Journal of African History, **46** (2005), pp. 379–404. © 2005 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0021853705000472 Printed in the United Kingdom

SLAVERY AND HUMAN SACRIFICE IN YORUBALAND: ONDO, *c.* 1870–94*

OLATUNJI OJO
Ohio University, Athens

ABSTRACT: This article, focusing on the operation and abolition of human sacrifice in eastern Yorubaland, examines a key aspect of the dialogue and conflict between Yoruba chiefs and their opponents – slaves, Christians and British colonialists – during the late nineteenth century. The exchange reflected the position of human sacrifice in the consolidation of economic inequalities and socio-cultural privileges. The article examines this controversy in the context of the broader changes of the era, including the ending of the Yoruba wars and the approach of colonial rule. It analyses the interaction of external and internal forces that produced the eventual demise of human sacrifice.

KEY WORDS: Nigeria, precolonial, kingdoms and states, religion, slavery, human sacrifice, imperialism.

HUMAN sacrifice was widely associated with the Yoruba *òrìṣà* religion. Indeed to many foreign observers, the incidence of human sacrifice was so central to Yoruba 'paganism' that its abolition constituted a yardstick with which they measured the success of their 'civilizing' enterprise.[1] Despite many decades of research on Yoruba history the study of human sacrifice there has received very little attention. Research on the kingdoms of Benin, Asante and Dahomey, however, and on Igbo and Delta societies has identified broad links between human sacrifice and forms of political organization, aristocratic privileges and militarism. These links showed human sacrifice as central to the exercise of royal authority and as an ideology which underpinned state formation and political centralization. These issues come out strongly in the discussion on the types of sacrifices. Sacrifices were offered to propitiate, appease or send messages to the gods, ward off sickness and provide workers for elite citizens in the afterlife. Because state administrators constituted the elite, human sacrifice also incorporated the protection of upper-class interests.[2] This is particularly evident when it is shown

* I am grateful to Paul Lovejoy, Mariza Soares, Elisee Soumonni and this journal's anonymous readers for their insightful comments on this paper.

[1] Jacob F. Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841–1891 : The Making of a New Elite* (London, 1965); Emmanuel A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842–1914 : A Political and Social Analysis* (London, 1966); and John D. Y. Peel, 'The pastor and the babalawo: the interaction of religions in nineteenth-century Yorubaland', *Africa*, 60 (1990), 338–69.

[2] James D. Graham, 'The slave trade, depopulation and human sacrifice in Benin history', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 5 (1965), 317–34; Kurty K. Nair, *Politics and Society in Southeastern Nigeria, 1841–1906* (Evanston, 1972), 47–55; Elizabeth Isichei, 'The quest for social reform in the context of traditional religion: a neglected theme of West African History', *African Affairs*, 77 (1978), 469–72; Robin Law, 'Human sacrifice in

that more sacrifices were carried out in celebration of elite affluence (royal funerals) than to the deities. This suggests that even when a sacrifice was carried out primarily for public and religious reasons it also had elements of elite affluence, militarism and royal absolutism.[3] The writers also touch on the regional variations and purposes of human sacrifice and the provision of victims. While they agree that the victims sacrificed included wives, slaves and criminals, there is a dispute over the degree to which sacrifices derived from sacrificial, religious or judicial actions. Although the history of human sacrifice in the eastern Yoruba districts of Ondo, Ife, Ilesa and Ekiti mirrors some of the findings of earlier writers, it also has some historical and ritual particularities.[4] Similarly, even when most victims were killed during funerals, information on Ondo shows that sacrifices were directed more to local deities than was the case in the societies already surveyed in the literature. That is, appeasing the gods was more important than serving the egos of the elite. Also, while Ondo's sacrifice stemmed from the symbolism of a hitherto strong monarchy, the picture also differs from that of several other African states in the nineteenth century. During this time, the monarchy, weakened by socio-political crises, neither controlled human sacrifice nor derived as much privilege from the practice as some of the chiefs. Indeed, for some time the approving authority was located outside the palace and given to the richest warlord. This raises the issue of the impact of the commercial and political transitions that followed the abolition of the overseas slave trade and the expansion of 'legitimate' trade. The consequences of these for the supply of slaves, commercial accumulation and social unrest in Yorubaland are central to understanding the history of Ondo. So this paper is a historical study of human sacrifice in Ondo with particular reference to the late nineteenth century. It considers the circumstances which facilitated as well as discouraged human sacrifice and how they were shaped by internal and external forces. Divided into three parts, the first examines *òrìṣà* religion, the history of Ondo and how both relate to the larger disruptions in the Yoruba region during the nineteenth century. The second part discusses the operations of human sacrifice and its connections with Ondo ancestral and funeral rites, and social formation. The third and final part explores the processes of abolition and how these changes fit within the discourse on reforms and social change in Africa.

---

pre-colonial West Africa', *African Affairs*, 84 (1985), 53–87. Other studies include Robert Home, *City of Blood Revisited: A New Look at the Benin Expedition of 1897* (London, 1982), 86–8; Clifford Williams, 'Asante: human sacrifice or capital punishment? An assessment of the period 1807–74', and Ivor Wilks, 'Asante: human sacrifice or capital punishment? A rejoinder', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 21 (1988), 433–41 and 443–52; John Reid, 'Warrior aristocrats in crisis: the political effects of the transition from slave trade to palm oil commerce in the nineteenth century kingdom of Dahomey' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Stirling, 1986). On recent cases see Iheanyi Enwerem, '"Money-magic" and ritual killing in contemporary Nigeria', in Jane Guyer, Laray Denzer and Adigun Agbaje (eds.), *Money Struggles and City Life: Devaluation in Ibadan and Other Urban Centers in Southern Nigeria, 1986–1996* (Portsmouth NH, 2002), 189–205.

[3] Law, 'Human sacrifice'.

[4] On the geographical spread of human sacrifice in Yorubaland see John D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, 2001), 69–71; and Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan (hereafter NAI), CSO 5/8: 'Enactments for the abolition of human sacrifices in Ijesa, Ekiti and Ife'.

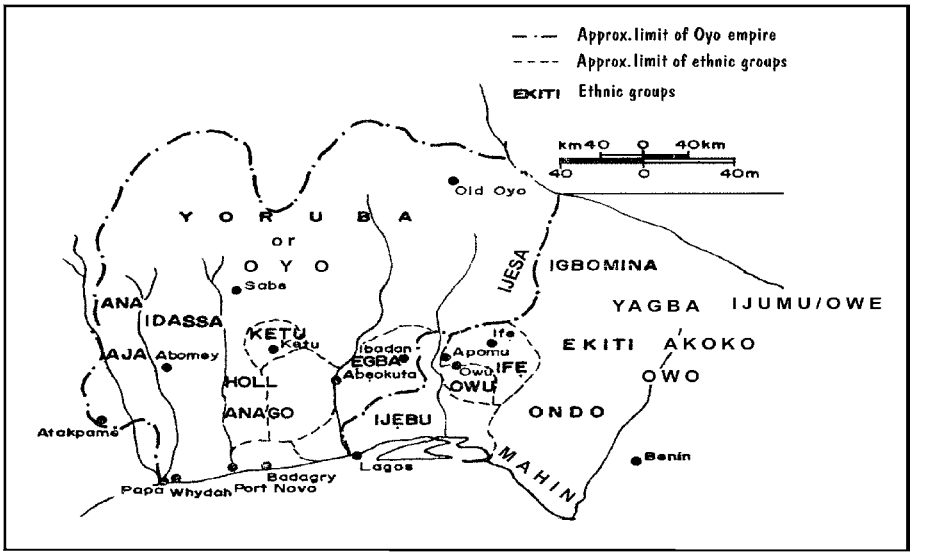

Fig. 1. Yoruba ethnic groups – nineteenth century. *Source*: Modified from Afolabi Ojo, *Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis* (London, 1967).

NOTE ON SOURCES

While this paper uses a variety of sources, most of the information derives from archival sources and particularly from the journals, diaries and letters of Charles Phillips. An Egba–Yoruba descendant of former slaves, Rev. Phillips was born in Sierra Leone in 1847, shortly after which he relocated with his parents to Yorubaland. Educated and having worked in Abeokuta and Lagos, Phillips was posted to Ondo in 1877 to head the newly created Ondo mission. He held this position until his death in 1905. Thus the Phillips papers present an unbroken eyewitness account of events in Ondo for almost thirty years. In addition to his ecclesiastical duties, Phillips involved himself in the daily life of the society, making notes of events, and often rebuked his priests for not writing detailed accounts of secular activities in their parishes.

The fact that the sources revolve around Church Missionary Society (CMS) figures, particularly Phillips, raises a problem. To what extent did Euro-Christian values shape these sources?[5] The Christian agenda, which Lamin Sanneh describes as 'anti-structure', entailed the sidelining of indigenous practices and authority.[6] Although most of Phillips's writings were

[5] See John D. Y. Peel 'Problems and opportunities in an anthropologist's use of a missionary archive', in Robert Bickers and Rosemary Seton (eds.), *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues* (Richmond, 1996), 70–94.

[6] Lamin Sanneh, '"A plantation of religion" and the enterprise culture in Africa: history, ex-slaves and religious inevitability', in Charles Jedrej, Kenneth King and Jack Thompson (eds.), *Rethinking African History* (Edinburgh, 1997), 439–40. See also Andrew Porter, 'Cambridge, Keswick and late nineteenth century attitudes to Africa', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 5 (1976), 5–34; and A. F. Walls, 'Black Europeans, white Africans: some missionary motives in West Africa', in Derek Baker

based on personal observations, he received additional information from others, both Christian and non-Christian. His informants included other CMS agents, local chiefs, slaves, British diplomats and traders, and members of the Ondo and Ekitiparapo associations in various Yoruba towns. A combination of these sources facilitated access to several non-Christian voices. The relative objectivity of his journals is also evident in his discussions on Yoruba ethnic and religious dynamics, and his differentiations between judicial executions and human sacrifice. In 1877 and 1896 he expressed his support for judicial executions and even demanded the administering of a poison ordeal to detect the culpability of a suspected murderer.[7] Also, unlike many European documents which allude to a rise in human sacrifice in places like Benin and Dahomey, Phillips's journals point to a decline in Ondo and credit this to a local reform.[8] These issues show Phillips believed in the efficacy of *òrìṣà* worship and understood local religio-political currents. Finally, I checked Phillips's account against other primary documents such as the official dispatches of colonial officers and traders, and also with academic writings on human sacrifice in West Africa. I also draw on oral interviews with *òrìṣà* adherents and community leaders in eastern Yorubaland in summer 2001. The interviews provided information and my informants' reflections on indigenous religion and social change.

