

# BAYREUTH

GEORGE OLÚŞQLÁ AJÍBÁDÉ

NEGOTIATING PERFORMANCE:  
ÒŞUN IN THE VERBAL AND VISUAL  
METAPHORS

BAYREUTH AFRICAN STUDIES WORKING PAPERS  
(OCTOBER 2005)

*No. 4*

## Bayreuth African Studies Online

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IAS: Herbert Popp (Geschäftsführender Direktor)

SFB/FK 560: Dieter Neubert (Sprecher)

SFB/FK 560: Verena Kremling (Wissenschaftliche Koordination)



Adresse:

Universität Bayreuth

Institut für Afrikastudien & Kulturwissenschaftliches

Forschungskolleg (SFB/FK 560)

D-95440 Bayreuth

Telefon: 0921/55-2088

Fax: 0921/55-2085

# **NEGOTIATING PERFORMANCE: ÒŞUN IN THE VERBAL AND VISUAL METAPHORS**

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## **Dedication**

This piece is dedicated to the Lord God Almighty, who was, is and will continue to exist; and to my late beloved and affectionate father, Enock Oyatòògùn Ajíbádé, Alias *Bàbá Fine*.

## Acknowledgements

I give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. One must appreciate what he has received. One good turn deserves another. I give thanks to all who have taken part in the plight of getting this book written. My prayer for you is that God will uphold you in Jesus name.

My profound gratitude goes to the Humanities Collaborative Research Centre, Geschäftsstelle des SFB/FK560 of University of Bayreuth, Germany for awarding a scholarship to me to carry out my research on Òşun Òşogbo and for the funding of this book. Most especially, I give thanks to Prof. Peter Probst, his wife Dr. Bühler-Probst, Mrs Gertrud Ziegler and Dr. Verena Kremling who I worked with while enjoying the scholarship both in Nigeria and Germany. I also express my gratitude to Professor Dierk Lange of University of Bayreuth for his constructive criticism that sharpens my analytical skill.

I show appreciation to my PhD supervisors, Prof. Revd. Thomas Makanjuola Ilesanmi, Prof. Bade Ajuwon of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, and Prof. Peter Probst of Bayreuth University. I appreciate their efforts to make this research successful. I appreciate your love without dissimulation, the time spared to read my work and your constant advice and suggestions. I appreciate your patience and constant guidance. Ilesanmi, a straightforward-man-who-puts-Satan-to-shame, a good father filled with humility. Thanks are to you, a humble elder who is in friendship with younger ones. I really thank you; you are a father indeed. You will never be demoted in the place of honour that God has placed you.

Likewise, I want to appreciate my father and my teachers, a Professor in knowledge, Bade Ajuwon. A good father that is full of good characters. The one who inculcates knowledge and characters in a gentle way you are highly appreciated. I appreciate your guidance and suggestions; your own children will never lack mercy.

I appreciate Professor Akintunde Akinyemi and his wife. He who gives fish to eat has not solved the problem, but he who teaches how to fish. Everything you did for me is not in vain. The people who have not known you will serve you and your sun shall never go down. The mercy of the Lord shall never depart from you and your family. I appreciate all my Lecturers who have fed me with good knowledge. I say a big “Thank you”

to Prof. Lawrence Olufemi Adewole, Dr. James Bode Agbaje, Mr. Ayo Opefeyitimi, Dr. (Mrs) Janet Laide Sheba and Dr. Joshua Abiodun Ogunwale. I also appreciate my colleagues- Mr. Fabunmi Abidemi Felix and Mr. Segun Akeem Salawu for their encouragement. Also, I appreciate Mrs Adeola Faleye. You won't miss eternity in Jesus name. I show appreciation to my friends everywhere. Death will not part us in Jesus name.

I appreciate my Parents – Late Pa Enock Oyatoogun Ajibade and Mrs. Serah Adetohun Ajibade - thank you. I appreciate my In-law Elder. Enock Oyewole Afolabi and Deaconess Lydia Aróláké Afolabi for their support.

In the course of conducting this research, I benefited from the cooperation and knowledge of numerous respondents in Òṣogbo, Ipole-Ijesa and other places. I express appreciation to the following people: Chief Gabreal Oparanti, Mrs Adenle Omileye, Chief Osuntoogun, Late Prince Adenle, Priest Lekan Orisadare, Mr Adigun Ajani, Chief Olasupo Aremu, Chief Oyegbade Olatona, Chief Oriyomi and Mama, Adunni Iwinfunmike Olorisa- Susanne Wenger. They took time to present me with information that led to this book.

I thank the body of Christ especially Pastor Femi Koya, Pastor Tunde Gureje, Prof. Sola Akinrinade, and others. My special thanks to Mr. and Mrs Sola Asa, Mr and Mrs Yinka Okunade, Dr. and Mrs Lakin Adesina, Dr. and Mrs Sola Ajayi, Prof. & Prof. (Mrs) Aina, Prof and Mrs. Adebayo, Prof. and Mrs. Abiodun Adediran, Prof. Odebiyi, and to Dr. and Mrs. Kale Feyisetan who initiated me into the cult of sociological research. My thanks go to all others whom for the purpose of economy I cannot list here - God bless you.

My special thanks and appreciation goes to my sweetheart wife, “the chosen one among many” Àsàké Mobólájí Ajíbádé and to my children - Bísóla, Olayinka and Adekunle who I really denied so many things while writing this piece in a far-off land- Germany. God bless you. In conclusion, I want to turn it into a song of appreciation that:

My God! You are, yesterday, today and forever.

Thank you

As numerous as people are in the world, you still remember me.



# **Negotiating Performance: Òṣun in the Verbal and Visual Metaphors**

## **1. Introduction and Objectives**

### **1.1. Introduction**

This research studied the cult of Òṣun and Òṣogbo community from the hermeneutical, semiotic and feminist perspectives. The Yorùbá people number well over twenty-five million and constitute one of the strongest and largest groups in Africa. Òṣogbo is one of the popular Yorùbá towns in the southwest of Nigeria due to the influence of Òṣun religion and artistic works. Òṣun is the most popular cult in Òṣogbo and it exerts a tremendous impact on its people and on those of many other communities, including outside the shores of Nigeria. Thus, this thesis further examined the dialectics of the localization and globalisation of the Òṣun cult, while appreciating its transformation into a deity of international repute. In understanding the transformation of Òṣun cult into a deity of national and international repute, the study investigated the roles of motifs and visual arts that were found to be crucial to the transformation process.

The study relied extensively on the collection, documentation and analysis of fresh data sourced mostly through fieldwork but also through desk research. The field work involved oral collection and documentation of the poetry of Òṣun cult in the form of recitations, chants and songs. This phase also included pictorial documentation, most of which was done by the author. The oral data and photographic collection were supplemented with materials from existing literature on Òṣun with the aid of chosen theoretical framework.

In the analysis and interpretation of the data, the study identified Òṣun as a personification of Yorùbá women. This was evidenced in the materials collected, particularly the motifs and the visual arts, and equally discernible in the oral and other primary sources. Also, both the poetry and visual arts emerged as conceptual paradigms to project the power, prowess and image of Òṣun as a deity in the Yorùbá pantheon of Òrìṣà (deities).

The study has facilitated and enhanced our understanding of the faith, fate, philosophy, perceptions and attitudes of the adherents of Òṣun cult in relation to its impact on the people locally and globally. The study also

revealed the intricate interplay between the verbal (word) and the visual (image) domains. Finally, the study explicated the transformation of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo from a local to an international phenomenon, principally through the slave trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and also through the appreciation of Òṣun visual art by an ever-growing international audience.

Most scholars who have worked on Òṣun rely so much on the myths of Òṣun but, in this work, the verbal and the visual arts of Òṣun will be used as the paradigms to shed more light on Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo and its impact upon the masses both at the local and the global levels. It is expected that this research will:

- a) Broaden our perception and knowledge of the position, impact and place of women in Yorùbá philosophy.
- b) Show the beliefs and faith of Òṣun worshippers in Òṣogbo.
- c) Elucidate the impacts of foreigners on Òṣun cult and on the changes of Òṣun cult and grooves in Òṣogbo, and how the local people vitalise their own locality within the globe in the face of these transformations.
- d) Examine the intricate interplay between the verbal and the visual arts in Òṣun grooves and their impacts on Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo community.
- e) Show other research interest area on Òṣun cult.

The worship of deities is of paramount importance throughout Yorùbá land. An individual, clan, or community have its own Deity. Each of the deities has his or her poetry. This poetry could be in the form of songs, chants or recitals. A particular deity can also make use of these three categories of poetry. There is variation in the time and space of performance of these genres for each deity. But, these poetries are more often performed during the worship or festival of each deity.

Òṣun is one of the prominent deities in Yorùbá society with her own poetry either in the form of songs, chants or recitals. This work examines the interplay between the verbal and the visual art of Òṣun in order to know what they reveal about Òṣun - her origin, place and power among other deities in Yorùbá land.

Besides, Òṣun poetry and the visual art were analysed to have better understanding about the philosophy of Yorùbá about women empowerment, the faith and fate of Òṣun adherents as contained in the verbal and the visual arts of Òṣun.

This research examines the impact of Òṣun cult on the people of Òṣogbo community, the vicinity and the far away places. It also examines the impact of the foreigners on Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo as represented in Òṣun verbal and visual art. In conclusion, this research examines the relationship between the verbal and the visual art of Òṣun with regards to their impact on the cult in Òṣogbo community.

## 1.2. Scope

As earlier shown, the focus of this research is the examination of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo in the verbal and the visual arts. It examines the poetry of Òṣun Òṣogbo - contents, time of performance and its utility. Also, various meanings accrue to the visual art of Òṣun were examined. More specifically, this research examines:

- a) The origin of Òṣun as a Deity and her spread;
- b) Òṣun as the emancipator of Yorùbá women;
- c) The place and the position of Òṣun in Yorùbá pantheon;
- d) The impact of Òṣun on the people of the community;
- e) The intricate interplay between the visual and the verbal arts of Òṣun;
- f) The impact of Òṣun on the people at the global level, the impact of foreigners on Òṣun and the transformation of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo to a deity of an international repute; this has to do with the intersection of localization and globalisation tendencies.

## 1.3. Research Methodology

The nature of this research is more of fieldwork-experiential participation. I took part as observer in the daily, weekly and annual worships of this deity, especially in the studied community-Òṣogbo. I also visited some other communities in which there is the worship of Òṣun, such as Ìpólé-Ìjèsà, Ìgédè-Èkiti, Ìjèbú-jèsà, Ede, Ìwó, Ìpòndá, Àátan-Ìjàyè and Ìkòyí.<sup>1</sup> During the fieldwork, there was oral documentation of poetry from various

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<sup>1</sup> Òṣun is a popular deity in the whole of Yorùbá land and far beyond the shore. She is worshipped in many towns more than the places we visited for the purpose of this research.

informants that formed bulk of our analysis on the verbal art of Òṣun. This was done through structured questionnaire used for in-depth interviews to elicit information on the subject matter. There were documentations of photographs of visual arts in Òṣun shrine, coupled with questions on them to know what they symbolise.<sup>2</sup> The analysis and interpretation of data benefited from a conceptual understanding gotten in the field through experiential participation and through in-depth interviews with the devotees of Òṣun.

The existing works on Òṣun were used as secondary data to supplement the primary data. So, the existing related books, articles and videotapes that are relevant to the subject of this research were used. Relevant libraries were consulted both in Nigeria and Bayreuth, Germany that serve as a source of inspiration for the work with regards to the existing works and theoretical framework.

This section will be incomplete and might not be useful for other researchers on the similar or same theme without making mention of the problems encountered in the field. The first obstacle encountered was the difference in religions of the researcher and the respondents. Being a Christian, some informants were unable to differentiate religion from academic. But through patience and expression of deep concern for Òṣun religion this problem was solved.

The issue of demanding for huge amount of money by the informants was another disheartening problem. This problem was solved through persuasion of explaining the academic importance and historical relevance of this kind of research to the respondents though I usually give money to the respondents and offer some assistance as the needs arise.

There was internal subversion among the Òṣun cult functionaries at the time I was conducting research. There were two factions and this made it hard and difficult for me in getting information from the two sides. Making my good intention known to them with all patience and longsuffering, I was able to interact with the two parties and even serve as a factor of cohesion and unity between them. My two major field research assistants- Miss Tolulope and Mr Waheed also offered wonderful assistance to me as the 'daughter and son' of the soil.

Mention must be made of two car accidents I had during my trips to Òṣogbo and Ìpólé-Ìjèṣà. The accidents cost me a lot of money for the repair of my car for a fault that was not mine. Getting appropriate tonemarks for some Yorùbá words on the software was another terrible problem but due to

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<sup>2</sup> The dressings of the Òṣun worshippers differ from one location to the other both in Nigeria and abroad. But there are common motifs of this Deity wherever she is worshipped. Water, Ota and bead are common to the worshippers.

my interaction with some scholars in linguistics I was able to solve the problem to greater extent.

#### 1.4. Review of Related Literature

Many scholars have worked on Òṣun. Farrow (1926:65) is one of the earliest and foremost scholars who have worked in Yorùbá land and he has this to say on Òṣun that:

The second of Shango's three river-wives is Òṣun. This river rising in the Ijèṣà country, flows from the north, to the eastward of Ibadan into the lagoon...many of the Egbas worship Oshun and may be seen wearing her distinctive necklace of transparent amber-coloured beads.

Farrow's observation is highly significant to this study. He makes us to realise that the origin of Òṣun could be traced to Ìjèṣà land and that the worship of Òṣun is not limited to the place of origin alone, the worship has spread to places like Ìbàdàn and Ègbá land. Besides, he mentioned necklace of transparent amber-coloured beads as one of the symbols of identity for the adherents of Òṣun. This is important because this kind of necklace is part of the attire of Òṣun worshippers that distinguishes them from other priests and priestesses of other deities (3). Beier (1957<sup>b</sup>: 170) shows that:

Oshun is a Òrìṣà who is widely worshipped in Yorùbá country. She is the deity of the river bearing the same name and, according to tradition; she was the favourite of Sàngó, the god of thunder. Her most important sanctuaries are in Oshogbo, where her name is linked up with the foundation of the town and where she has become a sort of national deity.

This observation of Beier is fundamental especially to this research that focuses on the cult of Òṣun in Òṣogbo. His view that this goddess was the favourite of Sàngó's wives is in consonance with Farrow's view as contained in Yorùbá mythology. Furthermore, Beier shows in his work that there are three shrines of Òṣun in Òṣogbo that are of paramount importance during the annual Òṣun festival in this community<sup>3</sup>. The contribution of Beier as shown above is also revealing. He has shown to us that Òṣun is not a local deity, and that Òṣogbo as a community people see this goddess as their tutelary deity. Ogunbowale (1962:60-66) in his work proves that Òṣun is a river goddess, which is given a public worship at Òṣogbo. He stresses

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<sup>3</sup> There are more than three shrines of Òṣun in Òṣogbo but there are three major shrines that are regarded as the communal shrines.

further that many people believe that Òṣogbo is her origin from where they have taken it to various communities where the worship could be found today. He adds that many of the worship songs were sung in Ìjèṣà dialect. He explains how Òṣun is worshipped. At this juncture he says that Òṣun is worshipped in Abeokuta at Jíbóro River in Ijemo area, and that ritual is being performed at Kúgbà River in Ìtoko near Arégbàá. He concludes that:

...as they perform that ritual of Òṣun they will perform that of Obàtálá because, they believe that Òṣun is the wife of Obàtálá, and that anyone who wants the favour of the husband must win the favour of the wife. The elders also said that Òṣun is the daughter of Yemoja. They said that, Yemoja suffered from infertility before she begat Òṣun.  
(*Translation by Author*)

One can infer from Ògúnbowalé that Òṣun is a river goddess, and that she is a popular deity in Òṣogbo, even though she is worshipped in many other places. His work has also revealed that there are various myths about Òṣun, but he presents Òṣun as the daughter of Yemoja and at the same time the wife to Obàtálá.

Daramólá and Jéjé (1967:248-284) is another work on Òṣun. In their work they prove that Yemoja is the wife of Aginju and both bore a son called Òrùngan. This child committed incest with his mother and aimed at killing the mother. The mother in attempt at escaping from her child was running away and thereby fell on the ground when she was exhausted. Water began to gush out on the spot where she fell among which gave birth to river Òṣun. In their work they say, “These are the things that came out of Yemoja: Sea goddess, Ocean goddess, Dàda the goddess of leave and Òṣun goddess”. They stress further that; Òṣun, Oya and Qbà were co-wives to Sàngó. In their work, they say, “The myth has it that Sàngo was the son of Òrányàn and that Oya, Òṣun and Qbà were his wives. The only people who were following Sàngo are his wives in persons of: Oya, Òṣun and Qbà”  
(*Translation by Author*)

One can deduce from their work that Òṣun is the daughter of Yemoja, she has to do with river, and she is a co-wife with Qbà and Oya who are also river goddesses. The correlation of Qbà and Oya in their work to that of Ogunbowale (1962) is that Òṣun is a river goddess and she is the daughter of Yemoja. Gleason (1971-97) says, “Òshun has many moods. Although women all over Yorùbá land pray to her for children, she is strongest where she encircles her favourite town, Òṣogbo”.

It is a fact that Òṣun is popularised in Òṣogbo and she is a deity that women do seek for the treatment of their children even up till the present day. But, it is an overstatement, to say that women all over Yorùbá land pray to her for children. Likewise, we cannot say that Òṣogbo is her

favourite town but it is a town that popularises her worship. Òṣun is worshipped in many places and Òṣogbo is not even the source of Òṣun. Recently, they have started using the audio and visual media to make publicity of Òṣun Ìkòyí, a town near Ìkirè in Òṣun State besides other known places. In Gleason's work, it is evident that Òṣogbo indigenes attach much importance to Òṣun because; she is associated with their origin as a town. That is one of the reasons why she has become popularised and regarded as the civil religion in Òṣogbo.

Adeoye (1979:42-44) is the next available work on Òṣun. He holds a different view from the scholars before him. He says that Òṣun, Ọbà, Yemoja and Aasà were co-wives of Lágbònnà. He says that Òṣun had problem of infertility and went for Ifá divination where she was told to offer two hundred parrot feathers as sacrifice. She was able to get these parrot feathers from Lágbònnà who was a hunter. That was how she became his wife. Òṣun knows how to take adequate care of her husband and due to this she became her husband's favourite among other wives. Other wives were jealous of her and this made Òṣun to transform into a river with her numinous powers. When other wives saw what she did, they also transformed into rivers out of competition and all of them were deified.

Adeoye has shown that Òṣun is a river goddess, who was once a human being before she was deified. Also, she is a river goddess just like Ọbà and Yemoja. But, Adeoye does not agree that Òṣun is the daughter of Yemoja, instead he maintains the view that they were co-wives. There is another dimension to the myth about Òṣun. Thompson (1984: 79-83) says:

Divination literature tells us that Òshun was once married to Ifá but fell into a more passionate involvement with the fiery thunder god, who carried her into his vast brass palace, where she ruled with him, she bore him twins and accumulated, as wont to do, money and splendid things galore ... When she died, she took these things to the bottom of the river.

Thompson's presentation is also on mythical representation of Òṣun. He has shown in his work that Òṣun is a river goddess, who was once married to Ifá and Sàngó and before her deification. He added that Òṣun is a goddess of love, a witch and a beautiful lady. He pointed out in his work that Òṣun could be found in places like Hispanic, New York, Cuba, Havana and Bahia. Thompson's contribution on Òṣun is crucial to this work. The presentation that Òṣun is a deity in the Diasporas not only in Nigeria but also beyond the shore is plausible.

Another piece on Òṣun is that of Ladele, et al (1986:21-25). They hold the view that Òrişàalá gave birth to Yemoja and that Òṣun was born by Yemoja. They presented their myth that Yemoja was barren for a long

period, and this made her to go for Ifá divination. She was told by Ifá to go to a river regularly to collect concoction and that from the river her child will follow her home. She was visiting this river every five days in white apparel and with a clay pot to receive concoction. Small children who echo her songs whenever she sings usually follow her. After a while she became pregnant and gave birth to a child. They bathed the baby and they took care of her umbilical cord but they discovered that the umbilical cord has developed sore. They went for divination and odù Ifá that appeared to them on that day is called Òsé -Orógbè. They were told of the necessary ritual to perform and that they will go to the river every morning to collect concoction. That was how they gave Òsé -níbú-omi to this child as her name, which they abbreviated as Òṣun. They concluded by saying that, “That was how anyone who gets pregnant through Òṣun must worship Òṣun. After this, Òṣun married and she gave birth to Tinúubú” (p. 25). (*Translation by Author*).

Myth is also the basis of their work. They also hold the view that Yemoja gave birth to Òṣun and that Òṣun gave birth to Tinúubú, a river goddess in Yorùbá land. They failed to tell us how Òṣun became Òrìṣà. They did not tell us where Yemoja would be collecting concoction. Òsé -níbú-omi, which they say was the abbreviation of Òṣun, has no linguistic basis. Because, we can neither say that it was gotten from vowel elision nor from coalition of vowels. But, that name may be her cognomen. Virtually all scholars up to that time based their works on the myths and legends of Òṣun.

Ilésanmí (1985), (1986), (1989) and (1991) differs from the previous scholars in that he makes use of Òṣun literature in his own works. One can deduce from his works that Òṣun poetry is very popular among the women in Ijèsà land. He holds the view that even though Òṣun is very popular in Òṣogbo, she is not originated from there. He shows that Òṣun is worshipped in Olúpònnà, Ìpòndá, Ìkónífin, Ìràgbijí, Ìjèbú-jèsà and many other places. He contends that Òṣun is more of Èkìtì and Ìjèsà origin as earlier pointed by Farrow (1926:65). He shows that Òṣun is one of the cults or ritualised paediatric among the Yorùbá, who is also for the protection of Òṣogbo community. Ilésanmí (1991:45) has noted that:

This goddess is accorded ‘national’ honour at Òṣogbo during her annual festival, not only for her care over children, but also for the great protection she gave to the Òṣogbo community at the early stage of their settlement.

He uses the above to buttress the reason why Òṣun is popularised among the people of Òṣogbo. He then divides Òṣun songs into two. He said that:



The music of Òṣun is one of the external manifestations of the feelings of the devotees at any time and function connected with their deity. It can be divided into (a) the ritual songs; and (b) the festival or entertainment songs. (Ilesanmi, 1991: 47)

He argues that the ritual songs contain the beliefs of the adherents of Òṣun and their philosophy about life. The adherents use this kind of songs to express their fate. He adds that the festival songs or entertainment songs give room for people to partake in the worship that it contains many things about Òṣun. It is true that Òṣun song is one of the ways in which the adherents express their views about the relationship that exists between them and Òṣun. But, I think, that the meaning, the content, the place, the context of performance and their utility should be used as the basis for an all-embracing classification of Òṣun poetry. Also, it may be unfeasible or inappropriate separating festival songs from ritual songs. This is because ritual is part of the festival itself. Omoyajowo (1991:75) maintains that:

Yemoja (literally Yèyé-omọ-eja, mother of fishes) was also a female Yorùbá divinity representing water. The myth was that she had a good-for-nothing son who committed incest against her. The mother fled, and the wicked son pursued her until she fell backward as a result of exhaustion. Streams of water poured from her body and eventually united to form a lagoon. The deities that emanated from her include: Olósà (Lagoon goddess), Olókun (God of sea), Oya (goddess of River Niger), Òṣun (River Òṣun goddess), Oḃà (goddess of River Oḃà), Òriṣà Oko (fertility god) etc.

The work of Omoyajowo is also on the myth of Òṣun, which is not different from that of Farrow 1926:65 and that of Daramola and Jeje (1967:248).

Chinweizu (1997:3) also made a statement on Òṣun that “Òshun is female and the goddess of a river” This is not a different view from that of the previous scholars.

Jones (1997:70) is another work on Òṣun. She holds the view that Òṣun is the only Yorùbá goddess who descended from heaven. Though, she did not give example of how Òṣun is praised but she mentioned that she is praised when worshipped. Jones’ view is contrary to that of many scholars who believe that Òṣun is a deified deity. We cannot say that Òṣun is the only goddess who descended from heaven in Yorùbá land. Therefore, we cannot accept Jones’ summation wholeheartedly. Jones’ also base her own work on the myth of Òṣun though she made mention of Òṣun literature.

Another work on Òṣun is that of Badejo (1991 & 1996). The first being a journal article, is the representation of Òṣun in literature. The first is equally inspirational in that it has shed light on some qualities of Òṣun as presented

in literature. The second (1996) is a book on Òṣun, which is a development on her article of 1991. The first chapter of her book contains the oríkì of Òṣun in Yorùbá and English languages without its analysis. She refers to Òṣun as the one with beaded comb, the leader of witches, a powerful woman, beautiful and rich, and a dyer. In her second chapter, she examines the structure of Yorùbá deities and likened Yorùbá rituals to a form of drama. In the third chapter, she examines the position of Òṣun among the Yorùbá people-as a powerful woman, the leader of witches, and her role in the settlement of Òṣogbo and in divinatory system. The fourth chapter focuses on Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo, while in the fifth and sixth chapters she compared Òṣun festival with drama. Her main focus on this is the ritual aspect of Òṣun and the secular drama. The last chapter focuses on gender, power and feminism from African's perspectives as a theoretical paradigm. The book does not deal with analysis of Òṣun poetry. Her basis is mainly myth about Òṣun. Even the poetry she listed was not analysed, and she refuses to talk about the visual art of Òṣun, which is part of the focus of this research. The work is very commendable and eye opener to this work and others that might follow. Lawal (1996:14) says, "The priests of the river goddess Òṣun are distinguished by white attire, brass bangles (*kerewú idẹ*) and a brass fan (*abèbè idẹ*)".

His observation is accurate and informative even though there are other items, which could be used as emblems of identification for Òṣun priests such as beads and parrot feathers. He stresses further that the image of Òṣun as an epitome of fertility and generosity is reflected in the following invocation to her (p. 24).

His observation is right and it is good for a work like this. Because, he is calling our attention to the intricate interplay between image and speech acts, and what they stand for.

Ogungbile (1998) is another work on Òṣun. His main focus is the role of Òṣun as a communal deity of Òṣogbo as a factor of unity, because of her association with the settlement of Òṣogbo people. His observation is right as it shows Òṣun as the civil religion of the Òṣogbo people. This work is neither on the art work of Òṣun nor on the poetry.

Another work on Òṣun is Murphy & Sanford (ed) (2001), which contains the works of nineteen contributors on various dimensions of Òṣun as it were in Africa and the America. It is interesting to know that the main focus of this collected essays on Òṣun is well stated in the introductory parts of the book by Murphy and Sandford (ed) (2001:1) that:

The purpose of collecting the essays for this volume is not only to document the historical and cultural significance of Yorùbá traditions,

but also to emphasize their plural nature, their multivocality both in Africa and the Americas.

Hence, eleven out of the seventeen contributors focus their works on the presentations of Òṣun in various communities outside Africa. Two among them (Abiodun Rowland and Abimbola Wande) base their works on the Ifá's myth about Òṣun. Badejo's contribution focusses on how the authority of women is revealed in Òṣun discourse. Ogungbile's focus is on the use of *Éérìndínlógún* by Òṣun as a means of divination. Adepegba's focus is on Òṣun and brass, in which he expresses that brass is the symbol of Òṣun. The work of Olúpònnà is on Òṣun as the civil region of Òṣogbo community in relation to their kingship. The work of Sanford focuses on the use of water by the contemporary Nigerian Christian women. This collected essay is highly informative and helpful to this work in many regards. It reveals the diversity of aspects of Òṣun layered in any single tradition as well as the multiple traditions of Òṣun in Yòrubá land and off the shore. If we examine the various existing works on Òṣun, we will observe that majority of them focus on the myths of Òṣun, and description of Òṣun festival. It is Ilésanmí and Bádéjo who make use of Òṣun literature to an extent in their works. Nevertheless, the work of Ilésanmi focuses on Ijèṣà land, even though his analysis of Òṣun literature in Ijèṣà land is not all that deep, because his concern is the paediatric attribute of the deity in the literature. Therefore, it is highly essential to see the representations of Òṣun in the poetry of Òṣun in another community. Even though, Badejo did her work on Òṣun Òṣogbo, her main focus is neither on the verbal art of Òṣun nor on the visual art. There are many pots still left unfilled.

Therefore, there is no particular work seen that centres on the focus of this research - ÒṢUN ÒṢOGBO IN THE VERBAL AND THE VISUAL METAPHORS. That is why I focus this research on the negotiation of space between the visual and the verbal art of Òṣun Òṣogbo to contribute to our understanding of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo local community and her impact on the people at the global level especially the process of cultural syncretization evident in this religion with the aid of literary theories as the theoretical framework.

## **1.5. Theoretical Framework**

Theory could be defined as a rule or a particular method, which we employ as a yardstick to explain a particular art or a branch of culture. It could also be defined as instrument of value judgment for a particular thing in focus. The theories we have in mind for this work are: hermeneutics, semiotics and

feminism. There are various suggestions with regards to passing a value judgment on the examination of literary works. Some scholars even argued that it is of no use to apply theory to literary works (Eagleton 1983). But, from observation, in order to have a through understanding of a literary work, either oral or written, it is of great necessity for a critic to use literary theory or theories considered suitable for a particular literature he/she is working upon. We should bear it in our mind that any literary work analysed with the appropriate literary theory will be more invaluable than the one without the use of theory. Scholars have suggested various theories and their suggestions continue.

The nature of work dictates the literary theory (ies) suitable for its explanation. Without mincing words, the theories I consider suitable for this research are: hermeneutics, semiotics and feminism. Though, other theories may be applicable but these theories will be used to bring out the hidden things in the verbal and the visual arts that are peculiar to our subject. The language of poetry is dense and its meanings are hidden, full of allusions of things that happened mostly in the past. Hence, there is need for a critical appraisal of it to bring out those hidden facts.

### **1.5.1. Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics developed from phenomenology. The contention of phenomenology is that everything in the world does not exist independent of human beings. A philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1964) formed this theory. His view is that deep thought about things or object will create relationship between our thought and the object we watch. He even asserted that everything that is neither contained in our experience nor in our imagination must not be allowed in our mind. The main focus of this theory is to look for a way of having a deeper understanding about what we have in the world around us.

Hermeneutics emerged when he said that language does not give meaning to our thought and experience of a particular art. Husserl contends that it is our perception of an art and our thought that can give an adequate meaning to a particular literary work.

The position of language in their argument made Martin Heidegger (1962) to oppose them. Heidegger then said that language is the main thrust in order to give meaning to a literary work. He stressed further that, without language, a critic couldn't give any meaning to a literary work. His own view is that the literary work itself will give meanings to the critic. This view of Martin Heidegger could be regarded as Hermeneutical - phenomenology. At the inception of hermeneutics, it was only restricted to

the interpretation of religious texts. It is not quite long that they are using it for other texts. This is seen in Eagleton (1983:66) that:

The word hermeneutics was originally confined to the interpretation of sacred scripture; but during the 19<sup>th</sup> century it broadened its scope to encompass the problem of textual interpretation as a whole.

Eagleton shows that hermeneutic recognizes history in order to have better comprehension of a particular art in the society. Hermeneutics sees history as a living dialogue between present and future, and seeks patiently to remove obstacles to this endless mutual communication. (p. 66)

A scholar of this school of thought, Hans Georg Gadamer (1960) explained the objectives of these critics. There were questions they raised which they wanted answer to them. One, can any literary work from a completely different culture from that of a critic working on it be understood by him? Can a critic working on it without employing his thought and experience in addition understand the work? Their focus is answer to these questions. This theory purports that the meaning of a text cannot be found in a single place, and then it is the duty of the critic to gather them together and bring them out. This implies that without a prior understanding of the cultural background of a particular literature, a critic cannot have better understanding of such literature. Also, the meaning of a particular literature cannot go beyond the experience, language and the culture where such literature has emerged.

Therefore, these critics have gotten answers to their questions. Hermeneutics that started as a theory of verbal art has transcend this and has become a tool for the analysis of the visual art Davey (1999:4-5) maintains that:

The history of hermeneutics may be divided into three distinct phases. Prior to the late eighteenth century, hermeneutics was primarily concerned with matters of biblical and theological interpretation... Hermeneutics entered its second phase when Scheiercher and Wilhelm Dilthey guided it towards a universal methods of cultural and social understanding ... the third and most contemporary phase of hermeneutics concerns the existential hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger and the closely related philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer...Gadamer becomes intensely preoccupied with understanding how that historical and cultural substantiality makes itself visible in an art work.

This is establishing the fact that hermeneutics is useful for the interpretation of both image and speech acts. Hence, this theory holds the view that both

the verbal and the visual arts are important means of communication in human society.

This theory is useful for the interpretation of religious texts. Since we know that the focus of this work is the study of verbal and visual art of Òşun, which are religious, hence the theory is useful for the work. This is because the verbal and the visual arts are regarded as texts. This theory allows the critic to make use of his experience, perception and knowledge to interpret a particular art. We can therefore use our experience, perception and knowledge to interpret some of the poetry and the visual art without sweat. Also, our experience, knowledge and perception can enhance the responses of our respondents.

Thirdly, this theory purports that the meanings of a particular work of art cannot be seen in a single place. Poetry is just like that; we will need to gather them together to bring out their meanings. Apart from this, two chanters can have different meanings for the same or similar poetry; the critic will use his own knowledge and understanding of the poetry to bring out the fact.

Fourthly, this theory holds the view that an interpretation that will be given by a critic cannot go beyond the community that such literature originates. This will afford us the opportunity to use our understanding of Yorùbá culture and community to interpret the verbal and the visual arts of Òşun.

Fifthly, this theory holds that everything existing in the world is not independent of human being. The issue of religion has to do with human being in the society and religion cannot exist without the adherents. Therefore, this theory will be useful to explain the impact of Òşun on the people as a product of the society. This usefulness has prompted its use for the interpretation of this work.

### **1.5.2. Semiotics**

This theory initially has linguistics as its basis but it has become a literary theory (Hawthorne 1989:75). The belief of the critics in this school of thought is that any sign/symbol is a means of communication. Among the critics of this theory are: Pierce C.S. from America, Saussure, Lekomcev, and Prokopovic etc. Eagleton (1983:100-101) has this to say about the origin of semiotics that:

The American founder of semiotics, the philosopher C.S. Pierce, distinguished between three basic kinds of sign. There was 'iconic', where the sign somehow resembled what it stood for (a photograph of a person, for example); the 'indexical' in which the sign is somehow

associated with what it is, a sign of (smoke with fire, spots with measles), and the 'symbolic' where as with Saussure the sign is only arbitrarily or conventionally linked with its referent. Semiotics takes up this and many other classifications: it distinguishes between 'denotation' (what the sign stands for) and 'connotation' (other signs associated with it); between codes (the rule-governed structures which produce meanings) and the messages transmitted by them...

From the above, it is evident that there are three types of signs - the iconic the indexical and the symbolic. A sign can have some resemblance of what it stood for; it can also be associated with what is stood for; and it can just be agreed upon conventionally to stand for something not related to it at all. There is different between the sign and the referent. What a particular sign is used for will help us to know, its meaning, usefulness and importance in the community. This means that, the moment the users of a particular sign see it, they can decode message(s) that it is passing to them. Apart from this, if a particular sign is strange to someone, he/she needs to ask for what it stands for in order to know what it means.

Frye et al (1957) argue that in the knowledge of the society, sociology and linguistics; semiotics encompasses words like kinesics, sighing, musical ensembles, pictures and other means of communication. Everything mentioned above is fitting into Yorùbá oral literature, which is a performance art, and at the same time visual in nature.

What we hear, the dressing of the poets, place/context of performance, mode of performance, extra textual materials and instrument of performance are all different types of signs. This is because; all of them are means of communication with deeper meanings in Yorùbá cosmology (Opefeyitimi 1997:44).

His observation is worthwhile. Most of the materials or images associated with Yorùbá deities are meaningful and they are means of communication, especially to the adherents of such deities. In other words, semiotics purports that some objects are not ordinary, but have meanings to the users. Leslie White (1949:9:25) notes that:

A symbol may be defined as a thing the value or meaning of which is bestowed upon it by those who use it. I say 'thing' because a symbol may have any kind of physical form: it may have the form of a material object, a colour, a sound, an odour, a motion of an object, a taste.

