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The Socio-Political Thoughts of Orunmila in the Ifa Indigenous Knowledge System

Summary

This project engages in a relational study of the Ifa indigenous knowledge system as practised amongst the Yoruba-African people home and diaspora in Nigeria, Benin and Brazil; targeting thoughts about the state, governance system, constitution, justice, equality, equity, citizenship, nationalism, environment, gender, sexuality, global justice and other central socio-political discourses that derive there from. This is considered a potential foundation for new theoretical and methodological heritages that are based on African epistemological and metaphysical axioms which, in practical terms, can augment efforts towards addressing the ever-complex socio-political challenges across the globe.

PROJECT TEAM



**PROF. DR. OLUKAYODE
SEGUN EESUOLA**

AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHTS AND
POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR
INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN AND DIASPORA
STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS



**PROF. DR. OLUMUYIWA
FALAIYE**

PROFESSOR OF AFRICAN
SOCIO-POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

Ifa is the intellectual heritage of Orunmila that is organised into 256 oral-symbolic signatures (odu). Odu rendition is usually poetic with accompanying stories, songs, proverbs and liturgies; each representing a basket of knowledge derived from lived experiences Modefi and Ama 2009. Babalawo and iyanifa are the schooled Ifa cognoscenti cum intelligentsia. Their training and experience can enable them identify and analyse the 256 odu into interpretative (not intuitive) divination. This aspect is based on faith and spirituality, and can also – as has been – projected as religion. The socio-political thoughts that derive from the 256 odu Ifa are the focus of this project.

As the intellectual heritage of Orunmila, Ifa has endured as part of state cum community executive, legislative and judicial institutions right from the outset of Yoruba civilization. The Oluwo (head of Ifa literati) is involved in all state and community political processes including king-making, wars, epidemics, pandemics, conflicts, diplomacy and constitution. Oluwo relies solely on Orunmila's thoughts and theories in the 256 odu to analyse issues and guide decision making during all of the processes. As evident in its spread around the world, Ifa is learnt without any special gift and, or intuitive power. It is open to male and female, young and old irrespective of tribes, races and tongues.

Key Questions

- What, in relational terms, is the current state of practice of the Ifa amongst the Yoruba-Africans at home and in the diaspora, especially Nigeria, Benin and Brazil?
- What socio-political thoughts derive from the knowledge



A young girl, Ifalola, explaining gender thoughts and ideas through the odu ifa.

system: about the state, governance system, constitution, justice, citizenship, nationalism, environment, gender, sexuality, global justice and others?

- How do the socio-political thoughts provoke new theories and methods that can complement existing ones in addressing the increasingly complex socio-political challenges around the globe?
- In which ways does the entire exercise, being derived from African epistemological and metaphysical axioms, contribute to reconfiguring African Studies?

Methods

This, in essence, is a hypothesis testing qualitative research. Qualitative research involves scientific narratives, analysis and interpretation of textual or numerical data (or both), mostly from conversations, discussions, interviews and observations to uncover meaningful patterns that describe a particular phenomenon Chigbu 2019. The research and the questions it elicit best fit into what Dunn 1934 classifies as 'original' or 'fundamental' that often seek "depth, flexibility and gestalt" Ahonsi and Aina 1996; Babie 2002. Qualitative methods are often best used to pursue such. (Babbie 1986, Berg 1989 and Ahonsi 1996.)

Researchers plan to pursue these research questions through key informant interviews and participant observations that will be subjected to focused group discussions and periodic methodological fine-tunings for the purpose of what Babie 2002 calls "concepts mapping and alignments with the general



Oluwo Akinboola Ifafimihan, Ilu Oyo

research theme". The Qualitative data are first sourced from purposively selected Babalawo and iyanifa communes in purposively selected locations across Nigeria, beginning from the sixteen (16) original homes of the 16 principal Odu Ifa (Oju Odu) as stated by Orunmila in Eji Ogbe. The sixteen are ancient Yoruba cities that exist till date in various federating states of Nigeria, and they also represent the origin of the sixteen original adherents of Orunmila. These activities then extend to Benin Republic and Brazil.

Vision

The vision of this project is for the discipline of African Studies to be reconfigured at three major points: Focus, Approach and Content. The focus of this research is autochthonous African thoughts. The approach, including the methodology, is peculiar in that it is Afro-adapted, while the content of what is being researched is Africa. This promises to redefine university curricular and socio-political policy frameworks.



Interview with Babalawo Ifalere of the Institute of Cultural Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife Ife

Relation to Cluster's Aims and Goals

This project speaks to African thoughts and philosophy in multiplicity. Although Orunmila and Ifa are the primary concern and they are from the Yoruba people of Nigeria and, by extension Benin Republic, the system has spread massively across the entire world. This speaks to multiplicity and, by extension, relationality which, is in some sense, also speaks to the idea of interconnectedness. On the side of reflexivity, which often generally refers to the examination of one's own beliefs, judgments and practices during the research process and how these may have influenced the research, this project makes significant contribution because it is a systematization and an application of knowledge.



Babalawo Kehinde Ifaloseyi ti Agunpopo

Further Links / Key References

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