ONDO IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: SOCIAL DISLOCATION AND *ÒRÌṢÀ* WORSHIP

The traditional account of the origin of Ondo, one of the oldest Yoruba kingdoms, is that *Odùduwà*, the legendary father of the Yoruba, had a wife (another version says a daughter), Pupupu, who bore a set of twins. To prevent their slaughter, Pupupu and her twins were banished from Ile-Ife, and they traveled southeastwards until they came to a spot called Epe (now an Ondo village). After some time, the party relocated to Ondo, and having suppressed the indigenous Idoko, Oka and Ifore groups, Pupupu became Ondo's first, and perhaps only female, monarch.[9] Pupupu was succeeded by her son, Airo, who was credited with the establishment of the current Ondo dynasty.

During the nineteenth century, the weakening of central administration in the northern Yoruba kingdom of Oyo, exacerbated by the abolition of the export slave trade, combined with the expansion of radical Islam and 'legitimate' trade to generate rapid changes.[10] Warfare and the raids for

---

(ed.), *Religious Motivation: Biographical and Sociological Problems of the Church Historian* (Cambridge, 1978), 339–48.

[7] NAI, Phillips 3/7, journal, 28 Nov.–16 Dec. 1896.

[8] See CMS, CA2/078, Phillips, 'Second letter from Ondo', 23 Nov. 1877; and NAI, Phillips 1/3/3, Phillips, 'Address delivered at missionary meeting held in the Faji school', Lagos, 28 Feb. 1879 (hereafter 'Faji address').

[9] NAI, CSO 26/4/30172, Intelligence Report on Ondo District, 11 (by A. F. B. Bridges, District Officer, 1934); Michael Adeyemi, *Ondo Kingdom: Its History and Culture* (Ibadan, 1993), 26–8; and Jerome Ojo, *Yoruba Customs from Ondo* (Wien, 1976), 40–2.

[10] Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos, 1976 [1921]), 178–283; and Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire c. 1600–c. 1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford, 1977), 278–312.

slaves to which it gave rise, later underscored the general social tension that characterized Yorubaland during the century. Warfare and population movement in northern Yorubaland and the attendant eastward movement of trade routes gradually drew the forest states of Ife and Ondo into the center of the Yoruba crises. With continuous inflow of slaves, refugees and trading goods, commerce increased the authority and influence of the *Osemowe* (Ondo king) over his community. Even though many incoming slaves were sold away, the end of the Atlantic slave trade created a rapid build up of slaves who were diverted into 'legitimate' commerce and political ventures.[11]

The importance of large slaveholding was not lost on the Ondo chiefs and other contenders for power. Starting from the 1820s, and increasing rapidly after 1850, economic and military power and size of slaveholding, and no longer hereditary rights, became synonymous with political authority.[12] This was particularly true of two men – Arilekolasi and Edun Kolidoye – both of whom translated their military and commercial prowess into political authority. With about 380 slaves Arilekolasi emerged as the *Osemowe* in the late 1820s and Edun's 800 slaves helped him to become the *Ayadi* (head of war chiefs) in the 1860s and *Lisa* (prime minister) in 1875. Indeed by 1877, Edun was referred to as the 'virtual ruler of Ondo'.[13]

Competition among local chieftains, slave agitation and the expansionist ambition of neighboring states soon turned Ondo into a combat zone, leading to a civil war and later its destruction and evacuation from about 1845 to 1872.[14] During these years, four kings reigned in quick succession and the capital was moved thrice. With rapid regime change, and continuous warfare, the position of the five *iwarefa* chiefs (kingmakers) was increasingly strengthened. They took charge of day-to-day administration and defence planning.

During this 'age of confusion', general instability and uncertainties resulted in a widespread sense of fear and panic.[15] Consequently, individuals, social groups and communities, in search of solutions and relief from fear, turned to *òrìṣà* religion.[16] While Ondo people adjusted differently to the nineteenth-century crises, the onus was on the chiefs to appease the *òrìṣà* so

[11] E. Adeniyi Oroge, 'The institution of slavery in Yorubaland with particular reference to the nineteenth century' (Ph.D. thesis, Birmingham, 1971), 86–211.

[12] NAI, Phillips 1/3/1, journal, 22 July 1879; British Parliamentary Papers (hereafter PP), C1544, 'Further correspondence respecting the wars between Native Tribes in the interior and negatiations for peace conducted by the government of Lagos' (1887), Phillips to Fred Evans, 19 Jan. 1887; and NAI, Phillips 3/2, diary, 11–14 Mar. 1887. This system developed so well at Ibadan that civil wars nearly became a pastime. See Johnson, *History*.

[13] See CMS, CA2/098, Young, journal, 9, 22 June, 11 July 1875 and 6 Mar. 1876; and Kenneth Dike Memorial Library, University of Ibadan (hereafter KDML), Phillips, journal, 30 Mar. 1877.

[14] Olasiji Oshin, 'Warfare and change in Ondo, *c.* 1830–1900', in Adeagbo Akinjogbin (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793–1893* (Ibadan, 1998), 53–64; and Olatunji Ojo, 'Warfare, slavery and the transformation of eastern Yorubaland' (Ph.D. thesis, York University, Toronto, 2003), ch. 2.

[15] See Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 47–122.

[16] NAI, MLG (W) 8/1, Ikale Assessment Report, para. 7. It is also probable that the search for spiritual assistance made Christianity, like Islam, attractive to slaves and women – those 'taught in the school of adversity'. See CMS, CA2/085a, Townsend to Henry Venn, 29 July 1852.

as to guarantee the welfare of the state. Thus the success of a polity became inseparable from that of its elite citizens. As the guardians and spokespersons for their communities, the chiefs for 'religious' and socio-political reasons intensified certain practices like the offering of sacrifices – 'ẹbọ' (to appease) or 'ètùtù' (to 'soften'). Within the then existing belief system, the sacrifices served the best interest of the chiefs and the community as well as satisfying the *òrìṣà*, and the bigger and more regular the offering, the better it was thought for the society.[17]

HUMAN SACRIFICE AND COMMUNAL *ÒRÌṢÀ* WORSHIP

The major human sacrifices to the *òrìṣà* in Ondo district included the two made during the annual festivals of *Èṣù* or *Ọba* (king) and *Ọràḿfẹ* or *Odùduwà* in Ondo town, *Ọranmiyan* and *Ọlọjọ* (Ogun) at Okeigbo and *Ọràḿfẹ* at Ekun (now Ileoluji).[18] On the two sacrifices at Ondo, Young and Phillips wrote: 'The first takes place in July or August, and it is kept to the devil [*Èṣù*]; the victim is always a woman. The other takes place in September or October and it is kept to the *Ọràḿfẹ*, their idol from Ile-Ife and god of agriculture, fertility and good harvest. The victim is a man'.[19] According to one source *Èṣù*, always represented by a piece of stone, was Ondo's second female monarch and Pupupu's successor.[20] While I did not find any other tradition to corroborate this assertion, there are various inferences to links between *Èṣù* and the monarchy. For instance, documents collected on Ondo festivals over a century show that *Èṣù* and the King's festivals were celebrated simultaneously, and in fact constituted two stages of the same activity.[21] Secondly, the recognition of Pupupu (memorialized in the Lobun female chieftaincy) as the founder and first Ondo King, the role of Lobun as the one who installs the Ondo King and the high visibility of women in Yoruba *Èṣù* cult all tend to confirm the association of *Èṣù* with the monarchy. So since *Ọràḿfẹ* is dedicated to the introduction of male kings, it is probable that the veneration of *Èṣù* marks Ondo's era of female authority.

[17] See Karin Barber, 'How man makes god in West Africa: Yoruba attitudes towards the Orisa', *Africa*, 51 (1981), 724–45; and John D. Y. Peel, 'Sacrifice in nineteenth-century Yorubaland: a critique of Iliffe's thesis', *Journal of African History*, 31 (1990), 465–84.

[18] CMS, CA2/078, Phillips, 23 Nov. 1877; and NAI, Phillips 3/8, journal, 22 June 1892.

[19] CMS, CA2/098, Young, journal, 16 July 1876, and CMS, CA2/078, Phillips, 4 Aug. and 23 Nov. 1877.

[20] See Ojo, *Yoruba Customs*, 93–8. The usage of the term '*Èṣù*' rather than '*Odun Ọba*' gained currency with Christian activities and this was in consonance of their association of *Èṣù* with the biblical satan/devil. '*Èṣù*' did not appear on a list of Ondo festivals complied in 1934. See NAI, CSO 26/4/30172, Intelligence Report on Ondo District, 63–4.

[21] In 1877, Phillips put the celebrations as: *Èṣù* (4 Aug.), *Ogun* (23 Sept.) and *Ọràḿfẹ* (7 Oct.), and in 1898: *Èṣù* (13 July) and *Odun Ọba* (15 July). Oshin's observation of *Odun Ọba* in 1976 has this arrangement: 1st day: *Ọba* received gifts from his subjects and danced with Ekule chiefs; 2nd day: received gifts from senior chiefs and danced in a long procession, and 3rd (final) day: another dance procession and *Ọba* received homage from his subjects. See Olasiji Oshin, 'Ondo in the nineteenth century' (MA, Ibadan, 1980). See also NAI, CSO 26/4/30172, Intelligence Report on Ondo District, 63; Ulli Beier, 'The Oba's festival, Ondo', *Nigerian Magazine*, 50 (1956), 238–59; Ojo, *Yoruba Customs*, 93; and Oshin, 'Ondo in the nineteenth century', 22–3.

Apart from being a communal god, every household had an *Èṣù* shrine, located at the entrance to their houses where they believed it would ward off mishaps. Because of *Èṣù*'s perceived benevolence and protective ability, sacrifices were made outside the town wall so that she could protect the town from foreign enemies and disasters.[22] The sacrifice of a woman regarded in Yoruba worldview as patient and motherly, buttressed the Yoruba's concept of *Èṣù* not only as a meek, gentle and mild *òrìṣà* but also as the manager of the crossroad, regulator of human character, yet a trickster.[23]

On the other hand, the importance of *Ọràmfẹ*, Ondo's highest *òrìṣà* and god of warfare evolved from the deification of Airo, Ondo's first male ruler and the town's historical links with Ife. For these links, *Ọràmfẹ* is associated with the foundation of Ondo's political and economic systems as well as with the Yoruba gods of thunder and fertility: *Ògún*, *Sàngó* and *Òrìsà Oko*.[24] These multi-purpose attributes of *Ọràmfẹ* as the one who restored order and blessings might explain its special position in Ondo and why the shrine was located within the town wall and appeased with a man.