The above shows that symbolic representation may be in different forms depending on what they are meant for. Hence, symbol, sign or image is a means of communication.

Banks and Murphy (1997:3) say that, “The visual is such an important component and perceptual processes that it can be relevant to all areas of anthropology”.

The above is of paramount importance especially to this work. This is because it establishes the fact that the visual art is an important aspect of culture of a particular society, which on their own has their essence that is what they reveal about the society where they exist. This connotes that the visual art in all forms are means of communication in space and time as well. Bakewell (1998:30) on her own links images to words (verbal art) and maintains that:

Images, much like words are hardly marginal and superfluous to human communication. On the contrary, they can flatter, promote, benefit, and better people, just as words can. They can also, fight, accuse, denounce, and harm those same people. Far from being ineffective and inert, images are powerful tools. We employ them regularly to do many things: to make promises, issue commands, or simply state. We use them to establish group solidarity, give visibility to our opinions, and create boundaries around others and ourselves.

It is clearly evident from Bakewell’s above that the verbal and the visual arts are kinds of signs that are interrelated in that both can make things happens as means of communication. In her words, she stresses further that:

Image acts are like speech acts, but visible. When exhibited or exposed, things happen, what, how, and why? Many scholars are turning to these questions, for image acts do something, with force and for a reason so much that an analysis of any one-speech act would suffer without serious attention to its image correlatives and visual context. Therefore, a proper theory of speech acts should incorporate images, in the same way that a proper theory of image acts should incorporate languages. These two systems of communication, as different as they are in practice, as separate and apart they often seem, are, in fact, in cahoots. (Ibid. p. 30)

Besides the fact that the verbal and the visual arts are signs, incorporation of both will pave way for a thorough understanding of the society or community that they are found. Whatever the words (the verbal art) cannot reveal, the visual art (images) will do. Mitchell (1986:9) while writing about images opines that:

Images are not just a particular kind of sign, but something like an actor on the historical stage, a presence or character endowed with legendary status, a history that parallels and participates in the stories we tell ourselves about our own evolution from creatures “made in the



image” of a creator, to creatures who make themselves and their world in their own image.

From Mitchell’s position above, we can see that the act of seeing of images could be regarded as a performance. In other words, it is a means of communication that takes place in time and space. Images like words are rooted in the culture of each society that they are found and are full of historical, legendary and mythical events in regards to that immediate environment or their society at large. This then connotes that application of semiotics to this work in connection with other literary theories will bring an all-embracing and all encompassing interpretation of data (results).

It is hoped that semiotics will every question that hermeneutics cannot answer in this work. Secondly, this theory shows that signs, symbols and images have deeper meanings and functions in the society that they are found. If we examine the court of Òşun in Òşogbo, there are signs, symbols and images, in which the application of this theory will help to decipher their layered meanings, history and relevance to the vitality of the community.

Thirdly, this theory will help our understanding of changes and transformation of Òşun cult in Òşogbo. It helps to understand how new cultural phenomena arise from the elements of disparate origin due to the global influence in time perspective. This is correlated to the observation of Hawthorne (1989:80) that:

A fundamental principle of semiotics is the transferability of signifiers: a new context can allow a fresh connection between signifier and signified. The possibilities of interpretation are interminable: even a signifier of such awesome power can, in a new context, be assigned a new signified...

In conclusion, there is need to make use of both theories that have to do with the verbal and the visual arts. This theory deals with both word (speech or verbal art) and the visual art (images, sign, pictures etc.). The understanding gained from its focus will serve as inspiration in our explanation of both the verbal and the visual arts.

### **1.5.3. Feminist Ideology**

This is also a literary theory that has its base in Europe and America before it was imported into Africa (Kolawole 1994 & 1997; Sheba 1996:55). This theory came into existence because; women thought that they were not placed rightly in the society. It is an attempt at challenging various inferiorisation policies and actions against women in the society. This made

women to seek for various means to liberate themselves. Tong (1989:1) says, “Feminist theory is not one, but many theories or perspectives and that each perspective attempts to describe women’s oppression, to explain its causes and consequences and to prescribe strategies for women’s liberation”.

This is to show that feminism has to do with various means whereby women are employing to become liberated from their men. In view of Tong’s assertion, women are inferior and there is need for them to be freed, so that they can be what are expected of them in the society. Milton (1989:135) who is a Marxist and a feminist holds similar view that:

Feminists perceive women as in the position of a social class, exploited by patriarchy at all levels (economic, political, ideological). Some feminists include Marxist strand in their explanation of women’s oppression.

Milton’s contention is that patriarchy is the basic cause of women’s oppression in the society, and that some feminists are also Marxists who believe in the equality of human gender and ethnic. Some hold the view that women inferiorisation is not universal but that it is peculiar to America and Europe. But, Omóyajowó (1991:73) is of the view that it is a global phenomenon when he says:

Generally and globally, the superiority of men over women has always been taken for granted. Women themselves seem to have internalised this image of female inferiority (a situation in which I have seen the women’s liberation or feminist movements as no more than apologetic) and have therefore somehow taken male domination as the natural order.

Omóyajowó establishes the fact that superiority of men over women has started for a very long period that women have been allowing since. Not only this, the issue is a global issues not just that of a particular locality. Schuler, et al (1992:16) hold similar view but in a different approach. They argue that:

Since the causes of women’s inferior status and unequal gender relations are deeply rooted in history, religion, culture, in the psychology of the self, in laws and legal systems, and in political institutions and social attitudes, if the status and material conditions of women’s lives is to change at all, the solutions must penetrate just as deeply.

Schuler et al are establishing the fact that women are inferiorated in every sphere of the societal institutions from a long time which has penetrated

deeply. Therefore, every effort to negate these inferiorisation must be deeply as well. This idea is corroborated by another Feminist, Grimke (1837:10) that:

All history attests that man has subjugated women to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all to debase and enslave her minds...

Grimke's position is that instead of men to see complementary virtues embedded in men and women, men have always been oppressing the women folk for their selfish purposes. Not only this, it was observed that in everything, women are inferiorated.

Another contention about feminist ideology is that the images or representations of women in literature is obnoxious and demeaning the reputation of female gender. Kingsley and Lucky (1989:141) say that, "Feminists wanted to object to the ways in which gender was represented in literature". This portends that literature that is a product of the society is used to demean woman.

Apart from the representation of women in literature the feminists are curious to know the role of women in the writing of literature. They want to know the difference in male and female literature. Bradstreet and Fleur (1989:146) say:

Is there a 'women's' language? Do women write differently from men as a result of biological, experiential or cultural difference? Women have different bodies, different physical experiences (childbirth, menstruation), and different role models. Do these differences produce a distinctively gendered discourse? It must be said immediately that the domination of literary culture by men has meant that, historically, many women have written within the constraints of patriarchy (literally the "rule of the father").

Bradstreet and Fleur show that men's oppression over women cuts across every area in the society, to the point that women were subjected to patriarchal ideologies even in their literary works. In short, women feel that they are oppressed and they are seeking liberation. The summary of feminist ideology is as follows:

- A change in bad position that the society, culture, history, politics and economy have placed women
- Women should not be denied their rights
- Image of women in literature is unfair

- Women's writings are patriarchal

Therefore, they want a change in which men and women will be equal. Men should see women as creatures like themselves who have important roles to play in every sphere in the society.

It is quite amazing that part of this feminist's movement do not believe that women need to fight for liberation especially in Africa. This is because women's position varies and that there are differences among communities and ethnic groups. They believe that African communities are different from that of American and European where this theory originated.

Humm (1992:122) makes a corroborating statement that:

Black feminism has a different relationship to dominating social policies than that white feminism. For example, a black woman's family and labour market experience might shape her economic equality but also and often, the family might be a source of succour and collective support.

Maggi Humm is of the opinion that feminist ideology in Africa is different from that of America and Europe. This is because; the role of African women in economy is different from that of America and Europe. Kolawole (1997:11) cited Ama Ata Aido's speech that, "Feminism, you know how we feel about that embarrassing western philosophy? The destroyer of homes imported mainly from America to ruin African homes".

This buttresses the fact that American feminism is not appropriate for African women. One could be tempted by Aido's comment to say that African women do not need feminism at all. But, Kolawole (1997:10) opines that:

To agree that African women do not need liberation is to present a false picture of them, an illusion that emerges from over-romantism. All over the continent, there are areas of women's marginalization that call for a re-ordering of the social order, and African women have peculiar needs in this area.

From Kolawole's perspective, even though American society is different from that of African, still there are areas whereby African women need liberation. African women need to agitate for their rights in the society. This view gave birth to another concept out of feminist ideology that is called WOMANISM or Womanist Ideology. This they coined in their attempt at getting a suitable feminist ideology for African women.

Hence, Kolawole (1997:10) goes further to define Womanism thus, "To African, Womanism is the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval, and self-assertion in positive cultural ways". She opines that every agitation

of women for their rights must be in consonance with the culture of the society. Hudson-Weems (1993:22)'s view of Womanism is that:

African Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desire of African women.

She is of the same view with Kolawole, that even though African women need to fight for their rights in the society but their emancipation must not destroy the cultural etiquette in their societies.

Feminism gave rise to Womanism in African societies. This prompted African feminists to evaluate the position of African women in the society - in religions, politics, economy, domestics, health care, and their roles in oral genres. A critical examination of the latter will show to us that, the role of women in oral genre in Africa, especially among the Yorùbá cannot be underestimated. Women are the patriots of most oral genre in Yorùbá land. They even have cult that is more powerful than that of men. (Ilesanmi 1989:92).

Kolawole (1997:74) states that, "A plethora of female genres exist among the Yorùbá. These include: obitun songs, olori songs, Aremo songs, Ago-oka, Gèlèdè, olele and Alámò songs".

This is revealing that women's role in literature especially in Yorùbá community is vast. Apart from the fact that they are the main composers and carriers of these genres, they use oral genres as strong weapons of self-assertion and emancipation. That is why Kolawole puts forth that; "These oral genres are manifestations of collective women's voices, dynamic group consciousness and a tool of eliciting positive influence on the society (p. 76)"

The summation of Womanist ideology is:

- Women should have equal authority with men,
- Women should not be denied their rights,
- Women should play significant roles in the society, in religion, politics, and economy and in oral genres as a product of the society.

It is evident that this theory will be useful for the verbal and the visual art of Òṣun who happens to be a woman.

This theory is useful for gender-related work, as we've known that part of the objectives of this research is to examine the role, the position and the place of Yorùbá women in the verbal and the visual arts of Òṣun, this theory is therefore appropriate. This theory helps the critic to make a value judgement on the representations of women in the verbal and visual art of

Òṣun as it were in Yorùbá cosmology. Apart from these, the perception and the view of cultural values are of paramount importance. These theories are sociological; therefore, they will help us to have better understanding about Yorùbá perception of their society and everything in their cosmology.

## 2. Òṣogbo Community and Òṣun Cult

Òṣogbo is the capital of Òṣun state of Nigeria, is located between Ibòkun, Ìkìrun, Ede and Àkódá. It can be found on latitude 7<sup>0</sup> and longitude 4.50<sup>0</sup> east. It is a worthwhile task to enumerate the founding history on myth of Òṣogbo before we delve into Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo. According to oral and secondary sources, there are at last four historical accounts of the origin of Òṣogbo community.

The first account has it that, there was struggle over the succession to the throne of Ibòkun that made one of the princes, Qwátè to migrate to another settlement. When they left Ibòkun, he was accompanied by his lovers both males and females to found Ìpólé-Òmu.<sup>4</sup> That was how Qwátè became the first king of Ìpólé-Òmu. Not quite long after their settlement at Ìpólé, they were faced with scarcity of water, which made them to consult Ifá to have a clue to their problem. Ifá told Qwátè to move yonder in order to get water, but Qwátè refused to leave. When Timéhin and Qláróyè who are the eldest children of Qwátè saw that their father was not ready to leave Ìpólé-Òmu, they decided to source for water to enhance their settlement. The whole place was a very thick forest at that time, even though it meant nothing to Timéhin who was a brave hunter. Ìdinlèkè was the Odù Ifá that appeared to them on that day. In their adventure, they met with Òròkí<sup>5</sup> who was a river

<sup>4</sup> This Ìpólé is located in Ìjèsà land not in Èkìtì land as Badejo (1991:96) put it that it is a Èkìtì town near Ìkògòsì. The Ìpólé in Èkìtì is called Ìpólé Ìlórò that was formerly Ìpólé-Àpá before it was changed. They migrated to the current site from Ìpólé-Ìjèsà. The king of Ìpólé-Ìjèsà gave this information to us in the year 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Information we got from Mr. Yekeen is that Òròkí is a female deity like Òṣun. She told Timéhin and Láróyè about Òkánlà water behind Àtáója's palace in Òṣogbo. It was relayed that she was also a witch, who accommodated Òṣun in Òṣogbo while coming from Ìgèdè-Èkìtì. Beside this, the very person told us that she (Òròkí) was the one who told Láróyè and Timéhin on what to do to appease to Òṣun. But, she doesn't like fame as in "we don't proclaim what is already proclaimed - *A kii fòkiki pòkiki*". This is contrary to Farotimi D.O. (1990:31) idea that:

The rulers were natural philosopher and thinker who always take adequate steps before embarking upon any actions, and decisions were never regretted. This was why people referred to Òṣogbo as a town where people think deeply before taking any decision, which is said in Yorùbá language as "Ìlú" tí wón gbé ñ rò ó kí á tó şe é" simply "ìlú òròkí"

Our view is also contrary to Badejo (1996:34) who says, "Òròkí refers to a famous woman probably from Òṣogbo. It may be the name of a former Òṣun priestess".

goddess. She told them about the water of Òkánlà<sup>6</sup> that they should be drinking it. They departed from Òròkí and continued their journey. That was how they met a stream of water and they decided to pitch a tent at its bank. This is where they called Ohùntótó after the name of Ọláròóyè's mother. Later on, the water there also dried up and they continue their quest for water. At this time Ọláròóyè was given the administrative power to coordinate the people. Because, his brother, Timéhin had no time for such because he was a hunter. So, Ọláròóyè sent Timéhin and some brave hunters to search for water. In their adventure, Timéhin shot an elephant during child labour and he brought its head to his Ògún shrine in the town. This is seen in the oríkì of Òşogbo that, they are the offspring of the one who brought elephant to know Òşogbo town. They make allusions to the historic elephant killed by Timéhin. As they journey forward, they met with Òsanyìn,<sup>7</sup> a powerful deity engaged in a serious battle. But in the end Òsanyìn assisted Timéhin and other hunters by giving them sixteen points lamp (Àtùpà Olójúmerìndínlógún) as a source of power to them. He then commanded them to observe its lighting yearly. From what we can see in the annual festival of Òşun Òşogbo, a whole day is dedicated to the ritual lighting of the sixteen points lamp of Òsanyìn. The importance of this sixteen points lamp of Òsanyìn is eulogized in the Oríkì of Òşogbo people thus:

Off spring of sixteen points lamp.  
Which shines in Òròkí Ilé  
If it shines for the king  
It will shine for Òşun  
If it shines for the Deity  
It will shine for the people (human beings)

It was after the time that Òsanyìn gave them this lamp that they met with Òşun River when they moved forward. As they got there, they decided to settle there. They were cutting a big tree there and as the tree fell into the river, they heard a voice saying, "*the wizards of the forest you have broken all my indigo pots!*"

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Likewise, we disagree to Wenger (1990) who holds the view that Òròkí is the junior sister of Òşun. If Òròkí is not supreme to Òşun, then, they must be equal in status as Deities.

<sup>6</sup> Òkánlà is spring water. It is at the back of Àtàoja's palace till today. They have even turned it into a well. The history reveals that, the water must be fetched and drank by each Àtàoja because it is regarded as a source of power to them. Apart from this, it is a cultural heritage to the kings of Òşogbo, which they must perform.

<sup>7</sup> Òsanyìn is a powerful deity in Yorùbá land. He is regarded as the most eminent deity who has adequate knowledge of herbal medicine and as the patron of all herbalists.



They were terrified by this voice, and they consulted Ifá on what to do. Ifá told them that; it is Òṣun the goddess of the river who is annoyed because of their intrusion in her empire/court. Besides, they have to move away from that arena before they can settle down. They sent for the king, Oláròyè that they have seen a good place to settle down where there is water.

When Oláròyè came, they had to offer sacrifice as were directed by Ifá. After they had offered the sacrifice, a big fish called Ikò<sup>8</sup> - the messenger of Òṣun came out and Oláròyè stretched his hands to receive this Ikò. The appearance of this fish symbolizes the acceptance and effectiveness of their sacrifice. From this scenario came the title of Òṣogbo king - Àtàója. This is coined from: *eni tó téwó gba eja* - *The person who stretched his hand to receive fish*. This is contracted to Àtàója till the present day.

Another account says Ajíbógun was a son to Qwá Ilésà. He decided to leave Ilé.,sà for another place that was not pleased to his father, Qwá. After much plea that Ajíbógun should not leave the town, he declined totally to his father's plea. He then left the town with Oláròyè, Timéhin, Ògidán, Talo and Sègilólá.<sup>9</sup> Their first settlement is called Ìpólé where they stayed for some time before the death of Ajíbógun. The death of Ajíbógun and scarcity of water in Ìpólé made them to leave the place. As they were preparing to leave the place, Qwá of Ilésà sent to them to return to Ilésà, but they declined. Timéhin and Ògidán who were hunters take the lead as they journey into the forest searching for water. As they were going they met a big river full of water. They decided to cut down a tree to mark the spot for easy identification when they would have brought the people from Ìpólé. But as the tree fell down into the river, they heard a mysterious voice saying:

Oṣó igbó, ẹ̀ pèlé - Wizards of the forest, well done!  
 Oṣó igbó, ẹ̀ rọ̀ra - Wizards of the forest, take it easy  
 Gbogbo ikòkò aró mi ni ẹ̀ ti fọ́ tán - You have broken all my  
 indigo pots!

This frightened them and they ran away. As they were going, they were called back by this voice. The voice revealed to them that she is Òṣun. She then told them to move away a bit for their settlement. She told them to be worshipping her annually. This is the annual Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo. When Ògidán and Timéhin went back to Qwá their people they heard that Oláròyè fought Òsanyin and that he had seized the sixteen points lamp

<sup>8</sup> *Ikò* means, a messenger or representative. Therefore, *Ikò Òṣun* refers to her messenger or representative. *Ikò Òṣun* is a big fish that used to appear in the past but can no longer appear because of transformation of Òṣun cult.

<sup>9</sup> (cf Bolanle Awe et al (1995:8)

from Òsanyìn. The lighting of this lamp is given a whole day during Òşun Òşogbo festival till today as pointed out in the first historical account.

The third account goes like this Ọwá Adéfokàn-balè-bí-àdàbà is the child of Ajíbógun, also known as Obòkun, the offspring of Ọlófin-ayé Odùduwà Adéfokànbàlè. He lived with his father in Ìlemùré, which is now called Ibòkun. After he departed from his father he founded Ìpólé-Òmu. Though Ọwá Adéfokànbàlè was the first Ọwá in Ìpólé-Òmu but there were about eight Ọwá who reigned there. The last Ọwá in Ìpólé was Ọláròoyè whose senior brother, Tíméhin was a great hunter; who was giving a tremendous support to the king. It was during the tenure of Ọláròoyè that they were facing scarcity of water in Ìpólé-Òmu. This crisis made Tíméhin, a brave hunter to begin the search for water in the forest.<sup>10</sup> In their quest for water, they met river Òşun, and decided to pitch a tent there before they could bring other people to the site. As they were cutting a tree, a big tree fell into the river and they heard a mysterious voice from inside the water that:

Oşo igbó, - Wizard of the forest!

È pèlé - Take it easy!

Gbogbo ikòkò aró mi ni è ti fó tán - You have broken all my indigo pots!

È sún sókè kí è lè gbèrú - Move yonder so that you can flourish!

È sún sókè kí è lè gbèrú - Move yonder so that you can flourish!

This happening made them to inquire of Ifá what they would do. Ifá told them to offer sacrifice to Òşun and they offered it. That was how they settled in that place till today.

The fourth account says that Òşogbo town is a heterogonous community. The account has it that people from Ìrẹşàadú, Ìrẹşàapa, Òbà, Ìliè and other towns and villages came to the present day Òşogbo as farmers and fishermen. Their men were farming and fishing, their wives were helping them to sell fish to the people of Ìjèsà, Ìpólé-Òmu. This group of people was called Gbónmi because their main occupation was fishing. They were not a town but a sparsely settlement (Wenger 1990:27). Their wives were also selling corn porridge (ègbo). This account says that the name Òşogbo was coined from Ìsò ègbo, that is, the place/spot where they sell ègbo. One of our informants, Mr. Yekeen even acclaimed: "*Gbónmi làgbà Òşogbo - Gbónmi is senior to Òşogbo*".

There are contradictions on the accounts of myth or history of Òşogbo. Rev. Samuel Johnson in his own account holds the view that it was during the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Aláàfin Kòrì was the king of Òyó Empire that Òşogbo was founded. During that time, some marauders from Ìjèsà land used to

<sup>10</sup> Ibid pp 8.

intercept people on their way to Apòmù market. It was these people who sought for the assistance of Aláàfin Òyó. The person sent by Aláàfin was a brave hunter, who founded the town of Èḍe. He is Timì of Èḍe. When Aláàfin of Òyó sent Timì, the Qwá of Ilésà also sent Àtàója to neutralise the power of Timì, and he also gave Àtàója the command to be worshipping Òṣun River (Samuel Johnson 1921:155-160).

It is a Herculean task to endorse any of the above narratives as the accepted account of Òṣogbo myth/history. At the same time, we cannot say that any of them is false. This is because, we have to accept the myths of each society as the truth as they were presented and accepted by the societies that have them (Joseph Miller 1980:1-60). I think that the ideal thing to do is to bring out the salient points/issues common to these narrations that have their basis in the contemporary society.

The first issue to point out is that Ìjèṣà people founded Òṣogbo community, even though people from towns like Ìrèsàadú, Ìrèsàapa, Òbà, and Ìliè have existed sparsely in the suburbs of that vicinity. We can then say that Òṣogbo is a conglomeration of Òyó and Ìjèṣà people.

Another issue we can bring out is that from every myth narrated above, Òṣun is linked up with the establishment of Òṣogbo town. In other words, we can say that it was Òṣun who christened Òṣogbo. Also, it is the relationship of Òṣun with the founders of Òṣogbo that brought out the title of their king Àtàója. Therefore, without Òṣun we cannot know Òṣogbo. This signifies that the historical foundation and the political authority of this community is linked up with Òṣun as a Deity.

In conclusion, the oríkì of all kings of Òṣogbo, past and present shows that Òṣogbo is related to both Ìjèṣà and Òyó communities. This means that the political power in Òṣogbo attests to this if we examine the oríkì of all kings of Òṣogbo beginning from the first to the incumbent Àtàója.

- Àtàója Oláròoyè Gbádewólú (1670-1760)
- Àtàója Sògbóḍeḍe (1760-1780)
- Àiná Sérébù (1780-1810)
- Àbógbé (1810-1812)
- Òbódegbéwá (1812-1815)
- Àtàója Láhànmi Òyípi (1815-1840)
- Àtàója Òjo Adió Òkéḡe (1840-1854)
- Àtàója Oládéjòbí Oládélé Mátànmi I (1854-1864)
- Àtàója Ògúnníkèé Dúrosinmi Fábòdé (1864-1891)
- Àtàója Bámigbólá Àláo (1891-1893).

- Àtàója Àjàyí Olósundé Oyètònà (1893-1903)
- Àtàója Àtándá Olúkéyè Olùgbèjà Mátànmí II (1903-1917)
- Àtàója Kòfowórolá Àjàdí Lájomọ Olátònà (1918-1920)
- Àtàója Àlàbí Kóláwọlé (1920-1933)
- Àtàója Samuel Oyèdòkun Àkàno Látònà II (1933-1943)
- Àtàója Samuel Adéléyẹ Adénlé I (1944-1975)
- Àtàója Olátidóyè Iyiọlá Oyèwálé Mátànmí II (1976 till date).

From these seventeen kings (including the regents) of Òṣogbo all of them have Ìjèsà descent either paternally or maternally. Even though the rulers of this community are linked to both Òyó and Ìjèsà, the collective oríkì-orílè of Òṣogbo people is also establishing the fact that the Ìjèsà people established Òṣogbo. Not only this Òṣogbo as a community cannot be separated from Òṣun religion.

The pertinent question we can then ask is that is it Òṣun alone who is the Deity in Òṣogbo? The answer to this is No. This prompts us to briefly mentioning some Deities we can find in Òṣogbo community.

## 2.2. The Calendar of Òṣogbo Traditional Festivals

Before the advent of Islam (1835-1840) and Christianity (1900) in Òṣogbo, the people of Òṣogbo have ways by which they commune with the divine essence (God). Research has shown that many of the deities that we can see in other Yorùbá towns and cities could be found in Òṣogbo. In fact, the importance of Òṣogbo with regard to Yorùbá traditional festival surpasses that of other towns in Yorùbá land. Although, the foreign religions are now pervading the nooks and the crannies of Yorùbá communities, still, these deities still exist. Instead of going into extinction, they are expanding yearly in a modern way though many have gone into moribund. These Deities have their adherents and times of their worship. We will have an overview of the deities in Òṣogbo.

From observation, there are differences in the motifs found in each of these shrines. In the three shrines, there are Òṣun pots with water inside them, parrot's feathers, gun and hand fan (made of bird's feathers), and Èdan. But at the palace shrine, there are images of other deities like: Şànpònná, Şàngó and Twins in addition to the aforementioned motifs. The main shrine is similar to this but the image of Şànpònná is not there.

**Orò:** This is an important deity in Òṣogbo. This festival takes place in the middle of the night. It is mainly a men cult. Scary sounds are made by

the worshippers to ward off bad spirits that are inimical to the peaceful existence of the town. The women are forbidden to see Orò. Any contravention is very disastrous. In the past, Orò is used for so many things. They use Orò to catch thieves and to perform various rituals in the town. Orò is worshipped in February in Òṣogbo. The king's priest in charge of Orò cult is called Alárè. He is in charge of the administration and organisation of the cult of Orò. Christianity and Islam are making the worship of Orò to go into extinction in Òṣogbo though there is resilience of the local origin.

**Egúngún:** Egúngún is also an important deity in Òṣogbo. In the past, Egúngún festival used to be celebrated bi-annually in Òṣogbo. The first festival used to be in March, which is called *Eégún-Òòlè*, while the second festival usually takes place between May and June. Even though, individual family has its own egúngún, Alágbaà is the chief Egúngún priest for the town in Òṣogbo. He is both the leader of the Egúngún cult group and the spokesperson that is responsible to the king in matters related to the cult. Egúngún is still celebrated in Òṣogbo till today. The original settlers and immigrants who are residing permanently in Òṣogbo brought many of the masquerades to Òṣogbo. It was gathered that King Lájomo married Talo, one of the daughters of the then Aláàfin of Òyó who later gave birth to three children-Adedunhan, Sògbódeḍe, and Òbóde. Aláàfin sent gifts to these children that includes a royal staff (*Òpagà-Òpàrigá*) and a masquerade, *Òpleba* by name. This masquerade has since become one the royal masquerades in Òṣogbo till today while Òpagà is carried before Àtáója as symbol of royalty (Falade, 2000: 165-166). In fact, Egúngún do feature during the Òṣun festivals, on the last day of the annual celebration. The name of this Egúngún is Òtònpòrò that belongs to the Kírí's compound. Its significance to the worship and the annual celebration of Òṣun shall be discussed in further chapter. Among the masquerades that feature in Òṣogbo are the following:

*Òtònpòrò* from Kírí's compound, *Òpeleba* from Lájomo's lineage, *Aníkúlápó* and *Doorogbo* from Olúóde Atúuku's compound, *Lóbaníkà*, *Sanga*, and *Eléènú* from Oluya's compound, *Gbógorù/Kógorù/Gógorù* from Balógun Àgòrò's compound, *Láyèwú* from the Olúóde's compound, *Aréweyò* from Olasigun's compound, and *Arénugbóngì* the royal masquerade from the Gbáèmú's compound.

**Ògún:** In Òṣogbo, Ògún festival is celebrated between April and May. Ògún festival is a prominent festival in Òṣogbo. A dog is slaughtered at the shrine of Ògún to sacrifice to this deity in addition to the favourites of Ògún such as roasted yam (Èsun iṣu), palm wine (Èmu), Kola nuts (Obì àbátá), Cold water (Omi tutu) and other materials as chosen by the deity through inquiry by the priest of this deity. Tíméhìn, one of the founders of Òṣogbo

introduced it from Ijèsà land. The festival still takes place in Òṣogbo till today. Ògún's main shrine in Òṣogbo is sited at Ojàaba-the king's market's square, very close to the king's palace, which is called Ìdí Ògún. Olúóde Atúrukú is the chief priest of Ògún worshippers in Òṣogbo.

**Oya:** Oya is among the deities in Òṣogbo. The Oya family worships her in May. The chief priest of Oya in Òṣogbo is called Baálè Oya. Though, Oya worship is not prominent today in Òṣogbo still, some of her adherents are still worshipping her.

**Sàngó:** Sàngó is among the deities they worship in Òṣogbo in the month of May. But, his worship has been adversely affected by the foreign religions Islam and Christianity. Baálè Sàngó is the chief priest of Sàngó in Òṣogbo. Probably Sàngó was imported from Òyó into Òṣogbo since Sàngó is a popular deity in Òyó (Beier 1956:10).

**Òṣun, Qbátálá, Òsanyìn, Eṣù, Òòṣàoko, Ifá and Ṣànpònná:** The reason why we've combined these deities together is that their festivals fall into the same period in Òṣogbo, between the month of July and August. Apart from this, they are interrelated and intermingle during their annual festival. Even though, their festivals come up almost the same time, it is evident that the worship of Òṣun is given prominence among them. Till today, the worship of Òṣun in Òṣogbo has not only engulfed many of these deities but has also marginalized them. This is because; many of these deities are trying to be placed within the context of Òṣun festival in a globally adapted religion. Òṣogbo. The worship of Òṣun is not limited to Òṣogbo locality alone it has become a national and international deity.

There is no way where we can talk about Òṣogbo as a community without talking about Òṣun. This is because both are inseparable. It is a common saying in Òṣogbo that "if there are millions and billions of Deities in Òṣogbo. Òròkí, Òṣun, the precious mother is their Leader". The place of honour and importance that the people of Òṣogbo locality attached to Òṣun has contributed to her international reputation among other Deities in Òṣogbo.

### 2.3.1. The Myth of Òṣun

The myths of Òṣun are numberless. It will be all right to enumerate some of them and bring out various important points. This will be preceded by Ifá's<sup>11</sup> myth on Òṣun. This is because, among the Yorùbá people, Ifá is regarded as the historian and archive of myths. Hence, he is praised thus:

A young person full of wisdom - Akéré-finú-ṣogbón

<sup>11</sup> We cannot enumerate all myths of Ifá on Òṣun in this work. This may be another book completely on Òṣun.

The eyewitness of predestination (creation) - Èlérí Ìpín  
 The historian of Ifè land - Òpitàn Ilè Ifè

In our interview with Babalola Ifátòògùn an Ifá priest in Ilobuu near Òṣogbo in 2000 and 2001, it has been shown that Ifá has said a lot about Òṣun. We will lay our hands on two of them. Odú Òṣéturá (Òṣé and Òtúá) that is a combination of two-major Odù says:

Kómú-n-kórò  
 The priest of Èwí of Adó,  
 Òrun-mú-dèdèdèè-kanlè.  
 The priest of Ìjèsà Township  
 The crab was inside the pond (river)  
 Marching on an extremely cold ground (soil)  
 Divination was made for the seventeen Odù  
 On the day of their plight from heaven into the world  
 They got into the world  
 They cleared Orò groove  
 They cleared Opa groove  
 They planned  
 They ignored Òṣun (in their planning)  
 They tried to govern the world  
 There was no peace and order in the world  
 They rose up instantly  
 And went to Olódùmarè  
 Olódùmarè welcomed them  
 And asked for the seventeenth of them  
 Olódùmarè said, “Why did you ignore her?  
 They said, “It was because she is a woman among us,”  
 Olódùmarè said:  
 Boríborí, the priest (diviner) of Ìrágberí,  
 Is an apprentice of Òṣun.  
 Ègbà, the priest (diviner) of Ìlukàn,  
 Is an apprentice of Òṣun  
 Àtòmù, their priest (diviner) in Ìkirè Ilé,  
 Is an apprentice of Òṣun These divinities (deities) are those  
 Who allow a person to trade,  
 Who allow a person to make gains  
 But, they don't allow the person to go home with the gains.  
 Olódùmarè said:  
 What you were ignorant of before.  
 Is what you have now known!

Go back into the world and involve Òṣun,  
in whatever you want to do.

Whatever you lay your hands upon.  
Will continue to prosper  
When they got into the world  
They begin to involve Òṣun in their planning  
And they begin to praise Òṣun as:  
The one who has shelf to store brass  
The one who lulls her children with brass  
My mother, the one who accepts coral beads for ritual  
Stone! Water! Èdan  
Àwùrà Olú Agbaja  
The Precious/Gracious Mother, Òṣun  
Ládékojú is the ever-present-one-in-decision-making,  
Òṣun, the Precious/Gracious Mother.

From the above Odù, Òṣun is seen as one of the Seventeen principal Divinities who descended into the world from heaven in Yorùbá mythology. Olódùmarè gave them the power (àṣe) to direct the affairs of the world. She is the only female among them and the one with àṣe-the power to make things happen. When Òṣun was neglected by other Divinities every effort of theirs proved futile. They did not succeed until they involved her in their decision-making. Apart from this Òṣun is a chief priestess, a diviner with apprentices such as Overcomer (Boríborí), Paralysis (Ègbà), Harm (Èṣe) and Able Captor (Atómú). These messengers could be regarded as members of her cult who make her wish come to pass. It is evident in this Odù Ifá that Òṣun is a river goddess, the one whose symbols are Ota (stone) and Èdan (the image of the Ògbóni cult). Òṣun is a powerful deity. Other deities succeeded in their activities only and when she was invited and involved. Another thing deducible from this Odù Ifá is that Òṣun is related to Ìjèṣà, Adó in Èkìtì, Írágberí, Ìlukàn and Ìkirè-Ilé.

Another Odù Ifá, Òdí Méjì, presents Òṣun thus:

The one who opens up her teeth,  
When an elegant woman wakes up,  
She opens up her teeth to her husband,  
The dirty person looks rough and sluggish when she wakes up  
The labour of an unmarried man is unreliable  
That of the person with children is fair,  
Divination was made for Oníjùmú-Nàkí  
Offspring of the-one-who-pounds-yam-with-bronze-mortar  
Oníjùmú-Nàkí was afflicted



And was restless  
 She was suffering from born-to-die children (àbíkú)  
 She was told to offer sacrifice  
 And she offered it.  
 After the offering  
 Things were turning good for her  
 She said, open up your teeth, open up your teeth,  
 When an elegant woman wakes up, she opens up her teeth to her  
 husband,  
 A dirty person wakes up and looks rough and sluggish.  
 The labour of an unmarried person is not reliable  
 That of the person with children is fair  
 Divination was made for Oníjùmú-Nàkí  
 The offspring of the one who uses bronze mortar to pound yam  
 She said, if it is my mother,  
 The one who washes bronze and washes children, Òtòòrò Èfòn.  
 Òṣun Èwùjí is what they worship there if one is born through  
 her.

This Odú Ifá reveals that Òṣun is the king of Ìjùmú town, where she is called Oníjùmú-Nàkí. Divination was made for her when she was suffering from infant mortality; She overcame her problem because of her obedience to offer the sacrifice. From there, she became a deified goddess who is blessing other people with children.

