.

The people/advisors? of the city of Ilérá wanted to behead Aáwón because of the evil he had done to their king. Jewésùn said, no, don’t behead him for one evil act. I want to reward him because he helped me when even my own mother abandoned me. Jewésùn gave him clothes and beads and ??? and sent him home. He also sent people to protect him on the way, as now he had great wealth, which may cause him to be attacked. Aáwón did not want to go back to his wife, whom he now knew as a liar. Since they could not bring Jewésùn back to town, they would not ever be successful, even not be able to feed themselves or have children. They would have to

constantly live on the charity of the village or of Jewésùn.

On the way home, Aáwón told the guards that he was going to go defecate and walked into the forest. He had his ancestor's medicine with him and ate some. [The medicine included ancient pounded yam and the herb Òt rupòn] The ground opened up and took him. The guards commented that he was taking too long and went looking for him. He was already half sunk when they found him. Soon he disappeared in a gush of water. They named the river that formed Yoruba word? (river that produces water that we drink in the city). The guards went on to the village to tell Aáwón's wife what had happened and give her the riches, but she had also disappeared. She had decided that she could not bear to look either her husband or foster son in the eye. She took her families medicine, leaned back against the mud brick wall and vanished. Both Aáwón and Kóórì became òrìşà.

What is Aáwón the òrìşà of?

Kóórì is the òrìşà of young people. She looks after other people's children. She is also able to reform bad children. Once a year, all the children in her care go to the river with bananas, vegetables and coconut. They bring lots of extra food and drink and all the children of the town eat, drink and dance. The whole town goes down to the river but a lot of food and drink are left over. They leave all that food down by the river and Kónkóto, the tiniest bird in Yorubaland, come and eat the leftovers. Some of the birds may come into her home to live with her. That is why the names Kóórì and Kónkóto are used interchangeably for that òrìşà.

There is not one city or town that is Kóórì 's main place. She is found everywhere. If there are no more children, Kóórì will be no more. TV and intrusive tech is taking away our children.

The Alara of Ilérá (king of Ilérá)has a horn on his crown. The kings in Ilérá do not follow a lineage.

Orphans are the children of all of us. People who can't or don't have children should take care of other's children. Foster families are good. Nothing can take the place of a parent, but a foster parent is better than an institution. The whole world is not one family, but it is one village.

Ęgbę are the children who were not born with us. Only a fraction of us were born. We played together in heaven before some of us came down to earth. They still interact with us. Seers are able to interact consciously with the Ęgbę.

Ęgbę Ògba - for those not here.

Are these Ęgbę or minor  òrìşà?

**Ìyálóde -** ♀ mother of all Ęgbę.

**Şeéwo** - ♂

**Baálè** - ♂ or ♀

**Jagun** - ♂

**Marootana** - ♀

**Máahún** - ♀

?

**Iyalaje** - ♀ controls the marketplace. Keeps cowrie shells. 70% of people in the marketplace are female. Women hold the cash.

**Gbógeró** - ♀ woman who is fashionable

**??** - person who has an important title and keeps that title.

**Eléékò** - ♀

**Kóńkóto** - ♀ accepts ebo for Kóórì. Also serves as a title for Kóórì.

**Onígló** - ♂ owner of the forest.

**Adeta** - ♀(♂) somebody whose crown is protruding.

**Sarepegbe** - ♂ or ♀ public relations - spin doctor.

**Gégébìni** - ♀ woman who dresses well and is ready for any occasion.

**Aşípa** - ♂? Commander of this group (of Ęgbę or minor  òrìşà?)

**Random other notes from this lecture**

There are three good things a person looks for:

good fortune in money/riches

good fortune in children and

good fortune of long life.

It is the measure of a civilization

how they take care of children / young people

how they take care of the deformed [& disAbled?]

and how they take care of the beauty of the environment.

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NB: Òşanyìn is not Osain [Cuba] as he does not control ALL medicine. Òşanyìn and medicine are NOT synonymous.