Ondo's ritual calendar is also very illustrative. *Èṣù* (July/August) coincided with the harvest of farm crops, the new yam festival and the wet season while *Ọràmfẹ* (September/October) marked the commencement of planting and preparation for military campaigns. The overlap in the farming and war calendars would explain the association of both *òrìṣà* with fertility and good harvests. Therefore it is logical to say that *Èṣù* was appeased to mark the opening of Ondo's major festivals and farming season and *Ọràmfẹ* the beginning of military campaigns and celebration of Ondo's political achievements.

The rituals associated with *Èṣù* and *Ọràmfẹ* included the seclusion of the king and the *Ṣọrà* (priest of *Ọràmfẹ*) and the suspension of certain secular activities such as drumming and night parties. The symbolism of the seclusion, *Ọba wọ'ọra* (the King has entered into *Ọrà*) was to reinforce the chiefs' magical power and sustain their authority over their subjects. *Èṣù* rituals also include ritual cleansing (*upenko*), and reenactments of royal authority and dynastic conflicts, especially the shift from female to male kings.[25] On the last day of either festival, the ritual victim (*oluwọ*), in chains, was paraded through the streets, where many people took the opportunity to perform the *ìwúre* (supplication to the *òrìṣà*) and thereby transfer their sins to the victim.[26] After the parade, the victim was taken to *Ọrà*'s grove and beheaded; the skull was kept by the *Ṣọrà*.

[22] CMS, CA2/098, Young, journal, 16 July 1876; and NAI, Phillips 1/3/3, 'Faji address'.

[23] John Pemberton, 'Eshu-Elegba: the Yoruba trickster god', *African Arts*, 9 (1975), 21–7.

[24] Adeyemi, *Ondo Kingdom*, 83–92; and Jacob K. Olupona, *Kinship, Religion, and Rituals in a Nigerian Community: A Phenomenological Study of Ondo Yoruba Festivals* (Stockholm, 1991), 86–109.

[25] Beier, 'Oba's festival'; and Oyin Ogunba, 'Ceremonies', in Saburi Biobaku (ed.), *Sources of Yoruba History* (Oxford, 1973), 96–7.

[26] NAI, Phillips 1/3/3, 'Faji address'. On *ìwúre* see Ayo Opefeyitimi, 'Iwure: a medium of communicating the desire of men to the gods in Yorubaland', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 18 (1988), 27–41.

Taken together, the sacrifice (*ìmúhọ̀*) (to hang) and rituals were to hedge the *òrìṣà*'s magical power; and keep them within boundaries of social order for them not be destructive. It was also believed that human sacrifice, the highest that could be paid, became a representation of triumph over dangerous forces. Finally, the sacrifice was expected to bring good fortune and blessings to the community, thus reinforcing and protecting its boundaries. Therefore the association of these deities with warfare, state formation and place administration, and the active involvement of the monarch, as Law has shown for Dahomey, reinforced the links between human sacrifice, militarism and the celebration of the achievements of the royal family.[27]

'REWARD FOR EXCELLENCE': HUMAN SACRIFICE AND ELITE FUNERALS

A strong belief in the immortality of souls is central to the explanation of an institutionalized aspect of human sacrifice in which Ondo surpassed other regions of Yorubaland. This involved the killing of slaves as substitutes for sick persons and at the funerals of wealthy chieftains. As the representatives and protectors of their communities, elite citizens were saddled with a permanent debt of obligation and expectation. So when they were ill or died, efforts were made to preserve them from death or provide them with attendants for their tasks in the afterlife.[28] The ritualized nature of these activities resulted in the association of leaders with mystical powers, through which they commanded respect from their followers. In essence, the society tolerated or even celebrated the excesses of their rulers. According to John Peel, 'to go beyond what was the norm for ordinary men … was to behave more like an *orișa* than a man'. Thus he concludes: 'big men and *orișa* were attractive to the Yoruba precisely because they did what lesser men … could only yearn to do'.[29]

The number, sex and age of slaves killed at the funerals of slaveholders depended on the wealth, influence and instructions of the deceased, their relations and social expectations. Several slaves of both sexes were sacrificed at the funerals of rich men, but only one or two females, often sick and old, were reportedly killed at the burials of most female and poor male chiefs. In essence, because the men were often richer, they could afford to buy or select prime slaves for their funerals from their holdings, while women and

[27] Robin Law, 'My head belongs to the king: on the political and ritual significance of decapitation in precolonial Dahomey', *Journal of African History*, 30 (1989), 399–415.

[28] When Governor Denton visited Itebu in 1893, he learnt that Chief Manuwa, a sick, old Chief, was planning to sacrifice two of his wives to an *òrișà*. See NAI, CSO 1/1/14, 'Report of visit to Atijere on 16 September 1893', in Denton to Ripon, 2 Oct. 1893.

[29] Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 82. Stephen Farrow writes: 'the soul of the dead cannot attain to the realms of the departed spirits, unless and until the body is duly and respectably buried; otherwise it wanders about, or hovers near the body, in terrible restlessness'. See *Faith, Fancies, and Fetich or Yoruba Paganism: Being Some Account of the Religious Beliefs of the West African Negroes, particularly of the Yoruba tribes of Southern Nigeria* (New York, 1969 [1926]), 108. On Yoruba 'big men' see Karin Barber, 'Money, self realization and the person in Yoruba texts', in Jane Guyer (ed.), *Money Matters: Instability, Values and Social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities* (Portsmouth NH, 1995), 205–24.

lower class men often bought cheap and old slaves. Overall, however, women featured more on the roster of ritual victims. In 1876 and 1877, two female slaves each were killed at the burials of two female relations of *Lisa* Edun. During the first act, Edun justified the sacrifice thus: 'how would it look when she had labored so hard and by it got rich and then bought about ten slaves; how could she go alone … They must kill one slave for her, if they cannot kill two'.[30] Since Edun was the richest and most powerful Ondo citizen in the 1870s, the frequency of human sacrifices at the burials of his relations demonstrated his wealth and power and that of his relations. For instance, because the woman who died in 1877 was young and not a title-holder, the society did not necessarily expect her to be buried with a human sacrifice. Hence, the sacrifice demonstrated her wealth and her affinity with the *Lisa*. In contrast with this burial was that of the Odofinlobun, the seventh-ranking female chief in 1882. Even though she was of higher rank than Edun's two sisters, only 'an old sickly slave woman' was killed at her funeral. Indeed the records show that she was a poor woman and had no slave of her own.[31] Like the honor done by the *Lisa* for her sisters, it was the Odofinlobun's niece who saw that she got a befitting burial.

More slaves were killed at the burials of male chiefs – the great number bearing testimony to their status. In 1880, the funeral of *Lisa* Edun was accompanied by the killing of seventeen slaves, two of whom were reportedly buried alive.[32] Two years later, six male and four female slaves were sacrificed at the funeral of the *Adaja*; and the death of the *Lurowo* in 1885 was marked with the sacrifice of five slaves.[33] Ondo tradition has more information on royal funeral rites when about sixteen slaves were killed. One slave each was killed at the gates leading to the King's harem, the two entrances to council courts, King's street and the market, and at least ten plus a cat were killed at the graveside.[34] With this number, it could be deduced that multiple human sacrifices were common in Ondo between *c.*1850 and 1872 consequent upon the death of not less than four kings and the installation of their successors. While sacrifices to the *òrìṣà* asserted royal authority, some aspects of funeral rites during the 1880s appeared to reflect Ondo's era of weak monarchy. Since power and authority were conveyed in sacrifices, the fact that more slaves were killed at Edun's funeral than what was expected for the King was a metaphor for Edun's grip on power. Therefore, rather than reinforce royal authority, human sacrifice in late nineteenth-century Ondo marked the age of meritocracy.

Even though only the funerals of the powerful and wealthy and their relations were supposed to be accompanied by human sacrifice, the social significance of wealth led to the appropriation of the practice by poor chiefs. During this period, those whose funerals were accompanied by human sacrifice received greater social respect than those who could not afford such luxury. Like the possession of many clients, funeral sacrifices added to the

[30] CMS CA2/098, Young, journal, 6 Mar. 1876 and 21 July 1877.
[31] NAI, Phillips 3/4, diary, 21 Feb. 1882.
[32] CMS, *Proceedings for Africa and the East, 1880–1882*, 18.
[33] NAI, Phillips 3/4, Phillips, diaries, 25 Sept. 1882; and NAI, Phillips 3/1, 3 Apr. 1885. The *Adaja* was the sixth ranking Ondo Chief and the *Lurowo* the fifth most senior Elegbe (warrior) Chief.
[34] PP, C5144, LX, Phillips to Fred Evans, 19 Jan. 1887.

social standing of the deceased and his/her relations. This would seem to explain the case at Itebu in 1879 when the corpse of a man was left unburied for almost five months because his relations could not procure a slave for sacrifice.[35] Apparently the man had died poor, yet his family thought he deserved an ostentatious funeral. The man probably belonged to the Ijamo society, whose members were buried with huge expenditure on food, the killing of two to seven slaves, two or three cows, goats, expensive clothes and many cases of gin.[36]

RITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMAN SACRIFICE AND SLAVE MARGINALITY THESIS

During a visit to *Lisa* Edun's title house in 1877, Phillips saw 'a string of about six human skulls, hung on a stick opposite his gate'.[37] Although the provenance of these skulls is unclear, two other observations were more specific. At Okeaye in 1873, James Maser saw some skulls of war victims displayed inside the *Èṣù* shrine; while Phillips in August 1877 found 'five skulls of the victims of past sacrifices' to *Ọràńfẹ* and new holes for future skulls at the *Ọṣọrà*'s residence.[38] The practice of keeping and exhibiting the skulls may be seen as an expression of the capacity for violence which was an essential attribute of political and religious authority. Law's discussion on the importance of 'war trophies' in Dahomey shows that even though the King could kill his own subjects (enemies and criminals) and keep their skulls, the most popular celebration of 'decapitation' was associated with external battles.[39] From this perspective it appears that human sacrifice was not only a manifestation of elite affluence but also helped to assert chiefly control and status. Like capital punishment, the significance of human sacrifice lay in the awe it inspired rather than its incidence.[40] As a coercive instrument, it presumably reduced affronts to local authority and custom and kept the populace in check. Indeed, so popular was the cult system that a colonial officer believed that it was the basis of Mahin chiefly power.[41]

As a social control measure, the provision of sacrificial victims enables us to analyse aspects of Yoruba class, gender and ethnic divisions and the links between slavery and human sacrifice. At a meeting with Ondo chiefs in 1877, a delegation of Christians and Lagos-Ondo residents demanded the abolition

[35] CMS, CA2/011, Nathaniel Ogbonaye, journal, 20 Oct. 1879.