Apart from Odù Ifá, there are various myths about the personality of Òṣun as a wife to Ọbàtálá (Ògúnbòwálé 1962:6). Another myth states that she is the wife of Şàngó (Daramola and Jéjé 1967:248). One myth says that she is the wife of Lágbonnà (Adeoye 1979:42-44). Another account says that she was once married to Ọrúnmílà but she divorced him and later married to Şàngó (Thompson 1984:79-83). There is another account that Òṣun was the wife of Ọgún Olútiímò in Ìpólé (Ilésanmi 1989:85). Most of the myths on Òṣun hold the view that Òṣun is the daughter of Yemoja (Ogunbowale 1962:60; Daramola Jéjé 1967:248, Ladele et al 1986:21-25). But, another myth says that Òṣun and Yemoja are co-wives (Adeoye 1979:42-44).

In these accounts, there are two major points about Òṣun. The first is that we can see Òṣun as a deity who descended into the world with other primordial divinities. The second thing is that we can see Òṣun as a deified river goddess.

Other deducible things are: Òṣun is a woman, a lover of children, wife to many deities and a co-wife to many women. Since we can see Òṣun as a descended deity and as a deified goddess, it will be appropriate to look at

the historical link of Òṣun with each community that she is associated with such as Òṣogbo. The question we can then ask is this, how did Òṣun begin in Òṣogbo? Or why do they ascribe Òṣogbo to Òṣun as her town? The next sub-division will give us clue to these interrogations.

### 2.3.2. The History of Òṣun Òṣogbo

It has been gathered that Òṣun is worshipped in many towns out of which Òṣogbo is one of them. The names given to Òṣun may be different from one locality to another depending on the perception of that locality about Òṣun. For example, there is Òṣun Àpapàrá in Ìdó-Òṣun, Òṣun Olúgbòódò in Ilé-Ifè, Òṣun Òkè in Èkiti, and Òṣun Àgunrá in Àkókó, Òṣun Ìkòyí in Ìkòyí Ilé. But, that of Òṣogbo is called by the name of the town because she is associated with their settlement and origin as earlier pointed out. Some people even hold the view that “Òṣun inside the bush” (*Òṣun tó wà nínú igbó*) later change into what we now call Òṣogbo today. Some scholars even hold the view that Òṣogbo is the source of Òṣun (Jones 1997:70). This cannot be true as there is no evidence whatsoever either in literature or the visual arts or in the myths.

It has been shown by Beier (1957:170) that it was when the founders of Òṣogbo were looking for where they could get water as a place of their settlement that they came across Òṣun. In their effort to pitch a tent, the spirit of that river called on them “Wizard in the forest, take it easy, you have broken all my indigo pots, move yonder so that you can flourish”. On hearing this voice, they inquired of Ifá what they can do and Ifá told them every item they should use to sacrifice to this deity. So, they offered ram, vegetable (*yánrin*) and corn-porridge (*ègbo*). This made them to enter into a pact with Òṣun. She later promised them perfect protection and prosperity if they will worship her once in a year. Therefore, the annual public worship of Òṣun in Òṣogbo is the responsibility of Àtâója as the fulfilment of his own part of agreement or bond between him and the deity. The people of Òṣogbo community took their name from the speech of this deity (Òṣun) on the day of entering a bond with the latter. They believe that wizard of the forest (*Oṣó igbó*) evolved to Òṣogbo. After the sacrifice, the messenger of the river goddess-Ikò came out and ordered the king to stretch his hands to receive the “water of peace” as symbol of acceptability of their sacrifice. The stretching of hands done by the then king has given birth to the title of the king of Òṣogbo - ‘Àtâója’ till today. That was how Òṣun goddess became the civil religion for the people of Òṣogbo locality till today in the language of Olupona (2001).

It has been said by Mr. Yekeen Olalekan that Òṣun was already in Òṣogbo before the founders came to settle there. He said that, “Òṣun is a

river-long narrow and winding. It takes its source from a swamp around Ìgèdè-Èkìtì in Ondo state of Nigeria. It flows through Ijèsà land into Òşogbo”.

The above view corroborates with that of Ilésanmi (1989:85) that Òşun has Èkìtì and Ìjèsà origin more than other places. Therefore, a critical and fair assessment shows that Òşun originated from Ìgèdè-Èkìtì, flows via Ijèsà land to Òşogbo and other places. We can assert that the founders of Òşogbo migrated from Ìpólé Òmu, and that they brought the worship of Òşun from Ìpólé-Ijèsà community.<sup>12</sup> One thing is certain, even though Ìgèdè-Èkìtì is the source of Òşun river that flows through Ijèsà land, there is no other place in the globe today that the worship of Òşun is popularised like that of Òşogbo. In fact, Òşun is always and is usually identified with Òşogbo. Apart from this, there are many shrines associated with Òşun Òşogbo; this will afford us to look into Òşun Òşogbo shrines.

### 2.3.3. The Shrine of Òşun Òşogbo

It is a difficult task to enumerate the total number of Òşun shrine in Òşogbo. Looking at etymological interpretation of “ojúbọ”, which is the noun of a place or space, it means a place/spot where articles of worship are offered to deities in order to obtain their favour for the goodness of our lives.

Therefore, it will be difficult if not impossible to know either where a single adherent or all adherents (devotees) of Òşun do worship their deity. But, it is certain that there are three public shrine of Òşun in Òşogbo, and many ‘deeps’ *ibú*. Some informants (list in the informants’ section) even said that there are sixteen “deeps” (*ibú*) of Òşun in Òşogbo, but in the course of my research I am aware that there are more than sixteen “deeps” (*ibú*) of Òşun in Òşogbo. But many of these deeps had given way to modernism and civilisation, especially Islam and Christianity.

There is only one shrine within the palace. The second one is opposite to the palace where the traditional chiefs usually hold their meetings. This is called “Lóde Òşun”. The third shrine is located in the court/bush of Òşun at the outskirts of the town. This is where the annual public worship of Òşun takes place. This shrine is called *Ojúbọ Òşun Àgbaàlú*.

From observation, there are differences in the motifs found in each of these shrines. In the three shrines, there are Òşun pots with water inside them, parrot’s feathers, gun and hand fan (made of bird’s feathers), and *Edan*.

<sup>12</sup> See Òşun Òşogbo Pamphlet / Brochure 1992:2



Fig. 2.3 Òṣun Òṣogbo main Shrine, Pix by Author, 2000

But at the palace shrine, there are images of other deities like: Ṣànpònná, Sàngó and Twins in addition to the aforementioned motifs. The main shrine is similar to this but the image of Ṣànpònná is not there.

As earlier said, there are many ‘deeps’ of Òṣun in Òṣogbo but we’ve identified the following: Ibú Ajigun, Ọ́lómọ̀yọ̀yọ̀, Dúdú, Oróòrùn, Ọ́sanyìn (Ibúsanyìn), Èléyélé, Ọ́lósun, Lákókàn, Ajé, Ọ̀mèniyànmerin, Gbódófon, Èlégbára, Aamò, Lasínmin-in, Asába, Ìjùmú, Kúkòyí, Alákàsò, Aiponíkèé, Ajangboro and Ibú Dáéké (Modákéké).

These “deeps” have their functions in the administration of Òṣun cult, even though we were not told the functions of many of them. For example, **Ọ̀mèniyànmerin** is the minister of internal defence, because of the power to swallow both human being and elephant. Beside the general Òṣun festival, there is the Ajigùn festival, Busanyin festival. Òṣun main festival is followed by Lakokan, and then comes up Ajigùn. After Ajigùn is Ìjùmú. **Ajigùn** is in charge of fertility - to make barren women become fertile by means of Òṣun water. The Ajigùn deep celebrates its own festival on the seventeenth day after the general festival. But it is not bogus like that of the Ìkòsè day.

This was revealed by the Priestess of Ajigùn in 2001 that, “We used to do it together in the past but we don’t usually go there. We took the permission from Òṣun not to go there again. It is only the Ìyá Òṣun who goes there to

meet with the priests and priestesses at that Ajigùn deep". They dance and dine at the shrine too and prepared food such as pap, porridge, pounded yam and àmàlà. Many people do attend there too. Ajigùn is also a big deity.

Ajigùn is also a big deep that must be observed. Recently the Arugbá decided not to follow them to the Ajigùn again. They seek the audience of Òṣun to give them that day to have their own rest and Òṣun gave them the day. And on the day the Ìyá Òṣun and Ajigùn priestess will be there with their drums and devotees and food. Òṣun priests will go there with their own drums. Many people also witness this too.

**Ibúsanyìn** is the minister of external defence, so that no evil will come into the empire of Òṣun. The importance of Òsanyìn's defensive roles is seen in a popular song in Òṣogbo thus:

A fi Ibúsanyìn ṣe apata - We hold Ibúsanyìn as our shield  
 A fi Ibúsanyìn ṣe apata - We hold Ibúsanyìn as our shield  
 Ogun kò jà kógun ó kó Òròkí - No war ever captured Òròkí  
 A fi Ibúsanyìn ṣe apata - We hold Ibúsanyìn as our shield

**Ajé** is in charge of economy - trading and business. From the above song, Òròkí is used synonymously for Òṣogbo Township, which is the territory of Òṣun. **Lákókàn** could be regarded as the first to be seen before one can see Òṣun. It was discovered that the issue of Lákókàn (the first to be seen/reached) is political. This particular shrine belongs to the Ìjèṣà people who are the founders of Òṣogbo community. Therefore, they are the first to be reckoned with in the worship of Òṣun. At least, they brought the worship of this deity from Ìpòlé. It was even established that the people who migrated from Ìpòlé have been worshipping Òṣun and Ògún in Ipólé-Ijèṣà before they left. Also, each deep represents each clan or lineage in Òṣogbo. This then connotes that people of Òṣogbo were born into their clans of religion that is Òṣun.



**Fig. 2.4. The Chief priest of Ibúsanyin-Òşuntóógùn, Pix by Ogungbile**

It is important for us to know that each deep of Òşun in Òşogbo belongs to each clan or lineage. Since Òşun festival is the civil religion of this community every settler or immigrant accept the worship by belonging to any of the deep associated with his/her clan (Ìdílé). This portends that the clan are created alongside of various clans with political and religious intentions. In the past, worship of Òşun takes place at each deep on separate days and times since each deep has its priest or priestess who preside over the administration and organisation of the deep. This is attested to by one of our respondents that:

The members of the royal family better know the issue of worshipping of Òşun. They know the nooks and the crannies of Òşun cult. Every king must know everything about it, either what the Arugbá must do and all other things associated with the worships. Now, Òşun as a deity came in the form of a river and it flows in different directions. The point at which its confluence flows is the various points at which each family is worshipping it till today. The affairs of these deeps are that of the family in charge of these deeps. There is nothing concern the Aworo, Arugba or the Ìyá Òşun. (*A former Arugbá, interviewed on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2002 in Òşogbo*).

### 2.3.4. Òṣun Òṣogbo Festival

There are two types of Òṣun festival. The first one is done every five days, which is called the weekly festival. Paps (Èkọ), yánrin vegetable and kola nuts are used for this service. Ìyá Òṣun Àwòrò Òṣun and other Òṣun cult members mainly do this. It begins at the palace shrine where they will prepare the sacrifice. They will divide it into two; half of it for the palace shrine and the rest will be taken to the river Òṣun shrine at the outskirts of the town.

The second Òṣun festival<sup>13</sup> is done once in a year. It usually takes place between the end of July and early September. It used to be celebrated at the period chosen by Ifá, but the time of worship has now been fixed for the last week of July to the first week of August every year. The annual Òṣun festival usually lasts for seven whole days packed with myriads of activities. The following are the events taking place during the annual worship of Òṣun in Òṣogbo.

#### Clearing / Cleansing Day -**Qjọ Ìwópópó.**

This is the first day of Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo. On this day, Àtàója, the traditional chiefs, Ìyá Òṣun, Àwòrò Òṣun and other members of Òṣun cult accompanied by the masses will take a procession from the palace to Gbáèmú with music, songs and dancing. The chanters will be praising the king. Chief Ògálá presides over the activities of this day. This procession symbolizes the ritualistic cleansing of the road leading to Òṣun grove. As they move, Ògálá will be performing the ritual to ward off all evils from the road. In the past before modernity, the bush on the road will be cleared by hefty men with cutlasses so that bush will not prevent the influx of the people to walk along the path to Òṣun grove. But today, there is no bush to disturb the people any longer; it is celebrated with songs, dancing and ritual. This activity is an indication that the road is ritually and ceremonially cleansed and cleared.

#### Day of Homage to the Deceased kings- **Qjọ Ìjúbà àwọn Qba tó ti wàjà.**

The clearing day is followed by this activity. It takes place in the palace. The first thing here is that they will offer sacrifice to the deceased kings in Òṣogbo community. They will mention their names one after the other from the beginning. They solicit for their support for the incumbent king so that he will also reign successfully. The second activity of this day is the lighting of sixteen points lamp of Òsanyìn. Timéhìn from Òsanyìn at Àwówó forest seized this lamp. There is another myth that it was Láròyè who seized it from Òsanyìn. The basis for the variation has some political undertone. It is

<sup>13</sup> This is the only festival which people regard as Òṣun festival because it has become a global event.

made of metal, which is called “Òpá Òṣorò. It is light in the night around 7p.m and it will burn till dawn, 7a.m the following day. Palm oil is used with cotton wool. Some young boys are usually responsible for fuelling it. It is presided over by Baálé Ààfin. Every item to be used will be produced by the king. On the day that they light this lamp, the king, his chiefs, Ìyá Òṣun, Àwòrò Òṣun and other Òṣun chiefs and cult officials will dance to Àràn drums thrice. The king must not meet the lamp burning at the last round of his dance according to the tradition. As they perform this, there will be drumming, singing and dancing by various people - hunters, Ifá priests and the masquerades. The significance of this sixteen points lamp of Òsanyin is eulogized in the Oríkì-orílè of Òṣogbo people<sup>14</sup> Àràn drum is peculiar to Ifá. Using Àràn drum for Òsanyin is a sign of interrelation of Ifá and Òsanyin.

#### The day of the Deceased Queens- **Ọjọ Ayaba Ìsàlè**

After the day of the deceased kings, the next day is devoted to the deceased queens. This event takes place in the palace. It is presided over by Ìyá Òṣun, who is supported by the king’s wives. As she offers sacrifice to the deceased queens she will pray for the king’s wives who are alive to live long and prosper. It was observed that, the event of this day and that of the day preceding it is more or less Egúngún worship or event better stated, the worship of the dead spirits who are believed to be taking part in the affairs of their relations that are alive. The worship of the ancestor is based on a firm belief and fate of the Yorùbá people that the spirit of a human being never dies. It will continue to influence the life of the community from another sphere after it has left the physical body; if at his death the necessary obsequies rites are undertaken (Adedeji 1983:117). Dead ancestors are regarded as presiding spiritually over the welfare of the family or community (Idowu, 1966:189-194). Also, the subject of these two days-kings and queens shows gender balance or, equal gender representation in Yorùbá cosmos.

#### The king’s Feast/Committee Day- **Ọjọ Àjọ Ọba**

This day is a day of great feast and joy in Òṣogbo. This ritual usually comes up on the Sunday (Ọjọ òsè) following the lighting of the sixteen-points lamp. The king will feast his chiefs, friends and the whole town. It starts in the morning at about 10.00a.m and ends in the evening. As the cooks are cooking, people will dine and wine. This is nothing more than sacrifice to the people’s mouth, which Yorùbá people hold as the greatest sacrifice to offer.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> We’ve cited this oríkì before under 2.1 above

<sup>15</sup> Yorùbá people regard ‘mouth’ as the greatest of the sacrifice. This is corroborated by a proverb that, “Ikú kii jẹun ẹni kó paní, àrùn kii jẹun ẹni kó paní-death and diseases cannot kill somebody after that person has fed them”. The mouth that the masses can use to abuse him in order to spoil his administration has been well fed. This



### The Day of Sacrifice to Personal head and Crown- **Ọjọ̀ Ẹ̀bọ̀rì àtí Ẹ̀bọ̀dẹ̀**

The day of the king's feast is followed by the day of sacrifice to head and crowns<sup>16</sup>. This event also takes place in the palace on the Monday that follows the king's feast day. They will arrange different types of crowns in the palace on a pavement (on a mat). On this day, they will offer sacrifice to the personal head of the king (destiny) and also perform ritual for the crowns. This event is also presided over by Baálẹ̀ Ààfín (the eldest man in the palace). The king will be on his throne-surrounded left and right by his wives. Ẹ̀yá Ọ̀ṣun, Àwòrò Ọ̀ṣun and other Ọ̀ṣun cult officials will begin to chant the oríkí of all kings who had reigned in Ọ̀ṣogbo beginning from Gbádẹ̀wólú Ọ̀láróyẹ̀ the first Àtáọ́ja to the present king who is on the throne. This is celebrated with drumming, singing and dancing. Paying of homage to the deceased kings is also a form of verbal ritual, in that their spirits are evoked in the homage. And it is believed that they are present with them in the community as their reminiscences are called into for their lives patterns to guide the current king in his administration for the peaceful existence of the people in the community.

Different groups in the town, different compounds and associations will come before the king, prostrating if they are men, kneeling down if they are women. The chiefs will dance before the king with cutlass (called *Ádá ilú*) on their hands. They will prostrate for the kings, showing their loyalty to him and they will pray for him to live long and prosper. Àwòrò will also come and prostrate for the king. He will also pray for him to live long and have peaceful administration. Ẹ̀yá Ọ̀ṣun and other Ọ̀ṣun devotees (women) will come before the king, kneeling down as they shower prayers upon him.

Devotees of various deities will come before the king to pray for him. Housewives from various compounds will also dance before the king. They will sing to show their loyalty to him and that they are enjoying his administration. As each group comes forward the king will respond to their homage paying and loyalty with kind gesture. The traditional artistes, acrobats, magicians and cultural dancers of various strands will accord the ceremony with befitting performances. That's what they do till the evening.

### The day of Sacrifice to the earth- **Ọjọ̀ Ẹ̀bọ̀lẹ̀**

This is the event of the sixth day. It is called the day of Ọ̀gbóni or Edan.<sup>17</sup> It takes place in the house of the most senior man from the lineage of the king

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performance has a place in the pace of re-gathering political authority of the king over his people and the chiefs. Every stingy person is usually contemned while a generous person is loved and supported. See also Abimbola (1968:68-69).

<sup>16</sup> Crown symbolizes the head and the heads who have worn them before. It is regarded as a sacred object among the Yorùbá people.

<sup>17</sup> In our own view, two things are deducible from the ritual performance for Edan. The first thing is that some people believe that it was Ọ̀ṣun who formed the Ọ̀gbóni society.

on the throne and the king will be present there too. They will perform ritual to Ẹdan Ògbóni. They will pray for the king, his chiefs and the entire locality of Òṣogbo. The event will be presided over by the chief priest of Ògbóni cult (Olúwo). The significance of this is that the Ògbóni people are showing their support to the administration of the king. The grand finale of the festival follows this event.

#### The Day of Joint Worship- **Ojó Àjọbọ**

This is the grand finale of Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo. This is the event on the seventh day. It takes place at the main shrine of Òṣun and the palace. Different people partake in the event of this day in one-way or the other. The events preceding this day take place within the town but the ritual event of the final day takes place at that shrine in the river. Very early on this day Ìyá Òṣun and Àwòrò will go to perform sacrifice at the shrine. This is an indication that even though it may seem as if Òṣun has been turned into a mere social activity, but it is only on the surface level. The core cult members are still adhering to the real traditional way of worshipping Òṣun. After this, they will prepare the calabash that the Votary maid or Caryatid (Arugbá) will carry to the shrine. Before the Votary maid's procession, two female devotees will also go ahead with sacrifice to the altar at the shrine. This is followed by the royal procession - Àtàója, Ìyá Òṣun, Àwòrò Òṣun, the king's wives, and chiefs, other devotees with Arugbá and the populace, to the river shrine.

The Votary maid - Arugbá will be in the front guarded by the whip men so that Arugbá will not fall down in the midst of the crowd. People will be singing different types of songs as they go and the masses continue to say - *Òrè Yèyé o!* - Precious mother, intermittently. At the shrine, Ìyá Òṣun and Àwòrò will offer the sacrifice. The king will sit on a rock in the shrine. This rock is believed to be the rock on which the first king - Ọláròyè sat when he was entering into treaty with Òṣun. The king will also offer sacrifice to Òṣun - a goat, pounded yam, pap and yánrin vegetable.

After the recitation of incantation and prayer (Ìwúre) upon the sacrifice, they will pour the relics into the river Òṣun and the people will exclaim in a loud voice "*Òrè Yèyé o! -Precious Mother*". As they do this, people will

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Therefore, worshipping of Ẹdan during Òṣun festival is not out of place, it is a form of paying homage to her. The second point is that it may be a way for the king to solicit the favour and the support of Ògbóni society members as a powerful group in the community to enhance his administration. In the past, the king is a regular member of Ògbóni cult because it used to be mainly a political organisation. It may be that he is seeking their support by paying homage to them. "The child who pays homage to the ground/soil will till the ground successfully till his old age". (*Ọmọdé tó bá júbà àgbà yóò roko dojó alé*)

begin to fetch and drink the concoction<sup>18</sup> saying all manner of prayers according to individual wishes. Many people fetch the water into various containers to their respective homes. Some people will even use the water to wash their heads<sup>19</sup>. After this, they will proceed to the palace with dancing and singing where reception takes place. This is the grand finale of Òşun Òşogbo annual festival. The key figures in this festival are: Àtàója, Àwòrò Òşun, Ìyá Òşun, Arugbá Òşun, the Ìwòrò and Ìsòrò Òşun and the offspring of Òşun in all forms. Therefore, it is expedient to know about the organisation of Òşun cult in Òşogbo.

What we've explained above is really at the surface level and a kind of transformation that has occurred to the worship of Òşun in Òşogbo. The joint worship that takes place annually at the central/main shrine of Òşun at the outskirts of the town is a recent development. After the Arugbá has been ritually cleansed in preparation for the sacrifice the Awòrò and other male priests especially the priest of Ibúsanyìn will prepare the calabash to be carried. The arugbá will carry the calabash and proceed to the main shrine guarded by men with whips, priests and priestesses in order to forestall disturbances from the crowd.

She has to be stopping intermittently on the road when carrying the calabash to the river. She pays homage at various shrines before coming finally to the main shrine of Òşun. She prays at each spot (deep) on the road for protection of lives and properties and longevity. An example of such prayer is the one below.

Òşun Òşogbo jé n wá léèmiin- Òşun Òşogbo let me witness the  
next one  
Bá mi dá omọ mi sí- Protect my child  
Bá mi womọ mi- Nurse my child for me  
Má jé kíyókúyọ yọ sí mi o- don't let me see bad things  
Má jé n dààmú o- don't let me suffer  
Má jé n pé kí n tó rólá- don't let it be late before I become  
wealthy  
Má dà mí láàmú o- don't trouble me  
Jé kí n rí jẹ kí n rí mu- Let me have what to eat and drink

It is prayer from one deep to the other. The Arugbá don't do anything than professing prayers.

<sup>18</sup> After they have poured the sacrifice into Òşun River after prayers, the water of the River has become ritually clean water (concoction/àgbo). This symbolizes that the water is possessed by the power of Òşun and it will work effectively for them to do whatever they want, especially for the barren women.

<sup>19</sup> They believe that Òşun has the power to remove ill luck from them through the washing of their heads with the water of Òşun, which has become ritually cleansed.

The Arugbá stops at Kírís's compound to pay homage to the Òtònpòró masquerade. She dances and sings there for the masquerade. This connotes cleansing of the road by Òtònpòró masquerade. They stop there to pay homage to Òtònpòró masquerade. This happened to be their guardian spirit. That is why they sing that, "*Eégún ṣoro- Òtònpòró ṣoro* – that is Òtònpòró should be ready for his duty of protection and guardian". That is why they pay homage on that spot as they move to the waterside. This masquerade was said to be one of the idols brought by the founders of Òṣogbo while migrating from Ìpólé.

When they come to the riverside, it takes a long time before they come to the shrine with the sacrifice. They have to wait so that they collect the sacrifice that the people bring. These people who bring the sacrifice are those who made covenant with Òṣun deity for particular thing, in most cases, it is child. In the past, they usually collect these sacrifice from the people and pour it to the river several times. But, now, even the crowd is hungry and they take out of the sacrifice that the people bring from the calabash. It is those people who are taking the food from the calabash who are hindering the movement. So, it is done once. The food (sacrifice) is thus poured into the River Òṣun to feed the deity as seen below.



Fig. 2.5. The Sacrifice was poured into the River. Pix by Author, 2002.

On the D-Day, in the past they carry the sacrifice to the shrine about three times, not on any other day. But now, it is done once because of the austerity in the society.

When they take the Eḍan - male and female symbols to the shrine, they are placed by the side of the calabash of Òşun. The Eḍan remain on this spot till the end of the ceremony. After the sacrifice has been offered, the images (Eḍan) would be packed into the calabash and then taken to the palace shrine again. The calabash must not be opened. The king can only touch the calabash and pray for the people. Touching it before praying shows that there is transfer of mystic powers from the object (calabash) to the king who is both the spiritual and the political leader of the community. In the past, the king usually changes his dress thrice as he touches the calabash and moves from one place to the other. That was how they handed it over to him. He must change his dress. He must not wear the same cloth he wore to the riverside back home. The given reason is that new dress symbolizes purity and sacredness of the calabash.

### 3. Organisation of Òṣun Òṣogbo Cult

#### 3.1. Òṣun Cult: An Overview

In the cult of Òṣun in Òṣogbo, there is a coherent organisation. There are the leader, assistants and the subordinates. The following arrangement<sup>20</sup> will give us an overview of the structure or organisation of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo.

Àtàója	
Ìyá Òṣun	Àwòrò Òṣun
Arugbá Òṣun	
Male officials	Female official
Ìsòrò Òṣun	Ìwòrò Òṣun
Balógun Òṣun	Ìyálásè Òṣun
Òtún Awo	Òsi Awo (Ìyá Èwe)
Omọ Òṣun (children)	

We shall examine the duties of each of them in Òṣun Òṣogbo cult.

**Àtàója:** The king occupies an important position in Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo. Àtàója regards Òṣun as his own mother in accordance to the treaty of peace and prosperity made by the first Àtàója with the deity- Òṣun. It is the belief of the local people of Òṣogbo that, the town cannot be peaceful without Òṣun. This reflects in their oríkì “*who doesn’t know that it is Òṣun who rules Òṣogbo community for the king?*” It is the duty of Àtàója to produce all articles of sacrifice and entertainment during Òṣun festival yearly. He’s also fully involved in the events of the seven main days of the festival. He holds the reception of the visitors. On the day of joint worship he will together with Ìyá Òṣun Arugba, and Àwòrò Òṣun pray for the whole town after the sacrifice has been performed. The king is fully involved in the worship of Òṣun Òṣogbo. But many things are reducing the priestly involvements of the king in Òṣun worship, especially his religious affiliation to Islam.

<sup>20</sup> The most prominent figures in Òṣun Òṣogbo cult are: Àtàója, Ìyá Òṣun, Àwòrò Òṣun and Arugbá. All other officers were chosen according to the needs of their cult, which is a modern event in Òṣun cult. This is similar to the organisation of the political structure in contemporary Yorùbá society.

**Ìyá Òṣun:** She is the leader of all Òṣun devotees. She is together with Àwòrò Òṣun organise the daily, weekly and annual worship<sup>21</sup>. She breaks the ritual kola nut at the shrine to know the wishes of Òṣun for her people. She knows what to do to commune with Òṣun. She knows the sacrifice to offer and the rituals to perform when epidemics or disasters enter into the town. Ìyá Òṣun knows the sacrifice to offer for the barren women, those suffering from àbíkú and those whose children are sick. She has adequate knowledge of the Oríkì, which is the verbal salutation or homage to Òṣun. She plaits her hair. On the day of the festival, she uses parrot feathers to adorn her plaited Àgògo hairdo, wearing white attire. She puts on her neck coral beads and different types of beads always. She always puts bronze bangles on her two wrists. The widow of a former king, Àtàojà is usually chosen for this post when the former one is dead. Such candidate must be an initiate of Òṣun cult. The current Ìyá Òṣun is called Omiléyẹ Adénlé who is just two years old on the post as at 2002.

**Àwòrò Òṣun:** He is the male head of the devotees. He is playing supportive role to Ìyá Òṣun. This position is a modern invention by the king, which arose out of the globalisation effect on the cult. The king appointed Àwòrò when he had no time to perform his priestly role in Òṣun cult adequately. This is better presented in Wenger (1990:29) language that:

In the course of time, when the city was already big, and the Oba could scarcely do justice to the complex of secular and priestly involvements of Òṣun worship, the office was divided into Àwòrò Òṣun (initiated high priest) and Àtàoja (the Oba).

So, the Àwòrò joins hands with Ìyá Òṣun to offer various sacrifices to Òṣun. He also has the knowledge of what to do to Òṣun in order to know her wishes for the people. He represents the Òṣun cult officials who pray for the king on the day of sacrifice to the 'head' (Ojó iborí-ḡoadé). In short, he represents the king in Òṣun cult. He knows the oríkì of Òṣun very well. He always holds the bell of Òṣun called Àjà. Even though, he is a man, he plaits his hair always just like that of a woman (Mother Òṣun). He puts on his neck and wrists coral and different types of beads, he puts on white attire with plenty beads on his neck on the day of Òṣun festival. Ifá will decide on the right candidate to fill the vacant post of Àwòrò (when one is dead) among the eligible candidates. The name of the current Àwòrò is Olálékan Òriṣàdàre.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Presently, the power of Ìyá Òṣun and Àwòrò Òṣun with regards to annual Òṣun festival has been greatly reduced. This is because, Òṣun festival is being manned by a committee instituted by Àtàoja, known as Òṣun Festival Committee, which Ìyá Òṣun and Àwòrò Òṣun are just members of that committee.

<sup>22</sup> The name of this Àwòrò Òṣun is the one of the names given to the devotees of Obátála.

**Arugbá Òṣun:** The Votary maid<sup>23</sup> is another important figure in Òṣun Òṣogbo. Her main duty becomes prominent on the last day of the festival. The Arugbá is a female, a chaste virgin who has not flirt with any man. She must be a spinster as long as she carries the calabash. She must be chosen from a royal family within the community. She is chosen from the family of the currently ruling Àtàoja or from the past depending on the outcome of divination. Ifá will choose the best candidate among the eligible candidates presented. She continues to carry the calabash until she is ready to marry. The year she marries will be her last time of carrying the calabash. She returns to her husband's house while returning from the river during the year she marries. Arugbá leads the royal procession to the Òṣun main shrine on the day of grand finale of Òṣun festival. The talking drums (as seen below Fig. 3.1) usually herald the outing of the Arugbá for the ritual procession to the main shrine of Òṣun. This drum is called *bènbé*. It is the favourite drum of Òṣun. These drums are kept in the palace shrine. They mainly use Dùndún musical ensembles for various activities connected to Òṣun.

But before the day of the communal worship of Òṣun she will be separated and consecrated for seven days at the palace shrine by undergoing series of rituals. The procession will commence from the palace with music and songs to the main shrine of Òṣun. Many Òṣun priests and priestesses who must guide her from falling down surround her. It is the prayer of the Ìyá Òṣun and other cultic functionaries that Arugbá must not fall down. This is because it is regarded as a bad omen and symbol of evil if she falls down. All of them proceed to the grove by dancing to the rhythm of the talking drum. Inside the calabash, we have *Edan* carved with brass, cowries' shell, small gun and sword made of brass, *Ota* and parrot point feather. The Arugbá till 2000 is Princess Gbónjúbólá Oyèwálé.

**Initiation of Arugbá:** The initiation of Arugbá is part of festival of Images. The washing of the newly chosen Arugbá takes place before the festival of Images. They bring them out. They will prepare the calabash as they do it during the annual Òṣun festival. By the time they take out all the images the calabash will be on the ground. By the time they finish the

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<sup>23</sup> She will be with Ìyá Òṣun from the commencement of the festival. Many rituals will be performed for her so that she will carry the Òṣun calabash successfully during the procession to the grove. These rituals will make her to be ritually and ceremonially cleansed from all forms of filthiness and abomination, which Òṣun detests. Research has shown it that the idea of Arugbá Òṣun is a strange phenomenon in the Òṣun festival in other places where Òṣun is worshipped. May be it was instituted in Òṣogbo to symbolise the maid who carried the calabash containing *Ota* Òṣun when they brought Òṣun motifs to Òṣogbo at the inception of the town.



dancing during the festival of images, they will take the calabash from the ground.



**Fig. 3.1. Bènbé Drum. Pix by Ogunbile, 1999.**

Their washing takes place before the festival of Images. So, they do the same thing like bringing out the calabash as if they are going to the market. They bring out the calabash and it must not be taken inside until the Images go out and come back. So, it is when they take the Images into the room that they take the calabash into the room (inner shrine). When they are doing the washing for them the calabash is out already as if they are preparing to go to the riverside.

Òṣun herself through divination by the Ìyá Òṣun chooses the new Arugbá. The chosen Ifá priest authenticates her candidacy. The person that must be chosen must possess certain qualifications- she must be from the royal family, unmarried and a virgin. The diviners need not having the knowledge of the physical appearance of the candidate prior the divination. It is the Osun herself that will choose the person she wants. It is only the Òṣun who knows that particular person. Even if the person is abroad, they will go and fetch her. Òṣun will identify her and let the people know the person who is going to carry the calabash. So, before she is appointed nobody knows her even those who will come to pick her from the family compound never know whom she is until Òṣun describes and discloses her name and they are able to know the person whom they are going to pick.

During the festival of Images they will bring out the images of various deities. It is a night vigil. They dance, sing, and chant the oriki of the deities represented by the Images they carry around the town. The past Arugbá (Votary Maids) who are in the vicinity and around the community of Òṣogbo take part in the festival of Images. The newly chosen Arugbá joins them too during the festival of images to move round the town to show to the people or inform them that new Arugbá has been chosen. This is done on the early morning of the second day after the festival of Images. The new Arugbá has to follow the images as they announce to the public her choice. It is the forum to tell the community that they have chosen another votary maid. The initiation takes place at the palace shrine (not even at the main shrine).

The newly chosen Arugbá will be taken to the palace shrine to be washed into deities (various traditional cults). The priestesses who are in charge of the initiation will fetch water from the Òkánlà River for the cleansing and initiation ceremony. This water is poured upon the candidate intermittently as they invoke the names of various deities into the water. Other items included in this initiation rite are leaves, mainly Òdúndún (Bryophyllum) and rinrin leaves. These leaves are regarded sacred beside the medicinal values that they possess. The candidate is washed with these leaves naked and they pour the water from Òkánlà River on her. Washing into deities connotes initiation into the cults of various deities in the community. This shows interrelation of the deities in the Yorúbá pantheon.

Different leaves are combined for the washing of the Votary Maid. As they wash the candidate into the cult of Òṣun they sing to invoke the spirits of various deities thus:

Òṣun Òṣogbo, wá jó o- Òṣun Òṣogbo, come and dance  
 Pàkòkó, wá jó o- Pàkòkó, come and dance.  
 Olódò kú odò o - Well done the owner of river!  
 Òṣun Búsanyìn wá jó o - Òṣun Búsanyìn, come and dance  
 Olódò kú odò o - Well done the owner of river!  
 Ibú Aásè, wá jó o - Ibú Aásè, come and dance.  
 Olódò kú odò o - Well done the owner of river!  
 Òkè Ọbátèdó, wá jó o - Òkè Ọbátèdó, come and dance  
 Olódò kú odò o - Well done the owner of river!  
 Ìdí Bàbá, wá jó o - Ìdí Bàbá, come and dance  
 Olódò kú odò o - Well done the owner of river!  
 Şàngó, wá jó o - Şàngó, come and dance  
 Olódò kú odò o - Well done the owner of river!  
 Ọya wá jó o- Ọya, come and dance  
 Olódò kú odò o - Well done the owner of river

They will begin to pour water of Òkánlà on her body as they sing as they call on the names of all deities, about one hundred and forty in numbers. They will use various leaves of each deity to wash the candidate and will be pouring water on her body in small quantity. But after they have finished calling the names of all deities, the remaining water will be poured on her body.