Òşanyìn is the younger brother of Ifá/Òrúnmilá. He has the same parents. Ifá was a young man when Òşanyìn was born.

Òşanyìn was half- blind, having only one eye. He was also deformed, having one leg and one arm. {some folktales say that he has other forms with anything from 1 to 16 legs} The most powerful of all the forms attributed to him is Òşanyìn ęlésè kan, who has only one leg. One legged Òşanyìn is most powerful, with the most medicine and the most magic.

Òşanyìn was abandoned in the forest at birth, but Ifá went and found him and raised him. He couldn't do much around the house, but Ifá didn't want him to just sit around, so Ifá set him in the garden and told him to weed the garden. When Ifá came back, Òşanyìn hadn't moved, and nothing was done. Ifá got angry and threatened to beat him if he didn't weed the garden. Òşanyìn said don't beat me, I just don't understand. Why do you want me to destroy so many good / useful plants? This one is medicine for fever. This one is medicine for leprosy, ... malaria,... diarrhea, etc.. That is how Ifá discovered that Òşanyìn had a gift for identifying the properties of plants. (he could also identify animals gifts and minerals, but plants was recognized first). Òşanyìn does not deal with everything connected to medicine, just herbalism and the like. He taught the uses of plants to the Yorùbá people and the òrìşà.

All òrìşà are medicine people (men & women).

Ifá is responsible for teaching the people the secret names of important animals (snakes included) and plants. Ifá knows all the secret names because he is the one who gave them out. When the plants and animals came down from heaven, Ifá met them at the crossroad known as orita (crossroad) àgbàràńsaala[14]. There he gave them their common and secret names. Talismans and incantations use the secret names. They are very powerful. [see Bonewits rule of the name]. It is necessary to combine Ifá's and Òşanyìn's knowledge. With the secret name of a thing, anything can come alive, be active. Baba Abimbólá equates this with sympathetic vibration. Everything is alive. Some things just need to be reminded that they are alive, and need to be woken up. We don't see the aliveness of things because we don't have the code / language to wake things up. sometimes it is just a name repeated the correct number of times. Sometimes it is more complex. It is doable for everything.

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Òşanyìn became famous. He became king of Èsìjé (modern Èsié[15]). [disAbled as king??? on Friday, not] He lived his last years in Èsìjé in the Northeast part of Yorùbáland. The title of the king of Èsìjé is Èlésìjé òwo[16] léji (person who commands sprinkles [drizzle] of rain). Òjò-ò-dun-lè (Òjò: rain/ ò: which does not/ dun: wet the ground / lè: very much). All kings of Èsìjé are descended from Òşanyìn.

Òşanyìn was king for many years. Every year the baba would promise children, money and respect. Each year they didn't come. After many years, Òşanyìn said if he promises the same thing, I will have him beheaded. When the diviner came, he said that Òşanyìn would have children, money and respect. Then he said don't kill me. This is the year. The three wives who told you this morning they had their periods will have children before the year is out. Òşanyìn decided not to kill him until the next year if the promises didn't happen, but before the end of the year, those three wives had children, he had a horse and a palace. If a person believes in Ifá and has patience, all predictions will come through.

Before the end of the most destructive and widespread slave trade in the 1890s and early 1900s, so many priests of Òşanyìn [Osayin?] were taken away that there are no authentic osayin in Yorùbáland today. of all the things that were lost, the knowledge of medicine was not lost. It was spread so widely, that despite the decimation of population, enough knowledge was left that they were able to re-create it. There is a department of the university called the Drug Research Department, which has many Western style PhDs and several medicine people, who together study the herbal medicine and look for its western 'active ingredients'. Yorùbá medicine depends not just on 'active ingredient' but also on the correct words to wake up the healing power. This involved secret names and secret rituals. All are being studied.