[36] Ijamo, the equivalent of Ogboni and Osugbo of Egba and Ijebu respectively, was the club for senior political and religious chiefs. See NAI, MLG (W) 8/1, Ikale Assessment Report, para. 7, 163–99.

[37] KDML, Phillips, journal, 18 Jan. 1877.

[38] CMS, CA2/068, Maser, journal, 17 Dec. 1873; and KDML, Phillips, journal, 24 Aug. 1877. In 1858, Rev. Hinderer on a visit to Ilesa counted about 100 skulls of war captives that were tempered into the town wall. See CMS, CA2/049, Hinderer, journal of a missionary journey, Aug.–Sept. 1858. The *Ọṣọrà* was the priest in charge of *Ọràńfe* cult.

[39] On decapitation see Law, 'My head belongs to the king'; and J. O. Ijoma, 'The Aro and their neighbours: a reconsideration of the historiography', *Nigerian Heritage*, 4 (1994), 43.

[40] See CMS, CA2/098, Young, journal, 6 Mar. 1876; Johnson, *History*, 321; and interviews with Chief Joel Ige, Samuel Ojo and David Ajibade.

[41] NAI, CSO 1/1/13, Governor Gilbert T. Carter to Lord Knutsford, 'Report of visit to Eastern District', 2 Nov. 1891.

of human sacrifice which they claimed had brought divine anger against the town. Although the delegation oversimplified the origins of Ondo crises, the chiefs did not deny the sacrifice of criminals and offending slaves.[42] To the chiefs, they were neither engaged in unnecessary destruction of lives nor cruel to their slaves. Instead, they saw the sacrifices as judicial punishments which the constitution approved.[43]

In Ondo, those convicted of murder, burglary, robbery, kidnapping, incest and adultery with the King's wives were sentenced to death by crucifixion or drowning.[44] So when a death sentence was passed, the authorities often reserved the convict for sacrifice. Therefore in a society where the chiefs were the court judges and the leading *òrìṣà* adherents, the need to supply human oblates created avenues for judicial corruption.[45] Thus, even if the killing of criminals could be essentially a judicial decision, when carried out during funerals or ancestral rites it ultimately assumed religious proportions. This would explain why sacrificial victims, regardless of pedigree, were clearly marked out as religious offerings.

Other aspects of human sacrifice further weaken the judicial explanation for it. In Ondo, the level of criminality did not fully explain the fluctuations in the number of religious victims and timing of sacrifices. Despite the tendency in most societies for the crime rate to move with socio-political and economic fluctuations, the fact that Ondo stuck to the killing of only a man or woman for their gods, and purchased slaves for funeral rites, shows that religion rather than the courts took precedence during religious ceremonies. Furthermore, the demand for sacrifice during periods of panic such as wars, poor harvest and epidemics shows that the urge for ritual purifications and the 'mastery of nature' took precedence over judicial considerations. Similarly, since only the council of chiefs had the power to impose capital punishment, the sacrifice of slaves and wives at individual funerals clearly demonstrates the incidence of non-judicial killings.[46]

Rather than a sharp distinction between judicial and religious killings, evidence from eastern Yorubaland points to a convergence. Certain aspects of the judicial system were rooted in religious beliefs: thus offenses against the gods carried stiff penalties. In 1877, Phillips and Young witnessed a trial for rape and murder which resulted in the conviction and killing of the accused on the spot where the crime had taken place.[47] Because of the

[42] CMS, CA2/078, Phillips, diary, 21–2 July 1877; and NAI, MLG (W) 8/1, Ikale Assessment Report, para. 123, 131–48.

[43] Samuel Charles Phillips Jnr. Papers, Box 1, KDML, Phillips, diary, 18 Jan. 1877; and NAI, Phillips 3/1, diary, 5 Apr. 1885. For a similar debate elsewhere see Law, 'Human sacrifice', 59–60; Williams, 'Asante: human sacrifice or capital punishment'; and Wilks, 'Human sacrifice or capital punishment? A rejoinder'.

[44] NAI, CSO 26/4/30172, Intelligence Report on Ondo District, para. 89. Neither the missionaries nor European officials mention death by crucifixion or drowning. Either the chiefs were not telling the truth or the District Officer imposed ideas from neighboring districts especially Benin. Allan Ryder's study on Benin shows that crucifixion was a post-1830s innovation. See *Benin and the Europeans 1485–1897* (London, 1969), 249.

[45] See Walter Rodney, ''African slavery and other forms of social oppression on the Upper Guinea coast in the context of the Atlantic slave trade', *Journal of African History*, 7 (1966), 431–43.

[46] See nn. 43 and 44.

[47] KDML, Phillips, journal 18 Jan. 1877. Similar sacrifices included the killing at Itebu of two slaves as appeasement for the suicide of a chief's daughter. Although the

inseparability of church and state, Ondo authorities based their verdict on the need to appease the 'god of the soil' that had been offended with the illegal shedding of blood. Failure to appease the god, they argued, would result in crop failure and infertility. Although the missionaries would probably have given the verdict a slightly different interpretation, both parties agreed that the punishment must be carried out so as not to offend either the Christian or Ondo god.

More than the judiciary, slavery provided the bulk of sacrificial victims. One means of procuring victims was through kidnapping where strangers became open targets. During the nineteenth century, such strangers included Okeigbo and Ikale people against whom Ondo was frequently at war, and travelers along the Ondo route. Thus during the festivals, strangers, travelers and traders, except the Ife, usually left the town and sought refuge in nearby villages.[48]

The final and most important source of victims was the purchase of slaves from existing slave markets or those retained within Ondo itself. Nothing illustrates social differentiation between slaves and freeborn more clearly than the supply of victims for the human sacrifices carried out at the burial of slave owners and their relations. The vulnerability of criminals, strangers and slaves in Ondo society shows that, during the nineteenth century, *òrìṣà* worship was an ideological instrument used to mediate unequal power and ethnic relations and politico-economic uncertainties.[49] In the ensuing struggle, incidents of human sacrifice became one of the manifestations of the tortuous nature of socio-economic and political transitions. As tension rose between ethnic and social groups, human sacrifice became a control mechanism to check a restless slave population as well as a manifestation of ethnic differences.

An examination of sacrifices in Ondo reveals the ethnicities of some of the slaves who were killed or targeted for immolation. Most of the slaves in the town were Yoruba-speaking.[50] Slave recruitment during this period was not a simple question of a 'Yoruba' enslaving another 'Yoruba'. Although people in the region spoke mutually intelligible dialects, shared many cultural traits and had a nostalgic attachment to Ile-Ife, they were divided into multiple ethnicities.[51] Hence slaves were sourced from among the Oyo, Egba,

---

woman had been due to be punished for adultery, the sacrifice was meant to purify the spot upon which the suicide took place. See NAI, CSO 1/1/7, no. 62, Griffith to Ussher, 20 Mar. 1880.

[48] NAI, MLG (W) 8/1, Ikale Assessment Report, para. 7. Almost every Yoruba town has at least one grove that is precluded to strangers. This is expressed in the saying: 'Ọmọ onígbó àiwọ, àjòjì tí ó ba wọ ibẹ, á di ẹni ẹbọ' (owner of a sacred grove, that no stranger must enter, he who does become a sacrificial object). See interview with Chief Ojo Elefontuyi (by Tope Akindele, 30 Apr. 1968) cited in Oroge, 'Institution of slavery', 140; NAI, CSO 26/51597, Assessment Report on Ekiti District, para. 128, and interviews with Pa Joseph Elegbeleye, 95 years, 47B Dallimore Street, Ado-Ekiti, 27 May 1999, Abioye Olapeju, Iwoye Street, Ayetoro, 2 June 1999, and Dele Adakeja, 27 May 1999, Dallimore Street, Ado Ekiti.

[49] KDML, Phillips, journal, 18 Jan. 1877. On *òrìṣà* see Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 92–100.

[50] As late as 1879, there were only three Hausa slaves in Ondo, others having been Yoruba-speakers. See NAI, Phillips 1/3/3, 'Faji address'.

[51] John D. Y. Peel, 'The cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis', in Toyin Falola (ed.), *Pioneer, Patriot and Patriarch: Samuel Johnson and the Yoruba People* (Madison, 1993),

Ife, Owu, Ekiti, Ijesa, Ondo and Ikale among others with slaves from one district (ethnic group) sold to holders in other districts.[52] One major implication therefore is that the sense of 'otherness' among the Yoruba-speaking people and the uncertainty of daily life most probably cheapened the value and monetary cost of human life. In 1878 and 1892, two women targeted for sacrifice were specifically identified as having come from Ekiti and Egba and two men in the same precarious situation from Owo and Ikale.[53] In the coastal town of Makun (off Mahin) three women from Ekiti, Ijesa and Ife were also identified as potential victims in 1894.[54] Finally, the fact that strangers avoided Ondo during the festivals and the frequency of slave flights during funerals demonstrates the dangers in which non-Ondo lived.

Why were women, strangers and slaves particularly targeted or vulnerable during sacrifices? The gap between chiefs and commoners, slaves and slave owners and 'indigenes' and 'strangers' created an avenue for the powerful to flaunt their wealth, and at the same time cheapened the lives of those who were identified as outsiders. This attitude developed so strongly in Yorubaland that differential status was attached to the lives of slaves and freeborn persons. In communal disputes, for instance, attacks against freeborn individuals could only be paid for by similar attacks on another freeborn persons; whereas the lives of slaves mattered less to the society. Early in February 1885, three Ayesan traders[55] had killed a freeborn Mahin man in a market dispute. According to Mahin's custom, the murderers should be handed over to the victim's family for punishment. However, the Ayesan refused to do so, knowing that the offenders would be killed. So the deceased's family watched for an opportunity to kill any freeborn Ayesan resident. Soon afterwards, they killed a man, and this was supposed to be the end of the matter. Later, the Mahin realized that their victim was only a slave, while the Mahin was freeborn. Since the death of a slave could not atone for the death of a freeborn individual, Ayesan authorities sent another slave as a further peace offering. Even though the Mahin accepted the slave, they still insisted that the only way to end the dispute would be the death of an freeborn Ayesan. Thus as late as October 1885, they were still watching out for a freeborn person to kill.[56]

In a brief discussion of the links between slavery and human sacrifice, Adeniyi Oroge distinguishes between the internal trade in slaves and

65–75; and Robin Law, 'Ethnicity and the slave trade: "Lucumi" and "Nago" as ethnonyms in West Africa', *History in Africa*, 24 (1997), 205–19.