The priestesses will do it. In the past, the priestesses of other deities like Obátálá, Sàngó and Oya used to be present during this initiation, unlike now that the people are selfish and are only concerned with their own religions due to religious intolerance that suffuse the nation. The initiation is solely performed by women there is no man there. It only involves the priestesses starting from Ìyá Òṣun and all the elderly female representatives of all deities will be present at the palace shrine to grace the occasion. Other priests, both male and females of other deities stay outside the shrine. All the past Arugbá must be present at the initiation scene, not only the immediate past, aged women must be present there also.

The priestesses who do the washing dress normally. There is no need for nakedness or wearing of apron. This washing continues with Òkánlà water until another Òṣun festival. This implies that the newly chosen Arugbá baths with the water from the Okánlà River. That is how a candidate becomes qualified to be Arugbá. They will then put two beads on her necks as symbol or emblem of Òṣun. She has thus become the wife of Òṣun. In other words, she is married to Òṣun. The newly initiated Arugbá will go to the main shrine every five days to worship Òṣun and commune with her. From that moment she stays with the Ìyá Òṣun in the palace shrine until the time of her marriage.

**Ìwòrò and Ìsòrò:** The female members of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo are called Ìwòrò among which we have Ìyálásè Òṣun, Ìyá Èwe and Òsì Awo. Their number depends on the needs for them within the cult. This means that they can appoint as many as possible for easy administration in the cult. The male members of the cult are called Ìsòrò, among which we have Balógun Òṣun and Òtún Awo.<sup>24</sup> During Òṣun festival, both groups appear in

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<sup>24</sup> These official were chosen in order to enhance easy administration of Òṣun cult. It was not so at the beginning. Apart from this, the disparity in the names - Ìwòrò and Ìsòrò is patriarchal, especially if we go into the etymological interpretation of these two dictions. Ìwòrò is coined from: "I" = a particle which stands for something / somebody "Wò" = a particle which is verb (to watch / view / see) "Orò" = a particle which is a noun and stands for ritual they perform. We then have Ìwòrò as a result of vowel elision and coalition of vowel. It then connotes that the Ìwòrò are just to watch, view or see the ritual that others perform, they are not the one performing it. "Ì" - a particle which stands for something / somebody "Ṣe" - a particle which is verb (to do, perform or act) "Orò - a particle which is a noun and stands for what they perform

white attire. The women among them plaited their hair, which they adorned with cowries shell. All of them put on coral beads on both, their hands and their necks. All of them take part in the worship of Òṣun either during the daily weekly or annual worship. They also know how to praise Òṣun in poetry. More importantly, they guide and guard the movement of Arugbá during her ritual procession to the main shrine of Òṣun on the final day of the festival. They also assist the people in fetching the water of Òṣun after it has become ritually empowered on the day of the festival. The picture below shows some of them as they assist the people in fetching water during the festival of 2002.



**Fig. 3.2. Òṣun Priests and Priestesses fetching water for the people, Pix by Author, 2002.**

### **3.2 The Children / Offspring of Òṣun Òṣogbo**

The offspring of Òṣun Òṣogbo could be divided into three main groups. The first group could also be divided into two again. The first sub-division could be referred to the children born through Òṣun. Their parents may not really belong to Òṣun religion and they may also be adherents of Òṣun deity. Though, some of their parents may belong to other religions but they hold

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(ritual). Vowel elision and coalition also gave us Ìsòrò. This is then saying that Ìsòrò are those who perform act or do the ritual they are not just on-lookers.

the belief that what or the object of their worship cannot give them children, but only Òṣun. Due to this, they may not really change their names and hence retain their religious names for social purpose. They can even give the names associated with their religions to the children they have gotten through Òṣun. The second sub-division are those children born into Òṣun religion, may be they are from Òṣun family. Òṣun is their religion and their names reflect their association or relationship with Òṣun. Among such names are: Òṣundàrà, Òṣun bíyíí, Òṣunléyẹ, Òṣunsínà, Òṣunlékè, Òṣunbùnmi, Omíleyẹ, Omíṣore etc.

The second group can also be sub-divided into two. All indigenes of Òṣogbo belong to this first sub-division. All of them see themselves as the offspring of Òṣun. They celebrate Òṣun festival together. Òṣun is the basis of their settlements. All of them, including many Muslims and Christians do take part in the annual Òṣun festival. The king of this local community, Àtàója is their head. Every true indigene of Òṣogbo is regarded as a child of Òṣun; this is because he or she was born into the clan of Òṣun worshippers. Among the media pictures or images that the Òṣun State Broadcasting Corporation does use on their screen are associated with Òṣun. The first thing is the water of Òṣun river flowing down from the rock, the second is the image of the first Àtàója of Òṣogbo, Gbádéwòlú, where he stretched his hands to receive Ikò, the Òṣun fish messenger. We can even refer to all indigenes of Òṣun state as offspring of Òṣun. The third is the bird that represents Òṣun as a witch who has possessed the broadcasters and can make them to see everywhere. Besides, on Òṣun radio, one of their signature tune songs is associated with Òṣun. For example, they say:

Omi la bùwè  
 Omi la bùmu,  
 A kíí bomi ṣòtá  
 Omi la bùwé  
 Omi la bù mu  
 Ní rédiò ipínlè Òṣun  
 (We fetch water to bath  
 We fetch water to quench thirst  
 We are not in enmity with water  
 We fetch water to bath  
 We fetch water to quench thirst  
 In Òṣun state Radio).

The water here stands for Òṣun from where Òṣun State as a whole derived their name. Likewise, they make use of oríkì Òṣun which portray her as all-knowing and all-seeing to qualify the activities of Òṣun Radio Broadcasting Corporation thus:

Rédíò ipínlè Òṣun  
 Àṣá gbàgùò tó rorí òpẹ̀ àgògo rẹ̀é lé té',nté  
 Ojú tólé, ojú took  
 (Òṣun Radio Broadcasting Corporation  
 Òṣun Radio Broadcasting Corporation  
 A huge hawk that has gone to the pick of a tall palm tree,  
 Its eyes can view everywhere).

The second categories under this are all and sundry those that watch the festival and take part either by singing, chanting or hailing mother Òṣun during the festival; this includes even the foreigners.

The third division of Òṣun children are those who are not originally from Òṣun lineage but they have been initiated into the cult. They have received Ota Òṣun and have undergone the initiation process. Such people will be taken to Òṣun shrine in Òṣun grove to be initiated (washed) into Òṣun. Parts of the initiation items are: *Òdúndún* leaves, *Rinrin* leaves and Òṣun water. They will take the blood of pigeon fowls, blood and the blood of she-goat or that of other animals, which Òṣun has chosen for them for that particular ritual. Apart from this, they will prepare *yánrin* vegetable *àbàtà* kola nut, sugar cane and *àádùn* for Òṣun in the name of the would-be initiate. *Ìyá* Òṣun and *Àwòrò* Òṣun will preside over the ritual and the initiation process. They will enumerate the taboos of Òṣun adherents for this new initiate. He will also vow that he/she will not act contrary to the decision and that he/she will not be ashamed of being a member of their cult. After this, *Ìyá* Òṣun will break kola nut and cast it so that they can decipher the name to be given to the initiate, which may be names like *Òṣún múyíwá* -Òṣun has brought this, *Òṣún ládé* Òṣun has emerged, etc. This young initiate will put on white attire on this day of initiation. They will give him/her coral beads, Ota Òṣun and brass bangles. The Ota Òṣun will be put inside the small pot he/she has taken to the river. They will put water on it, which he/she must continue to do as well.

## **4. The Contents of Òṣun Òṣogbo Cult**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Òṣun poetry is cryptic with meanings. Òṣun verbal art is similar to other Yorùbá oral genres in that they are rendered or performed either in the form of a chant, recitation or song. This then implies that whatever we can see about Òṣun in the form of song could also be seen in the form of either chants or recitation. Therefore, our main focus in this chapter is the analysis of the contents, that is the plural layers of meanings of Òṣun verbal art, which has to do with sociological interpretations of what they are used for. Interpretation of Òṣun poetry will shed more light to the beliefs of the people about Òṣun, the impact of Òṣun on the people at the local and the global levels and the relationship of Òṣun with other deities in the Yorùbá pantheon. Also, this interpretation will illuminate our understanding of the transformation processes of Òṣun religion in Òṣogbo, and its Diasporas plight within the continent of Africa and beyond the shore.

### **4.2. Òṣun as the Emancipator of Yorùbá Womanhood**

All over the world the move for women liberation is rampant. It is believed that they are denied of so many legal rights which men have in which they were marginalized and inferiorated and cannot really fulfil position which the creator has created them for in cosmology. The most encouraging and fruitful facet of Women's Liberation Movement (W.L.M.) is that it refutes all the various undignified and dehumanizing views and expression about women folk and established their fallacy. It helps women to show their real potentials and efficiencies in all spheres of life. In other words, it affords women the opportunity to demonstrate to the world that they are not in any ways lesser to men.

The feminist movement is also popular in Africa especially in Yorùbá land. The structure of Yorùbá society reveals that women are still marginalized in some areas. Even though, Yorùbá women are somehow inferiorated and oppressed still, we cannot compare their situation to that of American and European women. Before the popular and worldwide feminist

movement swept into Africa, we observe that it has begun from time immemorial in Yorùbá society. If we look into the Yorùbá society, their myths and oral literature have shown that women emancipation is not a borrowed concept or idea. Yorùbá myths show that Òṣun is the first Yorùbá women emancipator who fought for the rights of Yorùbá women. Hence, she could be regarded as the personification of Yorùbá women. In other words, we can regard her as the leader or first emancipator of Yorùbá women.

In *Odù Ifá Òséturá*, which gives the account of the descent of the seventeen principal Divinities, who were given *àṣẹ* by Olódùmarè to govern the world, the role of Òṣun as the first women emancipator is seen. Among the seventeen deities who were given *àṣẹ* by Olódùmarè, she is the only female. The spirit of superiority complex and patriarchy in these male deities made them to ignore and abandon Òṣun in their meetings and plans. When every effort of theirs proved futile, they went back to Olódùmarè to inform him of their failure. Olódùmarè educated them that their failure was due to the absence of Òṣun in their meetings. What happened in these narratives is that Òṣun, being a woman of power and authority, used the authority (*àṣẹ*), which Olódùmarè has given to her to fight, not only for her rights but also for the rights of other women. It was when Òṣun has shown latent or innate qualities and powers which Olódùmarè has given her to these male divinities that they began to honour her as someone who has power like their own or even more than their own. This is shown in that *Odù Ifá* got from Adebayo Babalola Ifatoogun in 2000 in Ilobu (near Òṣogbo) that:

Wón bèrè síí pe Òṣun - They begin to involve Òṣun

Ní wón bá ñ kí Òṣun bá yíí - And they begin to pay homage to Òṣun  
thus:

A-rí-pepe-kóde-sí - The one who has shelf to store brass

A-fide-wéwé-remọ - The one who lulls her children with brass

Yèyè, Afiyùn-gbàsè - The mother, who receives corals beads for ritual

Ọta o! Omi! Ẹdan o! - Stone! Water! Ẹdan!

Ládékojú, OoreYèyè Òṣun - Ládékojú, the precious mother Òṣun.

This story goes further that the rest male deities went to appeal to Òṣun but she refused their plea. After much plea, she told them that if the child she's about to deliver happened to be a male child; she would forgive them and listen to their plea. But, if the child happens to be a female, reverse is the case. If the child is a male child he will attend meetings with them. Òṣun's speech scared them and all of them begin to pray daily so that the child will be a male child. Later on, when Òṣun delivered the child it was a male child.



The child was given to Ọ̀bàtálá, the Yorùbá Arch divinity for naming on the ninth day. After the naming ceremony, this child was initiated into all available cults. That was how everything begins to prosper. They then begin to say:

Njé, Èbòyè tí n̄ bẹ̀ nílè yìi o  
 È jé á mú ìmò jo t' Ọ̀ṣun  
 Èrùkà tí n̄ bẹ̀ nílè yìi o  
 È jé á maa gbó t' Ọ̀ṣun  
 Bóniyán bá n̄ gúnyan láifí t' Ọ̀ṣun ẹ̀  
 Iyán rẹ̀ a maa lémo  
 Bí arokà bá rokà tí ò fi t' Ọ̀ṣun ẹ̀  
 Ọ̀kà rẹ̀ á ní kókó  
 (Now, Èbòyè in this land  
 Let's learn from Ọ̀ṣun  
 Èrùkà in this land  
 Let us listen to Ọ̀ṣun  
 If someone is pounding yam without acknowledging Ọ̀ṣun  
 The pounded yam will have lumps  
 If someone is preparing ọ̀kà without acknowledging Ọ̀ṣun  
 The ọ̀kà food will have lumps)  
 After this, Ọ̀ṣun went to Ifá for divination and she was told that:  
 Agberengeḍe Àjùbà  
 Àjùbà nàa Agberengeḍe  
 A díá fún Ọ̀sèngèsé Olóòyà iyùn  
 Nígba tó wà ní ikòkò  
 Tíí lo rẹ̀e bẹ̀ḅo gbogbo Irúnmalè jé  
 Wón ní, iwọ Ọ̀ṣun  
 Nígba tó ti rí báyií, ó tó  
 Yáa maa tún gbogbo nkan tí wọn bá n̄ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ni  
 Ó ní, òun ò tilẹ̀ gbodò má ẹ̀ bée  
 Nítorí tí ọ̀kúnrin kan bá bàjé báyií  
 A jé pé òun bá ọ̀mọ òun jé nù un  
 Njé, taa ní n̄ rúbọ̀ tí kò ké sélébọ̀?  
 Agberengeḍe Àjùbà  
 Àjùbà nàa Agberengeḍe  
 Ifá ní ẹ̀ jé á maa kúnlè kóbinrin  
 Obinrin ló bí wa ká sí tó dèniyàn  
 Agberengeḍe Àjùbà  
 Àjùbà nàa Agberengeḍe  
 Ifá ní ẹ̀ è ríí pé ijà obinrin tó?  
 Agberengeḍe Àjùbà

Àjùbà Agberengede  
 (Divination was made for Òsèngèsé owner of coral beads  
 While she was in a secret place  
 Spoiling the sacrifice of all deties  
 They said, 'you Òṣun'  
 Since, it is now like this, it is enough  
 Mend everything that they do  
 She said she cannot but do so  
 If she spoils any man's life now  
 It means she has spoiled that of her son as well  
 Now, who is performing sacrifice without involving the owner  
 of sacrifice?  
 Agberengede Àjùbà  
 Àjùbà Agberengede  
 Ifá says, let us kneel down to greet women  
 We were all born by women before we are known as human  
 being  
 Agberengede Àjùbà  
 Àjùbà Agberengede  
 Ifá says that the emancipation of women is right).

The above Odù Ifá shows Òṣun as a valiant woman who knows the rights of women and the way to fight for it, and she did it successfully. Apart from Odù Ifá, there are Òṣun verbal art that portray her as a leader among women. One oríkì Òṣun goes thus:

Ore Yèyé Òṣun  
 Ore Yèyé Mọlè  
 Oníkíí Amawo-má-rò  
 Onítèé tutu  
 Ọba lódò  
 Òṣun Àyílà gbà mí o  
 N ò lénikan  
 Èni a ní níí gbani  
 (Òṣun, Gracious Mother  
 Gracious and Mysterious Mother  
 Gracious Mother  
 Oníkì, an initiate who keeps secret  
 The one who has a cool throne  
 The Oníkíí Mother  
 King of the river  
 Òṣun Àyílà, save me

I have nobody  
 One expects refuge from his/her deity).

The above oríkí shows the power of Òṣun as a woman of prowess. Òṣun is seen as a mother to many deities due to the power (àse) that God has given to her. She is an initiate not just an ordinary women. The Yorùbá do say “an initiate must keep the cult’s secret- *wíwo lenu awo n wo*”. This means that whatever they discuss in the cult meeting must not be heard outside the cult, and the cult members should keep everything secret. The idea of Òṣun being an initiate who keeps secret is contrary to Yorùbá patriarchal perception that, “if at all a woman knows the secret she must not say it- *Bòbìnrin mawo, kò gbodò fò, kò gbodò wí*”. But, it shows the potentiality of Òṣun as someone who can keep as secret just like menfolk. Òṣun is regarded as a king who has the power to save people. The position of a king in Yorùbá society is not a mere position. Òṣun is then seen as a king, that is the number one person among many. Indeed, she is the leader of Yorùbá women as corroborated by Odù Ìwòrì-rèkú collected from Iatoogun in 2000 that:

Igbó etilé toun tégbin, - Hin-in  
 Àdàpò òwò toun tiyà, - Hin-in  
 Ìwọ̀ ò jù mí, èmi ò jù ó– Hin-in  
 Ní n jé kára ilé ẹni ó fojú dini, - Hin-in  
 Adí’á fún wọ̀n nílùúbínrìn – Hin-in  
 Níbi téégún abo ti n lé akọ kiri- Hin-in  
 Njé iwòrì ò rèkù oóo!  
 Eégún ò gbodò lu babaláwo.  
 Èwò Òrìṣà.  
 (The bush in the surrounding of the house full of faeces,  
 A collective trading full of suffering (cheating)  
 You are not superior to me, I am not superior to you  
 This usually makes people from the same household contemn  
 one another,  
 Divination was made for them in women’s town  
 When female masques were pursuing male’s masques  
 Behold! You Ìwòrì-òrèkú,  
 The masque must not flog Babaláwo (Ifá Priest)  
 It is forbidden)

This Ifá chant among many Ifá literatures shows gender differentiation and women power in relation to that of men in the Yorùbá cosmology. This connotes that; Yorùbá women occupy an invaluable position in the society, even though they face objections whenever they want to use their powers.

Therefore, Òṣun as a woman leader has proved that woman gender is equally important and has the power just like that of men in the cosmos. Another oríki of Òṣun says:

Òṣun Òyèyénímò  
 Obínrin gbònà okùnrin ní sá  
 Agègùn-sorò  
 Obínrin tíí dádé okùnrin  
 Irú re sòwón.  
 (Òṣun the one who is full of knowledge  
 The woman who blocks the road and men were running away  
 The one who lays ambush in order to afflict the enemies?  
 A woman who wears manly crown  
 You are so rare)

The oríki of Òṣun is establishing an adage that says, “what a man can do, a woman can do, (*ohun tí okùnrin lè ṣe, obínrin lè ṣe é*). In Yorùbá society, men are usually seen in the battlefield. This is not to deny the fact that many Yorùbá women had taken active role in battlefield. History has it that when there was a war of Islamic fundamentalists around 1804 in Òṣogbo, and the Fulani waged war against the inhabitants of Òṣogbo community, it was Òṣun who fought for them. That is the reason why Òṣun is praised as the “one who lays ambush in order to afflict the enemies; the woman who blocks the road and men were running away”. It was believed by Òṣogbo people that Òṣun transformed herself into a food seller and went to the Fulani fundamentalist camp to sell poisoned àmàlà food to them. That was how she conquered for Òṣogbo people. This is then showing Òṣun as a role model among women who used her bravery, prowess and manliness to conquer. These attributes of Òṣun cannot be over emphasised and that women cannot be ignored in anything of a noble course. An Ifá priest<sup>25</sup> even says:

Ifá made it clear that women emancipation is right. Indeed, they must be given a good recognition, which will have authority among men. However big a person is, he/she is born by a woman. Therefore, we must give respect to women, either our mother or our senior sister. Everything that we do as a group of people, we must involve women. That is why each town has Ìyálode. Without this, their deliberation will be in vain and they cannot have peace. (*Translated by Author*).

<sup>25</sup> This was said by Ifátòògùn Babalola of Ilobu, Òṣun state during my interview with him on 7-4-2001.

Therefore, it is clearly evident that it is the plan of Olódùmarè that men and women should combine their God's given knowledge, power and àse to direct the world. In Odù Òséturá that we cited the other time, every effort of male deities when they ignored Òṣun was futile and did not succeed. Likewise, Òṣun alone with àse she has cannot succeed as a person without relating with men. Therefore, it is the emancipation of Òṣun, coupled with the combination of her knowledge and power with that of male deities that brought unity, peace, progress and development to the world. This is concomitant with Yorùbá philosophy that our world is a world of binary complementarities and not of opposition (Ilesanmi 1989:89). A tree cannot make a forest. Therefore, women cannot be ignored in any developmental activities. It was even gathered from the *Nigeria population brochure*<sup>26</sup> that:

Experience has shown that the failure of most governmental programmes (especially those that deal with social life of the people) was partly due to the inability of the policy makers to recognise the important position women occupy in the family in particular and at the society at large

This is buttressing the fact that the position and impact of women in national development, either in the family or in the society cannot be ignored. In that oríkì of Òṣun, it is apparent that Òṣun is a personification of Yorùbá women, who cannot be attacked or ignored by men. In Yorùbá society, patriarchy is well rooted, in which it is an established norm or principle that kingship authority has become the rights of men alone. Even though we've heard in history and myths that some women were once made kings in some Yorùbá communities but the issue of kingship rights is solely men's rights in the contemporary society. The best a woman can be in some Yorùbá communities is to be appointed a regent when a king dies. Part of oríkì Òṣun above shows that she was a special woman among women. It is revealing that she was a king who was up to the task. There is nothing a man who wears crown does that Òṣun cannot do as a woman-king. This position of Òṣun is showing that Yorùbá women have their power that they are using to uphold the society in order to make progress.

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<sup>26</sup> See Census News by the Nigeria Population Commission, September 1990 Vol.1 No ISSN 116-11196.

### 4.3. Peculiarities of Òṣun as a Doyen of Yorùbá Motherhood

In Yorùbá society, it is not every woman who gives birth to children that they call a mother. A mother refers to the woman who knows how to nurse and care for the children. It is the practice of Yorùbá to praise their women for their meritorious service they render in nursing and nurturing their children. Beginning from conception inside the womb up to the time that the child will grow up and become matured, the work of mothers upon their children is commendable. There are days of keeping vigil and days of starving oneself for the good of their babies. No wonder the Yorùbá will say, “Mother is gold, father is the mirror-Ìyá ni wúrà baba ni díngí. This proverb portends the enduring and untiring love and care of women for their children that transcends birthing and nursing. A hunter genre collected from Mr. Ògúndìran in Òyó goes like this to support the role of women in Yorùbá society:

If a child grows up and say that  
His mother did nothing for him.  
He has cursed himself.  
The sleeping of yesterday  
Everything bothers on my mother.  
I have become pregnant  
Everything become on my mother  
Fowls incubate their eggs just for seventeen days,  
Sheep’s pregnancy lasts for six months,  
I was inside my mother’s womb for nine  
Whole months before I become a child,  
I have stomach and back aches.  
Everything still bothers on my mother  
Anyone who disregard his/her mother  
Has a curse upon him/herself. (*Translated by Author*).

This genre is just pointing to various efforts and cares of mother over her children. If we examine the verbal art of Òṣun, many things are pointing to her as a model mother. If we look at Òṣogbo as a local community, especially their myth of origin and oríkì, it is seen that Òṣun gave birth to Òṣogbo. She gave them their name. She is protecting them the way a good mother does protect her children. All indigenes of Òṣogbo see themselves as the children of Òṣun. This is even revealed in part of their oríkì thus:

Yèyè Aníyùnlábèbè  
È bá mi d’Òṣogbo Òròkí  
Òṣogbo omo Yèyè Òṣun  
Yèyè Atéwógbeja

(Come along with me to Òṣogbo Òròkí  
 Òṣogbo the child of Mother Òṣun  
 Mother of Àtàója  
 Mother, who has coral beaded fan).

This oríkì is showing that Òṣogbo town was born by Òṣun. She is then regarded as the mother of the past, the present and the future kings of Òṣogbo. Apart from this, there are revelations from Òṣun verbal art, showing Òṣun as a good, precious, daring and gracious mother. One of her oríkì during the annual Òṣun festival goes thus:

Yèyè, kú oḍún  
 Ìyá mi fàpèrè<sup>27</sup> jókòó  
 Ìyá mi orí n tagbá ọlómọrí  
 O kú isé ọmọ ní síse  
 Ìse Yèyè mí sọmọ rẹ  
 Ó mà rẹmí lópò  
 Òrè Yèyè ò!  
 (Mother, happy celebration,  
 My mother is sitting on a stool  
 My mother, calabash with its cover on it suffers pain.  
 Well done for your labour on the children!  
 I cherish the labour of mother (Òṣun) on her children,  
 Precious mother).

In the above verbal art, Òṣun is seen as a precious mother. The mother who's labour over her children is commendable and worthy of emulation. In the third line, the *calabash* here is used metaphorically and it refers to Òṣun as a mother, while *its cover* (ọmọrí) represents the adherents or devotees of Òṣun who are usually called children of Òṣun (Ọmọ Òṣun). The *pain* here is also used metaphorically to symbolize unparallel labour, care and suffering of Òṣun as a mother over her children. It is a good thing for a calabash to have cover but the cover is a form of load upon the calabash. It is appropriate and beautiful for a calabash to have head cover, so it is culturally vital and beautiful for a married woman to have children in Yorùbá society. That is why they say, “*ọmọ ladé orí igbáyàwó* that is, child is the crown of marriage. But the suffering and labour of a mother over her children is tremendous.

The labour and suffering of Òṣun as a good mother makes it possible for people to applause her in the fourth line that, “well done, for your labour on the children!” The labour of Òṣun on children is worthy of emulation for

<sup>27</sup> This is a traditional chair in Yorùbá land. It is also called òtítà or àpótí in other Yorùbá dialects.

women, apart from the fact that they appreciate it. This is contained in the fifth line that “I cherish the labour of mother (Òşun) on her children”. In the Yorùbá society, there are different types of mothers. The attitude of some women towards their children in the society does not show evidence of love and care. But, Òşun is distinct among women in her care and love for the children as seen in the verbal art. Another oríkí Òşun goes thus:

Adétayùn o!  
 Abiyamọ nínú láhálóho<sup>28</sup>  
 È bá mi kóre Yèyè f Òşun  
 Abiyamọ tíí retí igbe.  
 Ìyá mi lobínrin gbàgò nínú Olóbòtujè<sup>29</sup>  
 (Adétayùn o!  
 The mother who stood by her children in problem  
 Help me praise Òşun as the precious mother  
 The mother who watches over her children.  
 My mother is the active woman amidst Olóbòtujè

Adétayùn, in the first line is another name for Òşun. Her attitude and action towards her children made them to praise her as “a mother who stood by her children in problem”. This means that Òşun is neither tired nor wearied in her cares for children. That is why she was hailed in the third line as the precious mother. The fourth line “the mother who watches over her children” is also revealing the attitude of mother Òşun towards her children. An adage in Yorùbá say, “*Abiyamọ kíí gbékún omọ rẹ kó má tati were*” - A good mother usually reacts to her baby’s cry. Òşun will not only go and watch her baby when she heard him/her crying, but she is wide awake and very observant in watching over her children to know what they are passing through at all times. All her efforts and cares for the children make her adherents praising her with song like the one below:

Lílé: Ìyá mi n ń şişé o!  
 Ègbè: Ìyá mi n ń şişé omọ o jàre  
 Lílé: Ìyá mi n ń şişé o!  
 Ègbè: Aláwòyè n ń şişé omọ o jàre.  
 (Solo: My mother is working!  
 All: My mother is really working over her children.  
 Solo: My mother is working!  
 All: A perfect nurse is really working over her children).

<sup>28</sup> This is the type of a plant that is very irritating. This barrier in caring for her children never hinders Òşun as a good mother.

<sup>29</sup> This is also a type of plant that has sap that stains cloth. Òşun, being a precious mother never bother about her dress becoming stained by this plant; she does everything to please her children.



It is evident from the verbal art that Òṣun is not just an ordinary woman. She is a caring mother whose care and love for children is praiseworthy. That is why they refer to her as a perfect nurse. Referring to her as a nurse is not unconnected to the fact that Òṣun as a witch (*Àjé Olómọ* - A witch that nurses children) takes active role in the spiritual nurturing of small children. Òṣun has a deep knowledge of how to take care of children in various ways.

They also refer to Òṣun as “the one who lulls<sup>30</sup> her children with small brass, the one who has big and robust breasts”. This *oríkì* Òṣun is also showing Òṣun as a model mother, who knows and gives what the little children need so that they will not cry. That is why they refer to her as the one who lulls her children with small brass- “*Afide-wéwé-remọ*”. This small brass could be likened to toys that are given to the children in the contemporary society. It is also an indication that there is nothing too precious to Òṣun that she cannot release for the comfort of her children. It is a common saying among some mothers that, “*Kómọ ó tó jogún èmi náà ó jogbòn* - before my children eat twenty, I would have eaten thirty”. This group of women do not care adequately for their children. But Òṣun is not like them. She owns the brass and she does not deprive her children of using it. In Yorùbá society, brass materials and brass itself are regarded as precious and invaluable resources. Therefore, Òṣun gives something worthwhile to all her children-her devotees.

Besides, “the owner of big and robust breasts” means that she has the breast that is capable of feeding her infants. In Yorùbá society, in the past before the advent of Europeans with all manner of baby foods made from cereals such as *Cerelac*, *Nutriend*, *Lactogen* etc, it was the tradition and the usual practice of Yorùbá women to breast-feed their infants. In fact, the Yorùbá regard it as an unsympathetic and wicked act for a nursing mother to wean her baby so quickly or not to give the baby breast milk at all. The importance they attached to breastfeeding culminated into spacing of their children. At least, there will be a space of two and half years in between two children born by the same mother before she can give birth to another child. At times the co-wives of a woman who has weaned her child before a year and half used to be ridiculed with proverbial songs (*orin awérénde*) in a satirical way. One of such songs goes thus:

Lágbájá, onídodo tútú  
 Ó lóyún lómọ ogúnjó  
 Ó yànlè lómọ osù méfà

<sup>30</sup> There are different ways of lulling the little children in Yorùbá society. It may be by dancing for them while carrying or backing them and it may involve crooning to lull them. The type of such songs is called lullaby (*Orin arẹmọ*).

Lágbájá onídodo tútú.  
 (“Somebody<sup>31</sup> who is not wise  
 She becomes pregnant while holding a twenty days old baby  
 She is flirting while she still carries a six months old baby  
 “Somebody” who is not wise).

The essence of this kind of satirical song is to denounce the attitude of some women who are not giving adequate breast milk to their newborn babies. This is because; it is regarded as a bad attitude in Yorùbá society. Before an infant can be given other food apart from breast milk the child must be given six months exclusive breast-feeding (Adeoye 1979:250). Òşun is a good mother; she has the knowledge and understanding that breast milk is profitable for the babies.<sup>32</sup> Another thing we can deduce is that the contemporary global orientation of exclusive breast-feeding has started for a long period in Yorùbá society among the women. It is not something new or foreign to Yorùbá society. Òşun is known for this noble mother care.

During the annual Òşun festival in Òşogbo, the song below is one of the songs which women sing to praise Òşun as a good mother.

Lílé: È kóre Yèyé o!  
 Ègbè: È kóre Òşun  
 Lílé: Şe bíwọ niyá o!  
 Ègbè: Şe bíwọ niyá àwa  
 Lílé: Olómọ niyá o!  
 Ègbè: Olómọ niyá àwa  
 Lílé: È bá wa pèyá o!  
 Ègbè: È ba wa pèyá àwa!  
 (Solo: Hail the precious mother!  
 All: Hail Òşun, the precious mother  
 Solo: You are the mother!  
 All: You are our own mother.  
 Solo: The mother have children  
 All: Our mother have children  
 Solo: Hail the mother  
 All: Hail our mother for us.)

This song is showing Òşun as a role model mother who cares for her children very well. That is why her devotees are confident to boast that she is their mother, and that people should join them in praising her. The

<sup>31</sup> “Somebody” here means anybody. It is a way of withholding the name of the recipient so that it won’t be a kind of direct attack or opposition on the personality of the person.

<sup>32</sup> This reveals that the contemporary global breastfeeding campaign is nothing new to the Yorùbá society. It has existed in Yorùbá society for a long time. In fact, it could be traced to Òşun as a mother.

unparallel virtues they have found in her give them the confidence to proclaim her as the mother that is worthy to be praised and identified with.

#### 4.4. Òṣun as a Paediatrician<sup>33</sup>

In Yorùbá, there is an adage that “*ilera lorò - health is wealth*”. This is revealing the philosophy of the people with regards to the nursing of little children, by the use of her cold water without preparing fire inside the room. It is the belief of Òṣun devotees that the children of Òṣun do not need fire inside the house. The only thing they need is Òṣun water to take care of such children.

If we are trying to prevent sickness, and sickness has eventually come, the next effort is to prevent death. If we employ various methods to prevent our children from sickness but if diseases or sickness eventually attacks them, the next thing is to do everything possible to prevent them from dying. Whenever the children are sick, the devotees of Òṣun believe strongly that the healing of such children is vested in Òṣun through her mystical power and potent cold water. This is shown in one of her *oriki* which they use when they want to give Òṣun water to a nursing mother that:

Alágbo òfẹ  
 A-bi-wọmọ-sàkà  
 Yèyè wẹmọ yè  
 Òriṣà tí rómi tútù ú wàrùn  
 Onígboò àbíkú  
 Atorí-ẹni-tí-kò-sunwón-se  
 Àwòyè leja ní wo tirè nínú ibú  
 Àwòyè ni pèrègún ní wo tirè lódò  
 Òṣun, bá mi wò ó lówòşomọ  
 Ìyá omọ mi Ládékojú,  
 Bá mi télè orù  
 Yèyè bá mi jáwé<sup>34</sup> olóore sómi  
 Yèyè ló ní n mówó oògùn sápo  
 Yèyè ló ní n mówó alágbo yànkọ je.

<sup>33</sup> The practice of Òṣun method of healing by cold water is different from one place to the other. For example Ilesanmi has pointed out that in Ìj., èbujèṣà and Ìpòndá, this is known as the cult of Olómitútù.

<sup>34</sup> *Jáwé* here means, “pluck leaves”. But in the real sense it does not connote that Òṣun uses leaves and herbs to heal diseases. The Yorùbá believe that herbs and leaves are visible effective healing materials, so, they believe that, Òṣun has the power to use her mystical power to possess her water with healing powers which is more effective and efficient than the herbs.

(The one who gives concoction freely,  
 The one who gives effective treatment to babies  
 The mother who baths children unto survival  
 The Òrìṣà who uses cold water to cure diseases  
 Effective user of concoction (cold water)  
 Effective healer of Àbíkú  
 Effective mender of the destiny of unfortunate person  
 The Fishes in the deep nurse their children unto survival  
 The Pèrègún at the river bank nurse their children unto survival  
 Òṣun, help me nurse the child unto survival  
 Ládékojú, the mother of my children, be the power at the bottom of  
 the water pot  
 Mother, supply my pot of water with beneficial herbs  
 Mother, you told me to keep the money I would have spent for the  
 herbalist.  
 Mother, you told me to use the money I would have spent for the  
 person making concoction to feed myself.

The above oríkì of Òṣun is showing the dynamic activities of Òṣun in healing the little children when they are sick. It has been revealed from our interview with Iyá Òṣun that the concoction and herbs they mentioned in the oríkì are not real herbs and concoction. But, that they refer to the power embedded in Òṣun cold water for the cure of various diseases of the children. On the other hand, it was seen at the palace shrine of Òṣun in Òṣogbo where Ìyá Òṣun prescribed herbal concoction for a waiting mother. This then shows that Òṣun also has the mastery use of herbal medicine.

In Yorùbá land, it is the tradition of people to prepare different types of concoction for the newly born babies. There are various types they make depending on the diseases affecting a particular child. The essence of these concoctions is to enhance sound health of their babies. But, the above oríkì is presenting Òṣun as a goddess who uses cold water to heal various diseases of the children. The herbalists and the traditional healers who prepare concoction usually charge their clients for the concoction that they prepare for them. This is corroborated in the saying, “*Ènu òfífo kii dún yànmùyànmù* - Empty mouth does not make any noise”. The nursing mothers at times do spend a lot of money in preparing concoction for their children. But, Òṣun does give her healing water freely without receiving money from her clients. That is why they refer to her as “the one who gives concoction freely”. Even though the herbalists do use herbs and roots to heal, Òṣun devotees believe that the cold water of Òṣun heals effectively more than herbs. This is what the second line is saying that Òṣun is an

effective healer. That is why she is also portrayed in the third line as the mother who baths children unto survival.