Most healers are not babalawos or priests. Some don't belong to anything. Some are Christian or Muslim, but use the old ways for healing because it 'won't work right'. If they don't include the secret names, incantations, and talismans.

The fact that the forests are going away make it very difficult for all the healers. One of the most commonly used medicines is ibó àgbìgbò[17]. This is made when a large bird (name?) nests in a tree. They find a large hole in a tree and build their nest in it. Then the male closes it with clay moistened with its saliva and feathers. It is closed up so that only the female's head and neck can reach out. The female and her eggs stay in the nest until the eggs have hatched and are ready to fly. Then the female breaks out of the nest. The medicine is made from the mix of clay, saliva and feathers that were used to seal the nest. As the forests diminish, the nesting sites also diminish. That puts a limit on available medicine, and the increased population, which led to the diminishing of the forests, needs it more. The animals and lizards used in medicine are also disappearing. They are being eaten or sold to Europeans. Dr. Abimbólá's brother is a medicine man and he often goes with baba so that he can ask what medicines they still have locally when all the people show up to meet the baba. That is because

15The small e has an accent below it as well as above. My font set doesn't have that.
16Both os of owo have accents underneath. My font set doesn't have it.
17The o in ibo has an accent underneath it as well as on top. My fonts don't have this.

his local supply is disappearing and different things disappear in different places. If a locale has something, he may be able to trade with things still available near him.

Ògùngun (?) –> Òògùn (?) –> gùn (long)

A babalowo is different from a medicine person. A babalowo heals using:

- divination
- Counseling
- ebo
- medicines and talismans

The babalowo's medicine does not rely on an 'active ingredient' to work. A medicine person uses the medicine without talismans or incantations. The diagnosis and the correct 'active ingredient' is what is important.

Most people have worms. These are at the base of most people's problems. Worms are called  Yorùbá word? (snake of the abdomen).

àyájó[18] - is what makes medicine work.
It is stronger than ofo.[19] Ofo is simple medical/magical incantations. Children can know and perform ofo.

**Random other notes from this lecture**

Dr. Abimbólá believes that there was an early university of medicine at Ifá There is no other way he can see the medical system being codified, researched, experimented with and disseminated. The fact that medicine people talk to each other over time is not enough for such a complete medical system.

Snakebite cannot effect anyone in Dr. Abimbólá's family.

There is a leaf called ewé iná- leaves of fire, which are on a shrub. They burn and leave blisters on contact. It burns, it is not like poison ivy in that.  Another plant is the poison ivy like èsìsì. It is said that a child who goes into a forest with much èsìsì returns very quickly.

It is said that nobody ever sees the bottom of the dried ocean, and nobody ever sees the root of the omo[20]-ní-gèdègédé. The omo-ní-gèdègédé is a vine which can have its root over a mile away from the vine you have in your hand.

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18The o has an accent below as well as above it. My font set doesn't have it.
19Both o's have accents under them. My font doesn't have that.
20Both os in omo have accents below them. My font set doesn't have it.

In Èsìjé, there used to be an open field that was covered with thousands of stone carvings. When people discovered the value of them as 'art' to the Europeans, they were taken away and sold. There are few left. Nobody knows how they came there. One folktale has it that they are stone carvers from the city of Èsìjé that were turned into stone. It was a powerful sight.

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**Topic: Women in Yorùbá Society**

Oşun was the only female in the original 17 òrìşà sent to create the earth from the waters by the High God Olódùmarè. They were sent together to create the forest for oro. They were sent to create the forest for opa[21]. They all came down together to create the roads (paths) between the towns.

The 16 male òrìşà ignored her. After a while being ignored except when the male òrìşà were hungry, Oşun became angry. She retreated from them and cast a spell. The spell made everything the male òrìşà did come out wrong. Nothing worked well. "Bitterness took over the world. Restlessness took over the streets." There was famine and pestilence. The 16 male òrìşà spoke together and decided to send Òrúnmilá up to heaven to ask Olódùmarè what had gone wrong.