[52] 'Ekiti' or Okiti is the collective term for the several chiefdoms located between Ijesa, Ondo and Benin. Ijesa is sometimes added to these chiefdoms. Other generic names included Kakanda, Igbodo, Ado and Efon (the last two are names of two Ekiti towns) all of which were used interchangeably until the 1890s. See William H. Clarke, *Travels and Exploration in Yorubaland, 1854–1858, Edited with an Introduction by Joseph A. Atanda* (Ibadan, 1972); and C. A. Hone and D. Hone (eds.), *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country: Memorials of Anna Hinderer Gathered from her Journals and Letters* (London, 1872); and Edward Roper, 'What I saw in Africa: sketches of missionary life in the Yoruba country, *Church Missionary Gleaner*, 3, 27 (1876), 35.

[53] NAI, Phillips 1/3/3, journal, 20–1 Nov. 1878 and 10 Jan. 1879; NAI, Phillips 3/6, diary, 12 Dec. 1894; and CMS, G3/A2/1893/41, Lijadu, journal, 22 Sept. 1892.

[54] NAI, CSO 1/1/14, Carter to Ripon, 28 Feb. 1894.

[55] Most of Ayesan's residents were Ijesa and Ekiti ex-slaves.

[56] NAI, CMS (Y) 1/7/6, James B. Wood to Henry Lang, 28 Oct. 1885.

domestic slavery. He asserts that the victims of human sacrifice were procured from the markets and not chosen from among domestic slaves.[57] There is a problem with this theory because the boundary between house slaves (Oroge's 'domestic') and trade slaves was artificial. Slaves in the 'market place' were not total strangers; nor were 'house slaves' ever regarded as full relations of their owners. Oroge's distinction between domestic slavery and internal slave trading is a conflation of the term 'domestic' in African and American slave systems. To paraphrase Lovejoy, 'domestic' in America refers to slaves that were engaged in household work to demarcate them from those who worked on agricultural plantations and mines. In Africa on the other hand 'domestic' slaves usually refers to those who were not exported beyond the continent.[58] In early colonial Lagos a distinction was made between trade (newly acquired) slaves and domestic or *arota* (second or later generation or long-term serving slaves, freed slaves, products of affairs between slaves and freeborn or 'any person who has attached himself to the household of a chief').[59] Even in this context Oroge's hypothesis would still amount to an attempt at highlighting the benignity of African slavery. In this sense he foreshadowed Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff's 'slave to freeborn continuum' in which slaves gradually lost their marginality and were absorbed into the owners' families.[60] This probably explains Oroge's support for an early twentieth-century assertion that 'no [Yoruba slaveowner] had the power to kill his slave'.[61]

Materials from eastern Yorubaland show that rather than the 'domestic/trade' divide, the factors that determined the choice of a slave for sacrifice were his or her criminal history, sex, age and the personal idiosyncrasy of the slaveholder. In Ondo, the practice was to sell old slaves who were considered worthless to their owners, for sacrifice. Therefore a house slave at one moment could become a market slave at another, and this fluidity between assimilation and marginality was demonstrated on several occasions. For example, slave wives and females categorized as 'special' women were often reserved for sacrifice and slave owners were not prevented from selling such slaves for the purpose of sacrifice. Destined to die, and perhaps to prevent public sympathy, these women were prevented from becoming pregnant by the application of anti-fertility drugs.[62] Consequently, they were denied

[57] Oroge, 'Institution of slavery', 141–6.

[58] Paul E. Lovejoy, 'Islam, slavery, and political transformation in West Africa: constraints on the trans-Atlantic slave trade', *Revue française histoire d'outre mer*, 89 (2002), 247–82.

[59] In distinguishing between Hausa and Yoruba slaves Governor Freeman described them as those bought from the interior and those appertaining to the soil respectively. 'Both were domestic slaves but the former were more frequently sold into foreign slavery and more detached from their Yoruba owners'. See NAI, CSO 1/1/1, Freeman to duke of Newcastle, 9 Oct. 1862; and NAI, ComCol 1/154, vols. I and II: (1) Lagos land policy and disputes between Oshodi family and *Arotas*, 1936–46.

[60] Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, 'African "slavery" as an institution of marginality', in Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, 1977), 3–81. For a critique of the 'marginality thesis' see Martin A. Klein, 'The study of slavery in Africa: a review', *Journal of African History*, 19 (1978), 599–609.

[61] See Anthony G. Hopkins, 'A report on the Yoruba, 1910', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 5 (1969), 67–100.

[62] NAI, Phillips 1/3/3, journal, 20 Nov. 1878.

a significant opportunity for integration and used primarily for the sexual gratification of their owner-husbands. In May 1879, Lijofi of Ondo sold an old female slave who had served him for eleven years for sacrifice at Edun's mother-in-law's burial. Lijofi's action was explained as a vengeful act taken against the slave, who by reporting him to the King almost cost him his life.[63] On one hand this case reinforces Oroge's thesis because the buyer did not choose from among his domestic slaves but decided to buy one. However, since the slave's 11-year service was not enough to assimilate her into Lijofi's 'lineage', it is evidence that Ondo people did not demarcate clearly between a 'house' and 'market' slave. Moreover, because not everyone could afford to buy new slaves for sacrifice, those who had no riches tended to pick from among their house slaves. This was what Abigail Najo, a Christian convert, did in 1882 when she retrieved an old female slave from pawnship (which had represented a degree of assimilation) for sacrifice at her aunt's burial.[64]

In a century characterized by revolutionary developments and a celebration of military and individual ethos, laws against the killing of house slaves, women with children and private human sacrifices were sometimes disobeyed. At the burial of the *Adaja* in 1882, one of those killed was a mother. Her execution caused a big sensation in the town.[65] A version of the tradition says the woman was buried alive with her young children.[66] While we might not know the real cause of the 'sensation' it may not have been unconnected with 'opposition' to the killing of 'assimilated' slaves. First, the act of killing a mother was an aberration and a violation of social norms. In the neighboring district of Ekiti, the killing of a pregnant woman was considered sacrilegious. Hence the saying: *Ọni ko bá máboyún ṣ'ẹbọ ní parí èìọ* (whoever sacrifices a pregnant woman has committed the greatest taboo).[67] It is therefore not only necessary to abandon the proposition that individuals could not kill their own slaves. Evidence already adduced above shows that slaves of elite citizens were killed both at such owners' own funerals and at those of their friends, and this was the case with the woman killed at the *Adaja*'s burial.

Finally, the 'trade–domestic' slave divide also ignores the position of old slaves. With the growth of 'legitimate' trade and the emphasis on production, slaves, apart from serving their owners, also supported themselves, in the sense of growing their own food crops and engaging in trade and craft production. These needs often reduced the relative worth and prices of old, sick and infant slaves, thereby increasing their vulnerability.[68] For this reason, the prices of old slaves were low when imported into Ondo, so there

[63] NAI, Phillips 1/3/1, journal, 31 May and 7 June 1879.

[64] NAI, Phillips 3/4, diary, 21 Feb. 1882. On the slavery–pawnship nexus see Paul Lovejoy and Toyin Falola (eds.), *Pawnship, Slavery and Colonialism in Africa* (Trenton, 2003).

[65] NAI, Phillips 3/4, diary, 25 Sept. 1882.

[66] Interviews with Chief Seriki Awoyele, Akinkunmi Fagbohungbe and Madam Iyadunni Ayobami, Ondo, 23–5 July 2001.

[67] Anthony O. Oguntuyi, *History of Ekiti: From the Beginning to 1939* (Ibadan, 1979), 37.

[68] See Phillip Curtin, 'Joseph Wright of the Egba', in Curtin (ed.), *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison, 1967), 317–34; various missionary accounts in Oroge, 'Institution of slavery', 263–74; and CMS (Y) 1/7/5, Ekitiparapo kings to Governor of Lagos, 24 Mar. 1885.

was often the fear among such slaves that they were being bought for the purpose of sacrifice. Reporting from Ondo in 1879, Rev. Phillips demonstrated the panic among old slaves:

> One gr[e]y-headed woman applied to us this January through Mrs. Dada, her countrywoman (Egba). In the practice of human sacrifice common here, 'to lessen the expense of this abominable custom, the Ondos [do buy] persons who are too old to be useful to be immolated'. The old woman heard this soon after she was brought here and she applied to be redeemed.

The low status of slaves, with their high degree of vulnerability, will guide us into understanding the pattern of opposition to the practice.

SOCIAL CHANGE AND ONDO'S RESPONSE TO THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST HUMAN SACRIFICE

Most writers agree that protests from the potential victims, Christian missionaries and interventionist colonial regimes were crucial to the end of human sacrifice. Elizabeth Isichei, while not completely discounting the impact of Euro-Christian pressures against human sacrifice, suggests that the initial reform measures were born out of local reform initiatives on the part of certain African chieftains.[69] Law recognizes these local efforts, but insists that they be examined from the perspective of what they tried to achieve and how far they were aided by external forces. He shows that local opposition to human sacrifice, especially from slaves themselves, was not often geared towards the abolition of the practice but rather to reducing its cruelty, frequency and the number of victims. More than other writers however, Law also recognizes the role of Islam, the nature of integration into Atlantic trade and interactions between the abolitionist projects. For instance he demonstrates that human sacrifice lasted longer in non-Muslim societies and in states that were closely linked to Atlantic slavery than in areas under Islamic influence and relatively detached from Atlantic commerce.[70] Implicitly therefore, unlike in the West African forest states, political violence, religious fervor and social differentiation in Sudanese states were moderated by the adoption of a universal religion, Islam, which in turn created a sense of pan-Islamic identity and monotheism. The Muslim factor is important for Yorubaland, where human sacrifice also disappeared faster in the more militarized and centralized kingdom of Oyo, influenced by Islam, than in the diffused polities of eastern and southern Yorubaland.[71] Conversely, in Ondo, where Islamic influence was relatively weak, the first major onslaught against human sacrifice in Ondo came from its victims – slaves.