The infants are faced with different types of diseases. That is one of the causes of high infant mortality rate in the past among the Yorùbá. But, Òṣun has been shown in her oríkì as the one who saves from the tomfoolery of àbíkú. She is also acclaimed as the goddess who cures all manner of diseases with cold water due to the presence of her mystical power in it. In Yorùbá society, they believe that àbíkú are mysterious children who die soon after they were born. They may allow the same parents to give birth to them again. Their attitudes reveal them as a set of powerful and mischievous spirit children who cannot be prevented by the herbalists. That is why the Yorùbá will say, “*Àbíkú solóògùn dèké* - Àbíkú has made herbalist a liar,” This proverb is saying that however powerful an herbalist is, he cannot save a Àbíkú from dying. But, the above oríkì Òṣun shows that Òṣun is a saviour from àbíkú by the use of her cold water. The confidence and the faith of Òṣun devotees in her healing powers, make them to be praising her. Because, they believe that she is the one who can put the power to solve all manner of paediatric problems into her water. Also, the power that goes beyond the power of herbs, which is mystical, Òṣun puts into her water for the devotees. Hence, she is called upon to put a beneficial herb into their pots of water.

The last two lines of the oríkì of Òṣun above are also revealing the superiority of Òṣun healing water over all other traditional means of healing. Whatever kind of herbal medicine prepared to heal the diseases of the children; however powerful such herbal medicine are, the healing done by Òṣun by the use of cold water is considered highly effective and efficient more than all other means. The faith that the devotees of Òṣun have in divine healing power of Òṣun water, to heal all manner of paediatrics diseases will make them to keep the money they would have used for the herbalists in their pockets. This will also make them to use such money to feed themselves. It is the mystical power of Òṣun water that she uses to cure diseases.

It has been revealed that there are various ways in which the water of Òṣun is being used to cure diseases of the children. But, the two important methods of using this water to cure are drinking and bathing with it. One of Òṣun popular songs reveals this that:

Omi la bù wè  
 Omi la bù mu  
 A kíí bómi sòtá  
 Omi la bù wè  
 Omi la bù mu

It is water that we used to bathe  
 It is water that we drink  
 No one makes an enemy with water  
 It is water that we used to bathe  
 It is water that we drink

It indicates from the above that there is a supernatural power inside Òṣun water, potential and capable enough to solve all paediatrics problems in Yorùbá society. Though, the belief and the faith of people in the healing power of Òṣun water is fast catching up with modernity and intrusion of foreign religions, still, some people still hold to the belief in the water. During Òṣun 2001 and 2002, many people are even fetching the water into kegs. Many were pouring the water on their heads. Barren women who are looking for children approach the water with faith and assurance that this goddess would give them their own children. Those who are fetching it into kegs were taking it home. Some are even from outside Òṣogbo community. See. Fig. 4.4 that is the photograph below:



**Fig. 4.4: Picture of who were fetching Òṣun water for Healing, Pix by Author, 2001**

Till today in Òṣogbo one of the Deeps of Òṣun, Ajigùn, is noted for specialisation in healing via cold water. Many clients still visit this shrine either for caring of their children's sicknesses or for cure of infertility.

#### 4.5. Òṣun as a Deity of Productivity, Vitality and Fertility

It is a thing of joy among the Yorùbá for a marriage to be blessed with children. That is why they pray that the housewife will not remember the pain of sexual intercourse- “*Èyìn iyàwó kò ní mẹní*. It is even the tradition for ladies who are going to their husbands’ house to receive parental blessings so that they won’t be barren when they get to their husbands’s house. One of the nuptial songs they sing during such marriage ceremony goes thus:

Kórí Iya mi o b̀un mi lóṃṃ  
 Esúru k̀i yag̀an o  
 Kórí Iyá mi o b̀un mi lóṃṃ  
 Èsúru k̀i yag̀an o  
 Aṣo àrà or̀un mi  
 Oṃṃ lèmi yóó fi gbé/2x  
 Kórí Iyá mi o b̀un mi lóṃṃ  
 Èsúru k̀i yag̀an o  
 May my mother’s head give me children  
 Trifoliate yam is never barren  
 May my mother’s head give me children  
 Trifoliate yam is never barren  
 This beautiful dress on me  
 I will use it to carry children /2x  
 May my mother’s head give me children  
 Trifoliate yam is never barren.

The Yorùbá regard barrenness as a reproach, stigma and something awkward. Hence, barrenness is not taken with levity. An adage even says, “A nursing mother is an enemy to a barren woman-*Iyá ọ́lómọ́ ọ́tá àg̀an*”. This is pointing to the importance, which the Yorùbá people attach to child bearing. Besides, childbearing is regarded as part of productivity and vitality. They even say that:

Iná kú, ó feéru bojú  
 Ògèdè kú, ó fṃṃ è rópò  
 Bí aládií kò bá sí mó  
 Oṃṃ rẹ́ ní o jogún ẹbu  
 (When fire is dead ashes succeed it  
 When banana is dead another sucker replaces it  
 If palm kernel oil producer is not alive  
 Her child will inherit her factory).

A prominent prayer among the Yorùbá is that they have children who will inherit their properties. Procreation is of a great concern to the Yorùbá people to the extent that if it is getting longer for a newly married couple to have a child, they will go to Ifá priest or other sources for inquiry. The major reason why most people who are of Ifá clients do go for divination is of barrenness and infertility (Abimbola 1969:41). Therefore, the fruit of womb is one of the three important wishes/goals/pursuits of human being in the world according to Yorùbá philosophy. Apart from the blessings of children, the other two blessings are, blessing of money (prosperity) and blessing of long life that is the king of prosperity (Abimbola 1969:98). The Yorùbá adage says “*ohun tí a bá sọ láìsí owó, ìsọkúsọ ni* - Whatever we say in the absence of money is useless”. If somebody lives for a very long time in the world, with plenty children in poverty, he is not better than the person who is dead. If someone have money and children and died prematurely it is not a thing of glory because, such person is not qualified to be an ancestor. Therefore, those three goodness or blessings are the hearthstones of Yorùbá concept of vitality in life, which they usually pray for.

It has been shown in the verbal art of Òṣun that the three blessings that human beings are pursuing in life could be given by Òṣun. The devotees of Òṣun do show this when they worship Òṣun, especially during the weekly annual worship. After the Votary maid had carried the calabash to the main shrine at the riverside, the Ìyá Òṣun and Àwòrò Òṣun will begin to perform the sacrifice, and they pray to Òṣun thus:

Órè Yèyè o! - Gracious mother  
 Òṣun, mo pè ó o! - Òṣun, I call you  
 Mo pè ó sówó - I call you for money  
 Mo pè ó sómọ - I call you for children,  
 Mo pé ó sàikú baálè orò - I call you for long life the king o  
 prosperity  
 Èni tó ñ wówó - The person searching for money  
 Fowó dá a lólá - Bless such with money  
 Èni tó ñ wómọ - The person searching for child  
 N kò fé odi - I don't want a deaf  
 Èmi kò fé arọ - I don't want a lame<sup>35</sup>  
 Omọ rere - Good child,  
 Ní kí o fún gbogbo wọn - You should give to all of them

<sup>35</sup> In Yorùbá cosmology all deformed children such as lame, deaf, dumb and even the albino are regarded as the children of Òrì.,sà. This is because they believe that children are moulded by Òrìsàńlá - who shapes the head of children in the womb before they were born. Secondly, it is believed that, those deformed children are special children to Òrì.,sà who moulds them and they are regarded as special beings.



The above verbal art of Òṣun is part of the prayers of Òṣun devotees during their worship. It is indicated in this poetry that, the devotees of Òṣun believe strongly that Òṣun can provide the three types of blessings - money, children and long life for them. Apart from this, the devotees of Òṣun believe that, when they pray to Òṣun on behalf of other people who need the help of Òṣun, she will hearken to their voices. In their petition, they told Òṣun not to give disabled children to them but good (perfect) children.

It is also revealing in the verbal art of Òṣun that every woman can still procreate by the help of Òṣun. To Òṣun, there is no closed case for any woman. Age or menopause is not a barrier to fertility for Òṣun. One of her oríkì says:

Adétayùn o!  
 Ìyá mi gílògílò tí pa ará Ìwó<sup>36</sup> ládíe je  
 Adétayùn ní ènìyàn ju àbíkú,  
 Omọ n bẹ nínú arúgbó gbogbo  
 (Adétayùn o ò!  
 My sneaky mother who kills the fowls of Ìwó people  
 Adétayùn says human beings are more than àbíkú,  
 Every old person can still give birth to child)

Adétayùn is another name for Òṣun. The above oríkì Òṣun shows that however long somebody is being afflicted by àbíkú; there is hope in Òṣun as the goddess who can stop the menaces of àbíkú. Also, however old a woman is, Òṣun can still make it possible for such a woman to be pregnant and give birth to a child by the help of Òṣun. This then shows that Òṣun does not only put an end to àbíkú, she is also a goddess of fertility. To her, there is no closed case in regards to fertility and procreation. One of the major reasons why she has many followers is because of her association with fertility. She is a goddess of fertility who has the potency of removing shame of barrenness and infertility from women. That is why they pray to her thus:

Yèyé gbómọ fún mi jó  
 Ìyá tí kò léegun tí kò léjè  
 Òṣun Àyílà gbà mí o  
 N ò lénikan  
 Èni a ní níí gbani.  
 (Mother, give me baby which I will dance with  
 The mother without neither bone nor blood,  
 Òṣun the saviour, save me.  
 I have nobody to save me  
 His/her deity saves one)

<sup>36</sup> Ìwó is a community in Òṣun state of Nigeria where Òṣun is also worshipped.

This prayer shows the faith and the fate of Òṣun devotees in her as the goddess who can bless them with children.

It is the tradition of Yorùbá woman to dance with their babies as a form of lulling whenever they are crying. Therefore, the faith of the devotee who said the above prayer in Òṣun is very high. She has been using eye of faith to claim the child, which Òṣun will give her, which she will dance with. Also, it portrays her absolute and unwavering faith in Òṣun, who will remove the reproach and shame of barrenness from her so that she can have a child to dance with. Òṣun is described as “the one who digs the sand to bring out money”. This is showing Òṣun as a successful businesswoman. The devotees of Òṣun believe that they resemble their mother - Òṣun. Not only this, she is the one they believe that has the power to bless them with prosperity in diverse forms - blessings of money, children and long life. At times, in the songs of many devotees and those looking unto her for blessings of the womb, they praise her as they pray to her. One of such songs of prayers goes thus:

Yèyè bá mi ṣe é !  
 Yèyè Òṣun ò!  
 Yèyè Olómọyọyọ  
 Yèyè wá bá mi ṣe é!  
 (Mother, do it for me  
 Mother Òṣun,  
 Mother of plenty children.  
 Mother, come and do it for me!)

The above song is also showing Òṣun as a goddess of fertility, the one who can bless people with children because she has plenty of them. They trust solely in her as the one who can give them children. In conclusion, it is the fate and faith of Òṣun devotees and many others who belong to other religions such as Islam and Christianity that Òṣun has the power to bless them by giving children to the barren, health to the sick and prosperity to the poor. During the annual worship of Òṣun in Òṣogbo, the people who appear at the bank of the river praying, drinking Òṣun water, pouring it on their heads and those who bring personal ritual or sacrifice to the river are plenty and more than the few people who are the consistent devotees. This act is pointing to their faith in Òṣun as a goddess of productivity, vitality and fertility who occupies an important place and space in the community and far beyond.

#### 4.6. The Beauty and the Elegance of Òṣun

Beauty is in various forms. Òṣun is a pretty woman. In Yorùbá society, it is the tradition of their women to use different cosmetics to adorn themselves. Either a lady going into marriage or a married woman, all of them try to adorn themselves and appear charming, neatly and attractive to men. At times, it is a politics of appearance by using different cosmetics for adornment. There is an adage in Yorùbá that, “ a lady who is painting her feet, is an activity of beauty; the one who is using eyes lashes, it is also an act of beauty. *"Omoge tí ń lé làálì áájò ẹwà nì, Èyí tó sù ń tó tìròò áájò ẹwà náà nì"*.

This is corroborating the fact that Yorùbá women use different types of cosmetics to adorn themselves so that they can appear beautiful. Among these cosmetics and make-ups are: beads, bangles, traditional marks, weaving and plaiting of hair, painting of feet and eyes lashes etc. Apart from using these artificial make-ups, some of them are usually blessed by God with beauty from heaven (natural beauty). In such cases, whatever kind of dress they put on, the beauty and the glory of God their creator will just shine on them.

If we examine the poetry of Òṣun, chants, recitation or songs, if we use our imagery potentials, we will be able to decipher the depth of the beauty of Òṣun as a goddess. One of the oríkì of Òṣun goes thus:

Aṣade bí ẹ ń ṣagbá  
 Mo torí ilèkè ẹfòntè  
 Mo bá wọn mórùn gígùn wáyé  
 Mo torí idẹ móbó  
 Mo bá wọn lówó gbogbọ  
 Èjìgbà ilèkè ní ń ṣa mi lórùn ní Ìjùmú  
 Idẹ wéréwéré ń ṣa mi lówó eré abó  
 Mo ṣude mo i lérí idẹ  
 Èjìgbà ilèkè ni mo i tàkiti lókè Èfòn  
 Òṣun Ṣèègèsí Olóyà iyùn.  
 (The one who gathers brass as if gathering calabash,  
 Because of ẹfòntè beads,  
 I was created with a long neck.  
 I was created with long hands,  
 Because of brass bangles.  
 I put plenty coral beads on my neck in Ìjùmú  
 My wrists are filled with brass bangles  
 I added brass to brass

I used plenty coral beads during my performance at Èfòn.  
 Òşun Şèègèsí the owner of coral beaded comb

The above oríkì Òşun shows her as a woman that was created by God as a beautiful woman. The second to the fifth lines are revealing Òşun as a woman with a neck that her use of beads is very fitting and moderate. It is true that she used cosmetics like èfòntè beads and coral beads, but the nature of her neck made it possible for the beads to be moderate on her neck. As earlier said, necklaces is part of cosmetics which women use to beautify themselves. It means that Òşun is a pioneer among women who uses necklace to adorn herself.

Apart from necklaces, they make use of bangles. We can deduce from the above oríkì of Òşun that God gave her good hands that make the use of bangles fitting and corporate. The bangles she was using are not ordinary ones, they are bangles made of brass. That is why, in order to look like mother Òşun, her devotees do put on the similar necklaces and bangles today. The beaded comb of Òşun is also an indication that she plaits hair for the people. Therefore, she mends people's head so that they become beautiful. The outer beautification of head that Òşun does cannot be unconnected with her power to mend and rectify people's head (destiny) at the metaphysical level. Apart from this, she has different articles of beauty, elegance and glory.

Òşun is called "The mother who has fans of coral beads". This connotes that Òşun's fan was made of coral beads; this makes the fan colourful, beautiful and fanciful. In most cases, coral beads are an emblem of beauty and elegance. Another oríkì of Òşun says:

Òşun Şèègèsí  
 Olóyà iyùn  
 A fi-dídá-gòjò-gòjò-fàjàngbòn  
 (Òşun Şèègèsí,  
 The owner of beaded comb  
 The one who walks elegantly to cause trouble).

Part of what they use in plaiting women hair is comb, which is usually made of wood. But, the comb of Òşun was made of bead to show that she is sociable and elegant. The third line of her oríkì above shows that she is naturally beautiful among women. "The trouble" she causes with her walking style is nothing more than attraction she creates for men when they see her beauty. This is normal for some men when they see a beautiful lady walking in their presence, they cannot but feed the visual domain. The moment the men see the beauty of Òşun especially while she walks, they will be attracted to her. The beauty and the elegance of Òşun could be the

reason why she was a wife to a number of Yorùbá male deities according to some myths (Farris, 1983:24-50).

Apart from using cosmetics and her natural beauty, the character of Òṣun is a form of beauty for her. An adage in Yorùbá says, “Character is beauty”. This implies that, if somebody has a very good character and such person is not beautiful physically, the good character of such person will attract people to him/her and the person will become admirable unto the people. It is also the philosophy of Yorùbá that “good character is the make-up or cosmetics of a person” - iwà rere lèsó èniyàn. This means that, good character of a person is his/her beauty and the instrument of beauty for him/her. If the beauty associated with dressing/apparel and physical outlook is what can be seen physically, the good character is inner beauty which complements and at times overrides the physical beauty. Therefore, if we examine the character and the appearance of Òṣun as revealed in the verbal art, we can conclude that her good character makes her to be beautiful. Beier (2000:37) made a corroborating statement about Òṣun that “Her beauty came from her character rather than from her features. The phrase *Ìwàlẹ̀wà* (character is beauty) perfectly applies to her”.

In essence, this is supporting the view that the caring and generosity of Òṣun towards her devotees and those who go to her for one thing or the other is part of what make her beautiful. Even though Òṣun is a powerful deity, she doesn't use her power abnormally. There is nothing good that human beings are achieving in the world that Òṣun cannot enhance. She is a gracious and caring mother. She is a paediatrician. She is a goddess of fertility, productivity and prosperity. Therefore, all these good things which Òṣun is doing make us to conclude that she is good, pretty and elegant.

#### **4.7. The Role of Òṣun in Òṣogbo Polity**

As we've said earlier, Òṣogbo is one of Yorùbá towns that still keep many of the Yorùbá traditional heritages even in the face of modernism. Before the advent of Europeans in Yorùbá land each community had its own system of administration. In the past, the king is the political head of a local community. An adage says, “A tree cannot make a forest”. Even though, the king is the political head, he alone cannot do the administration. These are the participants in the administration of a local community:

God – Olódùmarè:

- Divinities / Deities Òrìṣà/Ìbọ
- The Deceased Patriarchs and Matriarchs-Òkú òrun

- King
- Village Head (Baálè)
- Family Head (Baálé)
- Elders (Men and Women)
- Youths (Male and Female).

The Yorùbá believe that God is the superior king of every local community in which the deities are just his representatives. If we examine Yorùbá communities, the Deities are deeply involved in the administration of each community in one-way or the other. If we examine Òṣogbo as a local community we will see the impact of Òṣun goddess. We cannot underestimate the role of Òṣun in the polity of Òṣogbo community. If we begin from the historical foundation of Òṣogbo as a town, we will see that she; Òṣun is the owner of Òṣogbo town. Without Òṣun we cannot have a town called Òṣogbo. She gave the name Òṣogbo to that community and the title of its political head Àtàoja was her machination. The people of Òṣogbo even regard Òṣun as the mother of their kings. This manifests in one of the oríkì Òṣun thus:

Ìyá mi Ṣolágbadé Èwùjì ọlórò ọba Ìjèsà  
 Iwin Láròóye Gbádewólú,  
 Mo kóre Yèyé f'Òsun ... etc  
 Iwin Sogbodede  
 My Mother, Solágbadé Èwùjì the owner of Ìjèsà king  
 The supporter of Laròóyè Gbádewólú  
 I praise the good mother, Òṣun  
 The supporter of Sògbódeḍe.

The chanter of this oríkì mentioned the past kings of Òṣogbo, linking them to Òṣun, showing that Òṣun is their counsellor and their backbone, including the king on the throne. This means that, every king of Òṣogbo community regards Òṣun as his own mother. It is also revealed in another chants that:

Taa ni ò mò pé Òṣun Òṣogbo, -Who knows not that it is Òṣun Òṣogbo  
 Níí bóbaá ṣèlú Òṣogbo? -Is the one who rules Òṣogbo for its king?  
 Òṣun Òṣogbo ní ó bá mi ṣe é-Òṣun Òṣogbo will do it for me  
 Apá mi kò ká a-There is no strength to do it.

This means that even though it is the Àtàoja who is seen by the people of Òṣogbo as their political leader, their main thrust is Òṣun. It is with the strength and the power of Òṣun that the king is ruling the town. If we even look at the staff of office of Àtàoja of Òṣogbo, which is the symbol or

emblem of his political authority over the community, at the peak of the staff is a bird. This bird stands for the witch, in which Òṣun is the leader of the group. Therefore, the image of the bird is not a mere aesthetic object but it also has its socio-cultural function and interpretation. This image of bird is also on some of the crowns of the king. This then represents the presence of powerful women (*Iyá Ayé* - mother of the world) in the administration of the community. The history has it that when there was Islamic war against Òṣogbo community in the early 1804, and the Fulani laid ambush for the people of Òṣogbo. It was Òṣun who transformed herself into a food seller - selling *àmàlà* and *gbègìrì* soup, which she poisoned. It was this poisoned food that was sold to the enemies in the camp. They ate it and died. That was how she fought for the people of Òṣogbo against the Fulani and thereby delivered Òṣogbo from its enemies. The *oríkì* Òṣun even shows that men were not bold enough to confront the enemies it was Òṣun, a woman who was bold because of her cosmic power to destroy the enemies of Òṣogbo people. We can see that this role she played is a prominent role in the political history of Òṣogbo. If not for her salvific role, Òṣogbo could have been a thing of past in history. That is why the popular saying by the people of Òṣogbo that “*Ogun kò gbodò jà mí, mo gbékèlé Òṣun*” - No war can invade Òṣogbo again; I put my trust in Òṣun.

Economy plays important role in the political stability or instability of a community. Any community with bad economy cannot make a significant progress. Indigo dye is a prominent business in Òṣogbo. Part of their national anthem song says:

Òṣogbo ilú aró-Òṣogbo is the town of indigo dye  
Aró dèdè bíi òkun-Indigo dye like the sea.

Indigo dye is the major occupation of Òṣun. This business has become a traditional occupation for the people of Òṣogbo community. This indigo dye is one of the fascinating industries that is attracting people from nearby communities and far away places to Òṣogbo.

The protective role, which Òṣun plays in Òṣogbo, is another commendable role in the politics of Òṣogbo. This is a thing of pride and glory to them and they eulogize it that:

Òṣogbo wù mí dé  
Ní ó lọ ságbalá Òṣun  
Níbi tí wón tí n rẹrọ  
Tí wón tún n gúndó idẹ.  
(I love to visit Òṣogbo,  
I want to see Òṣun court,

Where they make indigo dye  
And they also use brass mortar).

Apart from what Òṣun has done in the politics of Òṣogbo, the Òṣun festival itself is playing an important role in the development of this community. During Osun festivals the marketers are always happy because of high patronage they witness in their business. Òṣun festival is a factor of unity and cohesion in Òṣogbo. The time of Òṣun festival is a time of inspiration for the king of Òṣogbo. This is because; it is a time that various groups and social strata in the town will pledge their supports for him and also shows their obedience to his administration. If the people in the town refuse to cooperate with the king everything he does will amount to nothing. During Òṣun Òṣogbo festival, various groups, men and women will come before the king (who will sit majestically on the throne) especially on the day they light the sixteen points lamp and using songs and chants to show that they are in support of his administration. Among such festival songs are:

Lílé: Èyí yẹ wá ná  
Ègbè: Èyí yẹ wá ná  
Lílé: Ó tilè gbà foba  
Ègbè: Ó tilè gbà foba  
Lílé: Télégàn ló ma  
Ègbè: Télégàn ló ma kù o !  
(Solo: This celebration is successful  
All: This our celebration is successful  
Solo: It even befits our king  
All: It even befits our king  
Solo: Unless those who will despise you  
All: Unless those who will despise you)

Or

Lílé: Àwa rẹ làá jọ ẹ é  
Ègbè: Àwa rẹ làá jọ ẹ é  
Lílé: Oba wa Àlámú<sup>37</sup> o!  
Ègbè: Àwa rẹ làá jọ ẹ é.  
(Solo: We will do it jointly with you  
All: We will do it jointly with you  
Solo: Àlámú our king  
All: We will do it jointly with you

<sup>37</sup> Àlámú is the personal oríkì of the incumbent king, Àtàója Oyèwálé Mátànmí III.



In the above songs, the town women see themselves as co-operators who will work together with the King to make the community of Òṣogbo become great. That is why they told the king in the first song that Òṣun festival is “our celebration” not your (king) celebration alone. The commendation for the successfulness was not acclaimed to the king alone, but to all and sundry in the community. But, because the king is the political head of the community, he was given a special commendation in the third and fourth lines of the first song. They praised him so that he would be encouraged to do better. On the other hand, they used their songs to show that the celebration was done decently in a colourful way without going into debt. It is the duty of the king to finance the festival, though with the support from various groups and chiefs in the town. The women then sing to show that their king is capable to do his duties as the political and religious head of the town without going into any form of debt. Among such songs also is:

Lílé: Láú ẹ̀rẹ̀bẹ̀  
 Ègbè: Ẹ̀rẹ̀bẹ̀ láú  
 Lílé: Owó ilé là n lo  
 A ò mà yáwó fi ẹ̀ ẹ̀ o  
 Ègbè: Láú ẹ̀rẹ̀bẹ̀, ẹ̀rẹ̀bẹ̀ láú.  
 (Solo: Láú ẹ̀rẹ̀bẹ̀  
 All: Ẹ̀rẹ̀bẹ̀ láú  
 Solo: We are celebrating the festival with our own money  
 We do not borrow money to perform it,  
 All: Láú ẹ̀rẹ̀bẹ̀, ẹ̀rẹ̀bẹ̀ láú.

It is observed that this kind of song fosters unity and cooperation in the town. Hence there will be political stability, peace and progress in the community. Apart from this, in the communal songs during the Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo, they do pray for the king-Àtàoja so that everything will augur well in the town. Below is an example of such songs:

Lílé: Ọba wa Àlámú o  
 Ègbè: Ọlórún jégbà tirẹ́ ó rójú  
 Lílé: Mátànmi Iyiólá o  
 Ègbè: Ọlórún jégbà tirẹ́ ó rójú  
 (Solo: Àlámú, our king  
 All: May God make your own regime peaceful  
 Solo: Mátànmi Iyiólá  
 All: May God make your own regime peaceful.

When things augur well in the community, the members of the community will live well. If a wicked person becomes the king, the town will be in chaos. But, if the regime of a king is marked with peace, progress and

prosperity, then, the people in the community will enjoy. That is why they use the forum of Òşun festival to pray for their king.

The period of Òşun festival is a time of unity for the people of Òşogbo. They see themselves having a common identity. As women sing, men will also sing. All traditional chiefs will dance before the king, holding their cutlasses of authority. As they dance, they prostrate before the king to show their loyalty and support for the king. They will also pray for the king and the whole community in general. The town people will be saying, “may it be so” (Àşẹ) as they pray. This is a tool of harmony and love among the people of Òşogbo. This will in essence bring progress into the community.

Unity and harmony are strong machinery for politics and progress in an establishment or a community. Therefore, the impact of Òşun festival in Òşogbo in the politics of that community either as a communal worship, or as a social festival for the indigenes of Òşogbo, is of paramount importance. It has been shown that the king of this local community does not see Òşun festival as a religious or spiritual festival. But he sees it as a remembrance festival. He even asserted in one of his speeches during the annual Òşun festival of 1993 that:

Òşun Òşogbo Festival is a festival. That is all it is the celebration of the birth of Òşogbo and the remembrance of the events that led to the founding of the town. The occasion is an attempt on our part to look back into the life of our forefathers which we can still appreciate and hope to hand over to generations after us. It is not religion per se but a remembrance festival.<sup>38</sup>

In a nutshell, Àtàója sees Òşun festival as something that is pointing to their source as a community and as a festival that is authenticating, legitimising and reaffirming his political authority over this community. In essence, to the king, Òşun festival is an instrument that enhances the political authority and the locus standing of the king.

#### **4.8. Òşun as Water/River**

Water is essential to everything existing in the world. Without water, there can be no life, peace, productivity, fertility and sound health. No wonder they sing during Òşun festival that, “it is the water that we used to bathe, it is water that we drink, and no one will be an enemy to water”. Without mincing words, Òşun is water/river. Many things are pointing to it that Òşun is water. Jones (1997:73) Even says that “Òşun is not only an idea-it is

<sup>38</sup> See *Òşun Festival Brochure* 1993.

water”. Research has shown that Òşun is a river that has Igèdè as its source, and flows through Ijèşaland, Òşogbo, Èdè, Olúpònnà, Ìkòyí, Ìbàdàn, Abéòkúta, and Ìjèbù-Èrè to Lagos. It is even a reality that there is Òşun river, which has water in it in Òşogbo, which is what they worship there as a communal or the guardian deity of the community. Òşun even connotes river and the etymological interpretation of the name suggests river/water. In the verbal art of Òşun, there are many insignia referring to Òşun either as a river, or as water or both. One of her oríkì goes thus:

Onítèé tútù  
 Ò-wayanrin-wayanrin-kówó-sí  
 Oba lódò  
 Omi lẹngbẹ A-rin-má-sùn  
 Şolágbadé Èwùjí  
 Mo ké mọgbà lódò omi  
 Pèrègún ilé Ìjamò  
 Ò-wó-rùrù-fara-lùko  
 Omi A-rin-má-sùn  
 Omi asàn réré  
 Ó wólé òdàlè  
 Ó sànrèrè  
 Ó wólé èké  
 Òşun, A-rómi-tútù-soògùn-àgàn  
 Òşun, A-rómi-tútù-soògùn-àbíkú  
 Òşun, A-rómi-tútù-wàrùn  
 Ládékojú, Afitó-soro.  
 (The one who has a cool throne  
 The one who buries money inside the sand  
 King of the river  
 Pool of water that moves sleeplessly  
 Şolágbadé Èwùjí  
 I cry unto water for help  
 Dracaena (Pèrègún) at the riverside  
 It moves heavily and touches the herbs at the banks  
 The water that walks without sleeping  
 The water that flows here  
 It destroys the house of conspirators,  
 The water that moves there  
 It destroys the house of liars  
 Òşun, the one who uses cold water to cure barrenness  
 Òşun, the one who uses cold water to heal Àbíkú  
 Òşun, the one who uses cold water to heal diseases  
 Ládékojú, the one who uses saliva to fight).

From the above oríkì of Òṣun it is evident that Òṣun is water and at the same time river. There are many words pointing to it that Òṣun is a river/water in the above verbal art.

The first and the third lines reveal that Òṣun is a powerful river goddess. They show that she is a king of the river with a cool throne. Coldness or coolness is an attribute of river. This signifies that Òṣun as a king of the river is using her power for the peace (to cool) of her devotees. Cool water oozes out of fish inside the river- “Omi tútù ló ń tẹnu ẹja bó”. It is even the belief that Ọbàtálá, the Yorùbà arch divinity uses the water of Òṣun in the moulding of human bodies in the creation myth. This mystical water could be likened to the water flow at birth of a child at the metaphysical level in the Yorùbá idea of destiny-Àkúnlẹyàn.

As a river, there are many minerals and precious materials inside river, at the bedrock of the river. The second line of the above oríkì reveals that Òṣun is very rich and those who move deeper with her will be made rich and wealthy. It is even clear enough from the fifth line to the seventeenth line that Òṣun is a river that flows into different directions to do various things. This is because, her water is not ordinary water, and it is sacred and powerful. The fourth and the ninth lines reveal Òṣun’s attitude towards her devotees. She watches over them. She doesn’t sleep, she is always thinking about them at all times. This is because; she is a gracious and a careful mother who gives adequate care to her adherents as her children. That is why in the sixth line she was called upon for help and salvation.

The eighth line reveals Òṣun as a river or water that has the capacity to flow in different places and directions. This is also showing that Òṣun as a powerful goddess can penetrate anywhere in order to care for her own. This is also an attribute of water. She can also bear any form of hardship in order to do good for the people.

Òṣun detests conspiracy and lying. The tenth to thirteenth lines reveal Òṣun as a goddess who disciplines the evildoers. As pointed earlier, the power of Òṣun is inside her water. She can heal all manner of diseases with her sacred water. This is even the belief of her devotees. She is the deity who has the power to stop àbíkú from their pervading shenanigan. It is this same sacred water of Òṣun, which she uses to put an end to barrenness. That is why we have various names given to the children who were born through Òṣun bearing names associated with Òṣun. Among such names are: Òṣun has done this (Òṣúnṣẹ̀yí); Òṣun has opened the way (womb)-(Òṣúnṣínà); Òṣun has brought this (Òsúnmúyiwá); Òṣun has added to it (Òṣúnṣẹ̀nì) and so on.

The last line of the above poetry of Òṣun is loaded with meanings. The first thing is that the saliva symbolizes words, voice or speech in Yorùbà cosmology. This connotes that the words of Òṣun are powerful and

effective. She was the deity that Olódùmarè gave *àṣẹ* to when coming into the world. This may also depicts that Òṣun has a way of using her words to convince people. An Ifá priest, Babalolá Ifátòògùn even told me that it was Òṣun who begged Òrúnmilà to turn away his wrath when the latter was annoyed with Òṣogbo community. The Ifá priest even said that “if not for Òṣun, there wouldn’t be any community known as Òṣogbo again”.

Some of the songs of praises that they render to Òṣun reveal Òṣun as the one who uses torrential water to heal diseases. Her devotees even show that the water of Òṣun is more effective and efficient than concoction. This they claim as being in existence before the advent of modern medical doctors.

During the worship at Ajigun shrine of Òṣun in Òṣogbo on 6th August 2002 the attribute of Òṣun as water that has the power to heal barrenness and diseases is reflected in the songs recorded. Below are examples of the songs.

<b>Lílé:</b>	Omi ló bá mi ṣé é òò ò éé é! Omi ló bá mi ṣé é o àà à à! Gbogbo òrò tó n dún mí lémìí Omi ló bá mi ṣé é	<b>Lead:</b>	It was water that did it for me It was water that did it for me All requests of my heart
<b>Ègbè:</b>	Omi ló bá mi ṣé é òò ò éé é! Omi ló bá mi ṣé é o àà à à! Gbogbo òrò tó n dún mí lémìí Omi ló bá mi ṣé é	<b>Chorus:</b>	It was water that did it for me It was water that did it for me All requests of my heart
<b>Lile:</b>	Mo rée b’Ósun só ò éé é! Mo rée b’Ósun só o àà à à! Gbogbo òrò tó n dún mí lémìí Mo rée b’Ósun só.	<b>Lead:</b>	I went to discuss it with Osun I went to discuss it with Osun All requests of my heart I went to discuss it with Osun.

It is pertinent to mention here that testimony and gratitude to Òṣun concerning what she has done for the people makes their miracles last. This is reflected in some of the songs they render during the worships either at the local shrine or main shrine. Below are examples of such songs that the adherents and people who had been blessed by Òṣun rendered at the Ìjùmú shrine (deep) on August 6, 2002.

- (1) **Lílé:** Mo rée b'Òṣun sọ ò e e e e!  
 Mo rée b'Òṣun sọ o à à à à à!  
 Gbogbo òrò tó n dún mí léè mí  
 Mo rée b'Òṣun sọ-
- Lead:** I went to discuss it with Òṣun  
 I went to discuss it with Òṣun  
 All requests of my heart  
 I went to discuss it with Òṣun
- (2) **Ègbè:** Omi ló bá mi ṣé é ò éééé!  
 Omi ló bá mi ṣé e o à à à à à!  
 Gbogbo òrò tó n dún mí léè mí  
 Omi ló bá mi ṣé é
- Chorus:** It was water that did it for me  
 It was water that did it for me  
 All requests of my heart  
 It was water that did it for me.
- (3) **Ègbè:** Mo wá á dúpé ojó ò ò é é é é é!  
 Mo wá á dúpé ojó o à à à à à!  
 -  
 Ìyá Ìjèṣà dómọ náà sí -  
 Mo wá á dúpé ojó -
- Chorus:** I have come to appreciate  
 what you did for me  
 I have come to appreciate  
 what you did for me  
 The mother from Ìjèṣà will  
 make the child to survive  
 I have come to appreciate  
 what you did for me.

The first song reveals that the singer discussed all her needs, fears and aspiration with Òṣun while the second song above shows that Òṣun granted the request of the singer. Due to this she is happy and confident that it was Òṣun who did it for her neither another person nor deity.

The third song is a song of gratitude and thanksgiving to Òṣun for what she did for the singer who has come to testify at the grove. She testifies, gives thanks and prays that the child that was given to her by Òṣun be nurtured and kept until ripe age. It portends that her testimony is a source of thanksgiving and appreciation to Òṣun in order to receive more blessing and to also make her miracle lasts. This is in consonance with a Yorùbá proverb that, “*Eni dúpé oore àná yòò gba òmíràn-* One good turns deserves another”. The phenomenon of thanksgiving and sharing of testimony that characterize the new religious movements in Yorùbá society is not a foreign idea; it has been in existence long time ago before the advent of these religions. Giving of thanks to Òṣun and sharing the testimony of her kindness and provisions to the worshippers do not only attract the favour of Òṣun it also strengthens the faith and fate of other people who listen to such songs of Òṣun.