[Òrúnmilá is the òrìşà most often going between earth and heaven. He goes when called by Olódùmarè to divine for him/her or to present appeals to her/him.]

Olódùmarè asked Òrúnmilá how many òrìşà had been sent for the task.

Òrúnmilá replied 16. Unless you count the woman, then it's 17.

Olódùmarè said "Why are you talking like this?" I sent 17 of you down to do this thing. Why are you ignoring Oşun?

Òrúnmilá said, she is a very nice woman, she feeds us well and takes care of us. She nourishes us so we are able to work. That is why she is in the house. We like her a lot.

Olódùmarè said, that is what you are doing wrong. She needs to be involved in everything you do. She is not just there for you, she has a reason to be there as well. You (the male òrìşà) need to kneel down and beg her to participate in creation with you. That is the only way things can work out correctly.

Òrúnmilá went back to the earth and told the other male òrìşà what Olódùmarè had said. They got down on their knees and begged her to forgive them. Oşun said "the damage has already been done. You all know that I am pregnant." [with Òrúnmilá's baby. they were married but did not live together. Originally, married people kept their own houses and spent time together at either residence as well as time alone.] "You all need to pray that when the fetus is born it will not be female. If it is female, war has come. If my baby is male, then you will all teach him everything and things can be all right again.

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21O has accent below it.

The male òrìşà went to Obàtálá. Obàtálá is the only òrìşà who has both àbá, the power to generate ideas, and àşe, the power to make things happen. When these two powers are used together, they add up to a new power, called awò. Awò allows the wielder to see anything he wants to see. The wielder becomes a seer. Obàtálá used his awò to look into Oşun's womb. He told the rest that the fetus was female and they became worried. Obàtálá said not to worry and used his àbá and àşe to change the fetus to a male. He used his àbá to generate the how and what he wanted, then chanted incantations to his àşe to make it so.

The child was born male, and was named Òşętùúrá. He became very powerful. If Òşętùúrá touches a person, that person will be well.

The odù representing him is

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    ||    ||
    |      |
    |     ||
òtúrá   óşé
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[The Yorùbá word for glasses is the same word, awò, since it allows people who could not see to see. At one time all of Obàtálá's priests (♂ & ♀) had a form of awò and were seers]

Baba Wáňdé Abímbólá[22] believes that this myth shows a historical change in the role/place of women in Yorùbá culture. Early on, the role of women was extremely limited, as it is in much of Northern Africa, and as it was in the European and Middle Eastern cultures with which Northern African states were familiar. There was an event, or series of revolutions/events, which caused women to be included in every aspect of the culture. There is no part of Yorùbán society that does not include women at this time, or within historical knowledge.

It is said that the power behind Şango is Oya. "Without Oya, what can Şango do?"

In Western culture, women are steered towards one option. A woman either has a career OR a family. In Yorùbá, they do not understand why a woman cannot have both. If a man can do something, of course a woman can also. [I note that the women come home from work and cook and clean. It is not as equal as he thinks. He finds it ludicrous for a man to wash the dishes or to make dinner, even if he gets home from work first. A man should "be fully a man" , pay the mortgage, pay to feed his family and so on. Housework appears to fully devolve onto the wife.]

A woman can be rich (like Olokun, under the Atlantic), be a warrior, an emperor, priest and parent. There

22The o has an accent below it also. My font set does not have it.

are things a woman can be involved in but a man cannot. A man cannot sell foodstuffs at the market. A man cannot be àjé. Men do not hold the wealth. There are no things men can be involved in that a woman has no part of. Even the Egúngún societies, male centric have a place for women within the mysteries. Although only men dress in the Egúngún costumes and dance, there is a woman, the Iya aga, who knows the secrets, dresses the Egúngún and helps cleanse the town before the dancers. Iya aga are particular women, not all women, but there needs to be a female presence to make the magic work. An iya aga is a woman who was born holding onto the umbilical cord.