Unlike the elite group who justified human sacrifice as a communal or personal obligation, most slaves attributed their vulnerability to their

[69] Isichei, 'Quest for social reform', 470. [70] Law, 'Human sacrifice', 62, 78.

[71] Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 69–71. Report collected in the 1880s showed that Islamic influence was so strong in Ibadan that it had to contract the offering of human sacrifice to Ile-Ife. This tradition suggests a growing trend in Ibadan to end human sacrifice within its walls.

marginal status. Therefore, rather than wait to be sacrificed, they frequently ran away – often to Okeigbo after 1840.[72] While Okeigbo was the site of major funerals and associated sacrifices, the preference for it by Ondo runaway slaves is not difficult to establish. The town began as a farmstead and gradually assumed the role of a maroonage for fugitive slaves and criminals from Ife and Ondo. It gained prominence around 1845, when it received Arilekolasi's rebellious slaves, many of whom were former combatants and victims of the Ilorin-Oyo wars.[73] After 1870, Lekki and Lagos, as bases of an expanding British government, became even more attractive than Okeigbo. In 1875, aware of the frequent escapes of slaves into Lekki, the local CMS agent, David Hinderer, advised slaveholders to stop the maltreatment of their slaves, or else they would continue to escape.[74]

With the risk of being sacrificed, the onus was on a slave to find the means of integration into the host society. Contemporary observations on the treatment of slaves throw some light on the pattern of this integration. According to Phillips, 'slaves at Ondo were more at risk, the newer they were the closer to being total strangers'.[75] Newly acquired slaves felt a greater sense of alienation than those who had been held longer. Thus by defining themselves as insiders, or escaping to safety, slaves who had served for long periods and home born slaves (*ẹrú ibìlẹ̀*) had better opportunities to negotiate their rights and status within host societies and thereby secure immunity from human sacrifice. In Ondo, efforts were made not to kill assimilated slaves 'who had formed attachment in the compound' such as slave wives who had borne children for the community and had already started to become members of it. When the law against the sacrifice of 'assimilated' slaves began in Ondo is unknown, but it has been suggested that this was to prevent the inconvenience of killing a mother in the presence of her children.[76] In spite of the provisions for assimilation, evidence shows that slaves were hardly transformed into full lineage members.

The rift between long-time serving (old) and new slaves over who should be sacrificed was a problem at the funeral of *Lisa* Edun. According to eye-witness accounts:

> His death on 13 September 1880 promised a great display. But there was a delay because they had trouble in getting the 45 people which he had given orders to be killed … With the impending sacrifice, Lisa's slaves became very unsettled, and started to arm themselves. On the 17th fighting nearly broke out between the slaves and the town-chiefs (who felt that Lisa's wishes should be honoured). The chiefs suggested that the slaves would be in no danger if they contributed to the purchase of fresh slaves to be killed. But when this proved impracticable, the slaves themselves split into two factions, the older ones planning to assure their safety by offering up some of the newer ones. To calm things down, the King reduced the number to be killed to 20, and on the 20th the funeral went ahead. However tension

[72] Okeigbo was described as a heterogeneous society: 'populated from different tribes' comprised of Ife rulers and many Ondo fugitives who 'seem to enjoy much more liberty than in Ondo'. See CMS CA2/098, Young, journal, 25 Dec. 1876; KDML, Phillips, journal, 29 Jan. 1877; and NAI, Phillips 1/1/1, journal, Aug.–Oct. 1880.

[73] For a link between the jihadist impulse and Ondo war see Ojo, 'Warfare, slavery and the transformation of eastern Yorubaland', ch. 2.

[74] CMS, CA2/098, Young, journal, 6 Mar. 1876.

[75] NAI, Phillips 1/3/3, journal, 20 Nov. 1878.

[76] *Ibid.*

remained high as some people insisted that the full number be killed. A month later, fighting broke out again among the slaves, and about 300 of them escaped to Okeigbo.[77]

Disagreements within the enslaved class or between slaves and the freeborn over funeral rites had the potential for open revolt, as each party desired to impose its wish. This incident demonstrated the lack of 'class identity' among *Lisa* Edun's slaves. We might interpret the action as aimed at reducing the number of victims rather than as opposition to the practice itself. Nevertheless, the fact that these negotiations took place between the slaves and the town authorities is instructive. It shows that Ondo chiefs were careful not to drive the slave population to a major revolt, like that of the 1840s when Arilekolasi's slaves destroyed the town.

Next to the slaves in putting pressure on the defenders of human sacrifice were Christian missionaries, some of whom were former slaves themselves. When Ondo opened its doors to Christian missionaries and British officials in 1870, its rulers expected commercial and political allies who would attract traders and help in the war against Ondo's enemies; they did not expect the strangers to seek to restrict elite behavior.[78] The Ondo elite was to find, to the contrary, that – like Islam – the Christians, especially the CMS in West Africa, represented the imposition of a monotheistic world religion and the promotion of nation-states with boundaries defined by common traditions, geography and linguistic affinity.[79] Thus from its foundation in Sierra Leone, the CMS sought to unite the Yoruba-speaking peoples into a single entity.[80] The mission's aims included the spread of literacy, marriage reforms, violence, *òrìṣà* worship and the eradication of slavery. These goals were demonstrated in the mission's participation in the British-supervised peace initiatives which stopped the century-long Yoruba wars. Although an Egba, Phillip was the unofficial British consul to eastern Yorubaland and the spokesperson for Ondo and the Kiriji alliance (Ijesa, Ilorin, Akoko and Ekiti districts) during the 1880s.[81]

The CMS crusade against *òrìṣà* included the condemnation of human sacrifice and the documentation of all known cases of the practice. The missionary presence in the Ondo kingdom ensured that cases of human sacrifice could no longer be concealed and were promptly reported to the

[77] CMS, G3/A2/11-12/1881, Phillips's letter to the Governor of Lagos, 26 Oct. 1880; and Young and Phillips, journals, July–Dec. 1880. Cf. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 70–1.

[78] When Revs. Roper and Maser met Edun (then army chief) at Erinla in 1873, they noted that he refused to return to Ondo first because *Ifa* had not advised him to do so and more so was awaiting the outcome of the Anglo-Asante war. Even if Edun was an avowed Ifa adherent, his later activities and friendship with Governor Glover would show that he was more interested in Britain's military might. It is not fortuitous that he relocated to Ondo in 1875, a year after the fall of Kumasi. See Edward Roper, 'What I saw in Africa, Part IV', *Christian Missionary Gleaner*, 3, 30 (1876), 70.

[79] See Ajayi, *Christian Missions*.

[80] Robin Law, 'The heritage of Oduduwa: traditional history and political propaganda among the Yoruba', *Journal of African History*, 14 (1973), 207–22; and Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 278–318.

[81] On Phillips's peace initiatives see PP, C4957 and C5144, 'Correspondence and further correspondence respecting the wars between native tribes in the interior and negotiations for peace conducted by the Government of Lagos, 1887'.

government in Lagos. Christian agents also took on the added responsibility of warning local communities of Lagos's decision to enforce the abolition of human sacrifice and the willingness to use military means to enforce it.

By the early 1880s Ondo Christians were being seen as British moles, placed to watch over them. Thus, whenever human sacrifice was to be carried out, it became a common practice to conceal this from the clerics, but should there be a leakage of information, they were begged not to inform Lagos.[82] Furthermore, links between the Christians and the Lagos political and commercial sectors also increased their clout. Therefore many eastern Yorubaland communities required mission support to attract traders or use them as allies against their neighbors. The missionaries used this strategic position to restrain their local allies by threatening to cut them off from the Lagos commercial establishment.[83] For instance, between 1876 and 1880, Edun, more than the King, periodically questioned the activities of the CMS, claiming that the abolition of human sacrifice was not part of the agreement Ondo had with the Lagos government.[84] Similarly, Manuwa of Itebu, whose son eventually became a priest, complained in 1887 that he was no longer in Phillips's good books because he had allowed human sacrifice at his brother's funeral in March 1887. Even when he pleaded that he lacked the power to stop his brothers and nephews from carrying out the sacrifice, Phillips, like Young in 1876, questioned the authority of a king who could not restrain his subjects. This was contrary to their definition of an effective ruler. As members of the new Christian and educated elite, they loathed the warlordism of Yoruba chiefs, and wanted an authority that would maintain law, order and security of life.[85] The authority they expected was what British colonialism eventually granted Yoruba kings under the guise of indirect rule.[86] The significance of these dialogues lay in the erosion of chiefly power during the nineteenth century. Both *Osemowe* Ajimekun and Manuwa, like many Yoruba kings, lacked effective control over some of their subjects and chiefs owing largely to the empowerment of more people which came with commercial transition. By taking the initiative, therefore, the Christians were also placing themselves in a position of authority and in close proximity to the new source of power – the colonial government in Lagos.

The third and most decisive attack against human sacrifice came from the British administration. Starting in the 1860s, Britain began to treat the Yoruba hinterland as an extension of its Lagos colony and people in the region as belonging to a 'nation'. Following the non-implementation

[82] In June 1877, Phillips and Young interviewed a slave to verify a case of human sacrifice.

[83] Oyegbata, an Ondo chief and consul wanted the colonial government to deal with him and the Christians and not with other chiefs. See NAI, CSO 1/1/8, Rowe to Kimberley, 1 Nov. 1882.

[84] CMS, CA2/098, Young, journal, 26 Feb. and 6 Mar. 1876.

[85] CMS, CA2/098, Young, journal, 6 Mar. 1876; and NAI, Phillips 3/7, Phillips to Deji of Akure, 8 Jan. 1896. In 1889, the *Osemowe* accused Phillips of instigating the Lagos government against him. NAI, Phillips 3/4, diary, 8 Feb. 1889. The *Osemowe* was King of Ondo town and head of Ondo Kingdom.