In conclusion, if Òṣun is water and her powers are inside the water, then Òṣun is the one who owns all things, which could be seen as existing in the

form of water. These are: saliva, urine, blood, menses, spermatozoon and the likes. All these things do possess their latent power (*àse*) in them to effect a change in humanity. Then, Òṣun is a powerful river goddess.

#### 4.9. Relationship of Òṣun with other Deities in Yorùbá Pantheon

There are innumerable Deities in Yorùbá pantheon. Some scholars say that they are two hundred and one (201), while some are saying that they are four hundred (400) and others are saying that they are four hundred and one (401). Research has shown that the deities in Yorùbá land are more than four hundred and one, even though most of them have been forgotten and they are just points of historical referents.

The most important thing to know is that, there are numerous deities in Yorùbá land, and each is endowed with power and responsibility in the theocratic administration of the universe. The Yorùbá deities are just like a human being who has different parts such as: eyes, legs, hands, ears and so on. None of these is independent and cannot perform successfully without interacting or cooperating with other or some members of the body parts. As powerful as Òṣun is among the deities in Yorùbá land, she is still in deeper relationship with other deities in the Yorùbá pantheon.

There is a myth that Òṣun was once the wife of Şàngó, the god of thunder and lightning. This is also evidential in part of the *oríkì* Òṣun that goes thus:

Nítorí àmàlà,  
Ni Òṣun fi ní wá Şàngó ká  
Nítorí omọ ní fi gba yánrin  
(Because of àmàlà food,  
Òṣun searches for Şàngó,  
She receives yánrin vegetables because of child).

The above *oríkì* of Òṣun reveals a kind of marital relationship between Òṣun and Şàngó. It was not Şàngó alone that Òṣun had relationship with; she also had relationship with Òsanyìn the god of herbs. One of the songs, which they sing for Òṣun during Òṣun festival in Òşogbo, also reveals this. The song goes thus:

A fi Ibúsanyìn şapata  
A fi Ibúsanyìn şapata  
Ogun kò jà kógun ó kó Òròkí<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Òròkí here stands for the entire community of Òşogbo. The community is at times called “àgbàlá Òşun” - the court of Òşun.

A fi Ibúṣanyìn ṣapata.  
 (We hold Òṣanyìn Deeps as our shield  
 We hold Òṣanyìn Deeps as our shield  
 No war ever captured Òròkí,  
 We hold Òṣanyìn Deeps as our shield).

This song is revealing that Òṣanyìn deep is a shield or protection to Òṣun. The devotees of Òṣun regard Ibúṣanyìn as the deity in charge of external defence for Òṣun grove and the community of Òṣogbo in general. Òṣogbo as a community is regarded as the court of Òṣun (àgbàlá Òṣun). Therefore it is Ibúṣanyìn, who is the shield, who will not allow any external aggression or intrusion into Òròkí i.e Òṣogbo, which is the court of Òṣun. From the song, another thing we can uncover is that Òṣun is a traditional healer, who uses cold water, while Òṣanyìn is also a traditional healer who uses herbs. It then implies that both of them are playing prominent and complementary roles in securing sound health for humanity. It is clearly evident that the type of relationship between Òṣanyìn and Òṣun is not the issue of superiority or inferiority it is mutuality in nature. This is contrary to the legend in Òṣogbo that it was Òṣun who seized the power from Òṣanyìn. The power and the role of Òṣanyìn and the literature show that the relationship between Òṣun and Òṣanyìn is mutuality.

Òṣun is also a witch that forms an integral part of healing system in Yorùbá land; likewise, Òṣanyìn is closely associated with the witches in the frame of healing method/process in Yorùbá land. The structure of Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo also reveals that, Òṣanyìn and Òṣun are closely related and associated in the nexus of healing system among the Yorùbá. Wenger (1990:61) noted that:

The bird obligates Òṣanyìn and his magic implications to Àwọn Ìyàmi (the witches) who are the holders of positive and negative ambivalent - magic forces. This, Òṣanyìn closeness to Àwọn Ìyàmi, makes his psychosomatic orientated curative feats effective, especially his aptitude to transform the magic - emotional influx of destructive hysteria into creative and ritual forces.

The above excerpt is corroborating our view with regards to the relationship between Òṣun and Òṣanyìn. Out of seven days activities of Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo, a whole day is dedicated to the performance of ritual to Òṣanyìn. As they worship Òṣun annually and publicly in Òṣogbo, the same they do for Òṣanyìn. The issue of this sixteen points lamp of Òṣanyìn also forms an integral part of the collective oríkì of Òṣogbo community. The oríkì goes thus:

Òṣogbo wù mí dé  
 Ní ó lo sàgbàlá Òṣun



Níbi tí wón tí rẹrọ  
 Tí wón tún gúndó idẹ  
 Oṃọ àtùpà méríndínlógún  
 Tí n tòn l'Òròkí Ilé  
 Bó bá tòn f'Óba  
 A tòn f'Óṣun  
 Bó bá tòn fún Irúnmalè  
 A tòn fẹyàn.  
 (I delight to visit Òṣogbo  
 I want to visit Òṣun court.  
 Where they make indigo dye  
 And they use brass mortar to pound,  
 Offspring of sixteen points lamp  
 Which shines in Òròkí Ilé  
 If it shine for the king  
 It will shine for Òṣun  
 If it shine for Irúnmalè (the deities)  
 It will shine for the people (human being)

The above citation is revealing that Òsanyìn's lamp is not just for the benefit of Òṣun and Òsanyìn alone. As it is useful for them, it is useful for Òṣogbo indigenes and for other deities. This presentation is contrary to the view of some people, who hold the view that it was Òṣun who seize the sixteen points lamps from Òsanyìn, when she conquered the latter. The place of Òsanyìn during Òṣun festival and what the verbal art reveals about their relationship does not validate that opinion.

A myth reveals that Òṣun and Oya were once married to Şàngo. This means that Oya and Òṣun were co-wives in the household of Şàngó. This is evident in the oríkì Òṣun that says:

Taa ni yóò bá mi délé iyá mi?  
 Òtun mi imúkele  
 Òsì mi a sì fa bàbà  
 Agbede-méjì mi a sì mú şéré lówó  
 E bá mi kóre Yeyé f'Ósun.  
 (Who will accompany me to my mother's house?  
 My right hand I'll use to take kele bead  
 My left hand I'll use to hold bàbà in my hand.  
 The centre I'll use to hold sere  
 Help me hail Òṣun the gracious to Mother.)

In Yorùbá land, *Kele* beads belongs to Oya, *Bàbà* bead belongs to Òṣun, while Şàngó owns *Şéré*, a medicinal gourd. They are all motifs and

emblems of these deities. If we visualize the above oríkì Òṣun, we will see that Oya is situated at the right hand side of Sàngó who stays at the centre, while Òṣun is seen at the left hand side. If a man sleeps between two beautiful ladies (women) he will use the right hand to touch the one on the right hand and the left hand to touch the one on the left. Sàngó, who stays at the middle, is the husband while Oya and Òṣun are the two co-wives. This is establishing it that, these three deities are interrelated. It is also evidential that both Òṣun and Oya are river goddesses. Therefore, they are interrelated with each other. There is even another saying that reveals that Sàngó had many wives out of whom Òṣun is one; others include Oya and Oba who are also river deities.

The saying goes thus “*Obìnrin pò lówó Olúkòso Àrèmu, ṣíṣe yànyánnṣe l’Òṣun fì gborí lówó gbogbo wòn*”. That is, Sàngó has many wives, Òṣun became his best wife because, and she knows how to take care of him. Sàngó is also called Olúkòso Àrèmu. The above saying reveals that Sàngó had many wives, Òṣun is among them, and that, her attitude of caring for Sàngó made her Sàngó’s pet. Indeed, Òṣun is interrelated with other deities in Yorùbá land.

Various activities taking place during Òṣun Òṣogbo festival reveal that Òṣun is interrelated and interconnected with various deities in Yorùbá land, such as: Ifá, Obatálá, Èsù, Egbé, Orí and so on.

At the selection of Ìyá Òṣun and Àwòrò Òṣun, they will inquire from Ifá, when they want to begin Òṣun festival, they will consult Ifá. During the real festival period, the priests of Ifá, Obatálá and Egúngún do participate. This is to signify that they are interrelated; interconnected and interdependent Òrúnmilà was once the husband to Òṣun. The history has it that, it was Òrúnmilà who taught Òṣun the art of divination that is called Eérindínlógún. Òṣun’s role in the traditional healing process among the Yorùbá is tremendous. Likewise, Yorùbá traditional healing cycle is broken, if Ifá and Òsanyin are removed from it. Therefore, we can see Òrúnmilà, Òsanyin and Òṣun as co-workers or as partners in progress.

During Òṣun festival, a whole day is devoted to the worship of Orí (Destiny). The Yorùbá regard Orí as an important Deity whom they worship. They even say that, “*E má kóbì bọ òòsà mó, Orí ni ẹ jé á máa bọ. Nitorí pé kò sí Òrìṣà tí dání in gbè láìṣórí ẹni*”. Meaning - (Do not offer kola nut as sacrifice to any Deity any longer, let us sacrifice to Orí. There is no deity who can support or benefit a person without his/her Orí). The day of sacrifice to Orí in Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo is called the day of Ìborí-boadé. This signifies that there is a link between Òṣun and Orí. She is a mender of head in the spirit world. Òṣun comb has mystical power to beautify heads. Her water is empowered with the ability to wash away ill luck from people who have chosen bad head in their pregestational period in

heaven according to Yorùbá belief. The type of head that an individual possesses determines the success or failure of such a person. But to Òṣun, she has the power to mend bad heads with the aid of her water.

Egúngún is also a prominent traditional worship in Yorùbá communities. This is the paying of homage to the deceased fathers who are believed to be taking active and a prominent role in the affairs of the family or the community they left behind. A whole day is dedicated to the worship of the deceased Queens - king's dead wives. This day is known as the day of Ayaba Ìsàlè.

Among the Yorùbá, Ṣànpònná is usually referred to as the god of smallpox, which used to be the major disease of infants in their community. A visit to the shrine of Òṣun in the palace will be a conviction that Òṣun and Ṣànpònná are interrelated. This is because; they were sacrificing to them (their motifs) together at the same shrine, on the same altar.

Likewise, it is the belief of Yorùbá people that there are mysterious spiritual children, who have their *ẹgbé* - heavenly society. They are called *Emèrè* or *Eléréé*. Their leader is called *Ìyá Èré* or *Ìyá Jànjàsá*. This society is mainly responsible for the high infant mortality rate in Yorùbá land in the past. Therefore, they usually bring sufferings afflictions and shame to the people. Beside the major shrine of Òṣun is located the shrine of *Ẹgbé*. This is not accidental or coincidental but it is deliberate. It is the duty of Òṣun to put an end to the shenanigans of this mysterious group of children. Òṣun as a goddess has cosmic and mystical powers, and she can freely interact with the spirit world. It may be because of her interaction with these spirit-beings that makes it possible for her to curb their evils in humanity. Hence, a kind of relationship exists between them. In Òṣogbo, there is the festival of images during which their devotees will bring out the images of various deities in Yorùbá land to the market place in November. They will begin to chant the *oríki* of each of these deities to invoke their spirits. This is verbal worship and veneration. It is during this festival that new members into the cult of Òṣun are initiated.

In summary, the relationship between Òṣun and other Deities is an indication that, the perfect and wholesome protection, healing and salvation of human being is not vested in the hands of a single Deity. All of them do interact and interrelate to use the *àṣẹ* that *Olódùmarè* has given to each concertedly to maintain law, peace and order in the universe.

#### 4.10. Òṣun as a Witch

It is the belief of the Yorùbá people that there are certain group of people (mainly women) who have some supernatural powers to do whatever they like in the world. It has been shown that the witch as a society is a group that their membership is mainly women. Apart from this, they are of different types, and some men are also members of this society. It is widely believed among the Yorùbá that witches are of two types, even though both are very powerful. The first group is the group of those who use their powers to do evil, while the second group is those who use their powers to do well. Due to their evil acts, the Yorùbá do everything possible to obstruct the activities of those who are evil. The second group, which are doing good, are believed to be using their own witchcraft for protection, prosperity, progress and procreation in the society. They are usually called white witches or witches who have children or Àjé Olómọ.

Some scholars hold the views that witch are a group of women emancipators who usually negate social or sex stratification in the society that they are found. Among them is Judith, Hoch-Smith (1978:265) who says:

Without the concept of witchcraft, power would have flowed naturally through society, lodging only in socially structured positions, most of which were held by men in the traditional Yorùbá patrilineage. However, the concept of witchcraft permitted great qualities of power to become lodged in women, who in turn were thought to use that power against the institution of society. In this sense witchcraft symbolizes the eternal struggle of the sexes in Yorùbá society over control of the life force.

Judith's above, has shown that witch is a society of women, who use their power in the way they like. She also reveals that witchcraft is a form of instrument for women manumission to be liberated from men's domination. If we look at the Ifá's myth of seventeen Deities who were sent into the world by Olódùmarè, Òṣun is the only female among them. When other male Deities neglected her, they did not succeed because she used her witchcraft to fight for her right. It means that the power of witchcraft has been in existence for a long period. Research has also proved it that Èdan,<sup>40</sup> which Òṣun used to replace herself as a witch, is the object of worship for

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<sup>40</sup> Èdan has two forms, that is, there is female one and the male one. But, Ìyá - the mother is the owner of the house (the conclave which is called Ilédi). In the conclave meetings of the Ògbóni society serious recognition is given to "Mother-Ìyá" as the owner of the conclave and as the king of the conclave. See Ajibade, G.O. (1999: 194-203) for explanation on the role of Yorùbá women in Ògbóni cult.

the Ògbóni society, which is a mainly man in composition. Farris (1984:74) also has similar view about the witches that they use their power to struggle for women's liberation and rights. He argues that:

Witchcraft, in fact, militates against not only total male dominance but also the threat of class formation and drastically unequal distribution of wealth. At the core of the all-powerful council of male elders the Ògbóni society, lays the awesome image of their deity... all devouring, all -seeing.

Farris has shown that the witchcraft is not just to liberate women but to also make women equal in the society and to balance the unequal distribution of wealth. The power of witches is an unseen power that could be traced to Òṣun, who happened to be the leader of the group.

During Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo, a group of women do sing songs that reveal that Òṣun is a witch and that most of the women if not all of them, who are her devotees are witches as well. There are devotees of Òṣun who sing on the grand finale day of Òṣun festival. One of their songs says:

Egbé olówó ẹgbé ẹ wa  
Egbé ọlómọ ẹgbé ẹ wa  
Egbé wa kii sẹgbé olè  
Àjé ọlómọ làjé Òṣun  
E tẹlé Ósun ké ba lè rómọ gbé jó.  
(Our group is a group of rich people  
Our group is a group of owners of children  
Our group is not a group of thieves  
The group of Òṣun witches are the owners of children  
Follow Òṣun, so that you will be blessed with children to dance  
with)

The point of emphasis by this women group is that, Òṣun is a witch who uses her power to bless people with children and riches. Not only that, she uses her power not only to bring children into the world but to also nurse them adequately. While the above song is peculiar to the old women who are devotees of Òṣun, these two songs below are peculiar with the young ladies who are also Òṣun devotees. They sing the songs on the grand finale day of Òṣun festival.

Ọmọ ẹlẹgbé ni wá ò ééé  
Ọmọ ẹlẹgbé ni wá o ààà  
Bóìsì tí kò bá fé wa kó jòkó  
Ọmọ ẹlẹgbé ni wá  
Mo jogún nnú ẹgbé òò ééé  
Mo jogún nnú ẹgbé oo ààà

Olórisà ló jogún òjé  
 Mo jogún nnú egbé.  
 (We are members of a group  
 We are members of a group  
 Any boy who doesn't want to marry us  
 Should go and sit down  
 We are members of a group  
 I have inheritance in the group  
 I have inheritance in the group  
 Obàtálá devotees inherit lead  
 I have inheritance in the group.)

The first song above reveals these young Òṣun female devotees as bold witches. They are also pressurising their mind that they have right to belong to any society or group they like. The second song is in line with the first, showing that the group they belong to is benevolent and beneficial to them. They have what they benefit in the group and that they are proud to belong to the cult just as Obàtálá devotees are proud to use lead.

The witches in Yorùbá land are believed to possess the power of second sight. They can see beyond the physical reason because of their all-knowing and all-seeing power. One of the Oríkì Òṣun revealing this trait goes like this:

Ládéojú, Òrè Yèyè Òṣun  
 Òrìṣà tíí gbórí itàgè  
 Tíí ránṣé polóbì lójà  
 Ó gbénú ibú  
 Ó mọ ohun ti awo n ẹ  
 A gbó kélé inú aṣebi  
 (Ládékojú, the gracious mother Òṣun  
 The goddess who sits at home  
 And sends for kola nut sellers in the market  
 She stays in the deep (of river)  
 And she knows what they are doing in the secret cult  
 She hears the thought impulse of evildoers.)

The above song reveals the mystical power of Òṣun as a witch, who is all seeing and all knowing. It means that Òṣun can spread her tentacles to every place. This kind of power she has makes her a dreadful deity in the Yorùbá pantheon. Another Oríkì of Òṣun goes thus:

Bádahunṣe bá jí,  
 Tó gbé igbá tira,  
 Láifí t'Òṣun ẹ

Bí inú rẹ̀ bá wú tán  
 Kò ní lẹ̀ yan ẹ̀bọ.  
 (When a spiritual healer wakes up  
 And put calabash by his side,  
 If he gives no regard to Òṣun  
 After that his belly has swollen up  
 He won't be able to prescribe sacrifice to his clients)

The above oríkì reveals that however powerful a spiritual healer (Adáhunse) is, he must pay homage to Òṣun in order to succeed and be freed from danger. The kind of power that Òṣun uses is mystical powers of the witches. This is contrary to the views of men in the society that women are inferior to men.

During Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo, Íyà Òṣun, Àwòrò Òṣun and other devotees of Òṣun do sing with confidence to show that Òṣun has the power to deliver them from all their enemies. One of such songs goes thus:

Lílẹ̀: Ẹ̀yẹ̀ ní ó yojú rẹ̀ òtá ilé  
 Ẹ̀yẹ̀ ní ó yojú rẹ̀ òtá òde  
 Ẹ̀yẹ̀ ní ó yojú rẹ̀ je òtá àwa  
 Pekélépèké, ẹ̀yẹ̀ ní ó yojú.  
 All: Pekélépèké, ẹ̀yẹ̀ ní ó yojú  
 Pekélépèké, ẹ̀yẹ̀ ní ó yojú  
 (Solo: Bird will pluck your eyes, enemies at home  
 Bird will pluck your eyes, enemies outside  
 Bird will pluck your eyes our enemies  
 Pekélépèké, bird will pluck the eyes  
 All: Pekélépèké, bird will pluck the eyes  
 Pekélépèké, bird will pluck the eyes  
 Pekélépèké, bird will pluck the eyes)

The bird they mention here symbolizes the witches. The Yorùbá people do not speak out loosely, they speak in metaphor or irony. *Ẹ̀yẹ̀* refers to the witches. It is believed that the witches have a type of bird (*ẹ̀yẹ̀ àjé*) which usually fly about in the night especially when they are going for their group meeting. Therefore, it is evident that Òṣun is a witch even she is their leader.

This is also pronounced in the oríkì of Òṣun at the Ìjùmú shrine that adherents/devotees of Òṣun belong to a strong group that has mystical power to support somebody or group of people. They are numerous and operate in the celestial and terrestrial levels. One of the oríkì goes thus:

Ẹ̀gbé ò- Society  
 Ẹ̀gbé ò- Society  
 Ẹ̀gbé ò- Society

Egbé ògá ógo- the society of the most high  
 A pò bíi eèpè ilè- Plenty/Numerous like the sand on the ground  
 Bòròkíní òrun tí kii jé tayé ó té – A heavenly famous person who does  
 not allow that of earth to be put to shame  
 Ọdán nigí ojúde- Ọdán is the tree at the playing ground  
 Àràbà nigí èbá òdàn – Mahogany is the tree near the tick forest  
 Ẹ fún mí jẹ o- Give me food to eat  
 N ò rí mú wá mo wá gbà ní- I have nothing to bring I have come to  
 receive from you  
 Ẹ má jé n fipónjú lo ilé ayé mí- don't let me use my life in suffering  
 Ẹ má jé n rinhòhò wọjà o- don't let me walk naked into the market

From the above poetry of Òṣun that was collected at the Ìjùmú shrine in Òṣogbo, it could be seen that the *Egbé* literally society are the one being called upon to support and protect the worshippers on earth. Another striking issue in this poetry is that mention were made of some notable trees in Yorùbá land-Ọdán and Àràbà (Mahogany). This indicates the nature of operation of the witches as birds. They can fly and rest upon these trees in order to have their meetings, which usually come up in the night. They are numerous, powerful and regarded as the heavenly famous group that do not allow those on earth to suffer. This praise portends that the witches as a group could be positive in their acts and operation especially to the members of their group.



## 5. The Visual Art of Òṣun Òṣogbo

### 5.1. Introduction

Visual art is of different types in Yorùbá society. In most cases, there are various meanings to the visual art in Yorubaland. In other words, the visual art is a means of communication that the visual domain therein can only grab the essence. The Yorùbá have an adage that “ojú lórò wà”, which means “communication takes place in the face/eyes”. Also, another adage says that, “the recipient audience of the poem we render gazes into our face/eyes vehemently”. “*Eni tí à ñ kéwì fún, lójúlójú níí woni*”. These adages are revealing the impact and the importance of the visual domain in the communication process among the Yorùbá. There are many visual objects that can be used to communicate to others. This may be: our manner of dress, our body odour (sic), our physique or posture, our tension, our facial expression and degree of eye contact, our hands and body movement, pictures of different kinds, all forms of art work-carved, painted, sculptured etc. (Banjo 1987:4, Abercrombie 1968:55). The focus on art is salutary in that it provides insights into the complex processes and strategies whereby the sacred is (re) distributed in particular circumstances and localities (Hackett 1996:12). This is an indication that a piece of artwork has communicative potentials; and that it occupies space and place in the provision of space for the divine contact in worship.

Research has shown that each deity had his/her symbol or motif that his/her devotees use to signify or represent him/her. In most cases such symbol, image or motif is usually placed at the shrine. Without the images of these deities, we may not have a comprehensive understanding of their existence. A non-African perspective may distort our understanding of these images. The images of Yorùbá deities faced and are still facing great opposition from the foreign religions, Christianity and Islam to be precise. This kind of opposition to the traditional religion is seen in one of the songs by the Christians which says:

È wá ká jọ sìn/2x  
 Abọgi-bòpè má bọgi mó o!  
 È wá ká jọ sìn.  
 Come let us worship together/2x

Those of you who bow down to woods and sticks  
 Don't bow to images any longer  
 Come let us worship together.

The Christians give no regard to the images of Yorùbá deities. But these visual arts of Yorùbá deities have their meanings and importance to the adherents. They are laden with mythological and symbolic significance which the aliens may not grab their essence because of their bias or prejudice. The historians of religions even regard religious visual art as visual religion (Keppenberg 1987:27 and Olúpònnà 1995:87). And these images are essential motifs in the worship of Deities in the belief of the traditional worshippers.

Research has shown that in the shrines of Òṣun and her court as well, there are many religious images (visual arts). These images have their source and essence. The religious visual art in Òṣògbo could be divided into two categories, the traditional ones and the modern. Either the traditional images or the modern, to most of the adherents, they are serving the same purpose (religious). To Sussanne Wenger who is one of the patriots of these modern arts in Òṣògbo, they are serving the same purpose. Ogunbile (1998:72) even refers to this that:

The images, according to Sussanne Wenger, are not just mere imaginative constructions but inspirational and offerings to the gods. Thus, they present the presence of the deity to whom they are offered.

It connotes that the images made to represent the deities are not ordinary objects; their existence was by inspiration from the deities themselves, for they represent the presence of the deities that they stand for. Therefore, these religious visual arts perform greater role in the worship of the deities. They are made use in Òṣògbo as a means of revitalising not only the traditional religions of Òṣògbo people but also that of Yorùbá as an ethnic group. Lawal (1996:11) also says:

Before examining the role of art in Òrìṣà worship, it is necessary to stress the fact that the visual arts often combine with poetry, music and dance to create the right atmosphere for worship. A priest invites the spirit of a Òrìṣà to descend on the altar by chanting its praise poetry (oríki) often to the rhythm of a gourd-rattle or metal gong.

The above excerpt from Lawal reveals the importance and interrelations of the visual and verbal arts in communicating with the deities. This means that the visual art are neither imaginative constructions nor aesthetic objects alone but they form an integral part of the worship of deities among the people.

The visual art of Òṣun is of paramount importance to Òṣun devotees in the worship of Òṣun.<sup>41</sup> Through research on these religious visual arts in the court of Òṣun Òṣogbo, our understanding of Òṣun Òṣogbo cult becomes deeper, and it widens our knowledge about Òṣun, especially in Òṣogbo. In this chapter, our aesthetic appreciation of art works and images of Òṣun cannot be limited to an optical perspective but must include the philosophical realities of the people about these arts. Even though, the people do not regard these images as deities, rather they are vehicles or symbols, tangible indications of something ineffable that nevertheless compel beliefs (Cole, 1989:32).

Without mincing words, we will examine critically different types of the visual arts located in the court of Òṣun coupled with the photographs of participants in Òṣun festival to relay information about the cult of Òṣun in Òṣogbo and about Òṣogbo as a local community. It has been observed that, these visual arts are made up of different materials. Some were carved from stone, some from iron, brass, wood, clay, cement and clothes. These visual arts are revealing, highly informative and they are standing for specific things in time and space.<sup>42</sup>

## 5.2. Representations of Òṣun in the Visual Art

In the court of Òṣun and her shrines there are visual arts representing her. If one is not careful enough, one may mistaken them as designs for only aesthetic purpose but it is not so. Even though they beautify Òṣun shrine and court, primarily, most of the artworks are located in these shrines and groves for religious purposes and functions. Their functions transcend aesthetic purposes. This is because “*ohun tó wà léyìn èfà ó ju òje lẹ*” - what we have after six goes beyond seven. Rowland (1994:69) says, “We must try to understand an artwork in its cultural depth, as the expression of the local thought or belief systems, lest we unwittingly remove the “African” in African art”.

Rowland’s submission purports that; any researcher who is researching into the visual art in Africa must make an objective inquiry into their meanings and essence before drawing his or her conclusion. Everything

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<sup>41</sup> There is even what they call festival of images incorporated into Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo. Either traditional or modern art, which is called “The New Sacred Art”, both, are referential and informative.

<sup>42</sup> It serves that purpose of the altar where sacrifices take place, even though they were not there at the beginning. Susanne Wenger and her group placed them there when they started their renovation. These images occupy space and place through which religious contacts and communications take place.

existing has its source, hence, these visual art of Òṣun also have their sources. The below picture fig. 5.2 (a):



**Fig. 5.2 (a) The Main shrine of Òṣun Òṣogbo, Pix by Author, 2000.**

is the picture of the main shrine of Òṣun Òṣogbo where the grand finale of annual Òṣun festival takes place. We will observe that the poles of the building are of various designs. The design on one of the poles on the left hand side is that of Òṣun's image. Without proper investigation one may jump into conclusion that it is just a pole. But, if we look at it very closely the image on the pole is that of a woman carrying a baby. Likewise, the conspicuous image standing at the middle of the shrine is that of a woman carrying a baby. On her head is something like a crown. Research has revealed that these two images of a woman, carrying baby is more than one woman; they signify Òṣun, the gracious and caring mother. Apart from the fact that Òṣun is Òriṣà, every mother is regarded as òriṣà. That is why the Yorùbá will say "*kò sí òriṣà tí yóó ṣe bí ìyá*" - meaning, there is no òriṣà who can care/act like one's mother. From these images, we will see that Òṣun as a careful mother is holding the baby carefully and firmly in such a way that the baby cannot fall down from her hand. This is revealing the attitude of Òṣun towards her children. No wonder she is called "*Olówó gbogborọ tí yomọ rè lófin*" - The one with a long and strong hands who

delivers her children from calamities”. Òṣun is a loving and a caring mother who guides and guards her children.

The way she is carrying this baby reveals that, as a model mother, she is holding the baby firmly and closely to herself so that the child cannot wander away so that no evil will befall the child. Likewise, nobody can beat the child as she holds it. This also reveals Òṣun as a mother who protects her children/devotees so that nothing harmful will touch them. This child that Òṣun holds is receiving “warmth” from her as the mother. “Receiving warmth,” means enjoying all benefits and goodness that are available in being a child to Òṣun. She won’t allow them to suffer, and will not allow anybody to punish her own children even if they are at fault. Because, “help me beat my child, is not a statement from the depth of the mother’s heart” “*Bá mi na omọ mi kò dénú ọlómọ*”. This same beliefs about Òṣun is conveyed in this picture fig. 5.2 (b)



**Fig. 5.2 (b) The Image of Òṣun Òṣogbo, Pix by Author, 2000.**

In the above image of Òṣun 5.2 (b) Òṣun is holding this baby with great love and concern. It is observed that, what she has on her head is not the

common women head tie but a crown. This reveals that Òşun is a king and not a common woman or person in the community. This is even established in her poetry where she is portrayed as a powerful and wealthy king. An example of this is seen below.

Oba lódò  
 Onijùmú-nàkí<sup>43</sup>  
 Pára Onijùmú sode  
 Òdèdè Onijùmú sòlèkè jingbìnnì  
 Ààrin gùngùn Ìjùmú sàko iyùn háti  
 Ajá se tán, ajá se béegun ni  
 Mo kóre Yèyé f'Ósun.  
 (The king of river,  
 Onijùmú-nàkí  
 Onijùmú's shelf produces brass  
 Onijùmú's balcony produces plenty beads  
 The middle of Ìjùmú town tie beautiful coral beads on its ears  
 The dog thought that it is a bone  
 I pay homage to Òşun the gracious mother)

This is revealing Òşun as a king both at the river and in her mythical town, Ìjùmú. (cf Abimbola 1968:51). No one can really decipher what the talking drummer is using it to say except the drummer himself. Unless we ask the devotees of Òşun or and the makers of images of Òşun, we may not be able to decode what they mean and what they stand for. It has been revealed that Ìyá Òşun and Arugbá Òşun (the Votary maid or the caryatid) stand for Òşun. The Ìyá Òşun is taking part in the daily worship of Òşun. She is representing mother Òşun how she stands by her children daily. It is the duty of Ìyá Osun to listen to all who need the help of Òşun in order to put an end to the problems and calamities of their lives. This is clearly seen in her picture below.

Her dressing and posture reveals her as the mother Òşun. This is Ìyá Òşun standing with àgògo hairdo on her head, which is peculiar to Òşun. The hair is surrounded with parrot's feather, which glitter like rose flower. At the same time, she ties cowries' shell stitched together with rope to her hair, while two strings of cowries' shells are in suspension on her forehead. On her neck we have Şàngó bead, bàbà bead, coral bead (*iyùn*) and ẹfóntè bead. Kele Şàngó is also tied to her right-hand wrist while on her left hand wrist is a bronze bangle. She holds the bronze gong (*àjà*) by the right hand while she uses her left hand to hold Òşun staff of authority (*òpá àşẹ Òşun*).

<sup>43</sup> Onijùmú means the owner of Ìjùmú, which simply refers to the king of Ìjùmú. This is a mythical town of Òşun, and that is why she is referred to as Onijùmú. Ìjùmú is a town located in Kwara State of Nigeria.



Òṣun children who also put Òṣun bead on their necks then surround her. She tied sash to her belly and she put on white attire.



Fig. 5.2 (c). The picture of Ìyá Òṣun, Pix by-Author, 2000.

The dressing of Ìyá Òṣun on this day of the festival can make us call her Òṣun. The first thing about her appearance is that, she is portraying the beauty and the elegance of Òṣun. Also, she is showing Òṣun as a pretty, rich, elegant and a royal woman who possesses great authority (àṣẹ). The picture is also showing Òṣun as a clean, neat and sacred or holy goddess. White colour is a symbol of purity, neatness, holiness and sacredness; hence, Òṣun possesses all mentioned attributes. She detests conspiracy and all forms of vices. That is why she is praised:

A kíí f'Òṣun ṣàbòsí  
 A-tú-wọ̀n-ká-níbi-wón-gbé-ń-dáná-iró  
 Òṣun ní wólé òdàlè ní wólé èké.  
 (The followers of Òṣun must flee backbiting  
 The one who scatters the evil planners)

Òṣun is the one who destroys the house of conspirators and liars).

Therefore, Òṣun is a sacred and a holy goddess who loves truth and straight forwardness. The sash that Ìyá Òṣun ties to her belly is revealing Òṣun's effort in keeping and protecting her children. It means that Òṣun is a good mother who will back her children and hold them tightly with sash so that they will not fall. It then shows that the labour of Òṣun on her children is tremendous. Her effort and labour over her children make them to praise her thus:

Ìyá mi lobìnrin gbàgò nínú olóbòtujè  
 Egbìn nínú réré  
 Abiyamọ nínú làhàloho  
 Adétayùn o!  
 (My mother is the one who works in the midst of croton  
 The gazelle inside the cassia plantation  
 The mother who stood by her children in problems  
 Adétayùn o!).

It is a difficult task to back babies. To tie sash to one's belly is even painful, therefore, women are doing a commendable job by backing their babies with sash tied to their bellies. The posture of Ìyá Òṣun also reveals the power or authority (àṣẹ) of Òṣun. The bronze gong is a symbol of putting seal on a matter, which means, "May it be so". Likewise, the beaded rod of Òṣun connotes the authority, which Olódùmarè has given to Òṣun from heaven. This is contrary to the view of Yorùbá men in the community that women are not to rule or become king. This they convey in one of their proverbial sayings that, "*Òbò ò joyè*-Women are not kings".

Besides, the children of Òṣun who are surrounding her is revealing the attribute of Òṣun as the owner of plenty children. She is surrounded by many of them to the extent that it is even difficult for her to move. One odù Ifá even reveals that Òṣun has plenty children to the extent that there is no place to contain them any longer. The end of that odù Ifá, Ìwòrì méjì (Abimbola 1968:45) goes thus:

Ijó ní n jò  
 Ayò ní n yò  
 Ó n yin àwọn awo rè  
 Àwọn awo rè n yin Ifá  
 Ó ní, ilé Òṣun ò gbàyè ooò  
 Ilé Òṣun ò gbàyè  
 Òòró la bá Òṣun o.  
 Ilé Òṣun ò gbàyè



(She is dancing  
 She is rejoicing  
 Praising her priests  
 The priests are praising Ifá in return  
 She exclaimed, there is no space in Òṣun's house to contain  
 people  
 There is no space in Òṣun's house to contain people  
 Òṣun is always standing up.  
 There is no space in Òṣun's house to contain people).

This is establishing the fact that Òṣun is the owner of plenty children. This they indicate that the large crowd in Òṣogbo during Òṣun festival is symbolic, which signifies that Òṣun is the owner of plenty children.

Apart from the aesthetic value, cowries' shell signifies money or wealth. The cowries' shells on the plaited hair of Ìyá Òṣun reveal that Òṣun is a wealthy goddess. Before civilisation, the legal tender in Yorùbá society was cowries' shell; which at the same time were gotten from inside the river. Likewise, cowries' shell is the motif of another river goddess called Ajé. If we look at the various Deeps of Òṣun in Òṣogbo there is Ajé Deeps there. Then, cowries' shell reveals the wealth of Òṣun and her potency to make someone rich. That may be the reason why she is praised as:

Onítèé tútù  
 Ò-wa-yanrìn-wa-yanrìn-kówó-sí  
 (The owner of a cool throne  
 The one who digs the sand vehemently and put money there)

As Ìyá Òṣun reveals the attributes of Òṣun, the votary Maid<sup>44</sup> does. In fact, the votary maid is like “Òṣun Èwùjí” on the day of grand finale of Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo. Many people come purposely on that day to see her (Arugbà). As she moves, large crowd will follow her as seen in the diagram below fig. 5.2 (d).