Women in Africa are powerful. When menfolk look at a woman they are torn between two things. One is the wife/mother/lover ideal, the second is the mystery. Any woman may be àjé. Since you can never know who is àjé, the husbands must respect their wives. If said wives are àjé, they could may life unbearable for the disrespectful spouse. In Yorùbá, only women can be part of the society of àjé. Men cannot be part of it. Women hold the money. Women rule the marketplace. Women can work just for individual gain, not the family if they so choose. They can choose to loan money to their husbands or not.

Women are a strong part in the religion of Yorùbá. The priesthood of any òrìşa has a majority being female. The only exception to this is the babalowo, the diviners, where women are in the minority. This is because it is a hardship for women to complete the training. A woman cannot marry until she has been initiated. That means she will either marry very late (25 - 35 years old) or marry the master babalowo, which she would do before training starts.

Most trained female babalowo married a male babalowo. [except in the diaspora, where, due to Catholic influence, women cannot be babalowo.] In order to be a babalowo, you must train with and live with a master for 10 to 15 years. The only way to do this as a woman is to marry. Even if the baba you are under is female, she is married to a male baba, and you are likely to be. If you start your training as a child, the time frame goes up to 20 to 25 years. That is at least partly because you need to be taught more things. There are over 5000 verses of Ifá These must be learned by heart. The indigenous medicine is also complex, with chants and invocations as well as a main ingredient (active ingredient) which needs to be harvested/acquired in a precise way. In addition to this, a babalowo needs to know by heart all the rituals and how to make each of hundreds of kinds of ebo/sacrifices.

If a female child has a divination stating that she should be initiated, a farther divination is done to see which babalowo will marry and train her. She would then marry the babalowo at about age 5 - 10. The marriage is not consummated until the girl becomes a woman, if then. [see divorce section]

Most leaders of Condomble (in Brazil and Trinidad) are female. They were brought direct from Africa.

The statement that African men are in such straights because they have been traumatized by the experience of chattel slavery and the destruction inherent in that institution begs the question, “What about women?” Weren’t they equally, or more traumatized? Men rarely had to deal with the act of rape, let alone on-going gang rape as experienced by black women. Why are they ‘of course’ stronger spiritually and mentally than black men? Maybe because the women brought with them from Africa the idea that you could be in a situation you might not like (polygamy) and still be stronger and smarter and more powerful than the men around you. They just transferred that attitude to the white “masters”. [Baba’s interpretation, passed through my white female mind]

Polygamy makes women powerful. Within a population topping a million people, you can’t count over 1000 people of marriageable age who are not married.

It is forbidden for a man to divorce a woman. Women can go, can divorce their husband at any time. [Baba said if not, it is legalized slavery]. Judges in Nigeria, especially Yorùbá judges, will not send a woman out onto the street. If they could, men would throw out women with whom they had become bored when a fresh young thing came along that he wanted to make primary wife. A woman who has borne and raised a man’s children is still his wife and must be supported, even if he takes a new 15 year old spouse. Women suffer in monogamy because they always have to do all the work around the house with no help. Women in polygamous relationships always have someone close by to mind the children or fix dinner if they are going to be late home from work. The man pays the rent, food and school fees. The woman can loan him money to do these if she wants to, but it is a male responsibility. An extended family also keeps down wife beating and the like. The family, other wives or their families, the assailant’s brothers, uncles, grandfathers, will beat a wife beater until he stops or goes away. Then the rest of the family cares for those left behind in case of abandonment. Unless there is a basic assumption (solid base of theory and practice of) equality of duties and genders, abuse of women can and does happen. The extended family must step in the enforce that equality. The community also can and does step in to settle “domestic violence” cases.

The Western society, especially in the USA is a society where individualism has gone mad. We need community, not just self, or not just family.

Oya and Şango are the protectors of Egúngún.