[86] See J. A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Western Nigeria, 1894–1934* (London, 1973).

of the various Lagos–Ondo anti-sacrifice agreements between 1869 and 1880,[87] in November 1880 Lagos dispatched Consul Edward Hewett on a reconnaissance mission to establish the sources of arms trafficking into Yorubaland and how this trade had fuelled the Yoruba wars. He was also to remind Ondo chiefs of their previous promises to end human sacrifice and to sign treaties that would enhance free trade and abolish human sacrifice. The mission led to a new treaty, signed on 9 December 1880, which reads:

> it shall be deemed a criminal act [for] any subject of Ondo to aid or abet others, or perform or to participate in any ceremony at which human beings shall be sacrificed. Offenders shall be fined, imprisoned or punished by forced labor. Signed – Osemowe, Adaja, Ojomu and Sara.[88]

But attempts to end human sacrifice were met with strong objections. Many chiefs did not see why the practice should stop. Aderinsoye, the King of Ile-ife and Okeigbo, argued that human sacrifice was not only beneficial to his communities but that the *òrìṣà* and not the priests took responsibility for the killing of sacrificial victims.[89] He concluded that without the sacrifices the relevance of Ife as the fountain of knowledge and origin of mankind and the benevolent power of the *òrìṣà* would be destroyed. Even in Ekiti and Ijesa where there were also opposing forces, the chiefs believed that huge benefits could be derived through human sacrifice. So when pressed to abolish the practice, they pleaded for time, promising to make a decision only after the cessation of the Yoruba wars when they could consult with their people.[90]

There was also much reluctance from the Ondo chiefs. Unlike the perceived utilitarian value of *òrìṣà* religion which underscored human sacrifice, the gains accruable from Christianity (devoid of sacrifices) were unclear. Discussions between Ondo and the Lagos government from 1881 to 1893 centered on the 'apprehensions as to what could result from the end of

[87] The Lagos government partly premised its relations with Ondo on the abolition of human sacrifice. See PRO, CO 147/23, Goldsworthy to Glover, 13 June 1872, in Pope Hennessey to Kimberley, 24 Aug. 1872. An Ondo delegation to Lagos in August 1880 further discussed trade, protection and the abolition of funeral sacrifices. See *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Apr. 1881, 236.

[88] NAI, CSO 8/5/4, Griffith to Hewett, 11 Nov. 1880; *Osemowe* and chiefs to Griffith, 1 Dec. 1880, and Ondo authorities to Hewett, 9 Dec. 1880.

[89] NAI, Phillips 1/3/3, journal, 15 Jan. 1878: and PP, C4975, LX, Phillips, 'Report of second visit to the camps', enc. 6 in no. 33, Evans to Granville, 24 Aug. 1886. The same argument has been cited in the ongoing 'Okija shrine' investigation in Nigeria. See Charles Onyekamuo 'Anambra: 4 fresh bodies, 10 more skulls found, police to raid other shrines today as villagers flee', *This Day*, 6 Aug. 2004.

[90] PP, C5144, LX, no. 8, Higgins to Colonial Office, 20 June 1887 (journal entry for 4 Nov. 1886), and PP, C4975, LX, Owa and Ekiti chiefs to Moloney, 6 July 1886, encl. 2 in no. 33, and Head Chiefs of Ife to Moloney, 15 July 1886. These were genuine concerns. For example only 3 out of about 16 Ekiti district heads who happened to be at the war camp were involved in the negotiations. So even if they had agreed to abolish the practice, this would have had no effect in the remaining 13 districts. Secondly, since effective power at this time belonged to warchiefs, negotiations by the kings might have been of no consequence except perhaps to pitch them against their soldiers. See Toyin Falola and Dare Oguntomisin, *The Military in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Politics* (Ile-Ife, 1984).

human sacrifices'.[91] There were two main lines of argument – one relating abolition to communal welfare, the other to individual losses. For instance, most chiefs were not opposed to ending funeral sacrifices but feared that to dispense with the sacrifices to *Èṣù* and *Ọràńfẹ* would curtail their ability to prevent disaster: diseases, famine, slaves' unrest and deaths.[92] During a debate on the subject in 1887, the *Odunwo*, the fourth ranking Chief, linked the sudden death of Ajimekun in December 1886 to the non-performance of human sacrifice during the previous festivals.[93] Instead the *Ọba* had ordered the substitution of slaves with animals, which some chiefs thought were unacceptable to the two *òrìṣà*. More interesting was the position of the *Adaja* whose predecessor had died after a tough chieftaincy dispute. So with rumors that the Chief was bewitched, the new *Adaja*, afraid of meeting a similar fate, ascribed his support for human sacrifice to rumors of a plot to kill him.[94] It is interesting to see how Ondo chiefs linked human sacrifice with the need to prevent the spread of diseases and fear of sudden death.

There were also chiefs who were sensitive to their own material losses. Human sacrifice, like slave dealing, was a source of revenue. The *Osemowe* or the *Lisa* received one slave for every slave that was killed during burials. For this reason, the *Osemowe* rationalized sacrifices at funerals as legitimate means of income which he could not eliminate. In similar vein, the *Ọṣọrà* was entitled to an unspecified gift, while the *Adaja* got a live goat on each occasion.[95] In essence, human sacrifice was a matter of appeasing the *òrìṣà* and the dead and an economic opportunity for such chiefs who gave their consent in exchange for material payments. These payments confirm Law's association of human sacrifice with royal absolutism, and it was not surprising that those chiefs whose position was partly underpinned by human sacrifice constituted the strongest opposition to its abolition.

ABOLITION OF HUMAN SACRIFICE

In spite of strong opposition, the abolitionist cause gradually gained strength. Evidence dating back to 1877 shows that human sacrifice was becoming a clandestine activity. Victims were no longer publicly paraded, most killings were carried out in private and the number of victims declined.[96] While we do not have enough information on the period before 1875, data on the post-1876 period show a progressive decline of human sacrifice. Unlike the 43 sacrifices purportedly carried out shortly before

[91] CMS, CA2/078, Phillips, journal, 26 Dec. 1879, and CMS, CA2/098, Young, journal, 19 Jan., 2 Feb. 31 Mar., 2–28 Apr., 9 Oct., 5 Dec. 1879, 21 Jan. and 13 Feb. 1880 and 29 July and 5 Nov. 1884. Peel shows that six or seven ritual attempts were made between 1879 and 1880 to stop the spread of smallpox in Ondo. See *Religious Encounter*, 113.

[92] NAI, CSO 8/5/4, *Osemowe* and chiefs to Griffiths, 6 Sept. 1881, and Griffiths to *Osemowe*, 23 Sept. 1881, and NAI, CSO 1/1/8, Rowe to Kimberley, 11 Jan. 1882.

[93] NAI, Phillips 3/2, diary, 2 and 6 Jan., 11 and 14 Mar. and 8 July–29 Aug. 1887.

[94] CMS, CA2/098, Young, journal, 17 Mar. 1884; and NAI, Phillips 3/2, diary, 6 Jan. and 18 Aug. 1887.

[95] CMS, CA2/098, Young, journal, 6 Aug. 1877; CMS, CA2/078, Phillips, diary, 30 July 1877; and NAI, Phillips 3/4, Phillips, diary, 6–23 Apr. 1882.

[96] CMS, CA2/078, Phillips, 'Second letter from Ondo', 23 Nov. 1877.

January 1877,[97] or the killings at *Lisa* Edun and the *Adaja*'s funerals, our information shows only a trickle of later sacrifices. The effect of this change was so noticeable that some chiefs remarked upon it as a major shift in Ondo custom.[98]

Perhaps the most significant development was the change in the politics of Yorubaland after the mid-1880s. First, the Yoruba wars came to a standstill around 1882, resulting in a downward trend in new slave supplies. It might not be surprising that religious rituals also responded to this trend by consuming fewer victims. Second, during this period global economic depression was beginning to affect British trade with West Africa. Concerned about the impact of the ongoing Yoruba wars and Franco-Prussian threat to her economy in Lagos, Britain began to show more interest in Yoruba affairs.[99] In pursuit of commerce, intervention was decided upon as a multi-edged instrument to promote peace, trade, 'humanitarianism' and imperialism.

In 1886, Lagos sent a mission led by Captains Higgins and Smith with an escort of 50 Hausa soldiers, 2,500 ball cartridges, a seven-pounder gun and a rocket launcher to disband the Yoruba war camps.[100] On its way into the interior, the mission passed through Ondo where it demanded that the authorities implement the 1880 anti-human sacrifice treaty. According to Governor Evans, the troops were not intended to overawe the Yoruba, but to safeguard the commissioners. However, given the war-weariness of many Yoruba districts and what was known of the British occupation of Lagos, many people viewed the commission as a prelude to British conquest. We can gauge the impact of the military mission on Ondo. On the eve of its arrival debate over human sacrifice led to factional fighting with a party led by *Ọba* Ajimekun, some chiefs, Christians and palace slaves agreeing to abolish human sacrifice immediately.[101]

Opposed to the King were the military chiefs and the priests of *Èṣù* and *Ọràmfẹ*. The military leaders were particularly against the abolition of sacrifices to the two *òrìṣà*. Not satisfied that the final peace deal between Ondo and Okeigbo rejected the destruction of the latter, the Ondo military decided to jettison the friendship with Lagos and resume military mobilization and human sacrifice. This was a delicate time for the king whom

[97] KDML, Phillips, journal, 18 Jan. 1877. Phillips's source was the Lagos–Ondo Association. The high number most probably represented Ondo's response to the smallpox epidemic that was said to have killed seven to eight in each household and led many people to abandon the town. See CMS, CA2098, Young, journal, 4 Feb. and 2 Mar. 1876.

[98] NAI, Phillips 1/3/1, diary, 14 Apr. and 16 May 1879. See also *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Apr. 1881, 236.

[99] On Anglo-French rivalry see Anthony Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule, 1889–1945* (London, 1976), 39–45.

[100] PP, C4957, LX, instructions to Higgins and Smith, 14 Aug. 1886.