<sup>44</sup> Apart from Ìyá Òṣun and Arugbà Òṣun, there are other motifs of Òṣun that symbolise her. These are: Ota Òṣun (stone effigy), Idẹ (brass), Eḍan (bronze figure) and Abèbè (fan).



**Fig. 5.2(d) The picture of Arugbá Òşun, Pix by Author, 1999.**

As she appears from the palace, the people will begin to praise and hail her in songs, referring to her as the gracious mother - Òşun, thus:

Lílé:        È kóre yèyé o!  
 Ègbè:       È kóre yèyé Òşun  
 Lílé:        Şe bíwọ niyá o?  
 Ègbè:       Şe biwọ niyá àwa  
 Lílé:        Qlómq niyá o!  
 Ègbè:       Qlómq niyá àwa  
 Lílé:        È bá wa pèyá o!  
 Ègbè:       È bá wa pèyá àwa.  
 (Solo:       Hail the precious mother!  
 All:         Hail Òşun, the precious mother  
 Solo:        You are the mother!  
 All:         You are our mother!  
 Solo:        The mother has children!  
 All:         Our mother have children!  
 Solo:        Hail the mother!  
 All:         Hail our mother for us).

It is the Arugbá Òşun that the people look unto on this day. It is their belief that she represents the Òşun who made a pact with Gbádewólú their forefather. As she moves, the crowd will intermittently shout “Yèyé o!” meaning “this is mother!” At the same time many will begin to speak out their mind what they want mother Òşun to do for them. Some will even turn it into singing such as:

Yèyé bà mi şe è!  
 Yèyé Òşun o!  
 Yèyé Olómo-yoyó!  
 Yèyé wá bá mi şe é!  
 (Mother, do it for me!  
 Mother Òşun!  
 The mother who have plenty children  
 Mother, come and do it for me).

They do these because of their beliefs in Òşun and that the Arugbá stands for Òşun. The market women in the market will pray to Òşun to bless their trade as the Votary Maid moves on to the shrine with the royal entourage. The picture below fig 5.2 (e) is the image of Òşun at the river's bank.



**Fig. 5.2 (e). The Image Of Òşun at the Main Shrine in Òşogbo, Pix by Author, 2000.**

This is where they pour the sacrifice to before releasing some into the river to feed the fish of Òşun. It is the image of a woman with palm frond (màrìwò) on it, and people were struggling to fetch Òşun water at that spot after the sacrifice has been performed. This image is different from the rest images of Òşun, in that it does not totally resemble a person. It looks dreadful. Well, Òşun is also a dreadful goddess, that is why she is given such representation so that she can look awful as a deity and to also evokes the arsenal of powers that transcend human limitations. The various pictures and images have shown that, various images can be used to represent Òşun

depending on her attribute in focus. Even, the calabash of Òṣun that the Votary Maid carries represents Òṣun. Inside the calabash are: edan made of bronze,<sup>45</sup> beaded comb, parrot's feather and Ọta Òṣun. Beside Ọta Òṣun, which stands for Òṣun, all other motifs are the utensils of Òṣun that she uses in dressing.<sup>46</sup> This is an indication that the power and the authority (àṣẹ) of Òṣun inside the calabash have possessed the Arugbá who carry it. Then, she is no longer seen as Arugbá but mother Òṣun. That is why people do pray to her on that day to solve their problems - those looking for money, children and peace. Before the festival commences, the Arugbá will be staying with Ìyá Òṣun in the palace for seven days to undergo some purification rites and rituals, and she must be a chaste virgin. This is also an indication that Òṣun is a blameless goddess.

### 5.3. The Visual Art portraying the role of Òṣun in Òṣogbo Politics

Art constitutes an important historical and political narrative to the local community where it situates. Even though the artists in Òṣogbo have had contacts with the Westerners who spurred them into action of utilising their embedded potentials still, they appropriate and adapt their contacts to suit the local needs and purposes. These contacts result in incorporation of the Western ideas into traditional Yorùbá art without losing the meanings and signification. Therefore, various art works and images in Òṣogbo should be seen as both local exegesis and as historical movements or artefacts. In front of Àlàója's palace, there is a statue of Ọba Gbádéwòlú Ọláròyè, the first king of Òṣogbo. He's holding a fish. There is a crown on his head. This image of the king holding the fish messenger of Òṣun called Ikò is the historical base for the relationship between Òṣun and the founders of Òṣogbo. In essence, this image is historical. The fish portrays the acceptance of offering/sacrifice of the king of Òṣogbo at the inception of the town. This happened when the king entered into a treaty with Òṣun, and the appearance of the fish gave rise to the title of the king of Òṣogbo - Àtàója, till tomorrow. The role of Òṣun fish messenger in the pact between the king and Òṣun is even eulogized in their oríkì thus:

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<sup>45</sup> This edan is different from the one inside the conclave of Ògbóni society even though there is resemblance and both were brass.

<sup>46</sup> It has been shown that the motifs of Òṣun are different from one locality to another even in places where Òṣun is worshipped in Yoruba land. That of Òṣogbo is peculiar due to the Western influence on the cult and its artistic expressions.

Òròkí tí bá ẹja nílá sòrò  
 Tíí rán Ikò nisé  
 Òṣogbo wù mí dé,  
 N ó lọ ságbalá Òṣun  
 Níbi tí wón tí n rẹró  
 Níbi tí wón tí n gúndó idẹ  
 (Òròkí, who communicates with big fish  
 Who sends Ikò an errand  
 I desire to visit Òṣogbo,  
 I will go/visit the court of Òṣun  
 Where they make indigo dye  
 Where they pound with bronze mortar)



**Fig. 5.3 The Statue of the first king of Òṣogbo, Pix by Author, 2000.**

This image reveals the covenant between Òṣun and Àtàoja. It shows the support of Òṣun for the people of Òṣogbo that they will live in peace, harmony and prosperity. Òṣun is the king's mother, and the mother of both the chiefs and the people of the entire community. That is why they say, "Òṣun is the one who helps the king (Àtàoja) to rule the town. Also, fish symbolizes coolness and not hardship, hence the saying "cool water comes out of fish mouth" Omi tútù ló n ẓenu ẹja bó. This then implies that Òṣun will be producing everything that will make the town peaceful for them on the yearly basis in as much as they keep to the pact.

#### 5.4. Relationship of Òṣun with Other Deities in the Visual Art

The deities in Yorubaland are innumerable. It is obvious that most of the deities in Yorubaland are going into extinction. But, a cursory look at Òṣogbo community especially in the court of Òṣun, most of Yorùbá deities are represented with images. This is not to say that they are given corporate worship there. This observation made Beier (2000:47) to remark, “Yorùbá society is a conglomerate of numerous cult groups who do not normally meet. Thus, a husband and wife never celebrate their òsè together”.

Beier’s observation is true to some extent but, this does not deny the close connection between various deities in Yorubaland and there is even good relationship and the spirit of togetherness among the adherents of various religious cults. It is certain that, there are countless numbers of deities in Yorubaland, each having his/her own duty and obligation which God - Olódùmarè has given him/her to concertedly utilize for the orderization of the universe. These deities could be regarded as the servants, stewards or ministers of Olódùmarè. None of them can single handled the orderization of the universe. It is only when they combine their knowledge, power and all other Olódùmarè’s given potentials embedded in them that we can have a desirable humanity. Therefore, the conglomerations of religious images in the court of Òṣun in Òṣogbo community have their meanings. It is an indication that the deities in Yorubaland are interrelated and interdependent.<sup>47</sup>

The above 5.4 (a) is the statue of Ìyámòpó located at the entrance of Òṣun court. The etymological interpretation of this name is “The mother who builds a pole or who makes a path/way”. Hence, Ìyámòpó is a designer herself. She is one of the many deities in Yorùbá society. She is the goddess associated with pottery.<sup>48</sup> She is also the deity associated with palm oil processing and hair plaiting. Her worship is prominent in Ìbàdàn. Her worship takes place in Ìbàdàn nine days before the festival of Òkèbàdàn. During her festival, her devotees will be rolling on the ground inside the mud and they will splash the mud on the passers-by as they dance (cf Abraham 1958:333, Wenger & Beier 1957:208 & 225).

<sup>47</sup> These images were created or built by Susanne Wenger and her group, the New sacred Art. But, it is believed that they were built under the inspiration of these deities represented. Apart from this, they were carved in accordance to the myths and legends of each òrìsà as were narrated to Wenger and her group. Therefore, they are not just mere innovation or ideas but reality of the deities represented.

<sup>48</sup> Each vocation or occupation is with a particular deity according to Yorùbá belief. For example, every work associated with iron has the hands of Ògún, the god of iron in it. Òrìṣàoko is associated with farming etc.





**Fig. 5.4 (a1) Ìyámòpó statue, Pix by Author, 2001**

It is the belief of the people of Òṣogbo that Ìyámòpó has a great power that she uses to protect Òṣun court. That is why her statue is located at the entrance of the court. In my own view, the relationship between Ìyámòpó and Òṣun is more than the issue of protecting the grove. The first thing is that both of them are goddesses. The second observation is that pot making is the work of Ìyámòpó while indigo dyeing is the occupation of Òṣun. Pot is an important instrument for Òṣun in her indigo factory while, Ìyámòpó is the maker of these pots. By this, we can say that the nature of their relationship with regards to their occupation is commensalisms. They are partners in business. Therefore, the statue of Ìyámòpó at the entrance of Òṣun court reveals that she is the one protecting the court of Òṣun so that nothing evil tamper with the business of Òṣun and her own business will continue to prosper.

Also, Ìyámòpó is the goddess of hair plaiting in Yorubaland. Hair plaiting is one of the hobbies of Òṣun that is why she is praised as “Òṣun Ṣèègèsí, the owner of coral beaded comb (*Òòyà Iyùn*)”. Then, this reveals that both are also interrelated in the shaping and re-shaping of peoples’ head at the metaphysical level. According to Yorùbá mythology about Òṣun, Òòyà Iyùn is one of the instruments she uses in hairdressing to beautify the heads of women folk. But it has some spiritual connotations in that it transcends the physical adornment of head. It also has to do with her role in the shaping of peoples’ head both at the pregestational epoch and in the world of humanity. This principle was noted by Hackett, (1998: 364) that:

The hairplaiter/dresser is considered to be one who honours and beautifies *orí inú* or the ‘inner head’-understood by the Yorùbá as the visible representation of one’s destiny and the essence of one’s personality. Good *orí inú* will to some extent depend on how well its physical counterpart has been honoured and treated. The river goddess Oshun is in charge of the profession of hairplaiting/dressing. Hence she is believed to have the power to influence the destinies of humans and gods. Her presence is crucial to the sustenance of life and order on earth. Most of the deities or *Òriṣà* depend on Oshun for their power.

The hairdressers among the Yorùbá people are greeted with the statement “*Ìyámòpó á gbè ó o! – Ìyámòpó will support you*”. This shows the connection between *Òṣun* and the Deity, *Ìyámòpó* in the dressing of human head, not only in the physical but also at the metaphysical level.

*Ìyámòpó* also stands for women power - that is women’s vagina. In Yorùbá society, *Ìyámòpó* is synonymous to women’s vagina. When an oral poet is paying homage at the commencement of his/her performance, *Ìyámòpó* is usually paid homage to. This is because, that is the path (*òpó*) through which every human being came into the world regardless of gender differentiation. We can hear the Yorùbá oral poets in their performance paying homage to vagina (*Ìyámòpó*) thus:

Mo rìbà pèté ọwó  
 Mo rìbà pèté ẹsẹ  
 Mo rìbà okó  
 Tó dorí kodò tí ò ro  
 Mo rìbà Ìyámòpó  
 Tó dorí kodò tí ò ẹjẹ  
 (I pay homage to the flatness of palms (hands)  
 I pay homage to the flatness of feet  
 I pay homage to the penis  
 Which faces down without pouring liquid down  
 I pay homage to *Ìyámòpó* (vagina)  
 Which faces down without shedding blood)

This is even portraying the importance of woman’s vagina in the work of procreation and fertility. Hence, *Ìyámòpó* like *Òṣun* is deeply involved in fertility and productivity of human race. The statue also looks like women’s vagina. Hence, it stands for women power in Yorùbá cosmology that *Òṣun* is standing for even though in another dimension. This shows the role of mothers in the institution of motherhood among the Yorùbá as the path to life. This portends that women are life givers and they are also nurses who



see to the overall survival and vitality of children they bring into life as the path to life.

At the Òṣun shrine in the palace, there are different visual arts there. There are about ten statues of Ṣànpònná, the pot of soup of Òṣun, Ọta Òṣun, cowries' shell, guns and swords made of bronze. Ọta stands for Òṣun and brass is also a symbol of identity for Òṣun. That is why Òṣun is seriously referred to as the owner of brass in oral traditions, as the one who is never tired of brass (Adepegba 2001:102). The cowries' shell stands for the wealth of Òṣun. The gun and the swords of brass stand for the power, prowess and manly character of Òṣun, who saves the people of Òṣogbo from their enemies. The pot of soup reveals Òṣun as a model mother who takes care of her children and her husband, feeding them adequately. There is even a myth that Òṣun was using brass spoon to serve soup for her husband. Because, Òṣun cares so much for her husband her other co-wives become envious (Adeoye 1978:43).

In this palace shrine of Òṣun, it is amazing to see that, the most conspicuous statue is that of Ṣànpònná.<sup>49</sup> One can wonder that what is the relationship between Òṣun and Ṣànpònná? It has been shown that, they are interrelated. In Yorubaland, before modernism, it is the belief of the people that Ṣànpònná is the cause of smallpox. Smallpox is a prominent disease among the children. The Yorùbá people believe that when Ṣànpònná is angry with a particular community, he uses his emissaries Ebùrù and Wòròkó, to inflict the children of that community with smallpox by the aid of evil wind. That is why Yorùbá people, usually pray against evil wind. At that shrine of Òṣun in the palace, there are nine statues of servants of Ṣànpònná and the statue of Ṣànpònná, making ten as seen below.

They are there to reveal the relationship between Òṣun and Ṣànpònná with regards to the complexity of Yorùbá traditional healing framework or system. In order to prevent the epidemics of smallpox in the community or in order to ward it off if it has already invaded the community, they have to seek for the favour of Ṣànpònná. It has been said earlier that Òṣun is a paediatrician, who specialises in healing all manners of children diseases. It may be that her deep knowledge and recognition of the power of Ṣànpònná that makes her to know what to do for Ṣànpònná to seek for his favour to enhance the children survival from smallpox.

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<sup>49</sup> Ṣànpònná is known by various names. This includes: Nánábùkú, Olóde, Ọbalúáyé, Bàbá Àgbà, Ilèégbóná, Ìgbóná and so on.



**Fig.5.4 (a2) The Statue of Sànpónná with sacrifice at the Palace shrine, Pix by Author, 2002.**

Also, it was said that the witches also make use of Sanpónná's power to inflict people with smallpox when they are annoyed with such people. We have enough evidence to assert that Òṣun is a witch. Therefore, it is a possibility that their relationship is connected with their functions in the healing system in Yorùbá cosmology.

In Òṣun court, there are images and symbol of Ògún. There is a hard stone fig 5.4 (b), which is the symbol of Ògún. There is also the image of Ògún fig 5.4 (c) with palm fronds on his body. Ògún is one of the prominent deities in Yorùbá pantheon. He is known as the god of iron, the patron of hunters, blacksmiths and all users of iron materials. The first thing to point out with regards to the presence of the image of Ògún very close to Òṣun shrine is the political association of both deities in Òṣogbo. It is evidential that the Ìjèsà people founded Òṣogbo, and Ògún is the most popularised deity in Ìjèsà.



**Fig 5.4 (b) Ògún (stone), Pix by Author, 2000.**

Therefore, there is no way to talk about Òṣun Òṣogbo without linking it to Ògún, which was brought from Ìjèsà land by the founders - Timéhin and Láròóyè. Apart from this, there is also a legend or mythical account that Òṣun is the wife of Ògún Olútíméhin of Ìpólé. This Ògún is also called Qwári in Ìjèsà land. If this is so, it means that the image of Ògún and Òṣun standing not too distant in the court of Òṣun reveals husband and wife relationship.



**Fig. 5.4 (c) Ògún statue, Pix by Author, 2000**

Fig 5.4 (e) below is that of Ọ̀bàtálá worshippers. During Ọ̀ṣun festival in Ọ̀ṣogbo, the Ọ̀bàtálá worshippers see themselves as joint celebrants of Ọ̀ṣun festival with Ọ̀ṣun worshippers. In Ọ̀ṣun court, there is also Ọ̀bàtálá shrine very close to that of Ọ̀ṣun. The devotees of Ọ̀bàtálá put on white attire just like that of Ọ̀ṣun worshippers. One legend says that Ọ̀bàtálá was once the husband of Ọ̀ṣun and taught the use of Èrìndínlógún divinatory system to Ọ̀ṣun. Besides, both deities - Ọ̀ṣun and Ọ̀bàtálá are associated with procreation and paediatrics activities. Ọ̀bàtálá is mouldering babies right from inside the wombs and Ọ̀ṣun is also a goddess of fertility who makes barren women to become mothers of children. Ọ̀bàtálá is also called the owner of “free concoction for children” in one of the songs they sing for her, and this is also known of Ọ̀ṣun. A myth also says that Ọ̀bàtálá uses Ọ̀ṣun water to mould human beings. There is also an account that Ọ̀bàtálá is the great grand mother of Ọ̀ṣun (cf Ladele et al 1986:21), hence, they are related.



**Fig 5.4 (e) Ọ̀bàtálá devotees. Pix by Author, 1999.**



The above image 5.4 (e) is that of Èsù in Òṣun court in Òṣogbo. It is the belief of Yorùbá people that Èsù is a deity of neutrality (neutral force). He is a deity who is linked with all other deities that explains why the statue was located very close to mother Òṣun. He is like a policeman among Yorùbá deities. He is in charge of sacrifices made to deities. There is no deity who doesn't accept sacrifice. He knows whether a sacrifice is properly performed or not. Apart from this, there is a myth that says that, Èsù is the Òṣéturá that Òṣun gave birth to which she used to replace herself in the group of male deities. Therefore, Òṣun gave birth to Èsù according to that myth, narrated by an Ifá priest, Adeboye Ifatoogun (1999 and 2000 interviews).



**Fig. 5.4 (e) The statues of Èsù, Pix by Author, 2000.**

The picture below Fig 5.4 (f) is that of Èyò which came out during the Òṣun Òṣogbo festival. Èyò is peculiar to the Àwóri Yorùbá in Lagos and Ògùn States. Even though both are deities in Yorùbá pantheon, there is no specific notable relationship between Èyò and Òṣun. But, both cults are women cults.



**Fig. 5.4 (f) Èyò, Deity popular in Lagos and Ogun States Pix by Author, 1999.**

As we have Èyò present during Òşun festival, we also have Gèlédé masque as seen below Fig. 5.4 (g)



**Fig. 5.4 (g) Gèlédé Masque, Pix by Author, 1999.**



Gèlédé is also prominent among the Àwóri, Ègbá and Ìjèbú Yorùbá. It has been shown that Gèlédé cult is a women's cult that is associated with the witches (Ajibade 1999). If that is the case, it means that both belong to the same group or association and they have many things in common. If we examine the dressing, we will see that the appearance is that of a woman and the mask on her head is a plaited hair that is feminine. The presence of popular deities in other Yorùbá communities during the Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo is a new and global event. It has its root in the effect of globalisation whereby there is deep interaction of cultural and religious heritages all over the world. The new ideas and practices cannot claim a particular source. But individual tries to projects his or her religion through interactions and corporate celebrations.



Fig 5.4 (gb) Ifá Priests, Pix by Author, 1999

The picture 5.4 (gb) above is that of Ifá priest and priestess. It shows their interest in Òṣun festival. Research has shown that, there is a close connection and relationship between Ifá and Òṣun. There are varying myths and legends talking about the types of relationship between Òṣun and Ifá/Òrúnmilà. Farris (1984:83) shows that, Òrúnmilà was once a husband to Òṣun and that it was Òrúnmilà who taught Òṣun the art of divination (Éérindínlógún). Another account reveals that it was Òṣun who taught Òrúnmilà the use of sixteen cowries art of divination. Either it was Òrúnmilà who taught Òṣun or it was Òṣun who taught Òrúnmilà it simply means that both of them are interrelated.

Apart from the fact that Òṣun was a wife to Òrúnmilà, there is another myth that reveals that Òṣun and Òrúnmilà were friends in Òṣogbo. The friendship between them made it possible for Òrúnmilà to turn from his wrath when the people of Òṣogbo of that time offended him. The story is as follows as narrated by Babalolá Adébooyè Ifátòògùn of Ilobu in 2000 as seen below.

The Ifá myth about the founding of Òṣogbo says that Òrúnmilà came from Òtu Ifè to Òṣogbo on divination tour when it was made up of just seven huts. They inquired of Òrúnmilà what to do so that they can become multiplied and Òrúnmilà performed the sacrifice for them and they begin to perform rituals. He told them that they would become multiplied. Through this, Òṣogbo become expanded. That was how Òrúnmilà became famous than the then king of Òṣogbo. The people of this community conspired against Òrúnmilà and drove him out of Òṣogbo. When he got to the outskirts of the town he made use of his incantatory -words (àyájó) and there was darkness all over the town of Òṣogbo. They all became blind; they just knew that, they were breathing. It was those who were passing Òṣogbo from another town who saw the situation and reported to Òṣun. That was how Òṣun entreated Òrúnmilà with two hundred she goats, sheep, snails, cowries shells, kola nut, bitter kola and other items, in two hundred sets. This made the people of Òṣogbo to regain their sights. But they still lack understanding. Òṣun entreated Òrúnmilà further to loose the rope of calamities from the people of Òṣogbo to regain their sights. But they still lack understanding. Òṣun entreated Òrúnmilà further to loose the rope of calamities from the people of Òṣogbo. Òrúnmilà told her that, there is no problem with them again, because, he has loosened the rope of calamity from them. He then said that, water should gush out on that spot that they were staying as evidence that he has loosen the rope of calamity. It is after that name they call the river/water, Ikintúkùn, where Ifá divination is done in Òṣogbo till today. Then, Òrúnmilà cursed the people of Òṣogbo that the palm tree of Ifá will never germinate in Òṣogbo, even though he's no more annoyed with the people of Òṣogbo. Part of that Ifá literature says:



Four hundred buffalo, they have eight hundred horns,  
Forty Muslims, they have eighty sandals  
One hundred Sàngó devotees have two hundred Sééré  
Divination was made for Lúbélúbé,  
On the day he was making a divination tour to Òṣogbo  
In which he was to reside in the house of Alárè Ohùntótó  
Alárè Ohùntótó, the one who chews teeth as if chewing yam.

This Ifá narration is revealing the type of relationship between Òṣun and Ifá in Òṣogbo community. It shows that both Ifá and Òṣun play prominent role in what we now know as Òṣogbo community. Ifátóògùn even asserted “without Ifá, we cannot have the town which we call Òṣogbo today”. Fig. 5.5. (a-e) Pictures showing the Fate and the Faith of People in Òṣun.



**Fig. 5.5 (a) A woman praying to Òṣun, Pix by Author, 1999**



**Fig. 5.5 (b) People who were washing their heads, Pix by Author, 2000**



**Fig. 5.5 (d) A woman who fetched Òşun water, Pix by Author, 2000.**



**Fig. 5.5 (e) People fetching Òṣun water, Pix by Author, 2001.**

Figs. 5.5 (a) - 5.5 (e) are revealing the fate and the faith of the communal people in Òṣun goddess, especially in the water. After the prayer of Ìyá Òṣun and Àwòrò Òṣun upon the sacrifice, they will pour some into the river and some upon the altar. Then, people believe that the water of river Òṣun has been charged with power (àṣẹ) to perform whatever they want/wish. Fig 5.5 (a) is the picture of a barren woman. Her faith in Òṣun as a goddess of fertility and productivity warranted her praying to Òṣun to remove the reproach of barrenness from her. In our discussion with her, she maintained that she has faith in Òṣun that she will give her child. Even though she is a Muslim she has undaunted faith and belief in Òṣun as a deity of fertility and procreation. Fig 5.5 (b) shows people who are using Òṣun water to wash their heads. Some of them were even singing as they wash their heads with Òṣun water saying:

Wẹ́rí-wẹ́rí wẹ́rí mi o  
 Wẹ́rí-wẹ́rí wẹ́rí mi o  
 Kórí mi má gbàbòdè  
 Wẹ́rí mi o.

(The one who washes the head, wash my head  
 The one who washes the head, wash my head  
 So that my head will not act against me  
 Wash my head).



In Yorùbá society, it is the belief that each person has his own destiny or personal head. This is variously called *Orí*, *Ìpín*, *Áyànmó*, *Kádàrà*, and *Àkínlèyàn* and *Èlédàá*. Someone may be destined for good while another person may be destined for bad. Yorùbá believe that, one's personal head or destiny is the closest god to him or her. There is even an Ifá verse that says there is no deity that will make someone prosperous without the consent of one's personal head or destiny (cf Abimbola 1968:100-101). That is why they attach great importance to the worship of head (*Orí*) as one's personal god. These people were washing their heads with Òṣun water because, they believe in her as a goddess who can remove ill luck from them. They will use this water to drive away untimely death, diseases, loss, paralysis, bondage and accidents or disaster that may befall them.

These practices of washing the head, praying to head, and offering of sacrifices to head are clear indications that destiny is a negotiable concept in Yorùbá cosmography.

It is the belief of Yorùbá to do everything possible so that their destiny will be good in life. Yorùbá believe that we have inner and outer heads. This belief is revealing the Yorùbá view of their world as a world of binary complementarities. The inner head (*orí inú*) must support the outer head (*orí òde*); both must have harmonious relationship before a person can succeed in life. That is why Yorùbá will pray, "the inner head will not destroy the outer head". At times, they may warn an individual that he/she should entreat his/her head, so that it will not act contrary to his/her joy. *Orí* is very important to the Yorùbá people. Whatever a deity deserves, one's *Orí* deserves the same if not more. This is because; *Orí* is regarded as the closest and the most important deity to an individual. That is why the people were using Òṣun water to wash their heads to remove everything that may debar their progress, peace and prosperity from them.

Fig 5.5 (d) is the picture of a woman who fetched Òṣun water with plastic container apart from the fact that she used the water to wash her head. People regard Òṣun water as a powerful medicine (*àgbo*). They believe that if a barren woman drinks of it she will become fruitful and pregnant. They believe that, if a pregnant woman drinks of it she will labour and deliver her baby without tears. And if they use Òṣun water to bath for children, they will become hearty and healthy - free of diseases and sicknesses. One will wonder that in this era of orthodox medicine and modern medical care people are still going to Òṣun river en-mass to fetch the water during the festival. This is a clear indication of people's ever-growing belief and fate in Òṣun. Also, it is a clear indication of inadequacy of orthodox medicine to solve all human health problems.

## 6. Traditional and Modern: The Transformation of Òşun Cult in Òşogbo

### 6.1. Introduction

A critical examination of Òşun Òşogbo festival and Òşun cult in Òşogbo will reveal whether there are marks of transformation or not. This chapter focuses on the transformation of Òşun cult in Òşogbo and elucidate the necessitated factors for such changes. Without digressing from the main focus, it is clearly evident that Òşun cult and Òşun festival in Òşogbo have been transformed. There are various factors responsible for these changes ranging from the impact and the effect of foreign religions - Islam and Christianity, the impact of modernism which gave rise to modern healing methods; the impact of slave trade, and last but not the least, the impact and the effect of the visual art.

Beier (2000:54) made a similar observation that:

Even in 1951, when I first visited Òşogbo, the Òşun worshippers were only a tiny minority in the town and they carried no political influence whatsoever. Nevertheless, the spirit of Òşun somehow affected the whole community.

The above from Beier reveals that there are changes in Òşun cult in Òşogbo community. Since Òşun festival is deeply rooted in the culture and culture is dynamic, changing from time to time. Therefore, Òşun cult and festival cannot be static as well. When we consider various changes in the cult of Òşun Òşogbo with regards to factors necessitating for its changes we will be able to conclude whether this transformation is positive or negative. It is important to mention here that many companies use the opportunity of the crowd that are present during the festival to advertise and sell their own products. A good case in point here is Coca Cola Company. Annually, this company always organise a night party on one side of the palace on the day of lighting the sixteen points lamp (Àtùpà Olójú Mérindínlógún). The music they play is Western music with various forms of beats. Many youths, boys and girls appear naked, paint their bodies with images of fish that symbolises the representative of Òşun spirit that entered into treaty with the founder of Òşogbo-Òláròyè gbádewòlú. The presence of the popular Yorùbá Ethnic

Militia, Odùduwá Peoples' Congress is also important at the festival. They usually bring a white huge ram to the river as their own ritual object. All these, though adding colour to the festival but they are changes and transformations that the Òṣun religion is witnessing in Òṣogbo. It has now been seen as both ethnic and national pride.

## 6.2. The Impact of Foreign Religions on Òṣun Òṣogbo

Islam and Christianity as prominent among the foreign religions in Africa found their way into Òṣogbo community in the seventeenth century. Islamic fundamentalists made the first attempt from Ilorin in 1838. But, when their forceful effort to convert the people of Òṣogbo into Islam failed during that time they had to employ some peaceful means of introducing Islam into Òṣogbo community. Through the merchants and travellers who were Muslims, Islam was firmly established in Òṣogbo around 1870.

Likewise, in 1870, the first Christian Missionary came to Òṣogbo during the reign of Àtàoja Fábòdé (cf Gbadamosi 1978:54-55, Beier 1975:19; Adepegba 1995:4-5 and Ogungbile 1998:49-51). When these two foreign religions came into Òṣogbo many traditional worshippers among who were devotees of Òṣun get converted into Islam and Christianity. Among people who converted into Islam and Christianity were kings and traditional chiefs. They established various socio-religious societies and clubs, which made it easier for the people to join them. As they establish schools, they were educating people in the art of reading and writing, teaching the tenets of their religions through this means.

It has been shown that right from the time of Àtàoja Mátànmí I (1854-1864) till the present day, the political leader of Òṣogbo will either be a Muslim or a Christian. Likewise, the majority of the traditional chiefs are either Muslims or Christians. The Arugbá till year 2000, princess Gbónjúbólá Oyèwálé,<sup>50</sup> has also become a Christian now.

The incumbent Àtàoja is even facing opposition from his Muslim brethren who alledge him of idolatry. They have made him to realise that he has the power to put an end to the worship of Òṣun. He realises that doing this will be injurious to his locus standi as a legitimate king of the community since the worship of Osun is the basis for legitimising his position. At the same time his position in the festival has been of doubled faces. He does not see Òṣun festival as a religion per se but as a mere social event and a commemoration and celebration of founding history of this

<sup>50</sup> Princess Gbónjúbólá Oyewale was the Arugbá Òṣun Òṣogbo till August 2000. She is now a converted Christian living with her husband in Òra at the time of this research.

community. In his official opening speech during Òşun festival of 1993 and 2000, his political position was reflected thus:

Òşun Òşogbo Festival is a festival. That is all. It is the celebration of the birth of Òşogbo and the remembrance of the events that led to the founding of the town. The occasion is an attempt on our part to look back into the life of our forefathers which we can still appreciate and hope to hand over to generations after us. It is not religion per se but a remembrance festival (1993 Osun Brochure)

Your excellency, the Governor of Òşun State, the honourable Minister of Tourism and Culture, the executive director of Nigeria Tourism and Development Corporation, members of the State Executive council, chairmen of local governments, distinguished tourists from all over the globe, gentlemen of the press, ladies and gentlemen. We are gathered here today to celebrate this year's Òşun Òşogbo Festival, which could be referred to as the millennial Òşun Òşogbo Festival. Today's occasion is the celebration and commemoration of the source of Òşogbo as a settlement. This is why the festival comes up annually, with pomp and pageantry characterized by eating, drinking, drumming and eulogizing the noble strides of the forbearers of Òşogbo. Òşun Òşogbo as a festival, has been elevated internationally, in these modern times, for the purpose of articulating and projecting the grove's potentialities as a global tourist attraction of no mean order. It is therefore, my delight to once again, write artists of repute and, of various vocations, to take and utilize the advantage of the natural endowment, which abound in the ancient grove. It is a source of pride and the re-awakening of the beauty of African civilization (2000 Osun Brochure).

These noble speeches of the political head of Òşogbo community show that Òşun festival in Òşogbo has been transformed from a local to a global event by downplaying the religious simulation of the festival. Therefore, the king is presenting it annually as a mere celebration of historical foundation of the town. He cannot abandon it because it is the basis for his legitimacy to the throne; and he cannot proclaim it as a religious festival in order to save his face in Islam as a Muslim.

Another amazing issue about Òşun festival in Òşogbo is that almost all members of Òşun festival committee are Muslims and Christians. For example, the chairman of the committee, Chief Gabriel Òpárántí is a Christian, and the members of his committee are either Muslim or Christian. Also, in order to preserve Yorùbá religious traditions in Òşogbo, a society was established under the umbrella of the king who is also a Muslim, with their office located within the jurisdiction of the palace, and the president of the society is a traditional chief who is also a Christian. In fact, he is both the chairman of Òşun festival committee and the president of Òşogbo

cultural Heritage. These two committees overlap in membership even though some, who are members of Òṣun cultural Heritage councils are not members of Òṣun festival committee, while the membership of some people are constant. The real devotees of Òṣun who were allowed to be members of Òṣun festival committee are Ìyá Òṣun and Àwòrò Òṣun. Other devotees will just be given the feedback of the committee's decision. The office of Aworo was even created sometimes by the king to be the representative of the king in the cult.

All of these are pointing to the transformation of Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo community. But as strong and pushing these foreign religions - Islam and Christianity are in Òṣogbo, Òṣun still has its own place. On many occasions there were confrontations between some Islamic fundamentalists and the devotees of Òṣun. I was even told by the current Ìyá Òṣun that some years back, as the people were passing on the day of clearing the road - Ìwópópó Day, some Muslim boys threw water upon the crowd who were passing. It nearly resulted into a big fight if not for the intervention of the police. Currently, many Mosques in Òṣogbo have loudspeakers which they use at times to underscore the traditional religion in the town especially Òṣun festival. Thus, the Òṣun worshippers use songs of protest against the confrontational attitudes of Muslims. This they do in a satirical way, singing against them. These are some of their songs:

(a)

Ááwa ó ṣorò ilé wa o - We will perform our traditional rites  
 Ááwa ó ṣorò ilé wa o - We will perform our traditional rites  
 Ìmòlè ò pé ó ó e e - Islam does not forbid  
 Ìmòlè o pé káwa má ṣorò - Islam does not forbid us to do it  
 Ááwa ó ṣorò ilé wa o - We will perform our traditional rites.

(b)

Yóó bàyáláyàá wọn - Curse be unto their great grand mothers  
 Àwọn tó n pè wá lájẹbọ - Those are calling us pagans

(c)

Níbo ló ní n gbé Yèyè mi sí o? Where did he say that I should  
 put my mother?  
 Níbo ló ní n gbé Yèyè mi sí o? Where did he say that I should  
 put my mother?  
 Bàbá Oníláwàní bànbà - The man with a big turban  
 Tó ní kí n wá f' Òṣun sèmòlè - Who said I should embrace Islam  
 Níbo ló ní n gbé Yèyè mi sí o? Where did he say that I should  
 put my mother?



(d)

Bàbá Onírungbòn,<sup>51</sup> - Bearded father (man),  
 Jé á ṣẹbọ wa, - Allow us to perform our rituals/sacrifice  
 Bàbá Onírungbòn, - Bearded father (man),  
 Jé á ṣẹbọ wa - Allow us to perform our rituals/sacrifice.  
 Àwa ò mòmò pé ẹ má kírun lójúmó - We don't say that you  
 should not pray daily  
 Bàbá Onírungbòn, - Bearded father,  
 Jé á ṣẹbọ wa - Allow us to perform our rituals/sacrifice

(e)

Bàbá Onírungbòn Bearded father/man,  
 Yéé gbó tẹbọ wa - Leave us alone with our rituals/sacrifice  
 Ẹnikan ò mòmó pé o má kírun lójúmó - Nobody say that you  
 should not pray daily,  
 Bàbá Onírungbòn - Bearded father/man,  
 Yéé gbó tẹbọ wa - Leave us alone with our rituals/sacrifice

(f)

Iró ni wón n pa - They are all lying,  
 Òṣun ò lè parun - They cannot abolish Òṣun.  
 Àtélewó la bálà - We wake to meet lines on our palms  
 A ò mẹnì tó kọ ó - We don't know the person who did it  
 Iró ni wón n pa - They are all lying,  
 Òṣun ò lè parun - They cannot abolish Òṣun

The above songs among many others are circumstantial in that, they reveal the transformation of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo with regards to the advent of Islam in Òṣogbo as a force against Òṣun as one of the traditional festivals/religions of the community.

From these songs, many things are deducible. The first song above shows a kind of religious syncretism. The Òṣun worshippers admit that Òṣun festival should be seen as traditional rites that need to be performed irrespective of the new religion that people are embracing. They maintain that it doesn't matter for a Muslim to continue in Islam and at the same time performing the traditional festival.

The second song is different. This is because it is antagonistic and abusive. It is a reaction to the derogatory and the abhorrent term, which the Muslims are using to underscore Òṣun as a traditional religion. The devotees of Òṣun reject “paganism” as a term for their religion in that, they

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<sup>51</sup> Bearded man/father is a form of synecdoche. It stands for the Muslim scholars or leaders who usually have long beards.

believe that they know whom they worship. It is then uncalled for people to refer to them as pagans (ajẹbọ – eaters or consumers of sacrifice).

The third song reveals the total commitment and dedication of Òṣun devotees to the worship of Òṣun despite the global wave pervading the land at the moment. This song is opposing to syncretism idea conveyed in the first song. The theme of this third song is sordidly of patriotic idea of Òṣun devotees, that the changes of the community, especially the intrusion of Islam must not change their true devotion to Òṣun. Also, the song is revealing the attempt of Muslims to convert the Òṣun worshippers into Islam, telling them to do away with Òṣun. The approach of Òṣun devotees to this attempt is conveyed in the song that they cannot do away with Òṣun.

The fourth and the fifth songs are in concomitant to the third song. The devotees of Òṣun believe so much in fundamental human rights which allow individual the right to religion without interference from anybody or group of people. To this end, they emphasize freedom of worship without being antagonistic to one another. So, they use these songs to tell the Muslims leader or Imam that no one forbid them from observing their daily five times prayers, therefore, the Muslims also have no right whatsoever to tell them not to perform their rituals or in essence their festival. This is because; both Muslims and Òṣun worshippers know what they derive in worshipping their object of worship.

Even though the Muslims in Òṣogbo have seen that regardless of their preaching and activities to convert the traditional worshippers into Islam, some Òṣun worshippers are still persistent. To this end, they are using various means to get them converted into Islam. The sixth song above is a reaction to the multifarious attempts of Muslim to abolish Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo. The devotees of Òṣun are then making Muslims to realise that the worship of Òṣun is traditional, indigenous and has Òṣogbo as its base/root. That, it is deeply rooted in the community, therefore it is not what somebody or a group of people can abolish. And that each person who is a native of Òṣogbo is born into a clan whose religion is Osun. Technically, they are all born into Osun cult.

At this juncture, it is worthy to point out that these songs are not traditional. Because, they came into existence as a result of socio-cultural changes that occur to the Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo due to the advent of Islam in the community. They are not part of the traditional songs that the devotees of Òṣun do sing to praise or adore Òṣun in the time past. But, they are now added to the archive of Òṣun songs. This is an evidence of transformation of Òṣun cult and the festival in Òṣogbo community. This transformation of Òṣun cult is reflexive in that the reaction of Òṣun devotees to Muslims' attitude to them is causing another reaction from the Muslims. At times, the Muslims in their mosques through the use of

megaphone or microphone react to Òṣun worshipper's songs. One of such songs that the Muslim sing to react to Òṣun devotees says:

Èyin àbòsí - You conspirators  
 Bàbá yín ló sọ wá di Ìmòlè - is it your fathers who made us  
 Ìmòlè?

Ìmòlè is a derogatory term, which they use to qualify the Muslims. Literally, it means, "hard or forceful knowledge". The Muslims frown at it and it also forms part of their religious songs as well. Till today, the confrontational attitude against Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo by the Muslims of that community is still on. It has been shown that Ibrahim Mukanda, an Islamic fundamentalist is even the leader of this opposition, who established an Islamic school very close to Òṣun grove. He sees it as a way of combating Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo.

Though, the greatest and violent opposition to Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo is mainly from the Muslims, still, the Christians in Òṣogbo are also opposing to them, especially the evangelical or the charismatic group. Apart from various preaching which debase the worship of Òṣun, they also have various songs, which they sing to relegate Òṣun among other traditional religion in Òṣogbo community. These are some of the songs, which the Christians sing to confront, the Yorùbá traditional religion in Òṣogbo among which is Òṣun:

Omnipotent God  
 Omniscience God  
 Among other gods, there is none like you.  
 All other gods are the works of men,  
 Among other gods, there is none like this.

Apart from songs, different Christian drama and Christian home videos are presented from time to time both in the television sponsored programmes and in established crusades in order to turn into futility the Òṣun festival. For example, after the Òṣun festival of year 2001, a German born Christian evangelist, Rheinard Bonke was invited by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Òṣun State Branch to stage a powerful crusade in Òṣogbo. The crusade pulled crowd than what one can ever think of. This is nothing more than counter programme against Òṣun festival that was declared idolatry during the crusade. This is a funny episode in Òṣogbo as a community because the deities, Òṣun and other Yorùbá traditional institutions are being promoted by a Westerner, a Austrian born artist – Susanne Wenger; while it is being relegated, denounced and repudiated by another Westerner, a German born preacher – Reinhard Bonke. To me, the

whole issue is the evidence of neo-colonisation under the umbrella of globalisation and modernism. I think that one of the best ways to globalisation is willingly borrowing of ideas and cultural values that is void of force and intimidation.

To this effect, the attitude of Christians against Òṣun cult and festival in Òṣogbo has generated a lot of songs by Òṣun devotees against the Christians. Some of those songs are similar to those they sing against the Muslims with little changes. Examples of such songs are:

Níbo ló ní n gbé Yèyè mi sí o?  
 Níbo ló ní n gbé Yèyè mi sí o?  
 Bàbá Oníkólà<sup>52</sup> lórùn  
 Tó ní n wá f' Òṣun ṣe gbàgbó  
 Níbo ló ní n gbé Yèyè mi sí o?  
 (Where did he say that I should put my mother?  
 Where did he say that I should put my mother?  
 Father/Man with culler on his neck  
 Where did he say that I should put my mother?)  
 (b) Yóó bàyáláyáá wọn  
 Yóó bàyáláyáá wọn  
 Gbogbo àwọn tó n pè wá lájẹbọ  
 Yóó bàyáláyáá wọn.  
 (Curses be to their great grand mother  
 Curses be to their great grand mother  
 Those who are calling us pagans  
 Curses are to their great grand mother).

The view of Òṣun devotees concerning Christianity and Islam is similar. They regard both religions as foreign which must not interfere with the traditions (Òṣun festival). To this end, the first song above is showing the undaunted and unwavering faith of Òṣun devotees in Òṣun. This mother Òṣun is so important to them that the preaching of Christians is of no effect to them (Òṣun devotees). Therefore, they cannot embrace Christianity at the expense of Òṣun. The preaching of Christians in whom they view Òṣun and other traditional worshippers as pagans and idol worshippers also gave birth to songs like that second one above. The devotees of Òṣun are using such a song to oppose to the view of Christians that Òṣun devotees are pagans and idolaters.

When Christianity came into Òṣogbo community, divine healing without medicine, but solely the power of prayers, is one of their messages. Before

<sup>52</sup> The man with culler on his neck is also a form of synecdoche. It stands for Reverends and Pastors who usually put on cullers as a sign of their priesthood. The cloth itself is kasok with culler on the neck

they came into the community of Òṣogbo, people have been receiving healings through the water of Òṣun. Therefore, when Christianity came, the devotees of Òṣun saw them as rivals. That is why we have songs like the one below:

Orin òwé,  
 Òrò òwe  
 Àwa tí ñ wọmọ wa  
 Káládùúrà ó tó dé,  
 Abímọ-má-dáná-silé  
 Òṣun là ñ fẹyí kí.  
 (Proverbial songs,  
 Proverbial words/speech  
 We have been healing our children  
 Before the advent of Christianity.  
 The one who gives birth to child without having fire at home  
 We are using this to pay homage to Òṣun).

This is to say that the community people had their own healing system before the advent of Christians' healing system. Certain groups among the Christians even make use of water as instrument of therapy. This they use after they have prayed into the water in the name of Jesus. They can drink such water or use it to bath for their children. Among them are: Christ Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim Church, and Celestial Church of Christ. These are even the main focus of that song by Òṣun devotees. This is because, the way they use water to perform therapeutic functions is not too different from that of Òṣun devotees, the major difference is the object of worship and the prayer they say into the water. Most of these groups - Cherubim and Seraphim, and Celestial church of Christ even take some people to the river side to bath for them. It may be a total washing of the whole body or just to wash the head of their clients. These acts are similar to that to Òṣun devotees and they both believe in the therapeutic functions of water.

Due to this and many other reasons, Òṣun devotees hold the belief that the adherents of these foreign religions should see Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo community as a communal worship, which will in no way affect their commitment to their God but instead acts as complement. To this end, the Òṣun devotees reveal this perception in songs, and example of which is cited below:

Méjèèjì là ó máa ẹ  
 Kò bàjé o!  
 Méjèèjì là ó máa ẹ

Kò bàjé o!  
 Ká ṣàlùwàlá tán  
 Káa wódò ọmọ  
 Méjèèjì là ó máa ṣe  
 Kò bàjé o!  
 (We will practise the two together  
 It is not bad!  
 We will practise the two together  
 It is not bad!  
 After we've performed ablution  
 We will go to the river to bath the children,  
 We will practise the two together,  
 It is not bad!).

This song is showing that being a Muslim does not stop an individual to take part in the celebration of Òṣun festival. After all, the Muslims use water to perform ablution, and Òṣun devotees do use water to bath for the children.

Having said all, it is clearly evident that even though Islam and Christianity are the two major religions in Òṣogbo community, still Òṣun festival is very prominent and popular. Their preaching and evangelical activities have not stopped Òṣun festival. That is why the devotees of Òṣun sing confidently that, both Muslims and Christians are lying, Òṣun can never be abolished, and since it is upon it that the community of Òṣogbo was founded. It has even been observed that the number of Muslims and Christians taking part in Òṣun Òṣogbo festival is greater than the real devotees of Òṣun. Somebody even made a similar remark that “it is a common occurrence during traditional festivals like Egúngún, Sàngó, Òṣun etc., to find a large number of Christians and Muslims among the active participants and onlookers”.<sup>53</sup>

The above is corroborating our view that the Christians and Muslims who participate in Òṣun Òṣogbo outnumbered the devotees. Even though these foreign religions are very active in Òṣogbo community, their adherents have not given up their flavour in Òṣun festival. We can then say that the transformation of Òṣun in Òṣogbo has given way to what we can call religious syncretism or double loyalty.

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<sup>53</sup> Look at the editorial comment of *Òṣun Òṣogbo Brochure* 1992, pp. 9.

### 6.3. The Effect of Modern Medicine on Òṣun Cult in Òṣogbo

Before the commencement of modern medical ways of healing in Òṣogbo community, there were diverse ways in which people were seeking solutions to their health problems, just like other Yorùbá communities. One of the many Yorùbá traditional ways of healing is known as the cult of Olómitútù.<sup>54</sup> When the modern healing method came into Yorùbá land, especially Òṣogbo community, the traditional healing method has not given way totally, they are complementary in some situations. Though, many people hate and detest everything traditional either out of their religious faith, dogma or out of hatred for everything traditional, which they regard as uncivilised and unscientific. But many people still hold the view that, both means of healing should not be seen as opposition but rather complementary. A notable traditional healer in Yorùbá land, Lambo said that:

Modern doctors were only conscious of physical ways of disease affliction and were ignorant of the occult, metaphysical astral and esoteric ways of affliction. A disease caused via occult, could not be diagnosed by x-ray and thus made cure impossible through modern approach.<sup>55</sup>

The main emphasis in Lambo's submission is that both traditional and modern healing methods should be seen as complimentary, equally effective and efficient. Without mincing words, the cult of Òṣun heals different types of diseases through the use of Òṣun sacred water. When modern healing method was brought to Òṣogbo, they were introducing people to Health centre, Maternity and Dispensary. But, the devotees of Òṣun who man the cult of Òṣun's healing through cold water proved that, before the introduction of modern doctors, Òṣun has been healing those who believe in her healing power. One of the songs they sing to show their perception about the advent of modern medical practitioners is as follows:

Sélèrú àgbo  
Àgbàrá àgbo  
L'Òṣun fí ñ wọmọ rẹ  
Kì dókítà ó tó dé  
Abímọ-má-dáná-sílé

<sup>54</sup> See Ilesanmi (1991:46). He says that: Lómitútù, another cult for children, belongs to the liberal 'medical' cult where ordinary clean water is sanctified and used for the feeding and the general care of the child. From this research, the devotees of Òṣun do not even regard it as ordinary water; they believe that the mystical power of mother Òṣun is ever present in the water.

<sup>55</sup> See *The Nigerian Tribune*, Monday July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1986 pp. 16

Òṣun là n fèyí kí.  
 (Spring is concoction  
 Torrent is concoction  
 These are what Òṣun has been using to cure her children  
 Before the advent of Modern medical Doctors  
 The one who gives birth without having fire at home  
 We are using this to pay homage to Òṣun).

The awareness of Òṣun devotees concerning the modern healing method gave rise to the above song. Truly, the devotees of Òṣun take cognisance of the modern healing methods but they still believe in the efficiency and effectiveness of hydro-therapeutic method handed over to them by Òṣun. This research has shown that till today, many still believe in the healing power of Òṣun sacred cold water. People were struggling to fetch the water of Òṣun, many even give money to the priests and priestesses to fetch the water for them because of the great crowd that hinder them from fetching the water by them.

During the time of this research, there is hardly any day that I will not see many clients who will come to Ìyá Òṣun and her cult members at the palace shrine. At times, I do take them to the main shrine at the river Òṣun when they want to talk to the image of Òṣun in the river.

Therefore, the modern healing method has not wiped out the people's belief in Òṣun as hydro-physician. I would rather suggest that the modern doctors should examine the chemical composition of Òṣun water to know the type of minerals or power in it that is performing healing and removing barrenness and infertility. By this, they will be able to make use of both methods for perfect success in the healing process in our communities.

#### **6.4. The Effect of Visual Art on Òṣun Cult in Òṣogbo**

In Òṣogbo town, there are various types of visual art. They are located at various places such as: Ojà laròóyè, Ìdí Bàbá, Àgbàlá Òṣun, Igbó Ifá, Ilédi Ohùntótó, Igbó Àwówó, Igbó Ààrò, Igbo Epa, Igbó Orò, Igbó Ìgbàlè, Ìdí Ìyálóde, Àgbède Aalie, Olówu Asingbà, Tánjéfomọèjòògùn etc.

There is no way to talk of the visual arts in Òṣogbo community without mentioning some people. The foremost among them are Ulli Beier, Georgina Beier and Susanne Wenger, popularly known as Àdùnní Iwínfúnmiké Olóriṣà, who resides in Òṣogbo. Susanne Wenger pre-occupies herself with the artwork in Òṣogbo town.

Apart from these three foreigners, most of the people who play prominent roles in the visual art in Òṣogbo community are also indigenous



people. They are: Muraina Oyelami, Rufus Ogundele, Adebisi Fabunmi, Jacob Afolabi; Nikee Adams, Twins Seven-Seven, Ademola Oníbonòkúta, Jimoh Buraimoh, Tijani Mayakiri, Ashiru Olatunde, Adebisi Akanji, Yemi Bisiri, Oloruntóba, Solomon Wangboje, Lawani, Ojewale and others. It has been shown that Ulli Beier, Susanne Wenger and Georgina Beier are the source of inspiration unto those among them who are Nigerians. They have a group called New Sacred Art Group through which they organise periodic seminars and exhibitions the essence of which is to improve their skill in their area of specialisation in artwork.

A crucial question that we can ask is, what is the impact of the visual art of this New Sacred Art Group on Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo community? Answers to this question can only be given by narrating what gave rise to the visual art in Òṣogbo and the perception of people about it.

For a very long period, Òṣun Òṣogbo has been witnessing various changes and transformation. Those transformations are the outcome of introduction of foreign religions, civilisation and new political structure being introduced to the community. Most of the taboos associated with the cult of Òṣun have been violated and many can no longer adhere to them. For example, it is a taboo for people to kill fish in Òṣun River, and to hunt for animals in Òṣun sacred grove. It is also a taboo for people to urinate or defecate faeces in Òṣun grove. All these taboos people can no longer keep. Even, the government are fuelling the fire of violating these taboos. A branch of Ministry of Agriculture is using one part of what used to be Òṣun grove for teak plantation. People do defecate faeces and urinate anywhere. This state of non-recognition of traditions and or taboos associated with the cult of Òṣun in Òṣogbo made the dedicated devotees of that period under the leadership of the then Ìyá Òṣun, to call on Susanne Wenger to save them from the predicament. This they did because they knew that she loves Yorùbá traditions and religion, and she is also close to the corridor of political power.

Many people don't know that Susanne Wenger Àdùnní Olóriṣà is not a devotee of Òṣun. She is a Ọbátálá worshipper and a prominent member of Reformed Ogbóni Fraternity. The state of non-recognition of Òṣun cult and her shrine, the one that has been destroyed by the termites made Susanne Wenger to come to the aid of Òṣun devotees. She started organising different types of Artisans-traditional sculptors, bricklayers and carpenters to repair Òṣun shrine and give it a befitting outlook. We even read about Susanne Wenger that:

Susanne Wenger came to Nigeria in 1950 and was soon integrated into the traditional culture and religion of the Yorùbá. What started as the restoration of derelicts shrine developed into the creation of

contemporary art on ancient religious ground-New Sacred Art. Together with the Nigerian artists Susanne Wenger and their art in the Groves of Òṣogbo have in the meantime earned worldwide fame and recognition...She introduces the artists of New Sacred Art and their works and also recommends the visit of other places of interest in and around the town of Òṣogbo<sup>56</sup>.

We can bring out many points from the above excerpts. The first thing is that Susanne Wenger and her group - New Sacred Art is solely responsible for the emergence and source of all visual arts in Òṣogbo, especially those in the Òṣun Sacred grove and court. The second point is that the visual arts of the New Sacred Art Group located in Òṣogbo, especially those in the Òṣun cult, are the most viable and prominent factor, which has made Òṣun Òṣogbo to widen her local fame and popularity to the national and global levels.

Though the Òṣun main shrine is as old as Òṣogbo community, but the visual art, that is, the images of Òṣun and all other deities which can be seen in Òṣun court were not there before; they are new. In a nutshell, they are as old as the New Sacred Art Group. In attempt to replace the wood of the main shrine that was destroyed by termites, Susanne Wenger and her group thought of adding beauty to it according to various myths and legends that they were told, hence, images of Òṣun were carved on the poles that they used. This even reflects in Wenger (1990:19) that:

The main shrine Ojúḃò (Òṣun) Òṣogbo is ancient, older than the town of Òṣogbo (which is not older than 400 years, according to chief Olúgúnnà's research). The outer shrine walls and central altar room were almost intact when the late Ìyá Osun appealed to us worshipper - artists who at the time were rebuilding Ìdí-Bàbá. Termites had invaded the shrine, eagerly devouring that altar, walls, pillars and roof. We responded, destroying the termites and repairing damage. Our minds inspired by our own annual ceremony, spiritually urged some of us to create art on the repaired walls. This was the beginning of New Sacred Art.

Without mincing words, it is clearly evident that the visual arts that are currently located at the main shrine of Òṣun Òṣogbo were not there at the time that Òṣun religion or festival began in Òṣogbo. They are the handiwork of Susanne Wenger and her group, which after they have started continue to improve on them till the present day. The refurbishing activities generated these visual arts. This is establishing a point that, the visual arts at the Òṣun Òṣogbo shrine may not be there without the intervention of Susanne Wenger

<sup>56</sup> See Susanne Wenger (1990) *The Sacred Groves of Oshogbo*, the back cover.

and her group- The New Sacred Art Group. Without the renovation of the shrine by Wenger and her group, it is not a gainsaying that Òṣun Òṣogbo which is today seen as a national and global event might have gone into extinction. It is possible that the popularity of Òṣun Òṣogbo would have been limited to the local community of Òṣogbo and possibly its immediate environs. To this end, we can make a categorical statement that, the role of Wenger, her group and their art work have played a tremendous and inestimable impact in transforming Òṣun Òṣogbo from the local deity to a deity of global repute.

Even though, majority of the foreigners who take part in annual festival of Òṣun in Òṣogbo are African Diaspora all over the world especially in the Europe, America and Asia who were taken into slavery, tracing their identity and revitalising their routes, it wouldn't have been possible for them to see a dynamic and beautiful environment created by Wenger and her group, if they (Wenger and the New Sacred Art Group) refused the clarion call of renovation of the grove/shrine. There are two opinions with regards to the activities of the New Sacred Art in Òṣogbo. A school of thought believes that, the activities of Wenger and her group is the beginning of desacrilization of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo. This is because, it has reduced the Òṣun festival to just a social festival. Not only this, they believe that it has rendered the shrine to a mere tourist centre and a monumental grove. They are of the opinion that even though their activities have done so much in transforming the cult of Òṣun in Òṣogbo from the locality of Òṣogbo to the global world, the sacredness and the worship has greatly reduced.

Part of what this group is saying is that the period and time they spend in the real worship and communion with Òṣun is insignificant compare to the entire days devoted to the worship of Òṣun. They believe that Ìyá Òṣun and Àwòrò Òṣun are no longer in control of the festival any longer. They receive directives of how the festival will look like from the Òṣun festival committees (even though they are members) of which the leadership belongs to Christian, Muslim or both. A cursory look at their premises may tempt us to agree to their summation. But, it has been observed that it is not the artwork of Wenger and her group that resulted into what they call desacrilization of the cult. Their artwork has not taken the administration of the cult organisation from the devotees. Instead, it has made the cult and the worship of Òṣun to become popularised. This is because, their art works have created a space and a place in the worship of this community guardian deity and has made it possible for people to communicate with the deity through the images sculptured, carved, or smelted in the court of Òṣun.

The view and the perception of the second school of thought are contrary to the first group. In fact, most of our informants who are traditional

worshippers testify that if not for Susanne Wenger and her group, Òṣun cult would have become a thing of past in Òṣogbo. One<sup>57</sup> of them even says:

Susanne Wenger deserves our commendation. It not for her, Òṣun shrine would have become something else. Before she came we were just celebrating Òṣun festival for celebration's sake. She is using her own money and her time to transform Òṣun to become a global event. Susanne is researching into the myths and history of all Òriṣà in Òṣogbo, representing each of them with images. (*Translation by Author*)

It has been seen in this research that there are many things militating against the cult of Òṣun in Òṣogbo, bringing about changes and transformation to the cult. But, it is evidential that the activities of Wenger and her group have resulted in the globalisation of Òṣun cult and festival in Òṣogbo among many others.

In addition, the festival of images, which they incorporate into Òṣun festival, is foreign to the cult and it is a modern approach to Yorùbá traditional religion in Òṣogbo. The origin of this cannot but be traced to Susanne Wenger and her group of artists. They will represent each deity with images and the adherents of each deity will begin to invoke the Spirit of such Òriṣà by reciting his/her oríkì. Those who admire them will give them money for their good performance in chanting the oríkì or singing songs for these Òriṣà. Gradually, this act has been incorporated into Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo till today even though it usually takes place in November. And it is during this period that they initiate new members into the Òṣun cult. Therefore, the chronicle of Òṣun Òṣogbo, especially its globalisation is incomplete without the mention of Susanne Wenger and her New Sacred Art Group.

### **6.5. The Effect of Slavery on Òṣun Cult in Òṣogbo**

Many people from Yoruba land were affected by the slave trade before it was abolished. And wherever they were taken as slaves they went with their religions and traditional practices. Drewal, et al (1989:13-14) made similar observation that:

One of the effects of eighteenth and nineteenth century disruptions was the dispersal of millions of Yorùbá peoples over the globe, primarily to the Americas - Haiti, Cuba, Trinidad, and Brazil - where

<sup>57</sup> This informant is Chief Oyegbade Látònà, Ojúgbònnà of Òṣogbo town. Interviewed on 10/03/2001.

their late arrival and enormous numbers ensured a strong Yorùbá character, religious and social lives of Africans in the New World... Yorùbá philosophical, religious and artistic tenets, ideas and icons have transformed and continue to transform religious beliefs and practices and the arts of persons far beyond African shores.

What Drewal and his colleagues are saying is that many among those who were taken into slavery were Yorùbá people. It is certain that some of them were Òṣun worshippers before they were taken into slavery. There are two things we can derive from this scenario. One, Òṣun is no longer restricted to Yoruba land; the worship has gone beyond the local community into the global level. The second thing is that, the mode of worship, posture, language and the likes have transformed, hence the worship of Òṣun has been transformed from the traditional mode of worship. As at today, Òṣun is worshipped in many parts of the world such as New York, Havana, Cuba Brazil, Salvador da Bahia, Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago and many other places. And Òṣun is given various names such as Oxun, Ochun, Mama Oxum etc. All these are testifying to the effects of Osun in the Diaspora. It has also been noted that ‘many Yoruba were taken to the New World very late in the slave trade, which is one of the reasons why the worship of Yoruba deities (orisha) persists in recognizable form in the New World (Bascom, 1972:5). Therefore, the drive for identity is prompting many African Americans to come back to their source to be intimated with the way Òṣun is worshipped. This is adding colour to the annual Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo where Òṣun is most popularised in Yorùbá land. And it becomes more globalise yearly. Many of them have even been re-initiated into Òṣun cult when they come. One thing is certain, that the revival activities of Yorùbá religion in Òṣogbo started by Wenger and her group made it possible for Òṣun cult to become more popularised and globalised. Even though, slavery of eighteenth and early nineteenth century brought a lot of set backs to Yorùbá religions and traditions, one of its good effects is the globalisation of Osun festival which made it to be transformed from a local event to a global event. This is because Òṣun is worshipped beyond the shore of Africa. Due to this popularity given to Òṣun in Òṣogbo, many African Americans are visiting Òṣogbo not only to seek their roots but they are also getting initiated into Òṣun cult by receiving the stone emblem/motif (Ota) of this water deity.

## 7. Conclusions and Deductions

The two major focuses of this research are the interpretation of the verbal and the visual arts of Òṣun to mirror the cult of Òṣun Òṣogbo in order to broaden our understanding of the cult. Three literary theories hermeneutics, semiotics and feminism were employed in our analysis, with brief explanation of their relevance to our analysis. The first chapter of this work deals with introduction-our research methodology, the scope and objectives and the expected contribution to knowledge.

The second chapter focuses on the origin of Òṣogbo community, the deities in the community, the origin of Òṣun and Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo. It was established in this chapter that Òṣogbo started as a Ìjèṣà community but now a mixture of Òyó and Ìjèṣà Yorùbá with greater population and influence of the Òyó people. This cannot but be traced to the effect of political domination of the old Òyó Empire over other Yoruba groups. It is revealed that, Ìgèdè-Èkìtì is the source of Òṣun River, which flows through Ìjèṣà land to Òṣogbo where it is popularized. The various shrines and deeps (Ìbú Òṣun) were mentioned together with the baseline data of Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo.

The third chapter focuses on the structure or organisation of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo. This begins with the Àtàójà, the Ìyá Òṣun, Àwòrò Òṣun and other cultic functionaries - male and female. Aworo Òṣun is a modern event created by the king as his representative in the cult when he has many things to attend to and because of his new religious orientation. He cannot abandon the worship of Òṣun because of its importance in the legitimacy of his office as the king hinges upon this deity. So, Àwòrò has to be chosen as his representative in the cult. This chapter was concluded with the children of Òṣun at various levels.

The fourth chapter deals with the analysis of the content of Òṣun Verbal Art - songs, chants and recitation. Many hidden things about the cult of Òṣun in Òṣogbo became known in the analysis. Our analysis in this chapter has shown the position the impact and the place of Òṣun as a goddess in Yorùbá pantheon. Apart from this, the faith and the fate of Òṣun devotees in her have been shown. It is under this chapter that we examine Òṣun as the personification of Yorùbá womanhood; as a model mother; a paediatrician; as a deity of fertility, vitality and productivity. We also examine the beauty

and the elegance of Òṣun, and it has been shown that Òṣun combines beauty with good character as a complement, which is concomitant to the Yorùbá saying that, character is beauty (*ìwà lẹwà*). The analysis of Òṣun verbal art has shown the invaluable role of Òṣun in the politics of Òṣogbo community. It is evident that she is the one ruling Òṣogbo community for the king, because she owns the town. It has been shown that Òṣun is a river/water. A thorough analysis of her verbal art has shown how the attributes of water reveal the virtues embedded in Òṣun as a goddess.

In this same fourth chapter we examined the relationship of Òṣun with other deities in Yorùbá pantheon. It is evident that most of them are interrelated with Òṣun. This fourth chapter was concluded with examination of Òṣun as a witch, which is the source of her mystical power the one of which make her to be powerful and popular among the deities in the Yorùbá pantheon of Òrìṣà. Also, this chapter shows that the Òṣun oral literature is a repertoire of the local history, legends and myths through which the community is orderized and governed. These orature serves as tools through which the forgotten or hidden truths and practices are illuminated.

The fifth chapter centres on the examination of the visual art of Òṣun. Various visual art representing and reflecting the attributes of Òṣun were examined. The visual art like the verbal art reveals many things about Òṣun. She is seen as a model mother. We examined pictures that show her relationship with other deities in Yorùbá pantheon and those that show the fate and the faith of Òṣun devotees in her as a changer of bad destiny, repairer of lives and as the one who blesses those that trust in her. Also, this chapter reveals that the artists use their inner eyes (*ojú inú*) to arrive at various appropriate and appealing images of various orisa; which is a quality that they must possess before they can make the essential identity, character, attributes, appearance or better put, right representations of the deities. In the case of Òṣogbo religious artist, they use their innovative ideas to make right representations and presentations of myths, legends and *oríki* delivered to them by the word of mouths in their artistic expression. Hence, this chapter shows the interplay between the verbal and the visual metaphors of Òṣun both in the worship of this deity and also in espousing the tenets and the religious beliefs of the cult. This shows the Yorùbá notion of aesthetic that the verbal, visual and ontological elements are interrelated, interconnected and interdependent.

The sixth chapter focuses on the transformation of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo. The factors that are responsible for the transformation of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo were discussed. They include: the effect of eighteenth and nineteenth century slave trade; the impact of foreign religions, the effect of modernism which introduces modern healing method and new political structure; and the impact of the *New Sacred Art Group* which Susanne

Wenger, and Austrian woman spearheaded. In this chapter various ways in which the above-mentioned factors have contributed to the transformation of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo were discussed.

In conclusion, Òṣun is not the only traditional religious cult in Òṣogbo but it is the most popularised cult in that community. Òṣogbo is not the source of Òṣun but it is in Òṣogbo that she is given a global attention. It has been shown in this work that, apart from her attributes as a generous and a caring goddess, and slave trade of eighteenth and nineteenth century, the most invaluable factor responsible for her globalisation is the effort of Susanne Wenger and her New Sacred Art Group. Therefore, Òṣun verbal art can be regarded as the traditional aspect of Òṣun cult in Òṣogbo while the visual art of Òṣun in Òṣogbo community could be regarded as the foreign influence or aspect. There are dissensions about the visual arts of Òṣun and other deities in Òṣogbo. Many people hold the belief that the art works or images representing these deities are not ritualised and that they are into sacred. They even see it as a form of religious and cultural syncretism, and deviation from the tradition. But, another group of people see these art works as a means of vitalisation of the cult. It is important to know that the people's perception of these religious images is that their location in the grove of Òṣun makes them sacred. Also, they are already performing the expected function of provision of space and place with the divine contacts.

Effects of Islam and Christianity on the cult of Òṣun in Òṣogbo can be easily noticed in the verbal art in which it has changed the content of various literature of Òṣun to reflect the presence of these foreign religions in Òṣogbo and their effects on the cult of Òṣun. Even though Òṣun religion is receiving verbal persecution from these two prominent demesticated (foreign) religions on the daily basis; many Muslims and Christians still take passive and active roles in the festival. This is evidential in their large turnout at the annual Òṣun festival in Òṣogbo.

Finally, I hope that in exploring the social, cultural and anthropological nexus of communication, the verbal and the visual arts and domains should be taken into cognisance for better understanding and knowledge. This means, that, the combination of the verbal and the visual art of Òṣun Òṣogbo will broaden our understanding and knowledge of the cult. The orature is highly efficient means of studying cultural institutions and means of retrieving history and past experiences, and enactment and re-enactment of artistic values.

I want to suggest that; there should be a comparative study on Òṣun festival in the various locations that she is worshipped in Yorùbá land. Also, Òṣun is dying because of Western Colonisation. Òṣun is being reborn due to Western concept of what it should be. Hence, the whole event is no longer a real traditional event but a mixture of traditional and Western. It is a form of



neo-colonisation and at the same time a form of revitalisation of religious identity in the era of globalisation. The source of the new manifestations is more often than not of local nature even though they cannot be attributed wholly to a particular original culture. It is the adaptation of the global influence that is the foreign experience that resulted in the mixture of local and global experiences.

## 8. Oral Source

### Respondents

Name	Age	Town	Occupation	Date
Awo Babalolá Adébóoyè Ifátóògùn	56	Ilobùú	Babaláwo- Ifá Priest	1999-2001
Chief Yemí Elebuìbon	55	Olúode Atuuruku's Compound Òşogbo	Babaláwo Ifá	2000-2002
Chief Oyègbadé Látonà	70	Ojùgbònà Ìlú Òşogbo	Babaláwo Ifá	2000- 2002
Mrs. Susanne Wenger, Àdùnní Iwínfúnmi Olórisà	86	Ibòkun Road, Òşogbo	Artist and worshipper of Òşun and Obátálá	2001
Mr. Yekeen Yusuf	58	No. 24 - Awo Ita, Abesu Street, Akinymi's Compound, Òşogbo.	Retiree	1999-2001
Awo Adésinà Oríyomí Olúáwo	50	Oba's Compound, Òşogbo	Awo Ifá, Egúngún	1999-2001
Mrs. Olúsanya Morenike	40	Ilé Gbàémú, Òşogbo	Civil servant	2001
Mr. Olálékan Òrişádáre	43	Ààfin Àtája, Òşogbo	Àwòrò Osun	1999-2002
Mr. Owólabí Àyindé	55	Àremo Láyíwolá, Ilé Ìyá Dúdú Òşogbo	Balógún Òşun	2000, 2001

Mr. Kasali Àkànní (Bàbá Dàda)	54	No. 104, Òkè Baále Yìdì, Òşogbo.	Wenger's Driver and Artist	2000-2002
Chief Gabriel Opárántí	70	Ààfin Oba Àtáója, Òşogbo	President, Òşogbo Cultural Heritage & Member, Òşun Festival Committee	2000-2002
Mrs. Omíleye Adénlé	58	Ààfin Oba Àtáója, Òşogbo	Ìyá Osun Òşogbo	2000-2002
Mr. Àremú Olásùpo	70	Ìta Olóókan, Òşogbo	Àwòrò Osun 1984-1996.	1999-2002
Mr. Ògúndiran Olásùpo	45	Ilé-Ife	Asùnjálá, Civil Servant	2002
Mr. Osùntóògùn	65	Ààfin Oba Àtáója, Òşogbo	Àwòrò Ibúsanyìn	1999-2002
Olòògbé Prince Samuel Adénlé	65	Ààfin Oba Àtáója, Òşogbo	PRO, Òşogbo Cultural Heritage	2000-2001

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