[101] *Osemowe* and chiefs to Moloney, 31 July 1886, enc. 5 in no. 33, Evans to Granville, 24 Aug. 1886. Psychological warfare was not restricted to Kiriji camp. In 1893 Governor Gilbert S. Carter requested the deployment of two maxim guns and ammunition to Yorubaland, and, if possible, the new and superior machine-gun. In his words 'there is no doubt that these guns are much needed, not necessarily for use, but it has been found that the mere sight of them has a soothing effect upon the native mind'. See NAI, CSO 1/7/5, Carter to Knutsford, 8 Feb. 1892; and NAI, CSO 1/1/13, Carter to Ripon, 11 Dec. 1893.

the soldiers accused of succumbing to intimidation from the Lagos government.[102]

Soon after Ajimekun died in December 1886, the human sacrifice lobby found an opportunity to resuscitate the practice. Despite the absence of human sacrifice at his funeral in January 1887, the next few months, dominated by succession disputes and mobilization for war against Ikale, were testing moments for his supporters. The succession procedure revealed other conflicting interests in Ondo policy-making. While senior chiefs wanted a pliable candidate, the warriors a hawkish king, the Christians and royal slaves wanted a supportive and anti-slavery candidate.[103]

There was some common ground between the chiefs and warriors. By prolonging the succession process, the former could use the interregnum to reduce the King's household and weaken the new King's power base. It also satisfied the warriors' agenda as they searched for a candidate that would advance their cause, and protect the platform (warfare) which underpinned their power and prestige. In effect the human sacrifice debate provided an avenue to express such ideological problems generated by politico-economic fluidity. The agitation by the soldiers was a demonstration of Ondo's military ethos and a confirmation of the nexus between militarism and human sacrifice.[104] Furthermore, the cessation of Yoruba hostilities increased the activities of foreign traders – Lagos, Ijesa and Ikale – along the routes through Ondo to the detriment of Ondo's commercial influence in the region. Consequently, Ondo politicians and traders felt that Britain had deceived them into surrendering their political and commercial power to outsiders. Therefore the removal of these obstacles was considered as a prerequisite for military demobilization and religious reform.

The new King, Ajilobioje, who was the warriors' nominee, supported the resumption of human sacrifice at the two annual festivals.[105] Predictably, this was opposed by Ajimekun's supporters with some chiefs vowing to boycott the palace. The role of slaves in this debate is of special interest. For example, as preparation for Ajimekun's burial began on 2 January, there was a report of friction and possible conflict between Ondo people and the royal household which prompted the missionaries to visit and pacify the eunuchs (senior royal slaves). According to Phillips 'the king's people expressed their desire and resolution that human sacrifice should not be offered'. Seven months later, on the eve of *Ọràmfẹ*, the slaves again confronted Ajilobioje telling him that they (slaves) 'would not reverse the decision of the late king to whom they were all attached and whose cause they would uphold'.[106] The significance of this action is that if they had boycotted the palace, the slaves and

[102] See exchanges between Ondo and Lagos in PP, C5144, 'Further correspondence', and PP, C4957, LX, King and Chiefs of Ode Ondo to Moloney, 31 July 1886.

[103] See Phillips diary for 1887.

[104] For a link between militarism, human sacrifice and elite factions, see Robin Law, 'African response to abolition: Anglo-Dahomian negotiations on the slave trade, 1838–1877', *Slavery and Abolition*, 16 (1995), 296–306.

[105] During the debate, there was a human sacrifice (perhaps to *Ọràmfẹ*) on 17 Oct. 1887. See NAI, CSO 1/1/12, Moloney to Holland Bart, 31 Oct. 1887.

[106] NAI, Phillips 3/2, diary, 2 and 6 Jan., 11 and 14 Mar., 8–15 July and 22–9 Aug. 1887.

chiefs concerned would have succeeded in undermining palace rituals using the traditional power of sanction which angry officials could employ against the king. These conflicts which seemingly led to the end of funeral sacrifices might have influenced Jacob Olupona and Stephen Awogbamiye's assertions that human sacrifice ended in 1887 and 1889 respectively.[107] As we shall show below these dates are slightly off the mark.

An outbreak of smallpox and war with Ikale led to the resumption of human sacrifice in 1891. On the eve of the sacrifice, some angry slaves set fire to the house of the deputy priest of *Ọràmfẹ*.[108] So more than before, the activities of Ondo slaves after 1886 showed a stronger and collective desire to abolish human sacrifice. As in Old Calabar, these achievements were helped variously by missionary and British campaigns, the destruction of war camps, partial protection for refugee slaves and internal divisions within Ondo's council. While Calabar slaves received ideological support from the Presbyterian mission and British consuls which became active from around 1846,[109] those in Ondo got their motivation from the CMS and British diplomats after 1870. These external incentives largely explained the southward flight of Ondo slaves. Indeed a tradition ascribes the end of human sacrifice to the resistance put up by a particular victim. The story is that Petisei, an Akoko-Yoruba slave, overpowered and killed the *Ọṣọrà*. He put on the priest's regalia but could not continue with other rituals associated with the *òrìṣà*. Having worn the costume he was made the *Ọrà* and his lineage has since being known as *Ọṣọrà Akoko* (*Ọṣọrà* from Akoko).[110]

The final phase of the abolitionist movement began with a change of British policy towards the Yoruba interior. This began with the bombardment of Ijebu in May 1892 and occupation of Ibadan, the Yoruba military capital, in 1893. From then onwards, many Yoruba believed that Britain possessed the means and desire to impose colonial rule. Although the local elite might have overestimated British power, most people were also tired of the century-long Yoruba crises and wanted peace.[111]

Shortly after the fall of Ijebu, the Ondo authorities agreed to stop human sacrifice so as to forestall similar treatment.[112] While many people received the news with jubilation, the *Ọṣọrà* wanted the practice to continue. Lijadu gave a vivid account of the final reaction against human sacrifice. In July 1892, a goat was substituted for the woman due for *Èṣù* and a sheep was prepared for *Ọràmfẹ* in September. When the *Ọṣọrà* refused to accept the sheep, and insisted on the proper victim, fixing his eye on an Ikale war

[107] Olupona, *Kinship, Religion, and Rituals*, 87; and Stephen Awogbamiye, 'Human sacrifices in Ondo in the last century', *Ekimogun* (1989), 51–4.

[108] CMS, G3A2/1892/38, Lijadu, journal, 4 Sept. 1891.

[109] Nair, *Politics and Society*, 47–55.

[110] Awogbamiye, 'Human sacrifices', 53. For similar traditions in Ekiti see Oguntuyi, *History of Ekiti*, 37, and interviews with Joseph Adefolaju and Samuel Ojo, Omu, 26 June 1998 and 4 Apr. 1999. Oguntuyi writes: 'human sacrifice was stopped in Ekiti not by law but by necessity and reverses of fortune'.

[111] PRO, CO147/47, Johnson to Griffith, 26 and 29 Nov. 1881, in Rowe to Kimberley 18 Jan. 1882. On Anglo-Yoruba peace initiatives see Emmanuel A. Ayandele, *Nigerian Historical Studies* (London, 1979), 19–42; and Stephen A. Akintoye, 'The British and the 1877–93 war in Yorubaland', in Akinjogbin (ed.), *War and Peace*, 263–320.

[112] NAI, Phillips 3/5, diary, 21–2 Sept. 1892.

captive, Chief Sasere Oyegbata told him that the town could no longer afford to please *Ọràmfẹ* at the expense of its relationship with Lagos. He continued that if the *Ọṣọ̀rà* wanted a human being 'he should go to the Ikale (in apparent reference to the war Ondo had just fought with its southern neighbor) and get his victims'.[113]

Surprisingly, human sacrifice again took place in July 1893 when two slaves were killed at Oyegbata's funeral. It is unclear if this sacrifice was meant to test British commitment to abolition, the more so as the deceased was a Christian and Ondo's consul to Lagos. If this had happened, then Ondo could be said to be unaware of Britain's new policy. Unlike 1891 when Governor George Denton's dispatch to the Colonial Office had pleaded for caution 'so as not to alienate the Ondos',[114] his letter to the *Osemowe* on the 1893 sacrifice described the incident as 'detestable, abhorrent, disgraceful, cruel and revolting'. Finally, he warned: 'if you continue in it [human sacrifice] it is impossible for Lagos government to recognize you in any way'.[115] The letter is important in other ways. Apart from direct reference to Sasere's funeral, it also coincided with the *Ọràmfẹ* month. Therefore it ultimately served the purpose of pre-empting any plan to offer a human sacrifice during the festival. Such a threat was not an isolated case. A few Yoruba chiefs who ran foul of colonial policies were arrested and exiled.[116] It is not surprising that after receiving the threat Ondo finally agreed to end human sacrifice and a convinced Denton sent £4 to the *Osemowe* as compensation for the social cost of abolition.[117]

CONCLUSION

The abolition of human sacrifice marked the end of a long era in which Ondo benefited and suffered from warfare, slavery and social insecurity. Because of this form of political economy, chiefs and warlords acquired many slaves for social and economic production. The accumulation of slaves served a dual purpose. It facilitated differentiation between slaves and their owners thereby raising the social prestige, conspicuous consumption and ostentatious lifestyles of the freeborn elite. For slaveholders, 'legitimate' trade increased the desire to accumulate slaves as a means of production. Economic prowess and the militaristic ideology of slavery gave rise to intense power disputes between freeborn and slaves and between *òrìṣà* worshippers and modernizers. In asserting their influence, chiefs and rich merchants carried out human sacrifice as a celebration of wealth but also as a mark of chiefly and aristocratic power.

Since these developments took place alongside the campaign against slave trading and warfare, and the emergence of new foci of authority, there emerged severe contradictions in the ambitions of slaveholders and slaves.

[113] CMS, G3/A2/1893/41, Lijadu, journal, 22 Sept. 1892; cf. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 70.

[114] NAI, CSO 8/5/6, Denton to *Osemowe*, and NAI, CSO 1/3/2, Denton to Knutsford, 5 Feb. 1891.

[115] NAI, CSO 1/3/2, Denton to marquis of Ripon, 30 July 1893; and NAI, CSO 8/5/7, Denton to *Osemowe*, 9 and 22 Sept. 1893.

[116] NAI, CSO 1/1/14, Carter to Ripon, 19 June and 23 Aug. 1894.

[117] NAI, CSO 8/5/6, Denton to *Osemowe* and Chiefs, 21 June 1894.

Human sacrifice therefore became an ideological weapon for the celebration of elitism and a means of social control. The abolitionist impulse encouraged slave resistance as slaves seized on local and external initiatives to fight against human sacrifice. Finally, after many years of persuasion, treaty making and Christian teachings had failed to end the practice, Britain changed its policy from appeasement to confrontation. Since no case of human sacrifice was reported after 1893, it could be presumed that Lagos's decision to impose order worked. In the final analysis, the major gainers and losers were the slaves and *òrìṣà* priests respectively. While the former secured immunity from death, the latter lost their political and religious freedom to Britain. The suspension of human sacrifice, either because of the imposition of British rule or the installation of a slave-*Ọṣọ́rà*, undermined the integrity of *òrìṣà* worship. This would explain futile attempts to revive the relevance of local cults and the position of the *Ọṣọ́rà* in the early twentieth century. With the opposition of the colonial authorities, however, *òrìṣà* worship receded into the background where it continued to transform and thrive as the basis of indigenous socio-political power.